

Big Muff

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Velocity Girl

Velocity Girl took their name from an obscure Primal Scream B-side (which also happened to be on the infamous 'C86' cassette), and take their influences from obscure (in America) English indie-pop bands like The Pogues. Recently they've been driven to distraction by Th' Faith Healers pioneering across America, and driven to insanity by comparisons to well known English (in America) bands like My Bloody Valentine and Ride.

Velocity Girl are the new voice of Sub Pop youth. In the past Sub Pop has been known for it's one-dimensional good grunge, and it's hard to break out of a successful formula. Guts and persistence paid off though, and there is now a myriad of variety from Earth to Velocity Girl, and a whole rainbow in between. Now they leave it for the majors to fall flat on their faces by trying to play it safe.

The thing about music is that you start to think you've seen all the amazing bands - you've seen Th' Faith Healers, you've seen Huggy Bear, you've seen Hole, you've seen Action Swingers - but still bands come along that twist your expectations and keep up the surprises. Just when you think all bands are a bad copy of other bands, someone comes along with something different. Sure it's all been done before, but not quite like this.

Velocity Girl are four guys and a gal who know how to party. Even before the room fills with balloons, the stage could easily be mistaken for a bouncy castle if the activity going on on it is to be taken as a guide. Sub Pop have inflated 100,000 balloons to lift the album, 'Copacetic', to the heights it deserves, and they're all crammed into a tiny Camden back room, fuzzing up the dormant energy of the audience and reflecting it back and forth like peas in a whistle.

Even at the physically restrained 'showcase' show the music is hammering your senses with it's apparent simplicity and stands up on it's own, trading the visual excitement of the event with the eager power of the gig.

Velocity Girl are keen music fans. I give them the usual latest issue of my humble 'zine so they know what they're letting themselves in for, and it's soon read, passed round and hoarded. They pounce on the pile of back-issues they asked me to take to the next gig, clutching tightly on to them because there weren't enough to go around, each holding a Faith Healers flexi, making sure not to lose it, because I brought a wedge of them.

'This is the sound of my heartbeat breaking'

The lads have joined me to explain why it makes perfect sense to sit in a London pub to chat about their new album.

How do you pronounce the name of the album and what does it mean?

"'Copacetic' and it means everything's okay."

(It's pronounced 'Coe-puh-set-ic'.)

"It's sort of like a 50s beat criminal novel sort of word," elaborates Jim, a man whose car is a proud examples of American 60s design without the usual flagrant excesses. "Some people say they see it a lot, but the only place I've ever seen it is in books set in the 50s, like crime novels."

"In the slang dictionary it says 'origin unknown'," says Brian, showing a different literary trait. "I think it's one of the weird words that's strictly an American 50s thing."

Which song on the album means the most to you?

After some thought, Kelly decides "'Here Comes' makes me want to cry."

"I like 'Here Comes' a lot because it's so different from any of the other songs we've done that it feels sort of like an achievement," agrees Jim.

"Sarah's voice is so good on that," Archie quietly reflects.

Kelly thinks more about the song and comes up with more reasons why it's so good. "I like the interplay between the two guitar parts. It sounds like at some points it's one guitar then all of a sudden it becomes two guitars."

"I think we just write pretty simple noisy pop songs that are real straight-ahead. There's no weirdness"

You say that's different to the other songs, but one of the things I noticed about the album is that there is a lot of variety. And then to watch you live there's a different variety with more power and noise.

"That's something we aim for," Jim confirms. "Hopefully our live show will branch out a little bit once the album comes out. Some songs are too difficult to do live if people don't know the songs."

How was the gig at the Rough Trade shop? I stood upstairs and just listened because it was too packed to go downstairs and watch.

"The spirit of Rough Trade..." Jim starts, trying to explain the unique appeal of playing a great gig despite the far from perfect conditions. "It seemed like everyone knew not to expect a slick show but just to see a young band play in a record shop."

"We did a similar in-store type thing in Canada which I didn't care for as much even though it was in a bigger room," says Brian feeling the spirit.

What town is 'Crazy Town' about? (The last single.)

"London," Jim jokes. "London, England. Camden."

"It's about the whole Camden Falcon pub crowd," Kelly smirks (or is it a grimace?) "It's not about any town."

"None of our songs are really about specific things," answers Jim. "'Crazy Town' is sort of every town."

How are you finding England?

"Turn right at Greenland," Jim chuckles, proving that the old ones are the best.

How does the beer compare? It's better here isn't it?

"Oh yeah," says Kelly as if it was obvious. "I'm thinking of missing our flight back so I can stay at this pub."

"The night of the first show it crept up on me," says Jim, nursing a black eye. "I had a spill and I cracked my head open. I wasn't used to drinking these twice as big, twice as strong beers."

'I'm sure the sun doesn't shine as bright in other parts of the world'

Most commentaries on Velocity Girl mention My Bloody Valentine, but that's the problem - once someone mentions an easy comparison, the band are forever fighting it off. Occasionally a little hint of MBV may creep in, but within the same song it's gone, and the next song won't even breath the same air. I listened to the album and spotted a few similarities to other bands. The direct soundlike may only last for a fleeting moment, but the influence or style lingers a little longer. But again, the next song will have forgotten those previous tags.

Do you try and sound like English bands?

"It's a two part thing," Kelly says. "We get asked this a lot because there were not very many bands in America when we started out who are trying to do the type of stuff we're doing. Obviously we look up to and listen to a lot of English bands, but I don't think we try and consciously sound like them. In America the minute you have distorted guitar with melodic vocals the only thing that's going on now are the English type of bands. But I think a lot of what we're doing is different, especially with the album."

"Do you think the album sounds like an English band?" Jim wants to know.

Some of it does, I answer, and then carry on with the suggestion I was going to make anyway. 'Pop Loser' sounds like Even As We Speak, who are Australian but they're kind of English.

Archie wakes up and looks flattered by the comparison. "Really?!"

"That's a much more favourable thing to hear than the big noisy songs like My Bloody Valentine," Brian comments.

And some of the songs sound like The Pogguns, I continue. Do you know them?

"Oh yeah," they all assure me, thinking of course of Pogguns circa 'Snog', not the mainstream direction they're currently trying to pursue.

Archie keeps going. "They're one of the bands that I'd say actually did have an influence on us, although thankfully they're a little more obscure so a lot of people don't realise."

"Sometimes Sarah's voice reminds me of Wendy's," Jim nods.

"It struck me though when we did the album," Kelly continues, "we made some conscious decisions on a lot of the songs to try and stay away from that kind of thing and explore other territories, and there were even some songs, not consciously, but some of the things strike me as reminiscent of other musical forms, like 'Pop Loser' has a kind of country feel."

"What that reminds me of," Brian chips in, "I always think of that as our song poking fun at Julianna Hatfield or something."

"Even As We Speak," Kelly muses. "I have some of their records."

"Their version of 'Bizarre Love Triangle' was really good," Archie says drifting into song.

"If that's who we get tagged as, an Even As We Speak rip-off then I don't know if that's gonna...," Jim begins, but then leaves the thought criptically unfinished. I'm not sure which way it was going.

You mentioned Julianna Hatfield just then. I thought a couple of songs sounded a bit like Blake Babies.

"A few people have mentioned that," Brian concedes, wishing he hadn't brought it up. "Generally they're a lot jangler than us," he continues, thankfully denying it. "Probably a lot wordier too, their vocals are very upfront. We try and have no instrument out front so much as everything all at top volume competing."



Archie wants to tell me who their real influences are. "An influence that probably doesn't come across because they're not as well known are our friends who are in bands doing the same thing, like Small Factory and Tsunami or The Swirlies who were all sort of doing similar things in a different way. I know when I think of what I like in music there's a lot of British bands and there's also a lot of the new American bands... we don't always sound like them but they influence us somehow... a lot of new Sup Pop bands like Codeine, Sebadoh, obviously our good friends Tsunami who we tour with a lot. I find myself strumming chords that sound just like them."

"When I come home in the evening and I want to be by myself I put on Codeine and just writhe on the carpet"

You get compared to My Bloody Valentine a lot, but you're least like them.

"Although now, because of all the comparisons, we all sort of have a sore spot," says Brian. "I can't say I listen to their records any more, not because I don't like their records, but because it's almost painful to hear their records and think if people knew I was listening to a My Bloody Valentine record right now they'd just think I was the biggest wannabe."

Kelly is a bit more categorical "If anyone listened to 'Copacetic' and 'Loveless' side by side they would never say we sound anything like My Bloody Valentine."

Archie is still surprised MBV keep coming up. "What's funny is a lot of songs we've recorded I've expected us to be compared to other bands but inevitably it's always My Bloody Valentine. I thought we've put out songs that were a lot similar sounding to say The Wedding Present or something, a guitar sound or a sort of riff or a rhythm that resembles other bands more closely than My Bloody Valentine. I don't really hear the My Bloody Valentine influence in us."

Kelly's confused too. "It's odd because we got compared to them so often and I don't think we sound like them because they do weird things with the guitar. I think we just write pretty simple noisy pop songs that are real straight-ahead. There's no weirdness."

A quick closing reference: I thought I heard shades of the last Darling Buds album.

"I've heard that our album sounds almost similar to the new Darling Buds," Brian agrees once more. "I'm only familiar with the first two Darling Buds and I only like the first of those."

For those of you that don't know, the first Buds album was pretty good indie-pop turned major label pop, the second album was a dreadful attempt at real pop, and the third was really good, but slightly clichéd now, noisier pop - totally lost of course.



"Beat Happening are a distilled essence of pop"

'And she doesn't even know just how beautiful she is'

Of course Velocity Girl have got a history. They've released a sprinkling of singles and tracks on compilation albums over the last four years, as Archie explains.

"We put our first record out at the end of 1989. It was a very different line-up - Kelly and I were the only members currently that were with that line-up and a fellow named Bernie played bass and Bridget Cross who's in Unrest now was our singer then, and that was just a song on a compilation. That's pretty much the earliest thing we did."

Brian adds "The line-up now and pretty much what people perceive as Velocity Girl is only about two years old, maybe a little bit older."

One of these compilation tracks was their contribution to the Beat Happening tribute album, 'Fortune Cookie Prize', put together by Simple Machines, the label run by the girls in Tsunami. Various DC, NY and VA bands paid homage to a band who've been a mainstay influence to hundreds of bands for many years.

Brian is first to applaud Beat Happening. "They've been one of my favourite bands for probably five years. I've always liked the simplicity because I think they write genuinely great songs and they're the simplest songs in the world and there's a profound beauty to their lyrics."

Archie's keen too. "They're like a distilled essence of pop. There's so many bands full of musicians who can play unbelievably well but I think a lot of times they try to show more that they're musicians rather than that they can write songs and they'll play these incredibly complex songs that you can never remember and you'll go yeah it's alright and it's produced very well, but the song doesn't mean anything."

'I'd like to tell you something but I have to think of something first'

Well, I've got to the end of my short list of questions. "Okay then, we'll ask you questions. What do you think of our songs?"

Before yesterday I hadn't heard much by you, mainly 'My Forgotten Favorite' which is more jangley, so I was surprised at how powerful you were live, but I listened to the album today and it kind of makes sense now.

"It's funny you should say that's jangley," Archie picks up, "because I don't think there are any clean guitars on there. Wasn't your over-dub on there?" he asks Brian.

"Everything was absolutely on ten on that over-dub. It's really easy to hear the notes though because everything's so high."

"Do you like Codeine?"

They're a bit slow for me.

