

One of us should remove

the shades

#8

the MUFFS

MADDER ROSE

50p

Drugstore

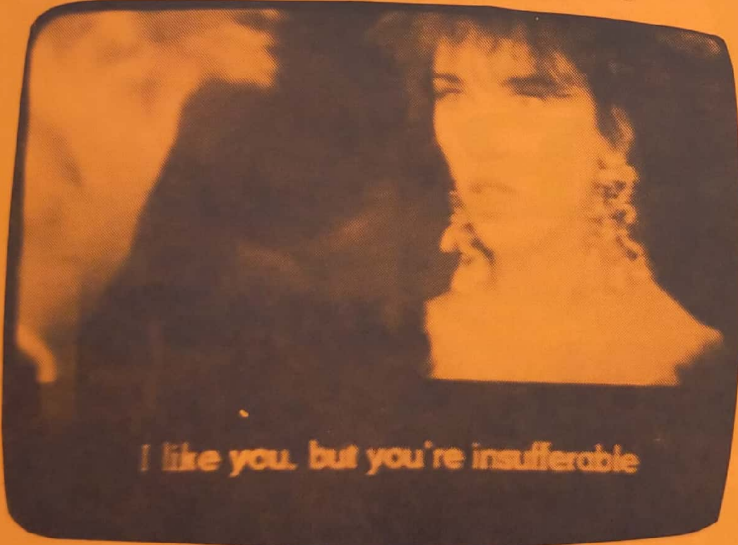
PRAM

TRUMANS WATER

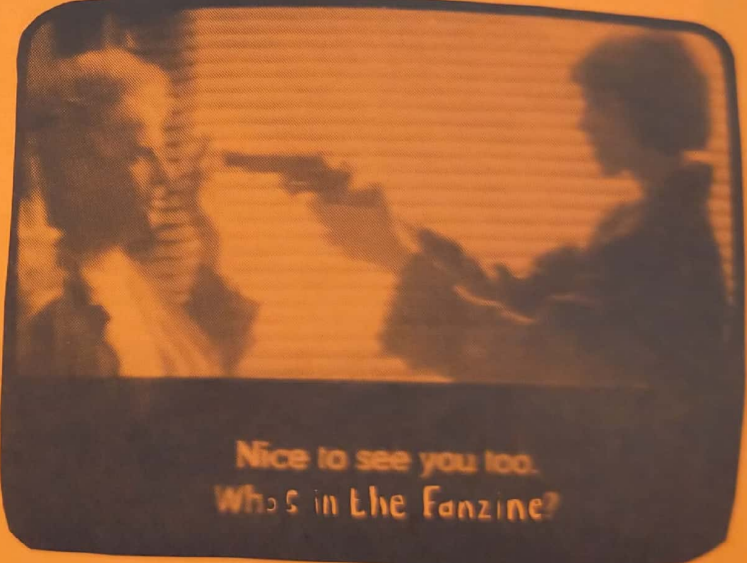
LUSCIOUS JACK



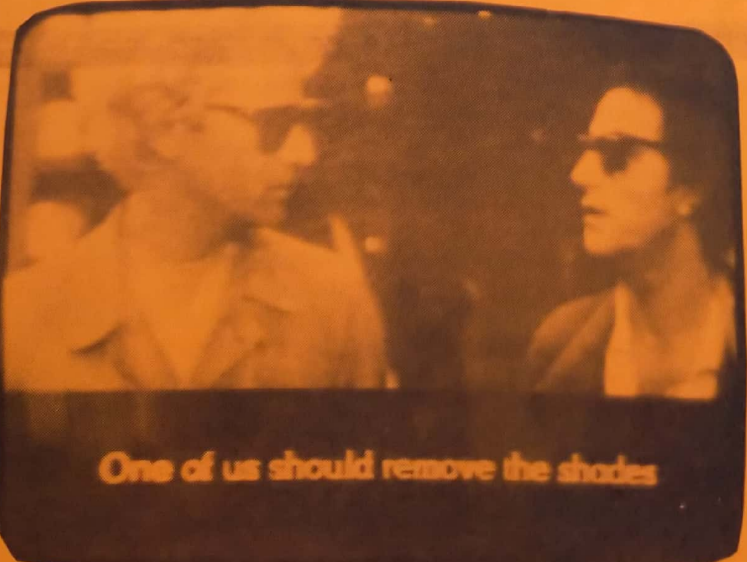
FLINCH PEACH



I like you. but you're insufferable



Nice to see you too. Who's in the Fanzine?



One of us should remove the shades



Hi! Notice anything different this issue? In case you were wondering, the name comes from a French film called 'Subway'. You should watch it next time it's on Channel 4. I thought this sub-title rolled off the tongue in a memorable way!

This issue is even more technically blighted than the others. I've yet to completely lose an interview because of Walkman problems, but some of them are incredibly difficult to make out. I did however lose a large number of pictures because of camera problems (nothing reading the instructions wouldn't have cured). Still, pictures are expensive anyway. I was particularly heartbroken to discover that Trumans Water's acrobatics were lost to technology. When I phoned up the record company for some replacements they said they'd just got some photos of them in a toilet. That explains why they rushed to the toilet at the mention of photos. As you can see they got lost in the post (it's a constant battle!) so you'll have to look out for them elsewhere. There was a similar story with Pram, but it didn't involve a backstage toilet. And The Muffs pictures broke the printer's camera.

Why you probably didn't buy this at a Mean Fiddler venue.

The Mean Fiddler organisation has this strange notion that if I sell you a fanzine you won't spend any money on drinks, therefore they lose out. Whenever anyone says they've got a choice between a fanzine and a pint, they always go for the pint. So maybe that's just one of the least original excuses I've heard, but it disproves the Mean Fiddler paffle.

They just don't understand music - it's just money at the till. Hasn't it occurred to them that I'm encouraging bands who later pull people into their venues. I don't know how significant a factor that is, but I'm sure as hell they don't even get the idea. I've tried to explain this on a few occasions, but you just can't get through a bouncer.

Here are the Mean Fiddler venues and the way I was thrown out of them.

Subteranea. Back in 1990 when bands used to play there, I was physically dragged away from someone who was buying a fanzine and thrown out. The bouncer said I could only come back if I didn't have the fanzines with me. He helpfully suggested I could "put them under a bush". I've never felt a need to go back there so that's okay.

Powerhaus. I went along with their wishes not to sell fanzines inside the venue, and sold them outside instead. When the bouncer told me to stop I pointed out that he didn't own the pavement. "It's my queue" he replied. So next time you're at a Mean Fiddler venue, ask yourself if you're happy being the property of a corporate rock capitalist.

Mean Fiddler, Grand, Forum (T+C). I don't go very often, and I can't be bothered having a one-way argument with a bouncer, so I don't try selling fanzines there.

Garage (T+C 2). The first time I went after Mean Fiddler took it over, I forgot they had and they didn't let me in, with no verbal reason that I can remember. As it turned out the gig I went to instead was much better than that one would have been. Since then I haven't tried selling fanzines there.

I have never been stopped from selling fanzines at any other venue.

Someone from a better known fanzine was prevented from selling fanzines at a gig he had organised at a Mean Fiddler venue.

Am I being unreasonable? Am I just bearing a grudge? Is it a coincidence that this is a crap year for new bands and it's the year that Mean Fiddler took over? Do you go to/play at their venues because you want to, or because there's no other choice?

Maybe you don't care if the people running your venues have no interest in music. Maybe you don't care if they don't understand what it's all about. Maybe that's inevitable. Maybe you didn't go to Phoenix. Just so long as you know. There is a choice.

Now you know why it's called Mean Fiddler.

PRAM

Interviews are a strange way to find out about a band. You chase a band from venue to venue until they're not tired from their journey from Birmingham to Islington, or they're not parked on a 20p-a-minute meter in Covent Garden. Chalk Farm finds them without an excuse, but there's no rush.

I know how good Pram are, but you don't believe anything without quote-marks around it. Interviews are just the industry's way of getting bands in to sell copies, so if they're not too keen on the idea why should I push them? I'm not the industry. Bands usually say they want to do interviews, but it must be pretty tedious talking about the same old rubbish all the time. How many times can you explain how you try to recreate your live sound in the studio? The stuff in quotes is bollocks too, but it's their bollocks, not mine. What do they know? You might just as well interview someone who's not even in the band to provide a few quotes. Just as I was beginning to think I may as well make up my own crap, it takes an incredibly bad support band gracing the Monarch stage for the comedy duo of Max and Darren to come and offer their words of wisdom.

As I may have mentioned, Pram are from Birmingham, and by now they should know the score - they're not exactly novices to this game, so you tend to wonder why they would want to play London so often. Maybe it's because their label is here.

"We feel the need to lose money," Darren explains. "We've been to gig-goers anonymous."

They've obviously resisted any kind of urge some bands have to move down here. It's probably better to stay away. Mind you, is Birmingham any better?

Max thinks so, but Darren contradicts him.

"It has its plus points," Max appeals. "It begins with 'B'."

"So Aberystwith's the best place in the country?," says Darren, making up his own logic.

Max's attempt to introduce London to his DJ talents ended with a bang as his decks overloaded the Monarch PA. That's a shame because he could have led gently into the weird world of Pram.

"It's nice to hear good Moog tunes," Darren ponders, "compared to hearing whoever was destroying 'Search And Destroy' through there earlier."

Of course Pram like to introduce people to musical styles that may be new to them, as Darren points out.

"The thing is, **the first time you hear anything you've never heard it before.**"

All the bands on Too Pure are musically diverse, but the thing they do have in common is the idea that music doesn't have to follow any predefined pattern. And as someone once pointed out, they do tend to base their sound on repetition.

"No," Darren argues.

"I don't agree," confirms Max.

"No." "I don't agree," they say again.

"What's wrong with repetition anyway? What killed The Fall?"

"Curiosity."

"That would stop at the end."

Maybe I misunderstood that last comment, but they found it incredibly funny. I use the break in the chatter to clarify that I meant the repetition is within the songs, like Th' Faith Healers who can play a single chord for 20 minutes, not that all the songs sound the same.

"I think the whole idea of classifying people as repetitive or non-repetitive a false attitude because you could say..." Max's argument stops mid-flow.

"You could say that."

"And I could repeat it."

"If it's worth repeating, then repeat it, but if it's not then don't. That's what I say. Many times. Because I repeat things."

"I think mainly what it is..." Max's is still unable to complete a line of thought.

"Would you like to repeat that?" Darren asks.

"No."

"See? That's proved the argument wrong hasn't it?"

"No, but I think mainly the thing is..." Max begins again.

"You're confused," Darren concludes.

Pram don't pander to the audience at all, they almost hold them in contempt, as if they grudge the fact that people have to watch them performing. Rosie seems to share more jokes with the keyboard than the punters. You could always throw in a few witty asides by way of introduction to the hidden meaning of the songs. You could just say 'hello, we're called Pram'. You could go see Lois for tips on how to unpoetise the songs. I know I can read the lyrics on the sleeve, but that doesn't tell me what it's about.

"We don't come out with a graph and a pointer," Max defends. "If you want to see a political rally... don't go to Blackpool."

"But if you want to see **great plastic buttocks with turds hanging out of them** then you go to Blackpool."

Go to the front to watch Pram. On those occasions when they let loose for an hour they may transform into a film backing soundtrack, but you can spend as long as you like just watching to see the motions that produce those sounds. The violin bow on the two remaining strings of a dying bass. The gentle tap tap tap on the neck of a guitar. The £15 Bontempi feeding the microphone of 'the world's first rap keyboard'. Where did they get that motley mix of toys that pass for keyboards?

"They're all just readily available, Casio, bottom of the range..." Darren starts.

"Off-the-peg, off-the-lorry..."

"Bit too hot to handle, pump-driven..."

"Power-drilled..."

I interrupt this flow of useful information to suggest that although these keyboards undoubtedly have an intended use, Pram don't use them in that way.

"We don't iron with them," says Darren.

"But I have to point out that the ironing board has been used for ironing".

"Has it? But has the keyboard?"

"It started to melt."

"That's that wacky shirt you've got then."

"But we have used your snare for a bit of cooking. We sieved rice with it."

I suppose this necessity to publicly explain themselves arises because from the need to promote their new album. A trick Max is evidently well versed in.

"It's like a ship on the docks and there's a few navvies and they're loading cargo onto the deck and somebody's pulling the pulley rope, they're just pulling it taut. That's it."

