

Big Muff ^{issue 4} 80p



Blake
Babies

Nina Hagen

Action Swingers

Wedding
Present

Sunshot

The Emotionals

Dharma Bums

Young Fresh Fellows

ZuZu's Petals

Our American Cousins

Another year, another Big Muff: the fanzine with the negative assumption. Unfortunately flexi-less, due to lack of funds, but there will definitely be one next time.

Lots of American bands this time round. That's not a trend, it's just that all the best bands around at the moment are American. As you've probably discovered by now, there's more to being good than being American. You won't find any bandwagon jumpers in here.

The address:

Neil Boyd
PO Box 858
London
SW12 8TR
England

I'm reviewing everything I've received since the last issue, so some of it is necessarily old, but bear with me. It is in approximately reverse order, ie the old stuff is at the back, so if you read it from the front you may miss some of the references. And I'll tell you what pisses me off: always having to look in the runout groove to see which is the A-side and which is the B-side.

GRADINGS

- * complete and utter bollocks
- ** not very good really
- *** okay I suppose
- **** damn fine coffee
- ***** almost as good as Hole

The Hair & Skin Trading Company - Jo In Nine G Hell LP (Situation Two) ****

Having spent a whole day basking in 'Honey's Dead', this doesn't sound as good as it might, but not many bands can follow the Marychain. Having been reduced from a clumsy five piece down to a tidy three piece, H&S have improved considerably. There is still more weirdness on the album than live, and the songs without it are the best, especially the killer single 'Ground Zero'. Just when I thought Situation Two had stopped sending me stuff because I didn't like Spectrum Zero, I discover that H&S are on the label, so I bought the single and eagerly awaited the album. Then this plops through my letterbox. Marvellous.

This has something of the atmospherics of God Machine, ie it's not very suitable for your Walkman on the tube because you can't hear most of it, except at stops (eg just outside Camden Town). So atmospheric in fact, it's as if they got into the studio and forgot what it was they were trying to do - someone must have banged them very hard on the head to cause a song like 'Kak', which lives up to it's name quite badly. Luckily their senses returned for most of the album. Not a re-creation of the live sound, but worth shopping around for.

The Leaving Trains - The Lump In My Forehead LP (SST) **
Not as good as The New York Dolls. Or No FX.

Fairfield Parlour - From Home To Home LP (UFO) **

Somewhat pointless but a nice bit of 1970 pop. And I mean that literally. This is a re-issue of a 1970 album. I expect that at the time these were The Beatles for people who didn't like The Beatles. Just in case you forget that music didn't start in 1986.

Big Wheel - Holiday Manor CD (Mammoth) ***

A pleasant blend of Memphis power and beautifully sculptured lyrics.

Machines Of Loving Grace CD (Mammoth) *

A synthesis of hardcore dance and real hardcore. Or something.

Gobblehoof - Headbanger 7 inch (New Alliance) **

A polite version of Unsane, not that I'm comparing them to Unsane, it's just that the cover picture is a tidied up car after someone has gone through the windscreen, and they credit backing singing on the B-side to 'guy from Reverb MF'. Made by people who thought 'we can do that'. Bless them for trying.

Main - Calm EP (Situation Two) **

It says here 'ex-Loop'. I think they should drop the 'ex-'.

Headcleaner - Bogieman 12 inch (Eve) ****

Whenever I see Headcleaner I always think of Therapy but somehow they never come to mind when listening to this single. Side A goes at 45 rpm and side B is 33. Funnily enough, side A has two fast songs and side B has two slow songs. Amazing! Produced by Robin of God Machine, photographed by Joe of Faith Healers, ex-Silverfish roadie, and countless other Camden connections that should provide another fine export to the rest of the country. I don't know how much sense it makes if you live in Dumbarton, but it's perfectly obvious from here. Proud to play The Falcon.

The Death Folk - Death Folk II LP (New Alliance) *

Two ass-wipes doing folk with loud guitars. Sounds like Ween!

Bowlfish at the Bull & Gate

Skinny is a frequently used word about Bowlfish, but they're not thin on songs or attitude. They can hit a mellow song like 'Reggie' as aptly as a grungier song like 'Spongebed' and make both sound as hard as nails. Bowlfish can roll off rock gems without the bullshit Nirvanism of someone like, say Scum Pups. Proving that you don't need two guitars to fill a room, there are only three Bowlfishes: singer/guitar tweaker Steve is the only person in the Western world still wearing brown T-shirts, drummer Phil sports his Stray Cats jacket and haircut with pride and another Steve on bass blends in so well he looks out of place. Their wallets should be getting a little fatter when the single comes out, and even more so for the album later.

Huggy Bear at the Bull & Gate

To look at, Huggy Bear should be doing jangly indie-pop, with their standing up girl drummer and a backing singer/gtr who look as if she would be uncomfortable sweating. The singer comes on like a mutation of Hue Pooh Stick and David Shop Assistant, but any ideas you may have on that front are blasted away when they start to play.

Imagine Heavenly with a stack of Marshalls, and knowing what do do with them. Huggy Bear are what Amelia would like Heavenly to be, but would never dare, or succeed. When the little bassist takes her turn at singing, she sings rougher than any Come pretenders. When she takes to the drums, she hits the kick drum like she was killing a rat.

If I was ever going to see a band who could follow Hole, these are the unlikeliest contenders.

and it's not just them at the Bull & Gate

Not by a long way. Go along there any time and for £3 you get to see three bands, and chances are at least one of them will be really good.

There is a plethora of good bands hanging around and looking for gigs, but most venues can't put them on because they need a name band to pull a crowd, but there's a few venues, like the Bull & Gate and Hampstead White Horse that are willing to take that chance. Follow the 'fuck pay-to-play' stickers.

In the same way that the 'Unknown Tapes' (reviewed in here somewhere) can put a lot of excellent music on a tape but no-one buys them because they haven't heard of the bands, some of the best bands are sadly under-attended, but remember who was putting on Daisy Chainsaw regularly two years ago in front of 20 people. You complain because the popular press feeds you a diet of popular bands. What did you expect? Don't write to NME asking for less Thousand Yard Stare - just ignore it. Take a chance. Go see Ventilator or Moist or Walk On Water or Ludicrous Lollipops. You might like them.

Ludicrous Lollipops



You've got the Pop Club on Friday, Saturday and Monday, with, as the name suggests, a slight leaning towards pop/indie pop. Wednesday and Thursday is Butterfly Evolution who complement them by playing the other side of the coin, grunge/noise type stuff. On Tuesday is Liquid Foundation, and Creation 2010 has just started on a Sunday.

The Bull & Gate is still the Mecca for good bands of all descriptions. Whenever I see a "new" band making the headlines I can boast about the time I saw them when they played the Bull & Gate. Why not go and see next month's headlines now?

And that concludes this public service announcement. Next week: seatbelts; they're for your own good.

Sun Dial - Reflector LP (UFO) *

The biog links Sun Dial with The Rockingbirds and The Shamen, and reports that the last single and album were both number one in the Italian indie charts. There's a confusing mix. They've embraced midi technology. If you give the needle a shove you can't tell if it's changed tracks.

Love Battery - Dayglo LP (Glitterhouse/Sub Pop) ****

This is the real thing - genuine Seattle Sub Pop, and jolly good it is too. Just when Sub Pop was at risk of become tired and worn, with lots of samey, Endino-produced groups, they sell Nirvana to Mr Geffen and take a rest to take stock while Nirvana dominates everything. This is still basically the same formula of drums, bass, guitar and vocals/guitar, but with a new freshness shining out of the crowd.

Afghan Whigs - Congregation LP (Glitterhouse/Sub Pop) ***

But having said that, this is not much of a step forward, but hey! what was wrong with the old stuff anyway? It all suddenly got better when the title track hit the boards.

theMonkeywrench - Clean As A Broken-Dick Dog LP (Glitterhouse/Sub Pop) ***

Some old scene legends getting back to their roots, most notably Mark Arm from Mudhoney. Apparently this is something akin to a blues jam session. If they'd said that a little louder I'd never have given it a chance, but luckily they didn't, and it's not blues as I remember it at all. On the whole it's not terrifically good, but the odd song makes it very worthwhile, mostly the cover versions - 'Codine' and 'Stop This World', although 'Look Back' on the start of side two is up there too. I suppose this lot have got far enough away from their roots now that they can't write their own stuff in the style, but this is nevertheless a reasonable reminder of where it's all coming from. I guess that's why I've always got the blues.

Radium Records sampler CD (Radium 226.05) **

Not quite as heavy metal as the sleeve notes suggest. In fact the first track, by Psychotic Youth, is a surfadelic pop tune about cars and girls. After that it just sells out to pure HM. I quite like Union Carbide Productions though. I was going to write about them in the last issue because I thought the album was dead good but I saw them play and they had a serious image problem that seemed to be stuck in the 1970s circa T Rex etc.

Robin Casinader - All This Will Be Yours CD (Shock) *

Ha ha ha. It's April the first, right?

This Is Serious Mum - Great Truckin Songs Of The Renaissance CD (Shock) ***

Interesting. TISM seem to have made a big success out of wearing masks and taking the piss out of anything that deserves it: Bon Jovi, Mods, Americans, themselves. I'm a little behind here since this album was released in Australia in 1988. It's probably incredibly hilarious if you've got an Australian sense of humour and you're stood watching them with 3000 like-minded individuals. For me it's funny, but not to laugh at. Not bad, but I never want to hear it again. Anne Nightingale will love it.

Jack Brewer Band - Harsh World LP (New Alliance) *

A labourious grind through tedious lyrics and exasperating guitars.

Action Swingers

In a sense, Action Swingers could be considered a supergroup, but they would probably kill me for saying so. Behind frontman Ned Hayden are Bruce Bennett on guitar, Howie Pierot (Blessed) on bass and Bob Bert (Sonic Youth, Pussy Galore) on drums. Ex-Swingers they like to keep quiet about are Julia Cafritz (Pussy Galore), Don Fleming (Gumball), Pete Shore (Unsane, Boss Hog), and doubtless more. But that's beside the point.

Towards the end of last year they released their eponymous album through Wiiiija. Twelve hard rocking songs mixing rock, punk and garage, and staying well clear of your average 'American Guitar Band'.

Side one starts with the misleadingly understated 'Song', a title which hides a perfect structure moulded into deep power drive. It ends with Julia singing 'Fire', which is so far into the garage you could get a truck in front of it, and sounds not a little unlike 'Dance With Me' by The Mojo Men, but then I'm just name-dropping.

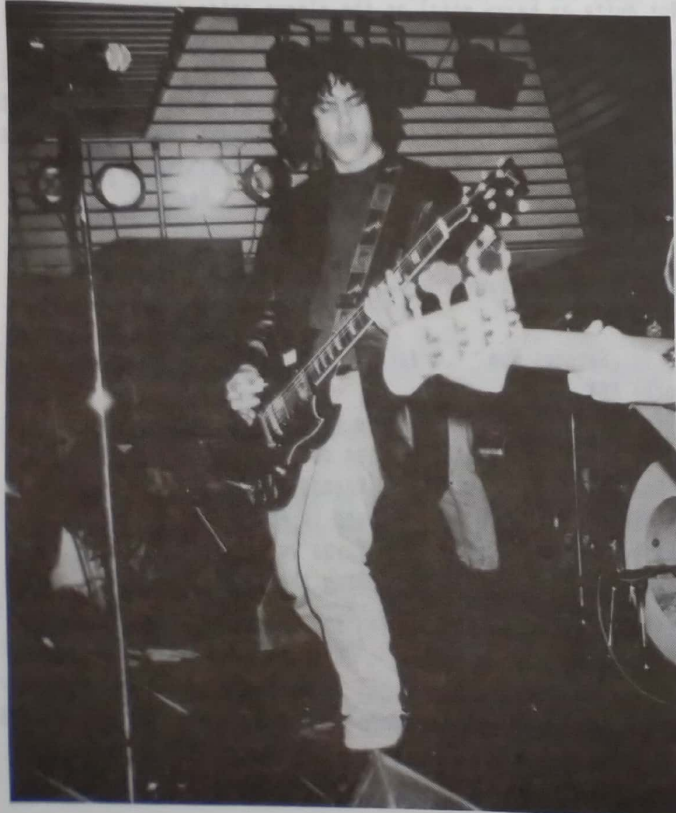
Turn the record over and it just keeps going. 'Hot Rock Action' is not only the name of the first song, but also a pretty neat self-description.

Playing live, they rock so hard with songs that are just built for thrashing to (or just listening to I suppose), that they make everyone else (including L7) seem like a middle rate Marquee band with two good songs (which L7 are).

Ned knows what he wants, and he's gone for it in a big way.

NED'S MANIFESTO

The whole point of Action Swingers is that we're not selling out and we're not just making crappy music just to make money. Believe me, it'd be very easy to get in some band that ape Soundgarden and get a major label deal. That's what everybody in America does, we're doing the complete opposite, just trying to have a good band that has decent songs and just rocks really hard, and not just some crappy record company scam. We have songs. We're not just some formless noise thing. It's so rock. The Unsane are noise. We're not noise at all.



"Kids don't have the energy they had in 77"

I just wanna be able to do my own thing and just have people appreciate it for that and not have to be part of any other thing. I don't want to be part of anybody else's thing. A lot of people say 'what's it like being in with Nirvana and Hole?' and then other people think we're in with Superchunk and Sebadoh and that's equally ridiculous. We're not part of any scene at all. I'm not at all influenced by current music. There's a few things I like, but I would never be *influenced* by it. I've got my own thing. If the New York scene entails staying home with my girlfriend and smoking pot and listening to records and watching TV every night then it's pretty exciting. Anybody that I know and am friends with pretty much lives the same kind of life that I do. Some people go out, they have a specific thing they go out to do, but nobody I know, or like, goes out and hangs out at CBGBs every night or something waiting for The Jesus Lizard to show up. It's not like 'wow, let's go do cocaine with Surgery'. I'm a little over that. You can have your own scene, but it's not a scene of bands. Nobody in Sonic Youth or nobody in Pussy Galore helped do anything in The Action Swingers, except for Bob. They didn't help us write any songs, they didn't help us get a record contract, they didn't help us get a gig, they didn't help us do anything, so I hate it when anybody puts ex-Sonic Youth or ex-anything on any of our stuff, but it's something Bob carries round with him and what the hell are you supposed to do? It's part of his fucking life.

People are so worshipful of some of these bigger bands and nothing they could do could possibly be wrong and every record they make is good and all this shit, and it's just bullshit. No-one's above reproach. I'm not and nobody is. I just don't think that bands should be held up as some sort of God thing and they should use their power to keep other bands down. You have people who exert their power over you, and people who dictate who's going to be allowed to flourish and who's going to be allowed to work. I don't think anybody should ever do that.

