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46 REVIEWS • PORTISHEAD
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YOUNG MARBLE GIANTS

World Radio History

PRICK



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noir

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February 1995

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

What new music/alternative rock figure most needs to be taken down a notch or two, and why? Tell us what you think, by mail, fax (516-466-7159), or email (cmj@cmjmusic.com).

- As a regular Letters To The Editor feature, the CMJ editors pose questions to you, our esteemed readers—this is the "Q" part—as well as answering some of your questions directly.

Critics: Get A Life

In the December issue, we asked what you thought of rock critics. This is what you said:

Well, there's a lot to be said for despising all rock critics.

When critics say things like "the music began to grow on me after listening to it six or seven times," I have to laugh. I work a minimum of 35 hours a week, where I'm not allowed to play a radio or tape player. I'm also married and want to spend time with my wife. In my spare time, as small as it is, I visit friends and relatives, watch TV, go to the movies, take vacations, etc. (I don't have kids, or I wouldn't have any spare time at all.) With the average CD about 60 minutes in length, it would take a lot of this time to listen six or seven times to a recording just to let it grow on me. If it wasn't for the invention of the Walkman, I would have had to leave a lot of music behind a long time ago. By living a life involving nothing but listening to music, often for free, perspective is lost. Many critics don't seem to remember who their audience is.

And finally, yes, of course rock critics are embittered geeks. In high school, when everybody else was attempting to develop their social skills, they were up in their rooms with headphones on playing air guitar or posing in front of the mirror holding a microphone substitute. (I know this 'cause I did it, too. I just never turned it into a career as a rock writer.)

Anthony Picco
New York, NY

The most annoying and begging-for-a-beating variety are the literary rock critics. These are the sphincters who forget that music is about one thing: music. Sociopolitics, trends and lyrical analyzations are fine and all, but are—GASP!—secondary to the... music.

If I want music I listen to music. If I desire prose, I'll read a fucking book. Dingbats who praise Bob Dylan seem to suspiciously not give much notice to his "gorgeous melodies" or "striking melodies" or "unforgettable melodies." Know why? Because he hasn't got any! When discussing great songs and melodies, critics cite the Beatles regularly and with good reason. Even Dylan's biggest fans praise his lyrics almost exclusively. The moral? The guy should be an author, not a musician, and critics should review lyrics last, if at all. Enough overlooking mediocre and generic and cliched music because you love the lyrics.

Also, it seems in the last decade more people have access to express their opinions to the multitudes. This is fine, as long as they acknowledge

their subjectivity and fan bias. The dumbest heavy metal fan in the world can know grammar and sentence structure and not much else except knowing what they like (Motley Crue in '84 and Pearl Jam in '94) and become a critic—implying they have a clue about music. This is the Severe Fan Syndrome. Of course, critics should be rabid lovers of music, but that's different than being a fan. You love everything Sonic Youth and the Cocteau Twins have ever done? Then you lack maturity, and shouldn't be a critic. There are too many mindless, indiscriminating, unobjective fans polluting record reviewing today.

Christopher
New York, NY

More Geography Trouble

First, I would like to congratulate you on your magazine, and thank you for making it available on the magazine racks. The CD is always excellent, a great representation of music, and a wonderful resource for me as a radio host.

Now I would like to scream and rant at you for one of the most irritating, deeply flawed sentences I have ever had the misfortune to read. From your September 1994 review of Jale's *Dreamcake* album:

"Before bands like Sloan, Eric's Trip and Jale came about [stupid American joke about some mythological Canadian accent deleted], Nova Scotia did not spring quickly to mind as a city recognized for its music scene."

I'm not upset about the Canadian accent joke (or as you Yanks might pronounce it, "jauwak"). It's just that NOVA SCOTIA IS A PROVINCE!!!! Sloan, Eric's Trip, Jale, Thrush Hermit, etc. are all children of the HALIFAX music scene. HALIFAX is a city. NOVA SCOTIA is a province.

(For you obviously geography-illiterate Americans, a province is the same thing as a state, but with perhaps [fewer] powers due to the Canadian federal system, but nevertheless a smaller region with set powers under the constitution.)

I'm sure you guys will get the geography thing down quickly. Alternative music is good for the mind and whoever is responsible for creating the CMJ New Music Monthly is one of the smartest Americans I've ever met.

Patrick Wilkins
16 years old and smarter than your editors

Funny, I always win at Where In The World Is Carmen San Diego—ed.
That's "San Diego," Scott—managing ed.

r e s p o n s e



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World Radio History

QUICK FIX



GOD: Less Popular Than The Beatles

Think music has the power to really affect audiences anymore? If not, you need to find GOD. Not God, the undefinable deity, but GOD, the hard-to-describe 10-member band. Says GOD leader Kevin Martin, "We did a festival in Holland where we pushed the volume so loud that... it ended up with the sound man being physically attacked—they tried to push over a six-foot stack of effects on him—and someone trying to drag me offstage."

While Martin admits a preference for the "chaotic side of music, the tension and abrasions and decays," his London-based collective is obviously after more than sheer noise; its current line-up includes two guitarists, two percussionists, two saxophonists, three bass players, samples, bass clarinet and electric viola. And judging by the new album, *The Anatomy Of Addiction* (Big Cat), the sound incorporates hypnotically pounding overload, ambient soundscapes, ethnically-spiced free jazz, and post-punk slow-core in a continually shifting collusion.

"Half of the attraction to music is that it's so difficult to pin down," says Martin, not offering any descriptive aid. "I don't see any difference between the intensity of Public Enemy, a horn blast from Pharoah Sanders, and Discharge."

Maybe that's why, though the seven-year-old band is largely unknown here, GOD has a healthy cult following among a wide variety of fellow musicians, including Ministry, Jim "Foetus" Thirlwell, Godflesh, My Bloody Valentine, John Zorn and Bill Laswell. And beyond just offering testimonials, many of <None> aforementioned have let actions speak louder than words. Zorn played on and helped mix GOD's 1992 album *Possession* (Venture-Caroline). More recently, Martin approached Laswell, Godflesh's Justin Broadrick, MBV's Kevin Shields, and hip-hoppers New Kingdom to remix *Addiction* tracks for a forthcoming EP. "Laswell brought out the dubby ambient side, Justin isolated the metal side, New Kingdom added in hip-hop rhythms, and Kevin just went for a weird-out," says Martin. "Those are all things that happen simultaneously in GOD," he points out, hoping the mixes may "make it easier for people to understand what's within the band."

Actually, what's within is more than one band can contain. GOD is, if you'll pardon the pun, very much the center of a musical universe. GOD's lineup includes members of former English/European avant-noise standard-bearers Henry Cow and Slab, not to mention Broadrick and his onetime Head Of David-mate Dave Cochrane. Broadrick and Martin each run their own labels: Broadrick's Headdirt label includes Skullflower and Sweet Tooth (both with GOD personnel) on its roster, while Martin's Pathological label has released Zeni Geva, Caspar and Peter Brotzmann, Terminal Cheesecake, and Switzerland's blistering 16-17 (whose Alex Buess plays *Addiction's* squawking bass clarinet).

Then there's Ice, a studio project including Martin, Cochrane, Broadrick, and Buess which exists, says Kevin, to "see if sampling and musicians could be integrated for the best of both worlds." And the newest effort, E.A.R., is a meeting of Martin, Sonic Boom (formerly of Spacemen 3) and Kevin Shields.

Not that Martin is trying to exploit the connections. "Forget exploitation," he says, "there's got to be a percentage of [Godflesh's] audience that will be interested in GOD, just because Justin and I share a taste in extremes. America's a nation of extremes, [and] this music is based around extreme sounds."

"But with this album, more than anything GOD's done, there's a directness, which is what I went for. [Last year's] *Consumed* has like 25-minute freak-outs, probably the most chaotic thing GOD's ever recorded, and it seemed senseless to repeat that." And, though the band is committed to ignoring musical boundaries, he insists "GOD's music is not an intellectual, arty pursuit, it's a physical thing. We actively enjoy the physical act of playing, doing live shows and improvising. There's no reason someone who's even into fucking Pantera couldn't get off on *Anatomy Of Addiction*."

—Eric Gladstone

World Radio History

ARTISTS' PERSONAL PICKS in my room

ANTIETAM

TARA KEY

David Bowie
Diamond Dogs

Betty Wright
Greatest Hits

Monkees
Headquarters

Neil Young
Live Rust

Miles Davis
Kind Of Blue

Tours We'd Like To See

MOTORPOOLOOZA:

Engines/Engine Kid/Engines Of Aggression/
Machines Of Loving Grace/Machine Head/Rage Against
The Machine/Tin Machine/Damn The Machine/Machine



here.

this is fort apache.

and hear.

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cold water flat
"magnetic north pole"

plus music from

belly
billy bragg
buffalo tom
come
dinosaur jr
juliana hatfield
lemonheads
radiohead
sebadoh
throwing muses
treat her right
walkabouts

on cd, cassette
and vinyl



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MCA

World Radio History

QUICK FIX



PHOTO BY DENNIS KEELEY

ARTISTS' PERSONAL PICKS **in my room**

SOUL COUGHING

M. DOUGHTY

George Jones
Golden Hits

Stereolab
Mars Audiac Quintet

Craig Mack
Project: Funk Da World

Low
I Could Live In Hope

Casual
Fear Itself

MARK DE GLI ANTONI

"This Way To The Gas Ladies And Gentlemen" by Tadeusz Borowski (story)

Cop Shoot Cop
Release

Cibo Matto (demos)

Marc Ribot
Shrek

Notorious (film)

Pete & Pete: Alternative Music For Kids

Five years ago Will McRobb and Chris Viscardi were working in the production office of Nickelodeon when they were approached to make a short-form series. The two came up with *The Adventures Of Pete & Pete*, the story of two brothers, both named Pete, coping with the problems of growing up in suburbia. The tale of Pete Wrigley (17) and Pete Wrigley (12) attacks the problems of childhood from a different angle. Wally and the Beav they aren't—see, for instance, the episode where little Pete teaches the Underwear Inspector the virtues of imperfection. Says McRobb, "All of our shows have to do with universal kid issues, but we try to put a spin on them." Viscardi adds, "We cram in many references that we think are funny that kids probably won't get. The only other show that's like that on Nickelodeon is *Ren & Stimpy*."

One of the subtleties that kids might not catch right away are the many rocker cameos and the indie-oriented soundtrack music. This year Steve Buscemi (*Airheads*, *Reservoir Dogs*), Martin Donavon (*Trust*), Frank Gifford, Michael Stipe, Iggy Pop, Syd Straw, Marshall Crenshaw and Juliana Hatfield have all made appearances in roles that range from crossing guard to lunch lady to ice cream man. The almost unnoticeable background music is a combination of obscure alternative groups. "We commission Polaris (Miracle Legion) and the Magnetic Fields to do songs for us. We tell them roughly what we want and they send us tapes. That's more like a soundtrack. Then we buy a couple of songs from our favorite albums," explains Will. Both McRobb and Viscardi stress the importance of music on the show. "Our show is about really great non sequiturs, and a lot of times the way we mix and match music creates these non sequiturs." This year the co-creators bought songs from bands like the Drop Nineteens, Nice and Chug. "It's great to turn kids onto new music," confesses Chris.

But why not use more recognizable music to draw kids' attention? Besides the cost (use of a single song one time can cost as much as \$30,000), Will cites the music as keeping with the spirit of the show. "There's a real independent spirit about the show. In our minds, *Pete & Pete* is the equivalent of being on an independent label of Nickelodeon. We look at Nick as being this huge conglomerate, and we're this little show on the side that gets to do sort of 'different' things. So we honor the spirit of indie rock, being an indie show." Chris adds, "Alternative music is in sync with what the spirit of a kid is—kind of rough and ragged. And it approaches things from an oblique angle. It's a natural fitting for our show."
—Dawn Sutter



Firestarters

There are plenty of smokers in the rock world, and plenty of comic-book readers, too. Smoke King has something to appeal to that cig-totin' comic-readin' rocker: Zippo lighters designed by comic artists. Famed cartoonists Peter Bagge (*Hate*) and Daniel Clowes (*Eightball*) have contributed to the flashy flickers. There's one from designer Frank Kozik, known for his vivacious and colorful rock show posters and cover art, as well as pieces featuring the works of The Coop, Charles S. Anderson, Robert Williams, "Big Daddy" Roth, Von Dutch, Basil Wolverton and Gary Panter. Collectible for chain smokers and art lovers alike.
—Dawn Sutter

SILOS: Same Band, Smaller Barn

DEFINITION OF SOUND:

Barefoot Rock, n.: A style of white, middle-class rock derived from Woodstock Rock. A music most enjoyed while seated in grassy areas where admission price is based on the carload. Sandals, one-hit pipes, tie dye, hacky-sacks, beach balls and dogs with kerchiefs tied around their necks are optional, yet highly recommended for maximum enjoyment. Masters of the genre: Grateful Dead, Spin Doctors, Blues Traveler, Blind Melon and Phish.

"I had it in my head that I couldn't go back," says the Silos' Walter Salas-Humara. Five years ago the Silos were poised for success after their self-titled RCA release won critical raves and sold close to 60,000 copies. Unfortunately, RCA went through a "restructuring" and the band was dropped, prompting co-leader Bob Rupe to leave and pursue other interests. Salas-Humara chose to forge on and, like a lot of other struggling American bands and artists, developed a sizable following in Europe. In 1992, Salas-Humara, bassist Tom Freund, drummer Darren Hess and violinist Mary Rowell recorded *Hasta La Victoria!* for the German label Normal with friends Victoria Williams, J.D. Foster and Jon Dee Graham.

Salas-Humara says of the time: "You know, I had to get a major label to release it here. But I didn't want to have to go through all the showcasing and bullshit that I'd gone through the first time, before we signed with RCA. Looking back, we should have just released it on an independent here. We would have filled the gap. There wouldn't have been such a long period of time between records in the States."

While the Silos developed their audience in England and Germany and waited for a major U.S. label to show interest in *Hasta La Victoria!*, Salas-Humara had written enough songs to record another album, *Susan Across The Ocean*. Eventually, the band hooked up with Austin's tiny Watermelon label. "I've known John Kuntz a long time from his record store," Salas-Humara explains (Kuntz is a partner in Watermelon and also runs Waterloo Records, a well-known Austin retail shop). "It's

a step back," he says of recording for a smaller label. "But it doesn't bother me. I'd like to see our records in every record store, to reach as many people as possible, and they're getting it together to make that happen."

The new relationship seems to have worked out fine. Watermelon has released three of the Silos records so far in 1994. *Susan Across The Ocean*, which features intense covers of songs from Lucinda Williams ("Change The Locks"), Jonathan Richman ("I'm Straight") and Michael Hall ("Let's Take Some Drugs And Drive Around"), was released in March. A re-issue of 1987's *Cuba* with several previously unreleased tracks was made available in June. Currently, there's a new version of *Hasta La Victoria!* with two new tracks and several newly tweaked songs.—Jim Caliguri



Fort Apache: The Label

Chances are good that you have an album or two recorded at Fort Apache Studios somewhere in your collection. Since opening on the outskirts of Boston in 1986, Fort Apache has been a significant player in the alternative music scene, playing host to the recording of Dinosaur Jr., the Pixies, the Blake Babies, and the Throwing Muses among others. Now, on the heels of a first-of-its-kind production partnership with MCA Records that will give the five producers at the Fort the power to sign, record and develop bands. The first release is *This Is Fort Apache*, a 13-track sampler of hits, B-sides and previously unreleased songs by some of the Fort's most successful clients.

Producer and studio co-owner Gary Smith notes "We're trying really hard to present a real picture of what the place is... trying to develop an identity of this little logo that we have so that when people get one of these MCA records that has our logo on it, they kind of know what to expect—to expect that it will be good."

Part of the studio's track record for working with great bands has stemmed from its reputation as being a "band's" studio—a relaxed environment conducive to artistic expression. And while an influx of funds resulting from the new partnership has allowed Smith to update the studio's equipment and renovate the studio itself, he stresses that "the feel of the place is pretty much identical. It's like Santa's workshop." Fort Apache boasts an incredible array of vintage gear and novelty amps. Upon his return from a stay in Los Angeles, Smith was given a tour of his own slightly-rearranged studio by Cold Water Flat, the first group to be signed to the new Fort Apache-MCA label. "I came home and they took me around what they called 'the museum.' They filled the studio—took every amp we have off the shelf and set them up in sort of huge rows and columns and stuff. There's one wall of Marshall amplifiers and then there's one wall of all these little tiny amplifiers all stacked end to end—so they're basically trying everything. And that's one of the good things about Fort Apache. When you come in as a musician it's like being in a candy shop."

Smith notes that the reason they signed with MCA was actually because of the label's limited roster of alternative bands. "For years we've had the intention at Fort Apache to try to develop our own label, and it always seemed like we needed to work with someone rather than do it on our own because we're all really busy. But what I didn't want to do was go in and fight for priority among a million other bands... MCA is a very strong company in other aspects, but they needed a new A&R source to sort of build their alternative roster."

Although Smith is encouraged by the studio's newfound freedom in acquiring and developing new acts, he is also cautious about the spectre of the corporate world looming so close, and stresses the exclusivity of the partnership. "Not trying to sound like an isolationist, we are still trying to keep it to ourselves, because it's a little overwhelming, this major-label thing, to be honest. And unless we try to keep our corner tidy, it's really hard to imagine keeping our identity. We could just get absorbed into a bigger system, which would be the wrong thing to do." —Aaron Claw

QUICK FIX



ARTISTS' **in my room** PERSONAL PICKS

EPIC SOUNDTRACKS

MC 5
High Times

O.V. Wright
That's How Strong My Love Is

Gram Parsons
Grievous Angel

Beach Boys
Pet Sounds

Alex Chilton
Like Flies On Sherbert

DANZIG: Who You Calling A Nerd?

Glenn Danzig, drink in hand and in happy spirits, presides over a party promoting his new Verotik Comics imprint.

"This is about changing people's ideas about what comic people really want," he says happily, motioning to a room packed for the evening's erotic dance performances, "And from the response we've gotten tonight, it's like yes... a resounding yes."

Verotik is something of a personal crusade for Danzig. "I've been reading comic books all my life, and I see where they could go... and what they could do and what they could mean to people. [Comics are] very underrated, except in prison systems, where they give [prisoners]... an incentive to read. Most stuff in school, people think sucks. And they're right, because it does suck—no one wants to read about that. When they can read something that can elevate not only their minds, but physical being, that's important. And that's what I want to do with comics, take people to another plane."

This is obviously more than another rock star hobby. Standing near to Danzig, demeaning comics is a bad idea. The mere mention of Spin's "comic book nerd" jab quickens his temper and dispels his pleasant demeanor. "I've been in jail five times for various violent shit. I've done shit people haven't... even begun to dream of in their nine-to-five world. Don't call me a nerd, okay?" His face turns terrifying. "I'll take your head and squeeze it between my hands until your eyeballs pop through my fuckin' fingers. I've done it before, I'll do it again."

Noticing his audience backing up a few steps during his tirade, he checks himself, returning to an easy grin and softer tone. "What I'm saying is, don't hide behind a magazine. If you wanna call people nerds, do it to their face. And if you wanna downgrade something, at least read it first."

"My whole view is, let's get real okay? It's like people with big magazines—'yeah, here, little boy, here's a fuckin' magazine, here's a million dollars, fuckin' run it.' But Verotik is doing the punk shit. We do it real. This is all out of my pocket, so fuck everybody if they don't like it." —Katherine Yeske



Schoolhouse Rock

These new CD covers from Chocolate USA and Tuscadero and 7" sleeve from Peechees all get an A for effort.

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QUICK FIX



DEAD CAPPY: A Cheery Story From The Ass Ponys Chuck Cleaver

PROLOGUE

When I was 15 and living in Clarksville, Ohio, I found a dead guy one morning before school. A friend recently asked me if I've ever dreamt or had nightmares about it and I had to admit to him that, no, I never have. At least not while I'm sleeping.

FINDING CAPPY DEAD

It was early autumn and it was raining. Not really raining. More like when you're on your back making raspberries and it falls down on your face. Spittle rain. Drizzle. It was Monday. I was in my sophomore year in high school and at the bus stop early that morning. Big mistake.

The bus stop was actually a former furniture store. It was in the center of town. It made sense. Mrs. Dixon, wife of Mr. Dixon, owner of the former furniture store, came out in her house coat. It was blue. She was smoking. Because I was so early, I was the only other one there. Fate, I suppose.

"Could you run up the street and look in on ol' Cappy?" she said. "Haven't seen him for a few days."

"Ol' Cappy" was Cappy Brandenburg, former town barber and then-current town drunk, who lived two doors up from Dixon's in his former barber shop. Nearly everything was *former* there. Even then.

I said sure and went up the street and looked through the glass in the front door. I knew immediately that "Ol' Cappy" was a goner. His small wrought-iron bed was on the far wall just opposite the door. He was on the bed with his right arm sort of hung up in the rungs of the headboard. Wrist bent. Palm facing down. Fingers curled. Hand like a claw. Dead.

I ran back to Mrs. Dixon and told her what I had seen. She went inside to call the sheriff's office. In what seemed like no time, a deputy pulled up in front of Cappy's place. Since there was still no one at the stop but me and Mrs. Dixon, the deputy asked, no, *told* me to go in with him. Damn. What could I say?

The door was unbolted. The deputy shoved it open and we were nearly knocked done by the stink. As thick as a blanket and, oddly enough, sweet. But not good sweet. Foul. We covered our mouths and went in to confirm the obvious.

Cappy was a white guy. A really pale white guy. But now his skin was a mottled gray blue-black. Like a catfish. (My cousin Jimmy had once found a dead guy when he was squirrel hunting. He said that it was a white guy but that he'd turned black. At the time I thought that he was full of it.) His eyes and mouth were open. Wide. He had pissed himself. And there was the claw. Jesus.

The deputy motioned "let's go" with his head and we were back out on the sidewalk. He might have thrown up. I know I didn't. Mrs. Dixon had smelled the stink and called the fire station. They were on their way she said. The bus had arrived, as had the other riders, who had all gotten on and were waiting for me. I grabbed my books and found a seat. When we were pulling out of town I heard the siren. The siren and the baying of Fat Hadley's dogs.

Some of the kids on the bus had talked to Mrs. Dixon. Wonderful. The ride to school was Q&A hell. It should have felt great. The attention. But it didn't. I felt like I'd been let in on some twisted little secret and I didn't feel like talking about it. But I did. I snitched.

I don't remember much about the school day. Telling and retelling and adding and subtracting and embellishing with every retelling. To be sure. After school the bus dropped us off at the corner pumps. Just up the street from the former furniture store. And from Cappy's. I went in for a pop. This guy Donald Claybo was telling his friends about dead Cappy and the stink and about how the thermostat was on 90 degrees and how he'd turned black and—this was the worst—about how Cappy had *burst on the sidewalk* when they were carrying him out. He *blew up!!!* Double Jesus.

On the way home I purposely walked on the other side of the street. I'd had enough for one day. I tried not to look over because I figured there would be a stain (there was). Plus, I was sort of afraid that I'd see Cappy looking out the door at me. Dead catfish-black Cappy. Eyes open. Mouth agape. And that claw. That damned and grasping claw.

It has never left me.

DEFINITION OF SOUND

Frat Rock. n.: Although there is no mention of funk-metal (or keggers for that matter) in Plato's writings, collegiate fraternal organization live by high-volume, mass-appeal music. Frat rock dates back to the Kingsmen's "Louie, Louie," and the genre continues to amass songs with similar shout-along appeal, as well as songs with the words "party," "rock" or "toke." Who knows if these current bands are proud to be included: Mighty Mighty Bosstones, Green Day, Weezer and perennial favorites Beastie Boys.

Hello... Killer?

FROM AN ACTUAL PRESS RELEASE:

"Rock 'N' Roll legend Jerry Lee Lewis has recently inaugurated his own 900 line, offering fans exclusive messages from the Killer himself, as well as special 'Fan Packs' with a variety of Jerry Lee Lewis Memorabilia, available only to callers of 1-900-988-FIRE.

"The Jerry Lee Lewis 'Great Balls Of Fire' Hotline will treat callers to daily messages from the entertainer on a wide variety of subjects, with information and inside news about his life, music and plans for the future. At the same they'll be offered a chance to purchase the Jerry Lee Lewis Fan Pack, with items specially selected by the artist. Included will be a greatest hits compact disc or cassette, an autographed 8x10 photo of the Killer, with a signed letter of appreciation. Also included, a vial of water from the lake on Jerry Lee Lewis' Memphis estate and a surprise special gift."