Okay, that's the hype over with.

Feeling that his work here's done, Darren leaves to join the soundcheck, so I take the opportunity to dig deeply for the truth about the change of drummers which happened a few months ago, a move which initially caused anxious looks all round as cymbals and snares went scuttling around the White Horse. Max happily obliges.

"Andy and Rosie turned up for a gig wearing the same outfit, so he's left to pursue a career in swimming."

Well, that's the dirt on Andy, so where did you find Darren?

"He was in a band called The Sensational Gays and he was playing a variety of music called chicken scratch music and he's now a full, contributing, creative member of the band."

Don't say I ever let bands pull the wool over my eyes.

Moving on to the obligatory 'you sound like' round, my money's on the first couple of Danielle Dax albums. Max looks blank, then quizzical.

"Pass. I'm not briefed. I'm not equipped to deal with that."

As I decide I've got all the details I need, Max shuffles a pile of paper he'd been playing with back into his pocket.

"I had all these notes ready if you were going to ask me about the lyrics," he says, "but you don't really know the album so it's not really any point. It'd be a bit of a false conversation. When you want to ask about the album..."

I'll read the sleeve. Until then...

LUSCIOUS JACKSON

Luscious Jackson dropped into our world to spend a weekend cooped up in the crumbling Victorian hotel region of Hyde Park. As Saturday mid-afternoon approaches it's my turn to keep them tied to a chair in the pot plant reception of one of the better preserved monuments. Me and a hundred others want to know what minds have worked to create an album which was named after a 70s slob and mixes the casual rap of De La Soul with the groovy basslines of, oh, whoever. Funky divas Jill and Gabby cruise through funk, punk, jazz and rap 'In Search Of Manny'. The party crashes from piss-take to social distortion and comes back to scoop a glass of girl power before getting down to the serious bopping.

The line-up's expanded since the album was recorded, as we'll hear later, and my interrogation starts with the not-so-recently added keyboard player, Vivian. Choreography by trade, she pumps the samples in to feed Jill and Gabby's bass and guitar. Meantime Kate's at the back driving them along with the funky drums.

Vivian doesn't normally get to answer questions, so in Jill's temporary absence I think I'll ask what she thinks Luscious Jackson have got in common with their tour headliners, The Breeders.

"Oh my god!" she ums, "I don't know how to answer that question. You can ask Jill that question. I'm sure she can come up with something." Okay I'll hold that for later and get right to the crux of the query - what do you listen to at home to concoct such a mixed bag as you do.

"Oh my god!" she aarghs. "We all listen to so much stuff. Everybody has a really large and varied music collection. Jill and I love Joni Mitchell, but the others don't necessarily. Everybody loves jazz. Everybody loves disco. They all went their big punk rock thing. I didn't really. Music across the board."

As I suspected, an intense mix of many groovy styles.

Here comes Jill, who joins in and bounds enthusiastically into my re-deal of the Breeders question.

"I think our live songs sound a little bit like them. We're like a funkier Breeders. We use a lot of harmonies."

'Life Of Leisure' (pronounced lee-zhure) is about wasting your life away - 'why you wanna waste away, lover of the life of leisure, you don't have a job, I got four' - which seems to be a bit of a theme of the whole album really. They certainly seem to keep themselves busy.

"I guess so. That was a true thing where I personally had four jobs and I had a boyfriend who didn't have one and he looked to me for the cash. I really did have four. I could count them all. There were four separate part time jobs I was doing." Jill's laugh indicates she wasn't too pissed off at the situation.

I figured maybe Jill was one of these busy people who can't stand to see people slobbering about. I got that one a bit wrong.

"I don't really care what you do but don't expect me to support you. If you have a trust fund and you're just lazing about, go ahead. We all have a little bit of laziness in us. We don't mind working hard for something we love but we don't want to be slaves. That's just a preference! I don't think any of us enjoy working 9 to 5 for an asshole. Especially women are always in these crap roles of managerial or typing or y'know, getting shitty wage."

I don't understand why everyone from New York always thinks English food is bad. I thought everyone ate junk food in America.

"No no no," Jill argues.

"No," Vivian affirms, "you're on Manhattan. You're surrounded by the best of everything."

"THE best food in the world. Except for San Francisco. You can't eat for shit in England.

It's THE worst food I've ever seen. Much worse than France, except Germany might be up there, I don't know yet."

Riot grrris... oh no, forget that one. Let's talk about the weather. What do you think of when you think of London?

"God we just got here!" comes Jill's exasperated response, before composing herself to answer "I think of really beautiful parks, great music, bad food, heavy drinking, wet, cold weather. What do you think of Vivian?"

"I think of the Bloomsbury crew!" That was obviously an in joke - Jill laughed. "Covent Garden. I dunno. A lot of those same things."

"Great reggae, soul scene," Jill continues.



'Manny' seems to reflect the mix of cultures that you get in New York, with its infusion of rap, jazz, soul. Luscious Jackson draw from those genres with no particular devotion to any one of them.

"All of that stuff was a major influence to us," says Jill. "We definitely have lots of records and listen to every kind of music passionately."

Is music a big thing in your life?

"Oh, totally. Absolutely. I'm pretty much always listening to music at home. The minute I step in the door I have some music on of some kind. Probably all of us are like that."

Vivian nods in agreement. "Yeah."

"It's like your home in New York is your..."

"It's your little haven."

"It's your haven and you've got to make it really nice cos it's so chaotic outside."

As you do when records come with lyric sheets, I was reading along to 'Daughters Of The Kaos' and I happened to notice that there's a bit on the lyric sheet which goes 'Angela's forever on the run', but is actually sung as 'Angela Davis is...'. Us trainspotters notice these things.

"They fucked up the lyrics," says Jill, "Angela Davis was a black revolutionary woman in the 60s in America, and it's just a symbolic reference to her as like a gun-toting feminist heroine. It's just a play on words, like Charlie's Angels but we're Angela's Angels."

So what is this 'Kaos' that crops up in 'Let Yourself Get Down' as well.

"Now what can I say about that?," Jill sighs. "I've explained it like five times today."

You have to think of something different to say every time, I offer helpfully.

"Yeah I know. Let me think of something totally new."

She takes a deep breath and says uneasily "Oh god, it's the kaos raging and bubbling within me." But then after another infectious chuckle reverts to the no-doubt traditional answer. "No, it's just about stomping out the tradition of male white purity and wanting to transcend that, and how women are associated with filth in the earth, and blood and gore and childbirth and Eve and evil, and that whole unhealthy tradition is something I'd just love to blow away. It comes from religion. It's very heavily into religion and literature and everything. It completely permeates our Western culture."

Wow!

"Here comes Kate."

Jill and Vivian rush off to get ready for a soundcheck they should have been at 10 minutes ago, and Kate takes their place, with Gabby in hot pursuit. I've pretty much got through my questions, so to keep some consistency I think I'll ask the Breeders one again.

"I think we have a similar lackadaisical style. We have a lot of fun up on stage and we're really laid back. We like to make good music. We like when people dance. We like to make jokes. We're women. I think lyrically Jill and Kim have similar outlooks. They write about personal issues but it's not completely blatant."

All those things seem to be the complete opposite of Urge Overkill, who've been second-on on this tour. They must break things up a bit.

"We have some similarities with Urge. They're quoting from the past 70s glam rock'n'roll and top 40 radio, and so are we in a lot of the samples we use and the disco clichés and stuff."

Kate wasn't on most of the album, so it seems obvious to ask whether she got involved with the band after they'd started to get a lot of attention.

"No, not really. They had done this demo, which is the first three songs on 'Manny', and Jill and I had played in bands before and she asked me if I wanted to be in a ESG cover band. ESG is a minimalism funk band from the early 80s. And I was like 'sure' and then Jill got into the demo separately and it sort of became one and Vivian started playing with us, and we didn't start getting notoriety until the record came out. By the time the record came out we were a full-fledged band and we were all Luscious Jackson, and even though the record has seven songs I'm only on two and Vivian's only on two."

Luscious Jackson have a completely different attitude to rap from most of the loud-mouths that I don't spare much time for. Rap is supposed to be tough but you're really laid back. It seems like you're not using rap in the traditional sense, so are you serious about rap?

"No, it's taking the piss definitely, especially a song like 'Let Yourself Get Down' which is making fun of the rap scene. It's just funny what people rap about. It's such a cliché to rap about yourself, how great you are. It's like 'well, okay I might not have a really massive sex life but I do have really nice toes and my underarm hair's nice'. We also have a sense of humour."

Then along comes Gabby who dives into a good insight into how rap was fine then, but as I'll find again out later when I see the show, rap is just something that got swept up along the way, and it's not what Luscious Jackson are about as such.

"I don't listen to rap these days as much. Back when Jungle Brothers, Tribe Called Quest, and when rap first came out we were always going to rap shows and it was just a blast, and that's where our influences are as far as rap is concerned, with like Sugarhill Gang, Treacherous Three, Funky Four Plus One, with all the earlier bands it was just simple fun. That was kind of before gangster rap."

"That was pre-Run DMC," Kate explains, in case I missed some of those references.

"We like Run DMC are awesome," Gabby points out. "The thing is about this record is we did do it three years ago." She stresses the last three words to highlight the fact that they've moved on since then. "That record does not represent the band, really, just because it doesn't have our lives songs on, except for two."

"It's hard because now we're out promoting 'Manny' and we have to play these songs that were written so long ago and we're like 'we want to play out new songs'," Kate whines, "but you can't, you only have half an hour and everyone wants to hear the songs that are on the record."

"You already feel like you're ahead somewhere and you're doing stuff..." Gabby starts. "Of course we still love the songs, but we're changing."

Which is probably why Vivian just flicks a switch for the 'Manny' songs while she and Kate join the other two at the front for a silly dance. Or why they get the audience to liven up 'Bam-bam' by singing along to the yelled parts - 'everybody say ho' - naff? maybe but it worked - you had to be there, really. Or why they have a laugh at the disco dancers they invite up to oscillate wildly.

The interview comes to a natural halt as Gabby stops to take a picture of "the awesome manager babes" who've just come back from eating falafel.

"Do you feel awful?" Kate asks poetically.

"Actually I ordered and then I was still hungry, so I had a second portion," the Urge babe replies.

"They were surprised!" says the Luscious babe.

MADDER ROSE

Bands just don't get any better than Madder Rose. It wouldn't be fair. There would be an enquiry into how it could happen and laws passed to stop it happening again. When Madder Rose announce that the album they're going to record when they get home from this extended European sojourn is going to be better than 'Bring It Down' I laugh. It couldn't be. If World War 3 breaks out in February I may not notice. I could listen to 'Bring It Down' for 10 hours a day. If the next one eclipses that I can get rid of all these other records.

Not only that but they're really nice people. When they sense that I'm running short on questions, they offer me a beer and we talk about the strange customs surrounding alcohol consumption in the US. And all this despite an inapparent urgency to get a soundcheck over with. They all seem so sweet, but then spoil the illusion by standing weekly on a stage in an empty room cluttered with drum parts, blasting out a huge guitar sound and asking "is this alright? - too much overdrive?"

When I told someone later about them evading a subject I avoided introducing directly, and another bit of side-stepping which you can read about, I was accused of letting them walk all over me. Let me lie at your feet with 'welcome' across my chest, please!

There was beer to spare mind. The tour manager managed to scrounge two crates of Newcy Brown: a double rider for "all those guest list jokers" to celebrate an impending sell-out show.

"I hope they give us our Jim Bean," Mary worries. "My vocal tonic!"

The Nightblooms entourage follow the ale and pop their heads round the door to wish them well and to enquire after Billy's health. The moody Dutch noiseniks, who share label space with Madder Rose in America, want to "count how many of you there are tonight".

"There will be four later," Mary pronounces defiantly.

Billy ate a dodgy kebab in Birmingham a couple of nights ago, and the sultry stargazers were among the first to witness his decline into salmonella which caused his absence at the previous night's show in Portsmouth, although they think he'll manage to prop himself up for tonight's show, for the sake of rock'n'roll.

"There's a good chance, thinks Matt. "We're prepared nonetheless to go on."

"I'm not," Mary insists. "I lived through that and we triumphed and I'm happy but I don't want to do that again."

"Last night we played without him," she tells me, "which was really scary but fun."

