

All 66 Clergy Songs Ranked, From Worst to Least Worst

This is a complete ranking of all 66 songs recorded by the Clergy, including the recent material on their comeback album *Fungus Rex*.

This list includes all songs on the Clergy's full-length albums (*SFR*, *Residual Alliance of the Dead*, *Meltdown*, *Prison of Shame* and *Fungus Rex*), and the EPs *Garage Sale*, *Clergy Does Other People's Stuff* and *Stuffed, Flushed and Resurrected – the Remix Masters*. It also includes the final two tracks on High Priest Joe's solo album, because he used the Clergy as his backup band for those songs. For songs recorded in more than one version such as "Rack 'em Good", both versions are included in the rankings (but "Lunatic Asylum" only appears once, since only one version appears on two different releases).

The list does not include the rest of the High Priest Joe solo material, anything from the Clergynerations project, any live bootlegs or radio broadcast archives, nor any of the non-musical audio "skits" used to open and/or close albums (i.e. Bufgoo in the bathroom or trying to start his truck).

66. Stuffed, Flushed and Resurrected (the entire original album)¹

The entire *SFR* album kicks off the bottom of the list, even though it's an album, not a song, because I don't actually know whether it contains individual songs, or what the titles of those songs are. A half-hour of nothing but experimental tape noise, *SFR* is basically the Clergy's equivalent of Lou Reed's *Metal Machine Music*, except that they at least had the good sense to get it out of their system before actually going public. *SFR* is so obscure that practically nobody has ever even heard it – in fact, even producer X never bothered to listen to more than a brief snippet before he agreed to work with the revamped Clergy on their Acne debut. It's so worthless, the Clergy didn't even use anything from it for their so-called "remix", except for the title. After this total flop (made worse by the contemporaneous bankruptcy of Ace Records), the band realized there was nothing here for them to build on. The only way forward was nothing less than a complete reboot with a new sound and lineup.

¹ Some might argue that it's improper to include the *SFR* album in this ranking, because it was never an official Acne Records release. For those people, I would suggest adding the "clean" version of "This One's for the Social Workers" at number 19, one spot below the uncensored version, and bump everything else down a notch to keep the number of Clergy songs at 66.

65. Jam (*Residual Alliance of the Dead*)

For the newly-reconstituted Clergy, the process of finding a workable sound after the *SFR* disaster necessarily involved quite a bit of studio experimentation. New instruments, amplifiers and recording gear had to be tested out, and apparently some cats had to be tortured as well. Most bands would not have used precious tape to document such an exorcising of their demons, let alone actually include it on their album. But the Clergy were under so much pressure from their new label Acne to release a full-length album, yet so short on material, that they let the tape keep rolling till it reached its end while they banged and clattered away. This process was used to fill out **both** sides of the *RAD* album, which certainly didn't do them any favors with the critics. The perfunctorily-titled "Jam" closes out the Reaper side of *RAD* and is the worse of the two side-ending jams.

64. Jam in B# (*R.A.D.*)

Closing out the Worms side of *RAD*, some view this Jam as even worse than the Jam on the other side, because here the Clergy members spend even less time playing actual instruments, instead just messing around with household objects. But I give it an ever-so-slight edge over "Jam" mainly due to the genuine passion and conviction of Joe's recurring grunts. Also, at some point one of the members starts randomly playing a '50s swing bass line, but the rest of the group has the good sense to completely ignore him.

63. Clergfil (*Stuffed Flushed and Resurrected – The Remix Masters*)

Barely even a song at a scant 20 seconds long, this is the last, pathetic gasp of the Clergy before going on a very long hiatus. (The subsequent odds & sods scraped together by Acne to try and keep the Clergy brand alive don't really count.) Particularly odd here is the way the Clergy negate the whole premise of the title of the EP by sampling and recycling sounds from *RAD* instead of the actual *SFR* album. They truly had nothing left to say at this point; all that remained was to let Joe's "boom, chak, boom, boom chak" loop fade away while they exited stage left.

62. Reaper Madness II – Trial by Clergy (*R.A.D.*)

Just as most metal bands don't include free-form studio jams on their official album releases, they generally don't put multiple takes of the same song on their albums, at least not until said albums get "expanded collector's edition" re-releases many years down the line. But as noted above, the *RAD* sessions presented the Clergy with the nearly insurmountable challenge of stretching a very meager repertoire to fill an hour-long album. So, the Clergy didn't even try to surmount it, instead larding up *RAD* with a second take of "Reaper Madness" that's even more long-winded than the first, albeit with enhanced "stereo separation". If the listener be

the judge, then this trial by the Clergy should rightly be ruled a mistrial, with all parties and their counsel hereby ordered to hit fast-forward to “Boulders” forthwith.²

61. More Organ Grinder (*Meltdown*)

Much of the Clergy’s career is shrouded in mystery and legend, but one thing can be said with absolute certainty: *nobody*, at any time or place, ever *asked* for more Organ Grinder. Yet there it is cluttering up side two (the Telephone side) of *Meltdown*, the most forgettable of a number of filler tracks on that side that have no obvious reason for existing, but hang around anyway like a cluster of pigeons shitting on your porch.

60. Hey You! (*R.A.D.*)

Only three tracks into their true debut album, we already have the first example of an annoying, recurring Clergy tendency: the dead-end stylistic detour. This one’s a woeful take on ‘50s rock & roll, with all of the band members sounding out of sorts. Manuel kicks off the proceedings with what at first sounds like a ukulele but soon turns out to be a down-tuned mariachi rhythm guitar. His dalliance with this instrument means that his usual fat bass sound is sorely missed. Joe’s lyrics are supposed to come off mean and threatening, but he screams them in such an unnaturally high register that they sound like yelps of anguish. Hack, apparently confused by the weirdness of it all, lays down a sad, wheezing nothingburger of a chainsaw solo. “Hey You!” constituted such a departure from the Clergy’s core strengths that they rarely played it live, and never returned to the ‘50s for inspiration on any later albums.

59. Watching the Toilet Flush (*Meltdown*)

This overly long piece of instrumental filler was used to flesh out the running time of the *Meltdown* album after the Clergy ran out of ideas (even mediocre, ill-advised ones like most of the other tracks on the Telephone side). It starts out with what sounds like a person with a very narrow urethra and a very weak stream taking a leak, and goes downhill from there, through a lazy campfire blues guitar section and into a nondescript, plodding full-band jam. As Rick McDick has pointed out, as soon as it ends your brain forgets whatever it is you’ve been listening to. The members’ spoken-word commentary during the guitar section is, in retrospect, the least funny of their many (some would say unrelenting) attempts at toilet humor - even by the admittedly low standards of toilet humor.

² The Clergy is rumored to be remastering *RAD* for a retrospective CD release that will have “Reaper Madness II” as its last numbered track in keeping with its status as an “alternate take”, with both of the “Jams” appearing thereafter as unlisted “hidden” tracks.

58. Flowers (*R.A.D.*)

Buried near the end of *RAD*'s tracklist, "Flowers" was Bufgoo's debut taking the lead on a Clergy song. His sci-fi B-movie-inspired track about a mutant killer garden plant gone berserk was all well and good in concept, but sorely lacking in execution. The bass and drums play a somewhat interesting syncopated groove on the verses, except in certain spots where it seems the tape got accidentally erased. Bufgoo's vocal delivery is tentative, lacking in confidence, and fails to express the dramatic tension in the lyrics. In contrast, Joe's random triangle outbursts are so absurdly hot in the mix that they, if nothing else, have a shot at startling the bejeezus out of the listener. Maybe that triangle is supposed to represent the flower? Bufgoo himself disowned this song soon after *RAD* came out, hence it was never much featured in the Clergy's live shows.

57. Moozur (*Hi Priest Joe* acapella version)

It's understandable why the Clergy was tempted to take a second stab at "Moozur": the original version on *Meltdown* pulled off the rare feat of being so bad, it was actually good. This version, by contrast, demonstrates why the Clergy made few other attempts at acapella vocal stylings (just some very short bits on the *Fungus Rex* album). Although their vocal tones sound intentionally ugly, the band members seem to still be sticking a little too close to the harmonies of the source hymn to be truly sacrilegious. Worst of all, this version makes one all too aware of the crucial role of X's madman organ playing in holding the original "Moozur" together and driving it forward. Its absence is the main reason this track never made it onto an official Clergy release and was instead relegated to Joe's solo project.