SUBWAY



GOOD TIMES

Illustration By Michael Davis

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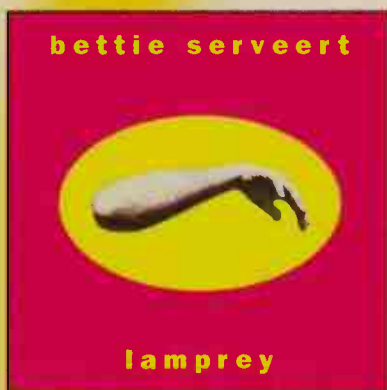


BEST NEW MUSIC

👉 BETTIE SERVEERT

Lamprey

Matador-Atlantic



Of all the albums that entered the college-rock canon in the last year or so, none was easier to like than Bettie Serveert's *Palomine*. Live and on record, Bettie is the kind of band that draws affection, playing its little heart out with incredible earnestness and charm. Frontwoman Carol van Dijk's songs appeal to the lighter-lofting rock 'n' roll sentimentality in people; she's inscrutable but never alienating. *Lamprey* is just as stellar as *Palomine*, providing further justification for Bettie's AOR aesthetic of long, expansive tracks, great cascades of guitar, and touchingly self-serious lyrics. "I can't trust the things I see/I can only trust in me/And if the whole world should drop dead/I'll build my own inside my head," goes van Dijk's epiphany on the standout "D. Feathers," this album's emotional highlight. Almost as lovely are the rocker "Keep Sake" and the classic Bettie ballad "21 Days." Where the playing on *Palomine* was often restrained, *Lamprey's* sound is closer to that of their live performances, with all their big, shimmering chords. In other words, you get more of what makes you loft your lighter. —Andrea Moed

DATALOG: Release date: Jan. 24. First single "Crutches."

FILE UNDER: Emoto-rock.

R.I.Y.L.: Victoria Williams, Antietam, Neil Young.

👉 LAUGHING HYENAS

Hard Times

Touch & Go



Ever since the Beatles, rock music has held an important lesson for its practitioners: Self-reinvention is key to career longevity. Few bands truly learn this lesson, and fewer still from the post-punk ranks of the late '80s have. So it's no less than a 10,000-volt shock to hear such a new direction from Laughing Hyenas, a Detroit group whose form of harder-than-bop rage rested squarely on vocalist John Brannon's unique ability to howl like an opiated man on fire.

Until now. Like many indie bands before them (from Velocity Girl to the Blues Explosion), the Hyenas took a recording pilgrimage to Memphis' Easley studio, but like no other thus far, they took the "home of the blues" inspiration to heart. *Hard Times* is thus, in short, a blues-rock album, but it's not just any blues rock album. In a manner which only the most psychic could predict, Brannon and guitarist Larissa Strickland have injected their visceral energy into the corpse of American song, and brought a beautiful golem to life. The album's opener "Just Can't Win" and endpiece "Each Dawn I Die" close the gaps between the Rolling Stones at their zenith and eager step-brothers the Stooges and the New York Dolls, in a way that can only leave lesser bands in jealous awe. In the five songs between them, they incorporate contemporaries from the Birthday Party (and predecessors The Scientists) to the Cramps to Scratch Acid and the Honeymoon Killers, pulling it all together with effortless, perfect logic.

Three years ago, when their rhythm section left to form Mule, many sounded the Hyenas' death knell, and though the 1992 EP *Crawl* had its moments, the writing seemed carved into the wall. Now, with the bassist and drummer from the Necros in tow, the new Hyenas have come late to the party, but brought the best present. Let's propose a toast. —Eric Gladstone

DATALOG: Release date: Jan. 23. Touring in February.

FILE UNDER: The toughest blues around.

R.I.Y.L.: Jon Spencer Blues Explosion, Jesus Lizard, *Exile On Main Street*.

THROWING MUSES

University

Sire-Reprise



You'd be fair to think of Throwing Muses as getting a little long in the tooth. Once alternative innovators, they may end up next to Bauhaus and the Pixies in that category of groups that spawned more imitators, spinoff bands (Breeders, Belly) and solo careers (Kristen Hersh) than hits. The Muses' younger days may be long gone, but you'll forget that listening to *University*. No longer the spry singer she once was, Hersh still possesses her gift: the ability to latch onto an off-kilter musical idea and build a song around it. *University* features several samples of this writer's knack, mainly on the quieter tracks: the ringing, Alex Chilton like "That's All You Wanted," which could be repetitive if the hook weren't so warm; the dreamy ballad "Crabtown," which sounds like it's just hovering and then manages to come to a point; the instrumental title track, which kicks off with one of Hersh's children babbling a melody and then moves into a swirling guitar line. Of course, the Muses also rock, and they have evolved into a tight if unsurprising unit. When they do challenge themselves, the results can be stunning, as on "Bright Yellow Gun" or "Hazing," which starts off as a power ballad but then shifts in and out of a chugging stomp as Hersh ululates a throaty chant. Despite its share of duds, *University* is a rare breed, the sort of unassuming rock album that you grow into with each listen. If the group members' extracurricular activities get the best of Throwing Muses, this would make a fitting swan song.

—Chris Molanphy

DATALOG: Release date: Jan. 17. First single "Bright Yellow Gun."

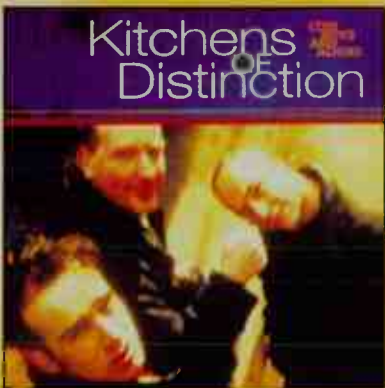
FILE UNDER: College-rock stalwarts.

R.I.Y.L.: Belly, Pixies, Bettie Serveert.

KITCHENS OF DISTINCTION

Cowboys And Aliens

A&M



David Byrne once said that lyrics are just a way to get people to listen to the music. Kitchens Of Distinction work in reverse. The group's shimmering guitars and pensive melodies lap gently against Patrick Fitzgerald's aching, sonorous tenor, and the whole business is sheathed in brittle effects-pedal noise, ornate without being pretentious, lulling without being sleepy or anonymous. The sound is forcefully romantic, and it does nothing better than open you up for Fitzgerald's spasms of poesy. His non-rhyming, evocative narratives are built on nuance and inference, telling their stories with snapshots and sidewalk pastels. Yet the lyrics aren't the sort you need to follow studiously to appreciate fully. Drunk with the beauty of language, lines like "Wake up, shake up your blanket of sorrows/Warm tongue in one ear, pearl gun in the other" (from "Here Come The Swans") unabashedly shake you out of some coiling melody or sweeping guitar line and commit the phrase in your mental tape loop. Listening, however casually, will still put short phrases like "Stained glass laughter" ("Sand On Fire") and full lyrics like "When the felons are out... felonizing/He is a place to hide" ("Come On Now") in your head. And the fact that *Cowboys And Aliens* is filled with words like that is what ultimately makes it such a rich listening experience.

—Scott Frampton

DATALOG: Release date: Jan. 24.

FILE UNDER: Fuzzy, poignant pop.

R.I.Y.L.: Echo And The Bunneymen, Chameleons UK, The Teardrop Explodes.

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Punk-O-Rama

Epitaph



The stupid thing about the are-they-or-aren't-they debate that Green Day and Offspring spawned this year is that punk has always been about attitude more than music. What was clever about Green Day was the way they knowingly deconstructed punk down to a schtick: whiny voals, catchy choruses, flung mud—ta-da! Punk. Besides, reducing punk to any set of criteria is fraught with peril; despite some touchstones—fast choruses, dead-end lyrics—punk can take many forms, as this collection of Epitaph Records' latest and greatest bears out. Of the bands here, Bad Religion has already moved to Atlantic, and Rancid and Pennywise have reportedly jumped to majors which makes this the de facto epitaph for Epitaph's golden era. (All songs were previously released, save one Rancid track.) As expected, superspeed aggression is here, courtesy of Total Chaos, 10 Foot Pole and SNFU. But there's also the sweet, harmony-laden urgency of Bad Religion's "Do What You Must" and Down By Law's "Bright Green Globe"; the hook-laden near-metal of Offspring and NOFX; and the versatile Rancid, represented by both the surf groove of "Hyena" and a Clash homage, "I Wanna Riot." The sooner everybody accepts that punks can be both snotty and rich (remember, the Sex Pistols were out to "Swindle" you), the sooner we can dump all these purist arguments and just get our rocks off. This is a great place to start.

—Chris Molanphy

DATALOG: Release date: Nov. 25. Also includes a track by Rich Kids On LSD, who appear on this month's CD.

FILE UNDER: Punk.

R.I.Y.L.: Any of the bands mentioned above.

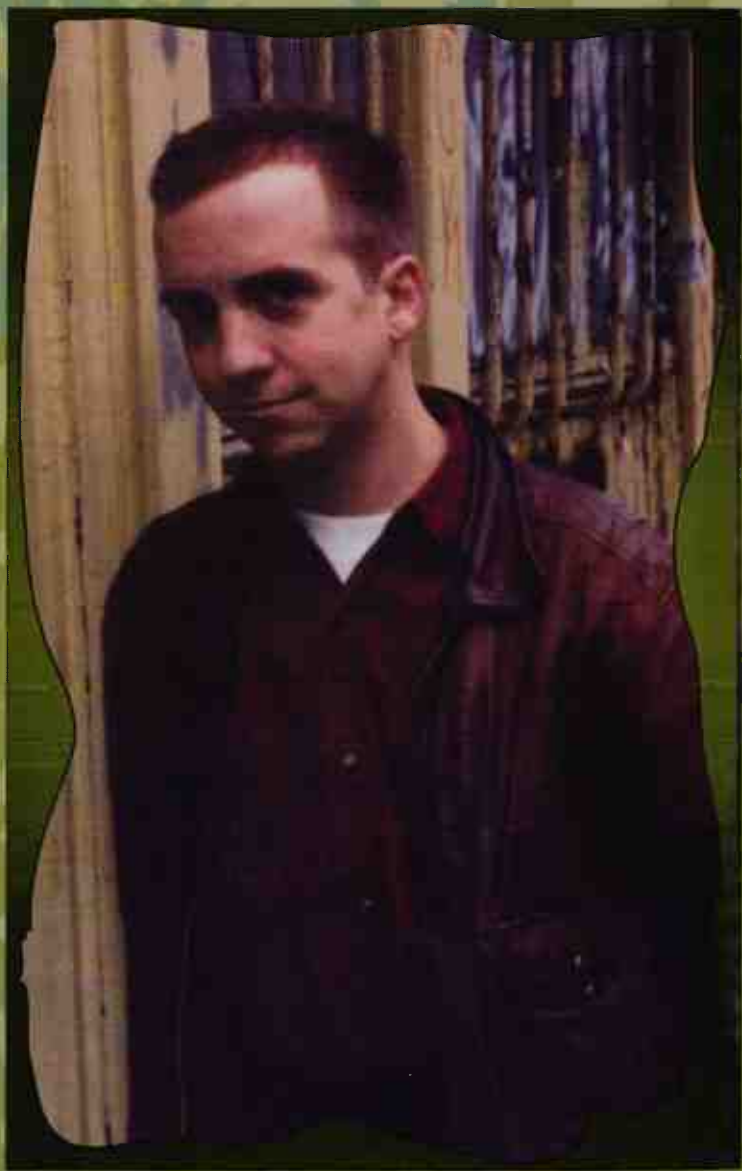
STEPHIN MERRITT'S STRANGE POWERS

Franklin Bruno talks
with the auteur behind *The
Magnetic Fields* and *The 6ths*

The music of *The Magnetic Fields* is equal parts craft and ardor, lyricism and irony, pop iconoclasm and pop tradition. Wildly disparate genres (electropop country, bubblegum dirge) collide with indelible melodies. On "Torn Green Velvet Eyes" (from last year's *Holiday*), synthesized percussion accelerates until the sound is transformed into something else entirely. An unidentifiable instrument (is it a guitar? a keyboard?) floats through "Are You The Trouble I've Been Looking For?," swooping past its key, only to meet it again on the way down. Sinister fantasy worlds are evoked and debunked in under three minutes. Amidst it all, a dolorous, urbane voice intones "Planets crash, the world goes nova, sun explodes, all goes black," like Noel Coward trapped on *Deadman's Curve*. The landscape is outlandish, but strangely familiar; everything seems completely wrong, yet completely right.

According to Stephin Merritt, *The Magnetic Fields'* auteur, self-confessed "control freak," and sole permanent member, all this magic is a kind of sleight of hand. On songwriting: "It's all cultural cutups, quotes and clichés... I think that I, you, and everybody else are stealing everything. I wrote the lyrics on *Distant Plastic Trees* [the first *Magnetic Fields* album] largely out of looking through Alan Lomax's *The Folk Songs Of North America*. I was ill at the time." Merritt's methods are the exact opposite of those of the

confessional singer-songwriter: "I don't see the difference between writing about my personal experiences and writing about, say, yours." Even these claims of creative larceny aren't original, since "everyone in rap is honest about it, everyone in country is honest about it, everyone in Europe is honest about it. Indie-rock is just so conservative that people are shocked when I say it." So how does he explain his popularity among benighted indie-rockers, clinging to their romantic, punk-era notions of the creative act? "If you release records on labels that indie-rockers buy everything on, they'll have to buy your records. It's easy, try it," he advises.



photos by Gail O'Hara



An inveterate lover of pop music (“I own every ABBA CD I’ve ever seen”) and fountain of musical minutiae (“Chuck Berry re-records all his major hits every few years. The version of ‘Maybellene’ released to oldies stations now was probably recorded in 1985”), Merritt has elaborate, well-thought-out ideas about production, somewhere between the Two Brians: Eno and Wilson. “Recording in the world is almost all in a style which likes to pretend that it sounds like real life, although it doesn’t sound anything like real life. In real life, almost all sounds are muffled, have no high end, and most sounds have no clear beginning or ending. Recording, each instrument is usually recorded as closely and as clearly as possible, if only to be modified later.” In the common style of recording which Merritt calls “false realism,” the more interesting characteristics of sound as we actually hear it are disguised by these supposedly “true” techniques of recording. “False realism presupposes a fictitious listener... When Robert Fripp produced *The Roches* in ‘audio verite,’ he recorded everything crisply and without reverb. But to sound like that live, they’d each have to be singing in a separate room, with soundproofing on all six surfaces.” So the presupposed listener is not only fictitious, but impossible! And yet, “Any other way of recording is considered ‘unprofessional.’”

As an example of an alternate means of sonic representation, Merritt cites “old Folkways recordings of circumcision rituals in which nothing sounds much like it was recorded in any particular condition. Everything is very indistinct, and gels together in a way that I happen to like. It’s not any less false, but at least it’s not constructed. You just point the mike and get the highest level you can on the tape without distorting.” Listening to such Magnetic Fields collections as the brilliant, country-tinged *The Charm Of The Highway Strip* or the poppier *Holiday*, one would be hard-pressed to call their aural atmosphere either “realist” or “not constructed.” If anything, Merritt’s recordings have an air of heightened artifice, a sort of techno-narcosis, making the listener aware of the recording as a recording in a way that complements the equally artificial or second-hand song-forms and lyrical sentiments. A vocal may be suddenly shoved “too far” up front. A melody may be carried by a sound whose waveform contains as much signal as noise. Dense layers of treated synth, not quite in rhythm, hover in the nether reaches of a recording’s ‘space,’ too indistinct for clear perception. *Charm’s* instrumental “Dust Bowl” features a percussive sound that adds color and depth but bears no discernible rhythmic relation to the song. Not surprisingly, Merritt is a bit secretive about his techniques (“I like people to wonder how things were recorded”).

Merritt’s most recent project is an album by The 6ths, the collective name for an ongoing collaborative effort in which indie-pop pals and admirers, both famous (Sebadoh’s Lou Barlow, Let’s Active’s Mitch Easter, who even gets to play a little guitar) and less famous (Ayako Akashiba of the Japanese band Sunshower) lend guest vocals to new Stephin Merritt tunes, mostly composed especially for them. Highlights include “San Diego Zoo,” breezy Californiana tailored to the relaxed, slightly sad voice of Barbara Manning, and “Puerto Rico Way,” a bit of ersatz-Carmen Miranda silliness given an appropriately suave treatment by Unrest/Air Miami’s Mark Robinson. Despite having twelve vocalists (including Merritt himself, acting as his own guest on “Aging Spinsters”), the album has a consistent tone that is anything but accidental. “Most of the songs are from a passive point of view. I told everyone to sing conversationally and quietly.” The effect is especially strange coming from singers associated with more aggressive personae, like Mac of Superchunk and Mary Timony of Helium.

“I’m always interested in recording singers who I don’t like. I don’t like [Heavenly vocalist] Amelia Fletcher’s voice, and what I don’t like about her voice made her perfect for the song she sang. ‘Looking For Love (In The Hall Of Mirrors)’ is written from the point of view of an aging gay man, and if you’ve ever heard Amelia Fletcher, she’s neither aging, gay, nor a man. It’s a... desperate song, but she sings it the way she sings everything else—in ecstasy.” Such juxtapositions are the flip side of Magnetic Fields records, on which the dark core of seemingly carefree confections like “Desert Island” is emphasized by Merritt’s own voice, a brooding, world-weary baritone. (After the interview, Stephin emphasizes that I should not misquote him as saying that he hates Amelia Fletcher.)

Even the album’s tentative title (*Wasps’ Nests*) is a result of the same inverted logic. “‘The 6ths,’ which looks beautiful on a page, is the hardest one-syllable word to pronounce in the English language... I like the idea of someone coming into a record store and having to say ‘do you have *Wasps’ Nests* by the 6ths?’ I have a whole list of unpronounceable titles for 6ths records.” Is there anyone else he covets as a future 6ths star? “On aesthetic grounds? I hate singers who yelp and exaggerate their accents, like Robert Smith, Sting, Michael Stipe, Huey Lewis, Billy Joel, Natalie Merchant and Edie Brickell. I’d be interested in their voices, but once I gave them my usual instructions, they probably wouldn’t have those qualities if they sang the way I would want them to.”

Other pseudonyms include The Gothic Archies, a bubblegum goth project (“It’s my opportunity to write suicide songs and be funny about it”) and Future Bible Heroes (“It’s me and my old boyfriend Chris. He does the music and I write the lyrics and vocal melodies. It’s real electropop, and indie-rockers hate it.”) Under any of the above names, Stephin Merritt creates, or perhaps just rearranges, popular (potentially very popular) art that emphasizes artifice in the grand counter-tradition of Warhol, Firkbank and Huysmans: art that is vivid, flamboyant, and melancholy, endlessly inventive but blithely “unoriginal.”

Franklin Bruno sings and plays guitar in *Nothing Painted Blue*.

Discography:

The Magnetic Fields:

- “100,000 Fireflies” (7”) (Harriet)
- The Wayward Bus* (includes the earlier British album *Distant Plastic Trees*) (PoPuP; reissued on Merge)
- “Long Vermont Roads” (7”) (Harriet)
- The House Of Tomorrow* (7” EP) (Feel Good All Over)
- Holiday* (Feel Good All Over)
- The Charm Of The Highway Strip* (Merge)
- The 6ths:
- “Heaven In A Black Leather Jacket” (7”) (Merge)
- Wasps’ Nests* (tentative title) (London)

young



ALISON STATTON AND SPIKE

15 YEARS AFTER *COLOSSAL YOUTH*, ALISON STATTON AND STUART MOXHAM ARE STILL MAKING BRAVE, QUIET RECORDS.

Begin near the end, in the Jazz Cafe, London, Oct. '94. Enter, past the spiffy patrons, past the eggshell walls lit blue from below, a sort of chamber orchestra—violins, congas, clarinet, electric piano, sax; pale, lanky, classical-inclined guitarist with his back to us; last, stock-still at front and center, facing us, is Alison Statton. "Tell me the story," she begins, "of a happy life..." The song is one of the duo's most delicate—they write as a duo, Alison Statton and Spike, the lanky man—and what these people are about is how pop songs can create, for a few minutes each, their own modest happy life. Statton's voice and Spike's arrangements don't project a personality, but present a situation, cleanly, self-effacingly, and the self-effacement of restricting a violin line to three notes or a vocal line to five, turns out to be the personality whose aspects we deduce while it hides.

Begin again in Cardiff, in 1978, with guitarist Stuart Moxham and his brother Phil. From distant echoes of London punk they learned that anyone could make a record; they wanted to do it quietly, and didn't care for the *sound* of punk. Phil brought in Alison to sing. The three Young Marble Giants got a primitive drum machine and played backstairs cafes. They sold a tape of their songs in local shops: an innovation. "Mono cassette players were only just available in the late '70s; recording was a question of finding an old reel-to-reel in a junk shop and borrowed tape," explains Stuart. Alison's singing before 1981 has a warm amateurism, a learn-by-doing quality; she's so unaffected because she has to be. "When I started out, I was singing but I wasn't a singer," she says. "I got more aware of what my voice can do."

Statton and the Moxhams were about to split up when Rough Trade heard and signed them; the cassette tunes became the group's sole album, *Colossal Youth*. YMG's combination of one effects-pedal-less guitar line, a politely nonlinear bass, syncopated click-talk from the drum machine, and intelligent everyday lyrics placed pop in the living room, an affair of individuals and not of crowds. The LP deployed these sounds across topics from lost love to Cardiff cafe culture to eating

marble giants

BY STEPHEN BURT

breakfast while watching crowds fill the morning street. The subsequent "Final Day" single put these small pleasures into the context of nuclear war: The lyrics list what will happen for the last time the day before the clouds rise, and the whole song rides a taut guitar riff as fragile as urban life itself may be.

In 1981 Stuart and Phil did an all-instrumental EP, six two-minute tunes supposedly meant for BBC testcards. Then Stuart renamed himself the Gist, a name which expanded to include whatever friends he chose to play out with; one of the odder Gist gigs was a rock festival in Portugal, where *Colossal Youth* had gone top ten, and where one of the supporting bands was an young Dublin act called U2. The Gist recorded three singles and an uneven album—*Embrace The Herd*—of minimalist experiments, some of which rose to a confectioned, miniature, artificial beauty, like those contraptions that fly to the moon in childrens' books: low-tech cocktail music for delighted intellectuals, with whispers behind it that could be rumors of war.

Meanwhile Alison, her Cardiff friend Spike and Simon Booth started making eclectic, cabaret-influenced music as Weekend. "There were a lot of musicians involved, and they all had their influences," Alison explains; the influences flowered on *La Variété*, their album. "La Variété," the sleeve said, was "the French term for... everything that's not heavy rock; music drawing from diversity and depth." That "diversity" started out jazzy and lushly pretty, but the late *Live At Ronnie Scott's* EP showed a band overgrown, sax and singing and bass staggering languidly in opposite directions.

In the early '80s, the ex-Giants abandoned music. Stuart worked as an animator, helping draw *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* Alison moved back to Cardiff, taught t'ai chi, and trained to be a chiropractor. Then ex-punk guitarist Ian Devine asked her to return to pop. He "did most of the writing," Alison says, on their two albums, of which the first, *The Prince Of Wales*, is a satisfying melange of lengthy acoustic riffs and lyrical wit. The US college-radio hit was a folksy cover of New Order's "Bizarre Love Triangle" (whose arrangement was recently rebranded by Frente!), but the best song was a catchy plea for Welsh cultural autonomy, "Turn The Aerials Away From England." Is there anything specifically Welsh about the earlier records? Stuart—who now lives in Hertfordshire, England—denies it: "What we did [in YMG] could have come from anywhere that was fairly isolated, really," he says.

Meanwhile, the rest of the world was catching up to what YMG did years before. Nirvana frequently cited them as an inspiration, Hole covered their "Credit In The Straight World," Feelies spin-off group Speed The Plough did "Final Day," and plans have been made for an all-star Young Marble Giants tribute album (which may come out sometime early this year).

Now all the ex-Young Marbles are back on musical tracks. Alison: "Spike and I have always been in touch, we've remained friends. And somehow we just ended up talking about playing again..." But the duo's new *Weekend In Wales* EP and *Tidal Blues* are more focused than their earlier work. The vocals hold a new and careful self-confidence: She is picking her way across the line of slick rocks at high tide, but she knows she can do it. *Tidal Blues* adds a larger band (Andrew Moxham on

drums) and ten other compactly excellent songs: "Mr. Morgan" clicks and coalesces around an organ line, resurrecting the Young Marbles' sound, and is so good it merits a national holiday in its honor. At the Jazz Cafe, Statton and Spike played one YMG song, "Salad Days," as a kind of dirge, with two violins, no guitars—as if to lay the old songs gently in their grave. More live shows may follow their upcoming tour of Japan.

Stuart's first release in ten years was the eclectic, low-key *Signal Paths*. Half the songs slide in and out of calypso and reggae conventions, and a few harder-edged tunes bring the conversational feel of the Young Marbles into Stuart's baritone voice. (Another CD, *Random Rules*, is now out in the U.S.) The original "innovator" and chief songwriter in YMG has kept innovating, trying not to stick to one style; assembling three forthcoming CDs, he says "I'm choosing from a vast range of materials from over a number of years," a backlog of 80-90 unreleased songs dating from 1977 to last week. The next record, *Cars In The Grass*—a live-in-the-studio band project with Spike and all three Moxhams—should be out shortly. If it includes the repertoire from Stuart's brief U.S. tour last year, it will balance lots of cymbals and bass against Stuart's weedier, shyer singing, and will, politely, delight and instruct.