"It was cool though," Matt decides. "It worked. Mary totally came through as the only guitar player, for the first time on stage. I thought it rocked pretty hard too. The fast ones were pretty hard-hitting."

"Yeah, they were," Mary agrees, and they both laugh at their uncharacteristic, but well-deserved arrogance.

Madder Rose's paradoxical calm reaches out from the busy urban landscape of Downtown Manhattan. Mary was attracted in from the middle-class outer-New York suburbia. Johnny spent time hauling cityfolk up and down in his taxi.

"Johnny would drive anywhere," Matt relates. "He'd pick up hookers and drive them to Harlem to cop dope and take them back down."

"That's so funny," Mary laughs. "I didn't know that."

It seems like you have to be tough to live in New York. All that bumper-to-bumper traffic, all that hustle and bustle, all that shouting 'yo', all those pretzels. I think they know what I mean, although as Matt explains, it's kind of a superficial image.

"It's not like you have to be a total hard-ass all the time, but you learn certain things, like eye contact type stuff. Walking by someone on the street you can't keep eye contact longer than .005 seconds, cos then all of a sudden there's a confrontation, y'know. So if you can learn to get that kind of glazed look and be able to look in someone's face and not register anything then you're okay. I'm pretty good at that glazed look."

When I spent my week there I kept to my usual economic ways and tended to walk when most people would have splashed out on a few dollars for a taxi. I wasn't too sure if that was a safe thing to do at night, but it seemed okay.

"Walk fast, don't look at anybody, keep your arms tight into your side, stiff spine, pleasant expression..."

Matt's guide to nocturnal survival is drowned out by the sound of a rattle around the toms.

"Johnny, do you want to come do this interview?" Mary yells through the door.

"Instead of wrecking it", chides Matt.

"Stop playing," Mary pleads in desperation.

Those who dare label Madder Rose tend to slot them alongside the Marychain for the noisy guitar sound, or Mazzy Star for the syllable similarity and the haunting but hefty vocal melodies. Those are fairly standard references, and many of the bands who get those tags pinned to them really do have a reasonable chunk of commonality, but Madder Rose don't actually sound that much alike, and I don't imagine they have those records in their collection.

"We listen to both those bands," Matt suggests, although Mary quickly denies it.

"People writing those articles are required to make references to current things. If you cite Cole Porter or Ramblin' Jack Elliot some of the kids might not understand."

Thank you Matt!

"We've often shuddered when people have compared us to things that have only happened in the last eight months, when all our influences really happened in the last 15 years."

Do you think people would be surprised at what really influences you?

After a few moments thought Mary says "It's hard to say. Last week we were interviewed by someone who asked each one of us to name four of our favourite bands, musicians, whatever, and they were really diverse."

Was he surprised?

"Yeah, he hadn't heard of half of them."

Matt is still reeling from the shock that someone who interviewed them last week didn't have any Rolling Stones records. Mary echoes his total disbelief.

I haven't got any Rolling Stones records, I announce.

"You're outta here!" Matt shouts as he points me towards the door. "Get 'em man, they're good. Fuck it. It's music history babe."

"They're great records," Mary assures me. "That's the music we grew up with."

"I started listening to records in 1963," says Johnny, who's left his drumkit to fend for itself. "I was five, but I'd always have the radio on, but my sister and brother were a lot older so they'd always listen to the Stones, the Young Rascals, all the Motown stuff. I was first influenced drummingwise by Charlie Watts of course."

As he drifts from conversation into thought I picked up something which got lost between him and my Walkman, but included the word 'speed'. You mean speed, as in speed? I ask, in a strange kind of way.

"That's an interesting question even though you didn't technically ask it," Matt translates. "If your idols are people who do certain drugs, do you try and get into their... Like a lot of people read Charles Mikowski and then become drinkers for two years while they're reading all his books. So, let's say Keith Richards is your idol, and he's a notorious junkie, does it follow that you have to try and take on the lifestyle of your heroes or your anti-heroes?"

I bounce the question back and he smirks as he avoids answering it.

"That's a good question. Mary, you answer that question."

"No, I don't want to. I want you to answer it."

"I was going to try and evade that question by posing it."

We all have a good laugh at the absurdity of that illogic, and he tries to justify not answering the question.

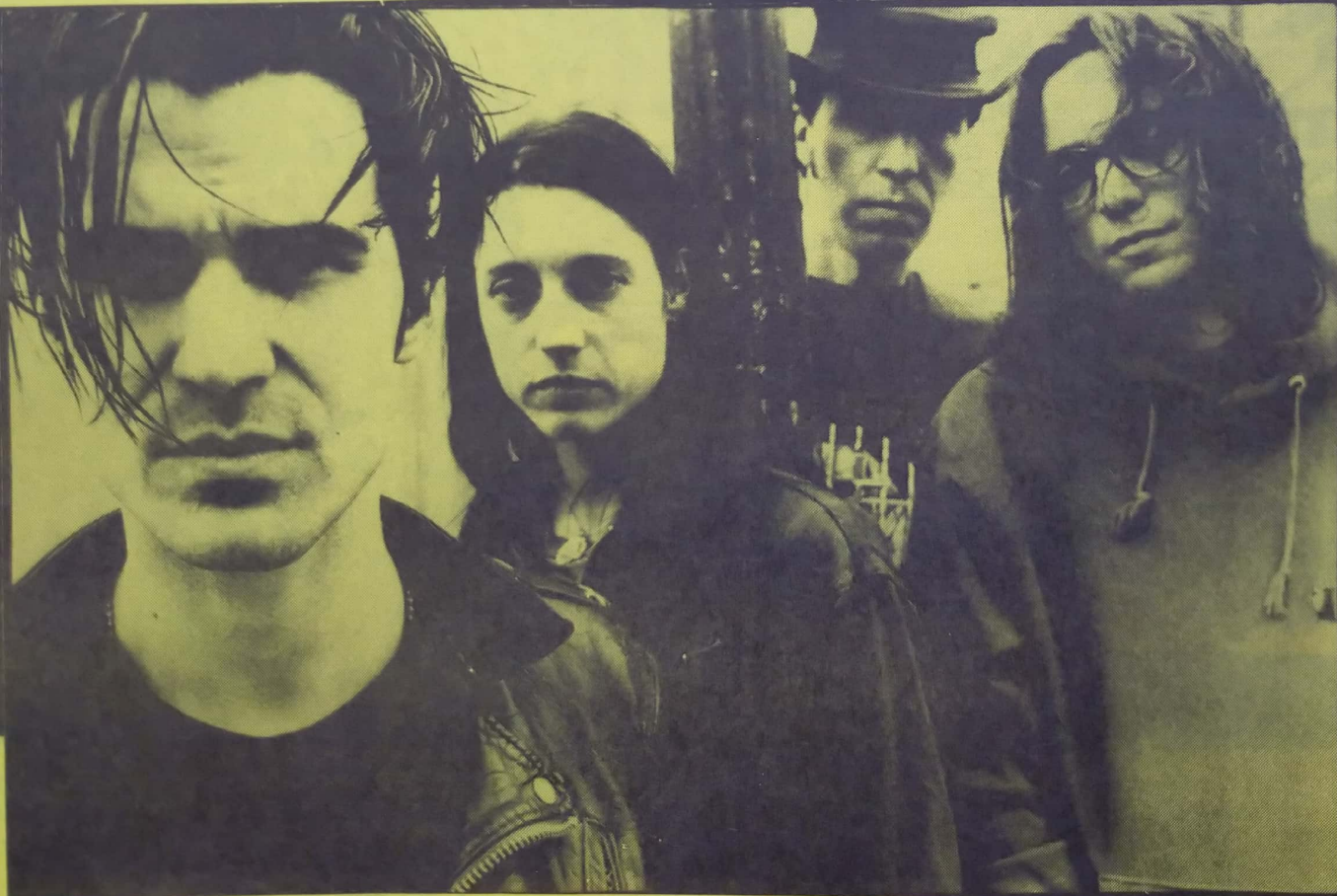
"I think what people have to do in their own life is strictly their own business. I don't recommend any particular lifestyle for your readers."

I get back on track with a question they might like to answer by reversing the previous nonsense and asking if their songs reflect their lifestyle.

Mary answers: "I think everybody hears music through the prism of their own experience. We have songs about our lifestyle that 16 year old girls from the suburbs love and think speak to them, when they're really written by a 31 year old guy living in Lower East Side. So who's to say? That's not really our job or our concern."

"Half the song's significance," Matt begins, "fully half of it - at least half of it - is non-verbal musical significance. So in a way we can understand how that girl in the suburbs can relate to it even though it might be verbally about particular subjects. When you're writing a song you write everything. You don't just write words and jam it into some chords. Some bands..." He stops quickly before he gets into a round of back-stabbing. "Maybe you do!" he continues from the bit he kept to himself. "I'm just saying, all the auditory considerations matter."

I don't think they realise that other bands take much more effort to make music which ends up sounding more derivative. Madder Rose just can't help being blessed with their unique perfection. If only they knew. They don't even listen to music at home - who needs an invisible friend when you've got an invisible band to keep you company?



"I'll see the record player and have an urge to put on a record, but something's keeping me from doing it," Matt says. "I'd rather have silence in the house. It's really hard for me to think of music or have music suggested to me when there's something playing. Especially if the music has words in it I can't think verbally at all. So I listen to jazz."

Is there a jazz influence in your music? Oops! Wrong interview!

'Bring It Down' marked the debut of Seed Records - 'we're seedlings' as Matt put it - and their first single was the first record to be released on the one man label, Spontaneous Generation.

"The only one," Mary points out, before quickly correcting herself, "no, they did one other."

The one other being fellow New Yorkers, Our American Cousins' finest moment.

I was reading the run-out groove to that single, as you do - it's their only single to have anything scratched into the playout - and it says 'I like hate' on the 'Headshot' side and 'and I hate everything else' on the 'Baby Gets High' side.

"That refers to Hate comics by Peter Bagge," explains Matt. "Tell your readers to check that out."

You heard the man, go buy Hate comics.

You might think the fuzzy, distorted guitars and dual, tincan 'la la' lyrics of 'Headshot' would be a memory they'd prefer to bury in the past, but none of it.

"We play 'Baby Gets High' off 'Headshot'," Mary reminds me.

That was on the B-side of 'Beautiful John' as well I counteract, but they didn't seem to be fully aware of Seed's choice of B-sides.

Matt thinks that the experimentation that makes 'Headshot' such an isolated beacon of the past could shine through in the future.

"Actually, what drove us in 'Headshot' to make a super-treble, horrible to listen to guitar sounds, stiff drum-machine like, that aspect of our approach to music is more entrenched than ever. This next album I think you'll see there's going to be a couple of risks taken with stuff that we may have been more timid about before. Then we were just doing it because there was nothing to lose."

As the Seed contract started looming, another indie single found it's way onto the 7 inch racks. The eponymous song, which later became 'Swim' was released on Rockville, backed with 'Lights Go Down', which also re-surfaced on 'Beautiful John' and on the album. Those Seed guys just can't let anything escape them. Both songs were initially more upbeat than their subsequent reincarnations, as if they felt that's what was required to be acceptable - 'Madder Rose' had double-time drumming, and the flip just went by quicker. This variation has it's merits, but it wouldn't have felt happy alongside the wallowing pity and supercharged smiles of the album.

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Digging even further into the murky past, I found a Studio Red sampler tape which includes Mary singing in her familiar style but with a backing which sounds rather staid compared to the direction that came with the Madder union.

"That's basically what I was doing was demoing stuff at Studio Red and trying to put a band together of my own. And then I hooked up with these guys."

Johnny describes how he became involved with the Madder machine. "I answered an ad. Matt had a rockabilly band, and I was working with Matt maybe six months, I never really met Billy or Mary."

"But Matt and Billy had been friends for a long time," Mary fills in.

"As it turned out they were putting this together as a recording project," Johnny says. "A project to sell songs, I'm not sure."

"No," Mary denies. "We were just thinking what would it sound like if we did these songs together. We demoed them at Matt's house - Billy and Matt and I - then when we decided to try play live Matt got Johnny in."

"I didn't actually play bass at that time," says Matt, "I play guitar. I figured how hard could it be? And I was right," he laughingly exclaims, "It's very easy."

Is it easy making music? There's always that fine balance between just doing what comes naturally and making the effort to be as good as possible. I guess the ideal equilibrium is to work on the songs to make them as amazing as theirs are, and then have the natural ability to make it look easy when you're up on stage enjoying yourself.