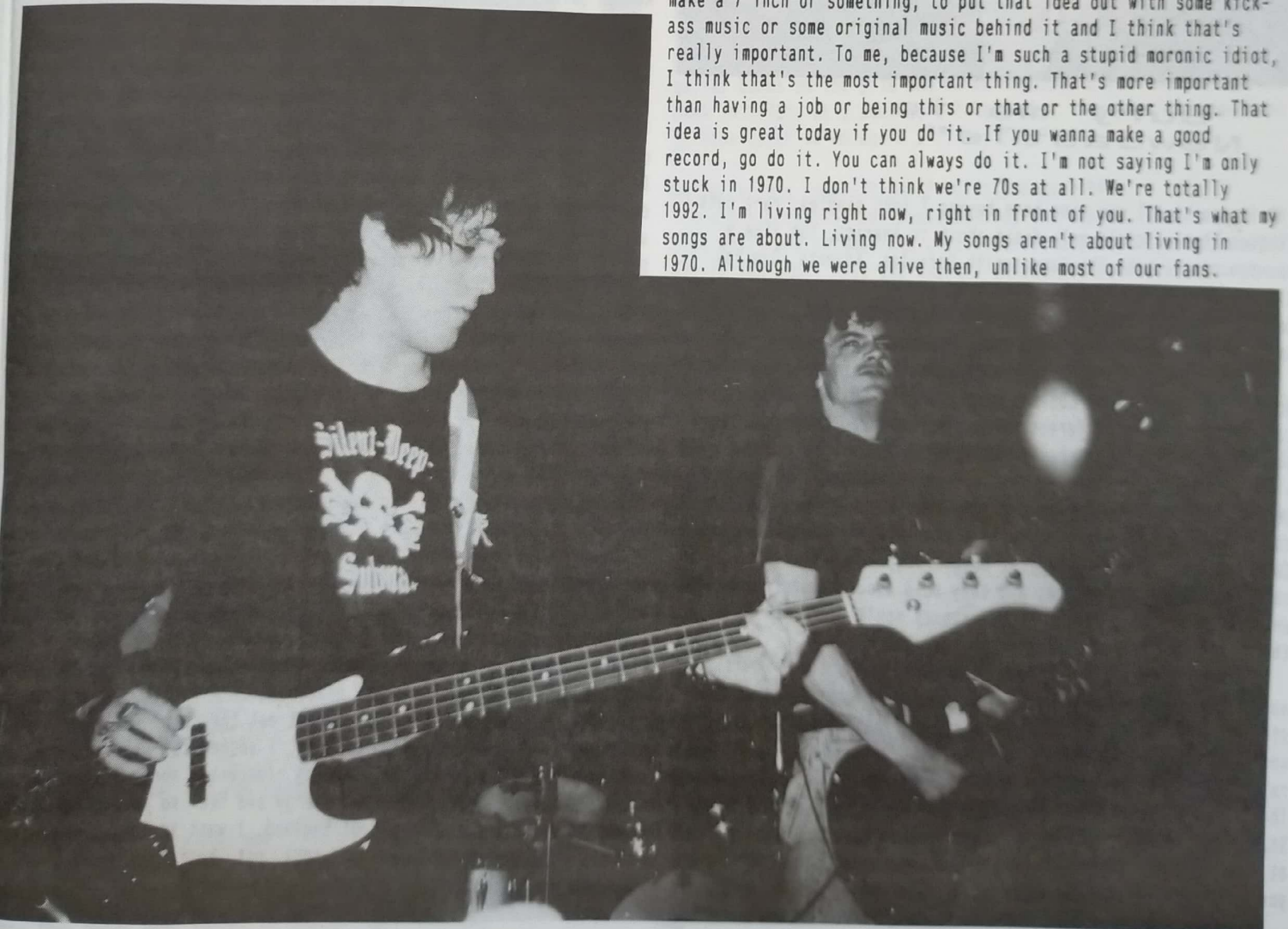
I hate being told what you fucking have to be. The minute you try to put me in some sort of club where you have to act a certain way to be in it, I will just throw a beer glass at it and they'll kick me out immediately. That's the main thing in my life that I hate. So that pretty much runs everything that I've done since I was about 13 years old.

**"We're huge fans,
but not of crap, of
good music"**

It's a clichéd thing to say, but it's the one thing this band's always had a reputation for is that we can blow away any band in rock. I feel bad if we play a crappy show, it makes me feel really crappy, because some kid had five bucks that week to spend and he spent it going to see The Action Swingers, and you feel like an asshole if you don't really give him the best show. People can't afford to buy everything, so we try to make the best possible records and put on the best possible show. But even as good as the records could be, we're far better live. By the time you get through making a record you never want to fucking even get near the thing again, but then you go out and play the songs live and you remember what they were about. You have to play in front of a group of people that don't wanna like you and make them leave being like 'wow, those guys are great, I'm gonna buy the record'. That's basically how I see it.

We play so hard and so intensely that I notice the audiences lose it after about the eighth song. The audiences don't have any energy. It's not us. We're up on stage and all of a sudden the audience is tired and we're still going. It brings us down. All those bands like The Fluid play an hour and a half. Who the hell wants to see some punk band play an hour and a half? As if you're Led Zeppelin or something. They were boring. But we don't do a short set. We play twelve songs and they're all at least two minutes long. Kids don't have the energy they had in '77 or something. Or '81 when Black Flag was around. Giving out speed to the audience. That'd be the only way.

The good thing about the 70s was that you just had people who were willing to be themselves. To express a little individuality, not to get too artsy fartsy. People would have an idea and go make a 7 inch or something, to put that idea out with some kick-ass music or some original music behind it and I think that's really important. To me, because I'm such a stupid moronic idiot, I think that's the most important thing. That's more important than having a job or being this or that or the other thing. That idea is great today if you do it. If you wanna make a good record, go do it. You can always do it. I'm not saying I'm only stuck in 1970. I don't think we're 70s at all. We're totally 1992. I'm living right now, right in front of you. That's what my songs are about. Living now. My songs aren't about living in 1970. Although we were alive then, unlike most of our fans.





"Bury me in Newcastle"

We've spent all our time here buying 7 inch singles, rare punk singles that we could only dream about in America, for like a pound a piece. Like The Hammersmith Gorillas, Adverts, Destroy All Monsters, all of our favourite bands, we've been finding the best records. We have thick stacks to take home with us to America. We're huge fans. But not of crap, of good music.

7 inch records are the premier thing, they're on the top of the scale. And then I like CDs the best and then LPs and then cassettes. There's different categories. We need them all. You should always have the choice. A lot of kids will only buy a vinyl record. Our record in America only came out on CD and cassette and all these people who wanted to buy it on vinyl couldn't buy it because they didn't have \$16 to buy a CD. Caroline, our label in America, bought vinyl from Wiiiija and then shipped it over to America, and they sold about a hundred copies, and that's it, because the record stores won't order it. It's there, but the record stores won't buy it.

We pretty much played all over England on this tour, so it wasn't just like we came to London and just played these posh stupid London gigs. We played some places that were kind of weird and some places that were good. Newcastle was amazing. I wanna raise my kids there and have my wife there. Bury me in Newcastle. That's the best city. I personally have never been out of United States before this, so it's fucking great. There's generally been at least a small pocket of people who were really into the band and so it was definitely worth it. It was really fun.

The people in London weren't as into us as they were in other parts of the country. It's the same as New York, they just stood there with their arms folded like they didn't even want to be there, and I don't understand that. London feels like home to us here, since we've been out in these weird fucking places that are freaking us out. Weird stuff happens to you when you're a billion miles in the North.

We've played to more of England than we have to America. All we've done in America is basically the North East. The last gig we played before we came over here, CBGBs was packed. Half the audience was going mad and singing along every word to every song. They were singing 'Song' louder than I was through the PA. It wasn't our friends, it was people I had never seen before. Our friends were next door having pizza.

I think this tour is just the start in that it's our first tour. We did a four day tour before in America and that was it. We're taking it more seriously. I'm putting a hell of a lot more energy into it, and so is everybody else, whereas before it wasn't so much a full time thing, now it is. When I get back to America I'm pretty much losing my job. I guess they call it being made redundant. I'll be at my job for about two weeks and then I'll be out on the street ready to starve to death. Watching game shows all day long and writing songs. I guess what I'll do is just take care of the band and see if I can get something going.

I like the way it sounds in small places, but I don't think it's absolutely written in stone that we have to spend all our time playing little places. Who knows what'll happen? Somebody could die tomorrow, then everybody could decide they hate The Action Swingers and that'd be the end of that.

I've been screaming at these kids after these shows because they're saying 'America is so great, you can walk down the street and see Jesus Lizard', and this and that. America is going straight to shit. It's much worse than here. The entire economy is bottoming out. The streets are like outta some awful horror movie. The kids can't go to school. People are losing their jobs. Nobody has any food. It's the worst possible thing. It's a great country at heart but it's gone right to hell. Here the socialist aspect, the idea that a society is supposed to take care of its people, still exists. In America it does not at all, and that's basically the big difference between England and America. They'll let you die in the streets in America, whereas if things get bad for you here they'll at least let you continue to live. They almost force you to become a crook because there's no possible way that you could ever make it being an honourable, moral person.

England stopped in 1950 whereas America just went into this horrible satanic, extreme, excessive thing heading right for a huge crash. In America people are boorish and disgusting and rude whereas people here are intelligent and polite. It's a stereotype but it is actually the truth. In America they'll give you a plastic thing to put inside your plastic thing to put inside your plastic thing. Here they'll give you some glass thing that they'll go boil and re-use, which makes a hell of a lot of sense.

There's no heat and the showers could be better, but aside from that everything's pretty cool here. And England needs food. Everybody eats fried food, all greasy shit. A lot of people in America are vegetarians now and won't eat the crap. You guys think it's kind of hippyish. Even me, I smoked for 12 years, three packs a day, I gave up smoking cigarettes about 8 months ago and now I have so much more energy and feel so much better. I want to save the good people of England, I want to turn them on to the healthy way of life. Punk rock, pot, health food and sarcasm is our motto.

Blake Babies

THE RECORDS

'Rosy Jack World' EP was the last record from Boston's Blake Babies. Recorded in mid-1991, but only released in the UK in February 1992, on CD only, it is the kind of record that almost makes you want to own a CD player. Five tracks featuring blissfully dreamy guitars and the wafting, peachy voice of Juliana Hatfield.

'Temptation Eyes' is a cover of a Grass Roots song, but it must surely belong to Blake Babies with its epochal build to the ecstatic chorus. 'Downtime' is manic plea out of frenzy, written and sung by John Strohm, with a little backing help from Henry Rollins and Diamanda Galas.

Just as 'Take Me' is a classic Blake Babies mix of hazy guitar and elevating vocals, so 'Severed Lips' is a unique adaptation of the Dinosaur Jr song, and the well-documented acoustic 'Nirvana' is about music's ability to restore your faith in living: "Makes me wanna go fuck shit up. I'm so glad I'm not dead".

This was shortly preceded by the 'Sunburn' LP.

'Sunburn' is an album of pop magnitude and indie ideology, with catchy little light hooks that rattle around your head for days. Singing about the simple things in life with an unsurpassed depth and integrity. It has the feel of a Throwing Muses album, and sounds in part like The Sundays, or maybe even Cyndi Lauper (when she's not doing a squeaky voice).



So at 5:10 Sunday I put the album on and settle in for an easy 40 minutes of delight before stopping for chips on the way to the T+C for what was rumoured to be Blakes Babies last ever gig.

THE CLOCKS

Oh shit! The clocks went forward last night. It's quarter past six and I have to be at the T+C at 6:30! Fill a bag with interview kit, leg it out the house and onto the departing 6:23. Except it's Sunday and the 6:23 is a 6:26, so I whizz through the press bundle.

THE SCOTSMAN

"Are you going to the T+C to interview the band?"

"How did you know that?"

"I'm interviewing Buffalo Tom for The Scotsman. What are they like?"

We have a little chat about the T+C being an ideal mid-sized venue - it's about as big as I get and about as small as he gets. He tells me how great The Belltower are, but these bands play the Falcon and think they've got an album's worth of material but they haven't. We'll see. Elton John is a nice guy when you get to know him. Who wants to know Elton John?

THE DINNER

At the T+C, a gaggle of fanzine writers get shown into The Room Upstairs where the band are eating. Visions of Alice In Wonderland flash across my mind as I see a long table with the Mad Hatter sitting at one end and Alice waiting on a long table containing assorted band members and stragglers.

Alice asks me if I'm eating. "He's doing an interviewing", someone says. "In that case no", says Alice as she whisks the plate of steaming food away from my hungry face.

The band get distributed among the fanzines. I get The Other Guitarist to interview as he picks at his fish and ignores the roast potatoes and mixed veg.

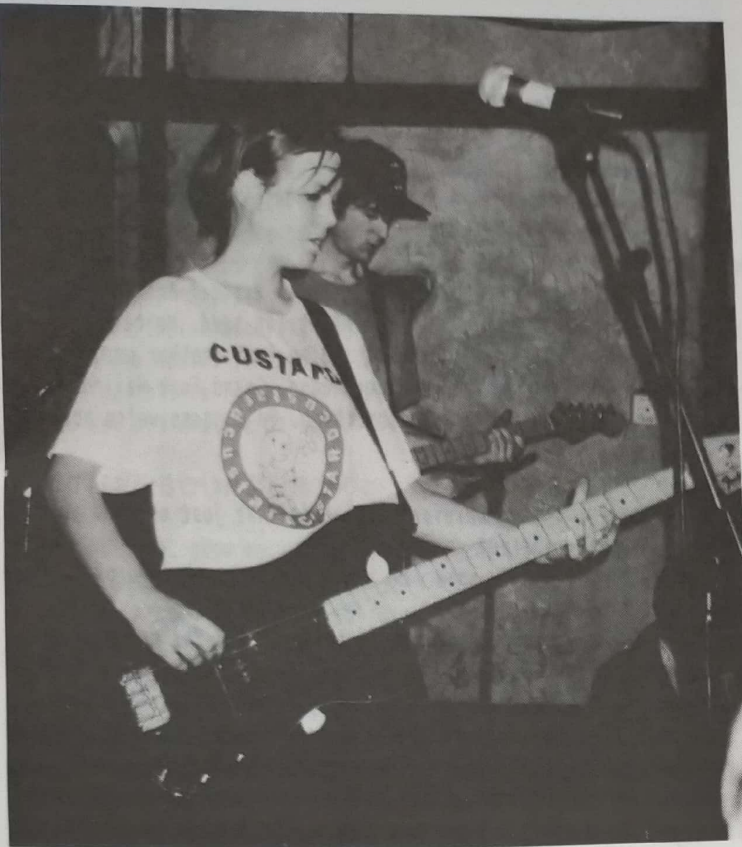
THE INTERVIEW - PART ONE - MICHAEL (THE OTHER GUITARIST)

Do you think Juliana's voice complements or contradicts the guitar?

It's definitely one of the elements that separates us, as far as just being another band up there playing live, when you do have that sweet, pretty voice coming over the twin thrashing guitar. It keeps stuff from sounding a little too poppy. Her voice gets pretty gutsy sometimes too. I know she likes that contrast too because she's aware of her vocal range. You kinda play the guitars heavier than you would to make up for a good kinda balance.

Is it a distraction to have people watching?

Sometimes you have one person out there in front of Juliana shouting 'look at me' and that can be a bit of a distraction, especially for her. But if people get up on stage, like last night Buffalo Tom, it got pretty out of control, and they were doing well with it, with the people jumping off. But then they were kinda hanging out in the area, and that can be quite a distraction, so I thought the show went downhill about halfway through. People get excited and they wanna get involved. We don't get many slammers. A lot of people stand and watch Juliana. A lot of young boys just staring up, lovingly. But I'm used to that. Boston audiences are classic for just watching a show with their arms folded. Over here there's a lot more jumping around and getting into it and heads moving and stuff.



Are you going to split up after this tour?

Yeah, well basically, John and Freda live in Bloomington now and Juliana and I live in Boston, so it's hard to keep something going full steam when you're not in the same town. These guys have made three albums and John and Jules are pretty prolific songwriters. Juliana made a solo record that's going to come out I guess here maybe in June or July, and John has a band in Bloomington called Antenna who made a record with Freda as a drummer, so I think what's going to happen for a while anyway is that those projects are going to get a little attention. So whether that means the end or hiatus is really vague right now.

Have you written anything since 'Rosy Jack World'?

That was the last actual Blake Babies recording, which is before my time, so then since then John and Juliana have both been writing a lot, but John's stuff has ended up in Antenna and Juliana's done a solo record. After three records the chemistry's still good, but they both want the opportunity to do it without the other.

Do you prefer 'Sunburn' or 'Rosy Jack World'?

I prefer 'Rosy Jack World'. It's pretty brief, but I think some of the songs on there are a bit better. 'Sunburn' is more of an album, more to get into.

Why don't you play 'Girl In A Box' (a song about keeping a girl under the bed to bring out when needed) live when everyone's shouting for it?

Basically it's John's decision because the song's really tongue-in-cheek but he gets some shit for it every once in a while. It's got some pretty sick lyrics. It offends some people. So just out of respect to that he doesn't like to play it, although that's not his intention at all. He's not agreeing that's true about the song. He just got tired of playing it and having people saying things about it. He's also afraid people do get the wrong idea. You are playing to an impressionable audience. But sometimes we play it, if we're drunk enough. We played it as 'Boy In A Box' in Chicago, last time we ever played it.

Is this your full-time job?

I work in a photo shop, I sell cameras. It's been my day job for about four years now. It's cool, they let me go away if I go on tour. Juliana works occasionally at a record store in Boston called Mystery Train, the guy from Bullet Lavalta works there. And John I don't think has had a job in five years, but he lives in Bloomington. It's a cheaper place to live. It's a college town outside of Indianapolis. Boston's expensive to live in so you have to make money.

What's the most people you've played to?

