

# CHARLIE PICKETT AND HIS INCREDIBLE ELECTRIC WOODCHOPPER

BY AL MITCHELL

They say true talent emerges, but I say that's a bunch of coyote shit. Because if that were true then Johnny Shinebox at work would be hosting the *Tonight Show* instead of that pompous load Jay Leno. So when nerdy alt-music critics apply reason as to why Charlie Pickett and his fantabulous Eggs never made it to the big dance, I'm like, "Shut to fuck up already... you're making my brain feel like old cabbage..."

'Cause one thing that good ole punk rock taught us was that a lot of very cool bands would never get the accolades they so truly deserved. Two perfect examples are the debut albums by The Gun Club and X-Ray Spex - absolutely amazing records that sadly, a lot of people will never hear.

So at the risk of coming off like some kind of low brow elitist, which of course is really what I am, let me say that Charlie Pickett makes music for the chosen few; the super hip, yes, brothers and sisters, me and you.

And you've got to give the big fella his props - while the blood of Sir Johnny Rotten was washing up on the shores of Fort Lauderdale Beach, Brother Pickett was squeezing his original brand of heroin fried hillbilly rock in between snarling punk bands and lesbian noise quartets at the local South Florida pubs. Courageous indeed, and someone that believed. And the way that they looked, fuckin'-A, baby... Charlie six foot three and all gang-a-lee, looking like a poor farm boy all dressed up for the Saturday night dance ...his hair parted on the side and slicked down with warm beer spit...his faithful Eggs skulking onto the stage behind

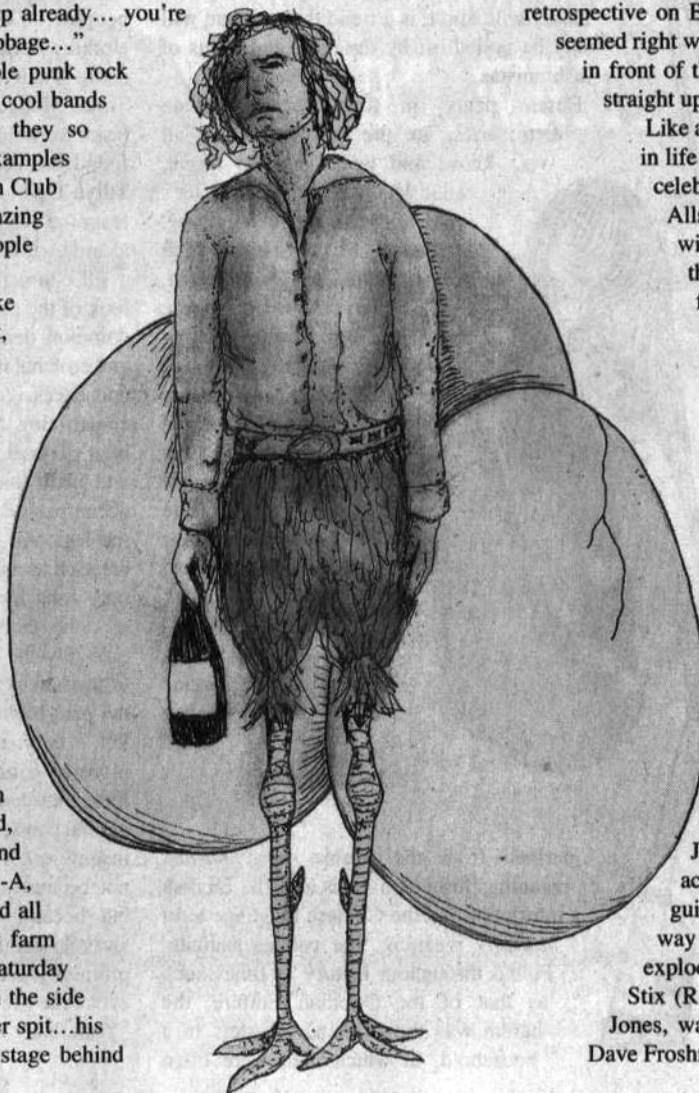
him, looking like they just got back from the local rabbit skinning convention...