And talking of enjoyment, it would be a fallacy to imagine Madder Rose to be harvesters of misery, or harbingers of gloom. I've never had so much fun on TV as my trip to the adopted home of Raw Soup (London-only, I think, TV show) in a Deptford community theatre, to make a fool of myself in front of Madder Rose. I thought it would be like The Word where you have to push through a crowd of 300 people to squeeze into a warehouse and pretend to know what's going on and look as if you're enjoying it. Instead there's just 10 or 15 stragglers who appeared to be waiting for a friend. The numbers are supplemented by the regular cast of cool locals and a late coach party. Because it's not live it's more laid back. You can move around to see what's happening, and you get to see the songs twice, but at least I didn't have to wait 10 days to see The Word. The crew, and even the presenters, were much more amenable. Since I started watching it I feel like they're my friends running around with cameras and talking nonsense. The band have to hang around from 10 in the morning to 9 at night, with Billy still not at the peak of fitness. I only went for another chance to see a couple of songs thinking I could hide in the throng and ignore the TV cameras. I was half right. Instead I'm down the front dancing with strangers and spinning my arms in a wild rotation. Only Madder Rose can do this. There aren't enough colours in the world to describe them, or at least, not enough colours in the studio.

"You didn't say nuffink about wanting peacock blue," says the bum-crack lighting man. "I've got amber or lavender".

"Okay, lavvy it is."

There are too many flowers in the garden, and none of them match Rose by any name.

THANK YOU JOHN MOLONEY FOR PICTURE

How are you finding England now you've seen more of it?
Matt: It's nice. It's a little rainy. We stopped in Portsmouth last night. It's pretty nice, desolate amusement strip.
Mary: Portsmouth reminded me of Coney Island.
Matt: A little run down but kinda cool.
Mary: Coney Island's a little more scary.

Mary: I took a couple of night buses home when I spent my summer here. The night buses are like a party though because everybody's drunk and everybody's just talking and soaking.

What's the first record you're going to put on when you get home?

Mary: Um. Oh. Something I just got. I can't remember now.

Matt: I'm going to put on a Billy Childish record.

Mary: I taped this Morphine record and it didn't come out on the tape so I've been looking for it everywhere. I just got the new Uncle Tupelo record, it's really good.

Matt: How about you Johnny.

Johnny: I have no idea, I never really thought about it.

Matt: Just pretend you're home right now and you're gonna get a record.

Johnny: I just wanna get in my own bed. I got a shitload of tapes and CDs but I can't remember which one to pick, there's so many of them. I think I'll listen to all of them.

Have you always lived in NY?

Mary: I grew up in the suburbs, like a half hour outside New York, and I always went there all the time. And I lived there for a year after high school before I went to college, and I moved back about four years ago.

Matt: We've all been there more or less there for about three years. Some of us longer.

Mary: No, you've been there for eight years haven't you?

Matt: Yeah, but I was averaging.

Mary: Johnny's been there since '79.

Matt: Anyway, a long time.

Matt: Even New York has gotten really different in terms of the times things are open. It used to be you go out on a Thursday night and you just start to think about where you want to go about 11.30 or 12, walking around, everybody was doing cocaine, everybody was up late doing speed balls, snorting speeds, everybody was wired all the time, so you would walk into the Pyramid Club at four in the morning on a Thursday and like 'yeah'.

all the bands play late
Matt: If you have an 8.30 gig with your band it's like not playing at all.

is it harder playing late?

Johnny: I prefer later myself.

Matt: It's weird.

Johnny: Doing an early show is like when you wake up for work at six in the morning. That's how it feels for me. I think we did a couple of 7.30s.

Matt: For our own reasons we didn't want to sign with the parent company, Atlantic, just 'cos they take too much control.

Mary: They offered us a deal with Atlantic and we turned it down. And then they came back and said 'you can go on Seed and you have more creative control and it's less money, but...'. So we get to do all our own artwork and chose the producers and do all that stuff.

Do you enjoy being in NY?

Mary: I love New York. It's very interesting. You have a lot of freedom there in a certain way. Everyone I know who lives in New York dreams of living in the country one day. Who knows how many of us will. But for now I love being there. London's a lot like New York. I spent a summer in London and I was just amazed. I had no idea what it was like when I arrived. It feels a lot like New York when you're walking around.

Have to be 21 to drink in America
Matt: For the most part!

Mary: It was 18 when I was that age.
Did they raise it?

Mary: About five years ago or so.

Johnny: When I was a kid it was 18, then they switched it to 19.

Why is it like that?

Matt: America's a quagmire of paradox. They love drugs. If they could tax the drugs that Americans use they could solve the deficit tomorrow.

talk about the comparative merits of English versus American licensing laws

I want to go back - where's a good place to go?

Mary: Arizona. New Mexico.

Matt: Vegas.

Johnny: Pittsburgh.

I'm told Seattle's good - see all the grunge bands

Mary: It's not very grungey though. You get a capuccino on every corner. My kinda town.

Matt: I'm definitely going to stick with the Vegas recommendation.

Mary: You could go to Lake Havazoo. Arizona. Where London Bridge has been reconstructed and a whole tourist town has been built.

laugh at the thought of going to see London Bridge

Mary: We just did!

Is it bad the way everything is geared around cars - environment
Mary: It's so integral to the lifestyle it's sort of inescapable. I wish New York was more like Amsterdam or London where you can ride your bike safely. There's so much traffic with couriers and everything it's dangerous. I wouldn't ride my bike. I would ride around Downtown.
Matt: I noticed we drove by a nuclear power plant with 10 stacks. I've never seen more than about three. I have a message for you English people, two words: be careful. That you people: so far power.

THE SHIT

No really. This is the pull out and throw away review section. Who cares that I don't like major label heavy metal but I do like noisy American indies?

I could tell it was time to do another fanzine because the pile of records to review can no longer stand up under it's own steam (the CD pile was first to topple). I hope you know by now, the reviews are in reverse order - new stuff first.

The stars are random shots at grading, from * to *****. The words tend to drift. Things without stars (ie other fanzines) are things that I didn't want to pass judgement on.

Po! - Ducks and Drakes LP (Rutland) *****

Po! are a deliberately occasional band. They're a bit like Band Of Susans in their outlook. They release a record and play a few gigs every couple of years, and nothing much has changed, but they're a refreshing breather from the passing fads. Po! are perfect indie. The CD is in record shops, the ltd LP is from PO Box 132, Leicester, LE2 0QU.

Xerox Girls - demo *****

Fast and frantic. All the greats started out this way. When Xerox Girls get to where Babes are now I'll dig this out to remind myself that they used to have fun.

Aenone - Saints & Razors single (Kokopop) ***

Acetone - Cindy LP (Hut) *

Auters - Lenny Valentino single (Hut) **

Aenone sound like Revolver. No actually if you give it more than 20 seconds it gets better.

Acetone doze off in no particular way. Skip to the next track and they wake up. I'll knock that on the head.

Auters seem to have picked up a bit of a punk pop classic feel. File alongside 'I Fought The Law'.

Done Lying Down - Heart Of Dirt single (Abstract) ****

Shouting a lot and making a yelled anthem. No doubts they'll sell out later when the records shift lorryloads.

Blaster! 4 fanzine

Guilty! Riot grrrls really take offence to this particular fanzine. It's only frivolity kids! After years and years in the biz our 'Bob' likes what he likes and mercilessly scorns what he doesn't quite like. 50p + SAE from PO Box 3080, London, N7 0DW.

Dylans - Grudge single (Beggars Banquet) **

Buffalo Tom - Tree House single (Beggars Banquet) ***

Polyphemus - Eyes single (Beggars Banquet) **

Sundial - Going Down single (Beggars Banquet) **

Radial Spangle - Birthday single (Beggars Banquet) ****

I never really liked The Dylans, and they've been keeping quiet for a year hoping everyone forgets they never really liked them either.

Hello again Buffalo Tom. I'm glad I don't have to buy all their stuff. It'd cost a fortune. Worth it maybe.

The Polyphemus track doesn't sit quite right in my CD player. It seems to be going too fast for psychedelia.

Sundial have moved on to groovy rock legends.

The Radial Spangle CD wouldn't play, but I've heard it on the radio and it's cool.

The last three are in dreadful promo sleeves that you have to pull to bits to get the damn thing out of.

7 Different Bands single ****

Sean from The Organ gave me this so you'll have to ask him where you can get one from. I won't bore you with names of bands. They're all slightly strange in a non-commercial but quite listenable way. Probably worth a watch on a stage. Just buy the record when you see it. Take a risk.

Passion Fruit & Holy Bread - Crush demo *

My mind is a blank.

Blake Babies - Innocence And Experience LP (Mammoth) ***

Well. Some people prefer Juliana solo. Personally I preferred Blake Babies, but that doesn't mean I want to hear some of their dodgier unreleased stuff, even if it is mixed in with some of the better stuff of the LPs.

For Love Not Lisa - Merge LP (eastwest) *

Chainsaw Kittens - Angel On The Range mini-LP (Mammoth) *

FLNL are a metal band. CK are too, but were a glam band. They have a drummer in common.

Insides - Euphoria LP (Guernica/4AD) ****

That Dog - That Dog LP (Guernica/4AD) ****

Spoonfed Hybrid - Spoonfed Hybrid LP (Guernica/4AD) ***

Having established Guernica as a groovy label with some safe bets who've now joined 4AD proper, this new batch is taking a few risks, although with the usual good taste taken into account, that's not much of a risk. Plus they've all got a history. They're all a bit weird, but the gods know the difference between weird and crap (a unique and rare talent). All have a free 7 inch single with the vinyl LP with two extra tracks not on the CD, surprisingly for a label that ought to lap up CD.

Insides are an electronic guru and a spooky singer. When you think about The Orb or St Etienne, you consider the potential of these guys. Fluffy and lovely.

That Dog are a familiar soft punk band along the lines of Belly/Breeders. Signed to Geffen in the US.

Spoonfed Hybrid have drawn the short straw. Ian (ex Pale Saints) drifts aimlessly into sighed words while Chris (ex AC Temple) potters about in the background.

I really couldn't say which of these will be headlining the Town & Country in 12 months time.

Spinanes - Manos LP (Sub Pop) ****

A second rate Lois is fine by me.

Seaweed - Go Your Own Way single (Sub Pop) ****

The Fleetwood Mac song, apparently released due to popular demand, with Kim from The Fastbacks doing the Stevie Nicks bits. A bit of a classic. The B-side's just a couple of Seaweed songs.

Die Cheerleader - Filth By Association LP (Abstract) ***

Their eponymous song is mentioned but not included in this backlog collection. I thought that song typified their generic 'rock babes' appeal.

Frightwig - Wild Women Never Die LP (Southern) ****

Every girl band since Babes was influenced by Frightwig, even if they don't know it. Frightwig don't get the acknowledgement they deserve. From now on everyone can be measured on the Frightwig scale. I only previously owned one Frightwig album, now I have two on one CD.

Bikini Kill - Pussy Whipped LP (Wiiija) ***

Despite other opinions, I quite like Bikini Kill records.

Unrest - Cath Carroll single (4AD) ***

Unrest - Perfect Teeth LP (4AD) ***

Not just any old single, this is a re-living of the ode to C.C., and a re-invention of 'Hydro' off 'Imperial'. That one track is longer than some LPs. A spooky little record that continues where 'Perfect Teeth' started detracting.

Breeders - Last Splash LP (4AD) ***

I'm never quite sure if I like The Breeders or Belly because I see them once in a while and sometimes think they're brilliant, sometimes think they're dull, and sometimes think they're each other. This is good.

sampler CD (Guernica) ****

That Dog, Spoonfed Hybrid and Insides. Three unusual bands destined for the usual excessive oddity of 4AD. That Dog are LA Bongwatery cuties. Spoonfed Hybrid are the combined experimentation of an ex-Pale Saint and an ex-AC Temple. Insides used to be called Earwig.

Martin Newell & Andy Partridge - The Greatest Living Englishman LP (Pipeline) **

Sunshot - Caught in the act of enjoying ourselves/Iron Ball Direction double LP (Pipeline) ****

Selling England to America. The first is a collaboration of a couple of original London punks doing jolly nice pop songs. The second is the first one and a half instalments of new London notgoths.