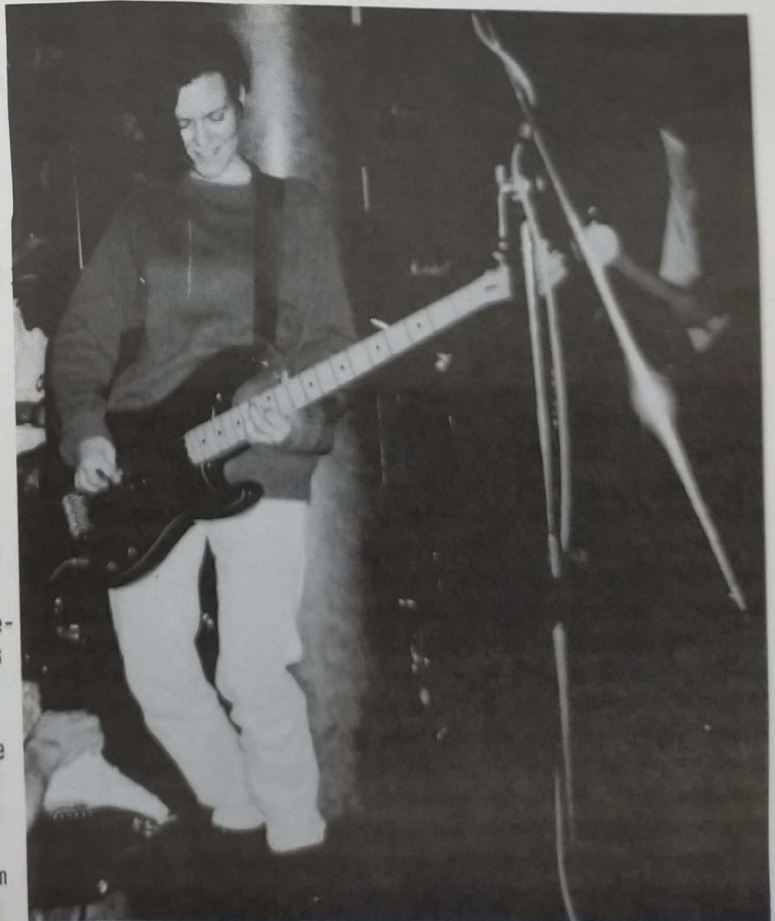
That would be 4000 people in San Fransisco opening for The Charlatans, who were cold bastards. It was a pretty funny show though because we had lost our drummer, Freda, and two days before we got a replacement who was Juliana's brother, so his first show with us was in front of the largest audience we have ever played to. It was kinda weird. I'd say it's probably the worst show of my life. We were real horrible but the crowd didn't seem to notice, and even the reviews were good.

Why hasn't Freda come over for this tour?

Freda's a little more weary of some of the aspects of touring. She needed a break from it, and she's thinking about taking some courses and stuff. She backed out on this tour but encouraged it happening. We did a lot of touring last year, and she was also touring with Antenna. Freda did something like six tours last year.

What preconceptions do people have about the band?

A lot of people on this tour are saying they didn't expect us to be so loud. They expected more jangly pop. But I don't think people are disappointed, I think they like that. They also expect to see a girl drummer and one guitar player and one girl singer, and then we show up and there's four people and the drummer with the Seattle haircut.



THE INTERVIEW - PART TWO
- JULIANA (THE SINGER)

Why did you do the publishing for the single yourself?

What single? Why did I put my name for the publishing? That just means I finally registered... got my own... publishing is so hard to explain. It just means I registered my name. I got my own publishing company and I just made it my name. I kept my own publishing which means I haven't sold it to any company so I get all the publishing money. But I just put it in my name because... it's so confusing, I dunno. I just wanted my own company in case I write with other people. And John has his own called Serrano.

When you play are you thinking about the songs or the people watching?

Um. Uh. Well, it changes a lot. Sometimes I tend to blank out. I close my eyes a lot. I think a lot about just singing, the actual musicalness of the singing. Trying to sing well. I concentrate on that a lot, not on the words or the people. Sometimes if I look at the people in the eyes it screws me up and I fuck up.

Do you feel uncomfortable singing?

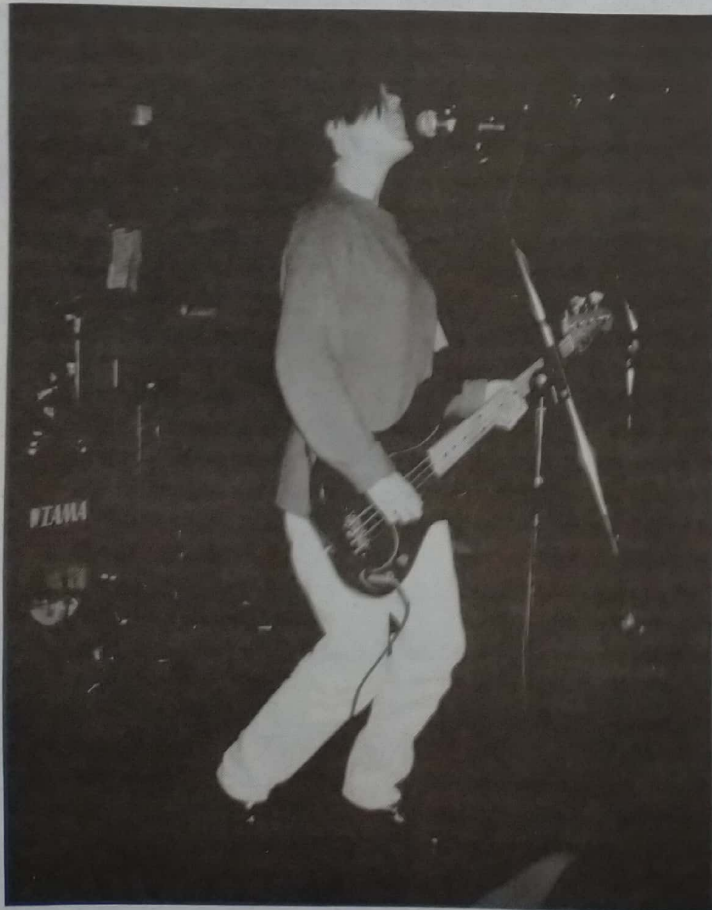
I feel uncomfortable singing really close, like if it's a small room and there's some people in the room, I feel really uncomfortable. I feel much better on a big stage singing because it's not as personal.

Is it a distraction to have people watching?

No because... only if I look at them it can be distracting. I like that. I like the tension of being in front of a crowd. It makes the music more energetic.

Do you think your voice complements or contradicts the guitar?

Both.



Do you think The Blake Babies are typically American?

No, I don't think so at all. I hope we're not typical American, because we kind of just keep away from the typical American thing. We're kinda like a minority. Musicians are a minority.

Who is a typical American band?

Oh, you mean... I thought you meant a typical American person. No I don't think we're a typical American band. We're just another band. There's all kinds, we're just another one. I don't think there is a typical American band. Grand Funk Railroad maybe. Or maybe Skid Row or something. So I guess we're not typical.

Do you think you're noisier live or is that just because you've got the extra guitar?

We are. It's kinda more raw, maybe, harder, when we play live.

Is there much difference between the loud and the quiet songs?

They're all pretty similar. To me there's not much difference between our songs. They're all pretty kinda the same. None of them are really loud, none of them are really soft. They're all just part of the big picture.

Do you feel more affinity with bands like Nirvana or Throwing Muses?

Both. Nirvana we're more similar in spirit maybe. Throwing Muses of course we have a chick singer and weird guitar chords.

Have you ever been compared to Cyndi Lauper?

I don't think so. No-one's ever compared me to her to my face.

Would that be an insult?

It wouldn't be an insult. I don't mind that comparison. She's a good singer, I guess. She just has bad material. She never had a good band or very good songs. She made her voice kind of a novelty, which is kinda sad because she has a good voice.

Are you going to split up after this tour?

Yeah, after this tour. We're gonna split up. At least for a while. I don't know what's going to happen in the future, but we just have to split up because half the band lives in Indiana and half lives in Boston. It's too far away to be a working band. You can do other things.

Are the other things pretty similar?

I made a record. It's similar, like I sing really melodic stuff still, really catchy melodies, but some of it's kinda heavier.

Do you prefer a heavier sound?

Yeah. I wanna go in that direction. I'm sick of jangly pop.

Did you start off jangly pop?

No, we started off really raunchy actually, like trashy pop in the beginning. John and I both play guitar and we had another bass player. Our first record, 'Nicely Nicely', was really raw sounding.

Do you prefer 'Rosy Jack World' or 'Sunburn'?

Right now I like 'Rosy Jack World' a lot better. It's more diverse. It's more varied. 'Sunburn' to me is just like all the same kinds of songs. And it's too wimpy to me, in retrospect. I'm really proud of it but I wouldn't do that again. I wouldn't make a record like that now. It's too light, not enough guitars.

THE GIG

The guitars come to the fore later that evening when Blake Babies take to the stage. They play like it was their last gig, which it may be, churning out their own little 'best of'. Enrapturing the audience with the cutesyish looks, the intelligent lyrics and the loud guitars. It all ends with Juliana beating out 'Nirvana' on an old guitar.

And is that J.Mascis I see wandering around? Come to check out the Blake Babies version of 'Severed Lips' no doubt. If anyone reading this is thinking of doing a Dinosaur interview, make sure you ask him what he thinks of it.

THE BOUNCER

"Could you show me your Walkman. You had a red light showing."

"Yes, I was taping the gig."

"I'll have to take that off you."

"Why?"

What is the point of bouncers? There's always too many of them. They never do anything unless it's some act of mindless annoyance. Why don't they pick up glasses or something?

What right does a bouncer have to tell me I can't tape a gig? If someone in a band tells me not to tape the gig, or not to give the tape to anyone, I respect that. But ask anyone who videos gigs (because videoing is more obvious) and you'll probably find that they ask the band first and they're only too happy. But bouncers know fuck all about artistic integrity. You see people trying to put reasoned arguments to them and they might as well be speaking Uzbek.

I could write reams on this subject, but I'm supposed to be writing a Blake Babies interview.

THE PUDDLE

As I wander away from the T+C at 9:50 I leave with a bizarre concoction of memories. A taxi drives through a puddle and soaks me with muddy water. I walk on unperturbed. I buy some chips and phone home (for tis Mother's Day). Some things you can always rely on.

From the surreal beginning to a tainted ending it was an eventful day, the best of it being Blake Babies where they belong: on a big stage.

more reviews

Jellystone Park - Consider Me Gone flexi **
The Deskimos demo **

Two floppy demos, in different contexts.

The Marmite Sisters - Tug flexi *

I give it one star reluctantly so as not to mess up my marking system. This gives flexis a bad name. The manufacturers should consider the detrimental effect of crap like this above profit. Much worse than CFCs. I'm going to burn it.

Trains And Boats And Planes - Hum LP (UFO) ****

A white label with no sleeve or press release. Doncha just love it? I know nothing about this, but I like it. Twin vocals and classic guitars with a touch of violins here and there. Guessing from UFO's history, this is some Americans taking time out from their regular band to create a masterpiece in a spare week. The papers will now come and spoil this by revealing that it's actually Lloyd Cole and Sinead O'Connor. If they do I'll ignore them and pretend it's Mark Eitzel and Kim Gordon.

Love Blobs - Congealed mini-LP (Wiiija) *****

Straight outta Croydon and into the arms of Camden. Putting their dodgy indie beginnings behind them, they've been reading up on the real stuff and hanging around the sludge zones, and have been transformed into a high calibre, hard driving rhythm offensive. This album has all their best songs on it, or maybe they're all good, I forget. Either way this is an album of excellent songs, given an extra push by John Wills at the steering wheel. The best can only get better for Wiiija's best new hope.

Sun Dial - Other Way Out EP (UFO) **

1968: the future of rock'n'roll. This is even more psychedelic than whoever I last accused of it - Spectrum Zero or someone. Much more directly imitating the drug-hazed Beatles. It's a couple of years old anyway, and may even be an LP but I didn't time it.

Lydia Lunch - Queen Of Siam LP (UFO) ****

A timely re-issue of Lydia's 1980 sleaze album. One for the low lights of a late night drinking club in downtown where-ever. Orchestration and trumpets never sounded so good, and then there's Lydia's seductive drawl. You surely jest.

Buffalo Tom - Velvet Roof single (Situation Two) ****

You know this kinda stuff is the bread and butter of any indie guitar audience. Obviously the title track is the classic, but the other three tracks are equally poignant, and they're not on the LP either.

Buffalo Tom - Let Me Come Over LP (Situation Two) ****

Apart from 'Velvet Roof' it sounds very much like American Music Club or Thin White Rope. Only Americans can do this. Anyone who says of a British band "if they were American everyone would love them" is talking nonsense.

Chicken Scratch - Giant And Invisible LP (Community 3) **

Haven't I heard this before somewhere? More "whacky" tunes from a "fun" US band. If you draw a line from Skin Yard through No FX and keep going another three feet you'll find a big puddle with a hundred Chicken Scratches in.

more reviews

Spitfire - Free Machine EP (Eve) **

Spitfire have gone all 60s70ssmokemachineanddancinggirls recently, which is veering towards Dr & The Medics territory. It all has it's place. The B-side is so mellow it's got seagulls standing on it.

Swans - Love Of Life LP (Young God) **

Although the singer may sound like Andrew Eldritch, the music is a bit more varied than pure goth. There are a few interesting narrations thrown in for good measure, and it's nice to see that they didn't feel compelled to think of a name for all the tracks on the album. And I thought Chris Trout had better taste.

Wedding Present

When I gave David Gedge a copy of Big Muff 1, way back when, I accused him of being a pop star. He sent me a postcard saying he liked the fanzine and is available for interview. I sent him issue 2 and said maybe sometime. Now is that time. Except I didn't do it - I left the honour to a friend of mine who's been a fan longer than me. Rupert went to Oxford to see them play the Jericho Tavern on the third night of their nostalgia trip tour, and he came back with this interview.

What do the Wedding Present do? If you don't know by now then you've been living in an FM zone for too many years. What's the point of telling you they dash of 200 mph finger-frazzling Lovelorn epics, the garrulous Mr Gedge intoning in a droning dirge of a voice the intimate details of one ruined relationship after another because you'd know that already? Every song is Heartbreak Hotel re-invented and revisited. Originating around the time of C86 the Wedding Present were lumped in with the shambling brigade but they were prickly and pugnacious, not sweet and swooning. When that scene melted into a gooey swamp of stale chocolate and hairy lollipops they stepped from the confectionary wreckage unstained. And since then they've moaned their way into our hearts. So just how fucked up is David Gedge?

Are the lyrics concerned with problems you've experienced in relationships?

I think there's a misconception about the lyrics. People think I've had thousands of girlfriends all of whom have chucked me but much of it is imagination and I'm also very nosy about other people's feelings and the way they conduct their affairs. Ideas also come from television programmes and newspaper articles but obviously a lot of it comes from my own personal history because it's easier to write about yourself.

Do you write about other people and do they notice?

Yes I do and no they don't, because I'm quite clever at disguising it I think. People say, oh I've spotted myself in that song, and they're often wrong, it wasn't actually about them. Because of course one person's view of a relationship is different from another person's so though they may think you're writing about them you're not at all. What I do is investigate the way people talk to each other in various ways and how people are motivated by feelings of jealousy, betrayal, lust and obsession and so on. There are thousands of different ways of looking at those feelings, each one is like a massive subject.

I think your voice is deeper and huskier than when you started out?

It's deeper but also higher. I've consciously tried to extend the range. When I started singing my voice was more conversational to fit the nature of the lyrics. It was tuneful but not in a big pop tunes way, it sort of trundled along with the guitars. I'm resigned to the fact that I haven't got a great voice but I have tried to develop it in recent years. The same goes for the music which was all fast 3 minute pop songs when we began but now we try and layer them and structure them a bit more.

Do you think singing is your natural vocation or would you be happy doing something else?

I'd have been happier being a guitarist or a drummer but they've got too many boxes to carry. But when we started the group I was writing songs and I knew if we couldn't find anyone to sing them I'd have to do it myself though I was wary of the limitations of my voice. Now though I don't think you have to have a brilliant voice, I mean Mark Smith is one of my favourite vocalists but I wouldn't say he was a great singer: he's got an interesting style.

If someone decided to do a poetry reading of Wedding Present songs would you go along to it?

I'd run a million miles from it. What's always guided my lyrical development is an avoidance of anything pretentious or lyrics full of metaphorical allegory. I'm more a fan of prose, I'd rather see a play written down.

What about the guy who did trumpet versions of Marychain songs? Would that approach to your songs interest you?

I'd love to hear that. I have heard the Brilliant Corners do a version of Anyone Can Make A Mistake with a trumpet taking one of the guitar parts. It surprised me because the trumpet is such a jovial instrument for one of our songs.

"I'd have been happier being a guitarist or a drummer"





Do RCA treat you as quirky pop stars and let you get on with what you want to do?

