Melvins
The Crybaby
(Ipecac)

To complete their yearlong trilogy of albums that started with The Maggot and The Bootlicker, the Melvins realized that it was a good time to enlist some reinforcements—and then subsequently realized that it would take a lot less time to find all of their friends than all of their enemies. The Washington State sludge buddies got on the horn and the result is The Crybaby, a ragtag, conspiratorial conquest over the evil forces of musical mass production that the Melvins steadfastly oppose.

An all—non–star cast proudly supports King Buzzo, Dale Crover and Kevin Rutmanis as the 11 tracks unwind, cloaked in dark oddities and played out in every conceivable combination—originals and covers with an array of guests. There are straight-up covers such as the album’s opener, an unexpectedly accurate rendition of “Smells Like Teen Spirit” that draws its only added drama from the vocal, sung by the king of covers and ex-teen heartthrob Leif Garrett. Then there are collaborations such as “Mine Is No Disgrace,” copenned by Buzzo and Jim Thirlwell, which turns out to be among the most threatening, self-pitying and honest ballads ever; the slow tones are broken up nicely by bursts of hideous fuzz and an unrelenting pound. But then, what manner of song is “Ramblin’ Man,” a new version of the Hank Williams number sung in fine, spine-chilling form by grandson Hank Williams III? And “Spineless” makes an impression courtesy of the thin meaness lent by Skeleton Key vocalist Erik Sanko.

The only time things get a little tired is toward the end, during the relatively unimaginative “The Man with the Laughing Hand Is Dead,” with Bliss Blood. But the multidirectional thrusts of the Melvins and Tool in “Divorced” is a thick mix of mentalities and textures on the level of creamy joined with crunchy, especially appropriate since hearing Mike Patton’s “GI Joe” is like having your ears and skull chewed by a ravenous robot. Hey! This isn’t just an album—it’s a sludge-rock Love Boat! So come aboard.—David Weiss