"I think Codeine is another band that reminds me a lot of Beat Happening and how people approach them," thinks Archie. "It's either love or hate. Some people, when they play a show, it's so slow they can't stand it and they're talking and trying to do other things."

"There's been a couple of times when I come home in the evening and I want to be by myself and I put on Codeine and just writhe on the carpet," Jim reveals.

"Do you like Sebadoh?"

I haven't listened to them much but what I've heard I like, I answer, non-committal as ever.

"Sebadoh to me is just one of the best bands."

How does it feel being on Sub Pop with all these cool bands?

"It's so great."

Are you surprised that they would want a band like you?

"We were when they first approached us," Jim acknowledges, "but it kind of makes sense to me now, seeing the newer bands that they're working with."

Do you think they're trying to get rid of their old image?

"I don't think they're trying to get rid of their image," Kelly argues.

"They're just trying to not let it get stagnated," Archie corrects. "If this was another label they might have tried to milk the grunge thing to death but they're the ones that fostered that scene and let it grow, but now that's happened and they're looking for other things."

Jim continues "while the major labels are signing grunge bands now, so they'll put out an album a year from now, at which time no-one will give a shit."

Brian recounts a tale: "We played a show in San Francisco with a bunch of the new bands - Pond, well The Fastbacks have been around for a while, and Hazel who are really great."

Everyone keeps talking about Hazel, I distract.

"Their first single should be out very soon," Archie diverts. "Their first Sub Pop single."

They had a credit on the Pond album, I remember.

"They're Portland pals," says Brian.

"I think they are honestly stupendous," Archie enthuses. "They are just wonderful. Jody, Brady and Peter are coming to kick your butt. That's the only reason they exist."

"And Fred," Jim adds. "They have this guy who just dances while they're playing and does whacky shit. He's a nut, but in the best way."

"Anyway, the T-shirts for the show said '100% grunge free'," Brian ends.

'Finished my song on the subway last night. I missed my stop but I got it just right'

As the talk draws to a natural conclusion, the band express thoughts about getting away to see Voodoo Queens who are supporting them, which brings to mind a subject which may or may not be close to their heart.

Is the riot grrrl stuff really happening in America?

"It's probably happening as much as it's happening over here," Brian thinks. "It seems exactly the same to me where there's not a lot of actual riot grrrls anywhere you go, but the newspapers have tagged it as this mass underground sub-culture that's erupted."

"Real riot grrrls wouldn't stand for being photographed"

In America it seems like they're more genuine, but over here they're just imitating, I suggest questionably.

"I think it's probably exactly the same," Brian affirms. "Blood Sausage played with us yesterday and they seemed to be a really authentically great punk rock band."

Archie has the same line in thought. "In America you don't read about riot grrrls in the papers, or if, like Spin magazine writes an article about them they get a model to pose for the photo because real riot grrrls wouldn't stand for being photographed."

"Bruce from Sub Pop was telling me he called up Huggy Bear and they wanted to do a record together," Brian tells me, "and Huggy Bear pretty much told him to fuck off. Bruce was totally into that, like 'somebody can tell me to fuck off, that's great!'"

"I really love the Huggy Bear stuff, but maybe I'm paranoid but I think if they ever met me they would hate me as a person or something just because they feel that I'm not a good person," Archie pleads. "Huggy Bear I love you!"

"I don't think they would have played on the bill yesterday with Blood Sausage if they had any intense hate feelings," Brian assures him.

"I think everybody hates me," Archie imagines.

No way! How could anyone hate a band who combine everything you like about a few of your favourite bands, and manage to mix in unimaginable flavours of their own so that you barely recognise the ingredients, but you love the taste in your mouth, like white chocolate mousse.

Even As We Speak

I don't think I've ever interviewed a pop band with chart potential before. I know all indie-pop bands think they stand a chance, but let's face it, bands don't go from indie-pop to real pop without then trying to step back again. Even As We Speak were quietly minding their own biz in Australia when an English label heard their version of New Order's 'Bizarre Love Triangle'. It was a laid-back, summer holiday interpretation, with a girl singer, which was sharing shelf-space with four other songs with a nervous boy singer and slow, jangley guitars which fitted in with the label's roster more closely. That label was Sarah Records, which has a more definite image in this country than it meant to a little band from New South Wales. The band direction changed slightly as Mary drifted into the lead singing role, but still Sarah and their fans were happy. The band were a bit surprised at the strong label-oriented categorisation that exists in England, but were glad to be appreciated in England and able to complete a successful tour.



That was a year or two ago. 1993 is the year they decided there's enough of a foothold and enough of an opening to try and set up base here. With a mighty fine album under their arm and plenty of warm clothing in their suitcases they're prepared to launch themselves upon the British public and face the British weather.

Four sixths of the only band with more qualifications than Heavenly are gathered at the end of a six week tour to compare ups and downs of England versus Australia, with the balance still apparently tipping England's way, at least musically.

"The industry's not very smart in Australia," Julian begins. "It's generally run by middle-aged people who don't know very much about music, especially indie music, so they pour money into more mainstream type bands which they think will do well, and as for the indie acts they've got no idea, so the only thing they've been doing recently is buying up all the indie labels as some way of trying to tap into the indie scene, but they don't understand how to promote indie bands."

"I reckon one of your jobs in a pop band is to try and subvert in some sort of way"

But are you really an indie band because you're quite poppy and less indie than most indie bands?

"We want to be a top 40 band."

Mary laughs as Julian's rigid determination.

"No, that's serious too. We want to have a single in the top 10 network chart," he states.

So what's stopping you?

"You need lots of money behind you," Mary answers.

She's right of course. Success isn't related to talent, as anyone knows.

"Have a look at what's happening to someone like Belly at the moment," Julian gives as an example. "£3000 worth of ads a week, and we've probably got material that would be more suited to the top 10 than they would, but because there's a little more kinda grungey and a little more specifically y'know..."

Yeah, I know. Belly deserve to get in the chart just as much as Even As We Speak, but a lot of promotion makes them much more likely to. So where do Sarah stand with all this?

"We haven't had a discussion with Sarah records as of yet," says Mary. "We're waiting for the end of this lot of dates to have a discussion with them to find out what comes next. Maybe we could be the band that could take Sarah into the top 10, but we don't know," she postulates mechanically.

Would Sarah be prepared to promote you a lot?

"That's what we don't know. So when we talk to them we'll know. It's hard to say because, one, it depends on their money, two, it depends on their philosophy. They've got a certain philosophy that we're not sure the extent of it I guess."

Are you surprised at the reaction you've had from being on Sarah over here? It has a definite kind of image.

"Yeah," says Julian.

"I don't think it does any more. I reckon it did and I reckon it's changing," Mary says, swallowing her tongue after moaning earlier about the lack of support from the other Sarah bands, presumably because they're not cutey enough.

People who know about Sarah know it's changing but people outside maybe don't, I hypothesize as Paul and Rob return from the bar.

"As Australians we're not used to this big preoccupation that English people have that a band is a Sarah band or a Creation band. You just play music in Australia and try and be awesomely beautiful or rawly powerful," Paul says as he settles into his pint.

"You're not trying to fit into some sort of mould that a label gives you," says Mary.

"It's less fashion driven than it is over here," Julian contrasts. "Over here it's incredibly fashion driven so it seems that Sarah Records have been incredibly unfashionable for a while."

"Which is fine for us," Paul laughs.

There's an image of a typical Sarah band, I suggest, although very few of the bands on Sarah actually fit it.

"It's more the audiences," says Julian. "You see the anoraks and the bowlcuts in the audience, not onstage."

"We did a few gigs with Boyracer who are a new Sarah signing and they're just... how would you describe them?" Mary asks Paul.

"The Fall meets Adrian Henry," he answers.

"We get into their stuff," Mary admits.

"It's not all Blueboy," Julian says, not quite dissing Sarah's 'typical' band.

The European indie music fans seem to be much more open to bands who are linked to stereotype images which are less widely accepted over here, so that a band who will pull 100 people on an average night in London could pull 400 on any night in Madrid. With this in mind it seems obvious that a globe-trotting band such as Even As We Speak would have tried their hand there.

"Not one thing in Europe," denies Mary. "We've had an offer for Germany. We've had an offer for France."

"Good reviews in France," Paul glows. "Said we play 'tout clair' guitar music, which is nice. I think that's sort of a complement."

"What does it mean?" Mary asks.

"All clear," says Paul. "Loses something in the translation."

"We'll try and go for the European thing in the summer, probably through a support with another band," Julian proposes.

Which brings to mind the obvious question of who they would like to support, which elicits a non-answer from Julian about versatility, peddling the kind of bullshit that only a band without a PR company would attempt.

"Even when we did support bands like Medicine," he continues, "who on a superficial level are incredibly different because they're incredibly noisy and we're not, they've got really strong pop songs which is what we have too, so stylistically it's a different approach but it's the same."

"We had a great time with them too," says Mary with a naughty chuckle which hides more than she's giving away.

So, enough of false images, what really matters is the music, and Even As We Speak's fruit has been 'Feral Pop Frenzy', a shining gift from the pop gods. Obviously it's not an album chock full of pop singles, but there are a couple or three of genuine catchy chart smashes plus some quality diversity that you would expect from a no-sell-out,

adventurous, multi-dimensional pop band with chart intentions. After seven singles and an EP they finally managed to get the money together to record an album, and they intend it to stand up to scrutiny on all levels. Julian joined the band during the process of recording the album, as Mary explains.

"He's produced the last couple of singles and hadn't actually joined the band as such but might as well have during the album, and he and Matt worked together a lot which brought together a whole heap of the new songs."

"The bigger the band and the less they need the money, the harder they fight to get money out of small bands for samples"

The new 'boy' is responsible for the frequent samples which drop in at appropriate places and litter the songs with snatches of variation from the usual contents of an indie-pop album. The samples are usually familiar sounds, the like of which have been used before on dance and rap songs, but it is difficult to place the source exactly.

"They range from incredibly obscure to incredibly well known," Julian says.

"We wouldn't like to say more than that," Paul says in a make-believe officious voice. They all laugh.

"We won't divulge the incredibly well known ones because we might get busted," says Julian, voicing a dormant possibility.

There's one sample which I recognised as soon as I heard it, but it's taken me until last night to remember exactly where it came from. The end of 'One Step Forward' is Yello isn't it?

"Ha ha ha yeah," Julian laughs, "it's Yello," carefully not giving any more away.

It's the end of 'Call It Love'.

"Yeah," he admits furtively, "Mixed in with other things. There's a funny anecdote, we won't name the bands involved, but these guys last year when they were over were talking to a particular record company person and played them 'One Step Forward' and they realised at the time when they were in the office, when they were playing the song to the record company executive, that there were samples contained on that record from one of their artists. And they had to cough when the samples came up."

Has anyone ever objected to any of the samples?

"No. I don't think so. I think it's absolutely ludicrous for people to object to sampling at the moment, especially the way that we use them - we're not building whole songs around a particular sample. When we saw Medicine the other night I particularly liked their guitar sound and I went up to the guitarist and said 'would you mind if I sampled your guitar sound?' and he said 'no, feel free, I'm all for that'. So most people have a fairly sensible approach. The bigger the band and the less they need the money, the harder they fight to get money out of small bands for samples. It's pretty ludicrous. Most indie bands or bands who aren't on huge record labels don't really care about that stuff, in fact they're all for it. Pop music's only just re-hashing riffs and stuff that everyone else has used before anyway."

"Yeah. Power to the people," Paul butts in.