They just look at us as an investment really. We have a contract that is fairly one sided, we have final say on all artistic and commercial decisions. They advise us on marketing techniques, the only difficulty we had was when we made a compilation video and we wanted to call it Spunk. They said that WHSmith wouldn't stock it, which I always found a bit preposterous anyway because it's only a music video and you'll find soft porn like 9½ Weeks in the shop. We were on the verge of taking it elsewhere and having someone else put it out but then the artist who designed the sleeve came up with the idea of removing the S so it was called Punk and put an asterisk where the S was.

Do they think you're just being awkward?

Yes, sometimes. We have these series of ideas like the hand painted sleeve or 12 singles in one year, even calling the LP George Best, which turned out to be successful in a marketing sense. Even using Steve Albini because that was a great way of getting onto American college radio.

Do you think you're selling enough for RCA with the singles being limited?

Probably not. This is a special case though and we're prepared to lose money on them. Well they don't lose money really, it just means our account is lower.

Does this anti-marketing approach help your credibility?

If I was a cynical record boss I'd say the credibility factor is important but if I'm honest I don't know and I don't care. I just thought doing 12 singles in a year was a great idea.

Is this approach a broadside at the CD influenced market?

Possibly. But I don't hate CDs, I think they're convenient. Though I'm a little sad the 7 inch single is dying. Britain is one of the few places still pressing them, in America they don't release them and in Europe it's rare and here they're just a marketing tool for an LP. For me pop music came on 7 inch singles. What we're doing is like a celebration of the format but I'd be the first to admit the 7 inch will die.

Is the Wedding Present a full time job?

Yes, it's quite worrying. Because it's not a job, it's something I really like doing, it creeps up on you so it starts out as a hobby, then becomes a big hobby and then it's all you're doing. Sometimes I'll think of nothing else but the band for days which is a bit stupid. It's like infatuation I suppose. I take it too seriously I think.

**"I saw that
Sonic Youth video
and I thought it
was a bit dull"**

Do the rest of the band see the Wedding Present as your band?

No not at all. They used to do interviews but all the questions were directed at me and they got bored. Also if they did say anything it would still be quoted as me or completely ignored. So I think people see me as the voice of the group. It's a democracy but I don't like people voting on my lyrics and song titles.

Seamonsters is not for sale in South Africa. Will recent events change your attitude to South Africa?

I welcome the changes but we can't yet relinquish our export ban but the day isn't far off now. I'm fairly optimistic but it would have to be a multi-party democracy before we could sell our records there. We get a lot of letters from South Africa asking us to play there but we have to write back and say that as a member of the anti-apartheid movement it would be a contradiction.

Would you write lyrics reflecting what's going on in the world?

I've tried but I've never been satisfied with them. Only one is slightly like that and that's Kennedy and I'm not keen on the lyrics. All About Eve is slightly about South Africa and that got tucked away on a 12 inch because I didn't like that song very much. Maybe it's me. I'm not very good at writing political songs. I'm not sure if pop music is the place for it. Even Billy Bragg, who's a really great bloke, writes better love songs I think because when he starts hurling political clichés I find it a bit embarrassing. Shipbuilding was, I think, a good political song, quite poetic.



Will you do a bigger tour next year?

This year probably, we usually do an autumn tour. We're doing this one now to cater for the more remote fans.

Presumably this tour is a lot more expensive?

No, it's less really because the PA is much smaller and we've only got one roadie. We've got another van for the barrier I suppose.

What do you think about Right Said Fred stealing your song title?

I can't say much about it really as I stole it myself. I think it was the title of a book I saw in WHSmith.

Do you enjoy making videos?

The group doesn't in general. I like it, though it's strange to spend the day miming your songs while people film you. I'm interested in film, the mechanics of directing a video and I'm pleased I've learnt about how videos are made. But I don't feel comfortable doing it. We're trying to do a video for all 12 singles on low budgets so we're using amateur film makers, people at film school rather than faceless companies. It's good to have people doing it who are Wedding Present fans who've got the chance to do something like this for the first time. It'll be interesting if we put it out on a compilation video, all the varied videos for the singles. But I saw that Sonic Youth one and before I saw it I thought it was a brilliant idea but when I saw it I was a bit disappointed, I thought it was a bit dull.



And that brings us back to the vocational question.

Well, there's many things I'd like to do, being a DJ or starting a record label.

Well there's a club I know who needs a good DJ. Would you consider being a producer?

I've been asked to produce once. Power Of Dreams asked me to produce a single because they said the stuff they'd done was too glossy. I don't know if I should take that as a complement. But it didn't work out. I think it would be a bit boring because I'm not a great lover of being stuck behind a mixing desk for weeks on end, which is why we tend to be very quick anyway.

So you don't write in the studio?

Not when they cost £600 a day and a rehearsal room is £50. Before we even go in the studio everything is rehearsed and finished and ready to record.

And that was that. That night the Wedding Present played to a packed Jericho Tavern. Last time I saw them play a venue this size they'd been supported by the Waltoners, Talulah Gosh and the Shamen. They weren't as hectic as they were then but they still had a ferocity all their own, only more controlled. Energy and passion still belong to them.

more reviews

The Daytrippers - She Said That single (October) *

I think if I was from Grantham I wouldn't remind everyone that it is the home of Maggie. If I liked Jonathan King I would probably jump off a tall building. If my debut gig was supporting the New FADs I would put it down as one of the things you have to do. I wouldn't put all this stuff in my press release.

A fifteenth rate Happy Mondays/Farm/bloody Top.

As Midge Ure might have said, this means nothing to me.

Terminal Power Company - The Hunger, The Heat single (Situation Two) **

It's okay, but isn't it techno dance? At least it's got a tune. The remix on the B-side is disappointingly short: it should have been at least 7 minutes, not a measly 4.45). The KLF put the extended messed-about version on the B-side and it's generally better than the pop version on the A-side. The A-side is better on this. They are not amateur enough.

Jacobs Mouse - No Fish Shop Parking LP (Blithering Idiot) **

Clumsy and unstructured, like the Falcon stage, which is probably why they fell off it.

Spinners - Dig The Hole Forget The Sun demo

All girl punk band from Turkey, it says here. US\$7 inc p&p from Zuhul Kececioğlu, PO Box 154, Kavaklıdere, 06692, ANKARA/TURKEY.

7 inch EP (Stark) ***

Four bands on Harlow's Stark label.

The Chekists are a clumsy techno band.

Tuesday Painters are a plaintive, dreamy, sado indie-pop kinda band. A name to watch out for.

The Indestructible Beat are a party punk/ska showband.

Pregnant Neck were a weird Thrilled Skinny/Keatons/Stump band.

You wanted variety. Here's where you get it. Stark Recordings, 12 Rye Hill Road, Harlow, Essex. Only £2.

100 Days Like This demo ****

Imagine American Music Club meets New Order and you've got intelligent, personal lyrics with a guitar pop backing. Visiting Americans. I don't know if this demo is for sale, but if you ever see the name around, look closer.

Chainsaw Kittens - Violent Religion LP (Mammoth) ***

There's a lot of mileage in Nirvana comparisons. This is cleaner than 'Bleach' but not as accessible as 'Nevermind'. There's a lot of mileage in crap puns too.

There's a common chord pattern and I can't tell if it's Led Zep or The Sweet. And that's not the only 70s guitar bit.

There's a lot of mileage in used 'riffs', but as I've said before, that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Dillon Dance - Christmas CD single (Mammoth) **

I was in HMV today and they've got rid of the 7 inch section, and I thought "I suppose they'll get rid of the vinyl section next". I get home and find a CD only single from someone who should know better. Maybe it's more difficult to sell 12 inch singles in America. Maybe I'm being a purist. Peelite was right - life has surface noise. Anyway, it's called 'Christmas' and it's on Mammoth. I guess it's okay.

Nina Hagen

Nina Hagen Town & Country Club Monday 24 February 1992

When I started enthusing about going to see Nina Hagen, people cringed and went "oh dear", but what do they know? So when Phonogram sent me two tickets, there were no takers for the second one. To try and find out what the touts were offering I asked how much they were selling them for. "£17 - it's a sell-out show". I managed to shake that one off, and offer another a ticket for £15. "You must be joking! It won't sell out in a million years, unless you've got 800 friends who want to go". It did fill up though, even upstairs. I guess the tourists saw the posters all around town. And every postcard punk in London was there.

The old fans were there too, "getting into the spirit", dancing to the B52s, and lapping up the atmosphere as if it was for real. They are probably writing this up now for their blue A5 "what does Nina Hagen have for breakfast" fanzines. So when Nina makes her big entrance on a Barbie moped they get very excited. Me, I just stood and thought "that's nice. At least she's making the effort to put on a show". But I could already tell that by the stage set, which was a massive mock-up of the LP sleeve. The LP, of course, being 'Street', a peculiar mix of post-punk and naff rap.



This was a well-staged show, with eight costume changes (and I've got the setlist to prove it), but it never drifted towards the clinical. Sure, the setlist is a photocopy that has seen many stages, but they didn't stick to it much at all. There were cock ups, but they didn't cause mass embarrassment or result in the sacking of the tour manager. Yes, there were backing tapes, but they only contained the naff-raps, and frequently came on at the wrong time. And what if there was a 40" TV on stage? It spent most of the time on fast-forward or pause. I saw Wendy & Lisa once in very similar circumstances, and it was so boring. They might as well have been miming, and they probably used the "hello London" line.

The band (drums, bass, guitar, keyboard) looked like musos, but they weren't entirely humourless. The guitarist started off in a 'Touched By The Hand Of God' heavy metal cliché wig, which was soon removed to reveal baldness-with-a-pigtail. (Although I'm not sure which bit is the humour). But then Nina's always worked with musos. Judging from the TV shows I've seen her on, I suppose that's a product of her upbringing. In a sense, this is cabaret (in the same way as The Cramps), but not as much as her Eurovision pap 'World Now'.

I've been reading Sandie Shaw's autobiography recently, and what a useless tosspot she is. Claiming to be a working class girl making it in the music business. She name-drops like nobody's business, only associating with showbiz stars, and talking about Morrissey slumming it on Rough Trade and living in luxury on EMI. What a wanker! She is what happens if you get drawn into cabaret. Playing to rich tuxedos in fucking casinos.

Thank God Nina knows where reality is. The show sometimes tends towards the pedestrian, but never towards the middle of the road.

Way back in 1978 Nina was a punk in East Germany. She got thrown out for being too radical, and had to leave her family behind, unable even to visit. She continued in West Germany for a while and then discovered America. America brought a change in lifestyle and music. She emerged in 1982 with 'Nunsexmonkrock', an album of cosmic experiences. 'Fearless' was an all-out move to American-style disco/rap, produced by Giorgio Moroder, and was pretty dismal. 'In Ekstasy' was the same done properly, with a mix of the old punk. Between 1978 and 1985 Nina Hagen made five albums, all for CBS. In 1989 she released her eponymous album, now on Phonogram. Somewhere in between were a couple of singles and a compilation. 1991 saw the release of 'Street', again on Phonogram.

'Nina Hagen' and 'Street' were both recorded in London amidst a climate of revolution in Nina's home turf and a proliferation of dancey music hereabouts. These influences are the basis of the last two albums, with an input from the previous five albums. There are also contributions from people as diverse as Lemmy and Adamski.

Nina doesn't shirk from her past, she celebrates it. The live show includes songs from all the albums, but not in a 'greatest hits' kind of way. She pauses to share a couple of books. One proves that UFOs really do exist - one of her pet subjects. The other offers scientific evidence that you don't have to die from AIDS. A dubious proposition, not helped by the video of Freddie Mercury playing in the background during 'My Way'.

Nina Hagen's fascinating history, and her willingness to share it, would have made an extremely interesting interview, but I tried to arrange it through Phonogram. They told me she was flying in from Germany to do the show and flying straight back afterwards. I should have taken my chances and just turned up with my Walkman. Next time.

Our American Cousins

"'Our American Cousins' was the name of the play that President Abraham Lincoln was watching when he got killed", explains Monica, bassist in the band of the same name, "so that was kinda like a sick joke."

"For a time Lincoln jokes were really funny in America", says drummer Rick.

Our American Cousins formed in New York in 1989 and released a 7 inch single 'Nitrobaby', a record owing much to early Marychain and raw punk. They then recruited John as the new singer, and Rick on drums to join original members Monica and JR to form the current line-up.

JR: "This is where our history starts I guess."

The second single, 'One Wish Too Many', an indie-pop kind of affair, backed with 'Brand New God' and 'Breakfast Club', ditto with the guitars turned up, was a new dawn for OAC.

Then came 'Pandora 99', leaving the realm of plastic-bag-and-wraparound-sleeves and joining the coloured-vinyl-with-big-hole-in-the-middle set. The title track continues where the previous single left off, but on the B-side, 'Red Swirling Grey' and 'The Lonesome Death Of Jack And Judy' are nearer American guitar pop as we know it, but still a little off-centre.

Not even the excellence of the singles could have prepared me for the powerful performance of the live show. Everything that knocks you out about the singles comes at you with a sledgehammer. All those clichés about a bullet through your cranium really come to life as John pours his heart out into the microphone, and Monica plays bass with a force that could bend iron girders at a glance.

Monica: "Our live sound is more powerful. We have a new tape we just did, and that was produced by Wharton Tiers who's done Sonic Youth, Unrest, Dinosaur Jr, Foetus, Swans, Lunachicks."

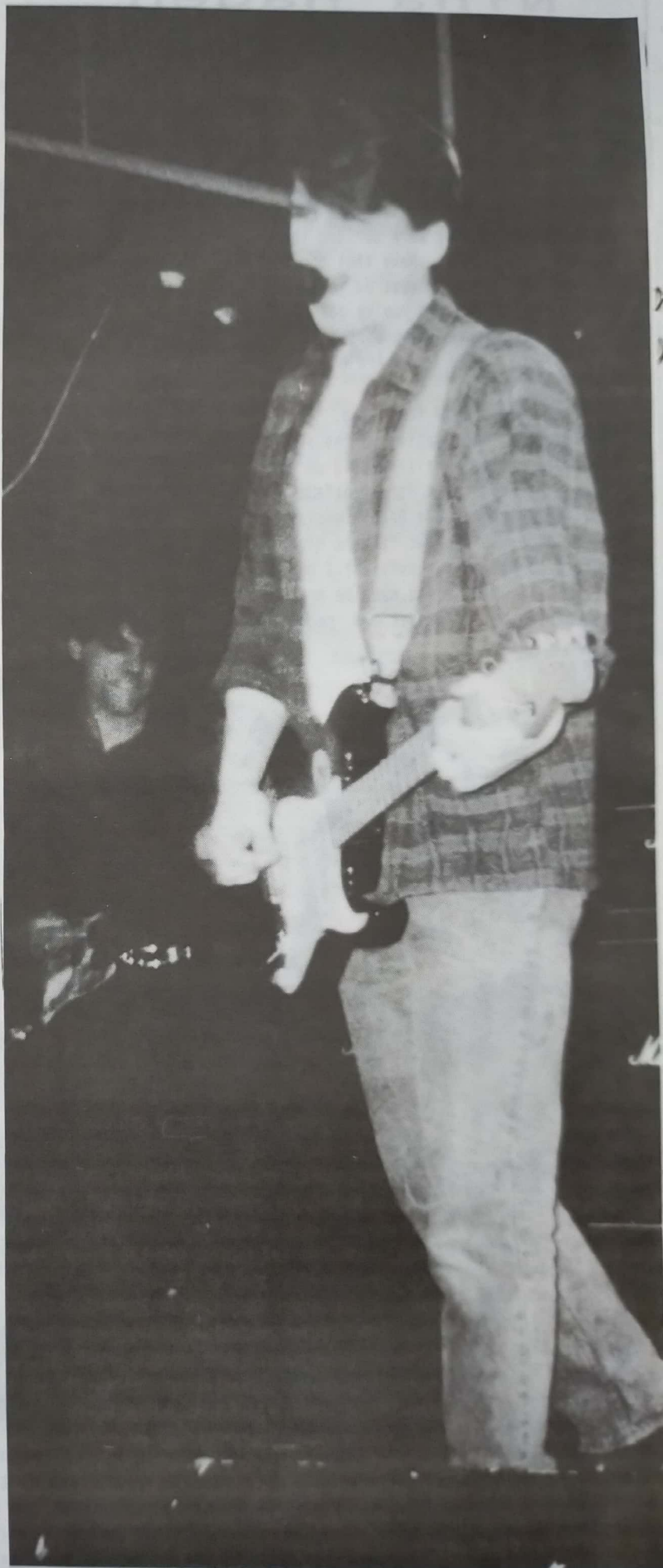
And let's not forget Action Swingers.