DISCOGRAPHY

Young Marble Giants:

Young Marble Giants (self-released cassette)
Colossal Youth (Rough Trade)
"Final Day" (Rough Trade)
Testcard (EP) (Rough Trade)

The Gist:

"Love At First Sight" (Rough Trade)
"Here Comes Love" (Rough Trade)
"Fool For A Valentine" (Rough Trade)
Embrace The Herd (Rough Trade)

Stuart Moxham:

Signal Paths (Feel Good All Over)
Random Rules (Feel Good All Over)
Cars In The Grass (Vinyl Japan)

Weekend:

"A View From Her Room" (Rough Trade)
"Past Meets Present" (Rough Trade)
"Drumbeat For Baby" (Rough Trade)
La Variété (Rough Trade)
Live At Ronnie Scott's (EP) (Rough Trade)

Devine and Statton:

The Prince Of Wales (Crepuscule-Rockville)
Cardiffians (Crepuscule)

Alison Statton And Spike:

Weekend In Wales (EP) (Vinyl Japan)

Tidal Blues (Vinyl Japan)

◆ "MR. MORGAN" BY ALISON STATTON AND SPIKE APPEARS ON THIS MONTH'S CD.



Veruca Salt ▼Elastica



THE HOT BUTTON. It's an inescapable aspect of mainstream entertainment, the indicator of budding superstardom for movie actors, authors, TV personalities, athletes... but not alternative rockers, right? Wrong, unfortunately. Though the world of new music might seem to subscribe to underground principles—let a band's popularity grow naturally, and may the best song win—behind the scenes, it's a different story.

Big Things

BY ERIC GLADSTONE

Since Nirvana's breakthrough success way back in 1992, the music industry has gotten increasingly hot and heavy in trying to find the *next big thing* and making sure that you, the consumer, know all about it. That means perhaps more bands than ever are realizing their dreams of a major label contract. But, as Veruca Salt's Jim Shapiro puts it, "The basic feeling you get is that no one has any idea what's going on but is going to try and cover everything in case something becomes huge." As a consequence, labels are put in the position of having to beat each other to the punch. "Bands aren't given the space to develop," says Elastica's Justine Frischmann.

elastica

"Most bands are so innocent to the way it works," says Elastica's Justine Frischmann, offering the typical media scheme: "They're either overhyped or ignored." With two-and-a-half years' experience in [London] Suede (she left before they hit big) and a boyfriend in Blur's Damon Albarn, Frischmann's new project faced little danger of the latter.

Having left Suede in 1992, she found herself "listening to things I hadn't in eight or nine years," and took out ads seeking fans of "The Fall, Wire and the Stranglers." What she found in drummer Justin Welch, bassist Annie Holland and guitarist Donna Matthews may not have fit the bill perfectly... but all the better.

"We've got a strange way of working, because it's very non-ego-based," says Justine. "Riffs switch from guitar to bass and back again. If we don't feel like we're playing as a unit then the song doesn't work." Obviously they're doing something right: bubbling over with energy, their live shows present melodies in short, simple bursts ("We have very low boredom thresholds. We can't be bothered with a middle eight") that are instantly memorable. And their first single, "Stutter," took the press, radio and even actual record buyers by such stunning surprise that they were quickly voted "Best New Band" by readers of the music paper *Melody Maker*. "People think it's really great to get that much hype," Frischmann cautions, "but when it happens to you, you realize it's a disaster."

After an EP and tour, the group found itself being hailed as the figurehead of a trend it never could've seen coming. "The New Wave Of New Wave" is what the British press have called it, lumping in groups such as Echobelly, S*M*A*S*H, Compulsion and These Animal Men. "We were one of the first bands to do that stuff, and suddenly there were loads of other bands as well," puzzles Matthews. Elastica decided it would be best to take time out to write and record the inevitable debut album.

"There is a punky side to what we do," Frischmann understates, but "there's a lot more ambitious stuff on the album. Stuff that sounds more modern, Pixies-ish... one we call 'the Beck song' 'cause it sounds like 'Loser,' and stuff that sounds a bit like Talking Heads, New Order. We've become quite interested in sonics, making things sound quite big, keyboards."

Those who've heard the Geffen *Stutter* EP shouldn't be concerned; judging by some rough mixes, Elastica's infectious energy remains intact. With good reason, Frischmann's looking to avoid typecasting, or blowing up and burning out before the group matures. "I think Veruca Salt is a classic case of a band getting too much too quickly," she says with concern for her new labelmates. "'Seether' is a really good single, [but] if they'd waited a year, it would be a much better album."

Both Shapiro and Frischmann can speak from personal experience. Veruca Salt, here in the US, and Elastica, in England, each had their share of record labels and media slaving over them before their first singles had entered public consciousness. You might think any band would want to thank its lucky stars for such fortune. But there is another side, particularly virulent in alternative circles: the backlash of negative sentiment. And if the hype is not always justified by an artist's music, often, neither is the backlash. "I'd heard all this hype about Liz Phair," says Veruca's Nina Gordon by way of example, "and didn't want to like her because I heard how great the record was. All my friends had her record but I refused to buy it."

A buzz can come from anywhere—radio, press, record labels, even a band's actual fans—but the questions remain, which bands get it, and why?

Who can say for sure? Nevertheless, in taking a close look at Veruca Salt and Elastica, two bands who have definitely had their share of hype, we saw some patterns emerge. We don't intend to imply that they both followed these steps intentionally, nor that if your band copies their movements, you'll be in the same position this time next year. But you never know.

Assemble a band that conveniently reflects a current trend.

Following the praise and attention lavished on the Breeders, Hole, Belly, Liz Phair, etc., both Veruca Salt and Elastica are prominently female groups. Veruca's Nina Gordon actually wanted a full female lineup: "We just thought it would be fun and feel right. A woman behind a drum kit just wailing is a really powerful thing for women to see, that power and brutality and energy. But we didn't find anyone," so they found Steve Lack and drafted Gordon's brother Shapiro (Gordon uses her mother's maiden name).

Justine Frischmann, whose Elastica is 3/4 women, claims "It was completely accidental. If anything, I was resisting the temptation. But Donna and Annie were exactly the kind of musicians I wanted."

"The basic feeling you get is that no one has any idea what's going on but is going to try and cover everything in case something becomes huge."

Start on a label that is indisputably independent, but nevertheless run by someone with shrewd industry acumen and contacts.

Veruca Salt's Chicago label Minty Fresh is owned by ex-Zoo and RCA A&R man Jim Powers. "He's a good guy and people respect him," says drummer Gordon, but "no one was really in a position" to get "Seether"'s impressive alrplay "at the time that happened, back in June. [He wasn't] making phone calls to get 'Seether' on the radio," but was "receiving phone calls asking how to get it."

Elastica's London label Deceptive is the baby of Steve Lamarq, a former *New Music Express* and *Select* magazine writer, and now a BBC Radio One disc jockey. "Deceptive is genuinely indie in England—it's actually one guy with a phone," says Frischmann, "and not this powerhouse doing dirty deals. He's a complete music lover. He will never say 'put that out because the press will like it,' or 'you'll get radio play.'"

Release a debut single in such limited quantities that it sells out immediately, yet is more widely available overseas.

The initial 2,000 copies of Veruca's "Seether" sold out in weeks last spring—but a reported 10,000 were pressed by the band's English label, Scared Hitless. Geffen has since rereleased the single.

Deceptive sold all 1,500 of Elastica's "Stutter" in two days. "When we actually cut the single, there wasn't much going on, we thought we'd sell 1,500," says Frischmann. "By the time the single was in the shops, we'd had two feature articles and it was obvious we could sell five or six times that. In England, things really do happen overnight." No matter: Sub Pop US pressed plenty more—available, against the band's wishes, on import. Geffen released a four-track *Stutter* EP in September.

Cultivate yourselves as a credible live act.

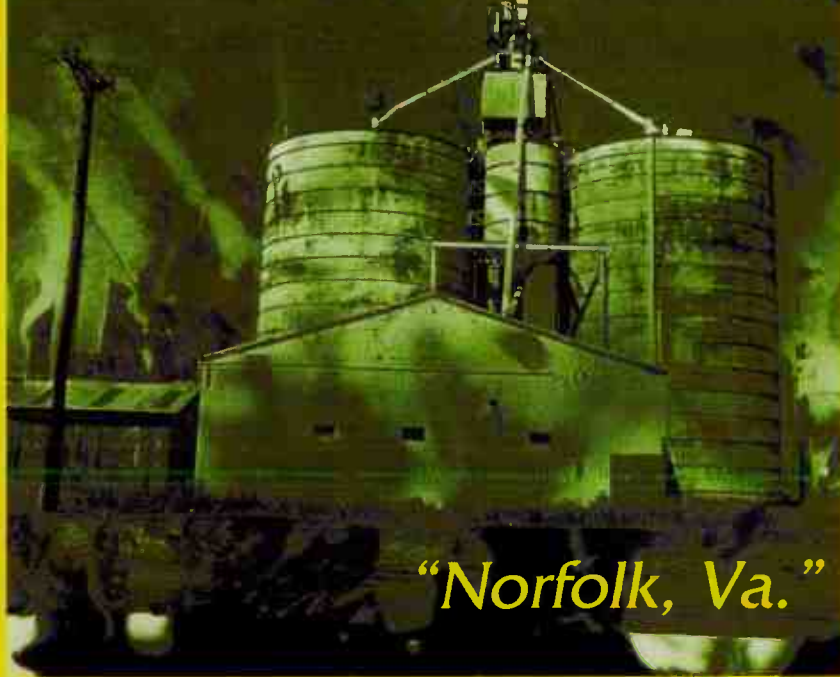
"People are always pleasantly surprised when they see us live," says Veruca's Shapiro. "We're a lot heavier than we sound on the record."

"I think live, we do tend to play all the stuff on the raw side of what we're doing," Frischmann asserts.

Prepare yourselves for a media blitz.

Elastica: "We've got a weekly music press that is widely read, so basically the turnover of bands needs to be four times quicker than anywhere else in the

COMBINE



“Norfolk, Va.”

“...threshing, mashing, blasting fields of sound...powerbuzz...avant punk...raving harangue...cubist guitar...chainsaw of shock and plunder...machine gun bursts ...they’ve pulled a monster out of the hat.”

- Alternative Press

SINCOLA



what the nothingness said

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"The phrase 'Veruca Salt sounds a lot like the Breeders' was almost added to the Pledge of Allegiance last year."

veruca salt

"When we recorded the record," says Veruca Salt's Nina Gordon, "we thought 'this will be this little record, and if it's good, people will notice, and if it's not, we'll make another.'" Gordon is well aware of the irony behind that statement. Ignited by the radio success of "Seether," the single Gordon wrote, her band's debut *American Thighs* is, as of this writing, #1 on Billboard's "Heatseekers" chart.

Produced by Brad Wood (Liz Phair, Shrimp Boat) over a four-month period, the album works an infectious formula: thick harmonies layered over attack-formation guitars and drums, with lyrics shifting from childlike innocence to guiltless brutality. "So sorry, lady/So sorry now/I killed your baby/I don't know how," sings Louise Post, who shares vocal duties with Gordon, in "All Hail Me."

"When I was writing these songs, my family was in disarray," says Gordon, for her part. "So it makes sense I'd return to some of those places I was at as a child that seemed safe, but were much darker than I perceived." "Seether," though, was more simply inspired; she liked the sound of the word.

Veruca Salt's success seems to have been as overnight as they come, having been a full band with bassist Steve Lack and drummer Jim Shapiro (Nina's brother) for only eight months before the album was recorded. Shapiro (who taught his sister guitar over transatlantic phone when she was living in Paris) explains that Gordon and Post had been working together since the previous year. To the obvious influence of the Pixies and Breeders, Gordon adds Game Theory's chord progressions, Prince's harmonies, Beatles and Beach Boys melodies, and the verbal skills of A Tribe Called Quest.

"There are definitely times when it's 'enough already!'" says Shapiro, who downplays the size of their Geffen deal and the hype they've been subjected to. "It's important to [realize] that's not the part we can have any control over. All we can possibly do is play shows and make records."

And, says Gordon, "Ultimately, I'm proud of our record. I don't think it's earthshattering, but it's good."

world. Papers were putting us on the cover when they told us they were just doing a piece on new bands. There's only so much you can do—you can't stop people from writing about you."

Veruca Salt: "As soon as people started writing about us long before the album was out," says Gordon, "I thought 'Oh shit, don't take this away from us, don't take it away from a debut record. If you like it, great, but don't make it more complicated by blowing us up.'"

Adds Shapiro, "There's exposure, there's response, then there's acclaim and scrutiny. Scrutiny is never that good a thing to feel you're under."

Then prepare yourselves for an inevitable backlash.

"As many people are going hysterical, there's an equal number hating your guts or not interested," says Frischmann.

"If I was in another band and heard all this hype about Veruca Salt," says Gordon, "I'd definitely want to hate them."

Offer faultless reasoning for your major label deal.

Elastica: "Deceptive didn't have any resources to get the record out in America, and didn't have any money to record the album. Geffen didn't offer us the most money, but they offered us the most control immediately."

Veruca Salt: "If you're looking for reasons that the mainstream record biz is not cool, you'll find them," says Gordon. "But, by and large, it's not a position we have any familiarity with. I don't think there's much of a point in pretending to be oblique or inaccessible, because our aesthetic naturally gravitates towards the accessible: harmonies, guitar hooks. We're mainstream record buyers who were fortunate enough to attract major-label attention early. But we weren't ever going to be an underground band."

Start to play down your most obvious influences.

"It's really just one side of us that's come out so far," Frischmann insists. "When we were told we were 'new wave,' we immediately went off and wrote lots of songs that weren't new wave. We've got tracks on our album that are punk, but we've got tracks that are just such a long way away from that."

"The phrase 'Veruca Salt sounds a lot like the Breeders' was almost added to the Pledge of Allegiance last year," Shapiro wryly jokes. "Nina and Louise both love *Pod*, I know that for a fact. Whose first record doesn't sound like what they were listening to when they started playing music?" he adds candidly. Still, "As they've written more songs and played out live, that influence is starting to wear off."

Realize people overseas may not love you just because they do at home.

"Britain is as snobby about America as America is about Britain," Frischmann reminds. "There's a Green Day backlash going on over here, and they haven't even got over here properly yet. It's the same as going over there and people saying 'So you've been on the cover of *NME* ten times, who gives a shit?'"

"We went on tour with Hole and everywhere there were cute 16-year-old girls all excited about what we were doing," Gordon seethes. "So I don't care about what [*NME* writer] Everett True is saying. He came to hang out with Hole in St. Louis and he insisted that we all go gambling on a riverboat, and he was just a drunken slob, an obnoxious, repulsive person. I just wasn't impressed by him. And he wasn't impressed by us."

Formulate a strategy for surviving overexposure.

"Last January we were on the cover of everything," says Frischmann. "Most bands, when that happens, just go for it. We said, 'Right, we're not going to release anything, not going to play any gigs, you can't write about us.' And we just went off, wrote songs and got the album together. You only get to do your debut album once. In 10 years, no one's going to remember if it came out now or in six months' time."

"We'll tour through the spring on this and then see where we are," Shapiro figures. "Ideally, we'll soon have generated enough musical content to start tipping the balance back towards people thinking primarily about the music, not the overexposure. The record was done at a very early stage in our development. So I'd really like another shot at it."

And if all else fails, wax philosophic.

Shapiro, offered the equation "Veruca Salt: The Breeders as Stone Temple Pilots: Pearl Jam," shoots back: "Stone Temple Pilots are the most secretly liked band in the country. Plenty of 'intelligentsia' will admit liking them if you get them drunk enough... so that's a funny band to get compared to. There are certainly plenty of bands that are derivative—that's what post-punk, post-modernism is all about."

"Music is one of those things that doesn't stand up in a vacuum," says Frischmann, posed with the question of whether hype helps or hurts. "It's very hard to have an opinion of a song if you have no idea who it is or what era they come from. In a way, sometimes, that's really negative."

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WRITE FOR CATALOG.

World Radio History

If Lightnin' Hopkins or Mississippi Fred McDowell ran a junk shop, and possessed a Frankenstein-like desire to build his own experimental equipment and then bash it to bits, he might wind up making music something like Doo Rag's. For "more than two, and definitely not five" years, the Tucson, Arizona-based band has been kicking up a spirited, lo-fi, bluesy ruckus, proving itself to be the missing link between scratchy old Charlie Patton 78s and the Butthole Surfers or Jon Spencer Blues Explosion. Onstage, Thermos Malling beats on an empty cardboard beer crate, a metal washbucket, and a dented film spool, while his partner Bob Log plays a battered, rust-encrusted steel guitar and hollers into a Dr. Seuss-looking contraption made out of an old vacuum cleaner hose. From there, the whole band's electronic signal runs into an enormous olive-drab speaker cone (dubbed "the Man" by Bob), the battered remnants of a squawky, Army-regulation loudspeaker vaguely reminiscent of the Korean War-era PA system seen on *M*A*S*H*. The whole sound gives the listener a distinct impression of hearing a Smithsonian recording of a field holler being broadcast via shortwave in terrible weather.

"It's, like, a government-issue," Bob acknowledges, looking over at the green speaker cone, which sits between gigs in the back of the van like an expectant passenger. "We've put that thing through the blender so many times. It's been dropped off the top of cars. And it's Army issue, so it lasts forever. That thing's been around since the band started. My friend stole that from the government, from the agricultural department.

"We just started for fun, you know, we played on the street for cigarettes."

Thermos elaborates, describing the duo's opening slot on Beck's last tour, "And it's kind of funny when you realize 12,000 people are looking at you, after a curtain opens, watching you bang on a bucket, and you're like 'this isn't for cigarettes.'"

"Well, we wanted to put out a 78 rpm record first, but you can't pay to make CDs by selling 78 rpm records," Bob says, popping open a beer and explaining the story behind *Chunked And Muddled*, their first CD (the follow-up is in the works and due any day now). "So, we made the CD first so that now we can make whatever vinyl we want to make.

"Also, we haven't quite worked out the details yet, but we got this record cutter, and as soon as it's fixed, we'll, like, have it so you can order your own, like, personalized, customized Doo Rag record. I dunno, for maybe \$50 or something, you can request which songs, tell us your name, we'll sit down, we'll record it just for you, hollerin' out your name, drinkin' a beer with you on the record. It'll be a one-off, not duplicated."

Sort of like all those old rare blues 78s where there's only one known copy? "Yeah," Bob enthuses. "We won't even have a copy of it."

The band recently did a Peel session for the BBC—initially, the band offered to do the session right over the phone, which the British DJ politely declined. "No, he wasn't into that," Bob explains.

"We have the phone invention. It's a phone with four microphones and a mixer. It's going to be ready when we get home. We have this phone genius, this Tucson phone genius, a guy named Dave Forbes, he's got schematics for every phone ever made. He's a master of phone technology... We're going to hopefully do a free tour of radio stations in America, playing live over the phone, over the air. We'll play like Texas and Montana and Seattle and New York in one night."

Thermos, the brain behind most of the group's unique mechanical inventions, picks up: "That's how our CD was recorded, was basically with phone mics. Because they're free. You know, we need a microphone, so we go run out and raid the pay phone. You actually unscrew the earpiece and there's like this little metal cup in there, and it has like two screws, and you just hook that up like you would a mic."

"They're flat, so you just tape 'em to the guitar, and it works good as a pickup that way," Bob explains.

Bob's discussion of phone mics reveals a bit about where Doo Rag's uniquely skewed blues vision comes from. "Well, I was into really old, old records, and that's just how they sound to me, and that's how I want to sound. My favorite records are field recordings, and I want to sound like that. It's kind of hard to do, but it's really easy and simple in a lot of ways."

"Our whole thing is like, we're playing stuff that anyone could have played in this whole century," Thermos reckons. "It's really nothing that nobody else couldn't do. I mean, guitars. Buckets."

discography:

"Trudge" (7") (In The Red)

Chunked And Muddled (CD) (Bloat)

"Hussy Bowler" (7") (Westworld)

"Swampwater Mopdown" (7") (Drunken Fish)

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PORTISHEAD

"To me there's a lot of money wasted on videos," says Portishead's Geoff Barrow. "So when we knew we had a budget, we wanted to use it for something more interesting." The British programmer and producer is explaining just how his group came to make a ten-minute film which perfectly evokes the '60s soundtrack motifs in the slack grooves of its new album *Dummy* (Go! Discs-London), and then how they created the album's lead track "Mysterons" as the film's soundtrack.

Confused? Hang tight.

To Kill A Dead Man, the film which stars Barrow and Portishead vocalist Beth Gibbons, is by their own admission a pastiche of spy movie clichés. "Instead of coming up with ideas to make us look cool, we thought 'let's give people a story,'" Barrow says. "We didn't expect it to be *Pulp Fiction* by any means!" Nevertheless, the short thrill-ette attracted enough attention to earn slots at a number of English and European film festivals, and screenings around London with *Body Of Evidence* and *Reservoir Dogs*.

Portishead's music couldn't ask for a better setting. The group's sound draws inspiration from the 30-year-old soundtrack themes of spymaster John Barry, spaghetti westerner Ennio Morricone, tele-visionary Lalo Schiffrin (whose "More Mission Impossible" gets sampled on the album) and sci-fi virtuoso Jerry Goldsmith. "I like the older soundtracks because they experiment with sound. They didn't just have a synthesizer to push 'go,' they had to do it with guitars, backward tapes and all kinds of madness." Still, the 22-year-old Barrow's past in both rock drumming and closet deejaying explains why *Dummy's* groundwork of slo-mo cruising beats is embellished by samples of Weather Report, Isaac Hayes, and War along with Fender and Hammond organs, strings, brass and the horror-movie-trademark Theremin.

It doesn't explain why the unpredictable melange works so well. That credit might belong to Gibbons, whose sensually melancholic (and consummately English) voice on songs like "Sour Times," "Numb" and "Wandering Star" recalls both the jaded romance of Sade and Basia, and the naive of '60s singers like Sandie Shaw and Dusty Springfield.

Or the credit might hang on the group's anti-technology attitude. Despite its use of samplers and sequencers, Barrow points out that "A lot of the drum beats and the samples we actually record ourselves." And when Portishead (named, by the way, after Barrow's hometown outside Bristol, England) take the stage, "it's all totally live. We have a drummer, a bass player who also plays double bass, vocals, and I scratch [records]."

Barrow adds, "I don't really like playing live. Beth does—I'm more a studio person." Which might explain why, despite his love of film music, he says "I don't see Portishead as a really visual thing—we haven't really got an image. When I'm recording, it's just the sounds."

DOUBLE
AGENTS
AGENTS
DOUBLE

BY ERIC GLADSTONE

ALIEN COMMUNITY *Alien Community I + II Fax USA*

One of the first of a whole crop of releases to be unleashed on American electronic music enthusiasts from Germany's acclaimed experimental label Fax Records, *Alien Community I + II* is a collaboration between Fax head honcho Peter Kuhlmann (aka Pete Namlook) and Spacetime Continuum's Jonah Sharp. Its musical ideas seem mostly foreign and quite possibly subliminal, as if only one's subconscious could clearly understand what's happening here. The sounds are strictly unconventional combinations of experimental noise and familiar drum machine beats. Think of this as the soundtrack to your own personal alien abduction. The subtitles of the discs, "Interdimensional Communication" and "A Long And Perilous Voyage," should help. After being wooed into the aircraft with gentle and plaintive signals, enticing you ever so slowly until you comply, the door is shut without possibility of escape and the ritual begins, a lunar celebration of cosmic dance music. As this is a truly trippy collection of sounds, beware—or prepare for—an o.o.b.e. (out of body experience).
—Tamara Palmer

DATALOG: Release date: Nov. 15. *Air, Silence and Fax Compilation* also available in initial batch of Fax USA releases.

FILE UNDER: Extraterrestrial communication.

R.I.Y.L.: Spacetime Continuum, Pink Floyd, Schwa.



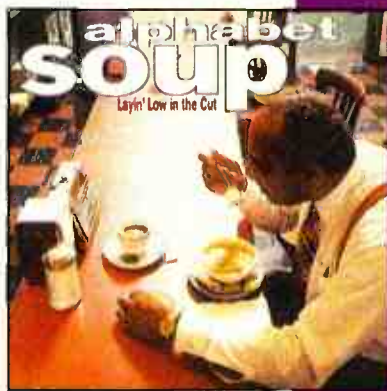
ALPHABET SOUP *Layin' Low In The Cut Mammoth*

The word is that Alphabet Soup is "acid jazz," but several listens later, I still don't know what that means. The jazz part is obvious enough—maybe a little too obvious. *Layin' Low* is grounded by perfectly fine sax, keyboard and slap bass noodling that tests positive for jazz but doesn't add up to much else. It's hard to tell what's "acid" about this album, unless it's the lackadaisical "Take A Ride," which is slightly trippy, with a few understatedly spacy effects. Or perhaps it's "First Day, Last Night," with its dreamy, if interminable, keyboard solo. To this mix, Alphabet Soup adds several more or less competent rappers. They trade off on the mic, jacking styles from Das EFX to Chuck D, but never venturing outside the formal slots provided for them in each composition. The final track, "Music In My Head," stands out by being just a little different; its dose of James Blood Ulmer-esque fusion is a welcome departure, if not exactly a trip. In theory, Alphabet Soup is a great idea—a hip-hop group that plays jazz instead of just offering props to it. Unfortunately, without strong compositions, they just come off like US 3 or the Digables without the beats.
—Andrea Moed

DATALOG: Release date: Jan. 24. First single "Take A Ride."

FILE UNDER: Resuscitation of the cool.

R.I.Y.L.: B.Y.O.B., US 3.



