

Forty new recordings to hear this month...



REVIEWS THE TOP TEN

1 & 2 Talk to the hand, prime minister...

GALLOWS *Grey Britain* (Warners) £12.72 ★★★★★ **THE ENEMY** *Music For the People* (Warners) £12.72 ★★★★★

Now is an awful time to be young and British. No wonder social realism is back, says Jon Savage



These ambitious second albums represent the first salvo in what will be a long campaign: the struggle to make music that addresses the economic downturn and its disproportionate effect on youth. The most recent figures estimate that 1.5 million young men and women between 16 and 24 are unemployed: the

highest figure for 15 years and rising.

This is a recipe for depression, frustration and anger, as a whole generation has been brought up in a materialistic, consumerist world that has now receded out of reach. In their different ways, both Gallows and the Enemy should be given credit for their prescience – both these records were recorded last year – and their willingness to engage with a recognisable social reality. Both groups have taken care to address the problem of turning

an uncompromising message and a powerful live sound into records that will appeal to the unconverted. Gallows' visceral hardcore is given depth and distance by a string section, while the Enemy leaven their more mainstream rock sound with punk traces and a strong sense of light and shade.

Grey Britain announces itself in apocalyptic terms: "Set light to the flag we used to fly," Frank Carter howls on *The Riverbank*. "It can't help us now we are ready to die." Gallows mix metal, prog and punk into a relentless assault

that matches lyrics of Gothic intensity: rats, plague and pestilence flourish alongside their attacks on bankers, clergymen and the BNP.

While the listener is largely swamped in this sense of horror and disgust – which no doubt makes the point – Gallows are also concerned with some kind of catharsis. The almost textbook, doom-laden lyrics of songs such as *Misery* – "There is nothing left for me: I want to kill myself for relief" – are undercut by vigorous, exciting playing and raucous vocals. ▶▶

THIS MONTH'S BESTSELLING ALBUM *No line on the Horizon* by U2 (Mercury)

Just as the hardcore genre encompasses pressure, discipline and release, so Gallows pick their way through their nihilistic feelings to offer some kind of light at the end of their tunnel. Queensbury Rules calls for violent teens to throw their knives into the Thames, while the closing Crucifucks calls for a symbolic death followed by a national rebirth: "Let's fucking start again."

The Enemy are squarely in the tradition of the early Clash and the Specials: plain-speaking music that addresses Britain's forgotten towns and forgotten teens. Hailing from Coventry, they know of what they speak. Theirs is a big sound for a three-piece, matched by big themes. As they state on Elephant Song: "Ever feel so small, stood in a world that owes you nothing at all."

There's No Time For Tears takes you to "the morning after the revolution", while 51st State and Don't Break the Red Tape offer succinct anti-government polemics. They are less convincing on slow numbers like the Springsteen-esque No Time to Cry, where the production and the vocal delivery force attention on prosaic phrases like "a concrete jungle" and "a million miles of traffic jams".

That's the problem with social realism, but the Enemy do their best to vary their sound and mode of address. There is always pleasure in hearing a young group stretch out – as they do on the climactic Silver Spoon – and they unveil a great line in Be Somebody: "No one ever gives you anything for free/ Unless you start sleeping with the BBC."

Both these records will be deservedly successful. They both achieve what they set out to do, which is to inject into British rock music the sense of standing for or against something, the feeling that there is something more at stake than money, fame and self, the belief that human beings are important. Although they are not particularly aimed at me, I applaud their spirit.

DOWNLOAD *Misery; The Riverbank* (Gallows); *Silver Spoon* (the Enemy)

THIS MONTH'S BESTSELLING