John: "That sounds more like we do live."

"I think the way the American indie scene is working out you can pretty much get popular completely through the mail"

So look out for a killer single in the near future and stop messing around with bands like Pavement. Everyone's looking for the next great American guitar band and all we can find is major label hype like Pearl Jam and Nymphs, so how do the real bands get known?

"They come over here" is Rick's theory. "Like The Pixies came over here. You have a small British bands that have been playing around here, like Lush, and then they get all this press in NME and Melody Maker and then they get signed to Polydor in America or Sire or something like that, but you gotta remember it took Sonic Youth 10 years to get signed to a major label in America, and Redd Kross were around for 10 years before they got signed, and all these bands that have been playing around, but meanwhile a British band gets some press here and they're signed within six months to an American label."



"I think you can do it America just through the fanzines", says John, not necessarily disagreeing. "The really small, like Xeroxed fanzines. If everyone goes wild then maybe eventually Spin likes you. I think the way the American indie scene is working out you can pretty much get popular completely through the mail. Pavement did it. Unrest has done it. Pay as little rent as possible and put out your own records and just make a name for yourself that way. Just release things from your basement, you get written about in fanzines, and play a few shows every once in a while."

Rick: "As far as New York City goes, there's not that many places to play. There's CB's, and Chase which doesn't really get a lot of touring bands but it's good for New York bands. And Marquee and Ritz but you have to be on a label to play those places."



"You have to suck some major dick to get in those places", says Monica, exhibiting a delightful turn of phrase. "I like playing CB's. I think CB's is the best small club in New York City to play. It's got the sound system, it's got the name. It sucks if you're playing three o'clock in the morning on a Tuesday night, but if you're playing a decent opening bill on a Friday or Saturday it's one of the best clubs you can play in New York. I really think so. And we've got treated fairly well there."

JR: "We did a show there with Debbie Harry a while ago. It was really early, but the crowd there was really into us, which was kinda nice."

Monica: "We've got to the point where we don't play the real crappy places any more. We usually play weekends and we usually play places that have a decent amount of people and a semi-decent venue, but it's taken us a few years to get to that point. We did the five feet by six foot shit-holes where three people show up on a Tuesday night. We've done that."

Rick: "We pretty much headline in New York now."



"Where the Hell's Darlington?"

So coming to England and doing this short tour of small places must feel like you're starting all over again.

Monica: "No, not really because we've played some pretty decent shows."

JR: "And everyone's really liked us a lot."

Monica: "If it's strangers that are into you, at least you know they're really sincere, they're into you for your music and nothing else. Your friends usually say they like you because they want to get invited to your next party. They're a bunch of lying shits if they're your friends."

Rick: "Yeah, last Friday was good when we played the White Horse, and then Leeds which was great. That was about the best show."

JR: "In Darlington they liked us. Where the hell's Darlington?"

Rick: "Yeah, it's like playing Winsconsin."

John: "We got to meet some great people and we played some great shows. And people have been so ridiculously stupid, unreasonably nice. I don't really know why. It's like 'stay at my place, here's some food, my firstborn child!'"

Rick: "We're having a lot of fun. It's kind of like work and pleasure mixed. Pleasure and pain."

Monica: "If it was a holiday I'd be in California right now! It's gonna be positive regardless of whatever happens."

John: "We'll wow the kids back in New York."

Rick: "Oh, we played at the Palladium in London! Lady Di came down and danced the night away!"

Do you think the view of America that we get over here through films is at all accurate?

John: "I'd say 90% of our movies are just complete escapism. The bigger the dumber the better."

Monica: "I like dumb, stupid movies so you can't ask me a question about movies. I fall asleep through anything intelligent."

John: "We've been watching your TV and all the shittiest shows we have are over here. None of the good stuff. Write your TV station and ask them for 'Get A Life'. It's the greatest show."

There's enough crap American sitcoms on TV.

JR: "You get garbage. 'Beverly Hill 90210'."

Rick: "You get 'Who's The Boss'. 'Get A Life' is completely brilliant."

John: "It's about this 35 year old paperboy."

JR: "Just keep mentioning 'Get A Life' and people go 'Ah, I read about that in a couple of fanzines. I can't wait until it comes over.'"

Monica: "Kojak', 'Golden Girls', 'Who's The Boss', all this crap American television. You don't get the real cool shows. I would never watch 'Golden Girls'. No way. Or Oprah Winfrey."

John: "Just about anything in the mainstream is shitty, but there's enough independant movies."

Monica: "We're into real cheesy old American 70s sitcoms."

John: "Yeah, probably not much mainstream stuff."

Rick: "We're American trash culturites."

That's interesting since your music seems to have more of an English sound.

John: "I actually listen to a lot of American bands, but strangely enough every song I write is a Wedding Present rip off, so I don't know. These guys I guess listen to more English stuff."

Rick: "I don't listen to anything. I listen to very few bands. Records are too much money, there's nothing on the radio. We don't try to sound like anybody, we don't want to be like anybody else. We don't consciously say we don't want to be like anybody else. Bands that say that write these really wierd riffs, like Living Color or something, nothing to do with the song."

Monica: "As far as like older influences, it's Ramones, Dolls, Patti Smith, Television."

John: "But then there was The Buzzcocks, The Undertones and all that stuff."

Monica: "Marychain. 'Psychocandy' changed a lot, for me and J anyway. I thought that was an amazing album when that came out, and that's pretty much how we started the band."

JR: "Kind of like feedback and noise. We weren't as much into the stage presence of them though. We like the energy of the old stuff, so we kind of mix the two."

John: "Right now I'd say I listen mostly to American indie bands, and The Wedding Present."

Monica: "I pretty much go for British bands."

Is it just a case of the grass being greener on the other side of the ocean? Our American Cousins have had your cake and eaten it. Worth crossing the sidewalk for.

The Emotional's

Blondie Blondie Blondie!!! Trying to describe The Emotional's without mentioning Blondie is like trying to describe London without mentioning the tube. Although they may try to deny their Blondie roots, if I ask anyone what The Emotional's sound like they invariably say "Blondie". I guess it's not Emma's fault she sounds like Debbie Harry, puts on an American accent, and goes "ooh oh oh" all the time. And talking of tubes, anyone who's ever been on one in zone 1 will have seen stickers with slogans like "The Emotional's play raunchy banana pop" and "The Emotional's play three minute rock orgasms" and "The Emotional's play the Robey January 16". Recently you've probably seen more of the last one, although I made that up, because their initial (naive?) enthusiasm is now waning. They are now digging their own grave by just playing The Robey all the time, whereas earlier on they were digging their own grave by forcing themselves at you. They sent the first LP to everyone in every music paper, thus causing the reaction "oh no, not another Emotional's LP". They put stickers on every advert on every tube station, thus causing the reaction "fuck off you obnoxious gits", so everyone was sick of The Emotional's before they'd even seen or heard them. If they'd played the Bull & Gate or the Falcon once in a while, or out of London, you'd have got to see them without the shite hype.

I don't normally like bands with girl singers who wear fishnets and high heels, y'know. It gives the impression of an office girl pub rock band. Emma romes around the stage exuding arrogant confidence, like a cross between Clare Grogan and Melanie out of Neighbours. "This is a new one. It's about sss... 3 minutes long". Aren't they all? Another banana driven bolsterous pop tune. While Emma yelps and kicks and turns, the 'lads' hold serious rock poses. The Robey regulars have seen all this before. Forgive me if I'm wrong, but surely the idea of pop that it's popular, not to keep playing to two men and a dog. Why do they carry on? Just for the taste of it. For the 'buzz'.



more reviews

Godflesh - Pure LP (Earache) ****

So this is what they mean by "hardcore grunge". All the songs sound the same. They've got a five second lurch that is repeated for five minutes with an unintelligible shouted vocal which is loud enough to add interest but not too loud to detract from the grunge. I exaggerate slightly: if it was that idealised it would get rather tedious, which never happens.

'Monotremata' is a complicated song. The machine is playing a varying, disjoint drum beat, and the guitars try and follow. There are still moments of consistency where it all hangs together.

Long tracks. A long album. Long may it continue. So this is what they mean by "faster louder harder".

Submerge 4 fanzine

The fanzine with the aforementioned Tony Head flexi, which is something of a contradiction because the bands in the fanzine are more centre-field. Live reviews and some record reviews are done by various contributors, interviews are done by the lass herself, including Dinosaur Jr, Gumball, Lush and Werefrogs. Every photo is a promo photo, and there are also some arty drawings scattered around.

No price on it, probably a quid + SAE from Tina, 35 Lickey House, North End Road, Fulham, London, W14.

If you haven't already got it, you should buy issue 3 which had interviews with Nirvana, L7, Dickies, TFC and others, and an exclusive Senseless Things flexi. That's £2 inc p&p.

Band Of Susans - The Word And The Flesh LP (Restless) ****

One of the most exciting things about writing this rag is people sending you things that you thought you wanted but were never quite sure enough to buy.

I've seen Band Of Susans often enough, and peaks like 'Hope Against Hope' make you want to worship the air they breath, but when it comes at the end of a 90 minute set, it could just be relief that they've finished their guitar cleverness and have finally got round to rocking out and just making a wonderful noise.

I unknowingly sold Robert Poss a fanzine at an AC Temple gig (where else?) which spurred him to send me this tape, along with a T-shirt (my first free T-shirt! - much more exciting than my first free video) and a wad of press cuttings dating back five years that shows as much within/without appreciation of the (world) music press as Bleach. Okay, so I know this is over a year old now, but when Robert Poss sends me a tape I'm going to review it.

Band Of Susans are an American guitar band, but they're not an American guitar band. Unlike Hole or Nirvana, you don't have to listen. The songs draw you in, but they let you go again. You can listen to the record while cooking the dinner and it fills the space nicely. You can listen to it on the tube and it'll annoy the neighbours. Turned down it's background music. Turned up it's guitar power. However you look at it, it feels different.

Deeper than Hole, wider than Nirvana. The end.

Moist - Face Pack demo **

Beat your instruments and see what happens. Tuneless noise that lacks power at home, and you daren't turn it up in case the neighbours think you've gone mad. They sound better in one of the breeding grounds though.

Float - Crazed Up with Happiness EP (Telepathy) *

About the E culture. Oh well. The title track has some deep bass that my record needle won't stay in. They'll want me to buy a CD player next. This is no reason to.

Cruel Frederick - We Are The Music We Play CD (SST) *

Another bloody CD. I read the press release and I was more and more put off the more I read. The last line is "jazz at its cruelest". I wouldn't have listened to it anyway.

The Sound Of The City compilation LP (Columbia) ***

The press release consists of stating how many copies 'The Sound Of The Suburbs' has sold, a tracklist, and a copy of Jake Burns' sleeve notes. To a cynic like me, that can only mean that this is released purely to rake in a few more quid to hype whatever major label 'talent' is waiting to tell you how good they are, and the bands on here are rated solely by the number of units they can shift. It is therefore entirely coincidental that this is actually quite good. Put it on at your next old punks gathering.

'Sheena Is A Punk Rocker' is every song The Ramones ever recorded, and the only one you need, but you do need it. 'Back Of My Hand' and 'Where's Captain Kirk' were probably novelty hits and entirely unrepresentative of the bands' work, but it's those units again. Sing along if you know the words.

Side Two plods on with Sham 69, The Pretenders, Gen X, SLF, etc. Every one a classic, but, like Christmas presents, if you haven't already got it, you probably don't want it. Most of the bands are still going in one form or another, and they probably read The Times now. (Commercial pressures are getting to me!).

Buy the CD from HMV. Play it to the kids.

The Only Ones - Another Girl Another Planet / Psychedelic Furs - Pretty In Pink single (Columbia) **

Remember the heyday of 1987 when one third of the Top 40 was Stock Aitken Waterman and another third was re-issues? 'Pretty In Pink' was a re-issue then due to an incidental part in the film of the same name. 'Another Girl Another Planet' is reasonable enough, but surely not worth digging up again. The hope is of course that it will get in the charts, like they used to, and promote the 'Best Of' and 'Sound Of The Cash Registers'.

The Spectrum Zero - Introduce It To Your Soul single (Situation Two) *

I went to see Loop once, and The Shamen were supposed to have shared the headline, but they got stuck on a motorway somewhere near Aberdeen. This record is even less relevant. Bob Dylan meets the fucking Doo-Dah Band or something.

Machines Of Loving Grace - Rite Of Shiva single (Mammoth) **

This is a weird one. There are no RPMs marked on the record, but the BPMs are. I couldn't work out what the RPM was supposed to be, so I had to count the BPMs. Desperate or what? It's a dance record. Mind you, The KLF are like that, and they've got one that's 120 BPM too, so it's fine by me.

Calamity Jane - Martha Jane Cannary (SMR) ***

More like ZuZu's Petals than Babes, ie they're making all the right noises but not meaning it. Come to think of it, they could actually be ZuZu's Petals. The real test is whether they have handbags.

Sunshot

Sunshot are three different souls pulling from opposite corners. Somehow it all ties together in the middle. Taru came to London from Finland with the intention of forming a band. Maria came from Middlesbrough for the same reason, and Toby came from Huddersfield. Destiny, and a classified ad, brought them together. Some people say Sunshot are a goth band. Those that have seen them say they're more like a cross between a noise band, a dance band and goth band.

"That's good: noise, goth and dance", says Taru. "Remember what I put in that ad how I got you?", she ask the other two Sunshots. "Sonic Youth meets Shamen meets The Sisters. And now it's all coming out, so my dream's coming true."

"The biggest preconception people have about us is that we're a goth band", Maria moans. "Didn't you know? We are a goth band. It's official. You've got to not take other people's opinions too seriously otherwise you just lose yourself one way or another. You either end up thinking you're brilliant or end up thinking you're shit and you're not either. You're just pretty good. Or rather excellent as we are!"

Toby: "But we've been called grunge noise pop. It's probably a bit closer to the truth."

Maria: "That's nice. I can live with that. We'll probably be acid houses (sic) next week."

Toby: "The bands I never liked was bands like Sisters or The Banshees cos they never had any balls behind them. I liked some of the songs but I was never a fan. There was never that grunge about them. Like The Young Gods have got a mega grunge but they've got no guitars."

Sunshot are not goths. Goths are sullen types who mope around because Cranes pulled out of a gig without telling anyone. Sunshot are groovers who stagedive to Young Gods, and bring chaos to a muted T+C.

"We're natural boogiers"

The other essential part of their sound is the drum machine. This is no ordinary drum machine. It's not there to replace an absent drummer, it's a vital component. It is the dance element to their music.

Taru: "I like really hardcore dancey beats and then I like hardcore trashy guitar beats."

Which probably explains where the bass fits in. The drum machine is doing a hard dance beat, Toby is providing a hardcore noise on guitar, and Taru's bass is somewhere in between with a kind of dance noise. In amongst this guitar dance collision is Maria's manic empyreal voice.

Any more than the three of them would upset the perfect balance, so the drum machine is the natural companion.

Toby: "I've always been in a band with a drum machine. I've never been in a band with a drummer before."

Taru: "I was in bands in Finland, we always had a drummer and we were always looking for a drummer, and then when we managed to find one they were never keeping time properly or things like this and that."

Maria: "I've never been in a band before but I like drum machines because they're compact."

Toby: "It expands our sound. You can do things a drummer couldn't play and you can get sounds a drummer couldn't get without having a really expensive kit. Like 'Playtime' (on the first single) has got a strange hip-hop beat, very quiet but then amplify it and throw it in for the chorus, but loads louder with a lot more things going on. You get the contrast which a drummer couldn't really do without about eight arms. If it's a dancey song I tend to make it a bit more powerful, make it sound like a drum machine, because it's got a harder edge than a drummer. Because it's more precise it's nastier somehow than a drummer."

Taru: "It's a three dimensional thing because the guitar speaks and the bass speaks and the lyrics speak. The songs are made of three parts, with the drums in the bottom which is made of all of us as well."

Maria: "There's nothing fucks me off more than when I can't hear the bass line, or I can't hear the noise. That's what I hate when you can't hear the noise."



Probably not helping dispel the goth image, but helping the coffers, Sunshot supported New Model Army on their recent tour.

Taru: "It's just really nice to just have a big stage and not even to be able to see the audience. It's much more convenient for my sort of presentation, because you've got lots of space and you can just sort of forget about the audience. Also I used to be a dancer. I was supposed to become a dancer, so it's very natural for me personally to move about."

