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MONTHLY

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Collins**
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Mary Lou Lord
leaves her indie world

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GOLDFINGER | LED ZEPPELIN | 42 REVIEWS

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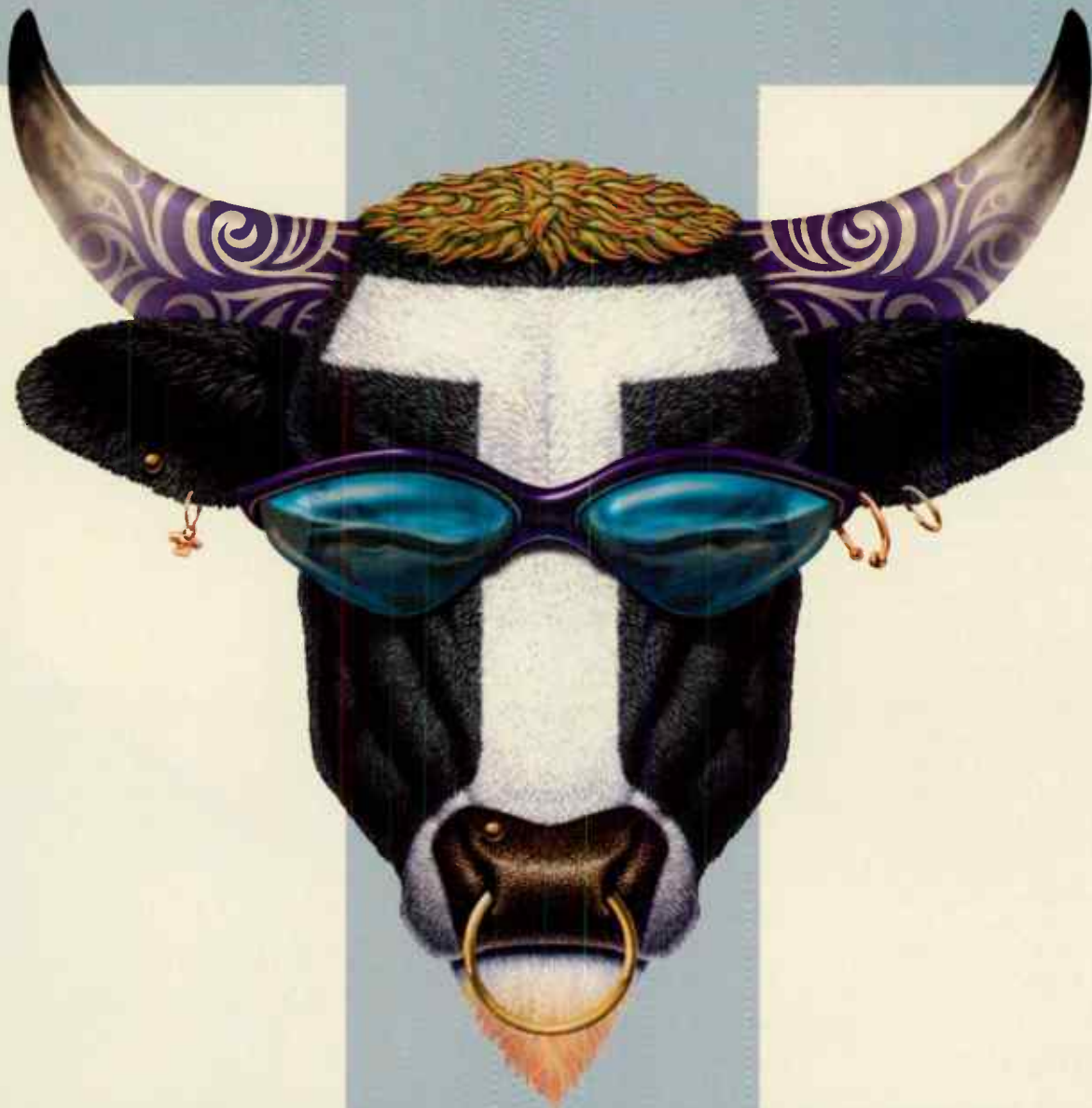
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ANYTHING LESS IS EVERYTHING ELSE™

features

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Just how big was Edwyn Collins's worldwide hit, "A Girl Like You"? "Um, As big as a large house?" —Interview by Tom Lanham.

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"It's only now that people are starting to realize that they don't have to like Bacharach and Gainsbourg only because it's kitschy." A Franco-American couple and a member of Fountains Of Wayne discuss the urbane, sophisticated pop of their *Apartment Life*. —Interview by Matt Ashare.

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"We're not some kind of bar band that can crank out riffs and make people happy... We're trying to make music that is very evocative." The inadvertent inspiration for cuddle-core, Stephen Pastel embraces maturity. —Interview by Franklin Bruno.

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"She has a great ear for songs and music. That's why she's so critical of her own songs. They have to be perfect, because she compares herself to all these other people," explains Margaret Mittleman, who signed Mary Lou Lord to her BMG Music Publishing deal. How did a woman who's written precious few songs come to spark a bidding war and emerge on top of 1998 with a stellar major-label debut? —Interview by Kurt B. Reighley.

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MARY LOU LORD PHOTOGRAPHED
BY MICHAEL HALSBAND

World Radio History



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Techno - Country - Gospel - Acid House - Blues
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A gauntlet thrown

You must think you're pretty slick answering all of July's letters in the styles of famous poems, but if you're half the editors you claim to be, you should be able to answer a month's worth of letters in haiku.

*Bill Snyder
Minneapolis, MN*

*Your letters answered
Ancient Japanese verse form
Editor's head throbs —ed.*

Gonna party down

It seems that the major music periodicals would be paying more attention to the reunion tour of one of the 70's hottest bands—Grand Funk Railroad. This group more or less defined the sound of American heavy metal as it is today. We fans would love to see coverage of the tour and related issues.

*Don
Bluefield, WV*

*Comin' to your town
Mark Farner shirtless again
American band —ed.*

The check's in the mail.

Quit whining and enjoy. Music is a unique experience for each individual person. The feelings come from within usually correlating with one's life experiences, as well as one's personal taste for rhythm and style. CMJ New Music Monthly provides a valuable service for the music enthusiast by presenting a virtual musical smorgasbord to the listener. So when you receive next month's issue don't bitch like a little schoolgirl that the CD doesn't have 22 of your favorite songs on it and your local garage band on the (fabulous new) cover. And no more letters to the editor whining about the lack of coverage of the music scene in upper Mongolia.

Greg Storms

*Loyal subscriber
Kicking ass, frightening me
Mongolians pissed —ed.*

Keepin' it real

What is with all the talentless techno tracks you have crammed into this CD? It was bad

enough to include almost no acoustic music on the entire disc, but these plastic "bands" that lay noise down over a drum machine and Casio synthesizer are stealing space from real groups that certainly could use the attention. Trust me, I can suggest several groups that can actually play music together, groups that are into making beautiful sounds with real instruments on which they have practiced for years. As I myself work very hard to play the guitar well, it especially irritates me when no-talent electronic posers who have virtually no ability to jam without their extension cord, amp, mixing board and distortion box are hailed as up-and-coming stars. I really do enjoy the work you people do, and I hope that you try to put some harder-working and more deserving musicians on your future discs. Maybe even, God forbid, a group with some originality!

Stephen Hill

*Techno musicians
Angering acoustic guy
Leave me out of this —ed.*

A few fucking curse words

The Sandpebbles are the best fucking rock band on Long Island. *Punk Planet* calls there [sic] music "fucking brilliant" and if you alternative cocksucker reviewers would [sic] stop worrying about a few fucking curse words and go out and buy their record, (you can get it at Tower Records in Huntington, Long Island.) You might understand why jaded club owners who only book alternative semi-cover bands won't dig them. This will probably go over your head because I listen to your monthly CD sampler and you guys wouldn't [sic] know rock if it fell out of the god damn sky and crushed your puny little skulls.

George Vitray

*Long Island hunk head
One more rock authority
Spelling atrocious —ed.*

[or this, supplied by CMJ Online Managing Ed., Steve Ciabattoni]

*Sandpebbles venting
Like so many lame punk bands
Stuck on the Island*

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World Radio History

“American women, I love you. You and your dental plans, fantastic! I've got this thing about teeth, I totally love teeth! And I'm in the wrong place [London].”
 —Fran Healy of Travis, on what attracts him to a woman



L-R: Jenks, Dingley

ALPHA

Melancholy, With A Twist

Once upon a time, you started a band by getting some lads together—a few with guitars and someone to bash the drums. These days, though, it takes a sampler, a decent record collection, and a studio. And a few good ideas don't hurt, either. Corin Dingley and Andy Jenks, trading under the name Alpha, are the newest in Bristol's creative line [see *The Scene Is Now*, page 18—ed.], and have smart ideas in abundance on their debut album, *Come From Heaven* (released on Massive Attack's Melankolic label, in conjunction with Caroline). Lush, sweeping, desolate and lovelorn, it's trip-hop that's not a million miles from darkly dramatic balladeers like Scott Walker.

"It started a couple of years ago," Dingley recounts. "I was working in a demo studio in Bristol, and I met up with Andy there. He was in Statik Sound System, and doing some other things. I went over, heard what

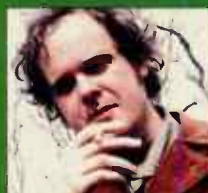
he was doing, and was interested in producing it. Then we started writing together, and it went from there."

"We did a single on a label called Fourfinger," Jenks continues, "which we used as a demo. A mutual friend knew Massive [Attack], and passed it on to them. They really liked it, and wanted to hear more, and it naturally progressed. It's been effortless so far."

Sampling, of course, has limitless possibilities, but for Dingley and Jenks there's more to it than grabbing a beat or a melody. "We have created a few samples," Dingley says, "but usually it's from the records; that's our art. But it's difficult. If you're using something you admire, you don't want to create something that's less than what it was."

in my room

ARTISTS



VARNALINE
Anders Parvill

- Various Artists
American Folk Music
- Delroy Wilson
Best/Original 12
- Bob Dylan
Time Out Of Mind
- Wire
Pink Flag
- Van Morrison
Voodoo Place

inspirational verse

"Salvation won't be rearing its head/For a fact, at least not in my time/And what good is a song for peace/When the lucky doesn't even rhyme"
 —Entombed, "Live This With The Gods"

random fact

Sales of the John Denver box set rose 1650% the week following his fatal plane crash.

"We're reverential about our sampling," Jenks adds. "It's more like paying homage, using a vibe from a track we like to create a new track. It's upsetting when you're denied the sample and you have to recreate them, especially when it's just one chord or something."

Although *Come From Heaven* is long on textural intrigue, it's quite apparent that Alpha is also about *songs*—the singing (from a core of vocalists including Wendy Stubbs, Martin Barnard, and Helen White) and the lyrics are as important to these tracks as the sound. "We write all the music," Dingley explains.

"We do bits of everything, including all the sampling... Then we give the singers rough tracks, they go away and write their melodies and lyrics, and then we put it all together. We're excited about learning songwriting, and how to write a song that has some effect on people, one with some meaning. So that's what comes through, rather than the beats or the influences."—Chris Nickson

weird record

weird

■ "These recordings serve as indispensable aids to parents during the feeding, teething, play, sleep and fretful periods of infants," reads the back of three newly issued CDs from composer/inventor RAYMOND SCOTT, *Soothing Sounds For Baby, Volumes 1-3* (Basta (Holland)). Scott's better known for writing indelible themes which were poached by Carl Stalling and others for various Warner Bros. cartoons, but these minimalist electronic discs, recorded in the early '60s, are at once instructive historical documents (prefiguring similarly minimalist electronic works by Fripp, Eno, Glass and Riley) and eerily sanguine lullabies that might turn even the sweetest babe into a little Damien.





Feldmann, far left

GOLDFINGER

12 Skanking Steps

Few things are less appealing than a man who wears his neuroses like a big ol' bull's eye tattoo, and Goldfinger singer John Feldmann is nothing if not unapologetically neurotic. While Feldmann's quirks are actually less annoying than they are endearing, the title of the band's second album, *Hang Ups*, is the first clue to what you're getting into.

"I've always been kind of an insecure person," Feldmann confesses over a lemonade at an East Village cafe. "I think as time goes on I'm more and more okay with who I am. I'm 30. I don't feel any different than I did when I was 18, I'm just more okay with the body that I've been given." It's hard to

P&D An abbreviation for "Production and Distribution," the term refers to a contractual relationship between record labels. In a P&D deal, the larger of two labels agrees to handle all of the manufacturing and shipping for the smaller label's records, while the smaller label does everything else (press, promotion, etc.). In some cases, the larger label will front the money to pay for the production and distribution costs (as is the case with most major label P&D deals), but in other cases, the smaller label pays for those costs itself. Either way, the deal is beneficial to the smaller label because it helps get its records into stores that might not otherwise carry them.

BUZZ WORDS

equate this insecurity with the way-cute, well-muscled man I see jumping around onstage later that night, but Feldmann's sincerity seems, well, sincere. And to listen to his lyrics is to believe him.

"Where are you now, I wanna talk to you/I'm sitting here alone, waiting by the phone," he howls accusingly in "My Head."

The theme of heartbreak resonates from both Goldfinger discs, but the song "Disorder" reveals another kind of problem: "I sit there at the bar wondering what I've done/Should I just fuck it all or should I go back home/'Cause if I take that drink I might as well just die/And if I kill myself I'll be giving up my try." Feldmann has been sober for over eight years now. "I drank at Denny's with old people," he says, explaining just how bad things got for him. "I picture that my volume knob is turned up higher than the normal person's who doesn't have to drink and do drugs." This seems to contradict a quote I read in another inter-

view where Feldmann credited drugs with saving his life. Apparently not. "I was a stressed out, high-strung, suicidal kid. When I found drugs, it opened up this world to me. All of a sudden the stoner kids—the Spiccoli kids—were my friends because we had this common bond of getting high."

It was only when he found that after the initial mind- and social circle-expanding experience, his addictive use of drugs narrowed his world down to his bedroom, that he quit everything. But even though Feldmann's experience with drugs legal and otherwise was not pleasant, you won't find him preaching the straight edge: "I don't have a problem with drinkers. I just know that for me, in my life, I just can't do it."

All this angst (combined with more than occasional bouts of goofiness) works well against the power-punk/pop/ska beats that make up the Goldfinger sound. Feldmann's secret to songwriting: "I can't write when I'm happy. I've never written a song when I'm in a good mood." —Judy McGuire

in my room

ARTISTS' ROOM



SHELTER
Ray Cappo

- Stevie Wonder
Innervisions
- The Hollies
Bust Up
- Echobelly
On
- My Guild Acoustic
Cutaway guitar
- Rice Dream bars

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“ Did you see *Star Wars*?... It was very accurate. ”
—Sun Ra, to a reporter, quoted in John Szwed's new biography *Space Is The Place*



L-R: Bonham, Plant, Page, Jones

LED ZEPPELIN

Hammer Of The Sods

Where did the Led Zeppelin stadium monster of the '70s come from? It's a question *The BBC Sessions*, a new double CD from Atlantic, goes a long way in answering. Captured live on radio shows from '69-'71, the band moves from the blues to blues-rock, changing month by month, growing more confident and more powerful, and not averse to a lot of experimentation—or some fun.

"Jimmy and I, and to some extent John Paul Jones, were really inspired by the wild and reckless rock 'n' roll and rockabilly period," explains Robert Plant. "Led Zeppelin was really a combination of that and [Chicago blues label] Chess Records. A year before that first BBC recording I met Jimmy, and the coming together of forces was such an amazing moment. Everywhere we played in those days, even if we played badly, the energy got us through. We'd try and experiment, bluff it a bit, make mistakes, and that's what this set of songs does."

"The whole reason Zeppelin carried on the length it did was that Jimmy and I said, 'Okay, we love blues, but now we must think about stretching, or it's going to get pretty boring,'" notes Plant. "So songs like 'That's The Way' and the whole acoustic angle was explored much more. It was very exciting onstage. The [blues] medleys weren't meant to be taken seriously, and a lot of the time we'd

throw titles up in the air, or I'd sing the first line of something Jonesy didn't know the bass line for, and it was 1-2-3-4-go! It became our own little bit of entertainment beyond the gig."

This "stretching" is particularly apparent in the early sessions, melding the blues with the freedom of the '60s: the set's first version of "Whole Lotta Love" takes off into sonics that leave the album track in the dust, while the version recorded two years later shows the same song becoming a platform for one of those blues medleys. Also obvious is the way Zeppelin tightened up as a band. The first sessions were recorded just as the group's debut album appeared, and they show the players still not completely sure of themselves, jamming through "I Can't Quit You, Baby" and "You Shook Me,"

But the seeds were there—Plant throwing his very distinctive voice in as a second lead instrument, Page's guitar versatility, and John Bonham's massive drum sound.

"In the early sessions," he recalls, "Bonzo was still playing like he did in the Band Of Joy, long before he and I met Jimmy. In time he refined his style. Our personalities changed, and the tone and color of what we were doing moved quickly through a rainbow of different styles. It's stimulating, almost cute—and at certain moments it's almost inspiring—the way the band was changing, the way we were all being affected by everything else we heard at the time.

There are snippets of the affectations of the time. We worked so much in that time. We played with such a checkered bunch of musicians—in America with the Doors, Jefferson Airplane, Sam & Dave, John Lee Hooker—and we dragged it all through our music."

And in doing so, they changed music's face. At this distance it's hard to imagine, but there was a time when Zep was *hungry*, when they were the young upstarts—the three versions of "Communication Breakdown" on the CD have more in common with punk than with the music of any of their contemporaries. "It was the beginning of a tempestuous journey," Plant reminisces. "Later we'd get sloppy. The youth of the thing is wonderful."

—Chris Nickson

random fact

A musical stage production of *Saturday Night Fever* is currently being readied for a spring opening in London.

in my room

ARTISTS' PERSONAL PICKS



BIG BACK FORTY

Sean L. Beal

- Radiohead
The Bends
- Fleetwood Mac
Rumours
- Haynes Boys
Guardian Angel
- Beth Orton
Trailer Park
- Books by Chris Offutt

BULLET PROOF ALIBI From a letter to the press from Gray Dot Records/BulletProof Music, a Christian label from Marietta, Georgia, about its *Live At The Strand* compilation. ■ If you are receiving or have received a copy of *Live At The Strand* for review, please be aware that the copy available in stores next month differs from your copy—the retail version does not contain the track by Metropolitan. After having manufactured a few thousand copies of the version with the track, it has come to our attention that the song is more than just a fun 1980s metal cover, but contains drug slang which none of our staff was aware of the meaning of. This came as a surprise to the label and the band and we immediately ceased production of that version, dropped the song, assigned new catalog numbers, and remanufactured... We at BulletProof have recently become concerned with the edginess of several of our releases... and are taking proactive countermeasures to head off controversy, such as: 1. To allay any concerns about the intent of the packaging on the *Sundays Child* release, retailers receive a copy of an explanatory letter about the album's storyline, so as not to lead anyone to think that it endorses gambling in any way... 2. We are reprinting the next run of *Squad Five-O* releases with... a slight change on the song listing—the word "sucks" is being omitted...



L-R: Popson, Eddie Walkins, Bowie, Brylawski

POLVO

The Horrible Truth About Polvo

There are two misconceptions about Polvo that singer/guitarist Ash Bowie wants to clear up. The first, and the easiest to dispel, is that he fronts the Chapel Hill-based foursome. Sure, he's got a frontguy last name, and over the course of four albums in seven years—including the new *Shapes* (Touch And Go)—he's penned (and sung) a few more tunes than fellow singer/guitarist Dave Brylawski. But Polvo is a partnership, more dependent on the way the high-tension discourse between Bowie and Brylawski's abraded guitars mesh with Steve Popson's vaguely dissonant bass lines and new

drummer Brian Walsby's cymbal bashing beats, than on the charismatic stance of a single member. Polvo is a little like Hüsker Dü back when Bob and Grant were still buddies, but were splitting the songwriting/singing responsibilities roughly down the middle. Only Polvo doesn't play anything as straightforwardly melodic as, say, "I Apologize" or "Pink Turns To Blue." The melodies are there, but they twist like wild thorny vines around abstract arrangements, planting bent hooks in the strangest places.

Which brings us to the other piece of horrible truth about Polvo: "We're not a prog band," Bowie reveals over lunch in Boston, which has been his second home for the past three years, during which he's doubled as the bassist in his girlfriend Mary Timony's trio Helium. "I've always been surprised at how much people think that weird time signatures and tempo changes really characterize our music. I've never really thought that. I think we have the occasional song where we use an abrupt change to create a juxtaposition. But we structure things to accommodate the melodies. I've always heard our songs as primarily melodic and rhythmic. Evidently a lot of people don't

“Because Diana's dead, I think we're the number one target now. It's not going to change anything is it? I don't see anyone standing up for me. When a photographer chases me, I don't see anyone saying, 'Leave him alone.'”

—Noel Gallagher, as quoted in the *Toronto Sun*

hear any melody at all. They just hear gymnastics or something.”

What they'll hear on *Shapes* is a band venturing into the heart of an art-damaged jungle, where Beefheart-like acid-blues swirl psychedelic patterns against Sonic Youth-style discord, sitars buzz against *Hunky Dory* piano chords, and jagged shards of melody rain down from nimbus clouds of distortion. It's a journey that, according to Bowie, may be nearing an end.

“We're all busy with other things, so we're taking it one record at a time. We are going to go on tour in January, so right now we're focused on that. But I really don't think it's going to get any easier for Polvo to do all this stuff.”

—Matt Ashare

in my room

ARTISTS' CHOICE



LONDON SUEDE
Simon Gilbert

- Mario 64 Nintendo cartridge
- Playing with dog, George, in Hyde Park
- Listening to the La's, for some reason
- Watching Leonardo DiCaprio films
- Watching Mike Leigh films

label profile

■ A reissue of Robert Mitchum's *Calypso Is Like So...* announced the arrival of **Scamp Records**, a reissue label with a both a sense of humor and a good imagination. "I never thought of the label as the 'Space-Age Bachelor Pad' kind of stuff. We're very proud not to have anything like martini glasses on the covers [of our records]," says Scamp label-head, Ashley Warren. Scamp, a two-year-old Caroline Records subsidiary, has always been ahead of the lounge-scene curve, reissuing some remarkable, left-of-center stuff. Its coffers include five albums by the Father Of Exotica, Martin Denny, composer Les Baxter's *Que Mango!*, Jackie Gleason's *And Awaay We Go*, Maya Angelou's *Miss Calypso*, *La Dolce Henke* by '60s jingle writer Mel Henke ("He's the guy who wrote the famous Ajax, 'stronger-than-dirt' jingle and 'See-the-U.S.A.-in-your-Chevrolet,' explains Warren), and an album by instrumental guitar outfit, the Shadows. Visit the label's website at: www.caroline.com/scamp.



Groovie Choulies



Q&A by Cheryl Botchick

Who better to answer questions about the undead than the Groovie Choulies' Kepi and Roach? Here, the First Couple of graveyard punk is joined by the Queens' B-Face, who played bass on the group's recent tour in support of Re-Animation Festival (Lookout).

Q: If released into a human-sized maze, who would reach the end first: a mummy or a zombie?

A: KEPI: Zombie!

B-FACE: But zombies don't have any purpose. The mummy's always going after something.

KEPI: No, zombies have a better sense of smell, and they've been getting faster as time goes on. Whereas mummies, though they're traditionally skilled at catacombs, a zombie has a thirst for blood and a need to get out of the maze.

