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VIC THRILL: 'CE-5'

Vic Thrill, the leader of a band called Vic Thrill and the stage name of one Billy Champion, once described himself as an amalgam of P.T. Barnum, Iggy Pop and Elvis Presley. You don't need to catch the man's live act -- which includes freaks, glitzy costumes and, on at least one occasion, a 20-minute lecture about UFOs -- to sense that he's both a musician and the master of a three-ring circus of tripped-out sound. "CE-5," Vic's full-length debut, is apparently classified as "electro-trash pop," but everything about this album is far too eccentric and too amusing for two words and a hyphen.

It sounds like a bunch of deranged aliens singing cartoon theme songs. No, wait, it's more like a barbershop quartet of robots making speed-disco at a prom in the future. Or maybe it's polka for lunatics. Whatever it is, "CE-5" is the kind of album that is more fun to laugh along with than define.

You know you've landed in a wacky parallel universe within 15 seconds of the opening track, "Hummingbird Pneumonia." The song has a trotting, vacuum-packed synth beat and a chorus of IBM computers singing like happy pirates. (Maybe it's actually the Thrill and band mates Goth Castrado, Saturn Missile and Aure Dextra.) The verse from "Afrological" could be inspired by David Bowie's "Ziggy Stardust" days, but the chorus perks into something not even Ziggy's backup band, the Spiders From Mars, could have imagined. None of the lyrics make any sense ("Lived under a river with a friendly sound / Ran a villa nova above the ground," Thrill sings on "Pneumonia") which just adds to the interplanetary weirdness.

-- *David Segal*