Maria: "The whole thing about playing a big venue, it means you get a big stage, and we move around a lot. We do try to make up for the fact that there's only three people on stage by the way we move around. We're going to have problems tonight at the Falcon because we're just going to be headbutting each other and stuff. I've never been able to understand how people can play to a really good sort of groove and not move to it. We're natural boogiers, aren't we?"



Sunshot stand out from the crowd (and not just because of Maria's green hair), and so naturally like a different lot of bands to everyone else. Who are some of your favourites?

Maria: "At the moment, Nirvana."

Ah well!

Toby: "Oh, you cynic!"

Maria: "No, I mean it. I think the album's ace."

Toby: "We're the best fuck in the world'. I hate bands who say that."

Maria: "You always say that in an interview yourself."

Toby: "Because everyone else says it."

Taru: "Keep our independence and control like they have."

Maria: "So you can retain your anonymity out of the band, but when you're in it you're respected."

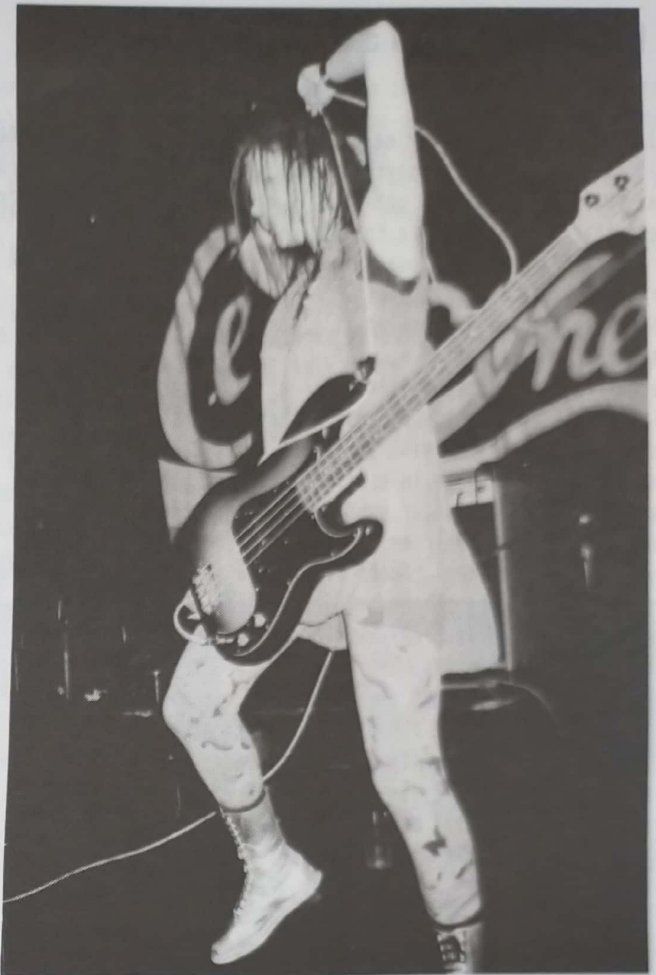
Taru: "I really like Sonic Youth."

Toby: "I like Young Gods and the Valentines."

Maria: "Nine Inch Nails. Jesus & Mary Chain."

Toby: "They're alright. A bit of a one idea band."

Haven't they sold out? (and I don't mean Brixton Academy!)



"It's the pink universe that surrounds us that gives this pulsating vibe"

Taru: "I love that 'Automatic' album, where they changed. We hate these clichés that you relate with music, and all of a sudden it's fucking bullshit language. For human beings I think it's too difficult to see things as individuals. You always have to make them some sort of pattern and cast them - you are this or that. And it's not. It's not my idea of life."

So you're an extra-terrestrial are you Taru?

Toby: "You haven't asked us where we got 'Very Nice' from."

It's just an EP title.

Taru: "Because my brain is basically in a shape of a lettuce, very nice, and pulsates from within."

Toby: "Neon backlit."

Of course!

Taru: "That's what it's saying. Have a very nice time."

Toby: "Do you like the pink and green T-shirts? The cover's going to be that colour as well. Very nice indeed."

Taru: "We've got pink vibes in us. I think it's the pink universe that surrounds us that gives this pulsating vibe. With the green planet Earth in the middle. Maybe. And silver bits."

Toby: "And blue bits as well. Blue's my favourite colour. Is your favourite colour green, Maria?"

Maria: "Yes. Green and silver. I love silver at the moment."

Toby: "Blue's better. I love blue and silver together like in a barber's pole."

Are Sunshot the best band in the world, or just a pigment of the imagination?

Dharma Bums

"If we were to speak for mainstream America there's no way they could swallow what we're saying", says Jeremy, singer with Dharma Bums. "Mainstream America got totally behind a war, whereas we're a band that's coming from a totally different place, where you don't work things out by punching someone in the face, you work things out by talking and stuff."

"So if we get really popular it'll be a big misunderstanding", jokes Eric, the guitarist.

Jeremy: "I think the sub-culture is a lot larger than people realise, it's a huge body of people that are pretty quiet but very artistic. I like trying to search those people out."

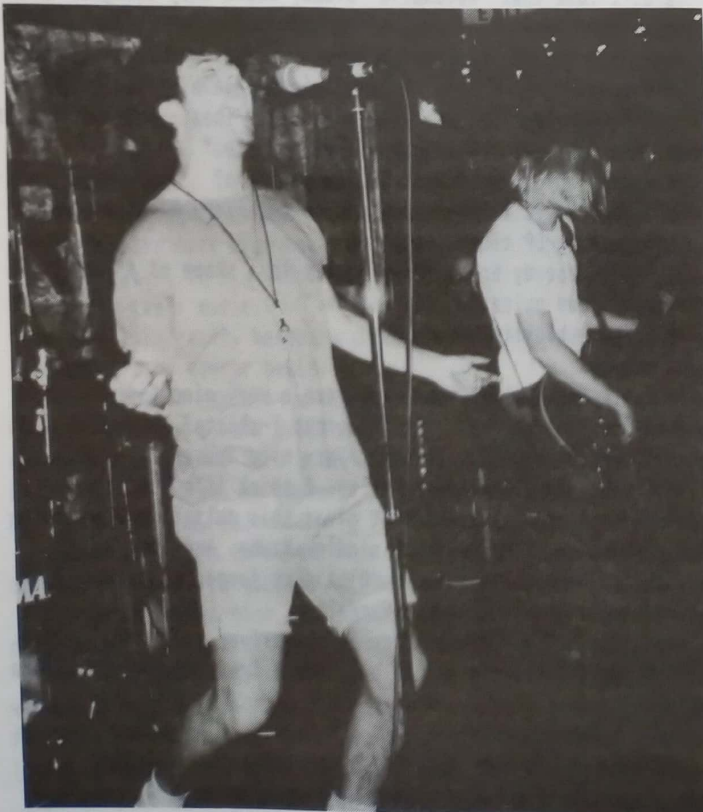
Dharma Bums' new album is a welcome find of gold-dust in the mudslide of American guitar bands. Funny you should say that because it's called 'Welcome' and the limited edition vinyl copies are on gold vinyl. Apart from those 1000 gold LPs, they've had to bow to the mainstream and just release CD and cassette.

The last album 'Bliss' was recorded in far from blissful circumstances. A friend of the band had just attempted suicide, another had been raped and another friend had died. To get away from everything they had this romantic idea of recording in a nineteenth century community hall in the deep countryside, to get an authentic 'electricity-on-stone' sound.

Jeremy: "It was a total escape from real life. It was an amazing time. It was the middle of summer, we were all going through these feelings of loss and confusion. We all managed to get deathly ill while we were out there. But we were able to focus. It was a hard experience but it was an incredible experience. It's something I'll never regret doing."

Eric: "In the scheme of things I'll look back and say 'that was a romantic idea'. If you think about the good things of doing it, it was great, but if you think about the actual everyday part of it, it was kinda rough."

Jeremy: "But that's what history's all about. I bet everything we've romanticised about in literature was a lot weirder and harder."



'Welcome' was recorded after spending the better part of 1991 touring the US. They went into the studio with songs about life, relationships and being on the road. They managed to capture some of that live feel as well as creating a sparkling record.

So you didn't record 'Welcome' in the same place as 'Bliss'?

Jeremy: "No! We wanted to record it in our home town and give it the energy of who we are now. We wanted to be close to our beds and close to our girlfriends this time."

Eric: "'Welcome' is a lot different to 'Bliss'. It goes back and forth. Our initial idea was to make an album that was as heavy and rocking as we could and also have the slowest and most beautiful songs we could and juxtapose them so they would fit together somehow. 'Bliss' is more of a rush - there's slower songs and faster songs but they all have a particular feel to them, whereas with 'Welcome' each song has it's own identity."

Jeremy: "We realise two things about us - one is that everyone says we're so rocking live and we've never caught that on record, and then we also knew as individuals that we love and have no problem with slower, beautiful, more melodic music, even though we come from an area where that might not necessarily be the popular thing. So we wanted to foster both sides of us."

'Bliss' was very much a 'back to basics' album, not just the rural atmosphere, but also with using 1960's guitars and amps. 'Welcome' was made more in the spirit of current standards.

Jeremy: "We thought we should probably embrace a little bit of this new technology and see what it's all about, because if it can be used to enhanced something as opposed to take away then that's important and we should utilise it in a good way."

Eric: "Especially in the mixing, we used a couple of outboard effects."

Jeremy: "But in a very tasteful manner, it's not a goopy record. It's a very clear sounding record."

Having enjoyed a high level of success by touring incessantly and building up a dedicated following by sheer hard graft, have they reached a level where they need the power of a major label to get the real recognition they deserve?

Eric: "You can get to a certain level doing what we're doing and then you do have to sign to a major. There's a lot less pressure on an independant label as far as creative things. We're able to make the records we want to make. We had an option about two years ago to sign to a major and at that point we turned it down because they were trying to push us in a musical direction. It was a mutual turning down. I think we would like to eventually be on a major label."

Jeremy: "An interesting statistic I just found out, it's been over five years since a band on an independant label has made number one on the College Music Journal charts. Smashing Pumpkins went to number one last summer and they were supposedly on Caroline but it turned out they were on a major label."

Frontier Records did their bit to further their cause in Europe by bringing Dharma Bums and Young Fresh Fellows over. They played the first night at the Underworld.

Jeremy: "That was an interesting situation. We had 25 minutes to play, it was our very first show ever in Europe, we were all very excited, all of us had been up for 24 hours straight. So I think, just by the time we were starting to settle into the set was when we were done. We were just starting to bring the set up to a place where we were going to get that really big applause at the end, and we got a nice applause."

Eric: "If we could have played two more songs we could have brought it all home."

The following night at the Falcon, away from the contrived, stifled atmosphere of the Underworld, they got the chance to show the audience what they are really about.

They really are serious about connecting with the audience. People didn't know what to expect, having never seen them before, apart from those who saw them the previous night where they didn't get a chance to shine. By the end of 40 minutes you know you've seen the genuine, unassuming power of a band with a total commitment to what they're doing. But at the same time it is never po-faced muso worship they crave. Jeremy jumps and slips and slides around the Falcon stage, and when he inevitably falls off it, he returns ass-over-tit, and manages to keep the stream of the song the whole time.

When they're up on stage they seem to be totally involved in the songs, and yet at the same time thinking about putting on a show for the audience.

When you play do you think about the songs or the people watching?

Jeremy: "It depends on a lot of things, like what level of inspiration you're at that night. I know that the night when a close friend of mine tried to kill himself and I had to go on stage that same night, that when I was singing I was thinking about our songs. I was so deep in our songs that I made friends cry, whereas at the Underworld I was pretty obsessed in my head with the fact I knew it was going to be over any minute. I was in this place where I was trying to overcome that knowledge so that I could focus. I big word for our band is 'focus'. We're really into creating a focus for ourselves so that we put out what we want to put out."

Eric: "It's always an emotional experience to go out and play. Some of our songs are really personal to each one of us, about people that we know - friends and family, so if you're thinking about someone, or something's in your mind and you do a song that brings that up it's emotional, it really is. Every night it is."

Jeremy: "I like that question because that really makes me think about what it is to be a musician or an artist. My own discipline I would like to have in my life is that every time I go up there I'm not tired of the songs, even if we've played 'Pumpkinhead' a hundred million times in the last two years, I'm going to play that song again and I'm going to believe in that song and put it out, because that's what I do, that's my art."

Following Dharma Bums on stage were Young Fresh Fellows, who seem to put more of an emphasis on playing the comedians, with the songs as a side-show. Unlikely bedfellows perhaps, but they do seem to go together very well, and very often.

What have you got in common with Young Fresh Fellows and what are the main differences?

Jeremy: "What we have in common is the spirit. Their spirit of putting out the record they want to put out, or doing the stupid thing they want to do. They've taught us in that way, and they were a real big influence."



Eric: "Differencewise, I think they tend to do things that are fairly silly sometimes. We do that some but not nearly as much. We tend to be a little more serious with our songs, not that theirs aren't serious."

Jeremy: "I think a lot of their songs are super-serious, it's just that that's the way they communicate, that's their flavour. I think we complement each other - we'll be this almost inner thing and they'll be this outward thing."

Have you got any gossip about them?

Jeremy: "Kurt wears those colourful underwear, like tight briefs, jockey shorts. The important thing is he's got the balls to wear those."

Metaphorically of course.

"And he'll show you. If you ask him he will pull down his pants and jump up and down with his guitar over his head with those on."

Eric: "If you see enough Young Fresh Fellows shows you'll see Kurt in his underwear on stage playing guitar."

Jeremy: "With his impressive balls, and his hairy back."

I thought we were being metaphorical!

Eric: "You never know what's going to happen with that band on stage. And sometimes we're on stage too."

Jeremy: "Once in Austin, Texas, everybody taped John, our drummer, to Tad's drumkit."

Eric: "And the funny thing was, Scott was singing a song and he crawls under the drum riser, and then each one of us goes up and takes over, and he crawls back out and it's a whole different band."

Jeremy: "The audience was so confused by that stage."

Eric: "Things like that can happen."

Jeremy: "Especially deep into a tour."

Dharma Bums are a band of contradictions and direction. They focus inwards without being egotists and focus outwards without being exhibitionists. A family to welcome into your heart.

Young Fresh Fellows

The Young Fresh Fellows are not a normal band. In Seattle, way back in 1983, Scott McCaughey decided to make an album. He gathered a band around him, including cousin Tad Hutchinson on drums, and recorded 15 songs in a weekend. Since then they've released another five or six or seven albums (five officially plus a French bootleg and Scott's solo album) and a tumult of singles. The last album, 'Electric Bird Digest', was a brilliant piece of guitar pop, produced by Butch Vig of N*r*v* fame. That came out in mid-1991, and the Fellows have been rather quiet around these parts apart from that.

"At the end of '89 we put out 'This One's For The Ladies' and my solo album and 'My Boyfriend's In Killdozer' single", Scott reminds me. "In 1990 we must have put out six or seven singles, maybe eight even, and a bunch more in '91, and all these compilation tracks, and of course 'Electric Bird Digest'. I guess we just forgot to tell anyone about it we were so busy."

'Electric Bird Digest' has a mere hint of humour to spice up the almost serious qualities, which didn't quite prepare me for the mayhem when they came over here with The Dharma Bums at the end of March, although I suppose the songs on the free 7" which came with vinyl versions on the album should have given me a clue. 'Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah' and 'The Teen Thing' are not songs you would catch Afghan Whigs doing. And I don't imagine those S*b P*p bands would be seen dead in a suit patterned in red, blue and yellow stars either. I also bought a couple of singles: 'Maiden Canada' - a disgustingly multi-coloured affair which includes a song called 'Sesame Street'; and 'New Theme' - an updated version of an earlier theme, with the lyrics and chords printed on the inside of the sleeve.



Maybe these should have been pointers as to what to expect from the live show. Before they even take to the stage, you wonder what the purpose of the frying pan taped to a bamboo cane four feet above the drum kit is for. Later, as you see it springing back and forth, narrowly avoiding removing the top part of Tad's head, it all makes perfect sense. At the Underworld, Scott tried encouraging the audience to get down on their knees while he was standing on his head. Just a small part of the fun.

"I don't know what I was doing! It was so dumb I just had to keep doing it to make people think I knew what I was doing."

"We try to be good live, and we try to play the songs well, but it's a lot more than that. A live thing is an evening of enjoyment, it's not something that you're going to go back to again and again, so we want people to have as much fun as possible on their evening with the band. We don't worry if we miss a note here and there that's for sure!"

Although they obviously have songs when they play live, if you want to just listen to them, you play the records. Looks like I've got some catching up to do, but aren't the older records going to sound dated now?