B-FACE: Now, see, I disagree. Zombies are mindless! They just wander!

KEPI: No way, dude! Did you not see *Return Of The Living Dead*? They can smell brains from 200 yards!

ROACH: Wait, wait! Are there brains at the end of the maze?

B-FACE: But the mummy lives in a pyramid! That's a maze as it is!

KEPI: It doesn't even matter, 'cause zombies are constantly looking for food. They're faster, they have more need. A mummy's just like "Ooooh, there's a curse upon you, I'll get you eventually..." They don't care! But a zombie needs it.

B-FACE: Okay, so if the zombie has such a good sense of smell, he's gonna be in the middle of the maze and there's brains at the end, and he's gonna just keep trying to walk straight forward to get to it and he'll run into the wall—he'll never get out of the maze.

B-FACE: Yeah, but he's gonna be like, "Brains! Mmm, brains!" and he'll get there. Period! I'm tellin' ya, dude. ■

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SIDE-1

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Fun For Me
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Sleep To Dream (Live)
Bjork
Pluto
Lou Reed
New York Telephone
Conversation
Blackstreet w/Slash, Ol'
Dirty Bastard, Fishbone
Fix (Main Mix)
Deep Forest & Peter Gabriel
While Earth Sleeps
Tricky
Ponderosa
Prodigy
Diesel Power
David Bowie
John, I'm Only Dancing
Garbage
Girl Don't Come
PJ Harvey
Peeling
HAL w/Gillian Anderson
Extremis (Quattara Remix)

SIDE-2

Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds
Tower Of Song
Goldie
Saint Angel
Radiohead
Electroreering
Aphex Twin
Boyz/Girl Song
Erykah Badu
Or & On
Sugarcubes
Hit
Leftfield
Open Up
R.E.M. & William
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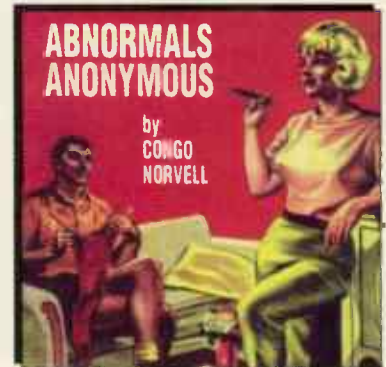


JONATHAN FIRE EATER ^{CD}

Wolf Songs For Lambs — DreamWorks

After developing a rep for raucous live shows and releasing a superb EP, 1996's *Tremble Under Boom Lights*, Jonathan Fire Eater became one of the most talked-about bands in the land. Here was this handsome, well-dressed quintet of upper-crust college dropouts playing hook-filled, off-kilter songs that danced around a roller-rink organ and a dandy lead singer's affected, effete vocals. It was trendy without being part of any trend, and it made hipsters jealous and record label executives take notice. On its debut for DreamWorks, JFE should satisfy the bosses and silence any critics. The peculiar prevailing sound on *Wolf Songs For Lambs* is too distinctive to be retro, yet it's oddly familiar. Walter Martin's up-front organ and Paul Maroon's unruly guitar suggest a '60s sensibility, yet Stewart Lupton's droning drawl and witty, observational lyrics lend JFE an, ahem, postmodern aesthetic. The melodies in songs like "When The Curtain Calls For You" and "No Love Like That" ricochet within the heavily punctuated rhythms, making this some of the catchiest musical street poetry since Lou Reed was in his prime. JFE maintains the coyness that sparked the music industry's love/hate relationship, dashing off titles such as "Bipolar Summer" and "Everybody Plays The Mime," but the songs themselves are so endearing that wolves and lambs alike will love 'em. —Richard Martin

Datalog: Released Oct.
7. Website at members.aol.com/ASHrendar/jfe.html
File Under: Downtown art-rock.
R.I.Y.L.: Cramps, Nick Cave/Birthday Party, Let It Bleed-era Stones.



CONGO NORVELL

Abnormals Anonymous — Jetset

Cramps and Gun Club veteran Kid Congo Powers speaks through his guitar, in tragic tremolo whispers and distant reverberated screams. With the exquisite poise and subtle jazz inflections of a torch singer from another, darker era, Sally Norvell answers him in a voice that reveals much more than just the words to the songs. Joined by former American Music Club frontman Mark Fitzel, they begin *Abnormals Anonymous* with a fitting tribute to one of Powers's former partners in crime, the late Gun Club leader Jeffrey Lee Pierce, whose rowdy "She's Like Heroin To Me" is stripped down to a slow-dance duet clothed sparsely in queasy slide guitar, bass, organ and violin. Powers and Norvell also dedicate to Pierce a gorgeously understated version of a tune written by another departed LA rocker, Travis John Alford's "Warm Tonight," breathing ghostly life into its skeletal frame. But it's the spirit of another debauched soul, Serge Gainsbourg, who seems to haunt "The Last Word," a lusciously evil duet featuring the deep-voiced Powers sparring with Norvell in a tune that would have been right at home in the French playboy's repertoire. A triumph of mood over matter. —Matt Ashare

DATALOG: Released Nov 11.
FILE UNDER: Torch-song cabaret.
R.I.Y.L.: Nick Cave, Isabella Rosellini In *Blue Velvet*, Marlene Dietrich.

STATIK SOUND SYSTEM ^{CD}

Tempesta II — Cup Of Tea/Iron America

On the sequel to last year's *Tempesta*, Helen White moves to the front of Statik Sound System's dance-oriented excursions into trip-hop and drum 'n' bass. The five guys by her side prove as adept at maneuvering the electronic landscape as Bristol neighbors Massive Attack, especially when employing the sultry singer's voice as the most effective instrument in this collective's impressive arsenal: A gently roiling synth mimics White's voice in "Sonar," a Melodica takes on the same role in the hypnotic, heartbreaking "Amazed By You," and Roger Mills adds tasteful trumpet solos to a few tracks. Much of this will sound familiar to fans of the "Bristol sound," but whether the group is laying down a smooth groove and a sharp breakbeat ("Free To Choose, Hard To Be") or conjuring a trippy drum 'n' bass backdrop ("Essential Times"), Statik Sound System not only succeeds, but surpasses many of its peers. The group also tries its hand at hip-hop and dub on *Tempesta II*, key diversions that help make this a thrilling album at every turn. Still, it's hard not to gravitate toward the songs in which White takes the mic, especially if you wait for the hidden bonus track, a laid-back remix of "Free To Choose, Hard To Be," one of the breathtaking highlights on this breakthrough record. —Richard Martin



DATALOG: Released Sep. 16.
FILE UNDER: Adventurous trip-hop.
R.I.Y.L.: Lamb, Cup Of Tea compilations, recent Everything But The Girl.

DIVINE COMEDY

Casanova — Setanta

Casanova might be seen as a theme album tracking the dalliances of a silk-clad espresso-sipper concerned primarily with high-art fantasies and sexy dames. But that would be missing the subtle tongue-in-cheek expression and extraordinary musical craft that Neil Hannon and his group the Divine Comedy show on their debut US release. "Pale, pubescent breasts roam through the streets and coffee-shops/Their prey gather in herds of stiff knee-length skirts and white ankle-socks," begins the telling "Songs Of Love," "But while they search for a mate, my type hibernate in bedrooms above/Composing their songs of love." This hopeless-romantic nature suffuses *Casanova*, giving it its charm and essence. The succulent excesses of Hannon's impossibly over-the-top vocals and *Casanova*'s horn-, piano- and string-rich

DATALOG: Released Oct. 21.
Official website, "The Liberator," at www.the-divine-comedy.com.
FILE UNDER: High-romance pop songs.
R.I.Y.L.: Scott Walker, Pulp, Edwyn Collins.

arrangements (kudos to conductor/pianist Joby Talbot) might make some listeners feel as though they'd stumbled unwittingly into the musical *theatah*—especially on the swooning "A Woman Of The World," on which backing vocalists chant in counterpoint to Hannon's storytelling, conjuring the image of how tie-clad tap dancers clattering in unison. But it's this attention to detail, ripe and distinct in each song, that confirms the Divine Comedy's true art. —*Lydia Anderson*

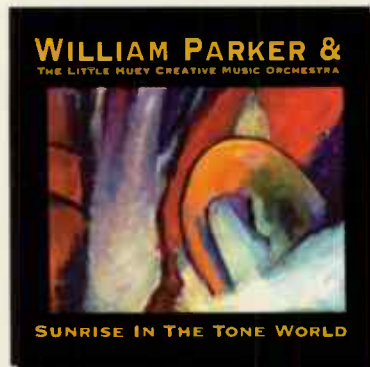
**WHEAT** CD

Medeiros — Sugar Free

Neither the liner notes nor the accompanying press biography for this album say much beyond song titles; by maintaining anonymity, Wheat distances itself from the egocentric nature of the down tempo, lo-fi indie pop genre in which it peddles its wares. Framed by the static-plus-keyboards "Preprise" and the solo electric piano closer "Reprise," these eight songs delve into

modest tales of varying degrees of disconsolation and heart-break. "My ears are buzzing like a cheap pair of speakers/So I guess you're doing fine," goes the opening couplet of "Karmic Episodes." Adding to the sullen atmosphere, the entire affair seems to have been recorded in a studio made of aluminum foil. The resulting rattle and overtones, complemented by the background noise of various electronic drones and whistles, only enhances the sensation of genuine emotional distress, when feelings can't be isolated, and resonate with what-ifs and might-have-beens. The album peaks with the almost seven-minute "Summer," a bittersweet reminiscence on youthful follies. We may look to musicians to help us articulate the complexities of our feelings, but ultimately everyone's experience is somehow unique, and Wheat understands this, straddling the line between the universal and extremely personal on *Medeiros* with maddening grace. —*Kurt B. Reighley*

DATALOG: Released Oct. 28.
FILE UNDER: Very glad to be unhappy.
R.I.Y.L.: Idaho, Pavement, Smog.

**WILLIAM PARKER & THE LITTLE HUEY CREATIVE MUSIC ORCHESTRA**

Sunrise In The Tone World — Aum Fidelity

William Parker is the improv world's utility infielder, a stand-up bassist who always adds elegant unpredictability and a certain spacey solidity to whomever he's working with. He's also a leader, and the overwhelming double-disc set *Sunrise In The Tone World* is performed by his 24-piece orchestra. All eight of

these pieces have scores of a sort—a predetermined arrangement, a melodic or rhythmic motif, even (in "Sunship For Dexter") a chord progression—but within those parameters, they're open for free, improvisational expression. Parker is pretty much following the example of Sun Ra's major '60s works: inspiration from poetry (the group is named after Huey Jackson, a poet who died at 17), directed into shaped macrostructures. It's a major challenge for a leader, but his passion and taste see him through. Not all the musicians in the orchestra are as centered or as eloquent players as Parker, and on a few tracks 24 "creative impulses" going at once get ragged; the 40-minute centerpiece "Huey Sees Light Through A Leaf," described by Parker as "a form of collective solo," is bursting with energy, but the chaos threatens to drag it down. But at its best, like the rich, stately title march, this is the kind of major free-jazz work that few have the courage to attempt. —*Douglas Wolk*

DATALOG: Release Date Oct. 1.
Forthcoming: An album by another Parker group, *Other Dimensions In Music*.
FILE UNDER: Free jazz.
R.I.Y.L.: Sun Ra, Anthony Braxton, David S. Ware.





BLUE RAGS

Yes, they're *another* North Carolina band that sounds like something your grandparents might have enjoyed, but the Blue Rags toss a shot of moonshine into the Squirrel Nut Zippers' mint juleps. Both bands stir in elements of jazz and swing, but even the Zippers' rowdiest moments sound sedate compared with the Blue Rags' feverish mix of ragtime, blues and bluegrass. This Asheville, North Carolina, quintet formed in 1990 and cut its chops with years of live performances before releasing its debut album, *Rag-N-Roll*, on Sub Pop last summer. The album includes both retro-fueled originals and spirited covers of tunes from bygone legends like Professor Longhair, Leadbelly and the Gershwins. Producer Bob Weston (Archers Of Loaf, Rodan) doesn't stifle the band's spontaneous energy, forsaking overdubs and leaving in plenty of hoots and hollers. Live, the Blue Rags' jam-heavy sessions could start toes tapping in even the most stoic club crowds. Dust off your dancing shoes, because the Blue Rags will continue to tour through the spring, hoping to explore new territory including the West Coast. —Wendy Mitchell

VERBENA

You'd never know it to listen to the Birmingham, Alabama, quartet's debut album, *Souls For Sale* (Merge), but Verbena used to play jangle-pop and even released a couple of 7" singles with upbeat tunes and twee boy/girl duets that garnered comparisons to bands like Unrest. So, when it was released last spring, the group's scrappy roots-rock long-player came as quite a surprise. Clearly, the kids had been spending a lot of time spinning their old



Rolling Stones records, learning how to play harmonica, practicing dirty guitar licks and figuring out how to snarl and sing at the same time. Not unlike Royal Trux's Jennifer Herrema and Neil Hagerty, Verbena's Anne Marie Griffin and Scott Bondy team up for vocals that show off their sharp, twangy Southern drawls. Griffin's voice, in fact, has a beautiful timbre; it's warm and rich and seeps into all of the songs' cracks like a thick, sweet syrup. After a handful of dates opening for the Foo Fighters, the band spent the end of '97 touring with the Jesus Lizard and will be in the studio recording its major label debut (for Capitol) during the coming months. —Jenny Eliscu

MOCKET

Sometimes two is better than one: Angry punk trio Mocket splits its vocal duties between bassist Audrey Marrs and guitarist Matt Steinke (also of Satisfact), and the pairing of her spunky snarl with his firecracker wail suggests the incendiary possibilities of putting Bikini Kill's Kathleen Hanna and Fugazi's Guy Picciotto behind a single mic. But the band's dense, choppy arrangements are equally compelling, as Marrs and Steinke weld their guitar lines, as long and angular as steel girders, to the fierce pummeling of new drummer Carolyn Rue (formerly of Hole) and bolster the whole thing with fierce, spooky notes from an organ or synthesizer. Although Mocket



is kin in many ways to various bands emanating from its hometown of Olympia, Washington, the band's new-wavey energy recalls the simultaneous punk and post-punk energy of early Wire. Mocket's second album, *Fanfare* (K), packs a dozen punchy songs into 23 minutes of disc space, with not a wasted moment. Look for another few minutes of powerful sound to emerge in the form of a new 7" on K; you can be sure it'll be crucial.

—Lydia Anderson

going out of my head

{ FATBOY SLIM }

{ MASSIVE ATTACK }

superpredators (metal postcard)

{ PRIMAL SCREAM } { BUSH }

star

swallowed (goldie/toasted on both sides mix)

{ ANI DI FRANCO }

{ MOBY }

joyful girl (peace and love mix)

shining

{ DOLLS HEAD }

{ BLACK GRAPE }

it's over, it's under

get higher

{ GOLDIE & J. MAJIK }

sunray 2

{ AGENT PROVOCATEUR }

red tape

{ THE CHARLATANS UK }

toothache (chemical brothers remix)

{ LUNATIC CALM }

{ APOLLO }

leave you far behind

raw power

{ FOUR FORTY }

{ L.T.J. BUKEM }

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The Jackal

MUSIC FROM AND INSPIRED BY

The Bristol Underground

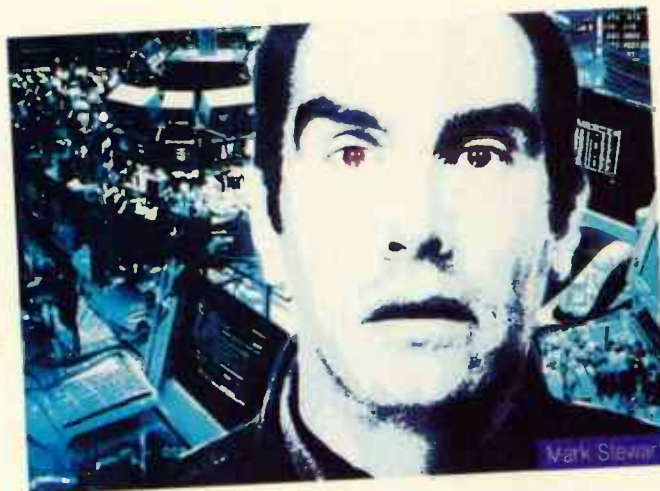
by Tim Haslett

With the interest in downtempo, breakbeat-influenced electronic music reaching nearly epidemic proportions, the southern English city of Bristol assumes a position of central influence. Given the preeminence in the music press of Massive Attack, Portishead and Tricky, and producer Nellee Hooper and Soul II Soul before them, it's interesting to take a look back, and into the future, at some of the less heralded artists who have formed the backbone of the Bristol sound.

At the heart of the Bristol sound (though, as many of the city's artists have pointed out, it is hardly as monolithic as that phrase might suggest) is the influence of roots dub. Since the mid-to-late '70s, the work of Lee Perry, King Tubby and Augustus

Pablo has exerted a stronger influence on musical production in the UK than it has in the US. It is not hard to discern an adoration, rather than a mere interest, for dub structures in the work of Massive Attack, Portishead and Tricky (to once again invoke the holy trinity of the Bristol scene). The long, extended moments of echo and reverb found on the first Massive Attack album are the direct outcome of the powerful influence of dub's time-and-space disruptions.

But certainly the first Massive Attack album is not where the story of the Bristol sound, and dub's centrality within it, begins. In 1983, when the young Mark Stewart first began to record the sonic extremes and sheet-metal facade of his Bristol outfit, the Pop Group, the dub effects were so deeply submerged in the mix that it would take a strip-miner to uncover them. And that is exactly what Adrian Sherwood did in the mid-1980s, with records by Mark Stewart & The Mafia on Sherwood's already established On-U Sound label. At the same time as Stewart was cooking up eccentric musical hybrids, the not-yet-fully formed elements of Massive Attack were beginning



Mark Stewart

to throw the Wild Bunch parties in Bristol, at which musical eclecticism was the name of the game: hip-hop, roots dub, rare groove and house. Meanwhile, around the corner, Nellee Hooper and the then nascent Soul II Soul collective were making a profound impression on the musical consciousness of the city.

Meanwhile, many consider the powerfully creative production team of Rob Smith & Ray Mighty the true founding fathers of the Bristol underground. In 1987, the duo's work on Mark Stewart's "Stranger Than Love" combined slow, loping beats with a deep reggae bass pulse and the reckless energy of hip-hop, essentially inaugurating Bristol sound. Rob and Ray both grew up in the city's St. Paul's district, an area where reggae has always thrived. But as Rob Smith said in a recent interview with the British webzine *Fly!*, the influence of dub is only half the picture: "Yeah, there is that, but



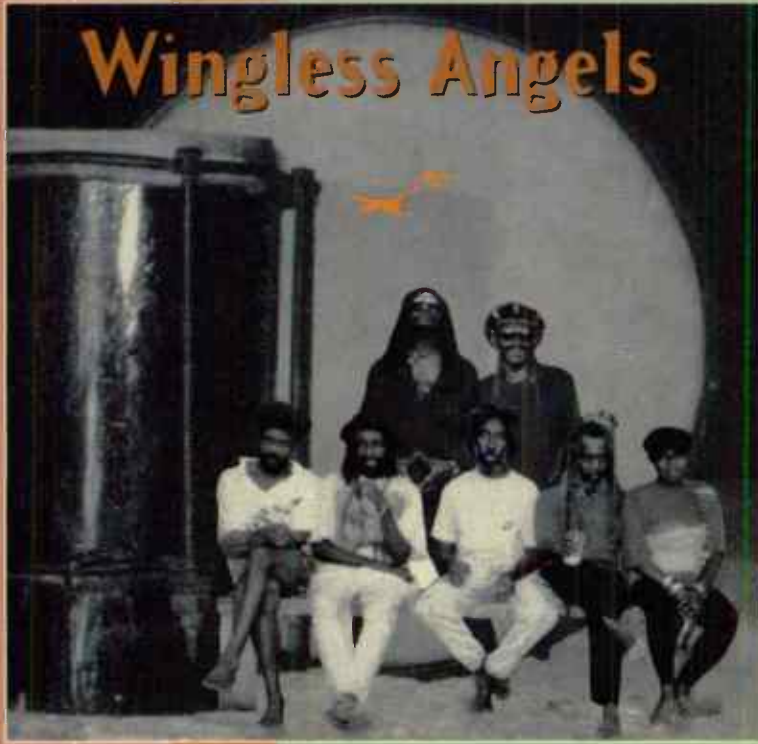
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also it's the way that Bristol's not afraid to mishmash the sounds, there's no limitations on what to mix up. For me personally, dub's been the structure of music for years. I used to listen to pop music as a kid, but once I heard reggae it was like 'Whoa!' it was so different."

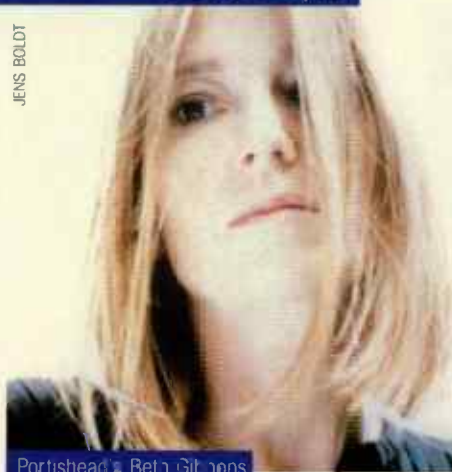
Two years ago, Smith & Mighty released their first album, *Bass Is Maternal*, on their own label, More Rockers. The record moved into drum 'n' bass territory but remained true to the duo's dub roots. It's one of the more gorgeous instances of the Bristol phenomenon, but it's also where the Smith & Mighty/ More Rockers posse forms the missing link in Bristol's recent musical evolution.

Another collection of prolific artists/producers began to congregate around Chaz and Dave Philpor's Cup Of Tea club, from which an extraordinary roster of producers has emerged: Purple Penguin, Statik Sound System, Spaceways, Monk & Canatella and numerous others. The Cup Of Tea club nights bring in DJs such as Mo Wax label head James Lavelle, France's DJ Cam, and San Francisco's Peanut Butter Wolf. The recent label licensing agreement between Cup Of Tea and Iron Music Group in North America has meant that access to the label's material is becoming greater than ever before on this side of the Atlantic.

More recently, attention has been directed towards the unprece-



JENS BOLDT



Portishead's Beth Gibbons

**"I used to listen to pop music as a kid, but once I heard reggae it was like 'Whoa!' it was so different."
—Rob Smith**

ented outpouring of drum 'n' bass from Bristol. Roni Size has gained considerable attention with his recent disc with his Reprazent collective, *New Forms* (Mercury), but it was only two years ago that Roni Size, DJ Die, DJ Suv and the posse around the V Recordings label (responsible for the recent, highly acclaimed *V Classic* album, recently reissued in the US on the new Concrete Jungle label) were selling records to a small British audience. *New Forms* demonstrates that the musical hybridity of the Bristol scene knows no bounds. Size is responsible for bringing Philly rapper Bahamadia into the mix, demolishing the myth that drum 'n' bass and hip-hop are uneasy bedfellows. In this respect, Roni Size and his colleagues represent the future of Bristol music, maintaining

its unending interest in hybrid musical forms and a healthy disregard for musical convention. ■

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edwyn collins

While his gal-pal prepares tea in an adjacent kitchenette, Edwyn Collins strolls through his busy London studio, pointing out the various tools of his cynical-pop trade. Over here, an antique Arpeggio-matic organ, complete with cheesy rhythm buttons. Over there, a Neve console from '69 and a converted four-track machine once used by Jim Morrison. And that strange Moog-like device? That's one of Collins's own creations, a synth/organ hybrid he's dubbed the Cyclaxian Voose. The informal tour ends at a mantle tacked over with currency from around the globe. "This is a pastiche, obviously," he explains. "Because last year I was literally all over the world, as you can see." He motions toward some of the more colorful notes, "in Korea, Malaysia, all these places. And there's my one dollar US bill. Originally, I put up a twenty, but it kept disappearing." It's a collection that song built, he grins. Or, more appropriately, one song in particular.