A PRESS RELEASE WE DID FINISH READING: "God knows why punk rock had to become the dull, miserable, sub-goth, PC-OR-DIE, strictly-by-the-rules, straightedge-vegan-sexless-moshpitt-weight-lifting/biceps-flexing Rollins hardboy-etc. fascistic sub-clone sectorization piece of shit that it has been and probably always will be, but if you've got half a brain, why not USE IT and DO YOUR OWN FUCKING THING!"

—Crypt records impresario Tim Warren, from a press release for the New Bomb Turks' *Information Highway Revisited*.

It's almost unfathomable that this is the first real, tangible, legitimate, *previously-unreleased* piece of Beatles product to emerge since the 28-minute *Live At The Hollywood Bowl*. But it is, and with all the very British fanfare, pomp and circumstance befitting the BBC, the release of this two-CD set is being heralded as an historic event.

Even Derek Taylor, legendary Beatle friend and press agent, has been dusted off to contribute a chipper liner essay about the good old days.

It's a glimpse of four rough, scruffy, loveable lads, relatively fresh from hellish stints at the Cavern Club and Hamburg, making the shift to pop stardom, switching from leather pants, pills and sideburns to suits, limousines, wives, and hordes of screaming girls on the street every time they want to run to the corner to pick up a pint of milk.

They were people on the brink of turning into a commodity, four musicians on their way to revolutionizing the way that music was played, sung and sold—the real *Backbeat* band, if you will.

About half of it, the truly great stuff—previously unofficially-released rockers and crooners like “Clarabella,” “Hippy Hippy Shake,” “Some Other Guy,” “To Know Her Is To Love Her” and “Soldier Of Love”—seems to leap out amidst the overheard hits like “Things We Said Today” or “A Hard Day’s Night.” Sometimes, after having heard the polished originals fifty billion times, hearing just a subtle difference in a live version jolts you like a jab of electricity, a powerful reminder that yes, indeed, all this really happened once, however long ago it may seem and however much the world may have changed.

It's also pretty amazing what comes out when you're listening today in 1995, especially the seemingly-inocuous, chatty little comedy skits sprinkled between tracks. For one thing, it's clear that even in 1964, John Lennon was running rings around everybody. He comically mangles lyrics (a line from “I’m A Loser” is rendered as “beneath this wig I am wearing a tie,” a possible dig at either the absurdity of Beatlemania in general or at stuffy BBC-types trying to cop hipness to “teen” audiences), verbally assaults announcers right and left, and slips in numerous digs and jabs at Paul that happen so fast and so subtly, you can't even be really sure they ever happened at all (“so here's Paul, whistling ‘Clarabella!’” goes one subtly smirking intro, as if McCartney were some kind of vaudeville talent show contestant). The crowning moment comes from an interview the week after Lennon's *In His Own Write* was published, where a spectacularly clueless BBC announcer interviews Paul about his singing influences while John keeps interrupting, shouting “What about my book then? What about my book?” in the background.

The last selection is “Love Me Do,” the song that launched the careers of the lads from Liverpool. Heard in the context of the early stuff here, it's a fitting finale, for where these early recordings end, their story really begins; having conquered England, they were about to board a TWA airliner and deliver the diversionary anaesthetic America needed after the numbing shock of JFK's assassination. Baby-boomer nostalgia is like a patient in psychoanalysis, reaching back to its most distant, most powerful, formative memories, trying to figure out who it really is and how it got to where it is today. And the Beatles in '64, as one of the most powerful totems of the era, represent the moment when the '50s were over for good and the '60s really started to get wild. *Live At The BBC* gives a glimpse of innocence before corruption, of music that wanted to hold your hand without some other more sinister, ulterior motive, songs that saw you standing there instead of invading your life through video or TV commercials. From a group whose later record label featured a picture of an apple, this is music from before the fall. —James Lien

DATALOG: Release date: Dec. 6. Compiled by George Martin.

FILE UNDER: Beat groups.

R.I.Y.L.: *Backbeat*, Buddy Holly, pre-draft Elvis.



BÜGSKÜLL Phantasies And Senseitions *Road Cone*

Depending on your perspective, BÜGSKÜLL is either a parody of a fringe jazz ensemble or a very puzzling rock band. Within a single song, the group may go from demure indie strumming to tape-loop alchemy to psychedelia. They sing sweet ballads and make noise collages, usually at the same time. On their debut album, *Phantasies and Senseitions*, they create a whole new kind of fusion, and the beauty of it is that they don't seem to care. BÜGSKÜLL treats its melodies so casually that tracks like "Elfin Magic" and "Olympic" verge on ambience, like muddied, percussionless Orbital songs. Nonetheless, every so often a submerged tune breaks the surface of electronic gurgle and fuzz, sung by Sean Byrne in a voice that makes the guy from Codeine sound perky. Like jazz riffs, these songs are simple, repetitive, and lodge easily in the brain. Other tracks are more purely products of BÜGSKÜLL's will to be weird, such as the whispered epic "Concave Life" and "Space," a baroque assemblage of wacky electronic effects *a la* Sun Ra. If this album is their attempt to defy categorization, well, it's working.

—Andrea Maed

DATALOG: Release date: Jan. 15.

FILE UNDER: Spaced-out basement tapers.

R.I.Y.L.: Shrimp Boat, Labradford, The Dead C.



CARDINAL Cardinal *Flydaddy*

When he was in a band called the Moles, Cardinal frontman Richard Davies drifted from Australia to England to NY and now Boston trying to get something going. With that band now dissolved, Davies has teamed up with Eric Matthews to form Cardinal. If the break-up left him feeling a bit blue, Cardinal offers evidence that Davies may have found his solace in the effortless melancholy and harmonies of early Bee Gees records and, especially, Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys. Davies gives Wilson's moodiness a crisp, decidedly British jacket, peppering the album with horns, strings, harpsichord and exquisite bridges, intros and fills. There are moments of such melodic ease and splendor on *Cardinal* that the rest of the album runs the risk of sounding a bit plain beside them. Case in point: "You've Lost Me There," with one of the most indelible sing-along choruses since "Hey Jude." Davies himself was so taken by the chorus that he chose to repeat it for the last two minutes of the track. Despite Cardinal's crafty musical nature, its studio treatments are relatively spare, avoiding the studio obsessiveness that makes many sycophantic revivalists of this sort of complex pop seem just plain silly. To keep things rooted in the real world, Cardinal's songs often hum, buzz and rattle like unskilled indie rock, but Davies and Matthews are never so coy that they hide a melody in sloppiness; they just keep their talents on the casual side.

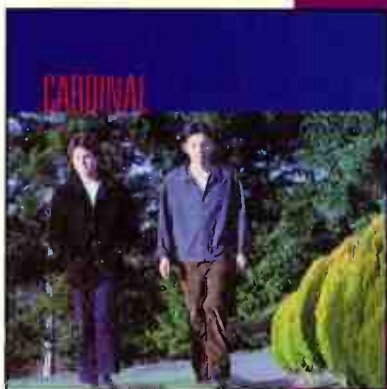
—Steve Ciabottoni

DATALOG: Release date: Oct. 11. First single "If You Believe In Christmas Trees."

Cardinal's "Dream Figure" appeared on CMJ's January CD.

FILE UNDER: Melancholy bliss.

R.I.Y.L.: Pet Sounds, the Chills, Epic Soundtracks.



CERTAIN DISTANT SUNS Happy On The Inside *Giant*

Certain Distant Suns dance around categorization like a cat across a bed of hot coals. The 10 tracks on *Happy On The Inside*, the band's major label debut, compiling two independently released EPs, bounce from genre to genre pretty radically, indicating either an intensely versatile bunch of guys or one searching for a stylistic identity. Beginning with a couple of salutes to melodic modern pop (lushly produced radio-ready dance grooves cut with guitar), the quintet's journey ends up traversing regions of R&B, new wave, and ambient music. The band's eagerness to explore sometimes leads it to unwelcoming territory. The 11-minute-plus "Crustacean" features the band lost in a maze of trance-oriented ambient sounds; OK if you specialize in that sort of thing, oh-no if you don't. More often, though, the sophisticated textures of the band's sampling, keyboards and vocals come together brilliantly, as on "Whatever" and "Round," and "Talk" heats up fast with a danceably abrasive guitar riff. When CDS follows that course, its eclectic capabilities stay on track, making up for those times when the excursions seem less well-planned.

—Bob Gullo

DATALOG: Release date: Jan. 24. First single "Bitter." Touring in February.

FILE UNDER: Eclectic, dance-based modernisms.

R.I.Y.L.: Flock Of Seagulls, The Cure, EMF.





CLUSTER *one hour*
CLUSTER *One Hour Gyroscope-Caroline*

Though relatively unknown in the States, Hans Joachim Roedelius and Dieter Moebius have been twiddling knobs, pressing buttons and tweaking amplitude for over 20 years. The German duo has amassed some 70 recordings as Cluster and with other collaborators, such as Brian Eno and members of Can. *One Hour* is exactly that, one hour of continuous electronic noodling trimmed from four hours of live improvisations. Like a soundtrack to some imaginary movie, the music engenders fantasies of spires rising out of sight into wispy clouds and journeys into other such exotic landscapes. Throughout, the clean, bright tones continue chiming, so don't bother turning up your bass knob. There's no denying this is disciplined listening, with rewards for those who delight in witnessing faint twists and turns in sonic landscapes that sound like just one sliver of a heavily-layered ambient record. Imagine listening to just the left channel of an Orb album. Try putting this record on every day for a week while you're doing something else; it's sure to latch onto the senses and become a cozy part of your consciousness. —Steve Ciabattani

DATALOG: Release date: Jan. 17.

FILE UNDER: Ambient jam session.

R.I.Y.L.: Brian Eno, Tangerine Dream, Kitaro.


COMBINE *Norfolk, VA Caroline*

Bands such as Combine are springing up all over in the excitable post-Fugazi world. Originally released on their own Staplegun Records label, this young band's debut wisely leaves Fugazi's funk toyings alone, concentrating on the stop/start rhythms, forceful vocals and slashing guitar leads. Each song wields its own hook, although sometimes that hook consists of just the band's aggressive stance. Combine uses punk energy, but in its best moments fuses it to a more complex song structure, making it less immediate than the current retro-punk outfits. It's clear from the song titles and lyrics that the band is struggling against just that sort of simplicity, from the grind of "Chester Valley Sr. Prom 1962" to the churn of "Suckboy Vs. The Hermaphrodite." Throughout the record, the music strips, layer by layer, and re-builds the songs, each of the instruments falling away only to plunge all together into the fray. While that technique may have been used many times before, it has by no means lost its charm, and Combine's ability to stick to what it knows makes *Norfolk, VA* a satisfying listen. —Elisabeth Bennett

DATALOG: Release date: Jan. 24.

FILE UNDER: Acerbic post-adolescent noise.

R.I.Y.L.: Fugazi, Helmet.

ARTIST FEATURED ON THIS MONTH'S CD

R.I.Y.L.: RECOMMENDED IF YOU LIKE



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THE CRUEL SEA *The Honeymoon Is Over* **A&M**

In its native Australia, The Cruel Sea is wildly popular, beating out national heroes like Crowded House and Midnight Oil for that country's Grammy-equivalents, but this is the band's first American release. *The Honeymoon Is Over* is split equally between instrumentals and proper songs. The former are the intriguing, though slick, brainchild of guitarist Danny Rumour, whose adept slide work is the centerpiece of the evocative, groove-oriented landscapes the band erects around him. The better tracks ("Sly Din," the didgeridoo-colored "Orleans Stomp") call up exotic outback landscapes in the manner of late-period Triffids. The other half of the album adds the darker musings of Tex Perkins, who Stateside followers of Down Under rock may recall from the Beasts Of Bourbon, Slug, and the excellent Salamander Jim. But where those bands fell squarely in the grand Australian tradition of bent, angular garage rock, Rumour and company supply a far more conventional setting for Perkins' blues-derived lyrics ("I'm the delivery man/I can bring it to your door in the middle of the night") and brooding vocals, both of which invite inevitable Nick Cave comparisons. The band's facile musicianship and Perkins' theatrical delivery combine effectively on the Stonesish title track and "Let's Lay Down Here & Make Love," with its deep, twangy guitar, but are merely jarring on the dub-inflected "Naked Flame." If you've ever wondered what "King Ink" would sound like if the Bad Seeds were Juluka, *The Honeymoon Is Over* is just the ticket.

—Franklin Bruno

DATALOG: Release date: Jan. 24.

FILE UNDER: Adult Australian Alternative.

R.I.Y.L.: Juluka, Hunters & Collectors, The Rolling Stones' Voodoo Lounge.

CUB *Come Out, Come Out* **Mint (Canada)**

Want to piss off a morose, snide indie-rocker in no time flat? Put on a Cub record. Your glum friend will be trying to tear your eyes out within seconds. These three Canadian women are avatars of all that is cute and charming. On this, their second album, they jangle and chirp through 13 adorable nuggets of snugly niceness, including suitably boppy covers of Yoko Ono and the Go-Go's. In their universe, "New York City" rhymes with "young and pretty." Even "Life Of Crime," nominally an attempt at bitterness, ends up evoking an irrepressible you're-cute-when-you-get-angry response. Somehow, though, Cub doesn't cross the line into actual saccharine or infantilism. The band simply acknowledges that there are times in life when you feel like singing "tra la la," and that you just have to let it out and damn the consequences; when they sing about being excited at traveling to meet a loved one, it's underpinned with genuine sexual longing. It also helps that their simple surf-pop melodies are so goddamn catchy. And really: is Lisa Cub's stage persona any more artificial than, say, Nick Cave's or Trent Reznor's? Can you deal with emotional pop that's not about anguish? Are you scared to get happy?

—Douglas Wolk

DATALOG: Release date: Jan. 15. CD version includes a techno remix of "Go Fish"; multi-colored triple-7" version includes a live-over-the-telephone version of "My Chinchilla."

FILE UNDER: Really, really cute pop.

R.I.Y.L.: The Modern Lovers, Beat Happening, Heavenly.

EDSEL *Detroit Folly* **Grass**

Beyond reference points to the vaguely depressive obsolescence embodied in its name, Edsel is a tough band to nail down. Up to now, it's straddled the fence between post-punk-haze ballads and experimental art-funk without the clear design of ex-Edselite Eli Janney's Girls Against Boys. That, of course, has been typical of most groups that have followed in the footsteps of Sonic Youth. But unlike even the Sonics themselves, Edsel have matured in both demeanor and execution. *Detroit Folly* (the title a pun that belies the album's seriousness) connects the dots of Edsel's sketchy past. While the lyrics of Sohrab Habibon and Steve Raskin still read like unconstructed haikus and Western Union poetry, the band's production (recorded during a week's sojourn in a remote cabin—really) fills the gaps with a clarity underground bands rarely allow themselves, creating the sort of sentimental clarity you feel on a sunny snow-covered morning. If Thurston Moore ever wiped the smirk off his face, he'd probably sound like this.

—Eric Gladstone

DATALOG: Release date: Dec. 6.

FILE UNDER: Indie-rock classicism.

R.I.Y.L.: Sonic Youth's *Daydream Nation*, Polvo.



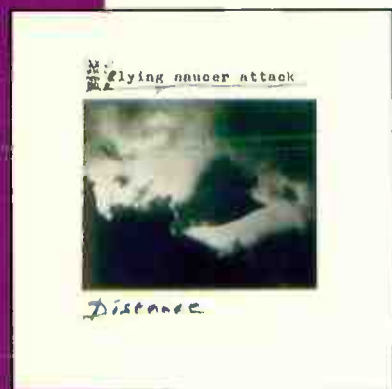
"I was arrested for standing up for my identity. [freedom of expression and breast size]—**Andover (MA) High School** honor student **Jyonne Nicoletti**, on her arrest for refusing to change out of a **White Zombie** t-shirt depicting two large-busted women.


EMERGENCY BROADCAST NETWORK *Telecommunication Breakdown* **TVT**

Emergency Broadcast Network snagged the opening video slot on U2's Zoo TV Tour with its clip of George Bush, aided by nimble off-line video editing, singing "We Will Rock You," and turned Gulf War coverage on its head on its EP, *Commercial Entertainment Product*. *Telecommunication Breakdown* is the soundtrack CD to EBN's upcoming long-form videotape and interactive CD-ROM. Since EBN's motherlode is TV imagery, the video is probably the buy; in the meantime, the CD is a clever, beat-heavy situationist *mille foglie* of soundbites and breakbeats. Produced by Jack Dangers of Meat Beat Manifesto (with additional remixes and production by Brian Eno and Bill Laswell), *Telecommunication Breakdown* is musically thicker than *Commercial Entertainment Product*. The record marries up-to-the-minute ambient textures and jiggling technoid beats wisely; it moves too swiftly to be mistaken for another fluffy cloud cover. At its best, EBN goes beyond clever juxtapositions of dopey exclamations to convey the vertiginous, morally numb flea market that TV can be—check out "Shoot The Mac 10" with guest vocalist Melle Mel, a convulsive meditation on the urge to buy, sell and use guns. Others also stand tall without visuals—"Get Down" sounds like skeet shooters diggin' in the crates, while "3:78" is loopy acid jazz playing chicken on the information highway with headless talking heads. The remaining beats (generally uptempo) and sonics won't melt your antenna, but when they work, EBN's tracks take you to the land where the people inside your TV actually exist. And if you can keep your lunch down, you can dance while you're there. —Sasha Frere-Janes

DATALOG: Release date: Jan. 24. First single and video "Electronic Behavior Control System."
FILE UNDER: Multimedia barrage.

R.I.Y.L.: Negativland, Messiah, Coldcut, Material.


FLYING SAUCER ATTACK *Distance* **VHF**

"Greybeat" was a sometimes derogatory term for the wave of post-Joy Division synth bands with few electro-pop sympathies; the dark (but not yet goth) rhythmic soundscapes of Crispy Ambulance, Section 25 or the earliest New Order. Oddly enough, there's a greybeat revival afoot in the mid-'90s, and Flying Saucer Attack are in the murky thick of it. *Distance* compiles a series of recent (and mostly out of print) 7" releases, showcasing the several sides of this Bristol outfit's turgidly beautiful music. "Oceans" is an onomatopoeic instrumental—lush, sweeping and dirty, with spare tribal puntings for beats, atmospheric but a little mean. "Standing Stone," the album's standout, sounds like one of those swoony British "Aah" bands in an electrified hanger. FSA's strength is more sound than song; think of the first Jesus And Mary Chain, the absurd (and brilliant) crackle of distortion constantly threatening to blot out the melody. The previously unreleased material is weaker; there's a hissy toss-off, another duller rendering of "Oceans," and a massively reverbed (and more than mildly pretentious) acoustic track—a perhaps unfortunate tiding of things to come (their next LP on Drag City, is rumored to be all-acoustic). *Distance* is nonetheless an excellent and rewarding compilation, snapshots of a buzz-heavy band in its sonic prime. —Michael Vazquez

DATALOG: Release date: Oct. 24.

FILE UNDER: The poetry of digital delay.

R.I.Y.L.: Jesus And Mary Chain, My Bloody Valentine, Chrome.


FUN ^ DA ^ MENTAL *Seize The Time* *Beggars Banquet/Mammoth-Atlantic*

Is Fun ^ Da ^ Mental the British PE? Not quite, although its radical politics and stacked samples beg the comparison. Haq Newaz Qureshi and Dave Watts—the group's core—rap about race in a different voice: The two are, respectively, first-generation Pakistani and Afro-Caribbean Brits. The England they've been born into is 95% white, and rife with racial beatings. The two know that their skin color could cost them their lives. *Seize The Time* is their fight back. Sifting through racial, religious, and British identities, the two relay their own version of history. Lyrics check their intellectual influences—the Black Panthers, Islam, women's rights—as much as the music's dub basslines, tablas, and Eastern flutes highlight their heritage. "Dog Tribe" epitomizes the mix; Reiterating that "self-defense is no offense," the song's feeling of *jihad* is pushed forward by goading horns and hard beats. Though the reference points may seem foreign—British rap, like all hip-hop, is rooted in the vernacular—the songs' message of respect is universal. These are no drive-by gangsta beatdowns, but rather tough talk that's genuine. Check the clock. —Julie Taraska

DATALOG: Release date: Feb. 14. Touring this spring.

FILE UNDER: Eastern-tinged righteous rap.

R.I.Y.L.: Public Enemy, Apache Indian, Last Poets.

GASTR DEL SOL *Mirror Repair* Drag City

David Grubbs used to be in a great punk rock band called Squirrel Bait, and later fronted the fast, hard, arty ensemble Bastro. Jim O'Rourke is a young avant-garde guitarist who's intimately familiar with the works of hundreds of 20th-century composers few people have ever heard of. Together, they form the core of Gastr Del Sol. The group's last record, *Crookt, Crakt Or Fly*, was fascinating but difficult listening—you could sense a dense compositional strategy going on, but it was oblique enough that you had to pay close attention to enjoy it. The EP *Mirror Repair* is less a follow-up than a refinement of that album. Its structure is mapped closely on *Crookt's*, and it's just as overtly brainy, but it's shorter, more to the point and easier to listen to casually. "Eight Corners," its nine-minute centerpiece, starts with a bit of art-song, then goes into a long piano obbligato that's actually really pretty—when a cluster of squealing woodwinds join in toward the end, it's strangely relieving, like watching a flock of geese take flight. The parts recognizable as rock are restricted to a single track, halfway through the record: "Dictionary Of Handwriting," a blistering series of variations on a polyrhythmic guitar/drum groove. Listen to *Mirror Repair* as background music, and it's unusual and nice; attune yourself to it, and it'll take your brain to some new places. —Joan Durrell



DATALOG: Release date: Nov. 18.

FILE UNDER: Experimental music in casual clothing.

R.I.Y.L.: John Cage, Brian Eno, King Crimson.

HAZEL *Are You Going To Eat That* Sub Pop

I was glad to see that Jody Bleyle, Hazel's drummer, had started playing bass and guitar in Team Dresch, Portland, Oregon's "lesbionic" supergroup. I was also a bit bummed, because Hazel's debut, *Toreador Of Love*, was a nifty and tragically underrated record, and I thought we'd never know if the band could top it. It turns out Hazel is still together, and still includes Bleyle. Even better, *Are You Going To Eat That* does indeed top *Toreador Of Love*. Sure the guitars have bite, but that's not necessarily what Hazel is interested in—it's as if the band's saying "we *could* rock more if we wanted to, but then anybody can, so what's the point?" In that respect, they're like late-period Hüsker Dü, when they dropped the hardcore and embraced the melody. There aren't many bands that can write mid-tempo songs that aren't dirgey or mopey or whiny. Hazel is one of them. When the group slows down, it's not to play self-pitying "slow-rock"; instead, it's reflective, wistful and even, dare I say, tender. Witness the wonderful girl/boy harmonies of Bleyle and guitarist Peter Krebs on "Crowned" and "King Twist." This is a band that dares to wear its heart on its sleeve, but won't embarrass you with uncalled-for confessions. These songs could be your best friends. Embrace them warmly. —Elisabeth Vincentelli



DATALOG: Release date: Feb. 14.

FILE UNDER: Admit it, you're a helpless romantic.

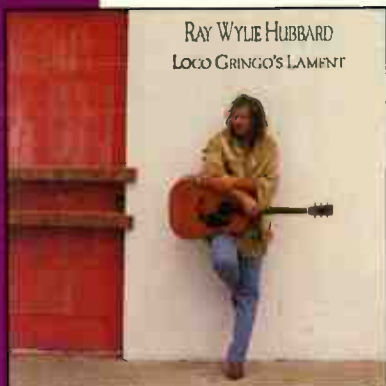
R.I.Y.L.: X, late Hüsker Dü.

"Early in his career, [blues pianist Little Brother] Montgomery had suffered a nervous breakdown while performing "Vicksburg Blues" in a Vicksburg barrelhouse called Zack's Place. On that occasion, Sam Chatmon [later of the Mississippi Shieks] had begun playing with him, only to find that Montgomery would not stop performing the song.

"Me and him started together, look like close to two hours: stayed on steady-playin'...I quit and left him sittin' there playin' 'cause I could see he wasn't gonna quit, so I just got up and quit myself. When the man [owner] seed he wasn't gonna quit, well, he called the law, and the law come in there and went there to try to talk to him and he just never did stop, he didn't pay this law no attention: just kept right on playin'. He just actin' crazy: I got outta the way."

"Montgomery was dragged off to Whitfield, the state insane asylum near Jackson."

—Stephen Carr, from *I'd Rather Be The Devil: Skip James & The Blues*


RAY WYLIE HUBBARD *Loco Gringo's Lament* *Dejadisc*

Ray Wylie Hubbard is forever linked to Jerry Jeff Walker, who turned the Hubbard-penned "Up Against The Wall, Redneck Mother" into a Lost Gonzo Band anthem on Walker's classic early '70s album, *Viva Terlingua*. While Hubbard had a self-released record out in 1993, which pretty much never got out of the Lone Star State, *Loco Gringo's Lament* is his first nationally released album in far too many years. This forceful set of songs makes it obvious that Hubbard's moved to the next level as a songwriter. Throughout, the record has a sound akin to the latest work of other Texas renegade honky-tonkers like Jimmie Dale Gilmore and Joe Ely. Songs like "Dust Of The Chase," "Didn't Have A Prayer," "Little Angel Comes A Walkin'" and the title track have a lean, dark edge, whether electric or acoustic, and lyrics that always ring true. With some of the top players from Austin—Lisa Mednick, Danny Levin, Iain Matthews, Rich Brotherton, Paul Percy and Bob Livingston all make appearances—and a first-class producer in Lloyd Maines, Hubbard has come up with one of the best records out of Texas in quite some time.