"You could re-perform the sample, and a lot of people have been doing that, and it's kind of a silly argument this whole copyright business."

You're undoubtedly an indie band, but some of the songs are very dancey, so do you see yourself as a dance band or a pop band or both?

"All the above," says Rob. "If we do something that's dancey there's no reason not to put it out just because you see yourself as a pop band. If it's good music, it's good music. Most people's record collections, using Matt's terminology, are pretty diverse. Most people like a bit of variety and we do too. We're definitely not a dance band exclusively and we don't see ourselves going that way. We're a pop band."

"But we hope to be able to be appreciated by dance music people," says Paul in his PR hat.

"We've got remixes coming out on a Manchester label," Julian prompts.

Oh yes, 'Straight As An Arrow', the indie dance track that combines the soft pop of St Etienne with the guitar dance of Sunshot. I was amazed when I heard that live that an indie band could pull off a dance track so well on stage, and with even more work input in the studio it should be something of a monster to storm the clubs, somewhere a live band can't get, especially an anti-fashion indie band.

"The remix is going to be really different," says Julian. "If I was remixing that I would have done it very differently, but that's kind of good in a way because you get a totally different angle on the song. The main mix of that is going to be sped up to about 125 beats per minute because that's what you need to get your record played in clubs these days, whereas when we did it, we did it at 92 beats per minute because we thought it sounded good at 92, so we're not worried about whether it's the right BPM to be played in a club or not. The best way to do a remix is to leave people alone. It's a creative process in itself and the last thing you want when you're doing a remix is someone telling you how they want it to sound. In my opinion the more it differs from the original the better."

Tucked up amongst the blue sky pop are a few gripes about the bad lot mankind has made for itself, like the

line in 'Love Is The Answer' about the government not helping to pay the rent, and the slow thump thump of 'Spirit Of Progress' which hammers out a message about the stupidity of war and the triviality of everyday living compared to the scale of worldwide events. Australia strikes me as being a pretty cushy country to live in, but in many ways pretty much like old Blighty.

"It's exactly the same except people are just a bit better off there," Paul confirms.

"We're not a political band obviously," says Rob, "but politics affects everyone. It's not politics as such but more just everyday life. Things like paying taxes and shit like that. And we all detest large bureaucracies."

"On a musical level we're an incredibly political band, we'll do things that no-one else would dare do for fear of being trashed or ridiculed," Julian hypes, borrowing the PR hat as the bullshit detector goes into overload. "That element of danger is really important, to keep people guessing, like to put out a hillbilly track. Pop music has become one of the most conservative forms of music that there is on the planet and personally I think that is highly ironic considering how it started. I reckon one of your jobs in a pop band is to try and subvert in some sort of way."

Is it easier to survive in Australia than it is over here?

"If you don't have much money you could lead a fairly comfortable existence in Australia but over here it seems it's hell if you don't have much money," says Julian. "Also the number of homeless people here. There is no way Australia would have anywhere near as many homeless people. It shocks you if you come from Australia to come here and see how many homeless people there are. And then when you study the social security system, if you see how that works, it's really geared against people who are unemployed. The whole housing benefit system and stuff like that. And landlords won't give you a flat if you're unemployed."

"Poll Tax! For fuck's sake!," Mary spurts. "Television license! What the hell's that?! You have to pay for water! For this shitty water! I can't believe the bills that you get thrown your way."



"I went to rent a TV and they wanted bank references and references from your landlord," Rob relates. "I couldn't believe it. That's where you see differences. They're very suspicious of you here."

"So it's weird there are so many people on the dole and they're all living in these little places that you don't develop better bands than Suede," Paul trivialises.



"A lot of people who play in bands in Australia are on the dole," says Julian. "It's unofficial arts funding."

"We call it our arts council bank," says Mary.

The dole seems to be the norm for bands over here, but I thought it would be less acceptable in a better-off country like Australia.

"Australia's a place where you have to be accepted somewhere else before you can be popular, and England's a place where if you're popular anywhere else first they'll never accept you"

"It's more acceptable if you want to rent a house," Julian contradicts. "They don't ask you if you're employed or not when you're going for a house."

"They don't say no DHSS in the papers," Paul says. "We think the food's better there too but I suppose that's only mind over matter!" he jokes, thinking it was about time to wrap up and go to the chippy. "We're just basically here to make our music successful I suppose. This is the place that you have to be accepted. Australia's still a place where you have to be accepted somewhere else before you can be popular unfortunately, and England's a place where if you're popular anywhere else first that they'll never accept you."

"The most popular Australian bands over here were not popular in Australia before they came here," says Julian. "Like The Birthday Party, The Go-Betweens and The Triffids."

"The Moodists, The Laughing Clowns," adds Paul.

Sensing the urge to eat I conclude by asking about their plans for the future.

"Some more recording," says Rob. "We're hoping to get back in the studio sometime this month and do some songs. We don't want to leave it too long between releases so we're thinking about trying to do an EP."

"Also we're more or less self-financed so that often dictates what you put out," Julian says. "If we had the money we might well have an album out before the end of the year but when you're in another country and you don't have your day jobs it's very hard to finance your recordings."

"You see the anoraks and the bowlcuts in the audience, not onstage"

That's what record labels are for isn't it?

"To give you an idea, we made our last album for somewhere in the region of £3500, so from that point of view we've been incredibly successful because I don't think there's too many bands could make an album for £3500 to do as well as our one has. So that's one of the major issues - finance. I don't think you can make a living out of a band until you're in the network charts. Someone said to us at a gig the other day 'you must be making a lot of money out of this' because they saw the number 8 entry or something, and I just laughed at them. We went to Manchester two nights ago to play a gig. We drove for six hours, we spent £60 on petrol, we played to a room that had over 200 people in it who were being charged £3.50 on the door, and the promoter tried to give us £25 at the end of the night. That's the sort of thing that you contend with. So we lost a lot of money just doing that one gig, and there's been other gigs where we lost money."

You should play all the college gigs, I suggest. They give you money and food.

"That's the better thing in England," Julian concedes. "You get fed when you play gigs sometimes."

"Tunbridge Wells where they give you sandwiches and then they stagedive for you. That's the best gig in the world," says Paul.

"And we all stagedived too," Mary retorts because she got thrown into the audience.

"You wouldn't see Ed Kuepper stagediving. He's too cool for that," says Paul as he folds up Big Muff 5 and tucks it into his bag.

"I reckon Ed would have a bit of a leap around at Tunbridge Wells," says Julian. "I reckon there's a bit of a rock pig in every person in a band. Has some secret desire to have a bit of a dive."

Whether they're rock pigs or pop bunnies or dance mules, there's bound to be one side of Even As We Speak to tickle your fancy. Open your mind and expand your horizons. Don't wait for another sunny day, let the sun shine all year.

Credit To The Nation

Any Chumbawamba fans in the house? If so you've probably danced to a young black rapper from Birmingham, and watched the dancers either side of him. You wouldn't stand for your average HM/grunge band stealing the intro to 'Teen Spirit', but it's an immediate entrance to a world of hip hop which is coming closer to my little enclave, with bands like Body Count and Rage Against The Machine mixing metal and rap. Credit To The Nation are a hip hop band with a message, and they're coming to get you. As well as three Chumbas tours under their belt, they've also supported Sunshot, Stereolab and Fundamental among others, so look out for them in your town. Having looked up from your beer to see who it is sampling Nirvana over a dance beat, you start to listen to the words. Words like the call for racial unity in 'Call It What You Want' and the self-explanatory 'The Lady Needs Respect', the two sides of the current 7 inch single. But it's not a totally po-faced gripe: there is a laugh at how blacks make better dancers, the point being that people are different are you should be proud of your differences.

Taking time out from recording some demos at Island's expense to try and capitalize on their publishing deal, MC Fusion (or Mattie to his friends) is sitting in a quiet Hammersmith pub, the ultimate white lower middle class stronghold, where people look and politely wonder "I wonder what he's doing here?". I start by asking about the obvious issues of racial differences which are voiced on the single.

"That was done about a year and a half ago now. I'm trying to change from all this about racism," he says, instantly wiping out half my questions. I'll admit I don't know much about hip hop, I just know that I like some of the little I hear, so I didn't expect to have a lot in common musically, although the Nirvana sample and the Chumbas support indicate some common ground, and I didn't want to warble on about supermarket shopping or something. Clearly race is an issue, and Credit appear to be making an effort to make it less so by making it more so, rather than making a novelty of it. Everybody's prejudiced. The question is how willing you are to drop the prejudices. You see a crustie band and you think they're going to sound like The Levellers, but if they start to play and sound like Pavement you forget your preconceptions. If you see more crustie bands and more of them sound like Pavement you'd then drop the idea that crusties sound like The Levellers. Do I need to spell out the racial parallel? You've got prejudices, but lay them open and it becomes less of an issue. But that's enough preaching from me. I'm not qualified to make a mountain out of a mountain anyway.

He leads onto the current direction, "I've started a new song called 'Manmade', slagging off the royal family and homophobia. The main thing that's pissing me off at the moment is the royal family. Just can't get into them at all so we're doing a lot of things about that. You've got to broaden your music and try and change your message. I've done a few soul songs, ballad songs, swingbeat."

Why don't you do all the different styles live?



"The only problem at the moment is the facilities that we've got. We live in Birmingham and we've only got an Astra, we haven't got lots of money. Ideally we'd like to have a drummer and bass guitarist but we're still looking for those."

Who does all the music now?

"Me. I do all the music and the lyrics, everything. With two dancers, and they do all their choreography on their own."

The dancers keep the interest filling the stage, and are an integral part of the show. They've even been known to declare a false start because the dancers fluffed. A tape machine's not very exciting to watch, so the dancers make up for it with their dancing, nay, performing, because some of the dances are acting out scenes, especially the masked artistry of 'Manmade' which approaches a theatrical mime show, but I'll leave you to go see that. Much more entertaining than a shoe-gazing guitarist.

"Shabba Ranks was on The Word slagging off gay people and he embarrassed me because he's black. The only time when black people get to get on television it's the stupid bastards who get on like Shabba Ranks"

I asked how Credit To The Nation came by their name, but aside from the obvious - they are a credit to the nation - he couldn't remember. How long have you been going for then? I ask, thinking surely it isn't long enough to forget how you got your name.

"Two years. We never planned to start a band really. Chumbas wanted us to go on tour with them. What happened is I did one demo at my manager's house on his 8-track, it was a slow ballad song, and another song which was called 'Crime Prevention' which was funded by the police and I was slagging off the police."

He laughs at the ironic inception of the band, being given a grant by the police to make a song about crime prevention, and them not realising he was saying 'shoot the crime preventor'.

"They thought it was brilliant and was going to make a video, the works. Showed this tape to Chumbas and they wanted to get us up on stage with them. So we got a few tracks together and went on tour."

How did you go down with the Chumba audience?

"That is the best audience I can get," he says with forceful enthusiasm that makes me want to buy one. "I've played to loads of Chumba audience, Hiphoprisy audience, and we played with Gang Star once and that was like a proper hip hop audience who are into the basic hip hop thing, the sexist hip hop, and they never took to me at all. The people who I thought would take to my music because I'm doing hip hop never took to me at all because of my lyrics. They never wanted to listen to somebody preaching about stop racism, stop sexism, whatever. All they wanted to hear was a good beat."



MC Fusion also had a walk-on part on Chumbawamba's 'Shhh' album. The album had to be re-made because the distributor didn't like all the copyright infringements. They asked Fusion to do a rap on the remake which was used to replace a load of talking from a film. He used the opportunity to get his own back on Chumbas censoring his first single which was released on their label, Agit Prop.