56. Intermission Music (*Meltdown*)

Taken as a standalone piece, Manuel's short unaccompanied bass solo is just a bit of tuneless noodling without any real musical value. Two things can be said in its favor, though. It serves a useful function in the overall flow of the *Meltdown* album, providing a moment of quiet reflection before the punk aggression of "Takin' Retards to the Zoo". It was also the basis of a rather clever Beatles joke.

55. Outro (*Fungus Rex*)

Even after a 20-odd year hiatus and a great leap forward in sound quality, some things never change with the Clergy – namely their practice of ending every album with a throwaway track. The outro that closes out *Fungus Rex* is nothing more than a retooled version of the intro, with some nutty editing and effects on the vocals. Where the Intro led directly into "Ignoble Gases", the Outro finishes off with a brief coda where Bufgoo inexplicably brings back the same beat he played on "Roto-

Rooter Man”. And we’re left still not knowing much of anything about the mysterious robot Thor.

54. Movers (*Meltdown*)

Like its predecessor *RAD*, the *Meltdown* album was a full hour long, but unlike *RAD*, which was recorded piecemeal over several months, *Meltdown* was knocked out in a single, intense week. Near the end of the process the Clergy members were seriously gassed, drained of the focus and intensity that had inspired the earlier songs on the album. Thus, toward the end of side 2 we find tracks offering less of the Clergy’s dark rage and more of their dumbfuck antics, such as this little brain fart in which nobody’s soul is damned to hell, only some items of personal property. Even worse, “Movers” is the **third** track on Side 2 alone that features a gratuitous drum solo. Either restraint was a foreign concept to Bufgoo, or the other members just really didn’t want to take solos anymore, or both. Probably both.

53. Arnold’s Song (*The Garage Sale EP*)

This simple campfire singalong gets demoted a few places because the Clergy didn’t actually write it themselves, but instead stole it from some random college freshman.³ It kicks off a very brief EP follow-up to *RAD* that was wholly devoted to exploring sounds outside of the metal genre. Here we notice a curious paradox that first manifested itself with “Hey You!”: on the sporadic occasions when a Clergy member picked up a guitar, their use of that instrument tended to steer the band away from metal and toward some other genre like folk, blues, punk or even funk. (More on that later.) For now, it suffices to note that although “Arnold’s Song” fits *Garage Sale*’s overall theme of “being back” quite well, it really shouldn’t have been the leadoff track. It would have worked much better as the EP’s final track since it is in much the same spirit as the throwaway joke tracks that close out the Clergy’s other releases, as evidenced by Joe’s bizarre Daffy Duck woo-hoos at the end.

52. Organ Grinder (*R.A.D.*)

Producer X cooked up a pretty gnarly distorted organ sound, and the Clergy thought it was cool enough to serve as the basis for a bit of filler. “Organ Grinder” does the

³ Whilst touring in support of *RAD*, the Clergy played a gig on a university campus in the Midwest. Hack thinks it was Ball State in Indiana, but Joe swears they were at Southern Illinois U at Carbondale. Anyway, after the show the group thought it would be fun to crash a party in one of the freshman dorms. They talked their way past security but must have got the wrong dorm because after searching every floor, there were no ragers anywhere to be found. They did, however, chance upon a small group of geeky frosh guys, one of whom was playing beginner-level chords on a guitar and ironically bleating out Arnold Schwarzenegger movie catchphrases. Joe and Hack remembered the “song” and the rest is history.

job of filler so well, you couldn't ask for more, and in fact, no one ever did ask for more. On *Meltdown*, the Clergy gave us more anyway, for no good reason.

51. Reaper Madness (*R.A.D.*)

There's a method to "Reaper Madness". Before you write off this lengthy instrumental excursion as pointless filler, listen a little deeper and a certain coherence emerges. An opening electronic moaning sound portends the arrival of Death and his four minions. Then, quite methodically, each of the four members of the Clergy in turn present their own motif and repeat it obsessively in the manner of an unholy cant, as if progressing through the stations of an inverted cross. Once this solemn procession has finished, the victim's soul departs with the sound of an eerie synthesized helicopter. All of that cool theory aside, this track will ultimately bore most listeners to tears with its length and virtual lack of vocals, or else irritate them with its very rough, lo-fi sound quality (ironically the Clergy's first attempt at "stereo" recording). Worse, the inclusion on *RAD* of an alternate take immediately following this one amounts to inexcusable audio torture (see #62 above).

50. 13 (*Clergy Does Other Peoples' Stuff*)

The leadoff track from the Clergy's EP of nearly all cover tunes did not bode well for the remainder of the project. Of the four covers here, this was the only one originally done by a thrash metal band, yet for unknown reasons the Clergy chose one of Anthrax' most perfunctory filler tracks for the EP. It came off as a perhaps unconscious message that the Clergy were unwilling or unable to do more than throw a token crumb to their thrash fans. Was it simply because they lacked the musical chops to cover a more complex or better-known song? (*Ed. -Yep.*) Further complicating matters is the thin, weak sound quality plaguing this track, a clue that the band was still adjusting to its new remote studio in Los Angeles and didn't have their sound fully dialed in. Fortunately, the remainder of *CDOPS* fared a bit better.

49. Blender Mania (*S.F.R. – T. R. M.*)

By far the more interesting of the two instrumental tracks that close out the *SFR Remix Masters* project. Most of the tracks on this EP juxtapose analog lo-fi vocals against brittle-sounding 8-bit digital sample-based instrumental tracks, but this track along with "Clergfil" (see #63) rely solely on harsh digital sonics, in particular various blender samples. The martial, robotic beats along with the grinding kitchen appliances tell the wordless story of the late Durk, a blender-playing zombie member of the proto-Clergy, who has now fully departed this mortal coil but whose Osterizer manipulations echo forever in the cyber-world.

48. Roto Rooter Man (*R.A.D.*)

Although this track is the highest-ranking of the multiple instrumental jams on *RAD*, it still falls solidly in the bottom third of the Clergy's overall output. Whereas "Blender Mania" was a digital creation, "R.R.M." is basically its analog, version 1.0 equivalent. Manuel and Bufgoo's bass and drums sound uber-wimpy here, but their quasi-funk rhythms serve as a foundation for a whole host of kitchen and bathroom appliances in addition to the Clergy's typical instrumentation. The piece zigs and zags whimsically, which helps it avoid becoming a total snooze-fest.

47. Meatgrinder (*S.F.R. – T.R.M.*)

The most aggro track on *SFRTRM* features some menacing digital chainsaw but otherwise doesn't bring much of anything new to the table. Joe disguises his lack of enthusiasm by trying way too hard to make his vocals sound aggressive, but on the chorus, he overdubs a silly vocal part apparently inspired by "Ballroom Blitz" that turns the whole performance into a farce. At this point on their final EP, it's hard not to begin feeling embarrassed for the Clergy, although the next track "Rawmeal" would constitute one last, brief high point.

46. Durk Durk (*Hi Priest Joe – Sinphony No. 666 etc., etc.*)

To finish off his lone solo album, Joe rounded up the rest of the Clergy for a plodding, workmanlike elegy to their one-time blenderman, Durk. In some respects, this track is a generic, by-the-numbers Clergy offering that hits all the expected notes, yet something about it just sounds a little off. Not the bass; even though the band disses Manuel as if he's not right there in the studio, it still sounds like him thumping the 4-string. Joe's maddening inability to maintain his randomly deployed fake Cockney accent through even one whole song is also true to form. More likely it's the backing vocals or the tuneless trumpet, but whatever it is, the impression that the Clergy is beginning to fall apart sonically, if not personally, is inescapable. The near-total use of digital instrumentation on their next release would confirm this notion.

45. Addicted to Love (*Prison of Shame*)

We now arrive at the weakest track on the Clergy's third full-length album. *POS*' shorter running time compared to its two predecessors made for a tighter album that eschewed aimless, free-form instrumental jamming, in B# or otherwise. That's not to say that *POS* doesn't have its own share of filler, let alone mediocrity. Exhibit A: this "live" (not really) Robert Palmer cover, which bears the Clergy's trademark sound but otherwise plays it very straight, lacking much in the way of irony – which is odd considering the many nods to punk/alternative music on the rest of *POS*.