—Jim Caligiuri

DATALOG: Release date: Oct. 4.

FILE UNDER: Top-shelf Texas honky-tonk.

R.I.Y.L.: Billy Joe Shaver, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Jerry Jeff Walker.


JAYHAWKS *Tomorrow The Green Grass* *American*

Arriving at a time when country-flavored "alternative" singers hide behind layers of pretension, cracking their voices every other note 'cause they think it's expressive, and when most of the music coming out of Nashville has more to do with *Star Search* than honky-tonks, the earnest country-rock of *Tomorrow The Green Grass* is pretty refreshing. Minneapolis' Jayhawks are not a straight country band, but singers Mark Olson and Gary Louris are two of the finest country singers around, able to create rock 'n' roll that recalls the Louvin Brothers. When their two voices blend, a third emerges, fragile, sad and lonely, articulating everything the lyrics never could. Standout tunes like "Blue," "Nothing Left To Borrow," "Over My Shoulder" and "Red's Song" exude innocence that never sounds practiced and a simplicity that's universal, but more importantly, their simple hooks make it impossible not to sing along. Cynics will dismiss *Green Grass* as an inconsequential extension of the bland country-rock monster created by the Eagles and their ilk, and when the Hawks fall short it can be hard for fans to argue their defense. George Drakoulias' production can be distracting when it gets too AOR-slick; the band's attempts at rocking out can be flaccid, while other songs, short on the usual hooks and soul, drag the Jayhawks into numbing MOR territory. But when they're on, the Jayhawks are the only feasible heir to the Byrds, the Everly Brothers and Gram Parsons.

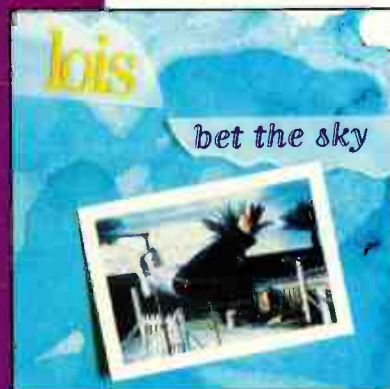
—Steve McGuire

DATALOG: Release date: Feb. 14. First single "Blue."

Also highly recommended: the Jayhawks' 1989 Twin/Tone LP, *Blue Earth*.

FILE UNDER: Country-rock.

R.I.Y.L.: Neil Young, Uncle Tupelo, Flying Burrito Brothers, Everly Brothers (esp. mid-late '60s).


LOIS *Bet The Sky* *K*

The pleasures of Lois Maffeo's records are modest but abundant. Accompanied by her toothy acoustic guitar, strummed quietly but hard (she doesn't use that many chords, but they're cool chords) and, occasionally, spartan drumming (here courtesy Heather Dunn), her voice wafts over the ten tracks of *Bet The Sky* like a silk handkerchief. But Lois demonstrates neatly the difference between featherweight and insubstantial: she's a favorite among bands much louder than hers (Fugazi's Brendan Canty plays on a few songs here, and her "Valentine" is quickly becoming an indie-rock standard). That's due, in part, to her deft, shyly witty songs (the chorus of "Charles Atlas" goes "I loved the boy who kicked the sand/Long before the arms made the man"); it's also admiration for her gift for making the most of what she has. For a while, Lois's live shows were far too rock; occasionally, fortuitously, a string would break and she'd finish a song in breathtaking *acappella*. On *Bet The Sky*, she's gone acoustic again, and she's letting her voice carry the music. She can wrap it around a slip of a melody like "Shy Town" and turn the song into a cool balm for whatever ails you, reassuring and comforting, like a long, tender goodnight kiss.

—Douglas Wolk

DATALOG: Release date: Jan. 24. First single "Shy Town."

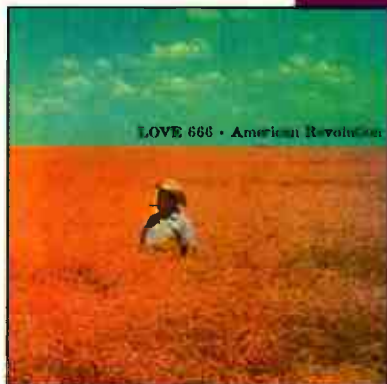
FILE UNDER: Gentle, substantive acoustic pop.

R.I.Y.L.: Liz Phair, Suzanne Vega, Barbara Manning.

LOVE 666 American Revolution *Amphetamine Reptile*

While pretty much every AmRep release toes a philosophical line summed up by the title of the label's continuing compilation series, *Dope, Guns And Fucking In The Streets*, few have matched this heretofore unknown trio in terms of sheer insurrection. Borrowing from the White Panther screeds of John Sinclair (and his henchmen in the MC5) and the sonic pyrotechnics of contemporaneous free jazzers, Love 666 has built a world where drugs and street terrorism are the only currency worth holding. Missives like "MDMA" and "Take A Chance On Death" employ enough brain-jarring tricks—from treated vocals to sampled dialogue to discomfiting Teutonic melodies—to foment the kind of Congressman-slaying reaction these Virginians so tirelessly advocate. If the SLA were able to reconvene and rule, they'd no doubt find a national anthem in here somewhere. —David Sprague

DATALOG: Release date: Jan. 20. Touring through February.
FILE UNDER: Armed and extremely dangerous.
R.I.Y.L.: MC5, Chrome, Laughing Hyenas.



NICK LOWE The Impossible Bird *Rounder*

Nick Lowe's best and best-known songs are ultra-catchy nuggets of cynical rancor like "Marie Provost" (about a silent-era star who dies alone, only to be eaten by her dog) and "Cruel To Be Kind" (which defined the dysfunctional relationship years before Oprah). So it's a bit dismaying to hear him singing about a "Soulful Wind" that will fill the world "with a powerful love" on *The Impossible Bird's* opening track. Has the man who used to sing about castrating Castro to faux-jackson 5 backing gone suddenly sincere? Well, not entirely. The black humor and ringing Rockpile guitars are gone, but Lowe is still a stylistic chameleon, offering acoustic self-pity one minute ("The Beast In Me," a Lowe song covered by Johnny Cash on *American Recordings*) and wedding-sermon homilies the next ("True Love Travels On A Gravel Road") with equally understated conviction. Musically, the album is accomplished and low-key, recalling the days when the same musicians played country sessions one day and soul the next. The rich-toned organ contributions are especially welcome, and "Trail Of Tears" ends with a coolly controlled guitar duel. The album's highlights come late, with the slightly more propulsive rockabilly of "I Live On A Battlefield" ("My new home is a shell hole filled... with bits of broken heart") and the witty kiss-off of "14 Days." All told, the emotions never get too heated, and many songs are ultimately just exercises in craft, which isn't always a bad thing. In today's grungeland of forced catharsis, the fact that Lowe plays his cards close to the vest is refreshing, but he could still take a lesson from the undiluted venom of his old pal Elvis Costello's *Brutal Youth* (on which he played bass). Oh, and Lowe's American accent is still more convincing than Joe Jackson's. —Franklin Bruno

DATALOG: Release date: Nov. 29.
FILE UNDER: Genteel country-rock with a genial, slightly untrustworthy host.
R.I.Y.L.: Lyle Lovett, Loudon Wainwright III, Richard Thompson.



MECCA NORMAL Sitting On Snaps *Matador*

Feminist theorist Laura Mulvey has written about her theory of non-phallogocentric film, which would liberate cinema from the tyranny of narrative and concentrate instead on impression and experience. For almost ten years, the Canadian duo Mecca Normal has been pulling off the pop-music equivalent of Mulvey's ideas: eschewing verse-chorus-hook hegemonies in favor of free-flowing structures, and finding a new sonic language for rock—one that doesn't need bass and drums and the rigid walls they put around songs. So what makes it rock? Try David Lester's ferocious, very macho guitar playing—even when he's playing quietly, his amp is turned up so loud that the slightest motion of his fingers is audible, and he knows the value of a good power-chord windmill. Throw in Jean Smith's vowel-mangling, consonant-stretching contralto and abstract-poetic lyrics—and, generally, no other instruments at all—and the result is a brilliant, startling signature sound. By last year's *Flood Plain*, though, the band had painted itself into a corner: "oh, another Mecca Normal record." On *Sitting On Snaps*, Smith and Lester have liberated themselves again, this time from their own stylistic constraints. The first sound we hear is a piano; their newly expanded sonic palette also includes bits of cello and acoustic guitar, lots of well-deployed overdubs, and even (startlingly, at the end of a song, *once*) a cymbal. You can still identify it as Mecca Normal from any given two seconds, but the band has given itself room to breathe, and it's the best move it's ever made. —Douglas Wolk

DATALOG: Release date: Jan. 24.
FILE UNDER: Utterly distinctive indie-rock.
R.I.Y.L.: Gastr Del Sol, Diamanda Galas, quieter Sonic Youth.



**BHEKI MSELEKU** *Meditations* Verve

Bheki Mseleku (say Becky M-sah-lay-coo) left South Africa in the '80s to live in London, and of late, the pianist's massive talent has been gaining more recognition all over the globe, with three records released domestically in 1994 alone. Recorded live in England in 1992, *Meditations* features two solo pieces, adding up to 46 minutes of music. Mseleku's style is free-flowing, but never erratic or indulgent. Each piece goes through seamless transformations, flowing from gospel and Christian tempos towards sultry African bop, with stops in between for New Orleans rags and other jazz cradles. Pianists Glenn Gould and Keith Jarrett are well known for their humming, grunting and other extraneous exclamations, but Mseleku's yaps and yowls are more than just hoots while lost in a groove—they're part of the groove. His African chants are stinging and melodic, transforming his rolling chords into tones that wake the gods. What's more, you'll probably do a double take while listening to "Meera-Ma," which features Mseleku on piano and sax *simultaneously*. In addition to the chanting, Mseleku emits vivid moans from his sax while laying down piano chords. It's stunning listening for its virtuosity alone, yet the pensive and evocative nature of the work far outshines the multi-instrumental wizardry.

—Steve Ciabattone



DATALOG: Release date: Oct. 18. Also recommended: Mseleku's last LP *Timelessness*, featuring Joe Henderson, Pharoah Sanders and Abbey Lincoln.

FILE UNDER: Channeling the spirits.

R.I.Y.L.: Keith Jarrett, Abdullah Ibrahim, Thelonious Monk.

VARIOUS ARTISTS *The Music Of Changes: A Brief History Of Ambient, Vol. 3* Virgin

As with other discs in this series, it's a bit limiting to describe everything on *The Music Of Changes* as being strictly ambient, unless taken in the classic Eno sense of the word as meaning "atmospheric music" rather than today's mish-mosh of electronica. What is to be found here is a true mix of different musical styles, compositional forms, and sensibilities. Present and accounted for are many of the forefathers of today's ambient scene, the electronic and exotic pioneers of the '70s and '80s, including Brian Eno, David Sylvian, Ryuichi Sakamoto, Bill Laswell, Robert Fripp and Holger Czukay. Also in the mix are some of today's trailblazers, such as William Orbit and Future Sound Of London (and the latter's alter ego Amorphous Androgynous). Rounding out the compilation are world-music artists who have served as major influences to the electronic musicians. The Tibetan troupe Shu-De are particularly amazing, with their deep-throated, spiritual Tuvan singing. Only completists (or trainspotters) might feel the lone possible disappointment to this beautiful collection: the fact that it contains no unreleased tracks other than Amorphous Androgynous' "A Study Of Six Guitars." Otherwise, it's a superb look of the history of something that's hard to define.

—Tamara Palmer



DATALOG: Release date: Jan. 10.

FILE UNDER: Avant-garde explorations.

R.I.Y.L.: Brian Eno, David Sylvian, Material, Future Sound Of London.

NEW BOMB TURKS *Information Highway Revisited* Crypt

1994 was the year that punk broke... down. Green Day and the Offspring went into heavy rotation at Top 40 radio stations, alongside Mariah Carey and Bryan Adams. Any beer-swilling college-age lunkhead knows all the words; MTV has muted the genre's high-voltage anger into a gentle buzz. In a decade where punk rock sells cars and beers, using it to sell records has become a non-issue. If the bi-coastal effort to market the redesigned Spirit of '77 leaves you limp, try Columbus, Ohio. Since surfacing in 1991, New Bomb Turks have issued close to a dozen seven-inches and EPs (on almost as many labels), and *Information Highway Revisited* is their second album. Blazing guitars dominate from the opening chords of "Id Slips In." The moments of respite are few but intense: a precious five second bassline opens "If I Could Only," and hyper-kinetic drumming blossoms into "Gotta Gotta Sinking Feeling." You wish that the band would slow down and savor the building momentum, but lacking patience (as do all good punk bands), NBT just climaxes song after song. A few tracks stray from the formulaic racing, most notably the harmonica at the end of "Lying On Our Backs" or the hot grind of "T.A.S." For the most part, though, NBT is just pure blast-from-the-past delirium, as only the Midwest could spawn.

—Megan McCarthy

DATALOG: Release date: Dec. 6.

FILE UNDER: Yelping, whelping punk rock.

R.I.Y.L.: The Pagans, the Stooges, Reverend Horton Heat.

PALACE SONGS Hope *Drag City*

When you're an unstoppable fountain of creativity, there's no sense in not letting it out. The frontman for Palace Songs/Palace Brothers/Palace, who's now calling himself "Push" (we fear that's short for "Pushkin"), is on a roll right now. This new EP is appearing just three months after the *Palace Brothers* album, and Drag City has just established a sub-label, Palace Recordings, to deal with the band's prodigious output (the first release, a 7" called "O How I Enjoy The Light," is available now by mail-order only). *Palace Brothers* was a frostbitten solo affair; the six songs of *Hope* are warmer and more familial, with a not-very-plugged-in band and lots of autumnal piano and organ parts. It could be a late-'60s soul record, if not for the straight-off-a-Folkways-Appalachian-field-recording vocals. What brings it all together are the songs, so graceful and natural they sound like they've slipped straight out of the collective unconscious into the recording studio—two listens and you'll swear you heard them somewhere as a child. "Agnes, Queen Of Sorrows" is less a song than a mantra with a chord progression, but it heads straight for the heart; the words to "All Gone, All Gone" devolve into "hey hey, hey hey," because that's all there is left to say. *Hope*, like other Palace records, is music for late nights, but this one's for late nights spent among longtime friends.

—Jen Garrison

DATALOG: Release date: Nov. 25.

FILE UNDER: Homey soul-folk.

R.I.Y.L.: Fairport Convention, slow Aretha Franklin, Leonard Cohen.



POND The Practice Of Joy Before Death *Sub Pop*

Portland's Pond is perhaps the most underrated of the Sub Pop clan. Its startling self-titled debut was a mix of soaring guitars and irresistible melody. Unfortunately, that record went largely unnoticed, but almost two years later, the band is back again with *The Practice Of Joy Before Death*, an auspicious return to form. Once again, the songs are loaded with gripping, kinetic melodies. This time around, however, the band loosens up and messes around with strange bent guitar licks, calling to mind the off-kilter sound of Polvo. A few tracks hint pointedly that they've been listening to bands from New Zealand's pop and noise scenes: noisy and experimental, yet beautifully coherent. Pond is at its best when the band pushes itself to the extreme, as on the howling "Carpenter Aunt" or the bass-fueled rocker "Sundial." This striking sophomore effort finds a more mature band advancing on its own successful formula, which should allow Pond to break out of the "best band you've never heard" sweepstakes.

DATALOG: Release date: Jan. 17.

FILE UNDER: Melodic guitar doodling.

R.I.Y.L.: Sugar, Straitjacket Fits, Built To Spill.



PRICK prick *Nothing-Interscope*

Prick would make a great lounge band. It'd be in a club perched on the cusp of one of Dante's outer circles of Hell, to be sure, but a great lounge band just the same. There's enough fuzzed-out guitar evil and sinister-sounding sampling to satisfy the Inferno in-crowd, but the band's melodic sensibilities are too strong and its pop aspirations too apparent for this Trent Reznor signing to fully descend into the noise Hell that their label boss so fully embraces these days. While the lounge band description may seem a coy dismissal of the band's efforts, Prick's is no mean feat: crossing infernal noise into the pop realm requires equal parts of songwriting smarts and industrial ingenuity. The music, at times, sports almost Beatle-esque melodies ("Communiqué") as it digs and claws at the open wounds of pop. Still, even the record's rougher raging-guitar moments never lapse into the lunkheaded abandon of a band content to lead a chorus of converts. For all its industrial flourishes (and for that matter, the instant associations that the name Reznor carries these days), Prick is less of an industrial band than a return to goth-rock. The technology and means may be state of the industry, but the effect is age-old. And all the better for it.

—Konrad Vost

DATALOG: Release date: Jan. 24. First single "Animal."

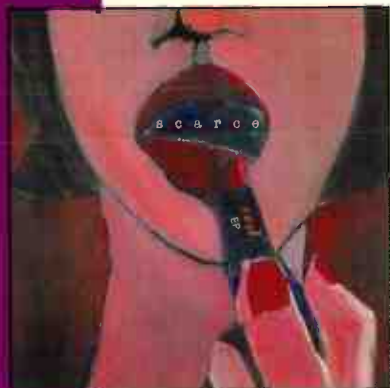
FILE UNDER: Gothic industry.

R.I.Y.L.: Shriekback, Nine Inch Nails, Foetus.



"When you have had a lot of bumps and grinds, eventually they come together as one like the body of Christ. Unity, cooperation and self respect have to do with success."

—The Amazing Delores, from the liner notes of her album *Stop Messin' With My Mind*.

**SCARCE** *Red (EP)* *Tumble Gear*

It's taken a dog's age for these songs to surface, but here they are at last, the first half-dozen nuggets from the Providence trio Scarce for public consumption. For a few years now, singer/songwriter/guitarist Chick Graning, bassist/songwriter Joyce Raskin, and drummer Jud Ehrbar (since departed) have supplied wonderfully difficult answers to simple pop equations. By seasoning deceptively uncomplicated melodies with an array of quirky vocal tricks and insightful storylines, the band has converted folks on both sides of the Atlantic into rabid fans, all without a big-deal recording contract. "Watching my friends going crazy; I'm going there too," Graning sings on the acoustic "Days Like This." On the melancholy "Something," he sings "Wish I was something/You needed something." Musically, Graning isn't far from where Kurt Cobain started in 1989, with a sharp vision, punk attitude, and buckets of exuberance. Cuts like "All Sideways" and "Scorpion Tray" resound with a pounding punk rock heart *à la* "Floyd The Barber," while the aforementioned "Something" could be an "All Apologies" for the New Alternatives. Graning and Raskin's wisdom and energy have kept Scarce on the cusp of stardom for some time now. There's some great stuff happening here; it's about time someone hears it.

—Bob Gulla

DATALOG: Release date: Nov. 22.**FILE UNDER:** Simple pop melodies with a punk rock heart.**R.I.Y.L.:** Nirvana, John Lennon, Anastasia Screamed (Graning's old band).**SIMPLE MINDS** *Good News From The Next World* *Virgin*

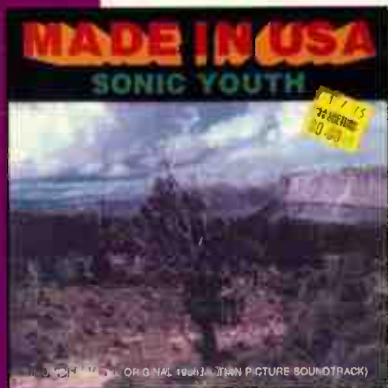
At their best, Simple Minds have always had this uncanny uplifting power about them. You could be in mid-bar fight, broken beer bottle in your hand, when someone punches up "Promised You A Miracle" on the jukebox—suddenly, you and your enemy feel the overwhelming urge to hug and make up. Hell, you could probably just drive a loudspeaked tank through the Middle East, blasting *Once Upon A Time*, for all those petty religious skirmishes to cease. The new India-recorded *Good News From The Next World* makes a nice addition to the celestial-sounding canon, awash in sweeping synths, cascading guitar streams, and Jim Kerr's monolithic, ultra-reverbed supplications. Typically, all nine tracks clock in at five minutes or more, giving Simple Minds ample time to canvass their panoramic terrain, from the monstrous Eastern-edged mix of the opening "She's A River" (which boasts a choir so loud it could crush those Mormon Tabernacle guys like so many insects) to the mechanical-metronomed "Hypnotized," the latter-day religious treatise "7 Deadly Sins" and the moody, foot-shuffling juggernaut "And The Band Played." If you thought *Jurassic Park's* T. Rex shook the earth when it moved, better grab ahold of something sturdy when Simple Minds come crashing through the village. Kerr and company have mastered the art of looking big, more grandiose than even Trent Reznor and all his industrial ilk. Don't argue with this enjoyable disc—just drop your weapons and surrender.

—Tom Lanham

DATALOG: Release date: Feb. 7.**FILE UNDER:** Grandiose pop.**R.I.Y.L.:** U2, Ike & Tina Turner.**SONIC YOUTH** *Made In The USA* *Rhino*

If you've followed Sonic Youth's career a bit too closely, you might remember that the band composed music for scenes in a 1988 independent film, *Made In The USA*. Not all the music made it into the film, and none was released until now. The 23 tracks here (only a handful could really be called songs) are mostly instrumental, and mostly the arty, ambient, fuzzy slabs of noise SY was known for in the '80s—though a few surprises, like acoustic guitar and harmonica, turn up, and several songs have a more conventional rock feel. Taken on their own, most of these tracks don't seem like much more than outtakes from 1986's *EVOL* (in fact, three variations on that album's distant, dreamlike "Secret Girls" appear here) or 1988's *Daydream Nation*. But they flow into a fairly cohesive, unobtrusive whole. Given the quiet nature of much of the material, this will probably be Sonic Youth's only long-player that you can as easily play in the background at, say, brunch with your parents as hear on the stereo at the local record store. *Made In The USA* isn't essential when compared to the band's "real" albums of the same period, but diehard fans should definitely consider it an excavated treasure.

—Katherine Hodges

DATALOG: Release date: Jan. 24.**FILE UNDER:** Surprisingly quiet soundtracks.**R.I.Y.L.:** SST-era Sonic Youth.

SONS OF ELVIS Glodean Priority

Polished is the first word to come to mind during a listen to *Glodean*, Sons Of Elvis' debut. Each of the album's nine tracks oozes with "big rock" flavor, a bombastic sound aided by the snappy production. Like Urge Overkill and D Generation, Sons Of Elvis are unflinching and unapologetic in their referentialism. The king-sized riffs are culled from the last two decades of hard rock and metal, restructured and spiffed up for the Lollapalooza generation. Packed with a diverse array of radio-friendly singles, *Glodean* is sure to be a hit with fans of guitar-powered rock and roll. The band even toys with funk-rock stylings, a la Big Chief and Rage Against The Machine. Though generally consistent, *Glodean* is bookended by its two best tracks, "Nothing Wrong," with its light but undeniable likeness to Smashing Pumpkins, and "Rattle," a guitar instrumental.

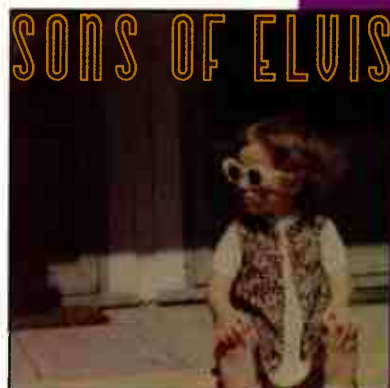
—Bryan McNamara

DATALOG: Release date: Dec. 6. First single and video "Formaldehyde."

The band named the album after Barry White's wife.

FILE UNDER: Arena-ready alterna-rock.

R.I.Y.L.: Smashing Pumpkins, Pearl Jam, Big Chief.



STONE ROSES Second Coming Geffen

What kind of *cojones* does it take to start a record off—not just any record, but one that fans and rock curiosity-seekers alike have been waiting more than five years for—with five minutes of gurgling water and frog sounds? Huge. Almost as big as it takes to name said record *Second Coming*. But for now, the Stone Roses can walk the walk. The record is filled with the sort of rocked-up blues licks and Faces-style funk that were resuscitated by the faddish British music scene last year, but unlike those artists that dove headlong into the sound (e.g. Primal Scream, Soup Dragons), the band still sounds very much like the Stone Roses that ascended to the top of the bygone Manchester music scene. If anything, *Second Coming* is proof that Manchester shuffle beats were never all that far from the guitar-band funk of late '60s/early '70s Britain to begin with. What's so odd, however, is how seamlessly these songs go from Southern-rock slide guitar licks and Zeppelin-esque guitar overtures, the sort of riffy noodling that you thought only existed in the captivity of classic rock radio, into one or another damnably catchy chorus. It's a record that works equally well as a dance club chill-out and a stadium rocker. Often when a band takes so long to follow a broadly successful debut, the ensuing record is such a mess of ambition and obsessive studio techniques that you half expect it to lift its head and whisper "the horror" at the end, but the Stone Roses have somehow managed to bundle up all those expectations into something of a *tour de force*. *Second Coming*, indeed.