Heather Nova - Blow LP (Big Life/Big Cat) ***

NY hippy poet songstress, borrowing as much from Big Life (sexy poses and dance infusion) as Big Cat (well-toned guitars and interesting singing style). Somewhere between PJ Harvey and Maria McKee.

Scrawl - Velvet Hammer LP (Simple Machines) ***

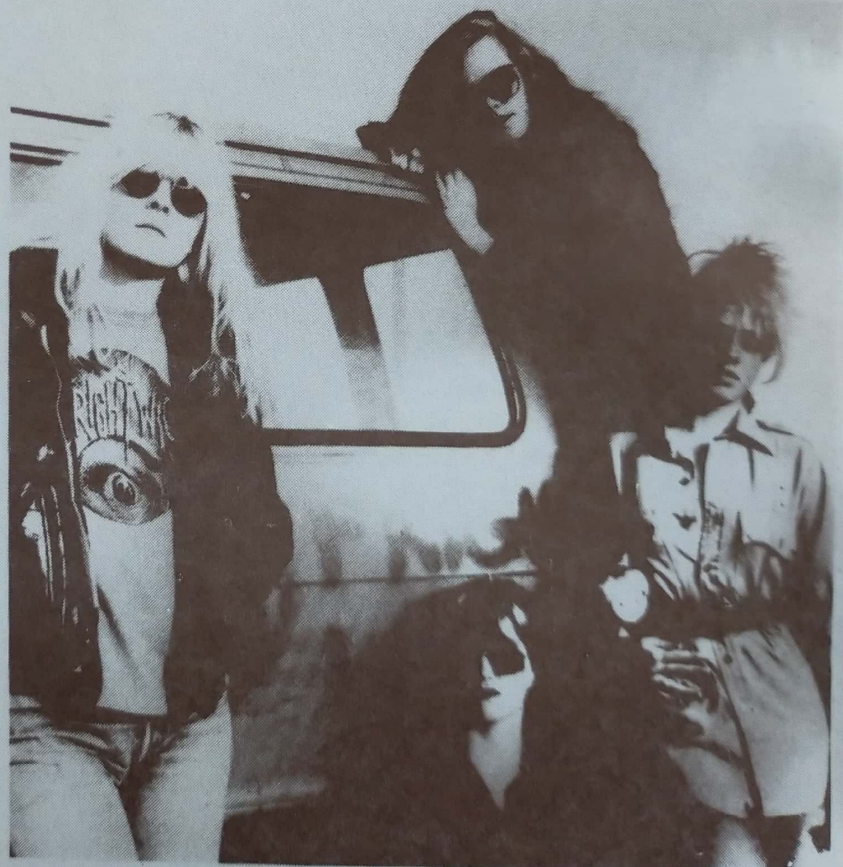
Scrawl sound like ZuZu's Petals, except it's the other way round.

Tribe 8 - By The Time We Get To Colorado LP (OutPunk) ****

Julep compilation LP (Yoyo) ****

The Machines compilation LP (Simple Machines) ****

Tribe 8 follow (or lead) the line of Bikini Kill/Spitboy sexually political punk grrris. Julep has more of the same along with some Washington state indie-pop. Machines has some of that along with some NY-neighbouring states art-rock. I would say more, but you've already got them, and if not, why not?



Celia

Deena

Suzie

Mia

FRIGHTWIG

Vidna Obmana - Echoing Delights LP (Extreme) *
Otomo Yoshihide - The Night Before The Death Of The
Sampling Virus LP (Extreme) *

This really is bollocks! It makes all the other garbage
sound like amateur crap-makers. I really can't believe
someone would go to the effort of pressing it up and
writing press releases. Jesus!

Dollface - Methedrine EP (Kill City) *

This sounds like pure bliss after that, not like badly
sung rock wanking.

Idaho - Year After Year LP (Quigley) **

Wipers - Silver Sail LP (Gift) ***

The press release makes Idaho out to be the weirdos at
the geek show, but they're actually caring balladeers. So
are The Wipers, which was unexpected.

Barkmarket - Gimmick LP (Beggars Banquet/Def American) **

Jesus Lizard - Lash single (Touch & Go) ***

Majority Of One - 2000 Years Of Indecision LP
(Doghouse/Cargo) **

7-Seconds - Out The Shizzy LP (Headhunter/Cargo) **

Jan Cyrka - Spirit LP (Food For Thought) *

DOA - Loggerheads LP (Alternative Tentacles) **

Radiorunners II compilation LP (Roadrunner) **

1993 Sampler LP (AmRep) **

Various shades of alternative metal. Americans.

Guided By Voices - Vampire On Titus/Propeller LP (Scat) *

Neurosis - Enemy Of The Sun LP (Alternative Tentacles) **

Jello Biafra and Mojo Nixon - Will The Fetus Be Aborted
single (Alternative Tentacles) ***

Various weird type stuff. Americans.

Hair & Skin Trading Company - Go Round single / Over
Valence LP / Loa single (Beggars Banquet) ***

They've done some strange things in their time, but it
all worked out for the best. Noisy offbeat repetition.

Other Two - Selfish single (London) ****

There are 29 remixes on 17 different formats. One would
have been fine.

Delta - Sugared-Up EP (Che) *

Birmingham hippies.

Drizzle - Salem single (Kokopop) **

Pineapples - She Brings Me Down single (Placebo) **

Grenadine - Don't Forget The Halo single (Simple Machines) **

NY's the place to be from this month. Not this lot
though. A wet girl/boy ballad and a wanky stadium rocker.
Then there's Grenadine from VA (half Tsunami, half Unrest,
out to lunch). All Kramer/Noise.

Dambuilders - Smell/Shrine single (Krunch!) ****

Top Boston band letting a couple of US A-sides escape on
one Derby 7 inch. Send £2 inc p&p to G.Roberts, Krunch!
Records, PO Box 207, Derby, DE3 5ZZ. Go on.

Horn Blower demo ****

I don't know what it is that makes all Midlands bands
sound like Neds/Stuffs. Maybe it's just a preconception
that won't die. So here we have one of the better ones (ie
not too similar). If you're going to knock it you might as
well mention that the lyrics could do with a bit more
originality. I wouldn't have brought it up if there was
more to criticise.

13

Hazel - Foreador Of Love LP (Sub Pop) ***

I'm not sure if Hazel are starting to sound more like
Sub Pop or if Sub Pop are starting to sound more like
Hazel. Unrest meet Surgery and have a big bust up. Unrest
come out laughing and Surgery come out growling.

Vanilla Trainwreck - Quandry single (Mammoth) ***

Sounding less road-sick than some of their labelmates.

Skyscraper - Lovesick single (Incoherent/Food) ****

A damn sight better than their last effort. This has
power and pace. Fucking amazing actually.

Quad Peace - Before You Go single (Eat The Peace) ****

Four lost souls wandering along the Brighton beach.

All - Shreen single (Cruz) ***

All - Breaking Things LP (Cruz) ***

Grotus - Luddite mini-LP (Alternative Tentacles) **

All songs are fast and happy. Grotus songs are slow and
heavy.

Smashing Pumpkins - Siamese Dream double LP (Hut) ****

Afghan Whigs - Gentlemen LP (Blast First) ****

Afghan Whigs - Gentlemen single (Blast First) ****

Smashing Pumpkins are a godsend really. While everyone
leaves Nirvana to be the acceptable face of popular grunge,
which was kind of stillborn, Billy and the lads wallow in
the wake with their slightly less chart-topping but
nevertheless across-the-board appeal. They've yet to put a
foot wrong. I like them.

Afghan Whigs are up there too.

Tindersticks - Tindersticks double LP (This Way Up) **

If I knew what I was talking about I probably wouldn't
mention Tom Waits or Frank Sinatra. I can tell it's good as
these 60s revivals go, but it's not my tippie.

Guzzard - Get A Witness LP (AmRep) ***

Vertigo - Nail Hole LP (AmRep) ***

A good pair of rockin' rhythm threesomes.

UK Subs - Normal Service Resumed LP (Fallout/Jungle) **

I know I keep saying how wonderful 'punk' is, but it
doesn't have to be. Punk's not dead, it just...

Holy Rollers - Holy Rollers LP (Dischord) ****

I saw this in NY, and I'd forgotten they were this good.
If I'd known I would of seen them again when they were over
here recently. Don't I feel silly now? Sounding a bit like
your average grunge punk band in a way, but much less long-
haired and much more indie. They're from DC.

AD - AD LP (Rage/Enemy) ****

Am I forgiven for saying they sound like Rage Against
The Machine? I haven't said it yet, but they are a rap/hip-
hop/metal crossover band. Except this is a New York
independant label, not the pushing power of CBS.

Spinanes - Spitfire single (Sub Pop) ***

Continuing the K/Sub Pop link, here's a Velocity Girl
type thing. Grab grab grab.

Rabby Feeber - Tricky Dick single (Wrocklige Wreckords)

One of those strange hardcore bands that isn't really
very hard. As good as any of the better known fish in their
kettle. 201 Walton Ave, Lexington, KY 40502, USA.

Madder Rose - Swim single (Seed) ****

I don't know how many times you can release the same song, but it is one of the best, and it is a bit of a remix, and it has got one/three new tracks with it (depending on whether you buy vinyl or CD).

Monsterland - Insulation/Totally Wired single (Seed) ****

Power power power pop (it says on their first demo). Fast, loud, manic, all those other words that come to mind when you hear a buzzed guitar tune rush over and above the others. And I've never heard a Fall song sound so good.

Earthmen - Cool Chick #59 single (Summershine) **

Forlorn indie-poppers hoping for bigger things on Seed (home of Madder Rose and Monsterland - they should have stopped there).

DOA - The Only Thing single (Alternative Tentacles) ***

A hearty tribute to the conservation of a region near DOA's home in Canada threatened by loggers.

Rosa Mota - Stop/Start single (Placebo) **

Not doing their image much good by releasing a pink single, but hey! image is for losers. Produced by Robin from God Machine which gives a hint of where they're near.

Fabric - Colussus single (Whole Car/Wiiija) ****

Claiming to be leaders of the 'London hardcore scene', which isn't true, but they're welcome to start.

Jacobs Mouse - Good single (Wiiija) ***

You're asking for me to say it isn't, but it is really.

Dillon Fence - Black Eyed Susan single (Mammoth) **

Antenna - For Now single (Mammoth) **

Loud Family - Take Me Down single (Alias) **

Small - True Zero Hook/Archers Of Loaf - Wrong split single (Alias) **

Jolly pop album promos.

Delicious Monster - Big Love single (Flute/Beechwood) ****

Making the move from derivative jangley indie sadoes to a band that are here to stay and be respected.

Conflict - These Colours Don't Run single (Jungle) **

What the fuck are you on about?

Mekons - I Heart Mekons LP (Quarterstick/Touch & Go) ****

That was a lot better than I expected. I remember their last album. I guess any fool can say they're reminiscent of Chumbawamba now.

Plastic Venus - Helven Park demo ****

A punk band from Israel who've now relocated to London in the hope of being compared to L7 no doubt. I'm going to say they sound like PiL though ('This is not a love song').

Steve Fisk - Over And Thru The Night LP (K) **

Big producer man. It's there if you want it.

Kava Kava - Dither EP (Chocolate Fireguard) *

Big Chief - Mack Avenue Skullgame LP (Sub Pop) *

Funky spacey garbage.

Flipper - Generic LP (Beggars Banquet/Def American) *

Jane Pow - Love It Be It / State LP (Slumberland) *

Dogbowl - Project Success LP (Shimmy Disc) *

Absolute bollocks. No talent. No trend. No theme. Apart from Dogbowl who makes people laugh.

Buffalo Tom - Big Red Letter Day LP (Beggars Banquet) **

I can't keep up with their release schedule.

Popsicle - Hey Princess single (Snap) ****

Wannadies - Cherry Man single (Snap) ****

Easy - Never Seen A Star single (Snap) ***

Speedy Swedish sizzlers. Great guitars guys. Terrible togs though.

Bats - Silverbeet LP (Flying Nun) **

New Zealanders strumming through a holiday in America.

