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Aug. 19, 2000

U.S. CRUSH

Self-titled (Immortal Records)

U.S. Crush founder Denny Lake makes a remarkable admission in the group's promotional material. "We sounded like a lot of other punk pop bands," he is quoted as saying.

In this he is right.

He goes on to credit Los Angeles producer Jim Pratt for making his sound more distinctive.

In this he is wrong.

U.S. Crush's major-label debut could have been produced by any number of punk pop bands. If it had been released under the name of Green Day, for example, nobody would have blinked an eye.

The Orange County livesome do a perfectly credible job at producing Southern California loser-punk pop songs, complete with the obligatory references to crack, snooty society girls and standing together in the face of in-crowd scorn.

They utterly fail, however, to do anything to advance the art, choosing instead to follow the formula slavishly. — Sean Scully

DAN FOGELBERG

Dan Fogelberg Live
(Chicago Records)

Sensitive 1970s rocker Dan Fogelberg does nothing to heal his reputation as a rock weenie with his new "Live" collection.

Mr. Fogelberg is the smooth voice behind such weepy schlock as "Longer," "Leader of the Band" and "Same Old Lang Syne."

His latest album is a live collection recorded between 1993 and 1995 but only now finding its way to CD. It combines some old chestnuts, some new songs and some famous covers.

For the most part, it is a horrendous, cringe-inducing mess. Mr. Fogelberg seems determined to become a parody of himself and invests such decent hits as "Hard to Say" and "Make Love Stay" with an overwhelming sense of folk-rock self-importance.

His new songs, such as "Don't Let That Sun Go Down," are no better.

Oddly, Mr. Fogelberg is at his best when he is doing songs not his own. His cover of the old Poco song "You Better Think Twice," harks back to his '70s heyday, when his sense of fun still shone through. His covers of blues classics "Statesboro Blues" and "Blow, Wind, Blow" are not too bad, although he insists on pronouncing the one "Statesboro Blows" for no apparent reason.

He did not, however, need to do a note-for-note remake of the Beatles' "Here Comes the Sun," which mercifully closes the album. — S.S.