Nobody expected "A Girl Like You" to become a worldwide smash single, least of all its author. Just how big was it? "Um, as big as a large house?" offers a tentative Collins, who was indeed able to purchase a large house with the royalties. "It was certainly kind of a phenomenon, and it's really hard to get your head around, because

with *faux* funk disco ("Seventies Night," featuring gruff vocals from notorious Fall frontman Mark E. Smith), Eagles-smooth hokum ("Country Rock"), and—naturally—the same soul-inspired turf he trod on "Girl Like You" ("Keep On Burning," "The Magic Piper Of Love"). But the album's centerpiece—where Collins's musical atavism and acerbic lyrical nastiness mesh perfectly—is the glam-guitar extravaganza "Adidas World": "Well don't get me wrong, I wore them myself/Back in the '80s, straight off the shelf...Don't wanna live in an Adidas world, with the Adidas boys and the Adidas girls." (Collins says he hasn't gotten any three-stripped feedback yet, "but I'm hoping to.") "It's really about overkill," he says. "Take a walk down Oxford Street and count the number of people wearing Adidas—it's bigger than Nike here. And I've got Adidas stuff too, so it's not intended to be malicious. I hope people see the funny side to it. But on the more serious side, I don't know if it's an apocryphal story, but there's a show over here called 'The Fashion Show,' and they had an item on kids from the Bronx boycotting Niketown and taking back their expensive trainers. They were like 'Enough is enough—we're being hyped.'"

"I've never been dishonest, so let's just say I'm a hypocrite. I'd sell my own granny, basically."



it's far bigger than me. And apparently it was totally unprecedented for an independent company as well—it was certainly the biggest seller in my label Setanta's history. So the only way I *can* get my head around it is to describe it as some kind of musical Esperanto—I mean, it went Top 40 on the Cantonese charts! It was bizarre! A mind-boggling phenomenon for me." He coughs, clears his throat. "Um, relative to the rest of my 17-year career, that is."

The irresistible ear-candy even tantalized its way into corporate Britain—Revlon saw "Girl!" as the perfect soundtrack for its new pan-European TV campaign. "We bided our time," says Collins. "We had a lot of offers, but they were all too provincial." Edwyn Collins—a cunning Capitalist? Not so fast, he warns. "I can appreciate the sentiment behind Neil Young's 'This Note's For You,' but let's put it this way: When I say, in one of my songs, 'It doesn't matter if I win or lose/As long as I am free to choose,' I'm being completely sincere. People are always talking about me as some arch kind of ironist, but one thing I've never been is dishonest. So let's just say I'm a hypocrite. I'd sell my own granny, basically, if the circumstances were right."

The man has come a long way from his tenure fronting the jangly Postcard Records group Orange Juice in Scottish pop's halcyon days. As an acid-tongued solo artist, the 38-year-old Collins has taken to employing not only aging music gear, but worn pop music styles as well; his latest, *I'm Not Following You* (Setanta-Epic), toys

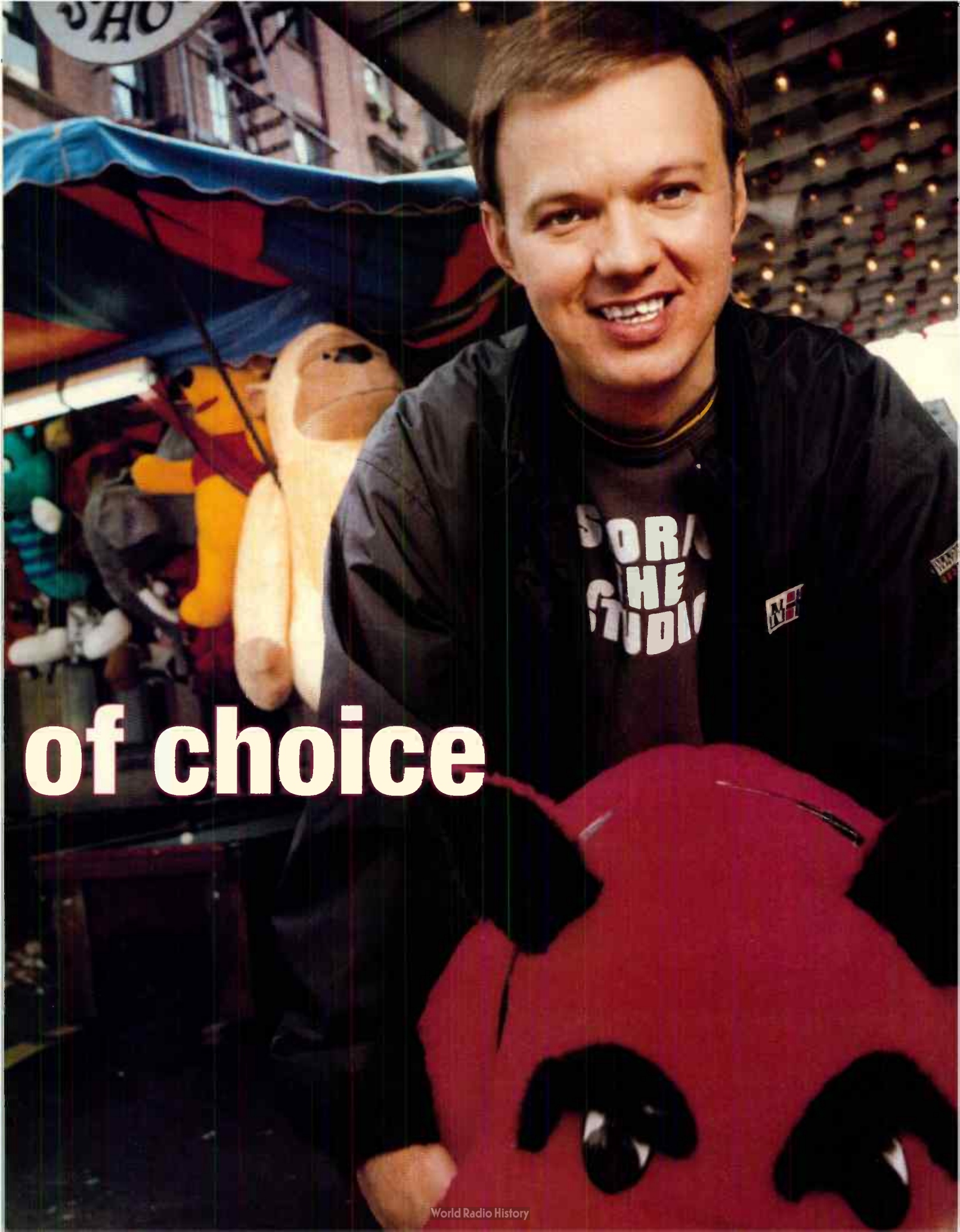
freedom

The moral to the story? "You have to dissent," Collins responds.

"In Britain at the moment, there's consensus in politics. Traditionally, the Labour party was like a pack of unruly dogs, just scraping all the time—it was a party synonymous with debate, and they washed all their dirty laundry in public. But now, with Tony Blair as a Labour party Prime Minister, it's almost kind of Stalinist. All the people on the left of the party have been effectively muzzled. Likewise in pop—if you don't tread the Britpop party line, you're treated as, at best, an eccentric, at worst a pariah." But returning to the Adidas motif, don't most teenage kids need a uniform, a piece of clothing that says they belong? Collins scratches his chin, pours himself another cup of tea. "Well, that's true. Yeah," he allows, pausing to form a properly snippy retort.

"But that doesn't mean you can't poke fun at it! And that fits in with the theme of the album—'I'm Not Following You'—separating the sheep from the goats. People who go their own way are mavericks. And the people who like to follow the herd are the flock. In times of consensus, *someone* has to dissent!"

by Tom Lanham photographs by Chris Toliver



of choice



THE ART

BY MATT ASHARE
PHOTOS BY CHRIS CUFFARO

Poise, grace and elegance: three largely intangible elements that haven't exactly been bountiful in the grunge- and industrial-dominated realm of angst-ridden modern rock. The mere mention of these words conjures retro images of swanky space-age bachelor pads and the cocktail culture of the swinging '60s, which goes a long way toward explaining the strange presence of a tongue-in-cheek lounge-music revival in quarters usually reserved for rock's rowdy subversives. But that doesn't quite account for Ivy, a New York City-based trio fronted by a sultry voiced, French-born chanteuse, and formed out of a shared, serious taste for the mature pop stylings of Parisian stars like Françoise Hardy and Serge Gainsbourg, the American crooner/composer Burt Bacharach, and '80s tunesmiths like the Go-Betweens and Orange Juice. It does, however, put Ivy, whose new *Apartment Life* (Atlantic) offers smooth sonic cocktails without the kitsch, in an interesting, and potentially promising, position.

"I remember when our first album [*Realistic*] came out, people would ask us what our influences were," recalls singer Dominique Durand over lunch with her band in Boston. "We mentioned things like Gainsbourg and Françoise Hardy, but nobody knew of these people. Of course they didn't, because Gainsbourg and Hardy are so French. But I'm from France, so I grew up listening to Hardy. She is totally part of the French culture. She and Serge Gainsbourg were huge. When I sing I'm not thinking of that, but I'm sure I was influenced by that. And now it's like everybody knows them and says they love it. I think that's great. But I don't understand how people who don't speak French can appreciate Gainsbourg because it's all about the lyrics."

Andy Chase, who's Ivy's guitarist and Durand's husband, has one very simple explanation. "Recently it's just become very fashionable to like Hardy and Gainsbourg. But it's been relevant to us and part of our musical background for years."

"The Burt Bacharach reference is very accurate too," Durand interjects, "because

"We were trying to make a record that you'd be more likely to listen to sitting in the privacy of your home."

all three of us are big fans."

"Yeah," pipes in Ivy bassist Adam Schlesinger, who spent the first half of '97 touring behind the debut album by his other Atlantic-signed band, Fountains Of Wayne. "But it's only now that people are starting to realize that they don't have to like Bacharach and Gainsbourg only because it's kitschy. When people first got into the idea of a cocktail revival, it had this very tongue-in-cheek quality. Then they realized that there's this amaz-

ing music out there that might be more interesting than what they've been listening to for the past four or five years. It's kind of leading the way toward things that are outside of rock. It heads toward jazz with the chords and the kind of instrumentation. To American teenagers these are foreign ideas, using horns and strings and various jazz chords."

Ivy came together in 1993, after a string of happy accidents Chase set in motion with an ad he'd placed for a guitar player in the *Village Voice*. Schlesinger saw the ad and was intrigued. As he tells it, "I was actually playing with [FOW singer/guitarist] Chris Collingwood in a pre-Fountains Of Wayne band and we were looking for a guitar player. But I saw Andy's ad, which listed Prefab Sprout and the Go-

Between as influences, and I figured I had to go meet these guys." "The only person who called and knew those bands was Adam," Chase continues. "So we met at my apartment and realized that it wouldn't work out: They were looking for a guitar player and already had a singer; I was a singer

looking for a guitar player. But when he left, Dominique, who had been hiding in the other room, said that that guy was really cool, that I should try to keep in touch with him."

"So for years Andy would make up these reasons to call me," Schlesinger jokes. "No, actually, we didn't see each other for at least

IVY

OF POISE

wake up
to a cuppa tea!



Statik Sound System
Tempesta II

Statik Sound System have landed in the US with the release of *Tempesta II*. Featuring vocalist Helen White and rapper/vocalist Kenny Lee Lewis, the Statik crew have received critical acclaim in magazines such as *Mixmag*, *CMJ*, *Melody Maker*, *Album Network*, *DJ Magazine*, *NME* and *Venue* for their album and countless live performances.

Check out Statik Sound System's 'Free To Choose' on this month's CMJ sampler.



Cup of Tea Records
Another Compilation

The follow up to Cup of Tea Records' 'A Compilation' featuring some of the UK's most creative forces including, Statik Sound System, The Invisible Pair of Hands, Fruit Loop, Receiver, Monk & Canatella, Spaceways, and Purple Penguin.

Check out Monk & Canatella's 'Picnics' on this month's CMJ sampler.



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L-R: Chase, Durand, Schlesinger

a year after that. We ran into each other by chance because I was looking for a studio to do a demo in and Andy has a studio that he co-owns in New York."

Chase's studio is called the Place, and it's located in NYC's Meat Packing District. *Apartment Life* was recorded at the Place, and so was the demo that became Ivy's debut EP, 1994's *Lately* (Seed). As Chase recounts, he had written a song that was too high for him to sing. So he asked Durand to do it and invited Schlesinger down to play bass.

"We bought a bottle of wine," details Chase, "got Dominique really drunk, and set up a microphone for her."

Though Durand had never intended to make a career out of music—she came to New York in 1990 mainly to learn English and see the sights—it had long been one of her passions. "When I moved I adapted to New York really fast. I didn't want to go back to France. Then things started to happen. I wasn't looking to be in a band. It was an accident."

"Even before she had been in a band, she was one of the most opinionated fans that we knew," Schlesinger points out. "She had

"Even before she had been in a band, she was one of the most opinionated fans that we knew."

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pastels

a fragile gang

by franklin bruno

"In the '80s, there was more conflict in the Pastels, and the records were very edgy-sounding, with all these mad ideas bouncing off each other.

Now there's a lot of planning and discussion, especially between me and Aggi and Katrina. With the three of us, it can become almost abstract, we can almost talk in a kind of baby language." Stephen Pastel, the founding member of the band whose name has replaced his own surname (McRobbie), is describing the difference between the workings of earlier incarnations of the Pastels, for whom English critics might have invented the term "shambling" and the current, more cohesive unit. "We're not some kind of bar band that can crank out riffs and make people happy. What we do is partly conceptual. We're trying to make music that is very evocative."

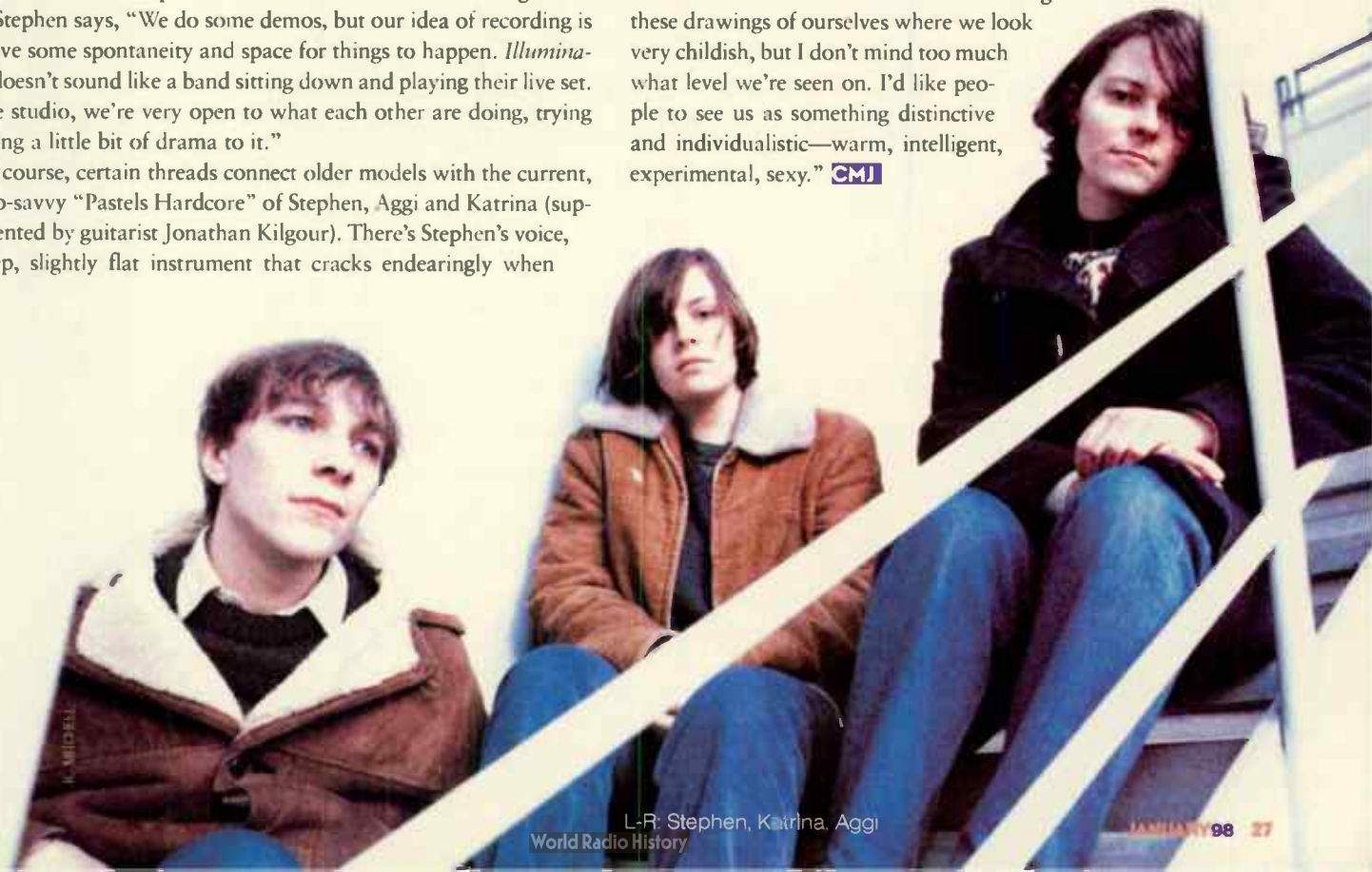
Even a cursory listen to *Illumination* (Up), their latest, shows how far the Pastels have come. If early songs like "Something's Going On" or "Truck Train Tractor" were crayon-bright scrawls of '60s-style melody and Fall-like repetition, the new record is a dark-hued pastoral landscape, rich with detail and shadow. Katrina Mitchell's drumming, a more organic recasting of trip-hop patterns, deserves special credit, but all the instruments bear layers of textured guitar and elegant melody aloft in ways that would only occur to formally untrained but now-experienced musicians. Of their working methods, Stephen says, "We do some demos, but our idea of recording is to leave some spontaneity and space for things to happen. *Illumination* doesn't sound like a band sitting down and playing their live set. In the studio, we're very open to what each other are doing, trying to bring a little bit of drama to it."

Of course, certain threads connect older models with the current, studio-savvy "Pastels Hardcore" of Stephen, Aggi and Katrina (supplemented by guitarist Jonathan Kilgour). There's Stephen's voice, a deep, slightly flat instrument that cracks endearingly when

he sings above his range. Aggi and Katrina, who sing much of *Illumination*, have slightly sweeter but still-imperfect pipes. And there's the personal, often sad words that these voices sing. The same voice that sang "I understand why that boy cries" in 1983 now sings "We're fragile for each other, as we go down." A bit more inventively phrased perhaps, but similarly unguarded. The latter line, from "Fragile Gang," suggests, as do several songs on the album, that the ups and downs of the Pastels are fair lyrical territory. Stephen demurs. "The songs reflect our lives—'Attic Plan' was written specifically about Glasgow, but it could be about any city you see from ten miles away and want to be in the heart of... There's no 'Ballad Of The Pastels'."

Even so, one obvious interpretation of Katrina's "Unfair Kind Of Fame," which Stephen says is "a tribute" to Z-grade director Ed Wood, is as an allegory of a band under-appreciated or lauded for the wrong thing. "All that you wanted/Was a little acclaim/But what they gave you/Unfair kind of fame," the singer laments. Stephen explains, "Katrina often sides with the underdog, as do I. I actually think there are certain sentiments and techniques in those films that are really good, and then there's a kind of shoddiness about it that makes it hard to see. It's like finding the great bands or great songs of our time, even though they may be badly recorded."

Just as Wood is mainly appreciated for his camp value, the Pastels are often seen as one of the launchers of "cuddle-core," forefathers (and -mothers) of a hundred bands with candies for names and a prepubescent, sexless world view. Though happy to be on the side of the values such music rejects—"When we started," Stephen recalls, "we were reacting against pretentiousness, pompousness, people that were trying to disguise what they actually were through production"—the Pastels are at best diffident standard-bearers for cuteness. "It can be ridiculous when we get these drawings of ourselves where we look very childish, but I don't mind too much what level we're seen on. I'd like people to see us as something distinctive and individualistic—warm, intelligent, experimental, sexy." **CMJ**



mary lou lord

is ready for her **close-up** now

by kurt b. reighley photographs by michael halsband

Once upon a time, there was an apple-cheeked street musician who, through diligence, charisma and fortuitous coincidences, came to the attention of a small independent label. She released a meager handful of endearingly lo-fi tracks that revealed a singer of modest voice but tremendous expression, with an encyclopedic knowledge of contemporary song. In short order, the nefarious major label A&R weasels came calling. Month after month, as our heroine crisscrossed the nation with a guitar slung across her small frame, they courted her with back catalog items and expense account dinners. Finally, unable to resist the terrible temptation, this musical missionary buckled and relinquished her soul to the highest bidder. She entered the studio to cut her debut full-length, and emerged with a highly polished product that abandoned her earlier acoustic vibe, a calculated move obviously engineered to take a bite out of Fiona Apple and her ilk. The indie rock nation sadly shook its collective, stocking-capped head, muttered “I told you so,” and resumed alphabetizing 7" singles.

That's how the Hollywood version of *Mary Lou Lord: The Early Years* might read. But as we all know, Tinseltown tends to simplify things—how else could Sandra Bullock play a biochemist? The reality of Miss Lord's rise to relative prominence actually proves much more complicated, peopled with an exciting array of colorful characters, and climaxes on an up note with the release of her first long-player, *Got No Shadow* (WORK).





“Mary Lou didn’t write as much as you would think, or hope, she would have when you sign a publishing deal.” —Margaret Mittleman, BMG Music Publishing

It’s a Sunday night in Austin, Texas, and from the tiny stage of Stubb’s BBQ, Mary Lou Lord holds a crowd of kids seated on the cement floor enraptured. With guileless charm, she saunters and strums her way through a 90-plus-minute set. In between tunes, she asks for cigarettes and politely fields requests. More importantly, she takes a moment to introduce every song. “Those boys can party,” she chirps to preface Guided By Voices’ “Blimps Go 90.” And she acknowledges the original source of all her covers: Pete Drobe, Elliott Smith, Richard Thompson, even “Muskrat Love” composer Willis Alan Ramsey.

“When I was a kid, I used to be a DJ,” she admits the next morning over a bagel and coffee. “I got fired, because I wasn’t following the playlist.” Soon after, she left her home in Boston and wound up in a London squat. She became enamored of the buskers in the city’s tube stations, and eventually decided to try her own hand at performing. “When I started playing [music], I realized I could kind of be DJ again. I wanted people to hear these songs that I thought were so great.”

