



Trash & vaudeville

Jesse Malin's taste in records, in film, in culture, in the types of women and workaday joes he writes about, in his nods-to — from Robin Hood, Lenny Bruce and *Midnight Cowboy's* Joe Buck to Motown, the Stones, the New York Dolls and the Jam — is suitably bittersweet. The allusions became little metaphors for blemished promise and telling plot points in his narratives. (That he's even writing songs with real narratives says a lot.) Malin continues to exist in that lonely world of record-listening, film-character fascination and street observation. At least that's how it comes across on his third solo album.

He's gotten good at singsong day-to-day melancholy ("Lucinda," "Broken Radio," "Aftermath"), as if under affectionate tutelage from Bruce Springsteen. His "little anarchist" in "Black Haired Girl" is that chick you glimpse on the corner and in the subway who instills a dull ache in your gut just as sunset fades on a Manhattan skyline, and it's a yearning and curiosity for the one you'll never get — but if you could you're convinced you'd rule the world.

There's also a soaring rock 'n' roll buoyancy here (particularly the poly-sex anthem "In the Modern World" and the downright cheery "Little Star") and the singer's no longer ranting woefully about burnt ambition and expected letdowns. Why should he? It's easy to see: In DGeneration, Malin purchased



Jesse Malin
Glitter in the Gutter
 Adeline/East West

the rock 'n' roll myth and all he got was a swollen liver. Here he sings a duet with Springsteen. He's got Dylan's kid on another tune. His bud Ryan Adams is ubiquitous. He has Euro press on their knees. He keeps getting record deals and his career is chugging along quite nicely. Life could be much worse. He could've ended up like Nikki Sudden. On "Love Streams," Malin dresses his new optimism neatly: "One day you wake up and you're 30/And you can't even drive a truck ... I'm not wasting away my dreams."

Malin's awareness of his own weakness for self-sabotage gives *Glitter* some rock 'n' roll graciousness; a line such as "Count me in like Dee Dee Ramone," shows subtle self-effacement and personal insecurity. Lennon had that.

Some songs pop blatantly in that sell-out-don't-well sense, like when David Johansen made *In Style* or when "Hungry Heart" hit the radio. The Bob Caggiano and Eddie Wuhlhelmed album is slick, smooth, punchy and compressed; capped with lovely harmonies here and thick radio arrangements there. "NY Nights" is classic '70s radio pop, that period marked with swelling strings, stereo acoustic guitars, and mellow distortion; as strings, la-la-la-la refrains and dynamic tension build you wonder if Malin's out hunting for Jimmy Webb's *Ghost of*

Hits Past. Malin owns the template with self-definition: "From the desert to this love-stained town/I still find comfort in the underground/It's written in my soul."

Of 13 songs there's but one stinker: Why's there a "2007" remake of his "Since You're in Love" (from 2004's *The Heat*)? It's baffling and extends the record one song too long. His spare recasting of the Replacements' "Bastards of Young" shows the song's so powerful that even a languid piano-vocal take can't enhance the longing and sadness of a blank generation. It works, though.

Malin's ubiquitous references to "radio" shows a kid who grew up believing in AM and its power to change. Hell, it changed him. He's a student of Brill-building pop, of Gordy's Motown song machine, of Springsteen's empathy for lonely waged folk, and it's all filtered through boyhood dreams of Max's Kansas City. Seven-day weekend indeed. —**Brian Smith**