Also, it's too damn long. On the plus side, this track is a quintessential showcase for the rumbling, reverb-y sound of the Clergy's main basement studio.

44. Down Under (*Meltdown*)

Listeners hoping to hear a Clergy take on the land of koalas and vegemite were sorely disappointed by this track which, truth be told, never had a fighting chance at becoming a fan favorite. For one, it had the misfortune to directly follow the great "Telephone God" on the *Meltdown* tracklist while being inferior in every way. Like the latter, it even boasts a drum solo, albeit one so redundant and tiresome that even the other bandmembers lose patience and start audibly goofing off, ignoring both the live mic and Bufgoo's hamfisted pounding. All the momentum of this song's relatively upbeat verses gets squandered by the somnolent chorus, which features Joe and Bufgoo trying out a vocal style closer to yawning than singing. The lyrics, which concern a kind of sewage that's even grosser than regular sewage because it runs down under Clergy Street, expand somewhat on the themes of *RAD*'s "Sludge Pit", but not enough to avoid coming off as redundant.

43. Jazzy Lil' Ditty (*P.O.S.*)

A short piece of throwaway filler to end *POS*, it manages to be far better and more listenable than any of the Clergy's other album-ending throwaways. Its walking bass and crisp ride cymbal are indeed jazzy, although there's not much else going on besides the band members taking turns reciting the same bit of indecipherable nonsense, much to Manuel's annoyance.

42. Residual Dead (*R.A.D.*)

The Clergy's first attempt at an extended epic was intended to be the centerpiece of their official debut album. Its extreme length meant that the band couldn't afford to do very many takes in the studio; they had to get it right in at most two passes, a feat their meager talent would not permit. The track is thus full of awkward flubs, including a totally botched ending fade-out. Still, one can't fault the band's ambition here – they maintain a high level of intensity through more verses than most Bob Dylan songs, each depicting a scene of gory mayhem more shockingly depraved than the last. Each verse is followed by a grunted chorus that rides over a devilishly tricky, complex time signature. Near the end there's the sort of endless drum solo that only makes sense in a live setting; a more commercial band would have edited it down for the album, but the Clergy had a lot of blank tape to fill. Far from the Clergy's best song, but certainly their deathiest, "Residual Dead" was the closer on almost all of their live setlists – effectively, their "Free Bird".

41. Skinny Sweaty Man (*C.D.O.P.S.*)

The *CDOPS* EP saw Joe introducing electric guitar to the Clergy's music for the first time, an addition that didn't change the band's sound all that much, but merely provided seasoning to a couple of tracks, including this one. "Skinny Sweaty Man" is one more example of the Clergy's affinity for covering songs that are only about a minute long. It's sloppy and below-average, but the band deserves some hipster cred for covering a lesser-known track from the pre-superstardom RHCP.

40. Shitfood (*P.O.S.*)

The Clergy were determined to never outgrow their taste for gross-out toilet humor, and this entry in said vein is about average in that department. (Their later track "Rawmeal" would cover the same subject matter to much funnier effect.) Featuring scratchy funk guitar and a hiccupping trip-up of a chorus, thanks to an extra 16th note added to each bar, "Shitfood" is basically filler but at least doesn't overstay its welcome.

39. Chickens (3 Different Kinds) (*S.F.R. – T.R.M.*)

Besides containing three songs titled after various members of the animal kingdom, the *Remix Masters* EP doesn't really have anything in common with Pink Floyd's *Animals*. Where the latter album's lyrics used animals metaphorically to deliver a heavy, depressing message about the unfairness of modern society, the animal-themed songs on this EP are literally about animals. "Chickens" is an especially trifling bit of industrial synth-pop fluff. Hack and Joe's vocals come off half-assed, as if they were fully aware that the lyrics are so silly, they're not even that funny. The result is nonetheless still more listenable than much of the band's *oeuvre*, thanks to the danceable groove. An extended 12" dance version would have elevated this song in the ranking, had one ever been made.

38. Funky Chicken Jam (*Meltdown*)

Side one of *Meltdown* is arguably the Clergy's most solid and consistent half-album. The flipside kicks off with this acoustic hillbilly hootenanny, which is all good fun, but can also be taken as an ominous warning that the listener is about to enter a realm of detours, failed experiments, great heights and bottomless depths. The following track, "Telephone God", would find the boys coming in from the backwoods and back to the basement to hit their thrash metal peak before flushing all notions of quality control down the toilet for the rest of the album.

37. Fish (*S.F.R. – T.R.M.*)

This wild and floppy track – the first actual song on *SFRTRM* after the brief opening comedy sketch “The Fishin’ Channel” – gave listeners their initial taste of the lo-fi digital sound that serves as the basis for the entire EP. Right off the bat, we find ourselves in an alien sonic realm, thanks to “Fish”’s totally unorthodox song structure in which an unaccompanied bass solo arrives right after the intro, but before the first verse. But that ain’t Manuel’s bass – it sounds more like his video game avatar, thanks to its apparently being processed through the sound chip of a Commodore 64. The chorus relies on a sped-up “Clergy Street” sample, along with the most brilliant feature of this track: a digitally distorted chainsaw that gurgles not unlike the idling motor of a charter boat pulling up to the dock. Joe and Hack’s vocals are all over the place since they play at least 5 different characters between them. It all gets exhausting, but you can’t fault the guys for trying.

36. Clergy Street (*C.D.O.P.S.*)

The band’s decision to re-record “Clergy Street” for an EP that was otherwise all cover songs made little sense to fans. In truth, they only did it because they felt it made for a perfect segue into their cover of Zeppelin’s “Rock and Roll”. Other than that, this version has no reason to exist, which may be why the rhythm section sounds so bored and listless. (Bufgoo can’t even find a steady tempo at first.) As compared with the original, the audio mix is better balanced here and Hack’s chainsaw solo explores more sonic territory, but the overall performance is dull and uninspired, making this the weaker version of “Clergy Street” in the final analysis.

35. Clergy Street (*Meltdown*)

If you think about it, “Clergy Street” is basically a rap song, or at least the closest thing to one in the Clergy catalog. Their goal was to kick off *Meltdown* with an anthem for the ages, a definitive statement about who they were as a band. Their approach to achieving this end was to dumb it down and return to the minimalism of “Worms” with a simple-as-fuck two-note bassline over a steady, plodding beat. They kept the arrangement minimal, with no instruments outside of drums, bass and chainsaw,⁴ so as to allow the vocals, shouted with a cadence clearly inspired by Run-DMC, to take center stage. Then there’s the mix, which sounds like it’s coming from the subwoofer of an Escalade that just pulled up next to you at a stoplight,⁵ thanks to the fact that X had just finished installing new recording equipment in the basement studio and didn’t have the settings fully calibrated yet. The band’s simplistic, conservative approach caused them to fall short of the intended stadium-

⁴ Plus a few little plonks on a xylophone.

⁵ Not on Clergy Street, though; more likely Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.

shaking anthem and instead wind up with what is the least essential track on side one of *Meltdown* – yet still better than 6 out of the 10 tracks on side two.

34. Boulders (*R.A.D.*)

The best of the bottom half of the Clergy catalog is this perfectly mediocre offering from their debut, significant because it was their first foray into a bona fide thrash metal tempo. Bufgoo shows himself capable of holding down a double-bass beat, punctuated with mechanical, unimaginative fills. But the other members don't fare so well, despite keeping their parts as basic as fuck just to have a shot at staying astride the galloping beat. The lyrics are apparently intended to make you scared of going hiking or taking your beagle for a walk. The Clergy's later hit "Telephone God" would be a more masterful and refined take on thrash, but "Boulders" made for a decent first effort, actually becoming an important mainstay of the group's live shows due to its effectiveness at getting the mosh pit going.⁶

33. Kaleidoscope (*Meltdown*)

Of all the Clergy's many stylistic dead-ends, this venture into shiny, happy '60s psychedelic pop was certainly the weirdest, and while it's certainly catchy and tightly written, it doesn't really fit in on the *Meltdown* album, or anywhere else in the Clergy discography for that matter. As it turns out, the song wasn't actually the band's idea. Shortly after they began working on *Meltdown*, an irate 48-year-old Englishman by the name of Gregg Stevens came out of the woodwork, essentially accusing the Clergy of identity theft and threatening litigation. You see, Stevens had been the lead singer of a twee British psych-pop band in the '60s that had shared the same name (but had never broken in the U.S.), and had long since descended into obscurity.⁷ Although nobody in the U.S. Clergy camp had ever heard of their U.K. namesakes, they needed album space to fill and were reluctant to get drawn into a costly court battle. Thus, they invited Stevens to sing lead on one of his own songs from the old days, with the Clergy serving as backup musicians (actually, X's keyboards did the lion's share of the backing up). For their troubles,

⁶ Joe especially enjoyed introducing "Boulders" in front of a live audience, often teasing the crowd with a fake intro that would instead lead into another song entirely. On one of their later tours, he would tease the song by shouting "We're... gonna... drop... some... PENNIES [or joints] ON THE STAGE!", before throwing down a handful of coins [or joints] from his pocket and then running around trying to pick them back up. Bufgoo would start off the drumbeat while Joe was still running around saying "Wait! Stop! I need mah COINS!"