—Elisabeth Bennett

DATALOG: Release date: Jan. 17.

FILE UNDER: Blues-rock shuffle beat.

R.I.Y.L.: Primal Scream, Black Crowes, Lenny Kravitz.

EPIC SOUNDTRACKS Sleeping Star Bar/None

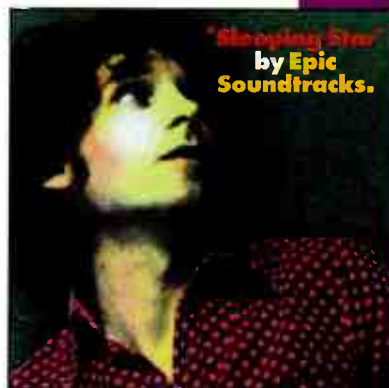
Back in the late '70s, when Epic Soundtracks was beating the heck out of the drums (or, as he called them, "drumms") for the Swell Maps, nobody could have suspected that behind that punk-weirdness exterior lay the soul of an old softie. As it turns out, all Epic ever wanted to be was Brian Wilson circa "Surf's Up" (a song he musically paraphrases a half-dozen times in the course of *Sleeping Star*), or at the very least Randy Newman on one of his less silly days: a sensitive aesthete, dryly pouring out his soul at the piano bench. At its worst, this leads to some painful banality—one song here is actually called "Baby I Love You," and very often his singing and piano playing recall the scene in *Monty Python Live At The Hollywood Bowl* where Neil Innes sings "How Sweet To Be An Idiot," except without the irony. But at times, the kind of back-to-basics moves Epic pulls help him get at a way of touching the soul. "Darling, oh my darling, I am at your command/You hold me like a flower you could crush in your hand" is the sort of line Robyn Hitchcock savages without even thinking about it, but when Epic sings it to a pre-fab '50s melody in "Tonight's The Night," it's moving because he means the sentiment (if, maybe, not the words). The five-note piano hook of "Tired Eyes" could not be simpler—that's its appeal. This is music to look out your window at a rainswept beach to.

—Violet Digby

DATALOG: Release date: Nov. 29.

FILE UNDER: Piano balladry.

R.I.Y.L.: Syd Barrett, Randy Newman, John Cale.




THREE MILE PILOT *The Chief Assassin To The Sinister* DGC

Wham! Replete with driving guitars, an intense, metronomic rhythm section and vocals filtered through the P.A. system from Hades, Three Mile Pilot's *The Chief Assassin To The Sinister* showcases a group infatuated with aural textures. This is a band with a sound; an all-encompassing swirl it cultivates on long jams like "Aquamagnetic," "X-Miner," and "Androsyn Guardian." "Shang Vs. Hangar" and the painful (pun intended) "Circumcised" are bathed in Pilot's ominous, murky Wall Of Pound. (It's like taking a stroll to your favorite alternative-rock bistro to find Ed Gein's rockin' the mic.) On cuts like "Inner Bishop" and the title track, Three Mile Pilot demonstrate the gift this LP proves is their stock-in-trade—in a compact disc age, they have created an enjoyable musical oxymoron: a pristine muddle. Rock on.

—Richard Torres

DATALOG: Release date: Jan. 17. "Circumcised" available as a shaped picture disc.

FILE UNDER: Dire rock.

R.I.Y.L.: Sonic Youth, Nice Strong Arm, Mission Of Burma.

TUSCADERO *The Pink Album* TeenBeat

Like this issue's cover co-stars Veruca Salt, Tuscadero charms with a flair for writing catchy tracks about pop-culture ephemera. And like Veruca Salt, Tuscadero is headed up (vocally) by two women, Melissa Farris and Margaret McCartney. Though the subjects may seem rather bubblegum at times, the music itself is gritty, with a raw edge that distinguishes the best of the new generation of below-mainstream pop outfits. A handful of tracks are list-songs, where the lyrics are as many Halloween candies or games or whatever as Farris and McCartney could think of, held together like fruitcake by the lightest of lyrical conceits. All hell breaks loose on the mom who has chosen to clean out the attic and dispose of some sacred items in "Nancy Drew," and "Crayola" is a simple tale of art (but "Leather Idol" and "Latex Dominatrix," though they're equally silly, aren't exactly kid stuff). Even the cover art is reminiscent of those classic black and white-bespeckled composition notebooks from grade school. For all the playfulness of the words, though, the music is as tough as it needs to be, drawing on the forceful rush of X-Ray Spex and the Raincoats. Still, for the most part, Tuscadero is lighthearted and mellow, a good reminder that life should not always be taken too seriously.

—Tamara Palmer

DATALOG: Release date: Dec. 6. A 7" with Mark Robinson remixes of two tracks will be released Jan. 30.

FILE UNDER: Indie grll pop.

R.I.Y.L.: Veruca Salt, the Raincoats, the Breeders.

TOWNES VAN ZANDT *No Deeper Blue* Sugar Hill

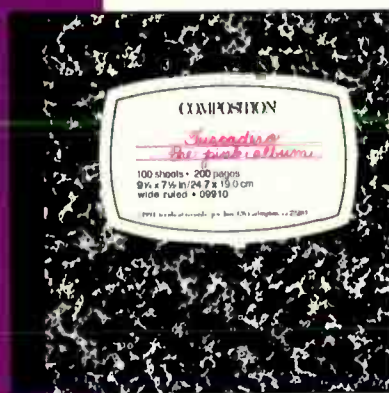
If there's a major cult figure in today's folk music, it's Townes Van Zandt, the Texas troubadour revered by all the other Texas troubadours. He releases records much too infrequently by most people's standards, an idea that is only strengthened when you learn that *No Deeper Blue* is his first studio album in almost eight years. Although it was recorded in Ireland, it still sounds like a Texas record. Van Zandt's haunting, weary vocals hover over the somber, acoustic proceedings, a remarkable mix of devout love songs, sweet lullabies, Lightnin' Hopkins-inspired blues and honky-tonking country rock. "Billy, Boney And Ma" distinguishes itself with its eerie Celtic feel, augmented by Uilleann pipes. "Marie" is a powerful narrative of hopelessness that just may bring a tear to your eye. Van Zandt's version of "Cowboy Junkie Lament" (he can count that Canadian band as major fans) is an intense Dylan-esque ramble, while "Gone Too Long" is a biting gambler's blues. Although we would have expected nothing less, *No Deeper Blue* is a masterful achievement from one of our day's finest songwriters.

—Jim Calliguri

DATALOG: Release date: Nov. 21. Touring West Coast through February.

FILE UNDER: The songwriter's songwriter.

R.I.Y.L.: Guy Clark, Robert Earl Keen, Steve Earle.


NO WONDER THE POPE'S BOOK IS SELLING SO WELL:

"Paul K's Catholic sensibility means his peers are as varied as to include veteran songwriters like Townes Van Zant and David Olney or rockers like the Afghan Whigs." —from a press release (yes, they capitalized it)

THE WEDDING PRESENT Hit Parade 1; Hit Parade 2; Seamonsters *Bizarre-Planet*

THE WEDDING PRESENT George Best *Pearls From The Past*

Spend this Valentine's Day with a loved one, or with the eloquent, pent-up ruminations of David Gedge, the voice of yearning behind The Wedding Present. It's easier than ever, thanks to a series of competing North American reissues.

Pearls From The Past has reissued the first Weddoes LP, 1987's *George Best*, with nine extra tracks. It's a *tour de force*, featuring brittle guitars at blistering speeds and Gedge's distinctive jaw-mincing delivery. Standouts include "What Did Your Last Servant Die Of," "My Favorite Dress," and "Nobody's Twisting Your Arm."

Meanwhile, Bizarre has released three CDs' worth of more recent recordings, starting with 1991's masterful *Seamonsters*. Steve Albini, the Phil Spector of Grunge, provided a heavy distortion makeover for this record, slowing down the breakneck pace of their previous efforts and lending the band a hefty dose of menace. (It's one of Albini's finest moments as a producer.) *Seamonsters* was the record nobody imagined the Wedding Present capable of; even the song titles are stripped down and barbed: "Suck," "Dare," "Octopusy," and "Corduroy."

There are also two volumes of *Hit Parade*, documenting the Wedding Present's daring venture to release a seven-inch single every month of 1992: a new original on the A-side, a cover version on the flip. The A-sides win; though some of these songs are a little generic-sounding, "Blue Eyes," "Silver Shorts," and "Go Go Dancer" are great. The covers, unfortunately, are often more interesting than good ("Cattle And Cane" by the Go-Betweens and Neil Young's "Don't Cry No Tears" suffer, in particular), though a version of the theme to David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* is intriguing, and the band's take on the Monkees' "Pleasant Valley Sunday" is excellent.

The re-issues are nice, too, in underlining what's great about the band's major label debut, *Watusi*: how the Weddoes managed to retain the depth and epic scope of the Albini era while regaining the breathless, shambolic energy of their early releases. There's never been a better time to be a Wedding Present fan. —Michael Vazquez

DATALOG: Release date: Nov. 15 (Bizarre reissues).
FILE UNDER: One-band British Invasion.
R.I.Y.L.: The Smiths, the Jam, the Velvet Underground.

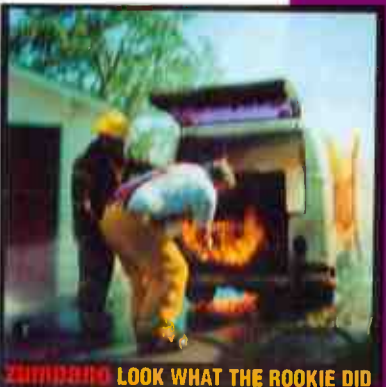
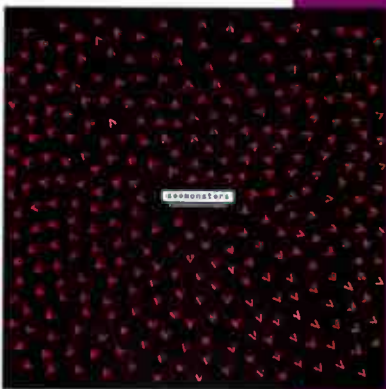
ZUMPANO Look What The Rookie Did *Sub Pop*

Of all the things to hold dear in this life—the loving touch of that special someone, the loyalty of a fine dog, color television—is there any that deserves to be cherished more than an irresistible pop *hook*? "The Party Rages On," the killer first cut on Zumpano's debut, is the rare song that answers that question with an unequivocal "no." Zumpano understands pop—its essence, its execution. The band doesn't bury its melodies with college-boy alterna-style distorto-noise, or distract you from the actual songs with a fashionably shrill minimal lo-fi sound. What *does* Zumpano sound like, then? Well, frankly, it sounds like the Zombies: prominent keyboards, swingin' jazzy rhythms, quirky lyrics, elegantly crafted melodies, the whole nine yards. The sound is so perversely incongruous with everything else going on today, and is played with such unabashed garage-band innocence, that it actually sounds fresh, and you just can't help but be charmed. *Look At What The Rookie Did* isn't perfect: A small handful of its eleven songs are pretty forgettable, the arrangements could be a little more adventurous (although horns and strings do appear here and there), and Carl Newman's vocals lack a deeper, emotive quality that may make it hard for even *Rookie*'s strongest songs to hold up after repeated listenings. But if you're gonna buy a pop record that isn't filed in the oldies or reissues section of your local record store, *Rookie* is a good choice. —Steve McGill

DATALOG: Release date: Jan. 24. Zumpano can also be heard on the *Zombies* tribute, *The World Of The Zombies* (Poplama).
FILE UNDER: Pure pop for now people.
R.I.Y.L.: Posies, Kinks, *Zombies*, the Remains, Big Star.

AND THEY CALL IT PUPPY LOVE: "She's in the ninth grade—pretty as can be—14, and I'm 21, you see... My heart is telling me to leave her alone, but the dog inside of me is sayin' serve her a bone... Earlier that night I had dismissed the teen 'But this young girl will always hold a spot in my mind, especially come masturbation time." —from Giovanni Salah's "Void The Temptation"

R.I.Y.L.: RECOMMENDED IF YOU LIKE



by James Lien

FLASHBACK



SURF MUSIC ON CD

Maybe your interest was piqued by recent twangy records by Shadowy Men On A Shadowy Planet, Man Or Astro-man? or the Phantom Surfers. Or maybe, after seeing *Pulp Fiction*, you're just looking for some cool and spooky tuneage to waste people to. Having scooped up *Pulp Fiction*'s soundtrack (MCA), with its excellent selection of revved-up surf tracks, now you want to catch an even bigger wave, a digital one. Surf music on CD? You bet your board, buddy.

First of all, by way of historical background, most of those who played surf music in the first place weren't surfers at all; some, like most members of the Beach Boys, weren't even the least bit athletic. (The phrase "walk don't run" could well have pertained to poolside behavior around early surf combos, lest some partygoer splash water on Timmy's Vox guitar and inadvertently electrocute him). Most surf music, with few exceptions, was played by nerdy guys in sweaters and big bulky spectacles who realized that music was simply their only way to gain any proximity to girls in bathing suits. So be it. Maybe that's why some of the music is among the most instrumentally passionate, red-blooded stuff created in America in the 20th century.

Let's start with the King Of The Surf Guitar, **DICK DALE**. His new records are groovy enough (and sound more accurately like the Dick Dale you're likely to see performing onstage today, a live night out we highly recommend), but to get to the real heart of Dick Dale's sound, start with *King Of The Surf Guitar: The Best Of Dick Dale & His Del-Tones* (on Rhino, not to be confused with other "Best Of" comps on other labels). *King Of The Surf Guitar* includes "The Wedge," "Miserlou," "Let's Go Trippin'," "Hava Nagila" (a must-have) and lesser known gems such as "Taco Wagon," "Mr. Eliminator" (a full fifteen years before ZZ Top), "Banzai Washout," and "Night Rider," which gave one modern young surf combo, Jon & The Nightriders, its name. Few artists have played with such consistently manic fury or have elevated instrumental madness to such virtuosic heights. Essential, primo stuff.

Even well after the surf craze was at low tide, the **VENTURES** were granted immortality via the "Theme From *Hawaii Five-O*." But unfortunately, all

that's been preserved on CD by the group who created such timeless fare as "Walk Don't Run," "Telstar" and "Tequila" is the hit-crammed single CD *Walk Don't Run: The Best Of The Ventures* (EMI). Fortunately, virtually every label the group recorded for in its prime, including Dolton, Liberty, and United Artists, is now owned by EMI, so this compilation features all of their major hits in one place, as well as some really nifty period jingles, interviews, and radio spots (sadly, none of the material from their wonderful Christmas album is on board). No other group in this genre so screams out for box set treatment. Three CDs, please!

For any serious fan of curl-shooting surf sounds, the Sundazed label has got the goods. The **REVELS'** excellent *Intoxica* is a superior collection, the aural equivalent of hanging ten. Then there's the **TORNADES'** *Bustin' Surfboards*, as well as several awe-inspiring titles from the **CHALLENGERS**, including *K-39*, *Surfbeat*, *On The Move* and our fave, *Lloyd Thaxton Goes Surfing With The Challengers*. Lloyd who? Oh come on. Surely you remember Thaxton, the unbelievably square-looking middle-aged teen show host lionized in the original liner notes as "host-producer of one of the highest-rated musical shows in Hollywood." His mid-'60s show was "a favorite not only of teenagers, but of their parents as well, because the show is more than a dance-party, it is filled with a variety of crazy and entertaining gimmicks."

Then there's the **SURFARIS** (of original "Wipe Out" infamy) who have an excellent retrospective out on the reissue label Varese Sarabande. This label emphasizes quality (good remastering, an essential for capturing the zenlike quality of surf music's tremolo and reverb) and promises to release even more surf sounds in the future. Hopefully, they won't reissue any of Surfaris' drummer Ron Wilson's other claim to fame, a Guinness Book Of World Records-entry 104-hour drum solo undertaken in California on April 27, 1965.

Though they're harder to find in stores, the English label Ace also has a few interesting titles, mostly mood-enhancing compilations. Check out their *Big Surf* collection and two CDs by the **CHAMPS** (*Tequila* and *Wing Ding!*). Also highly recommended is Ace's compilation of hot-rod music *32 Hot Rod Hits*, which deals with the related '60s genre of hot-rod music, i.e. songs about cars and drag racing as sources of entertainment and untimely teenage death.

Once you're fully immersed in surf music, you may find yourself hanging out with the wrong crowd, rougher kids looking for bigger kicks and a wilder ride. As your surf phase winds towards the mid-to-late '60s, and you find yourself skipping the beach blanket movie matinee to check out seminal B-movie biker flicks, things will no doubt start to lose some of their innocence and naivete. Say, isn't that Charlie Manson hanging out with Dennis Wilson of the Beach Boys over there? And gosh, Peter Fonda's sideburns sure are getting woollier every minute... Once you're ready to delve into the wilder, psychedelic underground of '60s music, Sundazed has a wide variety of titles for the wild bunch, by Chocolate Watch Band and others. For the ultimate in trashy teen music of the '60s, the folks at Norton Records are pretty much the kings of sleaze—try their *Bloodshot! The Gaiety Records Story Vols. 1-2*, featuring the Glen Rays, the Velquins, and the Crown Teens. Ay yi yi!

For the more absurdly fanatic set, Germany's Bear Family label has dipped a toe into the surf waters as well. The label, known for its exhaustively definitive rereleases of country and western artists has also put together several CDs of music from the **ASTRONAUTS**

and several releases from seminal twanger **DUANE EDDY**. These include *Especially For You*, featuring "Peter Gunn," "Fuzz" and "Along The Navajo Trail" (we're not sure what it means, but there's an obscure sub-species of surf music that deals with Native American themes, usually featuring driving tom-tom beats and sometimes even whooping war chants). To compensate the consumer for the fact that most surf-era LPs were about 24 minutes long, *Especially For You* has been teamed in a two-fer-one with *Girls! Girls! Girls!*, an early '60s outing that features Duane doing all songs that refer to various fabulous chicks in their titles. "Brenda," "Sioux City Sue," "Mona Lisa" and nine other femmes fatales are immortalized.

Surf's up!



LLOYD THAXTON



DANCE

by tim haslett

law of the jungle

various artists

Moonshine

The rise of jungle should come as no surprise to those interested in the music of the African diaspora. The music serves as an example of what British cultural critic Kobena Mercer has termed the "diaspora aesthetic." This splendid collection of tracks documents a genre that has arisen out of a specifically Black British context. Jungle's practitioners spent the '80s listening to U.S. hip-hop, Jamaican and British dancehall and dub, and Detroit techno. Jungle is the highly imaginative, stentorian, high-velocity fusion of these forms, constructed of sped-up drum breaks from '70s funk records by everyone from James Brown to Jimmy Castor and Herman Kelly, as well as drum patterns borrowed from old-school hip-hop. The speed of the breaks is such that the percussion provides virtually no bass—those chores are handled by subterranean reggae pulses which open into chasms of noise. Above the crackling fracas lies toasting (sampled and live), analog synth squelches and a whole lot of drum-and-bass acrobatics. Though the term "jungle" is often deployed in the U.S. to refer to the entire spectrum of British breakbeat records, its artists and followers across the Atlantic use the term to refer to drum-break-based tracks which have clear affinities with ragamuffin. The latter is what constitutes this exemplary collection, which contains tracks many enthusiasts have had difficulty finding on import. The reeling, mercurial "Original Nuttah" by UK Apachi and Shy FX, and the vaulting "Original Gangsta" by Shy FX and Gunsmoke, are the two standouts here, each possessed of more energy than a supernova. These two tracks have an aura of promise and excitement recalling the exhilaration surrounding Run-DMC's "Sucker DJs" in '83. That a number of Jamaican lyricists and vocalists are involved in the jungle scene is a testament to the genre's ability to penetrate the heart of reggae purist outposts like the Greensleeves label. Here, dancehall star Tippa Irie adds vocals to the exhausting "Hustling" by Booyaka Crew. Elsewhere, Capleton, General Levy, Barrington Levy, Half Pint and even Frankie Paul have all recorded barreling jungle tracks with UK producers. The influence of jungle is only beginning to be felt in the U.S., and "Law Of The Jungle" is an outstanding introduction.



- 1 VARIOUS ARTISTS • Trance Europe Express 3 (Volume) (UK)
- 2 PLASTIKMAN • Musik (NovaMute)
- 3 LORDS OF ACID • Voodoo-U (WHITE LABELS/Antler Subway-American)
- 4 VARIOUS ARTISTS • United State Of Ambience II (Moonshine)
- 5 VARIOUS ARTISTS • Concept In Dance (XL-Moonshine)
- 6 GLOBAL COMMUNICATION • 76:14 (Dedicated)
- 7 MOBY • "Feeling So Real" (S") (Elektra)
- 8 VARIOUS ARTISTS • Artificial Intelligence II (Warp/Wax Trax!-TVT)
- 9 VARIOUS ARTISTS • Mission Into Drums (Eye Q-Planet Earth)
- 10 ORBITAL • Snivillisation (ffrr-London)
- 11 AIR LIQUIDE • The Increased Difficulty Of Concentration (sm:je)
- 12 FRONT LINE ASSEMBLY • Millennium (Roadrunner)
- 13 VARIOUS ARTISTS • None Of These Are Love Songs (Planet Earth)
- 14 AXIOM AMBIENT • Lost In The Translation (Axiom-Island)
- 15 HIGHER INTELLIGENCE AGENCY • Colourform (Waveform)
- 16 VARIOUS ARTISTS • Plug In + Turn On X.2 (Instinct)
- 17 SPACETIME CONTINUUM • Sea Biscuit (Astralwerks-Caroline)
- 18 COSMIC BABY • Thinking About Myself (Logic)
- 19 TRACI LORDS • "Control" (12") (Radioactive)
- 20 KENNY LARKIN • Azimuth (Warp/Wax Trax!-TVT)
- 21 VARIOUS ARTISTS • Psychotrance (Moonshine)
- 22 FREAKY CHAKRA • Hallicifuge (Exist)
- 23 VARIOUS ARTISTS • Law Of The Jungle (Moonshine)
- 24 DRUM CLUB • Drums Are Dangerous (Big Life-Instinct)
- 25 HEAVENLY MUSIC CORPORATION • Consciousness III (Silent)

Compiled from the CMJ New Music Report's weekly RPM charts, collected from CMJ's pool of progressive radio reporters

JUST THE FAX

German electronic prankster Peter Namlook has provided the some of the more compelling moments in ambient electronics over the past three years, often rescuing the genre from its decline into the sort of self-indulgent, overblown symphonics we all thought had disappeared with Tangerine Dream and mid-'70s Yes albums. [The law of averages is on his side. It is probably worth mentioning that the guy very literally puts out an album every week. That is not an exaggeration—ed.] Despite the titles of his latest record, *Sad World I + II* (now available domestically as part of Instinct Record's FAX USA series), Namlook retains a sense of detachment and humor from the ambient project, something many of his peers seem incapable of doing. Namlook has collaborated with Tetsou Inoue, Bill Laswell, Richie Hawtin and Atom Heart, to name just a few. His work with collaborators is often far more interesting than his solo outings, but the *Sad World* pair represents some of the more imaginative, contemplative work of Namlook's career. Ambient fans already aware of Namlook will delight at the new accessibility of his music, and newcomers can look forward to a pleasant surprise indeed.

HIP-HOP

by glen sansone



non-fiction
Mercury

black sheep

It's been three years since Black Sheep's superb debut, *A Wolf In Sheep's Clothing*. Originating as some misfit, well-dressed-by-product of the Native Tongue family, the duo of Dres and Mr. Lawnce produced the hits "Flavor Of The Month" and "The Choice Is Yours," giving hip-hop a group who could mix humor, charm and nonchalantly cool rhyming skills into an engaging package that got "mad attention like the planet does on Earth Day." In a climate where rappers will change their style more often than their underwear to appeal to the masses, the Black Sheep return with the same striking lyrical command and flair for streetwise similes, while roughening up the edges on ass-kicking cuts like "E.F.F.E.C.T." (featuring Showbiz & A.G.). Even when they strike a hardcore pose on something like "City Lights" (spiced with an amazing stand-up bass loop) or say "I wish my people had the heart to start a revolution," they can't quite eclipse the music's affable and luxurious undertone. Mr. Lawnce gets caught up in his male ego on "Let's Get Cozy," while Dres steps from the swirl of wordy, polyrhythmic rhyming on "Autobiographical," where he reflects on his wild-eyed days with both regret and reverence. This bit of hip-hop on the non-fiction tip eschews posturing and pandering, while the Black Sheep plainly outwit and out-rhyme the competition.