"The lyrics on that slagging off Agit Prop, because when I did my first single there was a song called 'Make It A Better Day' and it was supposed to be called 'God Will Make It A Better Day' and they wouldn't let me have that lyric on because what they believe. So when it came to doing a rap on one of their songs, about censorship, I slagged off Chumbas."

The rap is a bit cryptic so I don't know if Chumbas realised they were being slagged off, or maybe they can take a joke, otherwise it doesn't seem to be a very wise move, unless you like living dangerously. The rap is about how 'censorship is bollocks' and it was done over the phone because the engineer wiped out the original.

'Call It What You Want' was recorded six months into Credit's life, reflecting the issues of the time.

"When I do songs it's about what I see in front of me. At that time there was loads of racism going on around my estate and things was really getting to me so I made that song. At that time I just started going out with this white girl and I was getting loads of hassle from that from

parents and everything. That's what Credit was based from really, the racism thing. That was the first thing what hurt me really, then the sexism thing came up," he says referring to the B-side: 'The Lady Needs Respect'. "And the royal family are shit," he says flitting back to his latest moan. "Bastards!"

Personally I couldn't give a toss about the royal family. If it wasn't for the tabloids you would never know they existed. So why should they rattle Credit's chain?

"As a black person growing up and watching television and hearing on the radio about the royal family I've never really actually liked it and the Union Jack stuck in my mind as a kid as a racist slur. When I look at that and look at the royal family I just think fuck. And why isn't there a black person in the fucking palace man? I'm sure there's somebody in the palace who likes a black woman or a black man. I'm try to get in there. Have sex with the Queen. I'd have sex with the Queen even though I don't like her. Pierce a hole in the condom and just do the job. It's gotta be done. Kelvin, the dancer, get him to have sex with Philip. Or Andrew or Edward. Or the corgi."

Which brings us neatly back to the subject of the possible next single, 'Manmade' which is about homophobia.

"That's after I was watching The Word and Shabba Ranks was on doing his song about shoot all gay people."

All reggae and a lot of rappers seem to be based on sexism. Take the current number one, Shaggy 'Carolina'.

"Since I started smoking dope I don't say my prayers any more"

"That's terribly sexist. It's fucking crap man. It's quite horrible really to know that that sound - it's good, I like listening to reggae music - it's based on sexist remarks. If you listen to every reggae song it's talking about sex and women with a beautiful body and nothing else at all. The thing about Shabba Ranks what pissed me off is he's got some good songs. In his first album he made some good songs about reality and everything, and now he's just changed and totally fucked up his view. He was on The Word and slagging off gay people and what pissed me off was he was saying there's black people getting oppressed, and it's the same thing for gay people getting oppressed. He embarrassed me as well because he's black. The only time when black people get to get on television it's the stupid bastards who get on like Shabba Ranks. If white people are introduced to black people and it's people like Shabba Ranks, Ice T, Ice Cube, all these people, you get the wrong view."

There was a lot of talk on Kiss FM when 'Malcolm X' first came out about how the cinemas were expecting a lot of trouble. Apparently only a few white people went to see it and they got shouted at as symbols of the oppression whites afflicted on blacks through the years, although the story changed as the film progressed.

"I'm sure that would happen because black people don't hold it back, if they're pissed off they'd show it. I don't

think it should be done that way because those white people are going to that cinema to see the other point of view and they're fretting. That's the best thing about music. If you do it in music it's easier for people to understand the other point of view. If you do it in the right way, not the wrong way like NWA. Mind you Ice T Ice Cube touch on the racism tip but when they start doing this thing about sexism it pisses me off because they're really sexist. They're really strong rappers saying something really positive, and at the same time they're doing stupid things and you'd think they'd be aware of it. I read this article on Ice Cube the other day in the Guardian and he was saying women don't have a problem with men calling them bitches and a real nigger isn't gay. I thought that was really weird."

"Why isn't there a black person in the palace? I'd have sex with the Queen"

Aren't there people out there who really believe that?

"No, it just makes him look like a fool because as soon as I read that I thought what a stupid idiot."

He's abusing his position, where he's been given the opportunity to say something positive and he's just spreading the impression that negative thinking is more widespread than it really is.

"There's lots of bands out there just in it for money, they're not thinking about what they're saying. I've got a song called 'Jump' slagging off Kris Kross. I slag off Kris Kross, Vanilla Ice, Marky Mark, New Kids On The Block. It may seem like a lot of white people but it's just rappers who are just in it for the money. Take That. East 17."

The white rappers seem to be much more guilty of just taking the artform and exploiting it, and they're the ones that make the money by just commercialising it, but they're nowhere near as good.

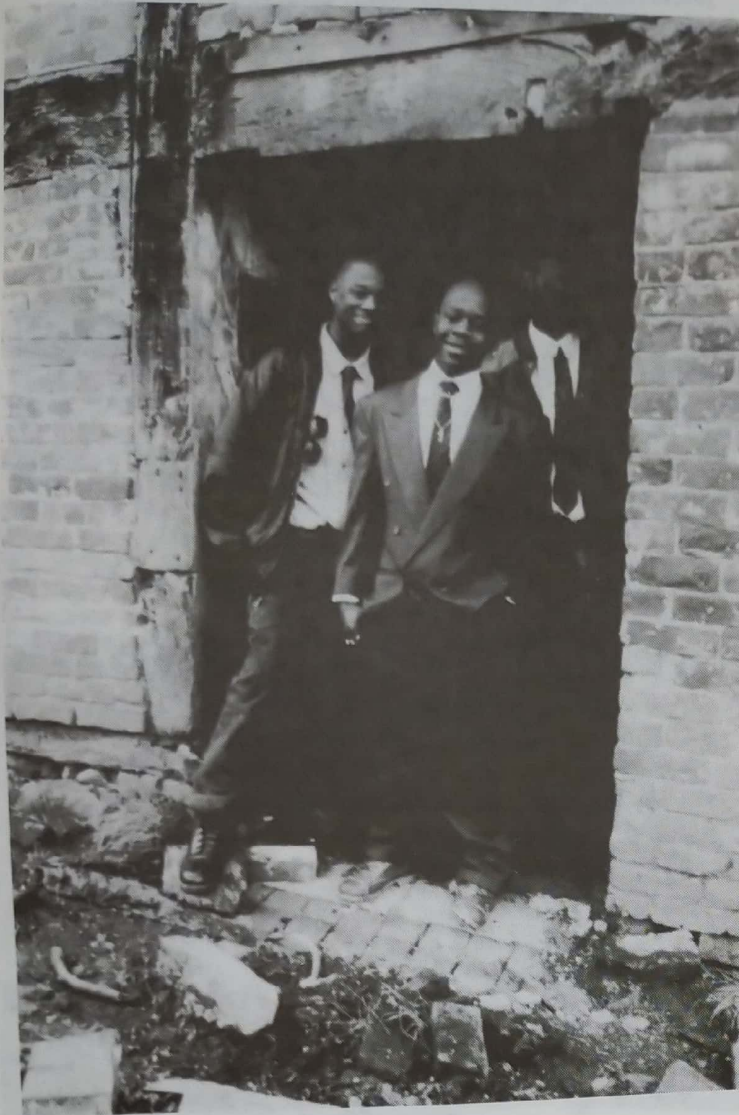
"No, it's not to do with colour really. There's white hip hop bands out there who are really good. Third Base was a good band but they've split up now. Cypress Hill are quite good, but in another way they're like Ice Cube and Ice T because they say some good things and at the same time they're saying stupid things about carrying guns around. House Of Pain. There's no harm in House Of Pain because they're not coming out on a stupid tip really. Young Black Teenagers. That's a bit weird, they're white and when you ask them a question about the name they say they were brought up around black people and they know more about black people more than their own culture, but at the same time they say some good things."

Guns: there's an interesting topic. Do you think the police should be armed?

"I should be armed and I should shoot the police."

I take it you don't like the police? Any particular reason?

"Because the police force is definitely racist. I was in my car the other day, I just passed my test, and I was followed by the police for about 10 minutes for no reason."



And it sounds stupid but when I'm driving I think about whether I'm going to get stopped by the police or not, so I don't wear my hat and I just drive around in proper clothes and I never got stopped. First time I drove around with my hat on straight away police following me for 10 minutes."

And then there's 'Filth', a rap about the police, or the Rodney King thing in particular, replete with orchestral samples.

I was listening to the phone-in on Kiss that I mentioned earlier on another occasion and they were saying about how blacks have got no identity because they don't celebrate their history. There's a lot to try and forget - slavery and so on - but there's a lot of good stuff too, Egyptian kings for example, but there's no pride in the history, whereas English history is investigated and studied and taught.

"That's the thing of being over-ruled by the western side of the world. Before I started music I used to go to church. My dad's a Reverend at church. I used to go to Pentecostal church but now it pisses me off. I can't believe it. Listening to what people say, what my dad's teaching is drilled into black people's brains by the western side of the world. The bible my dad preaches from is the King James bible and my dad's at church every week preaching to people this is the right way. There's just things in there that's so stupid. I was talking to him the other day, asking him about women becoming priests and he

said 'I don't think it's right because in the bible it says the woman is the weaker vessel and as long as the woman doesn't overstep the mark that's fine'. Then he said 'if the woman isn't the weaker vessel then we've been running this race for a long time with totally the wrong view'. We fucking have man. My mum was given a trouser suit and she wasn't allowed to wear it. I couldn't wear gold for a long time because you're not supposed to worship gold. He was saying the creator made you so you must do everything he says. There's people at his church believing this, and I said 'if you was to go up to the women, do a sermon next week and tell them about the woman is the weaker vessel would the women agree with you?' and he said 'they'd have to or the women would have to come out the church'. I was asking him to do a sermon about sexism and he wouldn't do it. I find it hard to believe the women at his church listening to that and say 'praise de lord, praise de lord'. I said 'if that's what you're going to preach you aren't going to get any young women in your church'. Nobody's listening to that shit these days."

Are you still religious?

"I don't know. Since I started smoking dope I don't say my prayers any more. I don't know what I believe in. There's something there bigger than god. We went to a Buddhist temple to get some samples and my dad freaked. The thing is he's got six kids. I'm the only boy, I've got five sisters, four older than me, one younger. Every single one of them so far - because he brings you up from church as a kid it pisses you off - none of them have turned out the way that he likes. One of them has turned religious, but a different religion. I thought he would be happy, but he was totally pissed off. My sister went to London to study at Polytechnic and she joined this religion. He totally rejected her, wouldn't let her in the house, he stopped her funds."

If religion is another subject that pisses you off I'd have thought you'd rap about it.

"Not since Chumbas," he confesses. "My first gig, just come out of church and went to a Chumbas gig, it was at Liverpool in a Methodist hall. Boff came on stage in his Jesus suit and it was the first time I'd seen them and he was dancing in front of this cross and saying 'if there really is a god, strike me down now, see, you can't do it can you'. And I was in the crowd like 'oh shit, what's he doing man?' I just went over the chip shop, I had to get out the place. Since my dad said that thing about women that put me off religion. Alice from Chumbawamba changed me. Did a few songs with 'baby baby' and I got slagged off from Chumbas. This was when I first started out and I couldn't understand why but now I understand. My dancers still ain't aware, one of my dancers, Kelvin, still says words that piss me off. When he's in the dressing room with me and Chumbas I'm always cringing because I don't know what he's going to say next. We're all dope freaks and Kelvin just turned a dope freak and we're hoping that's going to change him, stop him being sexist."