⁷ Stevens even went so far as to claim that the U.K. Clergy had never disbanded and was still an active group. While this was technically true, by 1990 Stevens was the only remaining original member, the group hadn't recorded any new music or played at any venue larger than a tea party in at least 20 years, and Stevens' main source of income was his job as a quality assurance supervisor.

the group also received promotional consideration from a now-defunct St. Louis-area movie theater chain.

The band soon felt dirty having participated in such a brazen sellout. Although they relented to Acne's demand that "Kaleidoscope" be included on the *Meltdown* album, they did so only on the condition that Hack reserve the right to take a flamethrower to Acne's entire masters archive if they ever promoted the track to radio, let alone release it as a single. The Clergy have never performed the song live, nor have they ever had any further contact with Gregg Stevens.

32. Lunatic Asylum (C.D.O.P.S.)

Hill Of Beans was a "freak-folk" acoustic duo that was active from 1988-91, mainly in the Los Angeles area, releasing just one CD in 1990 before splitting. Despite their limited popularity, not only did they inspire Jack Black to eventually form Tenacious D, but their best-known song "Satan, Lend Me a Dollar" was a major influence on Beck's "Satan Gave Me a Taco". It was quite serendipitous that the Clergy, while sojourning in L.A. for their recording of *CDOPS*, happened to be out grabbing chili burgers one night and overheard Hill of Beans performing at a coffeehouse next door. You'd think the aforementioned "Satan, Lend Me a Dollar" would be the obvious choice for the Clergy to cover, but instead they picked the duo's lesser-known "Lunatic Asylum" for a makeover. The Clergy's treatment gave the original a real kick in the ass, replacing Hill of Beans' good-natured goofiness with a sardonic bite driven by buzzing chainsaw, caustic organ, and even the brief appearance of Joe's electric guitar quoting "Iron Man". Also, the lyrics meld well enough with *POS* mental-illness theme that Acne saw fit to re-release "Lunatic Asylum" on that album as well, where it would reach an audience beyond the few hardcore devotees who actually bought *CDOPS*.

31. Rock and Roll (C.D.O.P.S.)

The Clergy closed out their covers EP by taking a complete opposite approach from their earlier misguided attempt at old timey rock n' roll on "Hey You"; here they strip out all the rock and roll from Led Zeppelin's song of the same name. Joe's delivery replaces Robert Plant's sexual frustration with deadpan, terminal alienation, a vocal rendition of a "forever alone" meme who can't actually be missing rock-and-rolling, because he's never done it in the first place. His bandmates replace Zeppelin's swagger with a sterile, plodding grind which would have worked better if they had simply maintained it through the entire song, but they break character and slide into a cheesy R&B-style organ break before returning to the grey mood for the finish. This track manages to be the best one on the EP, yet still worse than 30 other Clergy songs, making *Other People's Stuff* the band's least essential product.

30. 8,000 Miles (*P.O.S.*)

As pointed out earlier, the Clergy's use of guitar ironically tended to lower, rather than raise, the metal quotient for the minority of songs in which it appeared. "8,000 Miles" is a prime example of this tendency, as it's a perfectly fine, tough little fuzz-blues-rocker written from the perspective of a cannon-fodder grunt on the front lines of Operation Desert Storm. But it sounds more ZZ Top than Clergy, not least because only two members (Joe and Bufgoo) played on it. Hack contributed nothing, although he was probably nodding along in the control room, and Manuel was AWOL from the studio that day, so his part was covered by an uncredited session bassist who we can be fairly certain was *not* Tadashi "Joe" Nakamura.

29. Meat Robots (*Fungus Rex*)

The Clergy's 2020 comeback album boasts much-improved production quality thanks to today's affordable digital recording technology. The downside of that is that occasionally on *Fungus Rex*, the band's reach exceeds its grasp, like on this track where the task of mixing proved difficult, resulting in a muddy-sounding mess. "Meat Robots" was intended to be Hack's main feature on this album, but he wasn't up for tackling the cerebral lyrics, instead limiting his contribution to a humdrum chainsaw performance that shows he hasn't learned any new tricks on his machine.⁸ The other members more than take up the slack: Bufgoo powers the backbeat with an explosive rimshot sound, while Manuel debuts a new fretless bass which he manipulates to growl like a bear prematurely woken from hibernation. Above it all, Joe brings back the robotic voice he first used on "We're Back (We're Cybernetic)" to deliver the most richly philosophical lyrics of any Clergy song, driven by a fear that the coming transhuman singularity will strip us of what we perceive to be our autonomy and moral agency.

28. SIDS Is a Lie (*P.O.S.*)

After opening the *POS* album with the breakneck sprint-out-of-the-gate "Put Me Back", the Clergy maintained a high level of intensity on the second track, "SIDS Is a Lie", a tight, focused blast of punk rage. The band's feat of making their full instrumental arsenal of chainsaw, fuzz guitar, triangle, jawharp, bass and drums hit like a piledriver without coming off sloppy was a triumph, considering they had to cut the track quickly and without much opportunity for studio polishing. What's missing, though, is the Clergy's usual sense of humor. Joe spits out his vocals with genuine fury and bile, all for the sake of calling out tweaker parents who made up a diagnosis of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome to hide the fact that their infant died from sheer neglect. Horrible if true, except that such a scenario wasn't in the news

⁸ He did spend at least some of the Clergy's long hiatus learning percussion, as heard on some of the other tracks on *Fungus Rex*.

circa 1992. So either Joe knew such a couple personally, or he just made the whole thing up to create something to be pissed about. Really creepy either way, which is why it's probably best not to think too much about this song.

27. We're Back (We're Acoustic) (*Garage Sale*)

The Clergy's North American tour of summer/fall 1988 in support of *RAD* was a modest success, but their maiden voyage across the Atlantic to play in Scandinavia that winter was a disaster. Bad timing was partly to blame: all of the bigger Nordic black metal groups had completed their summer festival schedules and were holed up in their respective studios, so the Clergy were unable to get any opening slots to support those bands. Worse, Manuel proved unable to endure the endless subarctic nights, causing him to spiral into a depressive rage and quit the tour early. Finally, the container ship transporting the band's equipment back to the States was wrecked during an unusually violent nor'easter. All of this led to the Clergy scrapping plans for a full-length album, instead filling some of their downtime by playing acoustic coffeehouse gigs and recording the very brief *Garage Sale* EP entirely without the use of their usual gear. Lacking their trademark sonic arsenal, the Clergy managed to retain their identity as a band by expressing the sheer force of their personalities, as heard on "We're Back (We're Acoustic)", a simple three-chord folk guitar jam with the added bonus of Hack's ritual torture and sacrifice of a hammer dulcimer by way of an intro. Once the main chord sequence comes into focus, it forms a backdrop for each member to shout lyrics establishing his respective stage persona.⁹ A couple of distinctive Clergy quirks are introduced here as well: joking repartee between Bufgoo and his "mom", and Joe's debut of his makeshift horn, the "tuneless trumpet".¹⁰ Long, overly repetitious, and with terrible sound quality, this track's shortage of listenability is made up for by its significance as a document of the Clergy's perseverance during a very difficult career phase.