BONUS BEATS

Despite the deluge of hip-hop groups inking deals with major labels, the hip-hop underground is still a fertile breeding ground. With a strong independent label network to support them, a rap artist can create a verifiable street buzz. The Bay Area, for instance, has developed into a self-contained hotbed of hip-hop, generating rappers like **R.B.L. Posse**, **Dre Dog**, **Too \$hort** and **JT The Bigga Figga**, who can sell an exorbitant number of records without the rest of the hip-hop nation paying all that much attention. The area has also been the launching pad for groups like **Dru Down**, **Spice 1**, **E-40** (who will release the single "In A Major Way" in February) and **Rappin' 4-Tay**. This month we thought we'd tip you off to some more of the newer, lesser-known groups (we'll toss in a few heavyweights, too) to check for in '95... In Los Angeles, the streets are buzzing to a fairly new duo known as the **Nonce**. Comprised of rappers Nouka Bass and Yusef Afloat, the group's got a very uncharacteristic West Coast sound, concentrating on assertive freestyle and weighty beats. The Nonce's label, Wild West, signed a distribution deal with American Recordings late in 1994, and the single "Keep It On" b/w "Mix Tapes" (which put this South Central-native group on the map) is being re-released before they drop their debut album, *World Ultimate*, in February... After guesting on tracks by Freestyle Fellowship ("Heavyweights") and Volume 10, Los Angeles-based lyrical triggerman, **Ganjah K** is an artist to watch when he releases *Harvest For The World* on Pallas Records. Pallas is also releasing a full-length called *Synopsis* by the much-hyped crew known as **ERule** in late January... If that's not enough, West Coast rap devotees should be sure to check out **Ras Kass'** singles "Won't Catch Me Runnin'" (released a few months back on Patchwerk Records) and "Drama," which will help propel his album *Soul On Ice*, scheduled for a February release date. In the meantime, you can also sample Ras Kass' skills on the cut "Come Widdit" (on which he appears with Ahmad and Saafir) from the *Street Fighter* soundtrack (Priority), released last December... On the East Coast, **Channel Live** had a much-talked about single a few months back called "Mad Izm" (Capitol), featuring guest rapping and production by KRS-One. Brimming with Bronx-styled hardcore and lyrical smarts, the crew will release *Station Identification* in February... Keep an ear out for a release by **A.Z.** on EMI Records next month. He was a featured MC on Nas' "Life's A Bitch" single from *Illmatic* and has enjoyed buckets of pre-release hype... Although **Raekwon** is due to drop his first solo album in April, his crew, the **Wu-Tang Clan**, will be releasing new material in 1995, hopefully just in time for the summer rush... And, finally, Gang Starr's **Guru** is hard at work on *Jazzmatazz Volume 2*, which should be released in March or April.



- 1 DIGABLE PLANET • Blowout Comb (Pendulum-EMI)
- 2 KEITH MURRAY • The Most Beautifullest Thing In This World (Jive)
- 3 PETE ROCK & C.L. SMOOTH • The Main Ingredient (Elektra)
- 4 METHOD MAN • Tical (Def Jam/RAL-Island)
- 5 BRAND NUBIAN • Everything Is Everything (Elektra)
- 6 LORDS OF THE UNDERGROUND • Keepers Of The Funk (Pendulum-EMI)
- 7 BLACK SHEEP • Non-Fiction (Mercury)
- 8 CRAIG MACK • Project: Funk Da World (Bad Boy-Arista)
- 9 NOTORIOUS B.I.G. • Ready To Die (Bad Boy-Arista)
- 10 REDMAN • Dare Iz A Darkside (RAL-Island)
- 11 NAS • Illmatic (Columbia)
- 12 ARTIFACTS • Between A Rock And A Hard Place (Big Beat)
- 13 ROOTS • Do You Want More!!!!!! (DGC)
- 14 CHANNEL LIVE • "Mad Izm" (I2) (Capitol)
- 15 FU-SCHNICKENS • Nervous Breakdown (Jive)
- 16 BOOGIEMONSTERS • Riders Of The Storm: The Underwater Album (Pendulum-EMI)
- 17 COMMON SENSE • Resurrection (Relativity)
- 18 VARIOUS ARTISTS • Stolen Moments: Red Hot + Cool (GRP)
- 19 O.C. • Word...Life (Wild Pitch-EMI)
- 20 JERU THE DAMAJA • The Sun Rises In The East (PayDay/firrr-London)
- 21 SLICK RICK • Behind Bars (Def Jam/RAL-Island)
- 22 SOUNDTRACK • A Low Down Dirty Shame (Hollywood-Jive)
- 23 SCARFACE • The Diary (Noo Trybe/Rap-A-Lot-Virgin)
- 24 GANG STARR • Hard To Earn (Chrysalis-ERG)
- 25 JUSTICE SYSTEM • Rooftop Soundcheck (MCA)

Compiled from the CMJ New Music Report's weekly Beat Box charts, collected from CMJ's pool of progressive radio reporters.

on the verge

cake like

UP-AND-COMING ARTISTS

compiled by lydia anderson

Cake Like's debut album, *Delicious* (Avant), was produced by Girls Against Boys' Eli Janney and Shudder To Think's Craig Wedren, and those bands' arty toughness informs Cake Like's own approach. Like those of early Mekons or Fall, the group's songwriting and arranging skills are so far ahead of its technical abilities on the album (recorded a year ago but just released) that the songs turn the New York trio's awkward musicianship into a positive asset. "Bum Leg" and "Suck" erupt into bursts of grotesque, thudding fury, and Nina Hellman's halting guitar parts

are always doing something unexpected and fascinating. Recent live performances have shown Cake Like maturing into something even neater, but check out *Delicious* to see where they're coming from.

—Douglas Wolk

geraldine fibbers

More and more musicians, including groups as diverse as Uncle Tupelo, the Jayhawks, Bad Livers and Palace Brothers, are looking back to country as a starting point for building new traditions. Add to that list the Geraldine Fibbers, who play traditional instruments (violin, upright bass, banjo) and sometimes old tunes, but wind up with a distinctive sound. The Fibbers, who cover both Dolly Parton and Beck on their debut 10", *Get Thee Gone* (Sympathy For The Record Industry), prove there's much to learn from the music of yesteryear.

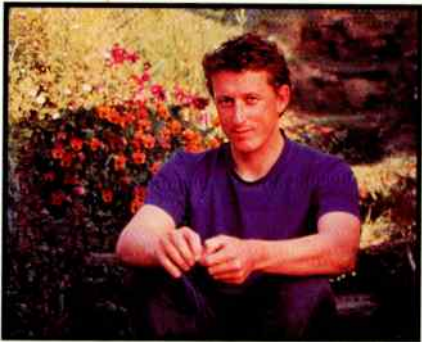
Look for the band's first album this summer on Virgin Records.

—Dawn Sutter



david kilgour

Though none of his numerous records are currently in print domestically (pop highs *Vehicle* and *Compilation* by The Clean, a



trio featuring Kilgour, his brother Hamish and the Bats' Robert Scott, are long since out of print), David Kilgour has been at the forefront of New Zealand's much-lauded pop scene since it began. Kilgour has just released *Sugarmouth*, his second solo album, for New Zealand's Flying Nun label. It offers higher-than-a-cloud pop plushness with a refined sensibility. The Clean's garage rock aesthetic honed down to highlight Kilgour's more attentive guitar detailing and balanced arrangements. A U.S. tour with Pavement directed a soft spotlight at Kilgour late last year; hopefully it's strong enough to earn this impressive artist a stable domestic deal. In the meantime, look for more precocious pop from Kilgour on a new Clean album called *Modern Rock* (Flying Nun) and a domestic Clean 7" called "Late Last Night" (Dark Beloved Cloud).

(LA)

hardship post

Hardship Post's first American 7" single, "Sugarcane" (Mag Wheel), had such strong Nirvana overtones it seemed almost too obvious when the trio from Newfoundland, Canada, signed with Sub Pop. But since that time, guitarist/vocalist Sebastian Lippa has cleverly diversified his band's sound, so that the band's debut Sub Pop outing, a single called "Slick Talking Jack," slows the pace to a seductive groove and "If I..." on the flipside is positively dreamy. A tape of early demos indicates enormous songwriting potential, sure to be borne out on Hardship Post's first full-length, due out in April.

(LA)

RIYL pt. 2: The Ringo Music Recommendation Service

by Misha Glouberman



Online culture and entertainment are exploding. All of a sudden, it's possible to upload your single (or short story, or 'zine, or comic book) for nothing and make it available to the networked millions. As more people start doing this, their newfound freedom produces a new problem: Old media did more than just attach ideas to physical objects and sell them off as a package. As part of this work, they also performed the important function of deciding (however badly) what's worthy of consumers' time and money. If you think there's too much garbage at your record store now, imagine what it'll be like on-line in a couple of years, when every bored teenager with a Mac can fart into a microphone and release his work as a single. Anyone who's sorted through the vast junkyard of Usenet news should be able to imagine the musical nightmare that will no doubt arise when sending out a 3-minute recording is as easy as posting a "Make Money Fast" message. Maybe we'll still need those gatekeepers.

Or maybe we won't. There's a lot of buzz going on right now about information filters and software agents—automated processes that'll sort through all the crap in cyberspace and find the stuff you want. Artificial intelligence experts are working on algorithms to understand individual human tastes in order to make personalized selections and recommendations. It's an appealing idea, but it still sounds like science fiction: Computers still can't reliably translate an English sentence into French or recognize human faces. We'll probably have to wait a while before they can listen to music and tell who will like it.

While computer scientists have been plugging away at AI algorithms, the Internet has been promoting an awareness of a whole different way of using computers to do things. By connecting large groups of people in various ways, the net allows people at computer terminals to do useful work that no software could ever accomplish. I've yet to see a CD-ROM that can do in even a single area what the Usenet discussion groups can do in thousands of topics. Sit down at your terminal, type in just about any question, and, as often as not, you can get a complete and authoritative answer. The Usenet software (your newsreader, the servers) doesn't know any answers, of course, but it does the important work of getting your questions to people who do. It's a very simple way of creating networked intelligence. More complicated mechanisms can be designed for specific tasks.

The Ringo music recommendation service at MIT's Media Lab uses networked human intelligence to recommend bands. The technology is called "social information filtering"—Ringo-master Max Metral describes it as "automated word of mouth." You send Ringo information about what bands you like and dislike, giving each artist a rating from one to seven. Ringo then takes your numbers and compares them to a large database of statistics, gathered from other Ringo users providing this same information. If someone liked most of the same stuff as you did, Ringo looks at artists that they've rated and you haven't, and uses the numbers to predict your tastes. The opinions of people with tastes very similar to your own count a lot, the opinions of people with somewhat similar tastes count less. Once the predictions are made, you can ask Ringo to recommend artists you would like, or ask it how much it thinks you would like some new band you've just heard about. Unlike "content-based" artificial intelligence programs, Ringo doesn't try to understand music. The real intelligence at work is the intelligence of a community of fans; Ringo just crunches the numbers.

Ringo promises new ways for listeners to hear about music. The way things work now, popularity has a way of breeding itself. The more popular an artist is, the more likely you are to be exposed to his music, or read about him in the press. The flip side is that it can be almost impossible for an unknown artist to break in. With a system like Ringo, even the most obscure artist will be brought to your attention sooner than the latest number-one hit: if there are a handful of people anywhere in the world who like the band's work and share your tastes, you'll hear about it. The recommendations are democratic—there are no authoritative experts deciding what's worthwhile. Yet the system escapes the homogenizing effect of crudely democratic tools like TV Nielsen ratings.

Ringo's growing fast, thanks to the people at MIT who develop it and the thousands of music fans who use it. The fans contribute the data that allows Ringo to do its stuff. There are over 3000 artists in Ringo's database now; all but a small initial seed set were added by users who wanted to see their favorite (or least favorite) acts included in the database. As more people provide ratings profiles, Ringo gets better at making individual recommendations.

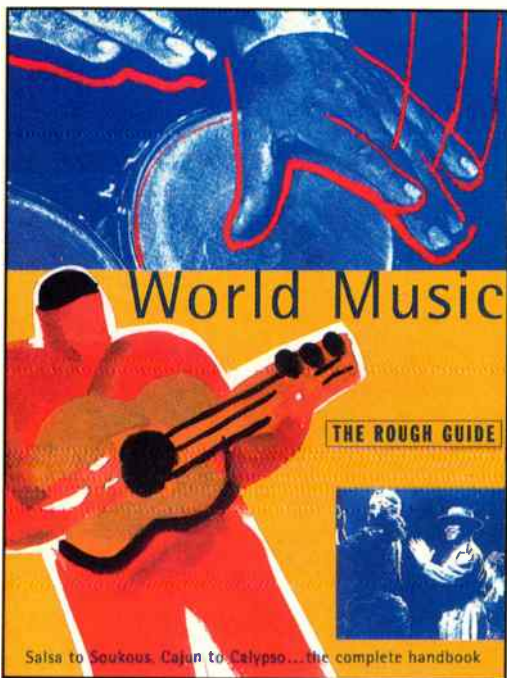
Metral, meanwhile, is busy adding features. You can already review artists' individual albums to give Ringo a more finely honed picture of your own tastes. You can also contribute short reviews for others to read. At the time of this writing, Ringo was only accessible through a clunky email interface, but by the time you read this, there should be a flashy, interactive front end on the World Wide Web. There'll be fun adjustments to make, like a "serendipity" knob: Turn it up, and Ringo will be more likely to

recommend artists that haven't gotten enough reviews to be statistically significant; turn it down, and the system will try its hardest only to recommend sure things. Best of all, there will be links to those artists who have their music on-line. Click on a recommendation, and within minutes you can be listening to the band Ringo recommended. Conversely, if you hear an on-line single you love, and Ringo hasn't heard of it, just add your rave rating to the database. This feature means that bands who release demos on-line are not just accessible in principle—they can also quickly find their way to the audience who will most appreciate their music, without having to seek the blessings of a record company, a radio station or the music press.

The big question, of course, is "does it work?" If other people like the same stuff as you, does that mean their tastes can statistically predict yours? Metral says that Ringo's predictions usually come within one point on users' one-to-seven ratings. But no one really knows how effective Ringo will be as the system expands, or how well the same methods might work for other media. Bellcore is doing a similar experiment with videos, and there's no reason the same methods couldn't be used for short stories or, as Metral is hoping to do next, restaurants.

Taste is complicated and mercurial. It seems unlikely that any system would be able to predict it perfectly. Which is probably as it should be—listening to new music wouldn't be the same without surprise and disappointment. But if it works as well as it seems to, it's an important step toward a world of networked media—a world with fewer media middlemen, and more direct communication between independent artists and audiences.

Ringo's email address is ringo@media.mit.edu—send mail with only the word "join" in the body of the message. Or point your Web browser to <http://rg.media.mit.edu/ringo>. To find out more about Bellcore's video recommendation service, send mail to videos@bellcore.com.



reads

THE ROUGH GUIDE TO WORLD MUSIC (Rough Guides-Penguin)

Having first put out numerous travel guides, the Rough Guides series now has undertaken a series of music guidebooks. *The Rough Guide To World Music* (there's also a volume for classical music, and jazz and opera are up next for later in the year) is an exhaustive and impressive tome that ambitiously tries to cover all the world's ethnic music in 720 environmentally-sound, vegetable-ink-printed pages. Its ideal customer is someone who knows roughly what they like, but wants more: e.g. if you know you want some Cajun music beyond the overly popular names, this book will steer you onto the real stuff. It's actually a little bit too complete—at times, it will whet your appetite by listing imported and esoteric CDs that even the most plugged-in and ambitious world music freak will have a hard time tracking down. It's great for its anecdotes and concise, clear-headed explanations—anybody can read the sticker on the CD cover that says that Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan is a *qawwali* singer, but the *Rough Guide* gives a succinct and understandable definition to help you understand the music once you've decided you like it. Occasionally the discographies can be a little tricky, as the book's English origin means that some of the labels are different for America. But to paraphrase a popular advertising slogan, if it's out there, it's in here, and even though the world's music may suddenly much bigger and grander after reading this, it will also seem more manageable.

—James Lien

mixed media

compiled by dawn sutter

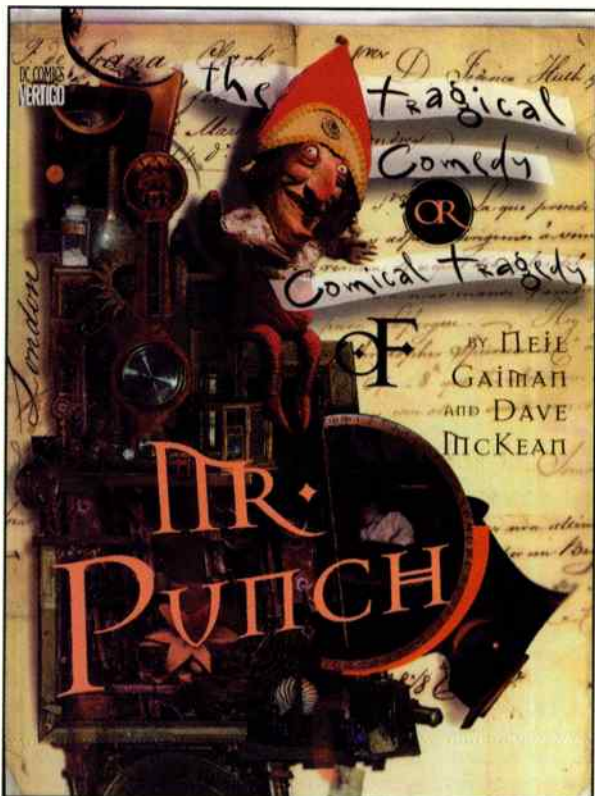
funnies

MR. PUNCH

by Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean (Vertigo-DC)

Released in a limited hardcover edition, *The Tragical Comedy Or Comical Tragedy Of Mr. Punch* (its full title on the cover) is probably the most visually splendid comic book ever published in America. Artist and designer Dave McKean (best known for his *Sandman* covers) spent years working on it, assembling the artwork in a variety of media: painting and line drawings (often in combination), photography, three-dimensional collage, airbrush, montage and puppetry. Every page has too many striking images to absorb at once; the more you pore over it, the more comes out of it. The story, by *Sandman*/*Miracleman* writer Neil Gaiman, has the traditional (and shockingly violent) Punch-and-Judy puppet show at the center of both its plot and its spirit. Like his earlier book *Violent Cases*, it concerns a young boy discovering and learning from the brutality of the adults around him, but never quite understanding everything that's going on. We can grasp more of the situation than he can, but not everything is revealed by the end of the book—the subjectivity of the kid's observation is more important than plot exposition. And it's sometimes tempting to ignore the story altogether and just stare at McKean's artwork, especially his malevolent, heavy-eyed puppets.

—Douglas Wolk



HotWIRED



The neatest new music 'zine of the month isn't even printed. *HotWIRED*, the World Wide Web site established by the folks who do *Wired* magazine (point your Web browser at <http://www.wired.com>), has a section called *Renaissance 2.0*, devoted to the electronic arts; pick the *Soundz* category out of it, and you'll find yourself able to access a half-dozen fascinating samples and loops every week. Unlike other sites with downloadable music, *Soundz* restricts itself to relatively tiny samples (most are only a few seconds long but capture the essence of the piece they're taken from), and points out the ones that can be looped effectively. Also unlike other sites, *Soundz* only has a few samples available at a time; there's a specific and idiosyncratic taste at work here, though, tending towards the extreme and unique, especially techno and non-Western musics. The rest of *Renaissance 2.0* is more than worth checking out, too—other parts of it feature first-rate computer animations and photography, and it recently serialized an original comic strip by cartoonist Jim Woodring. —Douglas Walk

VANISHING POINT

In the spirit, but not quite the fashion, of old-time radio serials, *Vanishing Point* offers a twisted, literate sense of adventure to the willing radio listener. A literal and figurative road trip, the syndicated radio series follows Matt Gray and John Krane, desperado pilots of a beat-up Cadillac. With the help of a "bible to the road," the two encounter more than potholes on their excursions; the cosmic roadmap perpetually turns them towards mystical doorways and curious characters. Though the side roads they choose take them towards things unreal, all of this happens on America's open road. In one episode, Gray and Krane happen upon an infinite audio archive housed inside a roadside rib joint owned by Otis The Road Mystic. Since the team are always on the road headed towards something a tad off-center, *Vanishing Point* keeps its listeners fixed. The female narrator, who sounds as if she's taken her cues from a robotic phone-sex operator, also increases the seductive nature of the show. Her inflections when describing the smell of roasted pork inside the rib joint sound downright lascivious. The unforced dialogue, jabs at subcultures and twists on stoic radio dramas and geeky sci-fi drivel make for a sophisticated program despite its humble production values. *Vanishing Point* also makes room at the end (and sometimes during) each episode for music from "alternative" artists, and welcomes submissions in any medium from any contributors. Show producers Michael Wexler and John Hulme have also compiled *Voices Of The X-iled* (Doubleday),



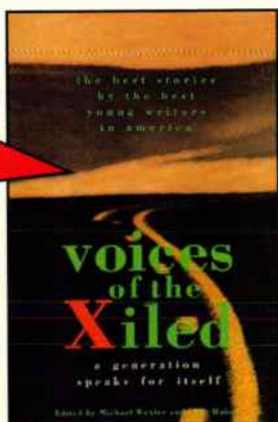
on the tube

TV FAMILIES

From *Happy Days* to *The Brady Bunch* to *The Cosby Show* to *Roseanne*, some of the most popular shows in television history have focused on traditional, nuclear families. The Independent Television Service asked independent filmmakers to challenge the traditional television family. What resulted was a series of short films, *TV Families*. The series takes a more realistic, though sometimes offbeat and arty, approach to the family, portraying non-nuclear families as well as those of different nationalities, in settings from the hills of Kentucky to the streets of Brooklyn. The filmmakers have incorporated the effect that the television family had on their lives into the pieces; *Dottie Gets Spanked*, for example, was inspired by writer/director Todd Haynes' fascination with *I Love Lucy*. *TV Families'* seven quirky segments have been previewed at the Sundance, New York and Toronto Film Festivals, and will be shown on public television stations around the U.S. in January and February. (DS)

on air

a collection of young writers born after, but not outside the influence of, the beat generation. *Vanishing Point* may not be broadcast on a station near you (right now it's on about 10 stations, mostly college, along the East Coast) so for info contact: P.O. Box 2208, Wilmington, NC 28402, (910) 343-43410.



—Steve Ciabattoni

TOP 75

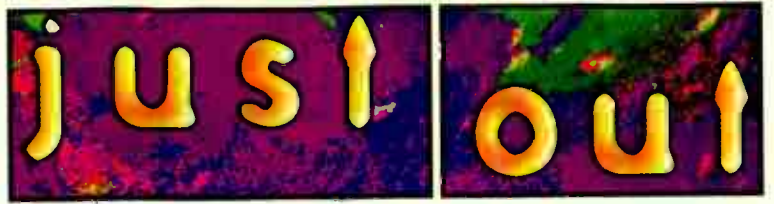
ALTERNATIVE RADIO AIRPLAY



VERUCA SALT

ARTIST	ALBUM TITLE	LABEL
1 VERUCA SALT	American Thighs	Minty Fresh-DGC
2 LIZ PHAIR	Lip-Smart	Motodor-Atlantic
3 R.E.M.	Monster	Worner Bros.
4 SMASHING PUMPKINS	Pisces Iscariot	Virgin
5 DEAD CAN DANCE	Toward The Within	4AD-WB
6 JON SPENCER BLUES EXPLOSION	Orange	Matador
7 WEDDING PRESENT	Watusi	Island
8 NIRVANA	MTV Unplugged In New York	DGC
9 CRAMPS	Flamejob	Medicine/Giant-WB
10 CRANBERRIES	No Need To Argue	Island
11 MIGHTY MIGHTY BOSSTONES	Question The Answers	Mercury
12 CATHERINE	Sorry	TVT
13 SOUL COUGHING	Ruby Vroom	Slash-WB
14 CRANES	Loved	Dedicated-Aristo
15 BAD RELIGION	Stranger Than Fiction	Atlantic
16 WEEN	Chocolate And Cheese	Elektra
17 MELVINS	Stoner Witch	Atlantic
18 SUGAR	File Under: Easy Listening	Rykodisc
19 PEARL JAM	Vitalogy	Epic
20 SOUNDTRACK	Clerks	Choos-Columbia
21 AMERICAN MUSIC CLUB	San Francisco	Reprise
22 FASTBACKS	Answer The Phone, Dummy	Sub Pop
23 ECHOBELLY	Everyone's Got One	Fauve-Rhythm King
24 LORDS OF ACID	Voodoo-U	WHITE LABEL/Antler Subway-American
25 PIZZICATO FIVE	Made In USA	Matador
26 DAVE MATTHEWS BAND	Under The Table And Dreaming	RCA
27 VARIOUS ARTISTS	Rock Stars Kill	Kill Rock Stars
28 ASS PONYS	Electric Rock Music	A&M
29 VICTORIA WILLIAMS	Loose	Mommoth-Atlantic
30 COMPULSION	Comforter	Interscope
31 SOUNDTRACK	Pulp Fiction	MCA
32 JAMES	Wah Wah	Fontana-Mercury
33 LAURIE ANDERSON	Bright Red	Warner Bros.
34 SMALL FACTORY	For If You Cannot Fly	Vernon Yard
35 PORTISHEAD	Dummy	Go! Discs-London
36 GRANT LEE BUFFALO	Mighty Joe Moon	Slash-Reprise
37 GOLDEN PALOMINOS	Pure	Restless
38 LONDON SUEDE	Dog Man Star	Nude-Columbia
39 FATIMA MANSIONS	Lost In The Former West	Radioactive
40 TOM PETTY	Wildflowers	Warner Bros.
41 WEEZER	Weezer	DGC
42 DIGABLE PLANETS	Blowout Comb	Pendulum-EMI
43 LISA GERMANO	Geek The Girl	4AD-WB
44 DOG FACED HERMANS	Those Deep Buds	Alternative Tentacles
45 COME	Don't Ask Don't Tell	Matador
46 THINKING FELLERS UNION LOCAL 282	Strangers From The Universe	Matador
47 SWANSONS	Shake	Citizen X-Interscope
48 BLACK CROWES	Amorica	American
49 JESUS & MARY CHAIN	Stoned & Dethroned	American
50 SILVER JEWS	Starlite Walker	Drag City
51 JONI MITCHELL	Turbulent Indigo	Reprise
52 SEBADOH	Bakesale	Sub Pop
53 ERIC'S TRIP	Forever Again	Sub Pop
54 DINOSAUR JR	Without A Sound	Sire-Reprise
55 OASIS	Definitely Maybe	Epic
56 THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS	John Henry	Elektra
57 LUSCIOUS JACKSON	Natural Ingredients	Grand Royal-Capitol
58 LOVE BATTERY	Nehru Jacket (EP)	Atlas-A&M
59 GIRLS AGAINST BOYS	Cruise Yourself	Touch And Go
60 KILL CREEK	St. Valentine's Garage	Mammoth
61 JUNED	Juned	Up
62 PEGBOY	Earwig	1/4 Stick-Touch And Go
63 SPELL	Mississippi	Island
64 MURMURS	Murmurs	MCA
65 RADIAL SPANGLE	Syrup Macrame	Beggars Banquet
66 DEUS	Worst Case Scenario	Island
67 POSTER CHILDREN	Just Like You (EP)	Sire-Reprise
68 BIG AUDIO	Higher Power	Columbia
69 BOYRACER	More Songs About Frustration And Self Hatred	Slumberland
70 HEAVENLY	The Decline And Fall Of Heavenly	K
71 VARIOUS ARTISTS	Stolen Moments: Red Hot + Cool	Red Hot-GRP
72 GREEN DAY	Dookie	Reprise
73 BUTTERGLORY	Crumble	Merge
74 LAZY	Some Assembly Required	Roadrunner
75 BEASTIE BOYS	Ill Communication	Grand Royal-Capitol

Chart data culled from CMJ New Music Report's weekly Top 150 radio chart based on combined airplay of approximately 500 college non-commercial and commercial radio stations reporting their top 35 most played releases that week.