"The only one I see that way is the first album, 'The Fabulous Sounds Of The Pacific Northwest', because that is such a weird sounding record, it doesn't sound like anybody would ever make a record that sounds like that. It was such an oddball record, but that's why people like us, that's why we're a band in the first place."

"When you record the way we do, in a basement on an eight track, you're not putting your band in the context of the time, although with 'Electric Bird Digest' we sort of did because we went to a really good studio and we used a producer who is very good and is making a lot of records that people really like, although at the time Butch Vig wasn't a bigwig at all."

"'Electric Bird Digest' I think is our best album and I don't think I'm going to change my opinion on that because it's been out now for almost a year and I still feel that way. Other people think 'The Men Who Loved Music' is probably our best album, that's the one our fans seem to rank."



What was the idea of the free single with 'Electric Bird Digest'?

"We wanted the people who bought the LP to get more than the people who got the CD and the cassette. We like the people who still buy vinyl to get a little treat. We had the sides planned out and we had these two more songs we really wanted to put on. Frontier wanted us to keep the album to a manageable length, because we always put too many songs on and they say it's too confusing for radio people, so we kept it down to 13 and put the extra songs on a single."

On the same subject, why do American singles have a big hole in the middle?

"Because of juke boxes. In the '50s that's how they earned a lot of their money, but juke boxes now are almost all CD anyway so it doesn't really make any sense but it's just sort of a tradition that went on. It's really silly, you have to buy an adapter."



"We're like a fly that keeps buzzing around people's heads and they swat at it but we never go away"

'Electric Bird Digest' seems to have a lot to do with country living. Would you rather live in the country than in Seattle?

"I always think I'd like to live in the country but I can never make myself do it because I'm too hooked into music. I want to see the bands that come around. Being in a city works better for me with getting the records I want to get and seeing the bands I want to see. With having a little girl I think about moving out because there's gangs, and I park the van in front of our house and I come out in the morning and there's a bunch of bullet-holes in it. That makes you start thinking about country living. But you can drive for 15 minutes and be out in the forest. Washington State can be real woodsy and lumberjacks and all that kind of thing. That's more like where Nirvana's from, they're from Aberdeen which is a total logging town, real Hicksville."

With the success of Sub Pop, especially Nirvana, major labels are signing up loads of bands hoping they'll be the next big thing. Haven't you been a party to that?

"I don't think we're a major label band. We're too hard to pigeonhole. Some people like us, some people don't. Maybe we appeal to a select crowd, and that's not what a major label's looking for. Obviously there's a lot more to marketing a band than good songs and having fun. We've never been a trendy band and I don't think we ever will be. I don't think we'll ever get a major label deal because we've been around too long. Sometimes I think we're really passé. We're not new and hip, we're like a fly that keeps buzzing around people's heads and they swat at it but we never go away."

Scott listed his influences as Mott The Hoople, The Kinks, The Stones, The Who and The Beatles, which seemed a little far removed from 'Electric Bird Digest', but then I bought a Spanish 'Best Of' compilation (LP number 9?) and some of the older stuff was maybe nearer sixties rock'n'roll. So what does Scott think of the current British bands?

"I don't know because I haven't delved into all these new English bands. I haven't listened to Ride, Lush, Blur, My Bloody Valentine. I've heard of them a little bit. To me they sound like pop bands with guitars, and I like that. I don't know if they're doing anything special or original or not. There's all these bands in America trying to do that Manchester kind of beat. I heard it was a big return to guitars and I was really excited and you listen to those fucking records and it's drums and a little guitar in the background every once in a while. I can't stomach Jesus Jones and shit like that."



What are the main similarities and the main differences between you and the Dharma Bums?

"The similarities are that we both really believe in music as being a really cool thing that can really move people and all that. Differences would be that they're a little bit more serious about putting on a good tight show. I think they take things a little more seriously than we do. They've hung around with us enough so that we've managed to fuck them up a little bit, but not quite to the extent that we're fucked up. When we first knew them they were so young. They thought we were The Beatles or something and that was really flattering. They're such a great band it's sometimes really hard for us to go on after them. They're always so rocking live and they're so serious about connecting with the audience."

But they did go on after Dharma Bums and they blew the audience away in a completely different way. The Bums by being so serious, and the Fellows just by being so silly. They've got each other sussed. It's about time you did.



more reviews

Roachmill - Eden Sore demo ****

God Machine on a shoestring. Through the poor quality production you can tell there is something there but you can't quite see it. I tried to see them live once but I only caught the soundcheck, and they certainly know what those amps are for. They make the right noises and mean it. Calamity Jane might be quite close to L7, but there's a chasm in between. Roachmill are on the right side of their chasm.

No FX - Liberal Animation LP (Epitaph) ****

What do pigs have for Sunday lunch? Exactly. What was the point again? The cover and the first track illustrate a family of pigs tucking into their roast human. The predominant themes seem to be drinking beer and eating meat, but it's not done in a tasteless or tacky way. This album is kinda like the way the Poopshovel album should have been. The songs rattle past at an average of 1½ minutes each, but they manage to cram all the notes and words in okay.

If you want speed metal, this is what you want. Sod Extreme Noise Terror, No FX speak volumes. Eat, drink and be merry. It's survival of the fittest on the road with No FX.

Tony Head Experience - Albatross flexi EP (Big Internation) **

This is the C-side of the 'Sleeper' EP and intriguingly has exactly the same sleeve layout. Unfortunately there are no three minute pop classics here. They dare to use the feedback from the Shoppies' 'I Don't Wanna...' at the start of 'Swing'. Even if this was any good, it's not that good. Don't even think of it. Sadly, this flexi is a huge disappointment.

But having said that, be excited about getting it free with a fanzine and use it as a pointer to the 'Sleeper' EP, and look forward to seeing them live. They are a sugar-coated treat to enjoy. They may look like The Fat Tulips, but don't worry, they've got their act together, and movement is sure to follow.

Thee Hypnotics - Coast To Coast single (Situation Two) **

I'd always imagined Thee Hypnotics to be one of those droning atmospheric bands like Loop, as their name suggests. In fact they lean slightly towards the old two-chord noise bands like the Marychain, as the title suggests. There's no tune, but it's not a bad racket.

The Dylans - Mary Quant In Blue EP (Situation Two) ***

So this is what The Dylans sound like. "Up down turn around, please don't let me hit the ground". Or was that someone else? "Could I be right could I be wrong". "The third time we opened the capsule". etc. Definitely under the influence. This is a promo sampler from the LP, so I don't know if it's actually released as an EP as such. Having said that, I can see 'Planet Love' being an excellent indie-dance crossover floor-filler. Keep sending the lemons.

Slunk - Only Available On CD demo **

No-one records demos in 24 track studios do they? The cover of this tape is a cartoon of the dwarf out of Star Wars hanging on to Frankie Howard's arm. So what? The word 'indifference' comes to mind. A noise band without the roots.

Passing Clouds - Protect Your Baby Ears EP (Bite Back) ****

The Passing Clouds are surely the only band fronted by two backing singers. Anne Reekie, who displays an alarming similarity to a velveteened Felicity Kendal, thumps the bass and provides the dry backing singing. Grant Madden is Billy Bragg with a sociology degree rapping/chanting poetically about strife and the state of the nation. Their singing styles are contrasting but not contradictory, like The Sugarcubes without the egos. Concentrate and you will see the thought bubbles float out of their heads and over yours.

The Mabuses - LP (Rough Trade) *

Three minute pop songs at their worst. Designer cliché catchy choruses. A grating voice. Sickly backing singing. Twangly guitars. Naff keyboards. No tune. No class. No good. I must go to the dentist.

ZuZu's Petals

The guitars on 'Jackals' approach the power of Babes In Toyland. The dangerously infectious vocals and lyrics on 'Categories' are reminiscent of Inside Out. 'Johanne' is a haunting ballad that sounds like one of the songs where Cyndi Lauper doesn't sound like a strangled hamster.

Three diverse songs on one 7 inch from a band from Minneapolis. "We recorded eight and those were the three that turned out the best", explains Laurie.

"You have to think about it before you put 'Jackals' and 'Johanne' on the same single", says Linda.

"That's kind of like the way we are as a band, we don't play all songs that are softer or all songs that are angrier", says Coleen.

Meet ZuZu's Petals! Laurie and Coleen take turns singing. Coleen stands stage left and also plays bass. Laurie stands stage right and plays guitar. Taking charge of drums is Linda, more alive than your average drummer.

"The single's doing better than I would have ever imagined", Laurie tells me. "In the States whole regions of the country don't even distribute 7 inches any more because it's all CDs, so it's nice to come here and have people actually heard it. People expect us to sound like Babes and we don't. We have angry songs and we have quiet songs and we have weird songs. Occasionally we might sound like them a little bit, but our songs aren't formed the same way their's are".

"I feel like I've been sentenced to play at CBGB's for a month"



"When we first started it was like 'you sound like a cross between Scrawl and Babes In Toyland'", laughs Linda. "Well that's covering a lot of ground isn't it! That's really narrowing it down for me! I laughed at those. That's not even trying".

Scrawl are three girls from Ohio who sound like early Heart Throbs colliding with The Breeders. Of course I'm only saying that because I've got nowhere to go without my pigeonhole. Scrawl are softer than ZuZu's Petals and Babes are harder, so I won't even try.

"The Minneapolis music scene is a lot more diverse than you might know", says Coleen.

"There's nothing to do in Minneapolis in the winter, and winter lasts about eight months, so you might as well go jam", says Laurie.

Having heard many favourable reports of the single (and it's then unavailability), but not having a copy of it, I traipsed along to Euston Rails to 'check them out'. It would be an understatement to say they were having a bad night.

"It was like throwing up in front of an audience on stage", illuminates Coleen.

Linda tries to explain. "We sat on our butts for seven days, alright. No practices, cool! New amps, cool! We got there late, took a taxi, alright. No way! It was awful. Everything that can possibly go wrong on a tour has been condensed into this one 45 minute period therefore everything else will go fine. I will never stick my stick through a snare head twice in one tour".

"I respect you for talking to us after that", says Laurie, little knowing that I'm not talking to them after that, I'm talking to them after scrounging the single. "It's been a learning experience. It's unfortunate that our two shows in London have probably been our worst shows". This being said just after the Mean Fiddler show, which was a big improvement on Rails, but evidently still not them at their best. "London's a lot like New York. I feel like I've been sentenced to play at CBGB's for a month".

"The cult radio in America really focuses on the Manchester thing here", says Coleen, mysteriously.

"We thought we were going to be playing with Neds Atomic Dustbin every night and it's going to be really weird", Laurie elaborates. Presumably Manchester looks bigger from further away.

"It's so amazing to play these beautiful towns with these castles and churches", says Coleen. "It's respect for the culture, an aesthetic that we don't respect in the States. We tear old buildings down and put up glass. That's what I hate about America. What I don't like about here is the way the men and women act. I don't get it. It seems a bit medieval to me".

Laurie continues, "Usually when we play in the States the first group of people to come clammer around us when we're done playing are women. Here they wouldn't dream of it. And the men seem to have a really weird regard for their mates. And I mean their women friends. Maybe we haven't met the right people yet. There seems to be some weird dynamics within relationships. A lot more violence than I've ever seen before".

When they get back to Minneapolis they're going to record their debut album.

"We're negotiating labels right now", says Laurie. "Yeah, that's first. We have some possible producers lined up. We can't say who because we haven't talked to them yet! We think they'll do it though, but we should check with them first!", says Laurie.

Kramer maybe? Jack Endino? Lori Barbero? I doubt it. 'Jackals etc' EP was produced in about four hours by the soundman they normally use, and compared to the live shambles it is a taste of honey. The LP could be something special, if all goes well.

another review

Twelve O'Clock High Volume 2 compilation video (Atavistic) ****

This video is billed as "essential fragments of our diseased culture". I couldn't have put it better myself. Essential because it contains tracks that you would be silly not to want. Fragments because it leaves you wanting so much more. Diseased culture speaks for itself.

It kicks off with Flaming Lips. 'Unconsciously Screamin' is a maelstrom of fuzzy guitars and sung catchy vocals. The video is, as are most of the videos on here, a Marychainish wild mix of abstract pictures, live chaos and hand-etchings over pictures of guitars.

Who is it who keeps pointing out that all the music we know and love is made by white lower-middle class Americans? He obviously hasn't seen Bad Brains proving that you don't have to be a wasp to make a buzz. 'Soul Craft' is four dreadlocked black guys belting out some more of the best type of heavy guitar noise.

Right from the drum intro through to the final shot of burning dolls, a Babes In Toyland video is an essential household appliance, not because it's necessarily better than the song itself, but just because it's more. Babes without the video is like curry without the poppadoms, you never knew it was important until you try it. So when I would have been happy with an iron, Babes give me a dishwasher. The dolls moving in juddery slow motion, hacking and burning each other, perfectly complement the rhythmic gyrations of Michelle, Kat and Lori as they plough through 'He's My Thing'. Michelle moves with the bass like a cowboy on a rodeo horse, feeling the natural rhythm and staying with it. Kat shouts at the microphone as if explanation hasn't worked, but volume does. The director forgot that she is also playing a guitar that shames most two-guitar bands into feeling like wimpy failures, but looks as if it is incidental. We know better. Lori absorbs all this and echos it through the drums. Babes are the real thing. Everyone else is just playing.

Foetus Inc makes a strange noise during which I can come back to earth after Babes. He calls it 'Butterfly Potion'. I don't.

David Atherton & Otto Piene presumably used to be/are in other bands, which allows them to make an obscure, black song/video like 'Babylon' and get away with it.

Thin White Rope are the more traditional approach to real music. With three(?) guitars 'Hidden Lands' fills the soundscape with layers of lush chords, and top it with Guy's crunchy-crisp vocals. As the music grows and dips, the video action keeps going round. Buildings going round, mirrors going round, buckets going round. As the dog runs around in the dusty ground, Thin White Rope stay in the cool shade of the ruins of the house.

Afghan Whigs spend their time in the video for 'You My Flower' wallowing around in trees and flowers, with the occasional live shot to show us that they are hard bastards really. This belies their usual image where they stand in the nuddy on the album sleeves and posters.

"This ain't no heart-felt shit this is Halo Of Flies", or at least I'd like to think that's what they're saying. 'No Time' is a stop-go guitar type thing with meaningless vocals, pictures of house-flies washing behind their ears, and bottles falling to earth in reverse. Something about art?

Why can I never think of anything to say about Buffalo Tom? Maybe I'm just trying to avoid mentioning Nirvana. 'Sunflower Suit' was the single before the last one, and is a song written in single mode, as opposed to album mode. The video shows inch high Toms twirling round with guitars, and whales being turned into dog food. It's all in good taste.

Still trying not to mention Nirvana, along come Big Trouble House with 'Union Feed Grain Mill'. The way I see it, a lot of the Nirvana/Mudhoney ex-college type bands (okay, maybe Nirvana are the exception that proves the rule) are no better than each other - some just promote themselves a lot more and work a lot harder than others. Just because Big Trouble House haven't been pouring out of the cracks doesn't mean they're any worse than Mudhoney - they're not, they are another excellent American guitar band, showing us their stuff in a variety of locations, ranging from the bedside to the trackside, and including more groping through the undergrowth.



From Bongwater comes 'Jimmy' and 'Lesbians Of Russia', not necessarily in that order. The video shows Ann Magnusson and Kramer at home doing the hoovering, in the park playing on the swings, and other slices of day-to-day life. The music is far from routine. From the moment Kramer's guitar cuts into Ann's monologue, the sign of a genius is clear. It's not just Ann that makes Bongwater (isn't she just a jumped up actress anyway?), it's Kramer's guitar that sends shivers down your spine as soon as it starts. If his Midas touch can make Jellyfish Kiss sound good, imagine what happens if he touches his own gold guitar.

Adrienne Altenhaus has produced a strange thing. An obscure series of video clips accompanied by drums, bass and guitar, with two sharp cuts in it, called 'Three Shorts'.

Lee Ranaldo's 'Notebook' is like Jello Biaffro without the humour and politics, but with added guitar. A vast improvement. A poetic diary of the last 35 years. Astute observations on American life and Lee's own life. "Life's so beautiful in the rear-view".

And so it ends. None of this is crap, or even worth fast forwarding over, and most of it is excellent, essential, interesting and important. The worst is okay, the best is astounding. All of it is well worth owning.

more reviews

Feel Good About Your Body 2 fanzine

Undoubtedly the best fanzine without interviews (unless you count The Pooh Sticks one with longer questions than answers). It's the attitude that counts, and so well written and presented. There are lots of little boxes with reviews, adverts, comments. Of course, what makes it so good is that he likes all the same stuff as me. He thinks The Field Mice were past their sell-by date when they split up, TFC are a Big Star rip-off, Phil Spector should come back and produce Shonen Knife, Moonshake's First EP was one of the best records on '91, and you should buy the Big Muff tape and the Waaaaaah! CD. Not sure about those last two!