26. Cows (*S.F.R. – T.R.M.*)

A dodgy mix and several vocal miscues aside, this track boasts the hardest-hitting groove of any of the digitally generated offerings on the *Remix Masters* project. Fittingly, "Cows" is the only song from that EP that the Clergy arranged for live performances after reuniting in 2013 (although a band insider claims they have also toyed around with "Rawmeal" in rehearsal). Its bottom-end whomp is an ideal foundation for lyrics depicting a ghastly, fully industrialized beef operation that bears an uncanny resemblance to the *Matrix*'s scenario, five years hence, of humans

⁹ For example, Hack announces his newly-acquired guitar skills consisting of a single chord, insufficient even for playing the basic A-G-D sequence featured here (coincidentally the same as on the Who's "Won't Get Fooled Again"). Joe and Manuel did all the actual strumming.

¹⁰ This instrument took its name from the chorus of a song by the U.K. indie rock band The Mekons: "Blow your tuneless trumpet... the choice is yours!"

being used as biological power cells. As such, “Cows” is the most fully realized entry in *SFR-TRM*’s animal-themed trilogy.

25. Green Puss Balls (*R.A.D.*)

The Clergy started their sessions for *R.A.D.* with only a small handful of songs already written, which meant that they had to create most of the material for that album in the studio. This process mostly resulted in an overabundance of filler and free-form jamming, except on one occasion when, during a burger break, they challenged themselves to write a proper verse-chorus-verse song in less than 15 minutes. To meet this challenge, the obvious strategy was to return to the band’s time-tested bottomless well of topical inspiration: disgusting bodily emissions and/or secretions. The end product was this gross-out jam that features Joe’s nonchalant vocal delivery over a jaunty, vaguely Latin rhythm and Hack somehow manipulating his chainsaw to play triads. For some reason the band saw fit to let Bufgoo take an extended drum solo even though he had already been featured in “Residual Dead”, but this time his solo was more concise and better thought-out. “Green Puss Balls” wound up having unexpected staying power and was featured in the Clergy’s live set even into the *Meltdown* era, yet still seemed a very unlikely song for Joe to resurrect for his solo album. His choice of this track to give a radical reworking is a testament to his contrarian nature.

24. Sick Minds (*P.O.S.*)

“Where’s the death metal?! We want some goddamn DEATH metal!” was the thought likely going through Clergy fans’ minds, sick or otherwise, whilst listening to *POS* for the first time and arriving at this track, which had some worrying that their favorite cut-rate black metal semi-heroes were turning into a cut-rate Violent Femmes. Notwithstanding its lack of anything either heavy or resembling metal, “Sick Minds” is a perfectly serviceable little slice of folk-punk with its brisk drumbeat and snappy acoustic guitar providing a solid platform for the members to engage in some spirited call-and-response vocals. It’s possible this song originated during the band’s exile in coffeehouse-land during their troubled *Garage Sale* era, but if so, it surely underwent significant polishing prior to turning up on *POS*. The bizarre shift to a samba beat near the song’s end is a sign of this over-polishing.

23. Meltdown People (*Meltdown*)

In many ways, the Clergy’s entire career was one long exercise in half-assedness, so it makes sense that *Meltdown*, their initial stab at a “concept” album, was similarly half-assed. Actually not even half: the meltdown concept is present only on four consecutive songs on said album, and even those four are only loosely thematically

related, lacking any sort of narrative arc or musical relation.¹¹ Of the four “title” songs, “Meltdown People” is the one that has typically taken the most flak due to its muddy mix and excessive length. But its running time of nearly seven minutes makes more sense if understood as part of a soundtrack to a ‘60s grindhouse teen exploitation flick. Its instrumental midsection features long solos on jawharp, chainsaw, tuneless trumpet and organ, each of which can be thought of as representing a different teenager transforming into a grotesque “meltdown person” before going out to terrorize the townsfolk. Manuel’s galloping bassline and Bufgoo’s mind-numbingly repetitive drumbeat¹² anchor this montage with a heart-pounding sense of dread. Unfortunately, none of the above is enough to redeem the stupid-ass intro, which should have been edited out entirely as no one would miss its weak, cheesy synth stabs, let alone Joe’s dork-fest of a spoken-word vocal.

22. In the Meltdown (*Meltdown*)

The second of *Meltdown*’s four “title” songs is a brief trip through nonsensical weirdness, its lyrics a veritable slide show of surreal house-of-horrors imagery. It remains a longtime favorite of Manuel’s hardcore fans because of the way he stretches the limits of his instrument here, more so than on any other Clergy track. His bass (aside from the lead vocals alternately supplied by Hack and Joe) powers the slow, oozing verses pretty much all by itself, with the full band entering only on the chorus. Also noteworthy is Joe’s decision on the second verse to bring back the squealing falsetto vocal tone last heard on “Hey You!”, although here he shows quite a bit more strength and control. Not to be outdone, Hack reveals himself on the chorus to be a rather hideous falsetto shrieker in his own right. As was the case with “Clergy Street”, the band hired a session xylophonist to play on this track, but due to severe budget constraints, they could only afford to pay him for three or four notes per song.

21. The Final Meltdown (*Meltdown*)

Everything about “The Final Meltdown”, including the title, is a little too obvious and on-the-nose. For their final installment in *Meltdown*’s title suite, the Clergy quite literally melted down their sound by dispensing with all sense of melody, making the pitch of the bass and chainsaw slide around like goo. Joe grunts out lyrics that are basically a post-nuclear-holocaust take on the famous stand-up comic

¹¹ Some have speculated that each of the four “meltdown” songs was written by a different Clergy member. This suspicion is difficult to confirm because, as a rule, all original Clergy songs are typically credited to the entire band, with songwriting royalties split according to a formula known only to the group and its lawyers.

¹² Bufgoo has since explained that his repetitive drumming on this song was per X’s request that he duplicate exactly the beats of the auto-rhythm unit that came pre-installed on the early-model home organ that X played on the track.

in-joke, the “Aristocrats”, but leaves the first two choruses to Hack and Bufgoo, the latter of whom flips his drumbeats around backwards to accent the perversity. Not only are Bufgoo’s beats turned around, but so is the whole song structure, going chorus-verse-chorus instead of verse-chorus-verse. Despite that chorus being rather catchy, the instrumental attack is too punishing to give this track any potential as a single or radio feature, but it nonetheless proved a very effective vehicle for the Clergy to bludgeon their live audiences with on the *Meltdown* tour. Even X was able to get in on the action, ramping his synth drone up to 11 on the post-chorus outro.

20. Takin’ Retards to the Zoo (*Meltdown*)

Not only was this track the Clergy’s very first attempt at recording a cover song, it was by far their best cover, and one of the few high points on the otherwise uneven side 2 of *Meltdown*. Here, they faithfully recreate the demented, juvenile energy of the song’s original creators The Dead Milkmen, in the process laying bare an affinity to punk rock that had heretofore bubbled beneath the surface of their music, while putting their own definitive instrumental and vocal stamp on the song. They even extended the original’s running time to just over the one-minute mark by adding a brief dueling chainsaw/jaw harp section. Finally, this might be the only Clergy track where Joe actually managed to keep up a fake British accent consistently through the entire performance. Holding this track up against the drab mediocrity of “Addicted to Love” or the entire *CDOPS* project leads one to the inevitable conclusion that when it came to cover songs, the Clergy would have been wise to quit after “Retards” while they were still ahead.

19. Pollution Solution (*P.O.S.*)

Near the end of the *P.O.S.* sessions, the Clergy decided it was time to put down the guitars and focus on cooking up a groove. Instead of coming up with anything super-original, however, Bufgoo and Manuel simply pounded out an homage to NIN’s “Head Like a Hole” and left it to Joe and Hack to create some actual content.¹³ Joe rose to the challenge with some thievery of his own, cutting-and-pasting lines from Was (Not Was) into the chorus. Beyond that, Joe’s main accomplishment here is an “ecological” song that is far too tongue-in-cheek to risk giving anyone the idea that the Clergy give even one, let alone two, shits about the environment. (The utter half-assedness of Hack and Bufgoo’s supporting vocals on the “suicide, suicide” sections drive said point home.) More importantly, the track is quite danceable, with its slinky funk giving way to a double-time “mosh” break, and then a sarcastic “waltz” section before the final chorus.¹⁴ On their tour in support of *P.O.S.*, the band

¹³ Bufgoo’s overdubbed doubling of his drum parts on electronic and acoustic drum kits was a very subtle production touch that exemplifies the band’s increasing sophistication in this area.