NEW RELEASES
JANUARY - FEBRUARY

24

CERTAIN DISTANT SUNS (Giant)

SONIC YOUTH Made In U.S.A. (soundtrack) (Rhino)

WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS Call Me Burroughs (Rhino)

ROBYN HITCHCOCK Black Snake Diamond Role; Groovy Decay; I Often Dream Of Trains (reissues) (Rhino)

MONKEES Headquarters; Pisces, Aquarius, Capricorn & Jones Ltd.; Instant Replay (reissues) (Rhino)

JASON & THE SCORCHERS A Blazing Grace (Mammoth)

PRICK Prick (Interscope)

ALPHABET SOUP Layin' Low In The Cut (Prawn Song-MDL)

SOME VELVET SIDEWALK Shipwreck (K)

MASSIVE ATTACK Protection (Virgin)

KITCHENS OF DISTINCTION Cowboys & Aliens (A&M)

THE CRUEL SEA The Honeymoon Is Over (A&M)

BONE THUGS 'N HARMONY (Ruthless-Relativity)

SWANS The Great Annihilator (Invisible)

LAUGHING HYENAS Hard Times (Touch And Go)

RHEOSTATICS Introducing Happiness (Sire-Warner Bros.)

WOLFGANG PRESS Funky Little Demons (4AD-Warner Bros.)

CORNERSHOP Hold On It Hurts (Merge)

MAGNETIC FIELDS The Wayward Bus/Distant Plastic Trees (reissue) (Merge)

MECCA NORMAL Sitting On Snaps (Matador)

GUIDED BY VOICES Box (S-CD box set of early LPs) (Scat)

SPEAKING CANARIES Songs For The Terrestrially Challenged (Scat)

BLACK VELVET FLAG Come Receive... (Go-Kart)

777 Point 3: Fire & Water (Astralwerks-Caroline)

BETTIE SERVEERT Lamprey (Matador-Atlantic)

LOIS Bet The Sky (K)

EMERGENCY BROADCAST NETWORK Telecommunication Breakdown (TVT)

LOVE 666 Satan Loves Me (Amphetamine Reptile)

ZUMPANO Look What The Rookie Did (Sub Pop)

SOUNDTRACK Jerky Boys (Atlantic)

TRENCHMOUTH Trenchmouth vs. The Light Of The Sun (Skene!-Elektra)

CHAMP MC Ghetto Flava (Elektra)

31

SONIC YOUTH Confusion Is Sex; Bad Moon Rising; The Whitey Album (Ciccone Youth) (reissues) (DGC)

DANDELION (Columbia)

COMBINE Norfolk, VA (Caroline)

SIOUXSIE & THE BANSHEES The Rapture (DGC)

DUMPTRUCK Days Of Fear (Unclean)

7

DIE WARZAU Engine (TVT)

ALISON KRAUSS Now That I've Found You: A Collection (Rounder)

VARIOUS ARTISTS The Marley Family Album (Heartbeat)

MILTON NASCIMENTO Clue Da Esquina, Volumes 1 & 2 (World Pacific)

UNREST Greatest Hits (TeenBeat)

14

SLASH'S SNAKE PIT It's 5:00 Somewhere (DGC)

KUSTOMIZED The Battle For Space (Matador)

JAYHAWKS Tomorrow The Green Grass (American)

HAZEL Are You Going To Eat That (Sub Pop)

KILLDOZER God Hears Pleas Of The Innocent (Touch & Go)

ROKY ERICKSON All That May Do My Rhyme (Trance Syndicate)

DOG FACED HERMANS Bump & Swing (live) (Alternative Tentacles)

ROBYN HITCHCOCK I Something You (7" EP) (K)

TRAGICALLY HIP Day For Night (Atlantic)

BARKMARKET Lardroom (EP) (American)

MOTHER HIPS Back To The Grotto (American)

ORANGE 9MM Driver Not Included (Elektra)

BAND OF SUSANS Here Comes Success (Restless)

CELIBATE RIFLES Spaceman In A Satin Suit (Hot-Restless)

21

GUZZARD (Amphetamine Reptile)

TISH HINOJOSA Frontejas (Rounder)

WINGTIP SLOAT Chewyfoot (VHF)

HEATHER NOVA (Columbia)

FUN-DA-MENTAL Seize The Time (Beggars Banquet/Mammoth-Atlantic)

FEBRUARY

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A 91505

ine Reptile
ve. South
L, MN 55408

iller Plaza
NY 10019

o Sphere
g. 80, Room 2A
NY 11430

l. Cut
04
J 07030

2. Fol
ow Strasse 12
n 1

3. Banquet
ilson Ave., Suite 804
ork, NY 10016

re/Planet
N. LaBrea Ave.
Angeles, CA 90038-3339

pitol
50 N. Vine St.
ollywood, CA 90028

Caroline
114 W. 26th St., 11th Floor
New York, NY 10001

Columbia
550 Madison Ave.
New York, NY 10022

Crypt c/o Matador
676 Broadway, 4th Floor
New York, NY 10012

DGC
9130 Sunset Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90069

Deceptive
The Sunday School
Rotary St.
London, UK SE1 6LG

Dejadisc
537 Lindsey St.
San Marcos, TX 78666

Drag City
PO. Box 476867
Chicago, IL 60647

Drunken Fish
8600 W. Olympic Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90035

Earache
295 Lafayette Ste., Ste. 915
New York, NY 10012

EMI
1290 Ave. of the Americas
42nd Floor
New York, NY 10104

Epic
550 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10022

Epitaph
6201 Sunset Blvd., Suite 111
Hollywood, CA 90028

FAX USA c/o Instinct
26 W. 17th St., Suite 502
New York, NY 10011

Flydaddy
P.O. Box 43542
Philadelphia, PA 10106

Flying Nun
Box 877
Auckland, New Zealand

Futurist
6 Greene St., 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10013

Geffen
9130 Sunset Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90069

Giant
8900 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 200
Beverly Hills, CA 90211

Grass
81 N. Forest Ave.
Rockville Centre, NY 11570

Interscope
10900 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 1230
Los Angeles, CA 90024

K
Box 7154
Olympia, WA 98507

Mag Wheel
PO. Box 15
Boston, MA 02133

Mammoth
Carr Mill, 2nd Floor
Carrboro, NC 27510

Matador
676 Broadway, 4th Floor
New York, NY 10012

MCA
70 Universal City Plaza
Universal City, CA 91608

Mercury
825 Eighth Ave.
New York, NY 10019

Mint
699-810 W. Broadway
Vancouver, BC
Canada V5Z 4C9

Moonshine
8391 Beverly Blvd., Suite 195
Los Angeles, CA 90048

Matown
6255 Sunset Blvd.
Hollywood, CA 90028

Norton
PO. Box 646
Cooper Station
New York, NY 10003

Pearls From The Past
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1562 Lonsdale Ave.
North Vancouver, B.C.
Canada V7M 3L5

Priority
6430 Sunser Blvd. Suite 900
Hollywood, CA 90028

Reprise
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Santa Monica, CA 90404

Road Cone
PO. Box 8732
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Rounder
11 Camp St.
Cambridge, MA 02140

Sub Pop
1932 First Ave.
Seattle, WA 98101

Sugar Hill
PO. Box 55300
Durham, NC 27717

Sundazed
PO. Box 85
Coxsackie, NY 12051

Supertux
PO. Box 291
Port Chester, NY 10573

Sympathy For The Record Industry
4901 Virginia Ave.
Long Beach, CA 90805

TeenBeat
PO. Box 3265
Arlington, VA 22203

Touch And Go
PO. Box 25520
Chicago, IL 60625

Tumble Gear
138 Duane St.
New York, NY 10013

TVT
23 E. 4th St.
New York, NY 10003

Umbrella
PO. Box 41269
Providence, RI 02940-1269

Varese Sarabande
11846 Ventura Blvd., Suite 130
Studio City, CA 91604

Verve
825 Eighth Ave., 26th Floor
New York, NY 10019

VHF
Box 7365
Fairfax, VA 22039

Virgin
338 N. Foothill Rd.
Beverly Hills, CA 90210

Virgin Japan
281 Camden High St.
Camden Town
London, UK NW1 7BX

Warner Bros.
3300 Warner Blvd.
Burbank, CA 91505

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<input type="checkbox"/>	2. THROWING MUSES	5	4	3	2	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. BETTIE SERVEERT	5	4	3	2	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. CHRIS WHITLEY	5	4	3	2	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. SIMPLE MINDS	5	4	3	2	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	6. STONE ROSES	5	4	3	2	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	7. KITCHENS OF DISTINCTION	5	4	3	2	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	8. COLD WATER FLAT	5	4	3	2	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	9. PRICK	5	4	3	2	1
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<input type="checkbox"/>	11. COMBINE	5	4	3	2	1
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<input type="checkbox"/>	16. LAUGHING HYENAS	5	4	3	2	1
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<input type="checkbox"/>	18. JENN VIX	5	4	3	2	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	19. ALISON STATTON AND SPIKE	5	4	3	2	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	20. REVELS	5	4	3	2	1

1. Are you...?
 Male Female

2. How old are you?
 under 18 35-44
 18-24 45+
 25-34 What's it to you?

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 record store bookstore
 other _____

4. How many CDs do you buy per month?
 0-2 6-10
 3-5 more than 10

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6. What radio station(s) do you usually listen to?
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ON TOUR



LISA GERMANO

FEZ, NEW YORK, NY, DECEMBER 5, 1994

Lisa Germano is perched on the edge of something, and she can't quite figure out what. On stage at the one-drink-minimum club Fez, she's brutally self-analytical (on the opening act: "I wish I could sing like that. But I can't") and a little confused by her own songs and the way people understand them. She explains the songs before she plays them, and the explanations are so obvious you have to blink to make sure you're hearing them right: most people are fucked up, growing up Catholic can make you terrified of sex, it's possible to be so in love with somebody else that you lose yourself. But received wisdom becomes that way for a reason: often, it's right. While her lyrics are usually direct to the point of obviousness, they're *real*—their straightforwardness isn't abetted by clichés, or predictability, or any kind of self-pity that isn't self-aware. "You've had all your treats and it's only 8:30 a.m./That's a.m.," she sings about addiction—the second line turns it from melodrama into something much more personal. "Cancer Of Everything" is about using stupid strategies to get attention, a topic that's so much part of people's day-to-day emotional lives (more so than, say, romantic passion) that it usually gets overlooked as a subject for songs.

The arrangements tonight, with Germano playing guitar and piano, joined only by a bass player, are of necessity stripped down from the hazy music-box sounds of *Geek The Girl* (4AD). A few times, she and her bass player kick up a drony racket and nearly drown out her singing; a few times, she indulges in piano-accompanied sickness that reminds the audience painfully that she used to play in John Cougar Mellencamp's band. For the most part, though, the instrumentation is low-key and inventive (the lead bass on a few songs is a nice touch), and the focus is on Germano's voice. While it's not technically as "good" as the singer from the opening band's—it's chalky and slurred, and cracks every so often—it's perfectly suited for her songs, which alternately demand her capacity for Lotte Lenya-like speak-singing and Kate Bush-like flights of whispery romanticism.

When Germano is called out for an encore, she asks, half-nervously, for requests. "Okay, 'Stars'?... 'Play anything you want to play?' I like that one! No, actually—I'm gonna play 'Stars,' even though I don't want to. No, I want to! It's the only happy song I'm playing tonight, so I'll play that one." She starts singing, and her posture changes as she's possessed by the song. "Why do people like stars/They're so far away/They're always there/And safe to look at," she sings. Yeah, we think. That's true. —Douglas Wolk

JOHNNY CASH

- Jan. 22 Miami, FL
- 24 Clearwater, FL
- 27 W. Palm Beach, FL
- 28 Gainesville, FL
- Feb. 23-4 Sparks, NV
- 25 Thousand Oaks CA

CURRENTLY TOURING

These bands should be on the road late January-February (tour dates were not available at press time):

- AMERICAN MUSIC CLUB
- ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT
- BAD RELIGION
- BAZOOKA
- CERTAIN DISTANT SUNS
- COP SHOOT COP
- COWS
- CRAMPS
- CRANES
- DIGABLE PLANETS
- PETE DROGE
- FUZZY
- G. LOVE AND SPECIAL SAUCE
- GOD BULLIES
- KILLDOZER
- LAUGHING HYENAS
- LOIS
- LONDON SUEDE
- LOVE 666
- MAGNAPOP
- MERCURY REV
- MOTOCASTER
- MOE TUCKER
- NICK LOWE
- POLVO
- SCARCE
- SPEARHEAD
- TOWNES VAN ZANDT
- THROWING MUSES

Classified section

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Localzine

by Timothy Burton
photographs by Sledge

BOSTON



Anybody who thinks the rock 'n' roll lifestyle is glamorous should have been forced to spend yesterday with me. I walked alone along miles of highway, eventually taking a mad dash across eight lanes of moving traffic to get to a cafeteria-style restaurant where I ate warmed-over food surrounded by old people. I topped off the day by throwing back a few Scotch on the rocks in a hotel bar sprinkled with self-important businessmen in dark suits, then went back to my room where I got on the phone to plead with my girlfriend not to dump me.

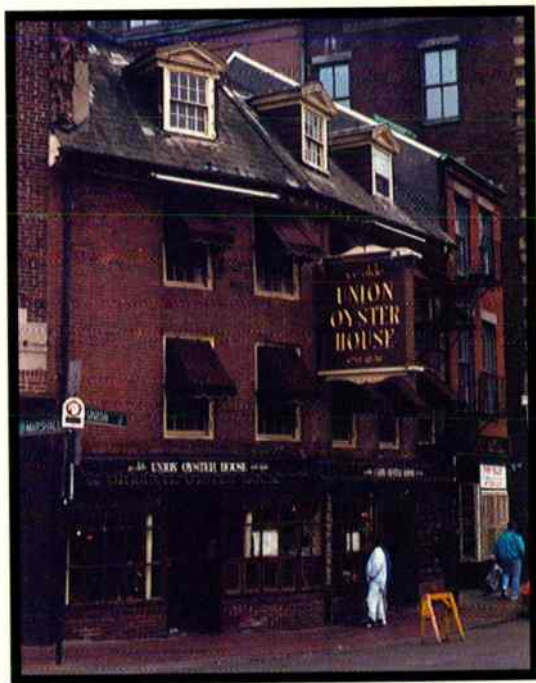
But we endure the weariness of these bad days for the exhilaration of the good ones—days spent in great cities hobnobbing with cool people. Touring at times takes on another dimension resembling something more akin to time travel than to a linear journey. One day you're hanging over a craps table in Vegas, the next you're shooting the breeze with auto workers in a tavern in Toledo. One day you're mixing with soccer hooligans in a stadium in Liverpool, the next... well, the next you're treading drearily along a superhighway outside Indianapolis. It is a way of life that is euphoric and addictive.

Because of the relentless tour schedule we force on ourselves, I usually spend only a few days every couple of months on the quiet, tree-lined street in Cambridge that I call home. In fact, when I'm in Beantown, I'm more of a tourist than a townie.

Anyway, what this is all leading to is that I'm not the best guy to point my fellow rockers in the direction of the new and hip in the Hub. I know more about bistros in Berlin than the exciting new eateries of Boston. What I do understand are the desires and needs of a traveler blowing through town for a few hours or a few days.

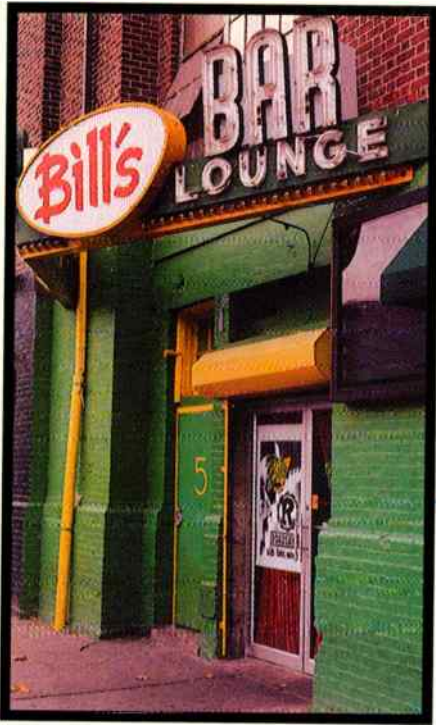
Boston is a city of arts and leisure, energized by students from the area's 200 colleges and universities. It is also a city of neighborhoods with vastly different personalities, some saintly, some sinful; the lifestyles and ideals of their inhabitants are reflected in the city streets. There are the Back Bay preppies, Harvard Square's intellectuals and layabouts, Dorchester's ethnic enclaves, and Brookline's elderly and wealthy. There are the mean streets and religious cloisters of Mission Hill and the Irish bars where townies congregate in South Boston and Charlestown. There's Little Italy, Chinatown, and the People's Republics of North Cambridge and Somerville.

If you are visiting Boston and work in the rock 'n' roll business, you're probably in one of three localities: Allston, Kenmore Square or Central Square in Cambridge. Each of these areas has rock clubs and countless bars and restaurants. They are also easily accessible by Boston's subway and streetcar system, known as the T. Most of the places listed hereafter are in these areas.



CLUBS AND BARROOMS

An old city that is inhabited primarily by the young, Boston has one of the most alive, supportive, consistent rock music scenes anywhere. Your best bet for live rock on any day of the week is probably **Local 186** (186 Harvard Ave., Allston, 351-2660). An old biker hangout in the heart of Allston, Local 186 has a worn bar that runs the length of the club and a couple of pool tables downstairs. Also featuring live music seven nights a week is **The Middle East** (472 Mass Ave., Cambridge, 492-9181) in Central Square. Boston's new underground rock mecca, the Middle East has a cozy restaurant and bar at its main street-level entrance, and two rock clubs: a smaller one upstairs, and a new, 600-capacity one downstairs. The staff is really cool, too. The old mecca for underground rock in Boston is **The Rathskeller** (528 Commonwealth Ave., 536-9438), in Kenmore Square. The Rat is Boston's most enduring club, and it's still pretty cool, with live music downstairs most nights and a seedy bar/restaurant at street level. If you leave The Rat, cross the bridge that runs over the Mass Turnpike and hang a left at Fenway Park. You will find yourself on Lansdowne Street, a thoroughfare cluttered with night clubs, including the 1500-capacity Avalon. Down at the end of the street, you'll find the more happening



Bill's Bar & Lounge (7 Lansdowne St., 421-9678). Bill's is the best on Tuesday nights when local and national acts play in a large, adjacent room. It's also one of Boston's main pick-up spots for the alternative collegiate set. For just plain boozing, you can't beat **Fathers II**, just outside Kenmore Square on Beacon St. This is where Boston's elite luses, bikers, punks and general riff-raff spend their Sunday afternoons consuming pints of quality drafts at bargain-basement prices. Dart throwing is a major pastime at Fathers II, and they have a killer jukebox. Note: Bring your ID with you anywhere they serve alcohol. You will get carded.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENT STORES

Due to the legions of music students in Beantown, we have a lot of great music stores. Though they sometimes seem overpriced compared to New York city stores, the Boston shops have a lot of variety, all types of used gear and top-notch maintenance and repair technicians. Guitar players should check out **Daddy's Junky Music** (165 Mass Ave., 249-0909) across the street from Berklee College of Music. They have lots of new and used guitars and amps, effects, strings, and other accoutrements. In Allston, drop by **Mr. Music** (Harvard Ave., 783-1609). They have lots of old guitars, including an amazing number of old Rickenbackers hanging in the aisles with the Fenders and Gibsons. **E.U. Wurlitzer** (922 Commonwealth Ave., 738-7000) and the brand new **Guitar Center** (750 Commonwealth Ave., 738-5958) are also good bets, but mostly for new stuff and supplies. Boston drummers are blessed with **Jack's Drum Shop** (1096 Boylston St., 266-4617) near Berklee College. They keep a huge inventory of sticks, skins, cymbals and percussive instruments, and the staff is knowledgeable and helpful. They can also tell you how to get to the Zildjian and Sabian Factories, both of which are in the Boston suburbs. Boston also has one of the top professional horn stores in the country, **Rayburn Musical Instrument Co.** (263 Huntington Ave., 266-4727). Also located near Berklee College at Symphony Hall, Rayburn's staff is known by professional woodwind and brass players around the country. They can do fast tune-ups and repairs, and have a large inventory of accessories.

SPECTATOR SPORTS

Boston is well known for its pro sports scene. Fenway Park is the coolest place in the country to see a ball game, and sixteen NBA and several NHL championship banners hang from the rafters of the soon-to-be-blown-up Boston Garden (the new Shaumut Center is being built behind the old garden).

One of the hidden treasures of the Boston sports scene is college hockey. On any given winter night you can go to one of four cozy arenas in the Boston area, buy a ticket at the window for \$6-10, and watch players, nearly all of whom have already been drafted by NHL teams, do battle with top regional teams like Maine and Lake Superior State, and cross-country powerhouses like Michigan and Wisconsin. In fact, it is the college and high school hockey scenes more than our beloved Bruins that make Boston the hockey hotbed of America. So check out Boston University, Northeastern, Boston College or Harvard. Each one of these teams is habitually ranked among the top ten teams in Division I college hockey, and each of their arenas is within easy access of the T.



RECORDS/TAPES/CDS

Harvard Square in Cambridge has a ton of record stores including major retailers like Tower, HMV and Strawberries, and small secondhand and specialty stores like **In Your Ear** and **The Kids Will Have Their Say**. The one place that consistently has the best price and selection is **Newbury Comics** (36 John F. Kennedy St. in the Garage Mall, 491-0337). What started as a comic book shop on Newbury Street 12 years ago became an alternative rock success story, growing to prominence in the competitive Boston market by making room on its shelves for all things indie and outpacing the rise of hardcore/alternative/punk rock.

OTHER COOL STUFF

The Brattle Theater

Once a battleground of competing avant-garde movie theaters, Boston has succumbed to the Loews Theater chain which bought up every screen in town and began a policy of screening only mainstream crap. One holdover from Boston's cinematic glory days is the Brattle Theater (40 Brattle St. in Harvard Square, 876-6837), a small, retrospective movie house that shows old and new greats.

Durgin Park

Boston's got a lot of restaurants, but for a unique Boston dining experience go to Durgin Park (5 Faneuil Hall Market Place, 227-2038) at Quincy Market. Durgin Park is known for its bench-like seating accommodations, white linen table cloths and rude waitresses. In fact, one of my fondest childhood memories is of the stocky waitress in nurse-like attire who flung a huge slab of prime rib at me and snarled that I couldn't have a salad because I would "have plenty to eat." The food is great, though slightly less awe-inspiring.

The Gardener Museum

Within walking distance of Boston's better known Museum Of Fine Arts is the Gardener Museum, former inner-city estate of the late art patron and cat fancier Isabella Stewart Gardener. The building itself is as fascinating as the many ancient and name-brand works of art it houses. A calming experience for road-weary rockers, and they have a nice little garden cafe, too.

All area codes are 617.

Timothy Burton is better known as Johnny Vegas, sax player of the Mighty Mighty Bosstones.

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