Straightjacket Fits - Blow LP (Flying Nun) *

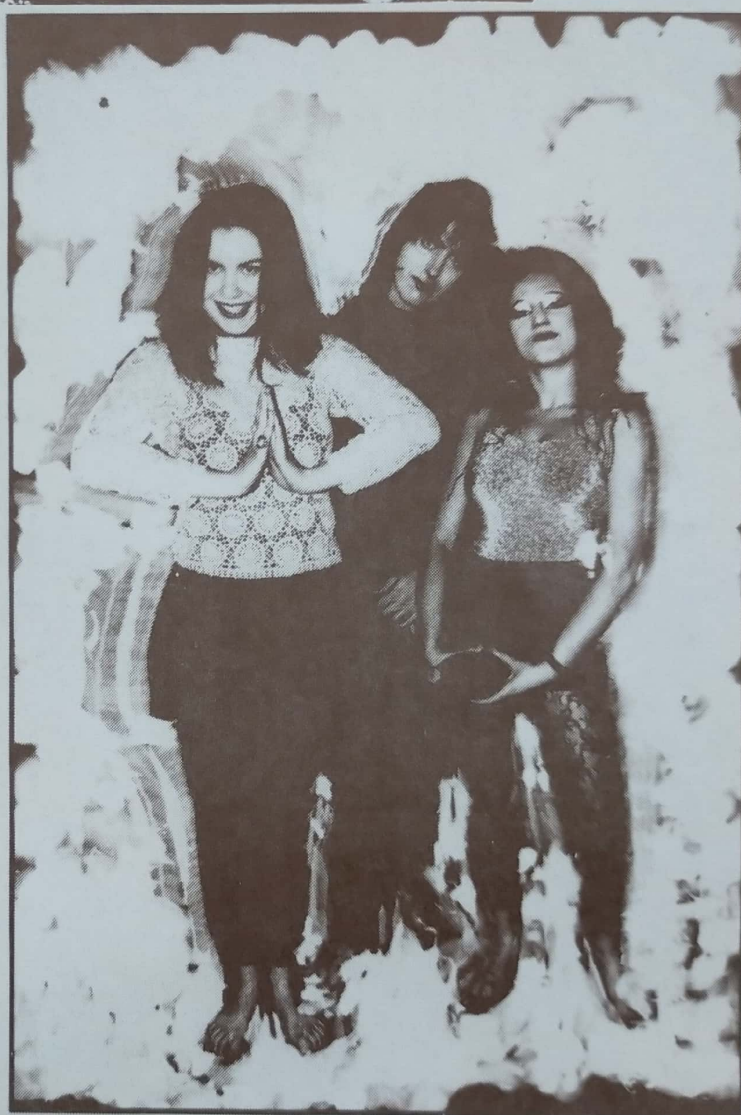
Noisish Aussie popsters on holiday in America.

JPS Experience - Bleeding Star LP (Flying Nun) *

Ethereal twangers staying at home.

Verve - Slide Away single (Dedicated) **

Sounds like U2. When they were just leaving punk.



Sunshot

Dead Can Dance - Into The Labyrinth LP (4AD) **

Chimera - Lughnasa LP (Flute/Beechwood) ***

Clannad yuppie CD arty music for ex-Goths. (That was a DCD review, but Chimera seem to fit).

Sepultura - Chaos AD LP (Roadrunner) ****

Yeah! A slammin' hardcore metal band. This is the Slayer type headbanging stuff, not ...oh whatever.

Heatseeker - Dead Air LP (Frontier) **
 Split Lip - The Love Of The Wounded LP (Doghouse/Cargo) *
 Face Value - Kick It Over LP (Doghouse/Cargo) *
 Motorpsycho - Demon Box LP (Voices Of Wonder) *
 Dogs D'Amour - Pretty Pretty Once single (China) *
 Clay People - Firetribe LP (Re-Construction/Cargo) *
 Bliss - Grafted To An Elbow LP (Patois/Cargo) *
 Bloodline - One Thousand Screams EP (Doghouse/Cargo) **
 Fetish 69 - Brute Force mini-LP (Intellectual Convulsion) *
 Type O Negative - Bloody Kisses LP (Roadrunner) *
 Metal, hardcore, etc.

Buffalo Tom - Soda Jerk single (Beggars Banquet) ***
 Buffalo Tom - 874 sampler (Beggars Banquet) ***
 Promos for the album.

Ruder Than You - Big Step LP (Foo Foo) *
 Wat Tyler have got a song about a rude boy, and it's going to forever haunt my infrequent encounters with ska.

Thumper - Hard single (Shiver) ***
 Big Chief - One Born Every Minute single (Sub Pop) ***
 Thumper are an NY college/art band, I'd say. A clumsier and wimpier version of Velocity Girl or a CD compilation band. 418 1/2 East 9th St 1A, NY NY 10009, USA.
 Big Chief are a metal band. The link between these two is that I picked them both up at the same time, and they're both spookily white vinyl 7 inches that play at 45 on side one and 33 on side two.

Sun City Girls - Torch Of The Mystics LP (Tupelo) **
 Long time art punks getting first CD release (re-issue).

Breed / Done Lying Down demos ***
 A double-sided promo tape to pre-empt slightly large things when their vinyl output hits the shops. Breed are smoochy critters. DLD are noisy buggers, of the singing type you expect from Boston. Both bands are a bit stuck in the 80s.

Chicken Damage - Synapse Like Popcorn tape (Gildge) **
 A pair of lovesick Californian crooners singing potent power poetry with semi/acoustic guitars. £1.90 inc postage from G.Cottrell, 18 Cranfield Drive, Weirhill, Shrewsbury, SY2 5HR.

Head Your Mind sampler (Dreantime) ****
 A taster of ambient/trance tunes to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the discovery of LSD. Bands such as Hybrids, Ship Of Fools, Tekton Motor Corp and GGFH float by on a space ride to nowhere. Also Sonic Violence who still remember new beat. For £2.99, it's worth a trip to your local CD purveyor.

Volume 4 compilation LP (Peaceville) ***
 From the same stable as the record above comes a more familiar death metal compilation, with the likes of Anathema, My Dying Bride and Autopsy, although Kong and GGFH from the above hazy compilation make it on here too, peculiarly.

I've's Plum - Blue single (Epic/Sony) ****
 It's probably taken a lot of Sony money to get this NY punk band to sound almost as good as The Darling Buds with a sore throat. (Buds are better, and on the same label, but they're not American).

Huggy Bear - Don't Die single (Wiiija) *****
 Who? Spot the Bikini Kill influence. But better.

Who Moved The Ground? - Barneydancing single (Icarus) ****
 Three battle anthems from A. Jershot's improving punk folk heroes. £2.00 inc. 37 Broadlands Court, Wokingham Road, Bracknell, Berks. RG12 1PZ.

Mecca Normal - Jarred Up LP (K) *****
 Jean Smith has got an evil voice. And David Lester's guitar could demolish bridges. 60 minutes worth can be a bit intense at first, but that's all the more reason to revisit it frequently. This is a compilation of some of the best stuff from the many singles and albums, and it's an essential work for any admirer of the indie ethic.

Liz Phair - Exile In Guyville double-LP (Matador) ****
 After Mecca Normal this sounds a bit laboured. After Lots this sounds a bit morose. Nevertheless worth a listen.

Forbidden Dimension - Sin Gallery LP (Cargo) ***
 A great slice of genuine rock'n'roll.

Cannanes - Witchetty Pole LP (Feel Good All Over/Cargo) ***
 Cannanes - Caveat Emptor LP (Feel Good All Over/Cargo) **
 There was a lot of shambly indie-pop in 1986/87, when the records compiled on Witchetty Pole were recorded, and most of it is less worth recalling than this. The Cannanes are Australian, and they sing sweet songs about getting letters from Calvin Johnson, in the formative days of K and Sub Pop. I could mention Close Lobsters and Mighty Mighty Buds that they signed to EMI. If The Pastels can do a re-issue compilation, why shouldn't The Cannanes?
 Bringing us right up to 1991. Caveat Emptor is... not as good. Or at least, not until the last track, which is an oh-so-French kind of thing.

Ex - And The Weathermen Shrug Their Shoulders LP (RecRec) *
 Apparently a big European influence on the American grunge legends... once upon a time. Now a dodgy folk band.

Colour Noise - Plunderphonic single (Lowspeak) ***
 Girlie power pop. Like Delicious Monster, Cranberries, Bang Bang Machine, etc.

16 Volt - Wisdom LP (Re-Construction/Ink Head/Cargo) **
 Euro-electro. Like KMFDM, Young Gods, Ministry, etc.

Cranes - Jewel single (Dedicated) *
 Sounds like a four year old on helium backed by a five year old on a Casio.

Dreams Made Flesh - Renegade Debutante/Mistress Of Distress single (Interplanet) *****
 A 7 inch of two excellent sides. Side two is a powerful, distorted but not feedbacked gr, with manic rough but also subtle repeated female vocals. Side one is a metal, but not that heavy, stroll through wailing wammies and power chords. 5 Dale Court, Stoneham, MA 02180, USA.

Loved Ones - Lickin' Stick single (Hightone) **
 Time warp alert! Good for a 1963 prom ball r'n'b band.

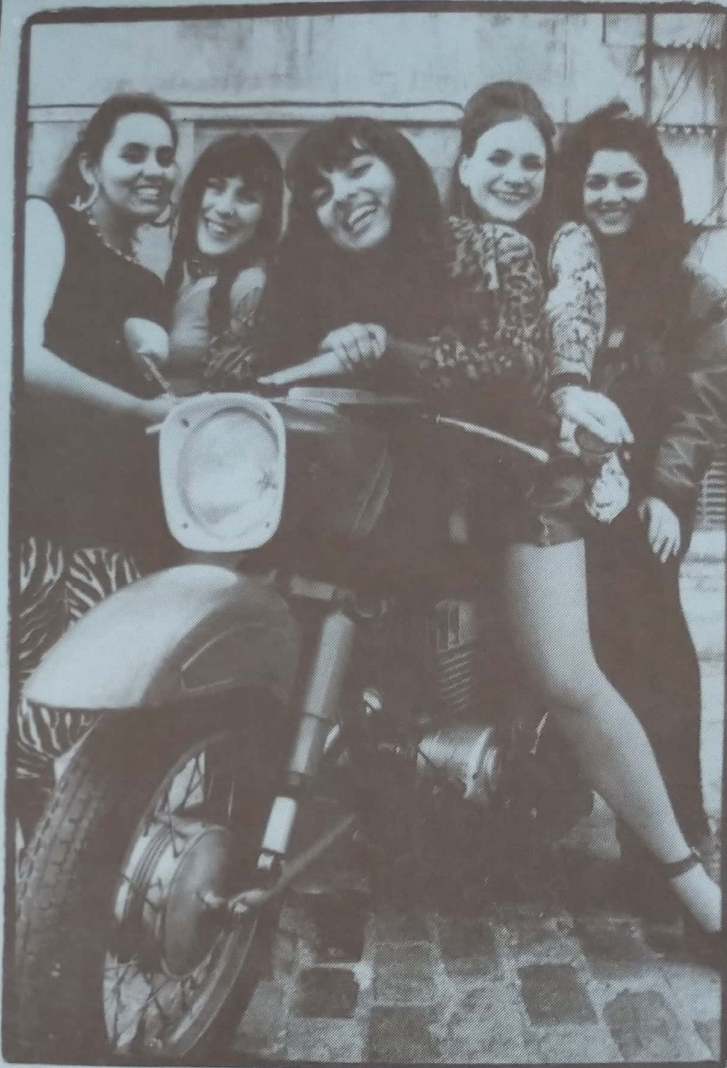
Wildhearts - Earth Versus LP (EastWest) *****
 Album on major label not too bad shock! There's no point in being original so I'll quote the press release to you: "Beatles meets Metallica". Singalong pop metal. Not grunge. If they only had less swearing I could see them on all the kids shows.

Today Is The Day - Supernova LP (AmRep) **
 Chokebore - Motionless LP (AmRep) *
 Love Battery - Far Gone LP (Sub Pop) *
 Six Finger Satellite - The Pigeon Is The Most Popular Bird (Idiot Version/Savant Version) single (Sub Pop) **
 Dwarves - Sugarfix LP (Sub Pop) *
 Another day maybe. I prefer Green Jelly to Dwarves.

Sub Pop Employee Of The Month - Lutz R Mastmeyer compilation LP (Sub Pop) ****
 Just to prove that all the records above are a thing of the past. The new sound of...

Back To The Planet - Daydream single (Parallel) **
 I liked BTTP better before I heard this.