But hell, those were the days of anything goes, so when Charlie turned up the plastic knobs on his electric woodchopper and ducked into "Phantom Train" (track 17 on *Bar Band Americanus*, the new retrospective on Bloodshot Records,) suddenly the world seemed right with itself, and the punk rockers that stood in front of the stage didn't think twice - they knew straight up that Charlie was the real deal.

Like all good rockers, he sang about the things in life that seemed just out of reach, as well as celebrating the ones that he could cradle in his Allstate hands. He combined 'Aw Shucks' with 'Aw Fucks' and kneaded the two of them like powdered dough between those funky chicken legs of his. His Americana-on-mushrooms approach to the lyrics is both clever and heartfelt; and although I could throw in some ten dollar words to describe them, that would clash with Charlie's get-in-free-if-you-don't-have-the-money way of thinking.

But back to the Eggs. Ah, those beautiful, fucked-up Eggs. Executioners of desperation, guilty of just about everything, they made the music jump and jerk, sway and stumble, rollick and rumble. Tight when they needed to be, sloppy when it tasted good.

Most notable on the disc is axe smacker/O.G. punk legend/walking corpse/folk hero Johnny Salton. Playing Doc Holliday to Charlie's Wyatt Earp, Johnny slides his Marlboro stained fingers across the greasy strings of a borrowed guitar, hitting all the right g-spots along the way to make it moan, wail and eventually explode in tube amp ecstasy. Drummer Johnny Stix (R.I.P.), just like Charlie Watts and Kenny Jones, was perfect for the band...as was bassist Dave Froshneider, who also wrote, played guitar and




fit into the Egg mold of being a mellow madman. What a team! There were others that joined the fray over the years, all of them quirky and wonderful and weird and perfect in their own way. Like Marco the bass player, also gone from us until the next world.

Two new songs are included, one of them a jumpy Chuck Berry-styled drug tale called "Let Me Get Off On Your Porch" and the other a swampy lover named "Penny Instead". Slow burner "Liked It A Lot" warms things up for the angsty and wonderful "In The Wilderness", and then later "But I Didn't" sets up the epic "If This Is Love Can I Get My Money Back?" (Yes, it's as good as its title, even better.)

But shit, this is a best-of disc, so all the songs are good, and all very different, too. Funny though, the song that gets me the most is the one that Charlie didn't write - it's his version of The Flaming Groovies' song "Shake Some Action" and it's one of the best covers I've ever heard. There is a sweet and innocent yearning in Charlie's voice that gets us back to that desperation thing, that soulful feeling inside that makes you want to really *live*, that makes you want to go out and burn down the night one more time.

It also puts me in mind of one of those nights a long, long time ago when I was a young man living in Pompano Beach, Florida. I was twenty-one years old and full of wonder, very reborn with this whole punk rock/new music thing. My friend Mario picked me up in his green Chevy van

and we drove down to Hallandale in search of this club that we'd heard about. We drove across the railroad tracks by Dixie Highway and saw some people hanging out in front of this bar wearing leather jackets and smoking cigs, laughing.

"There!" I said, and we quickly parked the van and rushed inside the dingy dive. We watched the amazing Reactions (listen to their song "I Can't Help It", one of the best poppers of all time) burn through their set of punk/pop blasters. They were so good I wanted to cry. Next up was Charlie, and before he even strapped on his guitar I became a fan. That night he and his band of merry misfits rocked hard under the glowing Miami moon and, incredibly, somewhere close by a child had its first dream; a baby opened its eyes and an alligator was stirred at the sound of a heron that landed close by. This was Florida, '79-'88. It was a fantastic and strange place to be. 



You can find Charlie Pickett on MySpace and also at [www.Trashfever.com](http://www.Trashfever.com).

*Former Circus Of Power frontman Alex Mitchell is currently fielding mega-offers for his latest novel, Working Class Superstar and raising wild animals in Topanga Canyon. He can be contacted at [Showbizal@earthlink.net](mailto:Showbizal@earthlink.net).*



Charlie Pickett and the Eggs, circa 1986. Clockwise from lower right: Charlie Pickett, Pat Johnson, Johnny Salton, and Bobby Tak. Photo by Jill Kahn.