It occurs to me that drugs are the cause of a lot of violence, but I didn't have that profound thought at the time so I didn't confront him with this contradiction.

MC Fusion is following in his father's footsteps, but not in quite the way his dad had planned. Unlike his father, he's preaching to the unconverted.

Huggy Bear

Where to start? You probably know very little about Huggy Bear even though you hear about them all the time. They only do interviews with fanzines these days, and although this is a fanzine, I'm not going to interview them. I did try, but it didn't work out. I didn't want to interview them anyway. Of course I did, but it's no great hardship because I can just write about them like everyone else does, but that means you get my opinions, not theirs. If I'm misrepresenting them I don't think anyone has any grounds for complaint. That's the trouble with riot grrrl, I'm not one. Riot grrrls can say their own thing and spread their own word. I'm just writing about the band who launched riot grrrl in this country.

Here is why I didn't do an interview. By the time I decided I was writing another fanzine and I wanted Huggy in it they were just starting their tour with Bikini Kill. I didn't go to any of the dates on the tour until ULU at the end. I thought maybe I could get an interview there, but they all said they were too busy and maybe some other time. Fair enough. The following Saturday they did a gig at Rough Trade Shop which was so secret even I didn't know about it, but luckily I happened to be there anyway. It was one of the emptiest gigs they've had there, and everyone was close enough to feel the spit. Afterwards they stand around in various parts of the shop having intense Politically Correct Conversations with their disciples. That night they were playing a women only gig at the White Horse, so I thought maybe I would get a chance there, before the women turn up. The first to escape his PCC was Jon, so I put my suggestion to him. He said no and ran away. I think he was joking. I asked Chris and he said it would probably be okay, but I'd "better have some good questions because we're fed up talking about riot grrrl". Meaning I should ask about the real issues, not about the 'scene' or 'movement' on its own. I might ask other bands "what do you think of riot grrrl?", but I think I can get past that with a band that is actually involved. 7.30 that night I turned up at the White Horse, hoping to avoid the women for whom the gig was intended. For some reason there were a lot of early birds (whoops!) so I hid downstairs and watched the soundcheck. By this time I was already feeling a bit of a lemon for being the only male non-participant anyway, and then I got thrown out for being a voyeur. I sheepishly step over Bikini Kill on the stairs, but manage to catch Niki passing and asked her about the chances of doing an interview. She practically bit my head off and said something about being too busy. Why don't I do it when they're not doing a gig. Jo slid past. But if they're not gigging, they're still being pilots of the riot grrrl movement, or socialising as most people call it. Karen was standing outside, so I thought maybe if Chris was still willing and Karen would join in, there would be enough to have an interview. That didn't happen, and by this stage I thought if they don't want to liberate their opinions I'm not going to pursue them any further. Maybe I'm better off not trying to have a half hour PCC anyway because they would probably hate me for my cynicism. The real reason they weren't interested in doing an interview is because they're fed up with them. During the tour they've chased

journalists out of venues, they've had people from bigger publications paying kids to pretend to be fanzine writers, and they've done loads of fanzine interviews, and there's been a lot of unknowledgeable bandwagonneers, although they've only got themselves to blame for that. I suppose I should know by now not to try interviewing bands at the end of a tour. All bands get fed up with doing interviews, but most see them as a necessary evil. Huggy are in the enviable position of not needing them and they can do as they please. I hate to spoil the party.



Ironically, Chris is the main believer in the whole people empowerment thing - riot grrrl, girl power - call it what you want. Jo's trying to go along with it but it's more of an act, which is becoming easier. Jon's bemused and sympathetic, but he doesn't particularly want to be a spokesman for a generation. Karen's got more to say than she's being given the opportunity to because she's 'just the drummer'. Niki's just a megalomaniac bigmouth. I'm sorry, I'm not meaning to slag you off - I wanted you to answer for yourselves.

Not being a girl myself, I see what's happening as more of a Huggy Nation thing than a riot grrrl thing. A lot of bands have sprung up around Huggy Bear, some are riot grrrls and some aren't. Mambo Taxi haven't got that much to do with riot grrrl, but they've got a lot more to do with Huggy Nation, and it's all helped them. Similarly Voodoo Queens. Then you've got Pussycat Trash, Waccamole, Linus, Blood Sausage, Scaredy Cat and a thousand others who wouldn't have had the platform if it hadn't been for Huggy. There used to be a lot of Sarah-type bands who would sit quietly in their bedrooms and write soft, sad songs about the hard lot they'd got. Now they can celebrate a cause and play to an audience at The Monarch. In this post-grunge world, everyone wants to make a noise. What did I say in my rather prophetic review in BM4? - 'Huggy Bear are Heavenly with a stack of Marshalls and knowing what to do with them... contenders to follow Hole'. Now what? Amelia is

the leader of the jangley indie branch of riot grrrl, including a guest appearance with Huggy on The Word, and Courtney is the riot queen. Riot grrrl is about women seizing the rights they've been denied. Huggy Nation is about doing what you want, giving yourself a voice. Huggy Nation is about not doing things in the conventional way. You don't have to be 'good'. You don't have to suck up to record labels or the press. You don't have to put yourself above the fans. Put yourself on the same level as the people you're trying to reach and they respect you for it. They listen, they join in, they copy, they form bands, they give out grrrl zines, they are the Nation.

The thing that makes Huggy stand out above other 'political' bands is that the music is good. It's what first drew me in. It's at times like these that I can make

Dome. Half the interest was watching the amount of damage Niki could do to Chris by jabbing her heel in as he crawled around the floor. They also used to swap positions more often so that Karen got to play guitar and Jo got to play bass and Niki got to drum. Their appeal was the fact that every time you see them it's a whole new experience. They have occasional bad gigs, but each one was different. You go home feeling as though you've enjoyed yourself, instead of just seeing a good band. You've seen the way people file miserably out of gigs normally. They've had a good time, it just doesn't show. With Huggy you're not just watching a band who can play well or play good songs, you're watching a new sensation in music-making. You're not just admiring their efforts for trying - they actually can play and have got good songs, but that's almost incidental.



use of my record of the gigs I've been to, and I can bore you with all the times I've seen Huggy Bear. First was December 1991, supporting Heavenly at their XMas B+G gig. Don't remember much about that except walking out after a couple of songs. April 1992 they played the B+G again and you can read about the amazing impact that had in BM4. May they played the Dome. I showed them their first bit of press (!) and Niki bought a copy. Again I was knocked out. By this time there was an 'in' hype which brought all the A+R men and people who ought to be there to the B+G in June. They were so awful I had to leave because I couldn't bear to see a band I like ruining their image in my eyes. I stopped short of apologizing to the people I told should go and see them. I continued to see them every chance I got, and they kept drawing me in. Falcon, Rough Trade, White Horse, Union Tavern, White Horse, Underworld, Rough Trade,

The B+G gig at the end of September was maybe the first well-attended Nation gig, possibly excluding some happenings at Rough Trade. Blood Sausage supported, which Huggy are a part of, and they rolled into Huggy's set. Towards the end they invited anyone who was around to join in. Amelia was persuaded into joining in with 'Beatnik Boy', and TVPs took over with a long-lost version of 'Part Time Punk'. You knew you'd been somewhere special. Things went a bit quiet for a couple of months, and when I saw them support The Pastels at The Jericho and The Powerhaus they came back like a whole new band. They were much the same really, but you can re-live the thrill of discovering a genuinely exciting and unique band. The next night was a beery all-night party at The Scala cinema which invoked compulsory participation. December they played to teenyboppers with Blur. The first week of 1993 saw the opening

of a new club at The Monarch in Chalk Farm. Starting off as they subsequently continued, they booked a couple of bands on a casual kind of basis, but the Nation turned up and couldn't help end up playing. The world and his cat got on stage, and a total of 11 bands played, and still finished early despite the late license. February was the well documented Word appearance, but you could hear fuck when you were there and you could see fuck on TV. Obviously the main attraction was the side-show. Jo became incensed at the bimbo feature and shouted a few things, and the rest of the Nation became equally enraged, and instead of bottling it up like you might be tempted to, they had their say. Security were in like a shot, dragging off anyone they could find, like Chris who was jumping up and down on the drum riser shouting 'crap crap crap'. At the time I thought it came across rather limply and they should have used their platform to be more constructive, or destructive, but watching it later on TV, it didn't come across too badly. The whole point is that it wasn't planned. They just happened to be there so they voiced their opinions about a tasteless feature, and got violently ejected for doing so.

As if The Word has got anything to protect. I blame the researchers who asked Huggy to be on in the first place. Huggy aren't interested in promotion. Someone asked them to be on TV so they went along. Anyway, it created the interest which has caused them to be so busy now, which is why I can't get a word in edgeways at a sold out ULU.

Even at ULU Huggy still manage to astound me with their greatness. They've got more to say now, and the ask-the-audience bit is good in theory, but all it did was to shut them up because they didn't want to be asked. From the reports filtering down from the rest of the tour most audiences were a lot more vocal, and even physical, but that's London for you. So apart from the annoying inserts, Huggy still rule.

Bikini Kill headlined at ULU, and I wanted to like them, but couldn't. It seems that in America they've got something to fight for - women's rights, or minority rights in general, seem to be more of an issue in America. It comes down to the fact that employers can fire people on a whim, whereas here a woman who's being harassed can scream unfair dismissal. I know there's more to it than that, but I think American riot grrrls give the politics a higher profile, and I don't think Bikini Kill managed to communicate with the British audience. Huggy Bear are more about beating the corporate music business, which happens to involve minority rights and is sympathetic to riot grrrl, but there's a distinct difference. The American bands push the message stronger than the music, which is why Bikini Kill and Seven Year Bitch can't get on here. For such a basic punk band, Bikini Kill spend a lot of time moaning about the poor equipment and the levels in the





monitors. Only rock stars want professionalism. If you want to see a political (with a small p) punk band you should hunt down Spitboy. A punk band who started out with modest intentions, and sing about a variety of personal experiences which you might like to share but don't have to. They're much more palatable that way, rather than being outcasted for not being a wholehearted supporter of every aspect of your one-sided manifesto. And I gather God Is My Co-Pilot might be over here soon. There's another bunch of radical feminists who don't let their opinions over-rule the music. You're much more likely to listen to someone talking to you than spraypainting the front of your house. So what am I saying? Shut up and get on with the music. No, just use the music as a vehicle for your opinions, not the other way round. Both Spitboy and GodCo peddle their respective causes, reaching the people they want to reach, without alienating people who maybe want to listen and take note.

Bikini Kill seem to be degrading their own cause with their titillation, but I'm sure they have their justifications. A girl got on stage at ULU and said women shouldn't be hating men because they have to fight from within, and Bikini Kill came on and disagreed saying women can work together to beat men. Being the enemy, it's hard to know where I stand, but I respect the right to distribute fanzines to women only, and to have women only gigs, because you don't want to give away your secrets, but on the other hand you don't want to exclude working with men because you can gain ground that way. Maybe that's just being two-faced, or maybe it depends on whether you think you need men or not. Everyone has their own ideas. It

becomes ridiculous though when lack of organisation causes Hole to play a half-empty crap venue at a crap price and no-one knows whether it is women only or not and it's an area where women wouldn't want to walk alone late at night. Whoever chose Subterania as a grrrl venue should be shot (as should anyone who chooses Subterania for anything, but that's another issue). On the subject of organisation and money, let's talk T-shirts. Huggy won't do T-shirts basically because they don't like band T-shirts, but they condone Catcall doing 'totally girl powered' T-shirts without the band name on even though everyone obviously associates it with Huggy because that's where they bought it. Then they quite reasonable want a percentage of the sales which Catcall aren't too happy about giving them. Where does that leave Huggy? Cynics or soft touches? Still on the subject of money, doesn't £1 for the fanzine sold on the tour seem a bit much? Maybe it makes up for all the free ones. I don't know. They made enough money on that tour.