Breather Hole - Lament In Cement EP *
 You'd have thought I'd want to get rid of a CD enclosed in sandpaper as soon as possible, and you'd be right.



Voodoo Queens

Blood Sausage - Happy Little Bullshit Boy LP (Wiiiija) ****
 Not many bands successfully re-produce a 50s garage sound, although many have tried who shouldn't have. Dale is not the genius he's sometimes lauded as, he's just a natural at a much misunderstood and misinterpreted musical form. He might be accused of trying too hard at times, but I'll believe him if he denies it.

Ventilator - One Way Street single (Holy Vinyl) ***
 Another unpretentious rock anthem with slide guitar! Available from 40A Barnsdale Rd, London, W9.

Linus - Driven Thing single (Bone) *****
 I've seen Linus in big places and small places and I've only ever liked them in big places. That's strange. This single is a big place.

WooDoo Queens - Kenuee Head single (Too Pure) *****
 The essential slice of summer sun, which is a bit late now. I like the concentration in the difficult bits of 'My Guitar Baby'.

Demigeve - Disgrace and single (Alternative Tentacles) **
 Japanese gtr momentum.

Porch - Expectorant single (Alternative Tentacles) **
 Bit of a mega-band here. One third Primus, one third Samiam and one third Sister Double Happiness. All they do is metal out.

Sister Double Happiness - Uncut LP (Sub Pop) ***
 Sister Double Happiness - Do What You Gotta Do single (Sub Pop) ***
 Remember The Long Ryders?

Velocity Girl - Audrey's Eyes single (Sub Pop) ****
 Much as I love VG, I wouldn't recommend you buy this single. The B side's not much cop, and the A side's on an amazing album.

Small - Useless single (Alias) *
 There's a gap in the 20th century and it doesn't need to be filled by people who slow down Drop 19s songs.

Pandora's Lunchbox - demo *
 Nice name, and they're American. That's the plusses.

Chatterman - Jigsaw demo **
 Crap name, and they're from Notts. Post-punk rock.

Happy Death Men - demo *
 Frankly - demo *
 Glazed Baby - Dead Men Don't Felch single *
 Guess which one's American.

Superconductor - Hit Songs For Girls LP (Tupelo) ***
 Just grunge.

Jawbreaker - Bivouac LP (Tupelo) *****
 A cross between Leatherface, Metallica and Mega City 4. That's good.

Satellite fanzine
 A slant towards fast pop-punk bands, and an interesting history of the T+C before it got taken over by a corporate monopolist. 50p + SAE, Symon Jones, 75 Ravenswood Crescent, South Harrow, Middx, HA2 9JL.

Propertico fanzine
 I think I would rather watch TV than review a pile of crap CDs, which is what Andy here seems to do (watches TV). A good first issue with humorous asides and some other stuff. Worth 50p + SAE, Andy, 56 Wolviston Rd, Billingham, Cleveland, TS22 5EJ.

Between The Lies 5 fanzine
 Very few reviews this time, and interviews with Zuzu's Petals, Moonshake, Leatherface, Blade and some journals. 50p + SAE, Davey Do-Nothing, 97 Sipson Rd, West Drayton, Middx.

Buzz Factory 15 Fanzine
 Thicker than all the above, and still 50p + SAE. 52 Mungahed Rd, Bainsford, Falkirk, FK2 7JG. Mostly reviews, but I guess that's fine if you live up there.

Pit Report magazine
 A free-in-Boston magazine with lengthy interviews with The Tulips most notably, among others, and a top 100. It's nice to see that the Muffs album which Warners didn't even see fit to release over here is at 19, and Moonshake are up from 95 to 49 with 'Eva Luna'.

Madder Rose - Bring It Down LP (Seed) *****
 Best album of the year. In years to come there'll be brilliant bands, but then I'll think "they're not as good as Madder Rose". And you'll get fed up of me saying so unless you also know it to be true. Perfection doesn't come much better than this. Analysis is out of place when the feeling is so encapsulating. After being drawn into the whining sadness of 'Swim', the hyperactive joy of 'Lay Down Low' is enough to force a rush of energy to make you crash your truck. Except the outwards signs don't necessarily reflect the deeper meaning. Hollywood constantly strives for this clash of emotions, but their mainstream playing has the sincerity of a boardroom battle. Madder Rose are what keeps music the only essential medium.

Skin Yard - Inside The Eye LP (Cruz) **
 Metallers.

Dog Eat Dog - Warrant mini-LP (Roadrunner) ***
 Not all metal/hip hop crossover is the blatant commercial hype you've heard up to now. These appear to be expensively dressed NY scenesters who squeeze in graveyard studio sessions to record a record that mixes the sounds that are rattling their eardrums.

Dillon Fence - Outside In LP (Mammoth) ***
 The difficult second album. Released hot on the tails of the brilliant first album, which came four years after the band started. This one claims to "capture the live feel", which is a dreadful cliché that should be avoided at all costs. If you bought the last album you'll buy this one because you couldn't possibly think badly of it.

Skyscraper - Choke single (Incoherent/Food) *
 Slow down for godsake.

National Pop Week - Spain single (Newt) ***
 I never realised NPW were the remains of Nottingham band Charlottes Web. I heard a song of theirs on the radio in the late 80s and the name has stuck in my mind ever since. Not a bad record, but I fear their intentions lie the way The Heart Throbs want.

Maxine - Hovering single (Blast First) *
 A limited edition of 1000 it says. Most of which are to be found in second-hand shops I guess.

International Hip Swing compilation LP (K) ***
 There's a lot of crap on this, but some good stuff too. This is a compilation of singles, and it's marginal when you'd be better off buying the singles instead, but that assumes you know which are the good bands. Here's a clue: Lois, Tiger Trap, Mecca Normal, Fifth Column. You'd also be better off buying 'Stars Kill Rock'. Basically there's better things to spend your money on.

Some Velvet Sidewalk - Avalanche LP (K) ****
 Some Velvet Sidewalk - I Scream EP (K) ****
 Indie pop. Lollipop.



Deanna

HOLY ROLLERS

Gene demo ***
 I should stop making my mind up based on press releases, but this one makes backhanded references to Star Trek and Heaven 17. That didn't put me off, and I wanted more than just these two tracks of mid 80s-style song writing (Aztec Camera, Prefab Sprout, as they were then). And they're from South of the river.

Oblivious - America LP (Daemon) *****
 Well, well. The author of Transvision Vamp's 'Tell That Girl To Shut Up', Holly Vincent is an ex-punk gone major label raunchy pop, but unlike Ms James, Holly was there when Blondie were doing it first. This could be big, if only they dropped the bit about being an ex-Mark Knopfler protégé from the press release. Try Daemon Records, PO Box 1207, Decatur, GA 30031, USA.

Bad Brains - Rise LP (Epic) *
 Another singer, another album. Major labels always mention the wrong people on press releases. Rollins.

Scream - Fumble LP (Dischord) *

Only a cynic would think they were only releasing this now. Four years after it was recorded, because Dave Grohl, now of Nirvana, was the drummer. A cynic like me.

Deadbolt - Shrunken Head LP (Headhunter/Cargo) *
Macabre r'n'r. The Cramps without the glamour.**

Rivet Head Culture compilation LP (If It Moves/Cargo) ***

An electronic dance compilation. I have never heard of a single band on here, but it's okay. Sounds like KMFDM, Young Gods, that kind of thing. There's no way you're going to buy it on that recommendation, but it's worth a listen.

Posies - Frosting On The Beater LP (Geffen) **

Major label Seattle grunge, which isn't such a bad thing in this case. Obviously it's more pop than the originals, along the lines of those bands you see on the Chart Show - Lemon Trees, Spin Doctors, and others that drifted by less memorably. I'll have forgotten this too in three weeks.

Mind Bomb LP (Mercury/Phonogram) **

Another major label record that's okay, but don't let me give you the impression this is common. This one's hardcore metal. Five minutes into it and I've changed my mind.

Kerbdog - Earthworks EP (Vertigo/Phonogram) *

As above, but crap from the start.

Black Train Jack - No Reward LP (Roadrunner) **

More hardcore NY HM, but less intense.

Gumball - Accelerator single (Big Cat) ****

Gumball - Super Tasty LP (Big Cat) ***

Faster, loud, hard rock, a la Action Swingers, but I'm sure they'd argue, especially about the album.

Pan - Ology LP (Big Cat) ***

An indie/souly/dancey pop band from Brighton. If they just did ravey dance instead of indie dance with that girlsoul vocal they would probably get further. It gets a bit wishy washy after 63 minutes, and I only listened to 5. Still better than One Dove.

James Hall - My Love, Sex & Spirit LP (Daemon) *

Their publicist says he sounds like early Bowie. What an observant man.

Chameleons - Strange Times LP (Geffen) **

It's a mystery to me why Chameleons LPs keep cropping up when the band split up years ago.

Boss Hog - Girl EP (AnRep) **

Nothing surprising, unless a bit of wine-bar jazz and a lack of wailing gtrs and screeching vocals is unexpected.

Band Of Susans - Veil LP (World Service) ****

Band Of Susans are brilliant. They've got three rhythm guitars blasting out an unrelenting wave of power, and no lead guitar. Or could that be the other way round?

Frantic Spiders - You're Dead single (Weirdness Inc) ***

If riot grrrrl hadn't happened they would be just another indie band, as it is they can probably claim to be RG, and be better than some of the others in that bin. From Exeter, and a good substitute for Mambo Taxi or Comet Gain.

Foreheads In A Fishtank single ****

Pardon the lack of information. I preferred it more before I knew who was behind it. It was a trick to get me to like Foreheads. It worked to a certain extent. This is a ravin've're'ravin' mix of fast drum beats and repetitive one-liner samples. Strange keyboard sounds fill the rear portions. It sounds okay at 33 too, but it goes by quicker at 45.

Breeders - Cannonball EP (4AD) **

I quite liked the last album.

CNN - Young, Stupid & White single/demo **

A gtr'n'samples attack on the star status they've got a fair chance of reaching. A bit like PWEI really.

Lydia Lunch - Crimes Against Nature LP (Triple X/Trident) ****

A triple CD collection of the spoken word albums. I imagine there were 1000 pairs of hands keen to grab this limited box set the minute it was released, so you won't get the chance to listen to this compelling storytelling of crimes committed by, on or around Lydia.

Scum Pups - Sonic Sculptures LP (Stayfree) ****

Debut album from Leicester's grunge metal purveyors. I think they would like to be lauded in the HM arena, but with their scathing cynicism that's improbable. They've got all the right moves though - the slow ballad ('Forever Smile'), the gtr solo howler ('Growler'), and the untitled epic, ('Untitled Epic'). There's even a hit single ('Shudder'), albeit in acoustic form, and a song called 'Hit Single' which is unlikely to be. Or then again, they could be grunge, but they lurch uneasily between the two moulds.

Supersuckers - Dead Homiez (Sub Pop) *

A piss-take of the Ice Cube song with no hint of rap.

b7 - Bright Black single (Southern) **

They sound like one of those bands that was around when Cud were around, and were probably on the Airspace compilation. I forget the details.

Band Of Susans - Now EP (Blue/Rough Trade Germany) ***

Band Of Susans - Mood Swing single (Sing Fat) ****

None of the latest gimmicks here. BOS have been working hard to make this intense three-guitar New York sound since Mudhoney were in high school, or thereabouts. The EP features 'Paint It Black', which is more typical of what they're known for and best at. No-one else could get the stereo balance of 'Mood Swing', especially not live.

Headcleaner - Stoked 2P (Orphan) ****

It would be difficult to make another record as good as their album.

Josa Mota - Drag For A Drag mini-LP (Placebo) **

They must of recorded this before they started getting good.

Tiger Trap - LP (K) *****

It's great when press releases do all your work for you. 'A faster, noisier American version of Heavenly'. The middle word there was the one that takes it okay for UK promo. Jangly girly indie pop lives on in Sacramento.

Pain Teens - Destroy Me Lover LP (Trance Syndicate) ***

At best they sound like Boss Dog.

Circus Lupus - Solid Brass LP (Dischord) ***

They call it slacker. I think that means they just play as if they know what they're doing, and yell as if it matters. They get by.

Sundial - Libertine LP (Beggars Banquet) *

One of their singles was okay, although I gather it got played to death in certain quarters. This is just Emerson, Lake and some other mid-80s synth garbage, with a snuff of a couple of singles thrown in.

