



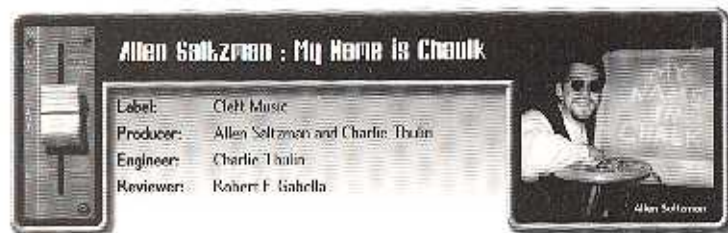
### The Ledge : Magic, Science, Religion

Label: Sun Sign Records  
 Producer: John Carpenter and The Ledge  
 Engineer: John Carpenter  
 Reviewer: Michael Finnegan

In a torrent of sound like Rush meets Rusted Root (so could I help hearing Counting Crows?), The Ledge's debut CD, *Magic, Science, Religion* is a welcome alterna-pop release that doesn't dip into alternative lite or the so annoying-you're-supposed-to-like-it schools. The Ledge have put out a CD full of thinking people's rock that doesn't bore or preach, but may require you to actually listen and -- if you're really thinking -- read the liner notes. One reviewer suggested that they might be "lyrically ominous at times" and pointed at songs like "Religion" and "Least Resistance." I read the liner notes and found that the band was suggesting taking personal responsibility for taking the higher road morally, trusting in God, and not just taking the simple path (you dark-hearted heathens), which is hardly ominous to me.

Just two years old, this outfit plays like a band that has been together a lot longer. Todd Lilley, who handles the singing, songwriting and acoustic guitar, is deftly counterpointed by Josh Bartunek whose cutting leads sail over a wall of percussion and bass provided by Mike Fry and William Pearson (who plays keyboards as well as bass). The production and arrangements of the songs is such that, for all the heavy thunder, none of the musicians overpowers the other and each seems to be adept at the magic art of subtlety.

For merchandise and booking call 219.462.1569 or call The Ledge Line at 219.878.6940.



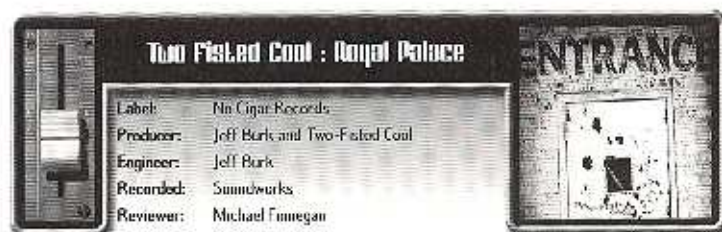
### Allen Saltzman : My Name is Chalk

Label: Cleft Music  
 Producer: Allen Saltzman and Charlie Thulin  
 Engineer: Charlie Thulin  
 Reviewer: Robert F. Gahella

Thanks to a possession of amazing range and depth, Buffalo Grove resident Allen Saltzman strums, picks, and croons his way through a personal tour de force of darkness and light on *My Name is Chalk*, his debut release. A troubadour in the classic sense, he brings vibrant life to the subjects of his songs, which are often the most basic of people and things. From the simple dreams of "Van the Barbershop Man" to the bitter reminiscence of "Point of the Story," Saltzman wrings more from his voice and guitar in the span of 11 songs than some bands draw from an entire career. A master of rhythm and musical construction, he is equally at home with the subtle, driving "Lead Secrets, Fully Explained (I know something you don't know...)" to the winsome sorrows of the misbegotten on "Puzzled Dream." On this tune, among others, the listener gets a clear picture of the precision with which his voice and guitar play off of one another. His voice can just as easily flatten broadly against one note as it can curl sinuously around another. Vocalists with a similar approach would include John Prime, Billy Corgan, Graham Nash and Kurt Cobain. Yet Saltzman is definitely his own man, with a singular set of musical pipes.

Through the keen observations of "Carry You, Carry On" the mood eventually darkens considerably, and you begin to see the emphasis of the verb in his lyrical structure. These are songs of action -- whether it be the action of reminiscence or of making good on commitments. And on the cut time funk of "Oh Test Me," the physical descent of his voice from baritone to emphatically punctuated bass closes lines like "fill in the ovals, close the open ends, be an expert, no time for knots," in a style akin to the traditional Mexican huapango. The huapango is a song (often of mourning) sung by lone troubadours (huapangeros), which has precisely phrased vocal drops at the end of alternate lines. In this case, Saltzman sees the irony of standardized aptitude tests, and his vocal play emphasizes the humor as well as the unique subject matter.

This fine acoustic debut stands alone as a proud testament to a fine musician who truly understands his craft. From the first cut, the hard driving "Thousandaires," to the last -- a sincere and grateful tribute to the "Everymother" called "It's a Mother's Day," you catch broad glimpses of insight into Saltzman's soul. It would be difficult to dismiss him as just another sensitive singer-songwriter, and anyone who's seen his live performances -- which fill every corner of the room with sound -- could easily agree. Saltzman is clearly one more reason why Chicago is the musical home to some of the best and the brightest, and with each future effort, I'll happily look forward to his melodious twists and turns.



### Two Fisted Cool : Royal Palace

Label: No Cigar Records  
 Producer: Jeff Burk and Two-Fisted Cool  
 Engineer: Jeff Burk  
 Recorded: Soundworks  
 Reviewer: Michael Finnegan

If there is another thing Chicago could be known for, it is a reputation for hardcore punk. Thanks to seminal local bands like Naked Raygun, Screaming Weasel, Rights of the Accused and Out of Order, thanks to labels like Johann's Face, thanks to a makeshift venue like Fireside Bowl, our city arguably should have some street credibility when it comes to punk music. Compared to the Ramones and, much to the band's own dismay, Lou Reed, Two Fisted Cool is a hard ready for the mainstream. The Ramone/Reed comparisons come not as a tag, but in recognition that it is the bands that stray from the hardcore center that really shine.

The band is comprised of Richard Carton on guitars, Paul Czarnocki on bass and vocals, John Immonen on guitars and vocals and Michael Milalunas. John Carpender sits in on drums for "Another in a Million" and "Wicker Park Dream," and Liam Parkinson plays piano on "Queen of Mars." This CD could easily get slotted into "alternative" but it is more noticeable for its energy and style. The listener should remember that The Police were originally considered punk. And so was U2.

Spilling from Two-Fisted Cool's own center are "Wicker Park Dream," "Follow the Leader," "Dammit Jannit," "Moron," and nine other ripping songs. Formally working in Chicago under the name Tarnations, this four-piece adopted their name from a saying of their favorite comic book hero... they are simply, Two-Fisted Cool.

To join their fan club write them at: 3401 N. Damen Ave., Chicago IL 60618 or by calling John at 773.404.7710.