The scratching on the run-out groove of 'Our Troubled Youth' says 'A real freak can't be made - a real freak must be born'. That's a quote from 'Geek Love', a book by Katherine Dunn, who also gets a mention on the sleeve of 'Her Jazz'. She's a journalist from Portland, Oregon, and I bought the book because Courtney said she was her favourite author of 1992. It's about a pair of circus freaks who deliberately breed deformed babies for the circus geek show. They grow up with great pride, feeling superior to 'norms' because of their 'gifts'. Draw your own parallels.

There's been talk lately that Huggy won't last out the year, and I must admit it's hard to see where they can go to after selling out large venues up and down the country. I don't think they'll be another victim of the Big Muff kiss of death. They're not in it for the competition - they don't have to sell out bigger and better venues to consider themselves a success. If they spent the next three years playing the White Horse and the Bull & Gate and the Monarch that wouldn't be a comedown, unlike other bands who get tossed away once they come back down a few steps.

Moving on a week or so from when I wrote this, Bikini Kill played the B+G (a decent venue at a reasonable price - to their credit) and sold it out, and Huggy sold out a crappy Mean Fiddler venue at an inflated price populated by incensed A2 inkie readers, a few of whom seemed determined to share their prejudged antagonism. I don't know if they do it on purpose, but Huggy have a knack of becoming crap at just the right time. Just like that A+R B+G gig 10 months previous, they were ceremoniously shite. But I was glad. The mouthy bigots came to see crap and got crap and they won't be back, and the rest of us got to not see Huggy being incited to the tabloid reaction they've been pasted with. This also gave me the chance to really notice Blood Sausage and Cornershop being seminally good for the first time. I've always known Blood Sausage are a band of moments, but those moments have been far apart up til then. And Cornershop have been tarred with the idea-over-ability brush for too long (by me, sorry) and have always been just good, but they suddenly leapt out and knocked me off my feet.

Christ, people go on sometimes! If you think I'm talking crap, don't tell me, I'm not interested. Tell the world, that's what this is all about: girl power.

record reviews

Hole - Beautiful Son single (City Slang) *****

I wet myself at the thought of a new Hole single, never mind actually listening to it. Less raw and more songy than the last lot of stuff, and all the better for it. They've moved on without losing anything. The good thing about CDs is that I can press the repeat button and need never move from this spot ever again.

Never Mind The Molluscs compilation (Sub Pop) ***

Apparently an attempt to distract the major labels away from Seattle and up to Canada. Sub Pop stuck a pin in the map, invented a scene there and put a few band on a CD. This is the result, and just watch Sloan, Jale, Eric's Trip and Ide'e Du Nord exploit major label cash. Hopefully this idea can continue, dragging expenses accounts to quiet and remote corners of America. Blah blah.

Lois - Butterfly Kiss LP (K/Cargo) *****

Lois is/are funny, clever, and an essential fave for anyone who likes Huggy, Heavenly or anyone like that. I doubt if you'll get another chance to see them play, so go out and get a live tape or two and you'll find out the entertaining story behind these songs. Some of them appear ponderous, but they've all got jovial undertones. Refreshing at any time of the day.

Ablaze! 10 fanzine/magazine

Hello Karren. I suppose I should really be upset by your review of BM, but it was too out of date to bother me. You reviewed issue 4 using the image of the four before. I think BM5 answered some of your criticisms - it's the best one. Besides, half the stuff you said applied equally to Ablaze! Just because you've got ultra-tiny typesetting doesn't mean I'm an environmental hazard. My writing is small enough as it is. Just because you've got flash computer graphics and a two-colour cover doesn't mean this is dull. And what was that you said about Q+A?

Anyway, enough about me, Ablaze! 10 is the riot grrrl issue (which causes a partial reversion to fanzine status) and it's got Huggy Bear on the cover. It's also got Nation Of Ulysses, Tsunami, Kicking Giant, as well as re-prints of riot grrrl fanzines. All good stuff. Other interviews include Moonshake, who also got lumbered into slugging off a few records, Sugar, Nuffana, Sonic Yawn, Frank Black, Poster Children, Bark Psychosis, Hood and Hula Hoop. Pavement managed to say good things about some demos and there are pages upon pages of record reviews. Much more importantly, there's a record with it. Wiiiija sponsored side one with Cornershop and Jacobs Mouse, and Elemental offered Bivouac and Trumans Water. All this at the modest price of £2.50 inc from 17 Wetherby Grove, Leeds, LS4 2JH.

The Best Of Nemesis Live compilation LP (Nemesis/Cargo) **

A hardcore compilation with contributions from the likes of Bad Religion, Sick Of It All, Slapshot and Carry Nation.

Revolver - Cradle Snatch single (Hut) ***

I didn't expect them to sound so much like Ride. I don't dislike Ride.

Sugar Shack - Charmer LP (Cargo) ****

It's difficult to find anything new to say about grunge, except that some of it sounds good and some doesn't. It's just difference settings on the guitars. At the end of each song you can here as the amps' buzz is faded down, because they're all turned up high but they still play chords, not just noise. I like a good bass line. This is Mudhoney meets The Gramps without the kinky leatherwear (probably).

Mother Goose - Too Many Tintins LP (Blast First) ***

Ah! So there is some good music coming out of the Scandinavian ice-fields. I thought there was just loads of wouldbe pop bands. This is moody guitar heartbreak noise power city.

Thin White Rope - The One That Got Away double LP (Frontier) ***

I suppose the title refers to the band themselves, since they're one of the much heralded breed of the 'critically acclaimed' that never did much else. They split up leaving a great uncharted legacy, and this is an unlive-sounding live recording celebrating a parting bestof. If it's not too expensive you should get it.

Mega City Four - Iron Sky single (Big Life) ***

It's easier to compare bands to MC4 than to comment on MC4 themselves. Of course they sound less like MC4 than the bands that sound like MC4. 10 inches are coming back into fashion, but I'm not sure poster bags are.

PJ Harvey - 50ft Queenie single (Island) ****

This really sounds like someone, and it's not PJ. I'll let you know when I remember. It's fast. It's energetic. It's not at all the morose Joni Mitchell soul ballad I was expecting, except maybe the B-side 'demos'.

Rain Tapes International Compilation Volumes 3, 4 & 5 ****

Another three in the ongoing Unknown saga. 3 has more than it's fair share of UK bands, but it starts characteristically well with the Polish band Sex Bomba, and ends with Canterbury's notable electrodes Playground. Everything in between is fine and dandy too. 4 has more of the European bands that Rain is reputed for, including punkpop contributions from France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Czech Republic and Wales. I'll listen to 5 when I get a chance. I'm looking forward to it. £2.25 each from Julian Smyth, 10 Maes y Dre, Ruthin, Clwyd, LL15 1DB, N Wales.

Cows- Sexy Pee Story LP (AmRep) *

'Uptown Suckers' is good but hopefully that's on a single so you can spare yourself the misery of the rest of the LP.

Fastbacks - Gone To The Moon single (Sub Pop) ****

This is the reason the jukebox 7" has lived on so long. A 3 minute burst of raw pop that would shine a light on any bar area. I wanna Wurlitzer.

Radial Spangle - Raze single (Jungle/Beggars Banquet) **

This also starts out a bit ravey, but turns into an earthgirl lullaby. Then just as I'm reading that they sound like Pavement, they do.

Pavement - Westing By Musket And Sextant LP (Big Cat) ****

I think it's great that a band can be so successful and still remain silly. The first song on this bin-bag of leftovers starts out like a druggy kazoo song that Ween would do. None of the songs really have a structure but they do manage to convey something, sometimes using a format recognisable as a song in the traditional sense. Some of the weirder things Pavement have dissipated.

Antenna - Hideout LP (Mammoth) ***

They've dropped The Blake Babies left-overs now and developed their own sound, which is rather more like Elvis Costello than I thought it might of been. I like it though because it's pop without being too poppy, grungish without being very grungy at all, simple without being too simple, and so on. It's nice.

The Fall - Why Are People Grudgeful? single (Permanent) ****

After all these years The Fall still continue to surprise me with a new style stamped with the same old stye. This is a 600bpm dance record. And you should hear their version of 'Lost In Music'.

Heart Throbs - Worser EP (One Little Indian) *

Excuse me. This is not "a return to their indie-guitar roots", nor is it "a marked change from previous releases", which by the way are mutually exclusive. It is however produced in Butch Vig's studio. It is a bit better than some records they've made recently, although you have to wait for the last track NO IT'S CRAP.

Chop Whip Grate Liquefy compilation CD (Mudd) ****

A bunch of Connecticut bands, headed by Monsterland who hold the beacon firmly aloft with a "silly pop song" apparently called 'Girlfriend On Drugs'. Bad Dream House are a fast punk band on the lines of 7 Year Bitch or maybe more like L7, Bunny Brains are a mad Unsane/Screaming Trees weirdangry originalpunk, and the rest are less noticeable but still pretty good. There's an incredible lack of information on this, and there are 6 more tracks than the list implies, so I may have got my bands mixed up. PO Box 814, Brookfield, CT 06804, USA.

Truly - Truly single (Sub Pop) *

Sub Pop's first rock band. They would be better off signing to Polydor and supporting Bryan Adams, except they're all friends of the Seattle scene.

Solace - My Brightest Star flexi ****

Lighthouse - Alone Together LP (Rosebud/Danceteria) **

A couple of French things given to me by my Richard cutie coo at Waaaaah!. Solace is a rueful cutesy indie thing, available from 15 Rue De Saint Malo, 35000 Rennes, France. Lighthouse is a silly indie thing that sounds like Throw That Beat In The Garbagecan doing Kate Bush.

Sarah 70

Getting back to their roots, this is what Sarah I was like. A miniature fanzine about the struggles and gains of side-stepping 'normal' society, and a miniature flexi which wimpily says nothing.

Ice-T - Home Invasion LP (Rhyme Syndicate/Virgin) ****

The first thing that strikes you about this is the amount of swearing, but you get used to it. Every sentence is full of expletives, and every personal description is offensive - a woman is a bitch or a ho and a man is a nigger or a homey (although I didn't think homey was an insult) - he even calls himself Ice Motherfucking T. Maybe he doesn't mean to be sexist and he doesn't seem to be racist. The world is fucked up and he's addressing these problems in a way that the people who can be either the problem or the solution are going to listen. There's a line that goes "everything I say is going to be analysed by a white man". Everything he says begs a question, and hopefully it makes everyone feel guilty, but equally it could be interpreted as a reason for hating the other guy. Whatever you think, you think something, which has got to be good. I don't think he's going to solve anything or make anything worse, he's just going to sell a lot of records.