¹⁴ The “mosh” section on “Pollution Solution” was actually taken from a whole separate song that remained unfinished by the deadline for completion of *P.O.S.* At the time, the Clergy had

would often greatly lengthen the moshing section when they sensed that the vibe from the audience was right. The real challenge was convincing the moshers to pair off and waltz afterwards – if they succeeded at that, the crowd was all theirs.

18. Rawmeal (*S.F.R.* – *T.R.M.*)

Disgusting, gross-out toilet humor proved to be a constant well of inspiration for the Clergy throughout their career, one that they would return to time and again, albeit with steadily diminishing returns – with the notable exception of this, the group’s last hurrah in the scat genre. By this point reduced to a core duo of Joe and Hack, the Clergy were, for the most part, running as short on enthusiasm as they were on members, yet they somehow coaxed out a late-career highlight by bucking up and going for broke both lyrically and vocally on this track, leaving every last vomitous chunk of themselves on the studio floor. “Rawmeal” doesn’t really start to get interesting until two minutes in, after Hack’s tentative first verse and some redundant triangle noodling. Once Joe kicks in with his Jabba-meets-John-Cleese roar at the top of the second verse, things really take off, culminating in an outrageous duet where the two vocalists challenge each other to plumb ever-more demented depths of depravity. Set to a minimal backing track with martial digital snare beats, a Darth Vader-esque bassline and what seems to be a constant, oppressive high-pitched drone of crickets, this ode to anti-cuisine strikes the perfect balance of nightmarish, stomach-churning and hilarious. Let’s hope the rumors are true that the re-formed Clergy will finally include “Rawmeal” in their live setlist.

17. This One’s for the Social Workers (*P.O.S.*)

In 1992, the year of *POS*, the practice of sampling old funk records still had yet to become litigious and prohibitively expensive, so hip-hop and R&B artists were continuing to get quite a bit of mileage out of recycling the music of James Brown and George Clinton. Although not exactly known for their R&B acumen, the Clergy nonetheless decided they wanted to get in on the action, bringing us this funk-rock guitar jam (sample-free!) that paid a clear debt to JB as filtered through the sensibilities of RHCP. Its bilious lyrics supposedly stem from Hack’s resentment toward pretty much every adult or authority figure (and there were many) who played a part in making his childhood miserable. Thus, the mood of this track is as sullen as the beat is funky – a soundtrack to the kind of party where everyone is single-mindedly devoted to self-medication instead of actually having fun. Still, the Acne brain trust thought the track had enough chart potential that they made the

recorded an extended instrumental jam with a vague verse-and-chorus structure, but it lacked any lyrics or vocals until 2018 when they dug it out of their archives and shaped it into the “Snake Free State” segment of the “Fungus Rex” suite.

band record a “clean” version that ended up being unintentionally funny, due to the ridiculous euphemisms they had to use in place of all the “fucks”.¹⁵

16. Asphalt (*Fungus Rex*)

It wasn't until the Clergy's 2010s reunion that the typically quiet, unassuming Manuel Martinez finally got the opportunity to step up to the lead mic for an entire song. He proved to be more than up to the task, romping through this funky, upbeat and occasionally hilarious funk number with a gravelly gangster roar inspired by the character of Tuco Salamanca on “Breaking Bad”. Also hot in the mix is Manuel's bass, actually a composite of his in-studio playing and a low-fi demo he'd recorded while drunk on a Sinaloa beach well before the rest of the song came together. As it so happened, his participation in the Clergy's reunion came with strings attached. Having grown restless during the band's lengthy downtime, he had decided to attempt a solo career, scraping together all the U.S. pesos he had squirreled away to finance a demo recording of “Asphalt” and a few other tracks. In 2015, he agreed to reunite with the Clergy on the condition that they record one of his demo tracks for their new album. “Asphalt” turned out to be the unanimous pick. The result is the most poppy and least-metallic track on *Fungus Rex*, tricked out with layers of Latin percussion and an arrangement at the precise point where the “Miami Vice” theme intersects with Sly and the Family Stone. The rest of the group contribute some truly bizarro backing vocals to top it off. By the song's end, we are left convinced that Manuel has conquered the States so thoroughly that he is now fully ready to set his sights on the land of the maple leaf.

15. At the Graveyard (*Meltdown*)

You wouldn't think a band like the Clergy would have enough exposure to African American gospel music to be able to pull off a parody of the style, but that's exactly what they did on this, the third installment of *Meltdown's* four-part title suite. Much credit is due to X's organ work; although the producer lacked access to an actual Leslie rotary speaker, he manipulated his keyboard to fake a variable-speed Leslie effect. But the real fun is hearing Joe and Hack enacting a ridiculous little play in the verses, each performing various characters including a crazed preacher, a newly undead atomic zombie, and a couple of sarcastic bystanders. It all culminates with the band imitating a mini-choir, clapping and swaying to Bufgoo and Manuel's deep-pocketed groove, with the sound quality about as clean as the Clergy ever got during this period. Oh, but I forgot to mention the intro to this song – probably because it's truly forgettable, a full minute of just Hack mumbling gibberish over Joe's weird, heavily-processed triangle. They could have left that part off and bumped this track up even a few notches higher.

¹⁵ Also, for some reason the keyboard part, played on a dime-store Casio, is much more audible on the “clean” version.

14. Ignoble Gases (*Fungus Rex*)

Returning after a quarter-century hiatus, the Clergy knew that the public's expectations would be either sky-high or nonexistent, so they kicked off their comeback album with a head-fake of an intro that showed off their newly polished, high-tech sound while suggesting that the musical content would be as dumb and corny as ever. I mean, "nine ten eleven twelve, we make Slayer sound like elves"... really?? Fortunately, after just sixty seconds of dumbassery the band quickly segues into "Ignoble Gases" proper, intended to be a star feature for High Priest Joe. After such a long layoff, he has a lot to say, and so he rants like a demon set free from the netherworld while the rhythm section bashes out complex three-against-two polyrhythms. Joe's jaw harp and triangle make their appearances, but the real co-star is Gimp, the band's new session keyboardist.¹⁶ Elsewhere on *Fungus Rex*, he deploys a wide variety of synths and orchestral samples, but here he sticks to going berserk on a Hammond organ in the manner of Nice-era Keith Emerson. Manuel's contributions are noteworthy as well: he debuts a much heavier, aggressive new sound for the main bassline, but also overdubs a recurring gadfly-like jig motif with his old bass to represent the obsessive-compulsive paranoia inside Joe's head. Not so much metal as heavy prog rock, "Ignoble Gases" tries to evoke Jimi Hendrix¹⁷ and ELP in equal measure and while it doesn't compare to those titans, it at least kicks off the album on a strong note, showing that the reformed Clergy (no pun intended) aren't just screwing around.

13. Lardball (*P.O.S.*)

When a kid is so morbidly obese that even the blubbery Bufgoo joins in with the name-calling, you have to think his porker quotient must be off the charts. In "Lardball", the Clergy spend no fewer than five verses grasping after just the right words to convey the mix of awe, horror and disgust they felt upon witnessing the rotundity of the song's subject. But oddly enough, the band has never disclosed whether "Lardball" is even about a real-life person. It's entirely possible the whole point of this song was to spin a larger-than-life tall tale.¹⁸ Anyhow, one would think five minutes of the Clergy hurling insults at a fat kid would get old very quickly, but instead the group manages to sustain the listener's interest and deliver a top-tier track thanks to two key elements. The first is the rhythm section's intense, locked-in 5/8 groove that hobbles along like a menacing, peg-legged stalker. The second is

¹⁶ Not really that new – Gimp had played keys live with the band as far back as the Prison of Shame tour, after X got offers to produce other bands under his real name and decided that was more desirable than continuing to play with the Clergy as an anonymous cloaked figure. Gimp also contributed synth and organ parts to Joe's 1993 solo album.

¹⁷ Although the track is devoid of guitar, it does crib elements from both "Manic Depression" and "Hey Joe".