That was in the late ’80s. But Mary Lou was already in her early twenties, and had a lot of technical catching up to do. She selected songs to learn very carefully, concentrating on the ones with unique stories to tell. “I didn’t know what the hell I was doing, and I was god awful, but the songs I was playing were really good. And I would just remember ‘Let the song carry you through, and you’ll be fine.’ When you first start, your timing is bad, your voice is off-key, and you forget chords. But if the melody is there, the progression is interesting, and the lyrics are solid, it’s a winner. And it will float, no matter how badly you try to sink it.”

She returned to Boston a year later, and plied her trade to that city’s commuters. At the time, she was still a firmly entrenched folkie, enamored of Joni Mitchell and Bob Dylan, and the type of ditties inevitably entitled either “The Ballad Of...” or “The Battle Of...” But after hearing Daniel Johnston’s “Speeding Motorcycle”

on the radio, and then buying a cassette by Lou Barlow’s Sentridoh, she began exploring other bins in the record shop. Mary Lou began to realize that some of the best minds of her musical generation were being ignored, and her repertoire began to expand exponentially. And she began to pen her own tunes, too.

She briefly relocated to Seattle, then returned to Boston. One evening at a party, she met Tinuviel, formerly of Olympia, Washington’s Kill Rock Stars label, and passed along a cas-

sette, which in turn landed in the hands of the label’s current proprietor, Slim Moon. “Tinuviel played me a tape of her just singing all of her songs into a boom box in the kitchen,” Moon recalls. “I didn’t really know anything about her as a person, although I had heard my friend Kurt Cobain speak highly of her a year prior to that.” He found the rough edges of her delivery enticing. “I thought her songs were great. And I usually hate folkies,” he chuckles. “I really liked her voice, the particular way she phrases and expresses meaning in the words, and squeezes everything she can out of a song.”

Moon decided to include Lord’s “Camden Town Rain” on the 1993 *Stars Kill Rock* compilation. “That track was the first time we’d ever had music remotely like that on one of our records.” The response to Mary Lou’s contribution was surprising. “The people that really liked it were hardcore kids, who didn’t like our stuff that strayed toward indie rock,” he recalls. “That’s really different from anything I’ve listened to,” they’d admit, “but it’s really cool.”

They weren’t the only ones who had noticed Lord. Margaret Mittleman of BMG Music Publishing (whose charges include Beck, Lou Barlow, Doug Martsch of Built To Spill, and Elliott Smith) had heard a tape of Mary Lou originals and liked them. While she was visiting Olympia, Moon encouraged her to check out Lord’s live show. “I was blown away by her performance,” Mittleman recalls.



"I met her afterwards, and she was a little unsure of me. Why would I want to talk to her?" Lord was already wrapped up in one evidently questionable business deal, having naively signed a purportedly dubious agreement with Deep Music, for whom she recorded tracks that reportedly barely received official release (Lord disowns them now), inadvertently signing away her publishing rights to a limited number of songs in the process.

Mittleman continued to pursue her from a respectful distance, even as the singer embarked on a bare bones tour with former Team Dresch member Kaia. When Mittleman saw Lord again at CBGB's, her resolve was fortified. "At that point, I didn't really know what were her songs and what weren't," she admits, "but I just loved them all." Eventually, Mary Lou grew to trust her, and within six months they'd done a legit publishing deal. In the interim, Kill Rock Stars released a single, "Some Jingle Jangle Morning" b/w "Western Union Desperate." The overwhelmingly positive response was almost immediate. On the strength of three songs and her live reputation, Mary Lou Lord quickly became the name to drop in buzzing music industry circles.

But Mittleman discovered that these three stellar songs weren't the tip of a monumental iceberg. "She didn't write as much as you would think, or hope, she would have when you sign a publishing deal," she confesses apropos of Lord's modest catalog. "But the ones



"When I started playing music, I realized I could kind of be DJ again. I wanted people to hear these songs that I thought were so great."

she did write were pretty amazing." Rather than wring her hands over the matter, Mittleman concentrated on letting Mary Lou do what she liked best—playing shows and meeting other musicians—and trusted that a little financial nurturing would eventually encourage her to devote more time to songwriting. "They never put pressure on me," insists Mary Lou. "I felt like an idiot, but in the end they trusted that I could work it out."

After I signed her, she started to get a lot of attention," recalls Mittleman. Everyone involved had different ideas about how they should proceed. They put their heads together, and eventually decided to do an EP on Kill Rock Stars. Mary Lou had grand plans for a polished pop record, while Slim aspired to something more along the lines of her subway performances. The resulting eight-song eponymous offering, released in early 1995, fell somewhere in the middle, mixing three originals with tunes by Johnston, Matt Keating, Jimmy Bruno, and her personal favorite, Nick Saloman of British underground psychedelic stalwart, the Bevis Frond.

The feeding frenzy to sign Lord began in earnest. At one point, *Rolling Stone* reported that no fewer than seven labels had their checkbooks drawn, "with several offering her six-figure deals." "It was really scary," she says, shaking her head. "Because I knew I wasn't ready. So I kept putting them off." They assumed this was a bidding war maneuver. Lord supposes their logic went "the longer you wait, the more the money goes up, and the more other people get interested. Why else would she wait, if she didn't have something

great up her sleeve?" But I didn't have any songs. I was screwed."

"She not only had trouble deciding who she wanted to sign with, but for at least a year she was uncertain whether she wanted to sign with a major label at all," adds Slim. "A year is a long time to have all these major label people coming to all your shows. It was really amazing how long that whole process went on with Mary Lou." And they continued to stalk her while she promoted the EP, doing press and hitting the road with Elliott Smith.

Back then, Elliott remained enough of a cult figure that he could soak up what was happening to Mary Lou from the sidelines. "When I was on tour with her, A&R people weren't talking to me," he confides. "They would just buy me a drink because they knew that I was friends with her." What he witnessed made him question whether or not he wanted to enter the fray himself. "Bidding wars are ugly. I saw her get pretty swallowed-up by that." But the tour had a plus side for him as well. "I learned about interacting with the audience," he says of playing with her nightly. "Before that tour, I pretty much just sat there and tried not to think about all the people. And she's very personable and familiar." That ease on stage allows her to transcend any shortcomings in her musicianship. "Her thing is not so much about technical matter," he observes. "She just loves playing songs, and that's pretty much ground zero for playing music, in my opinion."

There was, Mary Lou insists, another reason she bided her time. Longtime big wigs like Mo Austin of Warner Bros. were leaving their entrenched positions, and the pinions of the music biz were unsteady. "And even I, in my dumb head, could figure out that mail-

room people would become A&R people, A&R people would become vice presidents, that kind of thing.” She wasn’t about to have the domino effect leave her an unprotected orphan at her new label. When she met the founders of the neophyte WORK Group, her attitude shifted. They didn’t have an office or a staff yet. “Hmmm... no turnover,” she surmised. By the time they got up to steam, she’d be ready to record an album, and the WORK team would

“I wanted to make a really good record, and I didn’t want to let my ego get in the way and go ‘It has to be all my songs.’”

be enthusiastic to promote it. “It would be this new thing. It wouldn’t be a has-been thing where everyone was sick of it and they just want to get to the next label to get their advance and new position.”

As if these considerations weren’t weighty enough, Lord faced other obstacles. During her tenure in Seattle, she had become involved with Kurt Cobain, albeit very briefly (at one point, Mary Lou summarizes their romantic link as “a one-night stand”). The attendant happiness and subsequent heartbreak had inspired some of her early musings, and she’d made that public knowledge. But the widow Cobain, she-devil Courtney Love, wouldn’t hear of it, and accused Lord of trading on her dead husband’s name, lambasting her on the Internet, and even harassing her in public. “She was the best publicist I ever had,” laughs Mary Lou.

These days, Love has other concerns, and attention surrounding this matter has subsided. “People definitely bring it up a lot less,” admits Lord hesitantly. “I would imagine that’s because *she’s* not talking about it.” But the accusations leveled by Love that Mary Lou mania wasn’t due to her talent still sting. One of the high points of Lord’s set the night before was “Your New Thing,” from Shawn Colvin’s recent album *A Few Small Repairs*. Colvin and Lord have been friends for a long time, and Mary Lou has cried on her shoulder at various intervals. She claims Shawn nicknamed Cobain “Butthead,” and Love “Buttheadress,” and wrote the song with Love in mind. “A prom dress and a sneer/The woman of the year/But not quite,” sings Mary Lou, interjecting asides about designer attire from Prada and Versace. “That song makes me feel so good when I play it,” she confesses later with a smile.

While the pieces fell into place for the making of her first album, Mary Lou marked time by releasing a second Kill Rock Stars single, “Martian Saints,” which eventually evolved into a five-song EP, with tunes by Peter Laughner, Smith, Droge and Saloman, along with another Lord tune (“Salem ’76”). Although Mary Lou’s slow creative process aroused some concern (after all, she’d been courted as a singer/songwriter), she compensated by bringing her idol Nick Saloman to BMG, too. “They have people who try to go out and find talent for them,” she points out. “I didn’t feel guilty about the fact that

they gave me the little bit of money that they gave me, because they could’ve paid me the same amount to go out and find Nick if I were an A&R person.”

“For whatever I might have done to help her financially, and keep her business life together, she did for me turning me on to stuff,” concurs Mittleman. “She has a great ear for songs and music. That’s why she’s so critical of her own songs. They have to be perfect, because she compares herself to all these other people.”

And if you can’t beat ’em, join ’em. When it came time to hunker down to writing songs for *Got No Shadow*, she returned to her greatest source of material. “Immediately I thought of Nick Saloman.” The Bevis Frond frontman is a dad, and doesn’t like to leave his family to tour. Mary Lou’s proposal that they collaborate was a respectable way to generate income from the comfort of his living room. “I was over in London, hanging out with his wife and daughter, and it was just a really normal, family groove.” Saloman also shares her passion for songs of all stripes. Large chunks of the day were devoted to simply listening to selections from her host’s record library, appreciating nuances of craft. “It was like we were playing hooky from school.”

Sometimes they’d sit down and write together, as a team. “But mainly what would happen is we’d talk about something,” she recounts. “And then we’d break off and say ‘Okay, we’re gonna go write now.’ He’d go off to his room, and I’d go off to mine. It was a little bit like the Brill Building. So we’d come back with what we’d got. He’d always have something done in ten minutes, and it would be a masterpiece.” Mary Lou claims she’d be lucky to have a couplet to show for her time, but regardless, her input was sufficient to merit a co-songwriting credit on two of the album’s strongest tracks, “His Lamest Flame” and “Subway.” The new collection is rounded out by five Saloman tunes, four Mary Lou ones, and (surprisingly) a single cover, Freedy Johnston’s “Lucky One.”

Mary Lou admits that her songwriting is improving slowly. She wrote the new “Throng Of Blowtown” “in about six minutes, all by myself. I was following the Robert Pollard school of songwriting, whatever that is.” The ease with which it came to her provoked suspicion, but she let enough people hear it to ensure survival. “Sometimes you don’t know how to judge your own work.”

The fact that she had a specific agenda for *Got No Shadow* didn’t help her critical faculties. “I wanted to make a really good record, and I didn’t want to compromise. And I didn’t want to let my ego get in the way and go ‘It has to be all my songs.’” Having made the record she dreamt of, she feels confident that she’ll be more casual about her own compositions in the future.

Mary Lou’s penchant for covering other people’s material, at the expense of developing her own, has been a source of curious consternation. But as she observes, it wasn’t always the rule that singers had to write all their own songs. “Look at the early Dylan records, or the Beatles or the Stones,” she observes. “They didn’t have to put out



World Radio History



records with other peoples' songs on them, and they did. And I think it's because [the songs] really meant something to them. Those songs carried them to where they got to be, and gave them the inspiration to write their own."

"I see nothing wrong with that. There are so many people out there who write great songs that, for whatever reason, never get heard. It's a great thing to be able to play someone else's song. I know I get really corny, and talk about how Joni [Mitchell] says songs are like children, but I feel like a bit of a foster parent to these songs. And when you make a record, it's almost like they're your daughters, and this is their wedding day. You want them to be as much themselves as they can, but also be the most beautiful they can be on this special day."

Some might have preferred a civil ceremony, but Mary Lou was determined to make that wedding a splashy affair. "I knew the kind of record she really wanted to make, and I knew I couldn't afford it," says Slim Moon. Produced by Beck alumnus Rob Schnapf and Tom Rothrock, *Got No Shadow* is largely a straightforward rock affair, with high profile cameos from Roger McGuinn, Money Mark and Colvin. Making the adjustment to playing with a full band was a bit awkward for Lord. "I had to orchestrate the arrangements,

which was pretty hard. But I must stress, the songs are pretty simple, straight-ahead pop. It's not Yes or Jethro Tull, so you don't need a brain surgeon to figure out what to do."

"Sometimes the players might be playing something a little too rock," she admits, "and I'd have to go 'Ringo—just think Ringo.' I'd have to tell people to hold back, that the song didn't need it." Longtime fans may be a bit shocked when they hear the newly recorded versions of three old numbers: "Western Union Desperate," "Some Jingle Jangle Morning" and Saloman's "Lights Are Changing." Moon can see why some devotees may not dig them initially. "I had [the album] on cassette, and I hated it," he begins. "Once it was mastered, I understood it a little better. But sometimes you just get really attached to a version of a song, and you can't even tell if you're being objective or not when you hate the new version."

Mary Lou Lord is an attractive, spirited woman with a fondness for confessional songs (regardless of their author). For months, the media have been trumpeting that "Girls Are Hot!" Does she worry about being lumped in with Jewel and Fiona Apple, with no regard for the subtleties of her individual artistry and peculiar muse? "It will happen, and I'm not worried about it," she says, with a tense laugh. She insists that ill-fitting comparisons don't worry her. "The songs speak for themselves. I don't care where they place [my

record] because I know I'm going to get dumped into every category going."

"This record's got a lot of crossover [potential]," she adds. She reasons that state of affairs is a consequence of her busking experience. "After years of playing in the streets and on the subways, I can't pick and choose who's going to come down the steps. It could be a 45-year-old nun, or a 23-year-old indie boy. The stuff that I sing about has to be universal enough for people to understand, and it has to be somewhat palatable. And the record's got that. It sounds like me." And she manages to hold on to what she likes best about all the different genres she hints at in the process. "You might think that an indie-pop-type song wouldn't work with a Fairport Convention one, but they're all sitting there really happy together. They're all really different, but they don't sound separate."

Mary Lou doesn't concern herself with what people want to call her music, or how she gets it out there, she just wants to reach people with the songs. "There are all these bands that are so cool, and they try to appeal to just one audience, whether it's the girl thing or the boy thing or an indie thing. And you narrow your audience down. And that's a shame," she sighs, finishing her coffee. "I don't give a flying fuck if they accept me or not, really." **CMJ**



DATALOG: Released Oct. 14.
FILE UNDER: Incidental music for everyday listening.
R.I.Y.L.: Late Coctails, early Tortoise, Gastr Del Sol.

AERIAL-M

Aerial-M — *Drag City*

It's no surprise that Tortoise member Dave Pajo often plays sitting down: Songs like these don't really get danced to, and they don't need to get anywhere in a hurry. They move through the space of reflection and pause, rather than relying on glimmers of connection. The lazy-paced songs on his group Aerial-M's first record move in concentric circles; cycling again and again around a point, stretching the songs out across these points, as if to illustrate merely the journey between. What Aerial-M's songs do then, is not climax (or even really build), but meander: The record's strengths are in its gentle strokes of beauty, but not in its ability to fully engage. There is not, of course, any singing on this record, which is to its benefit—it's hard to imagine what kind of vocalization (other than the almost too played-out whispered 'poetry' kind of thing that usually accompanies music like this) would do anything but interfere with the simple constructions of these songs. The strongest works here are those with more punch: the soundtrack-like "Dazed And Awake" with its absolutely necessary organ, and the folky "Always Farewell." Not so much melancholic as bittersweet, *Aerial-M* draws strength from its simplicity and turns it into something very elegant and light.

—Liz Clayton

JOEY ALTRUDA

Presents *Kingston Cocktail* — *Will*

The rub with serious appreciation of "cocktail" music is that it's so closely associated with lifestyle, hardly anyone bothers to look at the two separately. If, however, you're going to pay attention to one such record this year, let it be *Kingston Cocktail*. With his band Jump With Joey, Joey Altruda has

been internationally recognized (meaning that his records weren't available domestically until Rykodisc's recent reissues) for his ability to mix classic ska with Afro-Cuban, jazz and jump blues influences without adulterating it. *Kingston Cocktail* is made of much of the same blend, but it's all been so finely mixed that the genres cease to matter. It's an utter lark that's also a pretty serious record, played with obvious enthusiasm by some obviously talented people, including the great Jamaican jazz guitarist, Ernest Ranglin. The fact that these musicians' virtuosity seems secondary to the elemental



DATALOG: Released Nov. 25.
FILE UNDER: Jamaican lounge.
R.I.Y.L.: Ernest Ranglin, recent Skatalites, Dean Frasier, Jolly Boys.

good time the disc radiates, or that the appreciation of their skill could very well be enhanced by a glass with ice, three parts ginger beer and one part dark rum, only adds to its worthiness for serious consideration: great musicians have always found a way to play to the whole room, and if you want to listen for subtle intricacies or merely rhythmically stir your drink, *Kingston Cocktail* is perfectly enjoyable either way.

—Scott Frampton

APHEX TWIN

Come To Daddy — *Warp/Sire*

It's hard to imagine what Richard D. James, a.k.a. Aphex Twin, was thinking when he made his perversely goofy new release *Come To Daddy*. "I want your soul/I will eat your soul/Aargh," chants the rapacious shock-metal voice on the opening track, "Come To Daddy, Pappy Mix." The "Little Lord Faulteroy Mix" of the same song features another of James's voice-manipulations, a sort of satanic elf that whispers, "Naughty little boy." Even when he's not auditioning for Wes Craven, James uses this eight-song mini-LP to explore stylistic extremes. He oscillates between his hard-



DATALOG: Released Oct. 28.
FILE UNDER: High concept electronica.
R.I.Y.L.: Photek, Luke Vibert, Land Of The Loops.

percussive mode, with its obsessively spliced buzz 'n' bass, and the bubbly, unassuming little tunes of his easy-listening mode. In the first category is the inspired beatscape "Bucephalus Bouncing Ball"—check out the nifty ricochet effect he creates with hard panning between the right and left speakers. On the milder side, "Flim" is built around bare melodic keyboard and bass with just a bit of vibration around the edges. James constantly plays with voices, warping them into unreality and cutting in the odd spoken phrase every so often. He even does a denser, trickier reworking of "To Cure A Weakling Child," his voice-collage track from the last album. It's an intriguing new emphasis for Aphex Twin, one that should entice his fans and give pause to anyone who thinks electronic music would be more comprehensible if only more of it had vocals. —Andrea Moed

BARDO POND

Lapsed — *Matador*

In the past, Bardo Pond has been about as reliable as a Russian rocket. Sometimes the band hits the switch, covers everything in fiery reverb and billowing fuzz, and takes off into the stratosphere. On other occasions it just teeters and implodes without ever leaving the launch pad. Part of Bardo Pond's problem stems from being a semi-improvisational band. How do you make sure everything falls together perfectly when half of the point is that it's never the same



DATALOG: Released Oct. 21.
FILE UNDER: Hypnotic acid rock.
R.I.Y.L.: Spacemen 3, My Bloody Valentine, Neil Young's Arc.

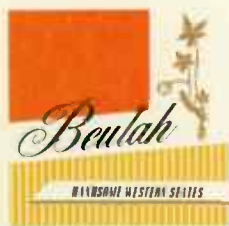
twice? On *Lapsed*, at least, it seems that this Philadelphia quintet has worked the kinks out of the program. Its third full-length begins at full blast and rarely lets up. Guitarists Michael and John Gibbons lay down a hazy wash of distortion and then slice through it with piercing, one-note leads. Isobel Sollenberger's breathy mantras hover in the distance, reflecting the feedback squalls with gentle coos. Bardo Pond is using pretty much the same elements as it did on its two previous full-lengths, but the band charts its course better, with cleaner melodies and heavier arrangements. Though the tracks easily fall into one another, the group keeps the sound interesting by adding distinct elements to the stew: a slide guitar soaring through "Pick My Brain," an ethnic polyrhythm propelling "Anandamide." *Lapsed* is an otherworldly trip.

—Neil Gladstone

BEULAH

Handsome Western States —
Elephant 6

San Francisco trio Beulah shares its taste for warm crunchy guitar sound, hooky sing-along choruses, and ornamental toots and strings with Elephant 6 fixtures Olivia Tremor Control and Neutral Milk Hotel. What's more, Beulah's lusty power pop songs recall early, great Guided By Voices.



DATALOG: Released Nov. 25.
FILE UNDER: Ingenuous power pop.
R.I.Y.L.: Guided By Voices, Neutral Milk Hotel, Superchunk.

But where Pollard & Co. are old and seasoned bards, Beulah exudes ingenuousness. You might even call these three bratty, given the bluntness of their attacks and the way they treat that "seven inches, yeah, gets so hard" line on "Rust With Me" as if it were really risqué. Their songs proceed in verse-chorus-verse lockstep, free of any complicating factors. This would be a little disappointing if they didn't put themselves over so winningly. Beulah can grab a hook by the

handle and sell it like GBV rarely tries to do (and like the trio's aforementioned labelmates are too perfectionist to do). The band's arrangements are bright and tidy, every trumpet, cello, and Pavement-ish la-la-la tucked into place. But while pop is no world-historical struggle for Beulah, it's no tumble off a log either. On "Delta," the three bear down on their mooning hearts to squeeze out pleas like "Hey, love, don't ya think about me sometimes/Think about you way more than I'd like." Maybe it's just finesse, but they sound as if they mean it.

—Andrea Moed

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Closed On Account Of Rabies (Poems & Tales By Edgar Allan Poe) — Mouth Almighty/Mercury
Edgar Allan Poe strove to achieve a "single effect" with his writing, but for this two-disc spoken-word compilation of Poe's works, producer Hal Willner (also known for eclectic tributes to Charles Mingus and William S. Burroughs) experiments with varied styles and moods and welcomes unexpected readings and readers. Unlikely suspects include funky blues man Dr. John growling through the short story "Berenice" and Christopher "Could You Repeat That?" Walken tackling "The Raven" with surprising clarity. In her 35-plus-minute reading of "The Black Cat," Diamanda Galás sounds as if she has all the wicked confidence Poe intended of his narrators. Some of the other musicians and actors, however, aren't as convincing: Iggy Pop's flat Midwestern croak sounds bored and forced during "The Tell Tale Heart." Of the sung selections, Deborah Harry's soprano and the Jazz Passengers' horn blasts add drama to "The City And The Sea," but Ed Sanders's folk-rock proves that Poe's lines



DATALOG: Released Nov. 18 (available in book and record stores).
FILE UNDER: Macabre open-mic nights.
R.I.Y.L.: Myth: Dreams Of The World, Weird Nightmare: Meditations On Mingus, Nicole Blackman.

weren't necessarily meant to be lyrics. Elsewhere, the music maintains the mood without detracting from the power of Poe's words; in addition to more generic sounds like ravens, heartbeats, thunderclaps and howling winds, Willner builds an eerie vibe with minimal cello, organ or electric guitar. Given its nearly two-and-a-half-hour duration, only Poe fanatics will manage *Closed On Account Of Rabies* in one sitting, but even in bits and pieces, this tribute can be as emotionally draining as his tensest tales.