He raps about street crime, but you can't help wondering how anyone can respect his authority on the subject when he lives in a million dollar house in Beverly Hills. He prides himself on remaining hardcore when others start out that way and move into dance and pop in order to survive, but you could just as easily slag him off for encouraging and promoting violence and disrespect. 'That's How I'm Living' tells how he got to be where he is now. He was alone in the world with no family by the age of 12, and he joined gangs to stay alive in the cruel world. Crime was a way of life, and obviously he had a lot to begrudge the police for - he's just going about his everyday deeds and getting harassed by the pigs. Pimping is just another job. 'Gotta Lotta Love' shows that he wants to see an end to the ridiculous violence situation, saying the greatest thing he's seen is a "straight-up fist fight", which is the hard way of saying no-one wants to shoot anyone, but you can't trust the other guy not to shoot you. That's the difference between America and England - everyone's got a gun so more people get shot. If you read the credits you see that DJ Aladdin co-wrote most of the songs, and the ones Ice-T wrote by himself are less street-violent and more positive. How about normal people who listen to it, where black or white is just a skin colour? They're just watching a gangster movie. It's all fiction to me, I don't know how close it is to him or anyone else or whether that's relevant. Maybe controversy and guaranteed no airplay is a successful formula, which doesn't help the honest rappers.

So that's the lyrics covered, how about the music? It's a simple drum beat and bass line with a few well-chosen samples and some of that kinda squeal that PE used on 'Rebel Without A Pause'. I hope a lot of people buy this and I hope it asks more questions than it's going to answer.

Laurels - Hate Me single (Heparin) ****

Great foghorn vocals and a psychomaniac guitar that revs up your adrenalin. Kind of how Razorblade Smile could get to sounding. Available from PO Box 29447, Providence, RI 02909, USA.

Hazel - Jilted single (Sub Pop) ***

The by now legendary Hazel. Calmer than a frozen lake. Madder than a nut cluster. One of the quiet storm set.

Volume One compilation CD (Eve) *****

A low priced sampler of Eve's past output. Essential for anyone who's only heard a couple of bands and thought they might like some of the others. Maybe you liked Milk but haven't caught up on Headcleaner. Few have heard Crazy Alice and Monster Zero, licensed from Boston's Sonic Bubblegum label, so this is a budget way of introducing yourself. If you're still with me, you'll probably also like Rosa Mota, Some Have Fins, Scissormen and Spitfire. I don't think I ever liked Spitfire, but the track on here was their pop song before they got too artwanky. God Machine are missing because they're playing with the big boys now. If I didn't already know about Eve I could well be amazed.

Rocket From The Crypt - Circa Now LP (Cargo) ***

I love the idea of making the CD look like a 7" single. They are another metal/grungey type band, but with more of a party atmosphere

Furnaceface - Just Buy It LP (Cargo) ****

From the names and attitudes you think these are going to be totally unfunny funny guys, but in fact they've got some serious issues with a humorous outlook. 'She Think's She's Fat' is about how girls think they're fat when they're not. Straightforward enough, but 'Fat Reprise' is a girl singing about how men say they don't think they're fat but really they do. Deep or what? All this without being trivial or ponderous. They've also got songs called 'KKKiss My Ass' and 'We Love You Tipper Gore', the latter about how it's now easier to choose the records you might like, or how to sell a record, depending on your point of view.

Nice - Nice LP (Cargo) ***

All Australian bands sound like The Go-Betweens and this is no exception.

Vacant Lot - Because They Can LP (Cargo) ***

MC4-type hardcore pop, but the first song has a Popguns riff, revealing indie undertones which probably even they're not aware of.

Gallon Drunk - From The Heart Of Town LP (Clawfist) ***

It's surprising in a way that this Nick Cave meets Frank Sinatra swingbeat music has such a wide appeal in popular indie. I guess that says a lot about people's openmindedness.

Animals That Swim - Roy single (Beachheads In Space) ***

I've never seen a standup drummer/singer frontstage before. I don't imagine it leaves much space for the other five band members. There's loads of spare space on the record though - trumpets and stuff have walk on parts. 'Roy' is about how Roy Orbison missed out on the big time because he was too ugly, told with the stark humour shared by Kittenbirds. Lenie from Mambo's other band.

Swineherd - Research single (Elemental) **

I don't really like Swineherd. I don't know why. It's said they sound like Leatherface or Therapy? but I think they're more like a Raw Power band. When's that coming back on TV?

Creaming Jesus - Headrush EP (Jungle) ***

Godflesh meets Mission meets Metallica. That's hardcore dance goth with a hint of HM. Not bad though.

Molly Half Head - Taste Of You single (Playtime) **

From Manchester I assume. These bands play Smashed nights with an arrogant confidence, and I can see their point, but I also miss the point.

Bridget - Sound single (Placebo) ***

There's a lot of dodgy music parading as roots r'n'r or whatever, but Placebo have done very well at finding the good stuff. I could become a huge fan just by reading the press release. If they played The Borderline it would be like Joan Collins visiting Madame Tussauds.

Maxine - EP (Blast First) ****

A guy who looks like J Mascis and sounds like Van Morrison on sedatives with a pair of bongos, or Jean Michel Jarre in a slow-motion dream. He's going nowhere but he's enjoying the scenery on the way, drawing you in like air to a bonfire, and then gently floating about on high. Far out man. Leave me alone.

Common Language - Sharks To Blood EP (Blast First) ***

Spot the common link of the last three? Bands that choose a girl's name for their monica (sic) seem to go for the mellow theme. Remember this band from the Big Muff 3 tape? This has been sitting in the Blast First vaults while they got their shit together. Common Language have all got girl's names and seem to have named themselves after weirdness. Late Joy Division with Liz Fraser singing, but then it gets all noisy and excited.

DOA - It's Not Unusual But It Sure Is Ugly single (Alternative Tentacles) ****

Surely the most tasteful thing on the label. Fast smiley punk pop. What else can you say? All meets NY Dolls.

Seefeel - More Like Space EP (Too Pure) ****

I've got a couple of albums of this stuff, it's called ambient house. The lazy drum beats slide along and the vocals gently drift by. A casual mix along the dimension of The Orb or Earwig or Cranes. Nothing happens but something moves. More to feel than see.

Th' Faith Healers - My Loser/Oh Baby single (Elektra) ****

Things are looking up. A major label single and it's a bluevinylbigholeinthemiddle. Elektra are apparently getting very excited about the prospects for Th' Faith Healers in the US, although this is not, to be honest, one of their best, so I hope it's not a proper single because I would hate to see them flop. Mind you, it'll take more than one off-peak single to negate the earlier stuff and the live extravaganza which have already made their mark on the American public. Another trade in the cultural exchange.

Ringmaster - A Way Of Life tape ***

Owing a little to Carter, but with less of the manic guitardrumtapes that make them so unbelievable. A bit of politico agit pop available from Wic Tapes, 7 Cranberry Walk, Coombe Dingle, Bristol, BS9 2RB.

Skyscraper - demo (Incoherent/Food) ***

Milk's last gig was supporting Sugar, and Vic seems to have started sounding nearer Husker Du than Milk now, which is good. Adi from Swervedriver forms another important third, and I don't suppose you've heard of Pitchfork Skyscraper, but Oliver from them brought the name with him. I still don't think they're as good as Milk, but maybe I shouldn't be making the comparison.

Sunshot - Caught in the act of enjoying ourselves LP (Deva) *****

The most spectacular congregation of beats and chords and tunes to set my soul on fire. The best drum machine in history. The best simple bass line ever. The best restraint of an ecstatic guitar known. The best spooky voice to ever grace a dance record. The only problem I've got is that the tracks aren't long enough, but I suppose if they were longer I would be saying there weren't enough of them. Every song is perfection pressed and I want it to last all night. Most songs from the previous singles are on here, but they are re-recorded and sufficiently different to be worth owning again, unless you didn't buy them in the first place in which case you've got no excuse. They've had time to practice now and I think this does pay a respectable tribute to their live hyperactivity. I can see their holograms dancing over the turntable. If this is goth I'm going to dye my hair black.

Young Fresh Fellows - It's Low Beat Time LP (Frontier) ****

Starts off as the usual skew-whiff 60s pop album you would expect from the YFFs, recalling the roots of Stax and Sun. Later into it extra musicians appear who add an authentic blues jam session type of atmosphere that you know only they would allow to happen, but only them and their fans would appreciate. 'Crafty Clerk' has got a farty trumpet and a woey instrument that sounds like something out of 'Thunderbirds' or 'The Invaders'. It ends with an inspirational performance by soul veteran Rufus Thomas, which doesn't shame YFF as much as they say. It ends with a false ending or two. It ends with a false ending or two.

Vanilla Trainwreck - Sounding To Try Like You LP (Mammoth) ***

It's hard to tell from these records what the band is really like. I saw Vertigo and Helios Creed the other night, and I had them completely wrong from the records. Vertigo made a brilliant, if a little generic, album but they were very poor live. Helios Creed made a totally weird, incomprehensible album, but live they used all kinds of strange effects and managed to keep a good solid sound and rhythm going - something that other weird bands could learn from - and you can start to appreciate where bands like Hair & Skin are coming from.

This records sounds okay, but they could go either way.

Steroid - Jism Harvester LP (Clay) ***

Techno for indie-disco kids, except it's distributed by Polygram thus ensuring it won't get anywhere. This is what happened to the members of Gaye Bykers that Mary left behind. Not too bad all things considered, although I heard stuff like this when Gaye Bykers were still around from people like Colourbox, Hard Corps and even Art Of Noise.

American Music Club - Mercury LP (Virgin) ****

Analyse it, feel it, whatever. This is album is the reflective charm of grinning faintly at lifes downs. Roll back and hold a torch to it.

Blood Sausage - Touching You In Ways That Don't Feel Comfortable single (Wiiija) *****

Passion, power and punk. What more do you need? Anger, attitude and anarchy. Three intense songs and a delicate poem. Calm and chaos rolled into 7 inches.

Sudanese Witch Hunt tape (Hunt) ***

A fair achievement in repetitive, unrepenting keyboard mastery. 47A Dalestorth St, Sutton-In-Ashfield, Notts. No-one ever puts prices on anything.

Dreamscape - Cradle EP (LaDiDa) ***

Less ethereally wimpy than ex-labelmates Earwig, but still quietly dreamy. More like Lush or Cranes, which doesn't say much for their powers of rocking out.

Avocado Baby - A Million And Nine demo ****

Everyone thinks they can be Huggy Bear these days, and good luck to all of them. I kept adding more stars the longer I listened. 50p + SAE, 15 Drumsheugh Place, Blakelaw, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE5 3SY.

Capital Wow demo **

Promising Brummie guitar terrorists that don't sound too much like Neds/Stuffies. 081 340 6237.

Witchdoctors - Dream Preacher single (Tribal Vibes) **

Mission meets Cult. Ideal for New Cross Venue. £2.50 inc, 174 Station Avenue, West Ewell, Surrey, KT19 9UG.

Junk Orange - Swimming With Sharks single (Topical Fruit) ***

A good fast bass line and a bit of a squeal in the guitar. The vocal drones in it's own pleasant little way. It's quite good actually. The B-side's good too. If there was a letter with this I've lost it, but there's a phone number. 071 267 9846.

Sandira - Ishmal Du Bach single (Indolent) **

An Arabic dance record (remember Ofra Haza?) by a one-time member of The Shamen. £3, Brynhyfryd, Vicarage Road, Potten End, Herts, HP4 2QZ.

Sloan - Underwhelmed single (Geffen) *****

Laughing at all the major label money being thrown at them, but without taking the piss. Sloan are a great, fun, grunge pop band from Canada with loud guitars. Maybe they're the next next next Nirvana.

Superchunk - The Question Is How Fast single (City Slang) *****

The A-side samples the flighty pop talents of the album, the B-sides show that there is more to them than that. 'Forged It' sounds like MC4 after a long tour with Helmet, and '100,000 Fireflies' is taking the piss out of the original version.