¹⁸ The "Marge Johnson" in the lyrics, however, actually *was* a real person.

the soft verse/loud chorus dynamic, smartly cribbed from Nirvana's bag of tricks. On the verses, Joe, Bufgoo and Hack mutter witty, jokey barbs about the title character over ominously burbling chainsaw, but on the choruses, the whole band explodes with a weird mixture of cackling laughter and bilious, howling rage. Bufgoo's brief drum solo, on the other hand, adds little to the song, and unfortunately makes use of all-too-obvious overdubbing. Still, if I were the "Lardball" character and I heard this song, I would be legitimately afraid of ever running into the Clergy in real life. How the band summoned so much anger toward a kid who may not have even existed, we'll never know, but the Clergy's catalog is all the better for it.

12. Moozur (*Meltdown*)

Most casual listeners tend to assume that the Clergy's music is so bad so much of the time because they were trying to be bad on purpose. That actually isn't the case with most of the Clergy's bad songs, where their badness resulted from the group's severe talent deficit. "Moozur", however, is an exception. On "Moozur", the Clergy was shooting for "bad" from the get-go. Yet they ended up overshooting "bad", sailing past "wretched" and "hideous" and landing at "bizarrely sublime".

"Moozur" was recorded in a small church in rural Finland during the Clergy's ill-fated first tour of Scandinavia. Manuel had gotten fed up with the unenthusiastic audiences and the dark, bitterly cold winter conditions, quitting midway through. The rest of the band, along with keyboardist X, soldiered on, but at one point got lost on a rural road in the middle of Finland and ran out of gas. They barely made it to the church before succumbing to frostbite and hypothermia. The members were thankful to find warmth and shelter, yet bummed that their refuge was in the form of a church – none of the members had ever been inside any sort of church during their adult lives, nor would they have ever entered one under normal circumstances. The members' weak, confused states of mind and conflicted emotions about being inside a church led them to flip through a hymnal and choose one at random to desecrate. Fortunately, X had his trusty pocket tape recorder with him. He went up to the console of the small pipe organ and started mashing the keyboard with the most dissonant chords he could think of. What the Clergy laid on top of those chords is the stuff of nightmares – the sound of a pack of hell-hounds yowling after accidentally dipping their toes in a puddle of holy water. Brief solos on chainsaw, drums and triangle allow the trio to regain some composure before vomiting out a second verse. The members recall the process of performing and recording this hymn to be torturous, but they knew it deserved a place on their next full-length album, and thankfully saved it for side 2 of *Meltdown*, where it livens up an otherwise weak stretch of songs near the end of the tracklist.

11. Sludge Pit (*R.A.D.*)

The first of the Clergy's many songs devoted to the topic of waste/scum/filth remains their best in that genre, mainly because its lyrics embody the supreme virtue of brevity.¹⁹ The band gets their point across with grunted words simple enough to comprise a kindergarten reader, freeing them up to fill most of the song's running time with a smorgasbord of sounds over an almost graceful, waltz-like rhythmic groove. An unusually melodic chainsaw riff gives way to chiming electric triangle, followed by an Animals-esque organ passage, a ray-gun fight, mewling kittens, and finally a Granny Goose record scratch. Clearly, at this early stage in their career the Clergy were quite eager to display a bewildering sense of eclecticism, but that groove holds it all together and makes the track a highlight of their debut album.

10. Rack 'em Good (Slow Version) (*Meltdown*)

This "slow" take on "Rack 'em" kicks off with a pipe-organ intro that sounds almost cut-and-pasted from the original version. But after that, the remainder of the song is flipped completely on its head. The *Meltdown* sessions found the Clergy bursting at the seams with creative juice, which resulted in some strange and ill-advised misses, but also some bang-on hits. Their decision to record a new version of a song from their previous album could have led to more pointless filler, but instead, "Rack 'em Slow" works as both a radical re-imagination and an ironic commentary on the *RAD* standard, making it a worthwhile listen. This is partly thanks to some of the members' departures from their respective comfort zones. Hack eschews his chainsaw in favor of acoustic guitar, having recently expanded his repertoire from just one chord to the four heard here.²⁰ Bufgoo returns to the lead mic with a deadpan, mild-mannered vocal style which he later admitted was an attempt to imitate the speaking voice of his father, the well-respected psychiatrist Dr. Grover Poindexter, Jr. He politely and nonchalantly drones the song's scenes of crotch-kicking mayhem while the band maintains a stately waltz beat with Joe interposing a fussy trumpet solo. They carry on in this manner until reaching the coda, at which point they kick things up a notch while Joe and Hack engage in a grunting match inspired by some of the popular female tennis players of the period. A prime "Meltdown" deep cut.

¹⁹ Although all the Clergy members were credited as writers on "Sludge Pit", Hack was most likely the main lyricist, given his tendency to keep his utterances to two syllables or less.

²⁰ "Rack 'em Slow" ended up being the only Clergy recording featuring Hack on guitar. On "Funky Chicken Jam" he played the dulcimer, while Manuel played the acoustic on that track and "Watching the Toilet Flush". Joe finally took over as main guitarist starting with the *Other People's Stuff* EP.

9. Rack ‘em Good (*R.A.D.*)

The Acne brain trust now realizes, with the benefit of hindsight, that the Clergy should have never released *Residual Alliance of the Dead* as a full-length album. The band’s legacy would have been better served had they instead edited the album down to two singles: “Worms” b/w “Boulders” for the debut, and “Rack ‘em Good” b/w “Sludge Pit” for the follow-up. They then could have held back “Residual Dead” to present in a more polished form on *Meltdown*, replacing some of that album’s more worthless filler tracks, with the rest of the *R.A.D.* songs relegated to the Acne dumpster, or at best the odd B-side.

With that said, “Rack ‘em”, the second track on *R.A.D.*, is as iconic as it is ridiculous. The intro, taking up a full 30% of the song’s running time, is an attempt to be cinematic, albeit in a Super 8 sense, with doom-y organ chords introducing a plodding, 4-note bassline that underlies the entire song. The bass gradually lumbers faster, like a brontosaurus struggling to achieve its maximum pace, and finally we reach the main body of the song, only to find that it’s so economically written that an entire verse-plus-chorus takes only 15 seconds. Joe barks orders to kick the enemy in the nards, the chainsaw growls, an electric triangle shimmers like a waterfall, Bufgoo signals each new verse with a 1-2-3-4 cowbell, the rest of the band halts for the drum fills as if at a train crossing, Joe shouts a corny beatbox riff, and in just over two minutes we have a Clergy classic.

8. Factory (*P.O.S.*)

At the time of *POS* release, “Factory” was an overlooked deep cut, but since then it has risen in stature due to its simple jam-band aesthetic. Its pithy, simplistic lyrics do the minimum of establishing the band members as working-class stiffs, but the context of the music makes it clear that they are now off the clock, using their free time to knock back copious quantities of brew and jam – sloppily – over a simple garage-rock foundation. Joe throws in a less-than-competent quote of “Secret Agent Man” on his fuzz guitar, while behind it all, low-quality samples of industrial noises add an 8-bit texture that prefigures the sound the group would pursue more fully on *SFR-TRM*. The band soon came to realize that this track worked even better as a live feature than on record, and as such was used in concert as a frequent jumping-off point for instrumental solos by the four members.

7. Drowning On The Moon (*Fungus Rex*)

Bufgoo, you’ve come a mighty long way since “Flowers”. “DOTM” presents the Clergy at their jazziest, thanks to the sheer force of will of their drummer. Granted, his ham-fisted awkwardness, both as drummer and lead vocalist, prevents this track from being *truly* jazzy, but that only adds to the charm – you can tell he’s at least *trying* to swing. Impressively, Bufgoo not only takes the lead vocal, but wrote

the whole song including the brass-section arrangement. The other members all make significant contributions as well. Manuel provides a dirty, meaty bass pocket, while Hack spices up the groove with bongos, sleigh bells and a brief chainsaw solo. Joe helps the song reach a climax by trading fours on his tuneless trumpet with Bufgoo's frantic drum fills. The lyrics appear to be from the perspective of a doomed astronaut on a lunar mission, but are actually based on a dream Bufgoo had after getting into an argument with his mother and passing out after eating too many chili burgers washed down with Argentine Malbec. (That would explain the misogyny.)