—Wendy Mitchell

COOTEES ^{CD}

Let's Play House — Tooth & Nail

When he sings "I need some Coke," Cootees bassist Jiles O'Neal is talking about the brand of cola. Really. A tribute to the "liquid satisfaction" that soda brings, "Coke Song" is the young quartet's equivalent to the Descendents "Coffee Mug." After all, you've got to have caffeine to play the kind of hyper-kinetic punk-pop that



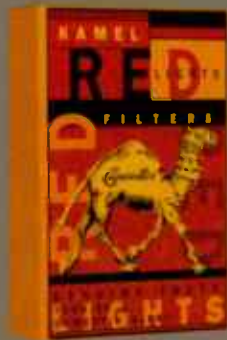
DATALOG: Released Oct. 21.
Website at: homegrohn.com/cootees/cootees1.htm
FILE UNDER: Punk-pop.
R.I.Y.L.: Descendents, MXPX, Green Day.

powers every single second of *Let's Play House*. Save the token ska number ("Jocks Don't Like Us") and a couple of hardcore tunes, the group (featuring members of MXPX and 90lb Wuss) doesn't waste time throwing curve-balls. Instead, with the tireless enthusiasm of a puppy dog, it cranks out high-octane ditties about school and girls and the beach. Meanwhile, quick, snarly guitar riffs sprout up like dandelions that are quickly mowed down by the three-chord machine plowing through these songs. The band falters when it tries to be sentimental, resorting to high-school poetics and insipid vocal melodies, but never fails to coax a smile with silly songs like "D.D.F." ("distance distortion factor"), which recommends getting a good close look at a girl

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before making up your mind that she's for you. The Cooties are like the Descendents' skinny little brother: Their hooks aren't always sharp enough and their guitar parts occasionally sound anemic. Still, *Let's Play House* is one to grow on and once these boys graduate from soda pop to java, they'll be unstoppable. —*Jenny Eliscu*

DJ KRUSH

Milight — Mo Wax/frr-London

You gotta walk a fine line in the new world of hip-hop. On one side is an allegiance to

DATALOG: Released Nov. 18.
FILE UNDER: Hip-hop past and future.
R.I.Y.L.: U.N.K.L.E., DJ Shadow, DJ Wally, DJ Cam.

its history—to stay true to the music and impress the aficionados who can't imagine the music without vocal raps. On the other side is this wide open spread of instrumental possibilities and those who are expanding the genre beyond its verbosity by concentrating on the music underneath. DJ Krush walks this line. On about half of *Milight's* tracks he works with various rappers from all over the world (there are raps in English, French and Krush's native Japanese), providing imaginative, curious beds for them to perform over. On the others he offers instrumentals as stand-alone structures with an understood hope that by adding mounds of texture—bird calls, bells, pianos, etc. and a low end groove—a message will reveal itself. What stands out, though, are the raps, because most of the music on *Milight*, while extremely adventurous, needs that extra layer to make an impression. When none is evident, all that remains are the bare bones—the equivalent of the obligatory “instrumental” edit on most hip-hop 12”. *Milight* is a fascinating confluence of these two camps, but in the end it isn't the perfect bridge it aspires to be. —*Randall Roberts*

DJ SHADOW

Preemptive Strike

— Mo Wax/frr-London

DJ Shadow should copyright that drum tone of his, because you can feel it spilling out of stereos from Tampa to Toronto these

days, and soon enough that tone is going to be the standard. Because, basically, DJ Shadow is the shit. He's the most talented of the new breed of hip-hop instrumentalists, and this singles collection shows why. Shadow can be minimal, showing the restraint to allow a tiny sound or rhythm take over a track, or he can pile on layers of mumbling voices, beats and woven sounds to create this perfect mess of sound. He can scratch,



DATALOG: Release date: Jan. 27.
FILE UNDER: Instrumental hip-hop.
R.I.Y.L.: Dr. Octagon, Beastie Boys, Coldcut.

he can cut, and, most importantly, he's got his own fully formed vision and sensibility. You can spot his cuts on compilations a mile away and you can groove to his signature rhythms—never flamboyant, always memorable—while they provide intellectual stimulation. Which is to say, you can simultaneously work your butt and brain to his beats. *Preemptive Strike* shows not only an artist cutting his teeth while he's cutting the platter, but an artist who appears to have arrived fluently speaking his own language after previously only muttering it under his breath. Wanna dive into the instrumental hip-hop waters? DJ Shadow is the place to start. —*Randall Roberts*

FREE KITTEN

Sentimental Education — Kill Rock Stars

Free Kitten is best appreciated as a side-project that makes fun of side-projects, an in-joke about in-jokers, or, at its most convoluted, a supergroup that parodies the concept of parodying a supergroup. It seems to be based on the rather thin premise that if you put four like-minded friends from four vaguely compatible bands together in a studio with nothing pressing to say or play, they'll come up with something interesting on the spot. If not, well, they can always ask DJ Spooky for a remix. So *Sentimental Education* brings Sonic Youth's Kim Gordon, Pussy Galore survivor Julia Cafritz, Pave-



DATALOG: Released Oct. 28.
FILE UNDER: Indie-rock supergroup.
R.I.Y.L.: Ciccone Youth, Boredoms, Pussy Galore.

ment's Mark Ibold, and Yoshimi P-Wee of the Boredoms together again for their second full-length session (Gordon and Cafritz generated two LPs before recruiting the boys) of pomo noisemaking, replete with the dubbed-out aural collage “DJ Spooky's Spatialized Chinatown Express Mix,” which may or may not have actually been remixed by Spooky, but works as illbient farce either way. [It is indeed Spooky—ed.] The rest is basically an entertaining, but ultimately forgettable, mess of poorly played punk riffs, Boredoms-style spazz outs, and Sonic Youth-y noise jams peppered with pop cult references like Mick Jagger floating dead in the River Thames. The danger in pushing a joke around too many corners is that eventually it ends up pointing right back at you. But it's doubtful whether anyone will have the patience to follow Free Kitten closely enough to ever notice. —*Matt Ashare*

FLYING SAUCER ATTACK

New Lands — Drag City

While hardly breaking from the foundation of the band's previous work—guitar feedback looped, filtered and layered in such a way as to produce rich vistas of droning sound—*New Lands* does find Flying Saucer Attack branching out a bit. Guitarist Dave Pearce is a master at creating incredibly dense and epic soundscapes with the most minimal of sonic tools, and here he's fashioned eight guitar-noise pieces with more gauzy warmth and (loosely) conventional



DATALOG: Released Oct. 14.
FILE UNDER: Space rock.
R.I.Y.L.: My Bloody Valentine, Spacemen 3, Brian Eno.

structure than is his norm. A distant heart-beat of a bass drum steadies his tone waves—densely sharp and squalling on one track, serene and hopeful on another—while the placement of empty space and suggestive touches of effects shades in vague outlines of glacial melody. While some ghostly, barely-there vocals have occasionally seeped through the FSA miasma in the past, they assume a much more up-front position here, evoking the hypnotic, soft-vocals-bathed-in-white-noise of My Bloody Valentine or the Jesus And Mary Chain. But Pearce is still millenniums ahead of any kind of post-punk retread; his stubbornly obtuse atmospheric and boundless sound-sculpturing are firmly dedicated to the re-thinking of such static concepts. —Colin Helms

FOR AGAINST

Shelf Life — Independent Project/World Domination

For Against has labored in indie-rock obscurity since the days when 'indie-rock' and 'obscurity' were by definition synonymous—well over a decade now. Part of the problem is that 'obscurity' and 'from Lincoln, Nebraska' also tend to be synonymous, but For Against has always maintained a timeless jangle-and-strum guitar-pop sound that can't be lumped into any flavor-of-the-month movement that has occurred since early-'80s Athens, Georgia.



DATALOG: Released Oct. 28.
FILE UNDER: Strum und drone.
R.I.Y.L.: Early R.E.M., Luna, Kitchens Of Distinction.

Which isn't to say that *Shelf Life* is stuck in slavish thrall to the firm of Stipe, Mills, Buck & Berry—some of the ringing minor-key chords sound familiar, but For Against opts for its own floaty, dream-pop sensibility without making effects the focal point. The guitars are soaked in reverb and flange; Jeffrey Runnings's plaintive, high-register vocals and confessional lyrics are echoey and distant. It would verge on hypnotic if not for the cracking rhythm section, which moves things along at a peppy clip. For

Against still needs to broaden its palette—every song, even the two cover tunes (by East River Pipe and Everything But The Girl's Tracey Thorn!), features the same guitar sound and one of two middling tempos—but they have a pure and gimmick-free sound. If, for some odd reason, graceful and understated pop music comes back in fashion, For Against will hopefully still be around, making it. —David Jarman

ROBBIE FULKS

South Mouth — Bloodshot

There's probably somebody at least a little like Robbie Fulks in most major American cities—a guy who knows the George Jones, Hank Williams and Buck Owens songbooks like the back of the hand he frets his vintage Fender or Gretsch with, and who maybe



DATALOG: Released Oct. 7.
FILE UNDER: Classic country and western
R.I.Y.L.: BR5-49, George Jones, Buck Owens.

even makes a bit of a living working regular weeknight bar gigs and opening for artists like Jimmie Dale Gilmore when they come to town. So it would stand to reason that one of those guys in one of those cities might turn out to be a cut above the rest. Fulks is that guy. On last year's *Country Love Songs* (Bloodshot), he offered up a honky-tonking collection of tunes that really weren't country love songs so much as songs about loving country music—the classic country of Jones, Williams and especially Owens, whose name got top billing in Fulks's clever mini-anthem "The Buck Starts Here." *South Mouth* finds Fulks aligning himself with the retro country western of BR5-49 both in style and in spirit, particularly in the tune "Fuck This Town," a witty pedal steel-driven ditty that takes aim at Nashville's writer-in-the-round music business culture. Which leaves Fulks too country for Nashville, too smart to waste his time playing covers, and too damn good to be written off as part of some fleeting hillbilly revival. —Matt Ashare



DATALOG: Released Oct. 28.
Another EP is to be released on Kill Rock Stars in January.
FILE UNDER: Maturing queens of rock.
R.I.Y.L.: Aimee Mann, Sam Phillips, Mary Lou Lord.

JULIANA HATFIELD

Please Do Not Disturb (EP)

— Bar/None

With the release of her long-finished fourth solo album (*God's Foot*) now on indefinite hold, Juliana Hatfield tries to appease her fans' demands for new material with the six-song EP *Please Do Not Disturb*. She could have tacked a comma on to that title followed by the words, "Work In Progress." What I've heard off *God's Foot* indicates that Hatfield was searching for a new place to be musically (perhaps due in part to *Only Everything's* lukewarm public reception), but those recordings also made clear that she hadn't yet figured out how to get there. *Please Do Not Disturb* may be a little rough around the edges, but it's definitely the most mature work she has released to date, and not just due to the arrangements. "Trying Not To Think About It" is an obvious homage to Jeff Buckley, touching in its fragile execution and brilliant in its lack of cliché. "As If Your Life Depended On It" marks Hatfield's return to the insecure, illuminating lyrics that initially endeared her fans with lines like, "Say hello/As if your life depended on it/Crack a joke/Light his smoke/As if your life depended on it." The arrangements here are gorgeous and haunting, coupling a thick, moody guitar solo with a backdrop of luscious strings. This EP still might not be the destination Hatfield had in mind, but it's a damn fine place to be. —Aaron Clow

HOLIDAY

Café Reggion — SpinART

On its last record *Ready, Steady, Go!*, Holiday had all of the makings of great lounge-pop, but couldn't piece the puzzle together. Lush horns and sweet melodies don't mean much without great hooks. On *Café Reggion*, the quartet has discovered a lot of what it was missing. Josh Gennet's spry vocal lines are immediately hummable, shimmy-



DATALOG: Released Oct. 28.
FILE UNDER: '60s lounge-pop.
R.I.Y.L.: Magnetic Fields, Orange Juice, Belle And Sebastian.

ing between the jazzy guitar lines. The album opener, "There's A Place," floats along like a dingy kissed by the summer breeze. The song might not be a classic, but it's close. With the help of Dave Max on flügelhorn, trumpet and trombone, Holiday shows it can churn out rich and reverent arrangements using just a handful of people. Giddy rave-ups like "Something About You" and "Just Follow" are perfect fare for your next soiree at the cabana. Unfortunately, only eight out of the 12 tracks here are new. The last four are from the band's early single "New Year's Anything," which included a cover of the Magnetic Fields' "Candy." Here the Brooklyn band rides the crest between new wave and indie rock with moderate success. Holiday has since moved its sound forward quite a bit by borrowing more from the '60s. Heck, if they had been around 30 years ago, these guys would probably be gigging with Dionne Warwick in Reno right about now. —Neil Gladstone

HURRICANE #1

Hurricane #1 — Sire/Warner Bros.

Like several UK acts of the last decade that slavishly followed the country's dominant rave sound and then evolved away from it (Blur, The Verve, the Charlatans), Ride got better the further it moved from trippy beats and distorted guitars. Sadly, the band's shift from shoegazer hymns to rock anthems led to its disbanding. Former Ride leader Andy Bell formed Hurricane #1 to pursue the anthemic-rock half of Ride's sound. He



DATALOG: Released: Oct. 28.
FILE UNDER: Classically British rock.
R.I.Y.L.: The Verve, Ride, Oasis, Kula Shaker.

made the right choice. Hurricane #1's debut is what Oasis's latest should have been: sweeping, catchy, unironic, craftily produced and just rock enough to matter. The first three (long) songs, "Just Another Illusion," "Faces In A Dream" and "Step Into My World," make up a classic suite of rock arias that set the tone for the rest of the album, which is not uniformly brilliant but is never less than tuneful. As the song titles indicate, lyrics are a quagmire for Bell, who relies on trite platitudes ("The river was flowing down to the sea/But I wanna know was she there for me") and repetitive, all-together-now choruses. But no one expects profound revelations from anthemic rock, just towering hooks, and Hurricane #1 fairly bursts with them. As for the now inevitable Beatles homage, Noel Gallagher had best take notes: Bell's "Mother Superior" cops its tune from "Baby You're A Rich Man" and its title from "Happiness Is A Warm Gun," and still sounds fairly original. —Chris Molanphy

INTERPRETERS

Back In The U.S.S.A. — Freeworld

This exuberant Philadelphia trio scored a coup last year when it got legendary Kinks/Who producer Shel Tamly to record its first single. One side of it ("Dogskin Report") is here, and, surprisingly, it's one



DATALOG: Released Sep. 30.
Website at www.theinterpreters.com.
FILE UNDER: Probably great live.
R.I.Y.L.: The Figgs, Material Issue, the Reactions

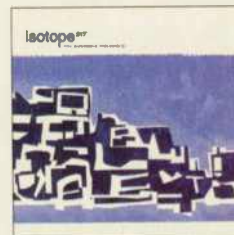
of the less Kinks/Who-derived tunes on the album, with nervous guitar and clipped vocals that recall XTC's first two records. There are a few other places where the Interpreters let on that they weren't dropped here from 1964, notably the pulsing, sonically huge "Make Up Your Mind," and several songs are taken at speeds unlikely prior to punk rock (or at least prior to The Jam doing Motown covers). Mostly, though, the Interpreters offer meaty rhythm guitar flavored with a bit of jangle, few solos, and

simple, repetitive choruses, wrapped up in packages that rarely break three-minutes. There's no great melodic gift at work here, and Herschel Gaer's forthright vocals lack character, which results in a cardinal sin for this sort of record—it's fully three songs in before a hook you can't ignore shows up. It's hard to be ill-disposed to music this unpretentious and energized (though a few between-song scraps of studio chat slow down the overall momentum), and it's nice to hear a major-label record in this genre where the drum and guitar sounds aren't overcompressed, but this debut is just a hair too faceless to make the power-pop short list. —Franklin Bruno

ISOTOPE 217

The Unstable Molecule — Thrill Jockey

Chicago jazzbos meet the mostly jazz-curious in this homegrown collaboration between members of the Chicago Underground Orchestra, a reduced Tortoise rhythm section, and similarly ecumenical others. The results are too polished to be jazz. Isotope's two drummers/one bass rhythm section plays with the restrained momentum of Tortoise's recent material, kicking out some smart if not very dynamic beats: dub, then funk, then Latin-influenced. Rhythm is the canvas for CUO cornetist Rob Mazurek and trombonist Sarah P. Smith, and the languid guitar work of CUO's Jeff Parker. Most of the time, the ensemble goes for consensus rather than counterpoint. On the blithe and swinging "La Jettee," a subdued snare beat is matched with equally mellow guitar and trumpet. When the drums and bass get funky on "Phonometrics," the horns and guitars wail. But there are also some surprising style plays, like the interlocking drum and horn rhythms of "Beneath The Undertow" and the hypnotic "Prince



DATALOG: Released Nov. 3.
FILE UNDER: Cool fusion.
R.I.Y.L.: Tortoise, UI, Spaceheads, Kind Of Blue-era Miles Davis.

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The players' excitement has given way to complacency, as if they knew their path so well, they sleepwalked their way through the album's recording. Despite a similar blending of Middle Eastern instrumentation with techno drum loops and sequenced ambiance, the record is devoid of any of the emotional fervor that made the group's past work so enthralling. The old and new sonic ideology still mesh, but Loop Guru only provides a picture postcard of a world its music once provided a passport to. The exceptions are the smooth "White Light," whose hyperspeed, lighter-than-air rhythmic textures drift into the yet uncharted territories of ethno-breakbeat, and the uncommonly energetic "Single Orphan First Year Camel." Elsewhere, *Loop Bites Dog* is mediocre, uninspiring and easily forgotten about once the play button is pressed.

—M. Tye Comer

LOW

Songs For A Dead Pilot (EP) —
Kranky

Music so often dismissed as "subdued" or even "soporific" tends to be defended by claims that others have missed out on its depth or points of subtlety. Yet for all its gentleness, subtlety is not remotely what Low is about—rarely does the ethereal, wispy and isolate ever get this *direct*. Begin-



DATALOG: Released Oct. 31.
FILE UNDER: A-melodic lullabies.
R.I.Y.L.: Quiet Yo La Tengo, Labradford, Codeine, Slowdive.

ning with the incredible "Will The Night," *Songs For A Dead Pilot* unfolds like fog spreading across the horizon—slowly and softly creeping in and then suddenly enveloping it. What lives within is the sound of quiet before glass breaking. The musical elements themselves (at whatever volume) deliver their force with a hammer-blow. The plodding bars of "Condescend" and the gripping vocal pairing of Mimi Parker and Alan Sparhawk are arresting at every moment. The culmination of the EP is "Be There," a droning and intricate piece that combines the best of the band's gentle assaults with their broadening reach towards spatial composition. The songs seem to have a motion within, but whether they are approaching or receding from us at any given point is dizzyingly unintelligible. Low has us on a tether, and where we are led is the band's choice entirely. —Liz Clayton

JAS. MATHUS AND HIS KNOCK-DOWN SOCIETY

Play Songs For Rosetta —
Mammoth

Born in 1887, Charley Patton was the first great star of Delta country blues. He was also the father of one Rosetta Patton, who became a beloved babysitter in Clarksdale, Mississippi. One of her charges subsequently grew up to be James "Jimbo" Mathus of Squirrel Nut Zippers fame. Inspired by a modest epiphany during a 1996 visit to his old homestead, *Play Songs For Rosetta* finds Mathus (billed here as Jas. "Ham-bone" Mathus) and an assortment of cronies serving up a blend of rustic covers and ramshackle originals in the tradition of the senior Patton. Lovers of the Zippers' busy swing numbers may be taken aback by the sparse arrangements found here, peppered with mandolin, washboard and even kazoo. But the exuberance that fills Mathus's singing and strumming on tunes like "Diggin' My Potatoes" spills over into the enthusiasm of all the assembled players. The



DATALOG: Released Oct. 14.
FILE UNDER: Porch settin' music.
R.I.Y.L.: Squirrel Nut Zippers, Bad Livers, Leadbelly.

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new compositions are just as no-fuss as the songs from bygone eras, and frequently—as in “Turkey Buzzard In A Pork Pie Hat” or “Who’ll Sop My Gravy”—just as silly, too. These 14 tracks form a sweet, succinct tribute to Charley Patton and his legacy, offering a fine remedy for any vacuous but hook-laden VH-1 or FM radio nightmare that might aim to cause you distress. —Kurt B. Reighley

MOCKET

Fanfare — K

Mocket’s singers, Audrey Marrs and Matt Steinke (also of Satisfact), are a genuinely scary pair: They’re too good at being inhuman. It’s telling that the closest Mocket comes to smiling on *Fanfare* is the computerized “Your Ice Cream Is Ready,” with its 15-second greeting-card microchip rendition of “Happy Days Are Here Again” and a robot announcing the song title. On “New Maps Of Hell,” Marrs’s slug-to-the-brain shouting punctuates the surly mistrust of Steinke’s monotone, while the boy/girl exchange further erupts on songs like “Should It Wait” and “Wendy/Walter.” Hole’s original drummer, Carolyn Rue, joins the hair-raising pair, fueling the band’s vicious attack and its driving need for metronomic implosion. The instrumentals are frustrating because the piercing, factory



DATALOG: Released Sep. 23.
FILE UNDER: Manstopping
new wave punk.
R.I.Y.L.: Gang Of Four, Sleater-Kinney, Candy Machine, Wire.

noise of the guitar and bass works so well with the interplay of the two singers. Steinke’s flattened ranting is effectively creepy throughout, and Marrs’s insistent savant babble is as unnerving as it is thrilling, since she seems to be detailing some crucial doomsday battle plan that’s just a hair shy of coherent. The long slow number “First Screening” ill-advisedly ends the album: You can actually hear Marrs singing, “Someone’s talking/Maybe I should have stayed quiet all this time.” But after *Fanfare*’s exhilarating ride of propulsive, sublimated sociopathology, such reflective pause, although nice enough, is 100% buzzkill. —Anne Marie Cruz

MOGWAI


Young Team — Jetset

With a name referring to the cute/scary creatures of a certain mid-’80s movie (*Gremlins*), this Glaswegian quintet erects a huge “sounds-like” wall that stretches from

Neil Young & Crazy Horse’s noise-sets on the *Ragged Glory* tour to the “slow-rock” of bands like Codeine. It isn’t easy to take melodic shards and wisps of romantic piano and master eight-minute group dynamics, but Mogwai rocks when it wants to, and at the other end of the spectrum, assembles sweet chamber laments built on single notes withheld, strained, echoed and strung in small clusters. Voices are scanty on *Young Team*, consisting mostly of disembodied snippets of phone calls, and there are few resolving chords, just impulses formed into thoughts and then allowed to drift off. The climactic guitar picking on “Katrien” produces overtones as well as a dense, hypnotic undertow. A smooth walking bass leads into a watery keyboard and a lovely hymn in “Tracy.” Even if one begrudges Mogwai the hackneyed delicate-into-crushingly-loud trick on “Like Herod,” there’s no denying the group these ambitious parameters. “Mogwai Fear Satan” rides a slow, psychedelic rave-up offset by a three-note tremoloed guitar riff, winding into a quiet



DATALOG: Released Oct. 21.
FILE UNDER: Moody,
instrumental rock.
R.I.Y.L.: Sonic Youth,
Sint, Rodan.

 ARTIST APPEARS ON THIS MONTH’S CD



A few years ago, Will Oldham was walking through New York City with David Berman. They walked through Chinatown and saw a restaurant called the Silver Palace. They thought “We should make a record together!” Well, this was attempted last year in-and-around Berman’s then-home Charlottesville, VA (he has since moved to Austin, Texas); however, the work never got past the initial collaborative writing phase. Even though the official “Silver Palace” record was not completed, the time spent together was fruitful. “Apocolypse, No!,” from Oldham’s new *JOYA* lp, is an example of this time: Berman had scribbled the first two lines on the wall of Oldham’s house, and from this the song’s lyric stemmed, Berman’s unrhyming conplet setting the stage for the tale of awkward amor-and-enmity among two friends described by that harrowing and beautiful song.