Slanged compilation LP (City Slang) *****

Hole are on it, so what do you reckon I think? If Courtney spat in an ashtray it would be beautiful art. This is a low-price sampler which exaggerates the greatness of City Slang, but nevertheless, by bringing together so much good work, it shows off the consistent excellence of a small independent German label. Brilliant examples, mostly of recently released album tracks, by Unsane, Lovechild, Superchunk, Cell, Sebadoh and more. The Hole song is previously unreleased in Europe (it was on 'Eight Songs For Greg Sage'). I don't know how much more I can recommend it.

Earth - 2 LP (Sub Pop) ***

A low, loud hum that shakes and stirs, like The Orb playing death metal. Guitar and bass throb together for 70-odd minutes of captivating nothingness.

Waaaaaaaaaaaaah! 4 fanzine

As usual it mixes dodgy punks (Sham 69) with dodgy cuties (Bouquet). It's got Blueboy, Brighter, Cat's Paw, Northern Picture Library interviews. Also comes with a quite okay BMX Bandits/Duglasettes flexi and a pathetic Bouquet 7 inch single. £2 from 7 Montana Road, Tooting, London, SW17 8SN. They seem to be coming round to the idea of Huggy Bear at last.

Snakebite City compilation LP (Bluefire) ****

The best album you'll ever get for £3. This is basically a set of singles that never made it onto 7 inch due to lack of funds. As singles you would be have been quite happy with most of these tracks, as an album the modest expectations invited by the low price are soon easily exceeded. The bands vary from rock-slut wannabes Big Boy Tomato to pop-rockers Phobia to classic tunesmiths Pretty Green. £3 inc p&p from Bluefire, PO Box 16, Aldershot, GU12 5XY. (Cheques to PN Talling). Please buy it - I want to hear volume 2 which won't come out until they've sold enough of these.

Walkabouts - Jack Candy single (Sub Pop) ***

Semi-seminal folk band. Would make a good and wholesome night out. Folk cover versions.

Crane - 345°S LP (Elemental) ****

I must say if I'd heard the singles earlier I might have thought even higher of them, although I always thought they were okay. This is a collection of the three singles they've had out to date. The live shows are more in tune with The Cardiacs, but on the records the madcap reality combines with an uncanny zest for well-honed hardcore.

Madder Rose - Madder Rose single (Rockville) *****

Stamping their mark a little more firmly in preparation for knocking your kilts off with an album later in the year. Mary's voice, it's been said, sounds something akin to Mazzy Star, but she's less heavenly (in a good way) here, and the whirring guitar under the unconventional lyrical structure presents a unique variation on the norm indie style. Both sides are something new and different, as they were on the last single. If imports weren't so expensive I'd suggest you get both, but as things are, just this one will have to do.

Gumball - Wisconsin Hayride single (Big Cat) ***

Punky cover versions. I'm not quite sure why they would want to do this, but I don't mind tuning in. The best one is Foetus's 'Butterfly Potion'.

Scaredycat - Backwards Magus demo **

Cutie indie kids have become a little less sorry for themselves since Huggy Grrl Nation took over. This makes it much more bearable. I don't suppose anyone bought the Mayomberos tape that I recommended in issue 2, but if you had you may have recognised some similarity here. The tape drifts along for 60 minutes with no particular highlights, just drops of TV samples and the occasional drum machine or distorted poetry. People buy this stuff. They send £2 to 37 Poplars Road, Walthamstow, London, E17 9AT.

Flinch - Falling/Mother demo ****

A couple of sparklers to shower you with glittering stardust. Imagine Joe Faith Healer drumming, Jon Huggy guitaring, Taru Sunshot bassing and Wendy Poppun singing a Shakespears Sister song. I don't know if they'd get on with each other, but I'd stand in the room. A warming glimmer on a dark night. A glow-worm quiet corner. A good demo. And I'm not just being nice because they're ex-Screaming Custard. Write to Kathy, 116 Dennetts Road, New Cross, London, SE14 5LW.

Trumans Water - Spasm Smash XXX OX OX OX & Ass LP (Elemental) ****

Sounding like The Pixies is nothing to be ashamed of. This doesn't so much *sound like* The Pixies, more it just reminds you of what it was that was so great about them. Teasing guitar intros, anxiousangry vocals, and that huge way of dragging out a line to keep adding a couple more words and then stretching the guitars to fit. If it's a raging calm you're after, here comes your band.

God Machine - What Time Is Love single (Fiction) ****

Not really close enough to the original to make much of a comparison (although the original wasn't very close to the original by the time they'd finished with it), but it's good to hear a band you respect covering a song you don't want to hear ruined, and taking tender loving care with it.

God Machine - Scenes From The Second Storey LP (Fiction) *****

I don't know how anyone else has the nerve to try and come close - Mint 400, Rollerskate Skinny, Bark Psychosis - they're just wasting their time. The God Machine are peerless. The guitars are on their knees as the percussion dances reverently over them. Robin's voice is sneering at the phoenix that fans the flames. A majestic work.

ZuZu's Petals - When No One's Looking LP (Twin Tone/Roadrunner) ****

Nice girls playing wholesome grunge ballads, but don't be fooled by those bittersweet tears and cheery smiles, it's not all pie and roses. Happy songs and sad songs are all handled with respect, which is what this album should earn them a bit of. Makes you think before biting into your cherry.

Osmium - Rise Up LP (Demi Monde) ***

Osmium are the kind of band that gets promoted by Sonic Relief and The Organ, which ensures that they are at least worth paying attention to. This album was recorded over a year ago but because of the inevitable money-type problems it's taken this long to come out. It sounds little more than your average hard-gigging pub band's demo tape, but it is more, and since it was recorded they've improved, which makes them worth seeing. Then you might want to buy the album.

Mint 400 - Natterjack Joe single (Incoherent/Food) ***

A compromised version of God Machine. They're not as sincere but they hope to have a lot more success (sales-wise). They're certainly managing to pull a fervoured little crowd.

G.W. McLennan - Fireboy LP (Beggars Banquet) ****

Former Go-Betweens frontman with his second solo album. It's not actually Grant on his own, although the band doesn't get a credit on the sleeve. The Go-Betweens are still cited as a respected influence on many bands, and on the strength of this album, G.W. will continue to be hailed as a major guru of any band with deep and serious, well-sung, and perfectly executed ballads, because he doesn't come across as a sad singer-songwriter or a muso or a self-centred poet or a major-label has-been, although he probably is all of those things.

Fastbacks - Zucker LP (Sub Pop) *****

More veteran pop from the Fastbacks that still delivers the same happy mix of guitar and twin vocals with the same freshness as when they first started out, probably because it's such an occasional band.

Chia Pet - Hey Baby single (KokoPop) ****

Similar to Bongwater or Boss Hog in make up, ie the singer is a chatshow host or something, and the editor of Sassy. I may have got mixed up here but I'm close. Anyway, Christina is a pretty good singer despite the 70s relapses, and sings about the perils of walking down the street minding her own business, trying to be a girl. On the B-side she goes on a blind date with a guy who lights up a cigarette before she's finished eating. Oh the trials of modern living! The revolution will be multi-faceted.

Chinny Chin Chin compilation LP (See Eye/Shimmy Disc) ***

"Love rock" compilation of four New York bands. Kicking Giant are Pastels meet Huggy Bear. They were doing it before the kids and they're so good that Huggy even used to do a version of Kicking Giant's 'Fuck The Rules'. Wall Drug is the band that Mark Ibold is in when he's not in Pavement or Dust Devils. Of little interest beyond that. Sleepyhead I've heard of vaguely before and deserve to be raised slightly above that status. Gimme American indie rock. Fantastic Palace are not fantastic and they'd never play the Palace. Not terrifically good overall, but a useful behind the scenes look at some indie beacons.

Janitor Joe - Boyfriend single (AmRep) ***

Yeah it's good. You wanna know more?

Delicious Monster - Snuggle single (Flute/Beechwood) ***

It was over before I'd read the press release. A delicate mish-mash. They bring to mind such luminaries as Foam or Swallow but they don't quite make it to the starting block.

Waking Hours - What You Don't Know single (Imperial) ***

A chirpy pair of songs from a little league American band in the line of REM that stand a fair chance of making a killing here.

Pram - Iron Lung EP (Too Pure) *****

If Pram were a fruitcake they would be a Christmas cake. If Pram played normal instruments properly they wouldn't be fruitcakes. A perfect balance of capability and innovation. Devastatingly simple and powerfully understated.

Belly - Star LP (4AD) *****

I really believed I didn't like Belly much until I listened to this. I suppose a quiet gig is just dull, but a quiet record has hidden powers. Still not far from Throwing Muses.

Lovechild - Witchcraft LP (City Slang) ***

The jangle softness comes out fighting over the noisy parts, so they cuddle up closer to their Homestead friends than their City Slang buddies. I had a shock when I was reminded of Blake Babies and it all went quiet then.

Unsane - Singles 89-92 LP (City Slang) *****

More bloody noise. Gore fetishists striking a blow for the power of structured noise as opposed to a tuneless racket.

Lotion - Head single (KokoPop) **

The B-side is called 'Peachtree' and it's got a nice build of guitar filling, not unlike Peach, the band on Mad Minute.

Grenadine - Goya LP (Shimmy Disc) ***

Everything on Shimmy has a hint of novelty, so when Jenny from Tsunami and Mark from Unrest team up to play Cole Porter and Hoagy Carmichael covers you have to look at it with a smidgen of cynicism, but it makes a very pleasant change to melt into an hour of "vocal with guitar accompaniment".

Fifth Column - All Women Are Bitches single (K) ****

Pretty on the outside but dangerous to know, like the implied threat in 'Dead Men Don't Rape'.

Lois - Press Play And Record single (K) ****

Lois is a god, and not just because she used to be in a band called Courtney Love. 'Long Time Gone' on the B-side is typical of the pure, untainted acoustic wave that washes over her beautiful untainted voice. On most of her songs the wit is ruffled by Molly from Bratmobile who Lois politely asks to tap the drums for.

I can personally guarantee that every single band on the 'Throw' compilation will get the recognition they deserve this year. Riot grrls were just the beginning.



Ventilator



Drugstore

DRUGSTORE - ALIVE

Drugstore is the sound of Latin America mixing with Godbless America in East London. They first got together in the summer of '92 and just nine months into their existence released a single which lights up your life with it's big league atmospherics, from which this song is taken. Hear it all by sending £2 inc p&p to PO Box 2791, London, E14 0BD. Do it now because it's limited. A second single should be along soon showing some of their upbeat poppy side. Drugstore are Isabel on bass/vox, Dave on gtr and Mike on drums.

VENTILATOR - PLASTER CAST FACE

Ventilator are a slacker grunge punk pop band from West London, formed from the ashes of The Waiting Sound who built up a good following and released a single which is worth tracking down. Give them a call on 081 968 3496 to find out when their single's coming out and when the next gig is. Ventilator are Karl on gtr/vox, Dean on gtr/vox, John on bass/vox and Andy on drums.

I want to extend a huge thanks to both bands for being on this flexi, and so should you.

BIG MUFF BACK ISSUES

5. All, Antenna, Headcleaner, Heavenly, Ed Kuepper, Milk, Pavement, Henry Rollins, Scum Pups, The Senseless Things plus the NY CMJ Music Marathon. Also includes a FREE Wiiiija flexi featuring Action Swingers and The Love Blobs. 50p
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Neil Boyd, PO Box 2714, London, NW6 2HS. (send A4 SAE with all orders)