6. Abortion Clinic (*Meltdown*)

Rather than taking any firm moral stance either in favor of or against abortion, the lyrics of "Abortion Clinic" seem determined to be as gross and offensive to as wide a spectrum of listeners as possible, regardless of where they stand on the issue. As such, this song reveals the Clergy as early forerunners of the kind of trolls that would later populate every dark corner of the internet. To further underscore what a troll-job this song is, its macabre lyrics are set to an ironically poppy, '60s-surf-derived backing track that liberally plagiarizes from Toni Basil's "Mickey". X leads the instrumental charge with his tacky Farfisa organ, while farting blasts from a trombone announce the verses. Although Joe sings all three verses himself, he switches up his voice on each verse as if trying to play different characters. It's not entirely clear why Joe opted for such a schizophrenic vocal approach, but once he reaches his final line – "we just know a great place to eat free!" – he seems to have exhausted all his humanity and reduced himself to a howling animal. Thus, he brings the first side of *Meltdown* to a fittingly demented climax.

5. We're Back (We're Cybernetic) (*Garage Sale*)

Two things about "We're Cybernetic" make it an essential entry in the Clergy discography. Firstly, this foray into Kraftwerk-inspired minimalistic techno is the sharpest and best-executed of all of the band's many detours away from their core metal sound. Having spent the rest of the *Garage Sale* EP exploring acoustic folk, it was only natural that the foursome would then turn the shaggy "We're Back" upside-down by rewriting it as an all-electronic cyborg jam. The extreme leanness of the arrangement (nothing beyond a single drum-machine pattern and ten-note synth bassline) brings the members' vocals to the forefront – and all four of them nail their respective android cosplay roles.

Secondly, there's the undeniable power of Hack's unaccompanied chainsaw solo halfway through the track, which still stands as his greatest moment on record. As noted before, the Clergy had to record this EP without most of their usual equipment, but Hack was able to get his hands on a replacement chainsaw before this track was cut. His mighty solo signaled to the Clergy's audience that they

hadn't completely abandoned their roots, thus saving the band from completely being written off due to the lack of metal on the EP in question. "We're Cybernetic" became an unlikely hit and was regularly featured in the band's live shows as a way to keep audiences engaged while Bufgoo gave his tired hands and feet a rest.

4. Fungus Rex (*Fungus Rex*)

The Clergy realized that if their 2015 reunion was to be deemed worth the effort, they would need to go big. Hence, big they went with the title track and centerpiece of their new album, a 25-minute epic that served partly as a clearinghouse of long-simmering ideas that had never found their way into proper Clergy songs, and partly as a vehicle to explore new and ambitious horizons. This 9-part suite is the band's proggiest effort ever, inasmuch as it was inspired by pretty much every side-long epic you can think of from prog's '70s heyday – "Echoes", "Close to the Edge", "Thick as a Brick", "2112", you name it. To further this end, the band gave session keyboardist Gimp free rein to layer on as many organ, synth, string and horn sounds as could fit in the mix. At the same time, it manages to be the band's most metallic effort as well, packed to the brim with the kind of crunchy, distorted guitar riffs that the group historically tended to eschew, plus endlessly frantic drumming by an overcaffeinated Bufgoo who apparently thought he was Carl Palmer playing on a sequel to "Karn Evil 9". With all that, the group still finds time to throw in an ambient/chillout electronic section, as well as a throwback section ("Snake Free State") based on an old instrumental track left over from the *Prison of Shame* period. Supposedly there's a storyline in the lyrics having to do with a giant subterranean fungus and its interactions with various groups of humans over several centuries, but it's pretty hard to follow. "Fungus Rex" is exhausting, far too much Clergy for a normal human to handle, but the proud few who are capable of staying on this voyage to its end will understand it to be the group's magnum opus.

3. Put Me Back (*P.O.S.*)

Coming off a stop-gap project (*Clergy Does Other People's Stuff*) that found them essentially treading water, the Clergy began the sessions for their third full-length album sensing that it was time for some bold new directions. Fittingly, they kicked off *Prison Of Shame* with their most radical and aggressive song ever. Since the lead-off tracks of both of their first two full-length efforts, "Worms" and "Clergy Street", had both featured slow, ponderous four-on-the-floor beats, Bufgoo decided to tease listeners with a fake slow count-off for "Put Me Back", only to charge out of the gate with an inhumanly fast double-time gallop that dares moshers to even try to keep up. More importantly, with this track the Clergy turns the whole idea of death metal on its head, single-handedly creating its opposite: "birth metal", based on the premise that the experience of birth is more terrifying and violent than any death one can imagine. Joe screams from the perspective of a preemie, ejected against his will from the comfort of the womb, his heart racing and incompletely-

formed lungs gasping. The instrumental track is a literal representation of this experience, with its unsustainably fast pulse eventually dissolving into convulsing waves of incoherent, crying noise. Yet the patented Clergy instrumental attack is still recognizable, with white-noise chainsaw punctuated by an occasional twang from Joe's jaw harp, plus strums from the scariest, ghostliest acoustic guitar ever heard on a Clergy song, seemingly beamed in from outer space. After three minutes, the band abruptly cuts off, leaving many a listener with the thought that eternal damnation might be a preferable fate compared to the trauma of reincarnation.

Kicking the *POS* album off with this birth-metal banger was a brilliant idea, so it's unfortunate that the Clergy felt obliged to follow through on the premise by basing the rest of the album on subsequent stages of human life: childhood, school, military service, work, and the mental and physical illnesses that often accompany these stages. In doing so, the band arguably strayed too far from their original death-metal focus, costing themselves quite a few fans in the process and ultimately leading to the group's collapse.

2. Telephone God (*Meltdown*)

You either get the Clergy or you don't. Those who do will acknowledge "Telephone God" as one of their all-time bops. Otherwise, objectively speaking "Telephone God" is five-and-a-half minutes of total absurdist nonsense, a musical golem fashioned from Jell-O poured over the skeleton of a Metallica thrash-metal tune. If one is to attempt to head-bang or mosh to this tune, it helps if one has already bought into the Clergy's unique twist on metal: the standard jagged, chugging guitar sounds are absent, replaced with Hack and Manuel's stretchy, oozing, taffy-like chainsaw and bass. It falls to Bufgoo alone to impose all of the rhythmic discipline, and he does so with such a manic glee that the other members drop out and give him a full 80 seconds to add a solo so hyperkinetic that he has to pause for a moment from sheer exhaustion. Joe's lyrics, equal parts bizarre, hilarious and menacing, seem to be the rantings of a paranoid obsessed with a conspiracy theory centered around the telecommunications industry. No one but Joe could attack such weird lyrics with so much gusto and conviction. Yet Hack and Bufgoo match his intensity with their call-and-response supporting vocals. This song is the clown jewel of the *Meltdown* album; without it, there would be precious little incentive to flip the tape over to side 2.

1. Worms (*R.A.D.*)

They get us all in the end. The worms, that is. But that's for later. Before you reach that ultimate destiny, take some of the limited time available to you and gaze into the void. Contemplate the smallness of your life in a tiny corner of an incomprehensibly vast universe, and consider the brevity and meaninglessness of

your existence therein. Consider the limited number of breaths you will take compared to eternity. The worms are waiting – but for now, breathe.

More than any other Clergy track, “Worms” breathes. Inasmuch as it was the first track the band recorded with producer X in his basement studio, the sound of “Worms” is literally the sound of the bandmembers collectively figuring out how to sound like the Clergy. In the process, they built a song out of the simplest building blocks available, and listened to each other. This allowed them to create a basic but powerful groove. Hack’s chainsaw does very little except provide ambience, representing the insistent raspy breathing of the song’s psychopathic narrator, or maybe the claustrophobia of lying trapped in a shallow grave. Underneath, Manuel plays a one-note bass line, locking in with Bufgoo’s deliberate death-march trudge. So little else is going on that when Bufgoo introduces the chorus with a minimal caveman fill, his snare hits land with earth-shattering force. This set up Joe to roar out the lead vocal in a voice that surprised even him.²¹

After “Worms”, the Clergy would go on to make faster, more complex, and smarter (and dumber) songs, but they never topped the sheer vibe that they conjured with their first-ever track. Thus, “Worms” retains its status as the quintessential, iconic Clergy song for the ages.

²¹ Joe has since explained that he broke out laughing at the end of the first line, not because the song is in any way funny, but because while he was hearing the whole mix in his monitor headphones, he couldn’t believe that the band’s sonic experimentation actually seemed to be working.