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section with flute-like elaborations. While swell for a few minutes, "Fear Satan" is an over-long song that's over before it's over. Thankfully, though, the band rarely resorts to gratuitous noise or studio effects to leaven their romantic, occasionally majestic music. —*Danny Housman*

WILL OLDHAM

Joya — Drag City

On *Joya*, former Palace Brother Will Oldham—the artist formerly not very well known as Push—seems to have found himself, or at least lost the desire to cloak his rootsy exploits in various permutations of the Palace moniker. Making a full recovery from the rickety acoustic regression of last year's Palace Music album *Arise Therefore*, and picking up where '95's organ-, piano-, and electric guitar-fortified *Viva Last Blues* left off, Oldham plugs back in to lead a loose yet sure-footed ensemble through a dozen cryptic folk-based numbers that bring to mind the young Dylan and early Neil



DATALOG: Released Oct. 27.
FILE UNDER: Appalachian indie-folk.
R.I.Y.L.: Early Bob Dylan, early Neil Young, Vic Chesnutt.

Young without sounding quite like either. It's Oldham's penchant for ambiguous turns of verse rooted in a kind of apocalyptic spirituality ("I've seen people crumble and fall by the way/And humble themselves like it's their due to pay") and Appalachian-flavored folk that most resembles Dylan. And it's his high-pitched nasal whine and world-weary delivery that recalls *Harvest*-era Young. The fuller arrangements on *Joya*, particularly on strum-and-drone tunes like "Antagonism" (a crocodile-smile of a song featuring string embellishments) and the ominous, Eastern-tinged "New Gypsy," also hint at some of R.E.M.'s less accessible

folk abstractions, which means Oldham's still an acquired taste but one that doesn't take as much effort to acquire as it once did. —*Matt Ashare*

TERRENCE PARKER

Detroit After Dark — IK7

Not to sound vulgar, but *connoisseurs d'amour* recognize that carefully programmed music is a vital component to successful lovemaking. Terrence Parker says he hopes to "bring light into your hearts, minds and souls" through the music of *Detroit After Dark*, but what it mostly ignites are the loins and libido. While many




DATALOG: Released Nov. 18.
FILE UNDER: Sweet and low after-hours electronics.
R.I.Y.L.: Frankie Knuckles, Carl Craig, Barry White.

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


Stop The Presses: "Kids Are Buying Electronic Music!" There must be a memo to that effect circulating in movieland these days (they're a little slow on the uptake in Hollywood). No fewer than three soundtracks this month prominently

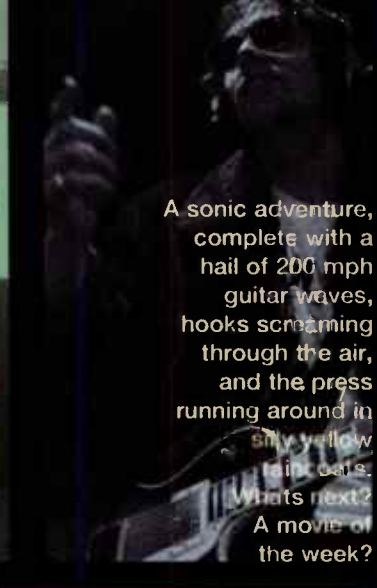
feature the ubiquitous Prodigy (the two below, plus **Hackers 2**). Hello people, this music isn't exactly conducive to sitting still! Although Prodigy's "Poison" doesn't actually appear in the film, the soundtrack to **The Jackal** (MCA)  features a version of last summer's hit, plus a collaboration between BT and Psychedelic Furs/Love Spilt Love's Richard Butler, and Massive Attack's interpretation of Siouxsie And The Banshees' "Metal Postcard." Just watch out for that first deceptive Goldie cut—it's really a Bush remix!... The same creative team that broke out in '96 with **Train-spotting**, and its accompanying brilliant soundtrack (which finally brought Underworld the prominence it justly deserves), returns with **A Life Less Ordinary** (London). The soundtrack reflects the film's American flavor with a broader array of participants, including Luscious Jackson and Folk Implosion. Slinky new cuts from the Cardigans and Beck comfortably rub shoulders with Elvis and Bobby Darin classics, and even the blasé Sneaker Pimps contribute the reasonably interesting "Velvet Divorce."... You won't find the Prodigy on the sprawling **Tibetan**



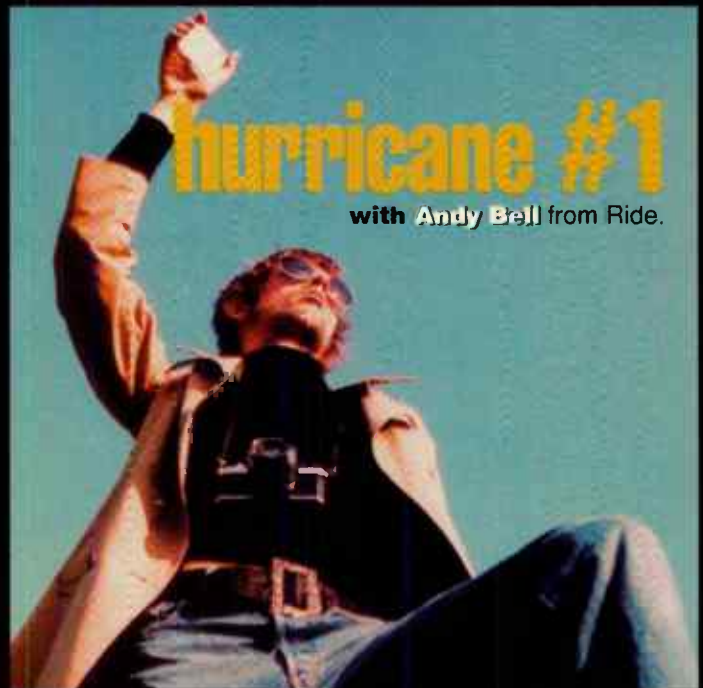
Freedom Concert (Grand Royal/Capitol) , but that's not the only thing making this triple-disc so remarkable. Capturing performances from the New York dates last July (as well as a handful from the '96 San Francisco shows), the programming reflects the diversity of participants, from Patti Smith to Rancid, Taj Mahal to Lee "Scratch" Perry. And the accompanying enhanced CD is actually entertaining and informative, with wisdom from the Dalai Lama, advice on how you can get involved in Tibet's struggle, and backstage footage. Plus, everyone's favorite Icelandic superstar! As the Swedish Chef would say, "Mmmm... Björk, Björk, Björk!"... Speaking of divas with a social conscience, Crystal Waters' "Gypsy Woman (She's Homeless)" is just one of 16 groovilicious cuts featured on **Disco Queens: The '90s** (Rhino). The third volume in this series lacks the consistency of its '70s and '80s sisters (the world didn't need DJ Miko's HI-NRC version of 4 Non-Blondes' "What's Up" any more than it needed the hideous original), but it still delivers more than enough treats — from Soul II Soul, Technotronic, Black Box and more — to shake the blues away. —Kurt B. Reighley

 ARTIST APPEARS ON THIS MONTH'S CD

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electronic artists are so busy programming beats they neglect subtle nuances of melody, Parker pours it on sweet and slow as maple syrup for these ten instrumental numbers. The actual arrangements are deceptively minimal, yet more strings are featured here than at a Suzuki convention, plus there's delectable piano passages, and even a simmering guitar lick on the title cut. There are moments one could dance to, but after the sultry openers "A Taste Of Heaven" and "Romancing Da Drum," you'll be much more comfortable in a horizontal position. Occasionally, a track hints at the more sinister aspects suggested by the title ("Play-ah Hate-ah" would make an excellent addition to a James Bond score—"The Spy Who Loved Me," perhaps?), but never to such a degree as to disrupt the pervasive air of sensuality. If *Detroit After Dark* doesn't send the blood rushing throughout your body, set out milk and cookies for the undertaker, cuz Jack... you dead. —Kurt B. Reighley

PELL MELL

Star City — Matador

The underdogs of instrumental not-really-pop for so long, Pell Mell comes out swinging with its latest effort, a would-be record of the year were anyone to know what to do with it. As instrumental indie music goes, most bands collect themselves among the axes of surf-based or lounge-tail nowadays, yet Pell Mell resonates more soundly with the likes of Ennio Morricone. Working as much with broad, sweeping strokes as with pointed punch and a sort of musical elasticity, Pell Mell's compositions are worthy of almost any backdrop, any season. Each song carries with it as much lightness as it does nostalgia, sentiment, and a sort of seriousness that makes the music seem all that much



DATALOG: Released Oct. 21.
FILE UNDER: Transcendental scores for modern life.
R.I.Y.L.: The Sea And Cake, Wire's *154*, film music of Ennio Morricone.

more immediate. Even in their sometimes understated measures, songs like "Salvo" are cacophonous and euphoric, while others spiral around and draw us in. "Headset" is a rather lovely homage to Wire's "Map Reference," and in fact much of the record seems to use that group's *154* as a point of inspiration—there's even a song called "On Approach." This inarguably laudable reference point notwithstanding, *Star City* has a beauty and an inertia all its own—soaring high above most anything else that's emerged from similar folds in a gravely long time. —Liz Clayton

PILGRIMAGE

9 Songs Of Ecstasy — Point Music

If there's something unsettling lurking in the background of this ravishingly beautiful record of ancient vocals and modern production, perhaps it's that the original purveyors of these melodies thought they were bringing the light of Christianity to



DATALOG: Released Oct. 21.
FILE UNDER: Piety plus production.
R.I.Y.L.: Hector Zazou, Cocteau Twins, Enigma.

the world, and other such 12th and 13th century efforts resulted in things like the Inquisition and the crusades. Siren Catherine Bott is renowned for her interpretations of early vocal music; her recordings of these pilgrim melodies were couched in an appealing ambient score by French composer/pianist Simon Cloquet and producer Eric Calvi. It couldn't have been easy choosing the right amount of fairydust to bring these church chants to life, but Cloquet, Calvi and conductor Phillip Picket have created a lush exploration of the music's spiritual qualities without obscuring the voice. Guests include Roxy Music guitarist Phil Manzanera, percussionist Glen Velez, trumpeter Ben Neill, and DJ Spooky. Bott's willowy style doesn't stress syllables, such that only listeners trained in

Romance languages will easily discern phrases, but the meaning is clear: All hail the heavenly kingdom of Eno—errr, rather, the unnamable mystical force.

—Danny Housman

PRINCESS SUPERSTAR

CEO — A Big Rich Major Label

Princess Superstar is the group's name, not that of lead performer Concetta Kirschner, who writes, sings, raps, purrs and plays some guitar. That puts some distance between the performer and the persona, the dollar-clocking, horny-but-



DATALOG: Released Nov. 4.
FILE UNDER:
Aggressive funk-rap.
R.I.Y.L.: Early Luscious Jackson, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Fishbone.

in-control CEO of her own corporation. Which is good, because the persona and the mix of old school rap and funk-rock is refreshing for a few songs but wears thin over an album. There's a basement tape sound which emphasizes the group's creativity as well as the limits of its recording technique. "Gimme All Your \$\$\$" is an irresistible groover with Kirschner's smoky irregular raps dancing between a bouncy piano, live drum track, and assorted sound effects. She dictates the terms of boot-knocking to a waiting lad, bragging coyly about her wealth and taste. "I Got To Get Aloan With You" starts off as a psychedelic-era jam, then slows into a smoky come-on ("You're like a paper factory with all of that wood"). Kirschner may be an average singer, but her swaggering rap-style has a suggestive flavor that suggests Mae West: "I'm packing lots of heat/But I ain't talking 'bout a gun/Come and take your Mazerati for a test-run." Her band's instrumentals romp through styles and samples evoking the Beastie Boys, Kiss and even Van Halen. Still, by "CEO" the thrash choruses seem predictable after the jokey verses.

—Danny Housman

It's nearly impossible to attend an underground dance event in the U.S. and not hear the drum 'n' bass vibrations of **DIESELBOY** (a.k.a. Damien Higgins) rumbling in the jungle room. As the most in-demand d'n'b DJ in America, this Philadelphia-by-way-of-Pittsburgh DJ is everywhere you turn, and for good reason. He's made a name for himself by spinning tracks that push breakbeats to new and

obscene levels, and his track selection and mixing leave listeners in ecstatic, sweaty awe. **97 Octane (Sub Base USA-Moonshine)** demonstrates the full fury of a famous Dieselboy set, drifting seamlessly from its bass-heavy jump-up



introduction to its dark, twisted hardstep/techstep conclusion. He's a master in command of his vinyl, and this disc is a flawlessly mixed guide for those brave enough to explore the deviant side of drum 'n' bass... Legendary Detroit DJ/producer **KEVIN SAUNDERSON** is receiving a healthy amount of attention of late, due not only to his recent singles compilation (see review in Dance column on pg. 56) but also for his latest mix CD effort, **Kevin Saunderson Presents X-Mix: Transmissions From Deep Space Radio (IK7)**. The 22-track disc pays homage to Saunderson's stint as a regular talent on Detroit's mid-'90s "Deep Space Radio" show, where he ambushed the airwaves with a minimal techno/house attack that incorporated styles emerging from Chicago and New York, as well as his distinguishable Detroit groove. Despite the disc's masturbatory, frequent and downright annoying overdubs ("Oooh...you're such a master" is cooed over the music about every fourth mix), this melodic, uplifting techno journey, executed with Saunderson's smooth overlay and edit style, shows why he remains one of the nation's best... The talents of Chicago mix-master **BAD BOY BILL** have been applauded on this page before, but mention must be made of his latest release, the excellent **Global House Culture Vol. 4 (Esp/Sun-Roadrunner)**. BBB guides the series into the banging world of fist-in-the-air Chicago house, squeezing in an astonishing 30 tracks in just over an hour. The set also incorporates bits of techno, electro and funky breaks, showing the rougher, tougher and more adventurous side of this Midwestern turntablist.

—M. Tye Comer



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DATALOG: Released Nov. 18. Domestic version drops "Mousetail" and adds two singles.
FILE UNDER: Spaced-out riff-rock.
R.I.Y.L.: Late Spacemen 3, Royal Trux, Th' Faith Healers.

QUICKSPACE

Quickspace —
 Kitty Kitty/Slash-London

Back in the early '90s, guitarist Tom Cullinan was the chief songwriter in Th' Faith Healers, a hard-touring, high-strung, unremittingly intense riff-attack band that ended most of its shows with an explosive two-chord song that went on for half an hour or more. After that band splintered, Cullinan re-emerged with Quickspace (initially Quickspace Supersport), a new quintet that, as its domestic debut reveals, does pretty much the same thing—just less so.

For one thing, his energy level seems to have dropped a lot in the last five years; only on "Quasi-brau" does Quickspace work itself up to anything close to Th' Faith Healers' frenzy. For another, though he's got a nicely casual singer in Nina Pascale, he does a lot of the singing here himself, which is a mistake—his strangled yawp makes "Winona" a chore to get through. Most of the riff-and-repeat numbers on *Quickspace* have potential, and on a stage, they could easily come alive. What the disc lacks in power, it tries to make up for in texture, with elements like the atonal, groping violin of "Docile" or the echoing leads of its slowed-down version "Docile Two," but there's not quite enough to the songs themselves to make the difference. —*Douglas Wolk*

SHIPPING NEWS

Save Everything — Touch And Go
 Jeff Mueller and Jason Noble seem to have developed a musical Morse code

over their years working together in Rodan. Though Noble has been concentrating more on the Rachel's lately and Mueller on June Of 44, the two still communicate with each other uncannily well. On *Save Everything*, the discussion between Mueller's brittle guitar and Noble's prowling bass could be telling the story of a long, pensive train ride. It's not completely improbable. After all, Mueller is infatuated with locomotion and he lives only a stone's throw away from the elevated train in Chicago. Plus, the opening cut is entitled "Books On Trains." As for the whole



DATALOG: Released Sep. 23.
FILE UNDER: Angular emo-core.
R.I.Y.L.: Rodan, June Of 44, Tortoise.

album, there are times when the epic imagery is downright engrossing and other passages when you could probably take a trip to the café car and not miss much. For most of this journey, Mueller and Noble trade haunting arpeggios and minor key riffs that shift in emotion from livid anger to hesitant remorse. In between, there are moments of spy-like intrigue and mysterious romance. Sparse vocals seep in like irrational, subconscious thoughts being suppressed by the instruments. Shipping News may not play the most inventive angular rock you've ever heard, but it says much more than most bands of its ilk, and usually without words. —*Neil Gladstone*

SPACE MONKEYS

The Daddy Of Them All —
 Factory/Chingon/Interscope

The stirring debut from this Manchester quartet evokes a late-'80s Britain where Happy Mondays and the Stone Roses ruled, E and acid were the drugs du jour, and smiley faces grinned from countless tees. On the cheekily rollicking opener "Acid House Killed Rock And Roll" the band tips its hat to its Madchester forebears with cranking beats and mesmerizing electronic sounds. Their lyrics still dwell on getting stoned, but these Monkeys cunningly update the acid house sound with an addictive fusion of big guitars, hip-hop, brass blasts, and whatever else takes their fancy. "Sugar Cane" is a daisy-age special, coated with scratching, sampling, and ragga-rapping, but the good-time vibe of



DATALOG: Released Nov. 4.
FILE UNDER: Acid house gone rock 'n' roll.
R.I.Y.L.: *Screamadelica*-era Primal Scream, early Happy Mondays, the Chemical Brothers.

PILGRIMAGE
 9 SONGS OF ECSTASY

a seductive blend
 of chant and
 trip hop

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The Daddy Of Them All lies in its tripped-out, *Screamadelica*-quality anthems. The psychedelic, wah-wah-drenched “Ready For The Rampage” clamors amidst its rumbling, “Are you ready to get teenaged?/Are you coming down mother-fucker?”; “Let it Shine” builds like a sunrise, from a lovely plucked guitar fragment to a blaze of tantalizing rhythms, as it documents the delights of smoking dope with dad. Frontman Richard McNevin-Duff’s gutsy vocals shift from a Liam Gallagher-like Northern gnarl to the sexy groan of Primal Scream’s Bobby Gillespie, anchoring the “dancehall in your brain” that *The Daddy Of Them All* purports itself to be. —Sarah Pratt

KATE ST. JOHN

Second Sight — Thirsty Ear

You might recognize Kate St. John’s name from the pretty oboe and English horn lines she contributed to Julian Cope’s first solo record, or as a member of both Van Morrison’s band and ’80s studio confectioners the Dream Academy (remember “Life In A Northern Town”?); over the past few years, she’s recorded an album with Roger Eno, two with the Channel Light Vessel and one prior solo release.



DATALOG: Released Nov. 11.
FILE UNDER: Dreamy Francophilic chamber-pop.
R.I.Y.L.: Jacques Brel, Madeleine Peyroux, Eric Matthews (for the arrangements).

Second Sight is a perhaps excessively genteel collection of mostly self-penned and -arranged ‘orch-pop,’ far closer to the Gallic chanteuse tradition than that of the Anglo singer-songwriter. St. John’s arrangements and playing are often gorgeous, though usually devoid of any rhythmic pulse—her oboe trembles airily, and she’s equally effective on accordion and even saxophones. Sadly, all this lushness is squandered on songwriting and singing that is average at best. It’s not simply that St. John’s voice is thin—so was Astrud Gilberto’s—but that it lacks expressiveness and character, and isn’t even especially

sweet-timbred. The lyrics tend to be as vague and ethereal as the surrounding music (“Lost in a dream of oblivion/Lost in the shimmering sea”), but even when they have some bite, as on the jealousy-driven “Fireworks,” the languid vocal performance isn’t nuanced enough to suggest intensity by its apparent absence. If St. John could convey as much personality with her voice as she can with her oboe, *Second Sight* would be worth more than a second listen. —Franklin Bruno

SUBARACHNOID SPACE

Almost Invisible — Release

San Francisco guitarist Mason Jones is best known for making trance records; his band Subarachnoid Space is a very different, but perhaps not incompatible, side project. The album’s six heavy, instrumental jams



DATALOG: Released Aug. 5.
FILE UNDER: Heavy psych jams.
R.I.Y.L.: Fushitsusha, Lhasa Cement Plant, Crystallized Movements.

rock utterly, with Mason and co-guitarist Melynda winding out long, lazy riffs backed by a competent if undistinguished rhythm section. But if you’re thinking Spinal Tap in its “fusion” mode, think again; what’s surprising about the studio-recorded tracks is how restrained they are. Tracks like “Floating Above The Skyline” are filled with bits of trembling, scraping technical display, but the solos never stray outside the dreamy atmosphere of the songs. The guitarists leave each other lots of space; while one plays a trippy, pedal-affected passage, the other invariably fades into the rhythmic landscape. The result is a comforting, bass-drenched stew, improvised but deliberate. The band revs up considerably on the second, live half of the album, leaning into a steady drone, and adding heavier drum sound and fancier effects. For a 20-minute live jam, this part hangs together uncommonly well. Building from a quiet rumble, the guitars gradually start to wail and the percussion gains presence. With the whole band playing at full

force, the song takes on a steady shimmer. Like the Dirty Three at its most intense, Subarachnoid Space illuminates the connection between trancing out and rocking out. —Andrea Moed

SCOTT WALKER

Tilt — Drag City

After a string of lachrymose teen hits with the Walker Brothers, Scott Walker made four cultishly revered albums of moody, orchestral pop before disappearing from music almost completely. *Tilt*, his first new record in more than a decade, is a compelling, confounding collection, studio-polished to mask the misshapen universe sketched by its songs. Walker and co-producer Peter Walsh create sparse, yet lush settings for Walker’s haunted cavern of a voice. On “Bouncer See Bouncer,” the accompaniment is often nothing more than a parade drum and an uncanny buzz sampled from a hurdy-gurdy. The strings of “Farmer In The City” and the solo guitar of “Rosary” are made to seem equally foreign to pop as we know it. Walker’s fragmented lyrics are equally dark. “Choruses” like “Lemon bloody cola” and “the Luzerner Zeitung never sold out” (referring to a Swiss newspaper) are little help in



DATALOG: Released Sep. 2.
FILE UNDER: Pleasure, torment, and high Modernism.
R.I.Y.L.: Tindersticks, Nick Cave, Van Dyke Parks, Jacques Brel.

resolving the narratives of “Bolivia ’95” or “Patriot,” respectively. The effect is something like hearing Harold Pinter performed in La Scala. Tantalizing hints of up-to-date political deal-cutting and torture abound, but one senses that the “whole stories” behind these songs are too much for their narrators to tell coherently. Matters do lighten up occasionally, as on the earthy, jaunty “Tilt” (“Come over and pray/They’ll turn the buffalo”). Throughout, Walker’s voice seems to luxuriate as decadently as ever in the subtly overwrought character of its surroundings. —Franklin Bruno

Robbie Williams

by Kurt B. Reighley

A journalist once asked a budding UK singer if he'd ever like to perform at big outdoor festivals. "Yeah, I would," he replied. "I'd like to arrive in a helicopter, and land backstage... I'd turn up with a bottle of champagne and a bevy of beauties... looking like Johnny Pop Star. Just to really get everybody's back up." Never mind that the subject hadn't released his first record, or played a single gig. Nobody contested this young upstart's visions of babes and bubbly in the sky. Such is Robbie Williams's charisma.

