



BRIMSTONE BUTTERFLY
NORMALITY KILLED THE CAT
(DVD-AUDIO: 24/96 STEREO
24/96 MULTI-CHANNEL)

Along with the spectacular French-language rock SACD 'Calogero 3', Brimstone Butterfly qualify as my unexpected find of this year. Admirably, these Danish surround enthusiasts have put together a DVD-Audio which not only demonstrates the full potential of the format, but also contains some cracking contemporary rock music. Not for nothing was this disc lauded at the last European DVD Audio Council meeting as an example of the great things people are doing with the format.

As the disc contains 224kbps MP3s of the album in a ROM section (as well as PDF lyric sheets annotated with the chords!), I spent some time familiarising myself with the stereo version on my iPod before auditioning the surround. I was instantly addicted to the hooky, brattish power-pop, which is given that very trendy new wave vibe by the vintage analogue keyboard sounds of Kristian Vensgaard, at times redolent of The Cars. The album is sung in English, and although the recording may sound slightly less polished than major label projects and some could find Thomas Krämer's nasal vocals slightly wearing, this sounds like a real band having a great time playing together. The stereo MLP version gives real

punch to the recording, but the surround mix opens it out brilliantly with massed guitars, a live, open sound and some discrete centre usage.

The band add maximum value by including interesting and varied videos for all eleven tracks and much textual background. If you wish to support a pioneering attempt to make DVD-Audio away from the majors, and get some great surround rock music as part of the bargain, I can't recommend this disc highly enough. European readers should be able to order by hitting the "English" link from www.brimstonebutterfly.com (sample downloads available) and the band promise that they will pull out all the stops to ship it further afield too. You know it makes sense!

GRANDMASTER FLASH, MELLE MEL & THE FURIOUS FIVE
GREATEST HITS
(DVD-AUDIO: 24/96 MULTI-CHANNEL)

Those old die-hards of DVD-Audio fundamentalism, 5.1 Entertainment, through their Silverline records arm, are about the only company putting out DVD-Audio product in sizable numbers at the moment. The most heartening aspect of this phenomenon is that the quality of their work has improved immeasurably as they move away from simple unwrap versions of doggy Sanctuary catalogue, to new

projects with close artist involvement.

Along with the equally impressive Sugarhill Gang best of disc, in the US this one will be released later this Autumn by the Warners reissues label Rhino, so for once we have beaten the Americans to the punch. The surround mix breathes space into the layered vocals on the classic 'White Lines', which leads off this collection, but I wish the bass kicked a bit more. Maybe the taut kick drum is constricted in the centre of the front soundstage deliberately, but the equally classic 'The Message' has plenty of oomph, with the synth tweets and burbles and the guitar fills traversing the room just as you would have expected them to do. Jesse just reminds you how great some of Prince's early funk excursions would sound in this format.

Ageing B-Boys should love having the ability to play out (and sample!) such seminal tracks on a surround rig, and it can only be hoped that more eighties hip-hop is brought to the format – the combination of tight rapping, sparse beats and primitive keyboard washes seems to work incredibly well when spread around the room – the backing vocals on 'Step Off' are huge and everywhere. Unfortunately the stereo presentation is only Dolby Digital 2.0 (The Sugarhill Gang do get stereo MLP), but Mr. Haynes of the 5.1 Group has done an excellent job with the MLP surround here – I just need to track down his Britney disc somewhere...!