I have no idea what this costs, but I guess you'll get change from \$5 or £3. From 4746 Northgate, Ann Arbor, MI 48103

Waaaaaah! 3 fanzine

Again, no-one's going to argue with a fanzine, a flexi and a hard 7" for £2. Well, you could, but it can't hear you, as Ted Chippington once said.

The flexi has some bunch of has-beens calling themselves The Field Mice live in Paris.

The hard 7" features the nauseatingly girlie Kind, Cudgels and Dufflecoats. It should really feature Cathy Heavenly because she's hard.

The fanzine has everything you expect from people who released a CD with The Duglasettes and Fluff Fluff Fluff Fluff And Cuddleness on it. Jah Wobble, Conflict and Asia Fields rub shoulders with The BMX Bandits, The Dufflecoats/Applicants, Heavenly, San Francisco (the place), Terry Edwards (the Fall/Marychain trumpet cover versionist), The Incredibly Fat Tulips and The Bedflowers.

You will of course notice some inconsistencies if you read it all. Heavenly have a go at The Field Mice for covering Loop songs, the Field Mice Loop cover version flexi has a request for demos "no dance thanks", The Bedflowers live review gets sidetracked at the Hacienda, there is an advert for The Dream Warriors next to an advert for L7, and Amelia reveals that she really wanted Heavenly to be a noise band.

Here's some more about that Hacienda thing. Me and Richard went up to Manchester to see the best band since Hole left the country, ie The Bedflowers, and it just happened to be the gay and lesbian night, which also just happened to be the one time of the year when all the indie-kids go to the Hacienda. It was appalling. The DJ mixed all the records together so that there was about 30 minutes of continuous monotony while the ravers waved their arms, went "wooh" and counted the BPMs. Whilst I sat upstairs cuddling my tinny getting more and more depressed that this is what the masses wanted when they should be wanting The Bedflowers, Richard was downstairs waving his arms, going "wooh" and counting the BPMs. Needless to say I was wearing a Hole T-shirt and Richard was wearing a Field Mice T-shirt.

All of this is completely irrelevant, as is the picture of The Duglasettes, but you can't have your cake and eat it.

You know where to get it. Oh, alright then, 7 Montana Road, Tooting, London, SW17 8SN.

Kerosene 5 fanzine with Mammoth Records flexi

It's the weight and the depth that allow Kerosene to be over priced and still worth every penny. If you ever think Big Muff is going too far one way or the other (or not far enough, or not going anywhere), read Kerosene and correct the balance. If I was thinking about doing a Smashing Pumpkins interview, I won't bother now because Kerosene has got one. Similarly for most bands in here, although I never considered doing a centre page spread of Sarah Sun Carriage's belly button.

As well as interviews with God Machine, Mudhoney, Gumball, etc, there are asides which try to dispel popular myths (like the "scene" and Carter). If that's what matters...

The flexi has got Blake Babies, Vanilla Trainwreck, Machines Of Loving Grace and Chainsaw Kittens. Three excellent bands. Four diverse bands. I don't understand MORG, but then I don't understand NIN either. All these tracks are from records that are reviewed and recommended on a page near here. Buy it and enter a new world.

£1.50 + SAE from Julian Carrera, 34 Muirfield Road, South Oxhey, Watford, Herts, WD1 6LN.

!Hype magazine

So you don't read German, but it's great to look at pages of foreign words and recognise pieces like "The KLF die am 31.12" and "Tim (guitar), Ex-McCarthy-Mann und nun hauptsächlich bei Stereolab". God knows what it means. Anyway, there's a Hole interview, and it makes a change to only recognise a few words and still know what they're saying. Somehow each one of Hole (there's four of them) has an equal amount of words attributed to them.

I know you're not going to buy this, but bear in mind that Siren isn't the only good glossy, it's just the only good English one.

DM 4.50 + P&P from S-Bahnhof Witzleben, Dresselsteg, 1000 Berlin 19, Germany.

Nikki Sudden - The Jewel Thief LP (UFO) *
"Death is hanging...over me".

Lydia Lunch - Shotgun Wedding LP (UFO) *****

I can't review this. It'd be like saying Hole are quite good. What I could do instead is to continue the Hole Underworld saga. I read Salli Bleach today saying how terrible it all was, as if it was true just because she'd read it. I was there. Here's what happened.

Courtney arrived very late, having been back to her hotel room. She stumbled on stage, dropped her (vodka?) glass on the amp, staggered towards the microphone looking very much the worse for drink, and sang 'Doll Parts' like it really mattered. Towards the end, Jill went for the old stage-diving-while-playing-bass guitar cliché. It worked. Courtney fancied some of the action, and made a very poor attempt at stage-diving, which basically consisted of jumping feet-first into the audience. Her feet took a while to reach the floor because, as you do, the audience tried to float her above them. It didn't work. She went away, and came back for the encore and said something like "is this how you treat girls here?" The 40 minutes while Hole were on stage was an exhibition of genuine rock entertainment, but the one minute at the end became a lever for the babe backlash, perpetrated by people who were probably two rows back on the balcony, and perpetuated by people who weren't even there. Fuck off and die.

more reviews

Moonflowers - Hash Smits LP *
Go away. Please.

Jellyfish Kiss - Strange Weather LP (Shimmy Disc) ***
Engineered and produced by Kramer. That's important. It should be in big letters on the front cover. Without Kramer they would be (and are) a weird-art-shit would-be wannabe nothing kinda band. With Kramer they still are, but there are some legendary guitar moments embedded in amongst the baggy tendencies. Did you know that the fibrey bits in orange squash is actually pine wood shavings? Give me Bongwater any day. They've got pips.

The Aints - Ascension LP ****

I swear the guy is only singing because that's what people do on albums, but they'd rather just do an album of instrumentals with the guitar as just another voice. With only five tracks, but still clocking in at almost 40 minutes, you have to believe this is something special. This is an escape of guitar genius recorded over two days last summer. There's no attempt at pop structure - it's just whatever happens. So maybe the title track fills half of side two and culminates with a tuneless sax solo - that wasn't uncalled for. So maybe 'A Good Soundtrack' is. But to what? Four guitarists beating each other up, or so they tell me.

The Tony Head Experience - Sleeper EP (Big Internation) *****
The Empty Set - demo ****

Two bands who are (probably accidentally) from the Flatmates/Bubblegum Splash school of brash indie pop.

'Debbie One' is the kind of song you could hold up as a landmark in years to come, but you would probably have trouble dating it. 'Sleeper' is more of tense, bitchy gripe, more along the lines of Avo-8.

Imagine Julianne Reagan singing for The Darling Buds and you've got The Empty Set. 'Slapper' has pretty much the same theme as 'Sleeper': "ooh Debbie, look at that tart!".

If any of the references passed you by, don't worry, I'm sure they don't know what I'm talking about either. Pop goes in circles.

Hungry I - The Second Step CD EP (Nursery) **

I haven't got a CD player, but I've read the reviews and basically they say it should be better considering they've got an ex-Primitive and an ex-Balaam & The Angel. I'm sure I wouldn't disagree.

Pray TV - Flux LP (Shock) ***

The impression I get from reading the pile of press clippings accompanying this record is that Australia is not big enough to support the wealth of pop rock bands that it can create. This seems to apply particularly to Pray TV, of course. They're dying for someone to give them a bit more money so that this album could have the production it deserves, and they could then go on to make it big in Japan, or America, or Europe, or anywhere. This record is very light and fluffy, but I don't think they meant it to be that way. It bounces along at a merry little pace, with lots of guitars that are jangly by default, not by design. The drums potter away at the back and the bass grinds away quietly in the depths. Unfortunately, just another album.

Dash Rip Rock - Not Of This World (Mammoth) **

I wonder what it is about America that produces all these bands. Where do they all play? I thought America was all theatres, bars and stadiums. I'll have to ask the next American band I come across. The foot-tapping rhythms and heavy rock guitar sounds are nice enough, but rather MOR. It's hard to tell if these guys are country bums, middle class suburbians, street punks, or what. Maybe it doesn't matter.

Gallon Drunk - Some Fools Mess 12" (Clawfist) ****

A remarkably different band. They dress like psychobillies, they sound somewhere between The Cramps and Nick Cave, and they've got a maracca player who does none of those things. The B side is a couple of tracks they've dug out from a couple of years ago which show their intent. Hopefully this doesn't mean the title track was a one-off piece of genius.

Hard-Ons - Dull 12" (Vinyl Solution) ***

A cross between Nirvana and Mega City 4.

The Bollweevils - Mouth 7" (Decoy) ****

Not many bands credit their hairdresser on the single sleeve, or release a single where the main track is sung by their background singer. It seemed like a good idea to release 'Mouth' as a single a while ago, but I don't think it quite works as a single now. Maybe the producers didn't understand them. They have got some better songs up their sleeve. Just remember, The Bollweevils have always been as good live as they are now, but if you haven't seen them for a while you forget.

Daisy Chainsaw - Love Sick Pleasure 12" (Deva) ****

Could do with a bit more studio time, but DC really are a live band. An excellent reminder of wild and (un)contrived moments of passionate exorcism. And it's not just Katie that makes DC - have you ever listened to the bass, or the guitar? If the Sex Pistols had the talent to make this kind of sound they would never have got as far as they did. Too good to be hyped. Stand back and watch them fly.

I suppose I should re-write this now.

The Unknown tapes *****

Here's your cure for xenophobia. If these had been unknown British bands they would be unknown because they are crap, but in fact this lot are unknown because they sing in foreign languages or foreign accents. Each tape is 90 minutes long and contains on average 30 tracks by 20 bands. None of it is crap, although obviously some it is not very good. Mostly though it is like listening to demo tapes after someone else has already filtered out the best tracks from the mountain. To your average mass demo listener there is no point in listening to foreign bands, but to you, the punter, it is a dream. What is most alarming is the amount of good music coming from places like Poland and especially Germany. It's also good to see someone persisting with his personal mission to try and bring this music to the masses despite the low sales achieved up to now. People consistently knock compilation tapes and fanzines which bring you the same old bands, but the fact is that big names sell, unknown bands don't. If only you knew what you were missing.

Unknown 11, 12, 13 and 14 are £2.25 each inc UK p&p from Julian Smyth, 10 Maes y Dre, Ruthin, Clwyd, LL15 1DB.

more reviews

The Would Be's - Wonderful EP (Decoy) **
Are they taking the piss or what? Does it really take six people to make a hollow jumble sale of noises? I think they're just trying to get a free holiday for as many of their friends as possible. The Would Be's one hit was wonderful; this is not it.

The God Machine - Purity EP (Eve) ****
Californian exiles based in Camden. Pretty much the ideal combination. This EP challenges the standards and rips up the mediocre. Repetition, power, drive, uncertainty all have their place in producing an EP that is too long for 45rpm and too good to overlook. No fast, shambolic rhythms here. It is a calculated, layered, deep, engulfing whirlpool of guitar orchestration.

The Fish John West Reject - Fin LP (Shock) **
It's all very good, but what's the point of it? The inner sleeves on these Shock records are pretty cool - they're square at the open end and semi-circular at the closed end.

Maria Angelica - Full Moon Depression EP (Polythene Pam) *
This band sound about as native to Brazil as McDonalds. Hopelessly disjointed music that has attempted to be commercialised with the help of an old name producer.

Violet Town - Seventh Veil EP (Shock) **
Presumably having had their fair share of success on Australian popular radio, Violet Town are now trying to launch themselves on the British public. I suspect that what'll actually happen is that they'll fill the Town & Country with home-sick Aussies and all us poms won't even notice.

American Music Club - Everclear LP (Alias) ****
The first few notes of 'Why Won't you Stay' have a hint of mid 60s crooner Little Anthony, but when the singing starts it is more reminiscent of Prefab Sprout meets Chris Rea. Not only does 'Bonny' come to mind, but the first word to leap out of 'Rise' is 'Appetite'. 'Rise' has a different producer to the rest of the LP, and sounds much clumsier. It would be criminally offensive to say 'Crabwalk' sounds like Bruce Springsteen, so I'll say it sounds like John Denver instead. Oh God, that's even worse; Tom Robinson then. The whole LP is a mixture of uplifting jollity and morose woe. Kiss that!

Edsel Auctioneer - Starfish 12" (Decoy) ***
Darkside - Melomania LP (Situation 2) ***
Two records which I didn't expect to like in a million years because I've seen both bands headlining The Charlottes and been very disimpressed, but these records, are quite good. Admittedly two years and The Charlottes have passed under the bridge since.

some records that came in the mail today, which is quite handy cos I've got this column to fill

Green Magnet School - Blood Music LP (Sub Pop) ***
This is all very well, but it's not going to fill this column.

Six Finger Satellite - Weapon single (Sub Pop) ****
Wow! This is what Sub Pop should be all about. Hearing some unknown band that knocks seven shades of shit out of all the bands who act big for no reason (we're talking Superchunk here). This band will probably come over here and play the Underworld but deserve the Astoria (like Skin Yard, Dharma Bums, etc). Or maybe they won't come over at all because they know what'll happen, but you've still got the single to cherish.

Come - Car single (Sub Pop) ****
I'm sorry I slagged you off. I can see what all the fuss was about now. You should have released this earlier, instead of it being an impossible-to-get-hold-of import. You can hear where it's coming from and where it's going. Selling bad fortune, but not inventing it.

Ozric Tentacles - Live Underslunky LP (Dovetail) *
Obviously there are a lot of people who get rather excited at the prospect of an Ozric Tentacles live double album. Not my cup of tea.

Melting Eskimo's - Paranoia single (Meller Welle Produkte) ***
I was expecting some wimpy crap, but I think I was just associating the name with the Deskimos. This is actually a rather different offering with some interesting and unusual sounds. The Melting Eskimo's are two multi-talented guys, supported by two strangely named bods on backing vocals and backing percussion. Could do with moving up from flexi quality, but otherwise a useful record. DM 7 plus postage from J.Kruckemeyer, Steinacker Str 18, 8767 Würth/Main, Germany.

!Hype magazine
Another issue of !Hype, and again I wish I could read German. I've just been flicking through it and picking up words here and there and it really looks like a magazine that there's a slot for over here. This is the April/May issue and it has Young Gods, TFC, Charlatans, Buffalo Tom, Marychain, as well as bits on various other little bands. It also has a fair bit on techno, but I ignored that. DM 4.50 plus postage from S-Bahnhof Witzleben, Dresselsteg, 1000 Berlin 19, Germany.

where are they now?

News about a few of those Big Muff bands.

still going, and...

Bollweevils - Criminally ignored but still fantastic. Dropped by Decoy, but they might have signed to a major.

Clare Grogan - Band still going but they haven't had time to do anything for a long time. That's probably an excuse.

Popinjays - Now full-time pop stars. Currently working on their second album, which should be done before too long.

Strawberry Story - Nearly split up due to personal problems, but carried on to continue the indie pop cause.

split up, but...

Charlottes - Petra got a new band, Ether, who played about two gigs and split up because she lives in Kentish Town and they live in Cambridge. She is now looking for another band.

Graham's new band, September, have played a gig or two, and are incredible. Maybe not a huge step forward from The Charlottes, but they could have been six steps back and still be fantastic.

Screaming Custard - Abbie left. They got a new singer, Grog, for a couple of gigs then split up. All of them are now in other bands and probably playing regularly in South London.

Vicious Kiss - Split up due to musical differences. Simon and Tanya are now in the much more credible Walk On Water.

moreMuff

Big Muff 3½ 50p + A4 SAE

has interviews with

AC Temple

Hole

Primitives

Big Muff 3 £1.50 + A5 SAE

a mini-fanzine with

Daisy Chainsaw Babes In Toyland
Heavenly

and others, but mostly a

C90 mega tape, including

The Pogguns

The Popinjays

The Bedflowers

Amelia Fletcher

Sofahead

The Emotional

Shelley's Children

Easy

Strawberry Story

Butterflies

Ammonites

Passing Clouds

Big Muff 2 £1.00 + A4 SAE

went a bit OTT with the interviews, including

Th' Faith Healers

Popinjays

Bollweevils

Bleach

Charlottes

KLF

Fat Tulips

and 10 more

and also had a Faith Healers flexi

Neil Boyd, PO Box 858, London, SW12 8TR

"When I get what I want
will I ever want it again?"
(Hole - 'Violet')