"Our Robbie" (as he's affectionately known in England) rose to prominence as the grinning class clown of prefab quintet Take That, which formed in 1990. The group's beginnings were hardly auspicious. The band members smeared jelly all over themselves for their first video. For years, their big finale was dropping their trousers to reveal T-A-K-E-T-H-A-T taped to their buttocks. But within six years, they'd sold over 15 million records, scoring seven UK #1 singles. All thanks to tight choreography, fresh-scrubbed good looks, catchy ditties... and Robbie Williams.

Boy bands are ostensibly democracies. Take That's handlers aimed the spotlight at frontman Gary Barlow. Yet portly "Gazza" was like a youngster you'd mock at school, but still attend a birthday party for, simply because his parents had the bucks to hire a clown. As for the remaining three—Jason, Howard and Mark—well, nobody round the pub ever affixed "Our" to their names... when they could remember them. Ignoring Robbie's "little something extra" was as futile as pretending Annette Funicello didn't stand out from her fellow Mousekateers.

In the summer of 1995, Robbie ditched rehearsals for an upcoming tour to attend the bacchanalia of Glastonbury. After many misadventures, he wound up dancing onstage with Oasis, clutching a beer. His drunken mug landed in every paper in the nation. His cohorts were not amused. On Monday, July 17, a press release announced that Robbie was leaving Take That. The story made front-page news throughout England. In Germany, a 14-year-old teenybopper attempted suicide. "WHY?" screamed the cover of *Smash Hits*. For once, the little girls *didn't* understand.



For the next year, Robbie seemed rudderless. Temporarily prohibited from recording, he hosted daytime TV, modeled in drag for a soda advertisement, and showed up at every social event on British soil. His weight ballooned and the press cruelly anointed him "Blobbie." Meanwhile, Take That trooped on, but the following spring they announced that a tepid cover of "How Deep Is Your Love?" would be their swan song.

On July 29, 1996, Robbie returned with a calculated cover of George Michaels's scathing "Freedom." It immediately went top ten. His next offering upped the stakes, applying his talents to original material. The anthemic "Old Before I Die" encapsulated his irrepressible allure perfectly. "I hope I'm old before I die/ But tonight I'm gonna live for today/ So come along for the ride," he exhorted. The nation sang along.

What makes Robbie irresistible to old and young, male and female alike? Artistically, he recognizes the twin poles of "serious" music and lightweight pop that define the British charts, and appreciates both. And in a world that loves scandal, he's been quite public about his problems;

Their big finale was dropping their trousers to reveal T-A-K-E-T-H-A-T taped to their buttocks.

prior to releasing his album *Life Thru A Lens* (Chrysalis UK), he went into rehab to get his substance abuse and waistline under control.

Then there are his boyish good looks, the type that hardcore adulterers dream of despoiling,

for Robbie's first post-Take That pictorial, Norman Watson photographed the singer in tear-streaked mascara, handcuffs and white briefs. He's turned down invitations to pose nude. "They offered £130,000," he quipped in *The Face*. "£65,000 an inch." Plus he's never turned up his nose at gay fans, shaking his groove thang at clubs like Queer Nation. He addressed the "is he or isn't he?" question in "Old Before I Die": "These are strange days/ We're living in today/ Am I straight or gay?" Well, mostly the former. Sigh. "I'm really comfortable with my sexuality," he told *Vox*. "I could sleep with a bloke today. But I actually don't want to." But then added, "I'll probably dabble before I die."

This points to the essence of his appeal: Whether he's on the top or the bottom, Robbie Williams is a man of the people. All of the people. A lousy student raised by a single mother, he went from community productions of *Oliver* to being in a hugely successful pop act, then left it all to stand on his own two feet, however shaky. He's cocky yet genuine, he desperately wants the public's love, and he's a star from head to toe. Even at a paltry £65,000 an inch. ■

★ And if Zep isn't heavy enough, **AC/DC** has announced plans for a box set celebrating its years with its late singer, Bon Scott. Scott, who drank himself to death in the back seat of a car in London, was about as rock 'n' roll as they come. Starting out as the band's driver, he stepped onstage one night in 1974, and went on to pen such ditties as "Hell Ain't A Bad Place To Be," "Bad Boy Boogie," "Highway To Hell" and "Walk All Over You." It was Scott more than Ozzy or Jimmy Page who really made rock 'n' roll into Satan's brand name of music, causing untold mayhem onstage and off- during his years with the Aussie band. Scott was certainly a rock icon of the highest order, but beneath his ultra-cool exterior lurked a genuinely anti-social personality, which led to a stint in the juvenile house of detention for assault and battery. It's true Scott may have ridden the highway to Hell to the end, but if you ask me, it's the other AC/DC-ers who are really in hell, trapped in their forties, with a lunk-headed replacement singer, having to dress like school kids and act like morons each night to maintain their flashy cars and country estates.

★ And if that isn't enough great music from dead classic rock guys, there's a new CD in the bins by **Jimi Hendrix** (MCA). It's *South Saturn Delta*, a sometimes motley, sometimes monumental collec-



inthebins

tion of outtakes, demos, cosmic jams, and ephemera previously found on posthumous albums like *Rainbow Bridge*, *War Heroes*, *Crash Landing* and *Midnight Lightning*. Unfortunately, some of the tracks are rather dated-sounding remixes done in the early '70s after Hendrix's death. Several of the tracks were remixed and remastered in 1997 by original Hendrix engineer Eddie Kramer and these sound great — it's a pity they couldn't have done them all like that. *South Saturn Delta* does contain one rather remarkable unfinished track from 1967, which reveals that two of Hendrix's most popular signature songs, "Angel" and "Little Wing," actually started life as the same song.

★ Fans of soul music will definitely want to check Legacy-Columbia's box set celebrating the genius of **Gamble & Huff**. These legendary Philly record men rode to the top of the charts in the late '60s and through '70s with hit after hit for the O'Jays, McFadden & Whitehead, Billy Paul, Harold Melvin & The Blue Notes (featuring Teddy Pendergrass) and a slew of others. This was really heady stuff, often topical songs addressing not just matters of love but real issues of the times, many of which are still relevant today. What makes it work is that in spite of representing over a dozen artists, all of the tracks came from the minds of the Gamble & Huff hitmaking machine. They still sound fantastic.

★ In Los Angeles, **X** was one of the quintessential underground bands of the '80s. Exene Cervenka and John Doe were like Richard and Linda Thompson on speed, and on a really good night, it almost seemed like they were having a domestic row onstage. Meanwhile, Billy Zoom was totally cool, a strong, silent guitar player whose rockabilly pompadour and flair made him seem like he belonged in a different band entirely. Elektra has released *Beyond And Back: The X Anthology*, a two-CD overview of X's years on the label. It starts out strong, but the second disc ends up much like the band's career, with the inevitable live filler and weaker hits.



Led Zepplin

BBC Sessions
Atlantic

If you're of a certain age—too young to have been there but old enough to know you'd missed out on something—you probably think of Led Zepplin as classic rock, the same 15 songs from the same nine studio albums played semi-hourly on FM radio, and an occasional midnight-movie screening of *The Song Remains The Same*. But in the group's early years, it wasn't that way at all. The whole source of the myth was to see Zep live. In the days before video, concerts were the only way to see this mysterious, monstrously powerful group who hated the press, loathed the music industry and rarely even put photos of themselves on their album covers. When you thought of Led Zepplin, you were supposed to think of the power—the unique combination of



forces, the "electric magic" of four incredible musicians, the alchemical combination of the four symbols, the presence of Presence, if you will. (Forgive me if I seem really into this stuff, but repeated listening to "Black Dog" and "Heartbreaker" has made me permanently 13 years old when it comes to all things Zep.) Cutac from BBC session tapes recorded live at the Paris Theater and the Royal Albert Hall in London in 1970 and '71, this two-disc set presents over two hours of Led Zepplin in its prime, and it's awesome stuff. This wasn't a sweat-soaked, strung-out Jimmy Page in a Nazi helmet stumbling around in a maze of lasers, or a bloated John Bonham solong drunk-enly for 45 minutes. This was the heaviest and best band on the planet, young and thin, loud and fun, sounding great and looking sexy under the spotlights, before the whole thing went and got really ugly later on. ★



When the KLF broke up and deleted its entire catalog in 1992, the band announced that it wouldn't record again until worldwide peace was declared. Under that name, anyway: As **2K**, "produced by the Justified Ancients Of Mu Mu" (its original pseudonym), the group reappears

just in time for the latest wave of millennial angst, with a 14-minute single called "***k The Millennium" (Blast First-Mute (UK)). It is *big*. It's a sort of hyper-mega-mix of the KLF's "What Time Is Love," hooks from the JAMMS' "All You Need Is Love" and "Don't Take Five," and a symphonic-choral hymn, and it's topped off by a chant of "Fuck the millennium! We want it *now!*" As an additional inducement, the single includes a remix of the brass-band version of "What Time Is Love," from the *Acid Brass* compilation. [See *Weird Record* in *Quick Fix*, Sep. 1997—ed.]

Will "Palace" **Oldham** keeps cranking out the singles. His contribution to Skin Graft's 7" series of AC/DC covers, under the name *Palace Contribution*, is a very silly rendition of "Big

Balls," done in the backwoods-yawp style of *Days In The Wake*, and the flip, **Zeni Cevea**'s take on "Let There Be Rock," isn't too thrilling either. Much more worthwhile is *Western Music* (Acuarela), a four-song EP under Oldham's own name, with a couple of nice full-band recordings (this time the band includes two-thirds of the Dirty Three, among others) and a couple of ultra-lo-fi songs. "Western Song For J.L.L." falls into the latter category: It's one of the simplest songs Oldham's ever written, and perfectly lovely.



All 20 minutes of **Harry Pussy**'s final show are documented on a blistering 10" EP, *Live* (Cherry Smash). To those who didn't get it, HP was nothing but unstructured noise, with Adris Hoyos screeching and randomly bashing her drums while two guitarists made a racket. But the three of them always managed to stop each noise-blurt at exactly the same time, and *Live*'s lyric sheet shows why: Everything was built around Hoyos's screeching voice and her nastily hilarious words. And, just to prove that it could play actual songs, HP wrapped up its career with a great cover of Kraftwerk's "Showroom Dummies."

A few quick drops of the needle: **Belle And Sebastian**'s 3.. 6.. 9 *Seconds Of Light* EP (Jeepster (UK)) is as delicate and airy as a successful soufflé, with wry lyrics that reference other B&S songs, one number called "Beautiful" that lives up to its title, and another song that actually makes something worthwhile of the dreaded "self"/"shelf" rhyme... The Spanish trio **RAEO** includes Mark Cunningham, once of the band Mars, the weirdest of the original no wave groups. RAEO's single "Words Are Worms" (Amanita-Father Yod) is sinister and slithery, with an intermittent trumpet part giving way to a brassy mist that permeates the rest of the record, and a subtly peculiar instrumental on the flip... The import single of **Beck**'s "Jack-ass" is worth tracking down for some fine bonuses: a quiet, orchestrated version of the title tune called "Strange Invitation," a Spanish-language salsa-fication of it called "Burro," and a dead-on rendition of Skip James's "Devil Took My Woman."

hiss&crackle

DJ Shadow

"High Noon"
Mo Wax (UK)



The story of electronica's integration into the pop mainstream isn't just the story of rockers abandoning guitars, or of breakbeats spreading like kudzu. As techno stops having to be defended by its enthusiasts, its pioneers are reaching out, and some of them are even embracing rock—like DJ Shadow with

this pathbreaking single, which is introduced by a sampled announcer's voice declaring "you are going to rock and roll." In methodology, "High Noon" is much like a lot of Shadow's album *Endtroducing...* with its multi-layered samples, cool-jazz organ and continuously mutating beats. But in form, it's a rock instrumental all the way: introduced and hooked by an acid guitar line, and anchored by drum riffs and fills that are straight-up rock. The main version is followed by a "bonus beats" version overlaid with a vehement and not terribly coherent sermon about how heavy rock leads to "orgasm and revolution." The disc is rounded out by a remake of *Endtroducing*'s organ-and-rhythm groove "Organ Donor," fuked up by a kicky, complicated mix and a new voice that sounds a lot like a distorted guitar.

✠ The new **Burzum** record, *Balder's Tød* (Misanthropy-Dutch East India), is allegedly the first music recorded by Varg Vikernes in prison, while he was in a holding cell awaiting trial. It sounds like he produced it through headphones. Though the record will surely be around a while, it's not a classic visionary effort on a par with last year's *Filosofem*. With no vocals or gritty guitar to offset the medieval dirges, a lot of *Balder's Tød* sounds like a wayward video game soundtrack. Vikernes is hunting on the same early music trail as Mortiiis, but instead of being enchanted by his grand mythic visions, I feel confronted with the limitations of using a prison cell as a recording studio and inspiration wellspring... Norway's **Hades** plays a stirring, melodic version of black metal, complimenting the music's atmospheric qualities with catchy mid-tempo guitar and arcane folk-tinged flourishes. *The Dawn Of The Dying Sun* (Full Moon Productions), the band's second domestic CD, is confident and majestic, but also gritty and grounded. Especially for metal bands, it's hard to be anthemic without sounding pompous, but Hades comes across as legitimate and inspiring. It's heavy in a natural, detached way, more like vintage Killdozer than Decide, but Hades's baroque touches (and cavalry swords) are unmistakably metal... **Pessimist** plays it wild on *Cult Of The Initiated* (Lost Disciple). Maybe because it has a hard time attracting attention as a death metal band in the conservative town of Boston, the quartet pushes its Satanic invocations hard, rushing

forward into songs like "Pyrosexual" and "Drunk With The Blood Of Saints" with breathless and constant pressure. Staying loyal to the ways of chaos, the group excels at slurred guitar trills and unpredictable tempo twists. With the seeming inactivity of New York's Fallen Christ, Pessimist may be the best devil's advocates on the East Coast... The British group **Iron Monkey** is an extraordinary Eyehategod clone, complete with piss talk, drug abuse graphics, and Burroughs-like text cutting. If the crushing flow of *Iron Monkey* (Earache) sometimes sounds stilted or halting, it's because the band is always stopping itself midway through to steal a Southern-tinged Jimmy Bower guitar riff. Iron Monkey is enthusiastic about its doom, but is stuck by a total absence of originality. The stultifying heavy guitars, caustic vocals, and general half-speed Sabbath crawl are all in place, but despite all the good points, Eye-ron Monkey is 85% imitation and 15% plagiarism.

metal top 25

- 1 **PANTERA**
Official Live: 101 Proof / EastWest-EEG
- 1 **CRISIS**
The Hollowing / Metal Black
- 2 **JUDAS PRIEST**
Angularity / CMC International
- 3 **SIX FEET UNDER**
Warpain / Metal Black
- 4 **OVERKILL**
From The Underground And Below / CMC International
- 5 **DEFTONES**
Around The Fur / Maverick WB
- 6 **INCUBUS**
S.C.I.E.N.C.E. / Immortal-Epic
- 7 **WILL HAVEN**
El Diablo / Crisis-Revelation
- 8 **DECIDE**
Berger's Of The Light / Roadrunner
- 9 **KMFDM**
KMFDM / New York-TXT
- 10 **BRUTAL TRUTH**
Sounds Of The Animal Kingdom / Relapse
- 11 **LIFE OF AGONY**
Soul Searching Sun / Roadrunner
- 12 **PANTERA**
Official Live: 101 Proof / EastWest-EEG
- 13 **TESTAMENT**
Demoniac / Mayhem-Fierce
- 14 **KREATOR**
Obsessed / F.A.D.
- 15 **DREAM THEATER**
Falling Into Infinity / EastWest-EEG
- 16 **DISMEMBER**
Death Metal / Nuclear Blast America
- 17 **GEEZER**
Black Science /TVT
- 18 **DAY IN THE LIFE**
Rayinballs... / Building TAT
- 19 **HUMAN WASTE PROJECT**
C/Lux / Hollywood
- 20 **FU MANCHU**
The Action Is Go / Mammoth
- 21 **WARZONE**
Fights For Justice / Victory
- 22 **TODAY IS THE DAY**
Temple Of The Morning Star / Relapse
- 23 **TREPOREUM PAL**
Higher / Mercury
- 24 **LIMP BIZKIT**
Three Dollar Bill, Y'all! / Hip-Interscope
- 25 **SATON**
Unleash The Beast / CMC International

Compiled from CMJ New Music, Dec 27/28 weekly, Loud Rock, Dec 16, 1998 and from CMJ's own all-inclusive radio monitors.

Brutal Truth

Sounds Of The Animal Kingdom Relapse

While the Kill Trend Suicide EP made it seem like Brutal Truth was settling down, it turns out the versatile New York-based foursome was only catching a breath between frantic full-lengths. Now five years into its experiment, the band is metabolizing blurcore, noise, Southern rock and free jazz into a messy, churning expression of ferocity that outthinks most metal and outplays most anything else. It's hard to characterize any Brutal Truth record as mannered, but this one is wild and off-the-cuff enough to make previous efforts seem mild by comparison. Rich Hoak plays most songs in the 360-400 bpm tempo range. Dan Lilker lays down a fundament of impossibly low-end

bass. One of the better songs, "Jemenez Cricket," picks up where guitarist Gurn McCarty left off previously, playing with great rubbery blues-based grindcore leads. Kevin Sharp, the MC for this mad dash, adds a likable drawl to his gurgle on "Fucktoy" and the Prong-like "Blue World." In the hectic push/shove, individual bits of sound press together and spark into shapes new and odd. Brutal Truth taps Sun Ra's "It's After The End Of The World" for a left-field hit, tinkers indiscriminately between songs, and finishes up Sounds with a squirreling 16-beat sample of the band itself that evolves over

20 minutes into a roaring bog of noise. The proudest results of the band's lab work, though, are the songs themselves, where the barrage of warring influences are threshed into a chewy new sound that is Brutal Truth's own messy and impressive invention. ✠





Kevin Saunderson Faces & Phases

Planet E

Kevin Saunderson's reputation as an innovator in Detroit's world-renowned techno scene precedes him. But the fact that many listeners will assume that very current-sounding *Faces & Phases*, effectively a greatest hits compilation, is a set of new material suggests that perhaps Saunderson isn't quite the household name he should be. More often than not, Saunderson worked under pseudonyms, as was the case with his Detroit

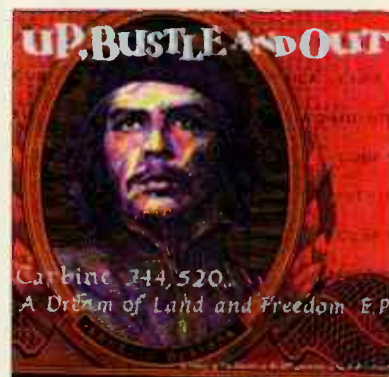
neighbors and colleagues Derrick May and Juan Atkins. The first ten seconds of the opening track, "Bassline" by Reese (a frequent Saunderson nom de plume), are some of the most sublime moments in techno's history, a combination of a lethal groove and a minor-key melody that marks the composure and restraint of a truly innovative composer. Saunderson belongs in the pantheon of modernist composers of the African Diaspora who foreshadowed in startling ways the techniques of bricolage now considered a hallmark of postmodern artistic practices. On tracks such as Reese's "Funky, Funk, Funk," Saunderson retools analog instruments including the Roland SH-101, TB-303, TR-808, and 909 to almost surreal extents, stretching their capacity to create sounds the machine's inventors surely never dreamed of. This collection spans the length of Saunderson's prolific career, up until the latest mixes from his inner city project, such as Ahnonjay. This techno collection is mandatory for any serious library and it kicks like a newborn. ♡

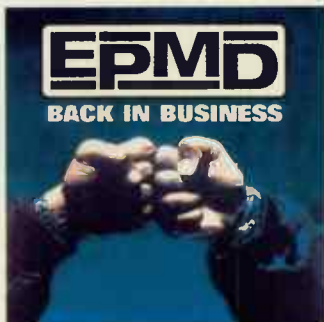
♣ The San Francisco duo **Bugs**, whose *Both Feet In It* EP won critical acclaim, have collaborated with seminal Bristol producers **Up, Bustle And Out**, who have remixed *Bugs About You* (Ubiquity) to devastating effect, adding a neatly trimmed, but bass-soaked, old school hip-hop drum loop, with an occasional snare rudely interrupting the hypnotic mix. As the giant break approaches, Up, Bustle And Out introduces synth planks which sound like something off the first Nitzer Ebb album by way of Adrian Sherwood and Tackhead. An unimpeded masterpiece of a mix... Bugs' debut full-length, *Infinite Syndrome* (Ubiquity), is an extraordinary effort, packed with gorgeous vocal tracks, slithering, incandescent bass lines and a thick percussive center. Tracks such as "Broken" have a melancholic edge, offset by hip-hop vocal samples, distant scratching sounds and the dirge-like, hypnotic quality of Cabaret Voltaire in a younger day. The range of influences here is intoxicating, making this album essential for followers of the Bay Area underground... The proceeds from *A Dream Of Land And Freedom* (Ninja Tune), the latest EP by Up, Bustle And Out, are going directly to fund a Cuban pirate radio station, broadcasting in defiance of the government and urging an end to the US blockade of the country. Up, Bustle And Out is about as far away from what might be called trip hop as you can get, despite the group's frequently being lumped into that category. "Carbine 744,520...Che Guevara" is laced with Spanish wooden guitar and vocal snippets from Ernesto "Che" Guevara, the late liberatory thinker whose Marxist-inspired revolutionary theory and practice made him a leftist hero. This single is a wildly eclectic affair. The "Rebel Radio DJ Mix" is buffeted by heavy kick-drums and a subterranean bass line, while the "Guitar Transmission Mix" is a deftly woven mixture of contemporary Cuban music and Bristol beats.

dance top25

- COLDCUT
Let Us Play / Ninja Tune
- 2 APHEX TWIN
Come To Daddy (EP) / Warp-Sire
- 3 FATBOY SLIM
Better Living Through Chemistry / Astralwerks-Caroline
- 4 RONI SIZE/REPRZENT
New Forms / Talon / Loud-Mercury
- 5 SPRING HEEL JACK
Busy Curious Thirsty / Island
- 6 HOWIE B
Turn The Dark Off / Island
- 7 PORTISHEAD
Portishead / Gift Beat-London
- 8 KMFDOM
KMFDOM / Wax Train:TVT
- 9 LOOP GURU
Loop Bites Dog / World Domination
- 10 STATIK SOUND SYSTEM
Tempests II / Cup Of Tea-Iron-America
- 11 VARIOUS ARTISTS
TV Terror: Fetching A Dead Horse / R+R-Construction-Cargo
- 12 WUMPSQUIT
Embryoided / Metropolis
- 13 PHOTEK
Modus Operandi / Astralwerks-Caroline
- 14 CRYSTAL METHOD
Vegas / Outpost-Geffin
- 15 EAT STATIC
Science Of The Gods / Planet
Dog-Marmalade
- 16 LUKE SLATER
Freak Funk / NovaMute-Mute
- 17 MOBY
I Like To Scare / Elektra-EEG
- 18 PIGFACE
A New High In Low / Inside
- 19 BT
ESCM / Perfecta/Kinetic-Repulse
- 20 DOWNLOAD
Charlie's Family / Metropolis
- 21 VARIOUS ARTISTS
Governator Presents: The Prototype
Years / Prototype/Columbia-CRC
- 22 VARIOUS ARTISTS
Infinite Beat Vol. 1 / DCC
- 23 FLUKE
Routte / Astralwerks-Caroline
- 24 VARIOUS ARTISTS
Cup Of Tea Records: Another
Compilation / Cup Of Tea-Iron-America
- 25 DIGITAL DUST
The Next Dimension Of Broadcast
Sound Engineering / Rawkus

Compiled from QM New Music Report/DJ weekly RPM charts, collected from QM's God of progressive radio reports





❖ And while we're on the subject of returning heroes, **EPMD's** new *Back In Business* (Def Jam) is another welcome comeback from one of rap music's most important groups. Although both Erick Sermon and Parrish Smith have been quite busy since their break-up in 1992, the fact that they are just as powerful now as they were back in the day is no small feat. They jump right back into the groove with their mix of "classic" EPMD rhyme schemes ("Never Seen Before," "Do It Again" and the amazing "You Gots To Chill '97") and skillz for '98 and beyond ("Richter Scale," "Da Joint," "Dungeon Master" and "Jane 5"), making this one of the most solid all-around records of the year, and a brilliant return to form... From the (very) dark side of Illadelph comes the mysterious **Jedi Mind Tricks** crew. And on their brilliant and powerful debut, *The Psycho-Social, Chemical, Biological, And Electro-Magnetic Manipulation Of Human Consciousness* (Superegular), they raise the stakes in the indie rap game considerably. The core duo of rapper Ikon The Verbal Hologram and producer Stoupe makes each track here eerily chaotic, thematically dense and more fascinating to listen to than the entire Top 20 on any rap chart you'd like to name. With generally RZA-inspired aural backdrops, their mix of metaphysical imagery, mythological theology, apocalyptic warnings and excellent verbal skills, this is the strongest release to come out of the rap underground since Dr. Octagon... And finally, the most experimental rap album honors for 1997 must go to rapper/producer **Sensational**—formerly known by the upbeat moniker Torture. His new musical sludge-fest, *Loaded With Power* (WordSound), is probably the most discordant, sloppy and horrifying rap platter you have ever heard. But there's a method to his madness, and the ultra-blunted freestyles and downright evil music on each of the 19 tracks here challenge the very essence of hip-hop music and force listeners to reevaluate what it is that they like (or dislike) about the "normal" music they listen to. How many records have forced an emotional crisis like that on you?

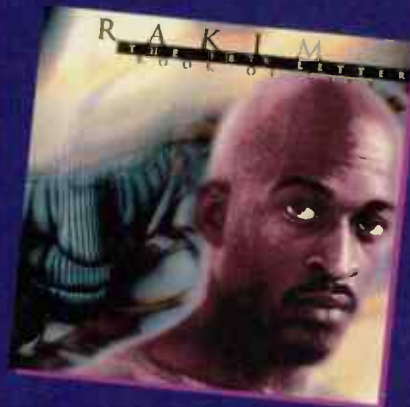
hip-hop top 25

- 1 **BUSTA RHYMES**
When Disaster Strikes... / Elektra-EEG
- 2 **GANG STARR**
"You Kippe Mytazz" / Neo Tybe-Virgin
- 3 **RAKIM**
"Guess Who's Back" / Universal
- 4 **EPMD**
"Never Seen Before" / Def Jam-Mercury
- 5 **WU-TANG CLAN**
Wu Tang Forever / Wu Tang-Last-RCA
- 6 **GRAVEDIGGAS**
"Dangerous Mood" / Gee Street-V2
- 7 **JAY-Z**
"Sunshine" / Roc-A-Fella-Priority
- 8 **THE FIRM**
The Album / Interscope
- 9 **ORGANIZED KONFUSION**
"Munkies" / Priority
- 10 **REFLECTION ETERNAL**
"Portland Live" / Real Gone
- 11 **WYCLEF JEANNEFUGEE**
CAMP ALL-STARS
Project: The Carnival / Ruffhouse/
Columbia-CRG
- 12 **THE ALKALIKS**
Liquoration / Loud-RCA
- 13 **PUFF DADDY & THE FAMILY**
No Way Out / Bad Boy-Arista
- 14 **X-ECUTIONERS**
Execution / Real Gone
- 15 **SOUNDTRACK/WU ALL STARS**
"Soul In The Hole" / Soul In The Hole /
Loud-RCA
- 16 **COMMON**
"Reminding Me I'm Self" / Relativity
- 17 **SOUNDTRACK**
Mokey Talks: The Album / Arista
- 18 **SOUNDTRACK/COCO BRUNAS**
"Win Or Win"/Soul In The Hole /
Loud-RCA
- 19 **DIAMOND**
"The Habit" / Mercury
- 20 **PRINCE PAUL**
Psychoanalysis (What Is It?) / Tommy Boy
- 21 **NOTORIOUS B.I.G.**
Life After Death / Bad Boy-Arista
- 22 **CAPONE N' NOREAGA**
"Clown" / Priority-Tommy Boy
- 23 **MIC GEROHIMO**
"Nuttin' More But The Money" / Blind/TXT
- 24 **LL COOL J**
Phenomenon / Def Jam-PPG
- 25 **SIR MENELIK**
"Space Cadillac" / Rawkus

Compiled from QM, Spin, Music, Source & weekly Best Rap charts, collaboration from QM's pool of progressive radio reporters.

Rakim

The 18th Letter/Book Of Life (Greatest Hits) Universal



There are far too few universal icons in hip-hop, but Rakim, truly the first rapper in hip-hop's modern age, is certainly one of them. Since his last album (with ex-partner Eric B.), 1992's *Don't Sweat The Technique*, this Long Island-bred master has been too damn quiet, and many had begun to worry that he had hung up his gilded microphone. But as his amazing new *The 18th Letter* shows, he's back—and then some. Rakim has adapted with ease to a '90s rap style that has changed quite a bit in the years since prototypical tracks like (Eric B. & Rakim's "Eric B. Is President," "Paid In Full" and "Microphone Fiend," and each song on his gleaming new effort shines with the power of his voice and the strength of his perfect lyrical flow. Great production by DJ Premier, Clark Kent, Father Shaheed (of the Poor Righteous Teachers), and a

refreshingly rejuvenated Pete Rock makes the album all the better. Future classics like "The 18th Letter," "Guess Who's Back," and "It's Been A Long Time" find Rakim rocking brilliant lyrics that are self-referential and universal at the same time. The poet has finally returned, and with a virtually flawless album that will make new-jacks learn their history (with the aid of the included *Book Of Life* greatest hits package) and old-schoolers rejoice at the rebirth of a legend. ❖

mixed media

This past November, New York hosted the first annual Shorts International Film Festival: 51 short films in six programs, including lots of award winners that hadn't been seen in public much (like the experimental documentary "The Film Of Her," about the restoration of the paper film collection at the Library of Congress). Organizer Jeremiah Newton says, "Ultimately, we want to see short films back in the movie theaters." They're hoping to take the festival elsewhere, and in the meantime, they have a web site at www.shortcuts.org.



SICK Cinepix

Bob Flanagan, the subject of the notorious book **Supermasochist!**, died of cystic fibrosis two years ago, at the age of 43—much older than most people with the disease usually make it to. How did he survive so long? By particularly extreme forms of masochism, he suggested, and by documenting it in extraordinary art. **Sick** is Kirby Dick's documentary about Flanagan, mostly filmed in the last few years of his life. Flanagan and his dominant partner, lover and torturer, Sheree Rose, talk about their lives and their art; the movie is fleshed out by interviews with their families and with a 17-year-old girl with CF whose meeting with Flanagan was arranged through the Make-A-Wish Foundation; Flanagan is also seen in some of his performances, and singing "Forever Lung" to a group of kids at CF camp. **Sick** is not for the squeamish—it includes some rather hard-to-take performances, including Flanagan's infamous trick of nailing his penis to a board, and some harder-to-take images of Flanagan gasping for air, near death, as well as Rose's post-mortem photographs of him. Still, his good-humored willingness to face and test the abilities and failings of his own body makes his acts of masochism surprisingly un-scary, and sometimes intensely moving. —DW

KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR...

Two new volumes in the All Music Guide reference series: a second edition of the **All-Music Guide To Rock**, and—covering less well-trodden territory—the **All-Music Guide To Country**, featuring histories of 1000 artists and reviews of their in-print albums.

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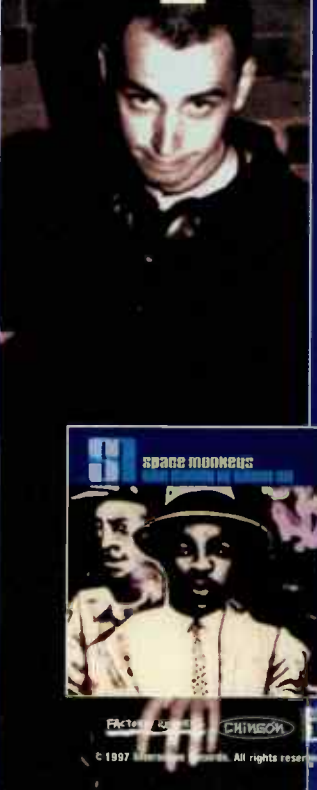
Lookout!
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TOP 75 ALTERNATIVE RADIO AIRPLAY

	<u>artist</u>	<u>title</u>	<u>label</u>
1	PORTISHEAD	Portishead	Go! Beat-London
2	BJÖRK	Homogenic	Elektra-EEG
3	STEREOLAB	Dots And Loops	Elektra-EEG
4	THE VERVE	Urban Hymns	Virgin
5	CORNERSHOP	When I Was Born For The 7th Time	Luaka Bop-WB
6	KMFDM	KMFDM	Wax Trax!-TVT
7	MOBY	I Like To Score	Elektra-EEG
8	HELIUM	The Magic City	Matador
9	VARIOUS ARTISTS	Lounge-A-Palooza	Hollywood
10	PROMISE RING	Nothing Feels Good	Jade Tree
11	MOGWAI	Young Team	Jetset
12	APPLES IN STEREO	Tone Soul Evolution	SpinArt
13	TANYA DONELLY	Lovesongs For Underdogs	Reprise
14	EVERCLEAR	So Much For The Afterglow	Capitol
15	SOUTHERN CULTURE ON THE SKIDS	Plastic Seat Sweat	DGC
16	PIXIES	Death To The Pixies	4AD/Elektra-EEG
17	SHIFT	Get In	Columbia-CRG
18	DEFTONES	Around The Fur	Maverick-WB
19	DANCE HALL CRASHERS	Honey, I'm Homely	510-MCA
20	SUNDAYS	Static & Silence	DGC
21	IVY	Apartment Life	Atlantic
22	VARIOUS ARTISTS	Tibetan Freedom Concert	Grand Royal-Capitol
23	CHUMBAWAMBA	Tubthumper	Republic-Universal
24	APHEX TWIN	Come To Daddy (EP)	Warp-Sire
25	PIZZICATO FIVE	Happy End Of The World	Matador-Capitol
26	MIKE WATT	Contemplating The Engine Room	Columbia-CRG
27	COLDCUT	Let Us Play	Ninja Tune
28	SUPERCHUNK	Indoor Living	Merge
29	GREEN DAY	Nimrod	Reprise
30	SEELY	Seconds	Too Pure-Beggars Banquet
31	POLVO	Shapes	Touch And Go
32	SAVE FERRIS	It Means Everything	Starpool-Epic
33	JONATHAN FIRE EATER	Wolf Songs For Lambs	DreamWorks
34	VARIOUS ARTISTS	Before You Were Punk	Vagrant
35	BABYBIRD	Ugly Beautiful	Atlantic
36	LAIKA	Sounds Of The Satellites	Too Pure-Sire



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PORTISHEAD

Chart data culled from: [CMJ New Music Report's](#) weekly Top 200 radio chart, based on combined airplay of approximately 300 college and non-commercial radio stations reporting their top 30 most played releases.

37	VARIOUS ARTISTS	Duran Duran Tribute Album	Mojo
38	SYRUP USA	All Over The Land	Flydaddy
39	SILVER SCOOTER	The Other Palm Springs	Peek-A-Boo
40	PLUG	Drum 'N' Bass For Papa/Plug EPs 1, 2 & 3	Nothing-Interscope
41	GRIFFERS	Full Blown Possession	Sub Pop
42	MAN OR ASTRO-MAN?	Made From Technetium	Touch And Go
43	LETTERS TO CLEO	Go!	Revolution
44	FATBOY SLIM	Better Living Through Chemistry	Astralwerks-Caroline
45	BOB DYLAN	Time Out Of Mind	Columbia-CRG
46	THE CURE	Galore	Fiction/Elektra-EEG
47	KELLEY DEAL 6000	Boom! Boom! Boom!	Nice-New West
48	GOLDFINGER	Hang-Ups	Mojo
49	INTERPRETERS	Back In The U.S.S.A.	Freeworld
50	SHIPPING NEWS	Save Everything	Quarterstick
51	VARIOUS ARTISTS	We Will Fall: A Tribute To Iggy Pop	Life Beat-Royalty
52	RADIOHEAD	OK Computer	Capitol
53	DELTA 72	The Soul Of A New Machine	Touch And Go
54	RONI SIZE/REPAZENT	New Forms	Talkin' Loud-Mercury
55	HUMAN WASTE PROJECT	E-Lux	Hollywood
56	PATTI SMITH	Peace And Noise	Arista
57	GRAVEDIGGAZ	The Pick, The Sickle And The Shovel	Gee Street-V2
58	G. LOVE & SPECIAL SAUCE	Yeah, It's That Easy	OKeh-Epic
59	INCUBUS	S.C.I.E.N.C.E.	Immortal-Epic
60	JOHN FAHEY & CUL DE SAC	The Epiphany Of Glenn Jones	Thirsty Ear
61	BOUNCING SOULS	The Bouncing Souls	Epitaph
62	CHERRY POPPIN' DADDIES	Zoot Suit Riot	Space Age Bachelor Pad-Mojo
63	CHRIS KNOX	Yes!!	Flying Nun
64	AERIAL-M	Aerial-M	Drag City
65	BEATNIK FILMSTARS	In Hospitalable	Merge
66	OASIS	Be Here Now	Epic
67	FU MANCHU	The Action Is Go	Mammoth
68	LOW	Songs For A Dead Pilot (EP)	Kranky
69	SEA AND CAKE	Two Gentlemen (EP)	Thrill Jockey
70	SELF	The Half-Baked Serenade	Spongebath
71	VARIOUS ARTISTS	Live From 6A: Conan O'Brien	Mercury
72	THE NEED	The Need	Chainsaw
73	DUBSTAR	Goodbye	Polydor-A&M Associated
74	VARIOUS ARTISTS	Ska Island	Island
75	CRYSTAL METHOD	Vegas	Outpost

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THE ART OF POISE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26

extremely strong musical opinions, and an extremely broad frame of reference."

"She could run circles around us," admits Chase.

"I guess I could have been a music critic," says Durand. "I was a huge music fan. In France you can go out from when you are 12. So I used to go out and see bands when I was very young. My family and friends were all involved in music. My brother was in a band, my cousin ran a music magazine, so I was always around musicians and a music scene."

Durand's opinions and her soft-focus voice have turned out to be a perfect match for the sophisticated songcraft of Chase and Schlesinger, lending poise and elegance to the mix of understated guitar hooks, breezy melodies, Bacharach-like horns arrangements, and subtle keyboard textures that graces *Apartment Life*. It's a comfortably intimate sound, refined yet never sterile, with retro touches that lend a hint of appealing familiarity to each of the disc's dozen tunes.

"Our band exists in our apartments," explains Schlesinger. "We write our songs on acoustic guitars sitting on a couch. So we were trying to make a record that you'd be more likely to listen to sitting in the privacy of your home. It's not a cathartic, arena rock experience. It's like a headphone record. Part of what we tried to do was to throw in little sonic details, textural things that grab your attention because they don't sound like indie-rock or guitar-rock. We didn't want to be cute, retro, or kitschy. We wanted it to have a mood and references that people would recognize, but not as some kind of joke. In fact, one of the things we've always worried about is that the people who would be really into our band are the kind of people who wouldn't necessarily even go to a rock club. I think there's a whole sort of other audience for our music that's not part of the general rock concert audience. Culturally, we're at a point where people who grew up on pop music are getting older. And they're not going to just immediately start listening to classical music and give up on pop. But it's hard to find those people." **CMJ**

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by Sam Cannon photos by Sean Ziebarth

Salt Lake City, Utah

Location of the 2002 Winter Olympics, world headquarters of the Mormon Church, and home to the second best basketball team in the NBA, Salt Lake City has plenty to brag about, yet you'll rarely hear a peep about its diverse and unique forms of entertainment. Blame it on post-Osmonds guilt syndrome or repressed childhoods, but denizens of the city's established music scene seem to shrug off media attention. Here's to one of the fastest growing and most unassuming cities in America...



radio stations

Among the four NCAA universities within an hour of the city, only the University of Utah's **KUTE** plays what you'd call alternative rock—and it's restricted to a campus-only signal. Fortunately for the rest of the valley, the independently owned commercial alternative station, **KXRK 96.3 FM (X96)**, spins a bit little left of center—eager to break such “risky” acts as Girls Against Boys, Underworld, and Morphine. On Fridays, **KRCL 90.9 FM** switches its normally eclectic blend of folk, blues and Latino music over to funk, R&B, jazz and hip-hop. Colloquially known as “Black Friday,” it's about the only dose of soul on the dial.

record stores

Salt Lake lacks any of the “good” chain stores, leaving one to rely on area independents, each with its own specialties. **Randy's Records** (157 East 900 South, 532-4413) has been stocking oldies since they were considered new releases. Of course, vinyl is the shop's medium of choice, and its employees are the resident turntable experts. **MODified** (247 East 900 South, 355-1770) focuses on indie and import releases of the '80s and '90s. **Mechanized** services the electronica-minded at its new location (310 S. Main). For underground hip-hop, you have one choice: the devoted, but sometimes sparsely stocked **Funksion**, a k a the **Hip-Hop Shop** (1100 East 2120 South, 463-0484). The **Heavy Metal Shop** (1074 East 2100 South, 467-7071) caters to Salt Lake's metal and industrial heads, of which there are plenty. But the *best* music store in Salt Lake City is actually 45 miles south of downtown.

Crandall Audio (1202 N. State in Orem, 800-576-8737), once operated out

of Scott Crandall's home in his parents' peach orchard, is worth the drive for its massive, hand-picked collection of new and used music at humane prices.

bookstores

Sam Weller's Zion Bookstore (254 S. Main, 328-2586) is a multi-story maze of new and used books in the heart of downtown.avid readers/collectors such as Lloyd Cole and M. Doughty of Soul Coughing have walked away beaming over treasures they scored at Weller's. Speaking of musicians and lit, the folks at **Bibliotect** (235 South 400 West, 236-1010) move their shelves of art and architecture tomes on the weekends to accommodate performances from touring acts such as Thumbnail, the Lookers and Karp, or locals like Red Bennies and We All Fall Down, which have all performed in the shop.

local music

Contrary to popular beliefs, family variety acts and Christian new age aren't the only musical exports Salt Lake has to offer. On any given night you can catch abstract rap (Numbs), narrative hippie rock (Jackmormons, featuring Jerry Joseph of Northwest legends Little Women), psychedelic desert jams (Elbo Finn), ethereal female-fronted melodies (Gathering Osiris), or country-tinged grit (Sea Of Jones). Ska pranksters Stretch have drawn as many as 2,000 people to their shows. Bluesy pop idols Clover have sold over 6,000 copies of their latest CD, *Sun*. So who will be Salt Lake City's breakthrough ambassadors? Boasting a strong pedigree, representation from Jeremy Enigk's manager, and a self-designed Sub Pop 7", the plaintive punk four-piece Megastatic seems to have all the right tools.



bars/venues

Under Utah's conservative liquor laws, bars are technically considered "private clubs" with yearly membership fees and all. This presents a small hoop for patrons to jump through—you can be "sponsored" by just saying the word, and when national acts are performing, your ticket counts as one-time membership card. Touring bills usually stop at **DV8** (115 S. West Temple, 539-8400) or **Zephyr Club** (301 S. West Temple, 355-2582). **Spanky's Cinema Bar** (45 W. Broadway, 359-1200) and **The Holy Cow** (241 South 500 East, 531-8259) take on the more obscure, up-and-coming artists, but otherwise rely on local talent and nice sets of pool tables. For straight BPMs, **Bricks** (579 West 200 South, 328-0255) weighs in heavy, with thousands of hipsters packing the joint Thursday through Saturday for Long Island Iced Teas and a variety of beats and dancefloors. The **Vortex** (32 E. Exchange Place, 521-9292) features go-go cages for the more, um, serious dancers. **Manhattan Club** (5 East 400 South, 364-7651) offers everything from live lounge music to drum 'n' bass DJs amidst a vintage speakeasy decor. Check listings in Salt Lake's music monthly, *grid magazine*, or in the *City Weekly* for specifics.



restaurants

For the longest time, Utah restaurants specialized in "family dining," all-you-can-eat smorgasbords of starch-laden cafeteria slop in a novelty theme environment. But the times they are a-changin'. Perhaps the most popular "secret" among Salt Lake City restaurants is **Red Igwana** (736 W. North Temple, 322-1489), located in the mostly Latino west side. Its savory Mexican molés are incredible and have earned praises from Mojo Nixon, Oingo Boingo and Grant Lee Buffalo, among others. Favorites among the more health conscious include **Long Life Vegi House** (1353 East 3300 South, 467-1111) and **Bangkok Thai** (1400 S. Foothill Dr., 582-8424). Long Life is a scheduled stop for predominantly vegan bands like Into Another, Earth Crisis and Shift. Bangkok Thai's fiery pad thai has even put a smile on the mug of Rage Against The Machine's Zack De La Rocha. For late-night dining, **Bill And Nada's** (479 South 600 East, 359-6984) greasy spoon menu, which includes liver and onions, eggs

and brains, and of course, hash browns, is open 24 hours a day. On the dessert tip, Utah ranks first in the country in per capita ice cream consumption. If you have doubts, peep the downtown **Snelgrove's** on a Friday night (605 East 400 South, 359-4207).

film

Thanks to Bob Redford's Sundance Film Festival, Utah has gained a reputation as a Mecca for cutting edge cinema. But outside of those couple of weeks in January, **Tower Theatre** (297-4040) is Salt Lake's only source for alternative and independent films. Tower gives screen time to all the good stuff the bigger movie houses won't touch and stocks a wide selection of foreign, cult classic, and animation videos for rent. **Brewvies** (677 South 200 West, 355-5500) relies on more familiar material, but it does serve micro brews and pub fare at the concessions stand, which somehow enhances your umpeenth viewing of *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*.



thrift shops

The eccentric or just plain thrifty have quite a selection between **Grunts & Postures** (779 East 300 South, 521-3202) and **Ec-lectic** (380 W. Pierpont Ave., 322-4804), which both excel in vintage and kitschy clothes and accessories. The Mormon-run **Deseret Industries** chain can deliver feast or famine. As a general rule, the closer a branch is to

downtown, the more picked-over the merchandise. If you can afford near-retail prices, or just like to window shop, **Elemente** (353 W. Pierpont Ave., 355-7400), in the artsy warehouse district, and downtown neighbors **Circa** (635 S. State, 532-2542) and **Wasatch Furniture** (623 S. State, 521-8845) are all excellent sources for funky, refurbished furniture.



All phone numbers are in the area code 801.

Sam Cannon (sam@gridmagazine.com) is the editor of *Grid Magazine*.



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