Mercury Rev - Something For Joey single (Beggars Banquet/Mint/Jungle) **

Something like Drop 19s, which I suppose is an improvement.

Seefeel/Aphex Twin - Plainsong 2P/Pure, Impure LP (Too Pure) ***

I thought it was better without Aphex Twin.

Bad Religion - Recipe For Hate LP (Epitaph) **

I'm beginning to get fed up of saying bands sound like All now, but they do. Which is much more melodic and "accessible" than the frantic hardcore they do live.

Forgodsake - Blasthead LP (Bleeding Hearts) *

There was a press cutting with the Bad Religion record from a magazine called 'Metal CD'. Can you think of anything worse?

Submerge 6 fanzine

As well as Tina's drooling over Evan Dando (Lemonheads) and succumbing to the charms of Ned Haydn (Action Swingers) they mix the big (Banshees) and the small (Nuthins) with equal aplomb. Also Screaming Trees, Alice Donut, Love Battery and others. There's millions of reviews of such the same stuff as in here, and a single attached with Slingbacks, Cats Paw and Nuthins. £2, Tina, 35 Lickey House, North End Road, London, W14.

Cop Shoot Cop - Ask Questions Later LP (Big Cat) *****

I'm glad I gave this the opportunity to grow on me. On first listen there are a few tracks which really make the grade, but upon deeper absorption the whole is mightier than the magnificent parts. There are tracks you could pick out as striking examples of hardcore pop anthems - '110 Bill', 'Room 429', 'Got No Soul' - but you need more than bricks to build a house. With the usual building blocks of a grinding bass, a snarling vocal and an array of steel sheeting, CSC have made an album worth an enquiry.

Johnboy - Pistol Swing LP (Trance Syndicate) ***

They also sound kind of industrial, but they've just got the usual gtr/bs/dr/vox. I guess it's driven that much harder, like Headcleaner or someone.

Hypnolove - Altered States LP (Alias) *

Matt Keating - Tell It To Yourself LP (Alias) *

Take them out and look at the colour of the vinyl.

Eugene Chadbourne & Evan Johns - Terror Has Some Strange

Kinfolk LP (Alternative Tentacles) **

Mad but tame and palatable cowpoke country.

Bivouac - Tuber LP (Elemental) *

Sound like Bowlfish at times, but more generic 90s than generic 70s.

Agnostic Front - Last Warning LP (Relativity/Roadrunner) **

Nazi Punks Fuck Off single (Alternative Tentacles) ***

Punk's not dead... It's feet are skyward, but still kicking.



Bowlfish - Twisted Hips single (Roughneck) ***
"Teen pop drama" it says on the press release. I can see that. 70s metal guitar breaks with an updated indie noise guitar sound. And a crap B-side.

State Of Grace - Miss You single (3rd Stone) **
Basically like Curve, but the second track sounds a bit like Danielle Dax only not as good, which is good. I think if you like it you'll like it a lot.

Mint 400 - Thruster single (Incoherent/Food) **
Aaaaah! You're so kind. An etched promo 12 inch. When Mint 400 are mega pop stars this'll be worth quids. I'd better sell it now before anyone realises they won't be.

Sunshot - Iron Ball Direction LP (Deva/Trident) ****
Really? A live album? On CD and cassette only? What a strange move. They've recently abandoned the drum machine for a real drummer too. Something's afoot. Anyway, this album contains an equal mix of new stuff and tracks off the last album. It's true, Sunshot are a brilliant live band but, to listen to, the studio recordings serve the purpose better. I'm a bit confused.

Babes In Toyland - Painkillers LP (Southern) ***
As above, but it's a bootleg style mix of a good EP's worth of new stuff plus an unexciting, low-fi half hour of 'Fontanelle' live.

Suck Henry - So Depraved single (Kill City/Trident) ****
A mite Babes-ish but they're better on their own merits.

Die Cheerleader - 69 Hayloft Action EP *
They were okay when they were copying Babes, now they would just be better off if they went all-out HM.

Someone's Gonna Get Their Head To Believe In Something compilation LP (Better Youth Organization) **
BYO was founded in LA in 1979 and this is a celebration of 10 years of the punk ethic, apparently (I guess they can't count past 10 because it's 1993 now). The usual mix of NY Dolls soundalikes and various types of punk from the raw to the fast. 21 bands, 31 tracks, but no-one particularly well-known except SNFU and Bad Religion.

Moonshake - Big Good Angel mini-LP (Too Pure) ****
Moonshake always seem to be delighted with falling equipment on stage, but they don't realise that people can put up with that because the bits in between more than make up for it. Rhythm and noise with strange compelling words.

His Name Is Alive - Mouth By Mouth LP (4AD) ****
It's pretty amazing when you think about it that 4AD is such a big and successful business when they release weird offbeat stuff like this and yet none of it ever flops. This is why independents are so much better than majors because a major just wouldn't realise that this is good because it's not like something else that's already been a success. I don't hear any hit singles here. The album rambles on with strange electronic sounds and samples, underpinned by percussive drums and dreamfolk female vocals, with the occasional massive guitar noise. Sock it to 'em.

Seefeel - Plainsong EP (Too Pure) ****
More captivating basement ambience. Space space space.

Cornershop - Lock Stock And Double Barrel EP (Wiiija) ****
Amazing basic punk that recalls 1978 in the sleeve notes but is definitely 1993 in riot on attitude. Fighting the powers that be in a more convincing way than the lazy chant they feign live.

Poindexter Steward - College Rock EP (SST) ***
That's the name of the band, not the singer who has apparently stolen the name and sold it to Warners. This is hard, almost grunge dance (with more emphasis on the metal). Featuring Greg Ginn (of SST) on guitar.

Skin Yard - Inside The Eye single (Cruz) **
As above. Featuring Jack Endino (Sub Pop producer) on guitar.

Sugar Shack - The Good Life single (Fistpuppet/Cargo) ****
A fast upbeat guitar stomper. Featuring Tim Kerr (of T/K Records) as guest slide guitarist.

Love Jones - I Like Young Girls single (Minty Fresh) ***
Hit Parade - Hitomi single (Minty Fresh) ***
Stump The Host - California Zephyr single (Minty Fresh) ***
Love Jones are bossa nova crooners that woo a candlelit audience of wine drinkers. Smooth pink vinyl. Hit Parade are Everything But The Girl out for a walk in the English countryside. Cool blue vinyl. Stump The Host are modern country. I forget the last country band I liked, but this is better. Daisy white vinyl. A great set of records, all with equally good B-sides. Not many labels manage this quality with their first three releases. **** for the collection. 355 W Chicago Ave #301, Chicago, IL 60610, USA.

Udead - There's A Riot In Tompkins Square single (Overground) **
Either I'm playing this at the wrong speed or it sounds like The Toy Dolls. Sad Clash leftovers.

Beatnick Filmstars flexi *
This really is saad!

Ed Kuepper - Serene Machine LP (Hot) ***
Going more for the three minute songs rather than the 10 minute soundscapes this time round. It's hard to keep up with Ed's shifting tides.

Monsterland/China Pig - Blank/Maggie single (Mudd) **
Don't think much of China Pig and Monsterland are not at their best here.

CuckooLand demo ****
Starts out like the full fast sound of Chumbawamba, but then gives way to the style of Shelley's Children, for it is they. Twin indiegirl vocals and a keyboard accompanied pop soundtrack with a socio-political lyrical theme. c/o Rising Sun Institute, 30 Silver St, Reading, RG1 2ST.

Artificial Eye demo ****
They used to be called Dead Souls, which indicates the lurking goth influence, and they sound like All About Eve on speed. One track claims to feature The Tulips, which I find a little hard to believe, but you could send £3 to Paul Clark, 35 Westwood Ave, Hitchin, Herts, SG4 9LL to find out.

Steved - Reducer EP **
Garage.

Big Chief - Brand Product LP (Sub Pop) ***
SM vocals with a funky beat under the grunge guitar.

Gallon Drunk - You Should Be Ashamed single (Clavist/City Slang) ***
Reverend Horton Heat - Full Custom Gospel Sounds Of LP (Sub Pop) ***
Proving the popularity of rockabilly r'n'b.

Love & Napalm compilation LP (Trance) **
The only band that's any good is Drain, but since I've not heard of them before that's worth mentioning. Cherubs aren't too bad either. Pain Teens are also on it.

Supersnazz - Superstupid! LP (Sub Pop) ****
I would say they were a cross between Shonen Knife and Lunachicks if that wasn't so easy. Japanese pop metal with a few 60s soul/pop covers thrown in. They would have loved to have been Phil Spector protégés.

Deity Guns - Trans Lines Appointment LP (Big Cat) ***
French hardcore. Produced by Lee Ranaldo and Wharton Tiers, which probably makes a considerable improvement.

Fugazi - In On The Killtaker LP (Dischord) ***
College hardcore?

Toxic Narcotic - Population single (Rodent Popsticle) ***
DIY punk hardcore grinding obliviously away in Boston. I've seen Extreme Noise Terror and I prefer this. PO Box 335, Newton Ctr, MA 02159, USA.

Some Have Fins - We Let Go single (Eve) ***
Another under-rated British grunge band. There's no justice.

Eric's Trip - Peter single (Cargo or Sub Pop) **
Eric's Trip - Songs About Chris single (Sub Pop) **
Noisy Canadian show-gazers. 'Chris' features the cunningly titled 'Sloan Song', Eric's more trippy than Sloan and more crap indie than Pavement.

Supernova - Long Hair & Tattoos single (Odyssey) ***
I don't want to keep being reminded of New York Dolls, but it keeps happening. This transmutes into the BS2s and then Dead Milkmen. Earth Outpost, 3334 E pch, Suite 225, CA 92625, USA.

New Order - Republic LP (London) ***
Pretty much what you expect.

Shadow Men On A Shadowy Planet - Sport Fishin LP (Cargo)
As if Dalek Beach Party wasn't enough, they have dodgy Shadows wannabes in America too (or is it Canada?).

Unrest - Isabel Bishop EP (4AD) ****
Bridget Cross does a good impression of Tracy Thorn, the rest is pure Unrest in fine form. I guess they've pretty much established their lot of fans now, but for those that don't know, they're a more talented version of Pavement, with indie roots and the requisite rocking out element.

Moon Seven Times LP (Third Mind/Roadrunner) **
Another ethereal rock album that regales the serenity of Cocteau Twins whilst adorning the indie hallways occupied by Unrest for example.

Slint - Tweez LP (Touch And Go/Southern) ****
Softish hardcore kinda stuff. Produced by Steve Albini in 1987 but released for the first time on CD because they've seen others succeed with lesser records.

Madder Rose - Beautiful John single (Seed) ****
Unfortunately you have to get the CD single because it's got two more tracks than the 7 inch. The B-side of the 7 inch was the B-side of 'Headshot', but I guess you ignored my advice of six months year ago and missed that. Madder Rose are lazy lazy dreamers, like Blake Babies with the pop replaced by heart and soul. New York's where it's at y'know.

Luscious Jackson - In Search Of Manny LP (Big Cat) ***
If anyone paid any attention to what I wrote in EMS you may have come across Groove Garden, who injected a luscious soul rap into my NY aftermath. This follows Luscious Jackson who are slightly harder than girl rappers. Not as good as that one Groove Garden track but as good a place as any to start.

Volume 6 compilation LP ***
The Volume series are such good value you can't help thinking they're just a promotional tool. A maximum length CD and a 152 page interview book with such luminaries as St Etienne, Bjork, Killdozer and the not-very-like. This one seems to be of a mellower theme, with lots of lazy bass-lines.

Daniel Ash - Foolish Thing Desire LP (Beggars Banquet) ***
I've had a bit of a laid-back afternoon all in all because this is another smoothy. Ex-Bauhaus etc sounding like The The or one of Yello's slower themes for the most part. A big studio sound.

Tsunami - Deep End LP (Simple Machines/Southern) ***
Velocity Girl are the only band who get a thankyou on the sleeve, but although they're soulmates, the music of Tsunami is more rock-pop than indie-pop, in the sense that it's more full-on and full-throated. They're a great band live.

Julie Dolphin - Roses EP (Tinaktuk) ****
A band consisting of various people from bands that were recently big in Australia, which tells you nothing except that they've got a fair degree of competence, probably. I bet they had a hard time picking the lead track on this EP because all four are pretty amazing - if it's on CD press 'random play'. The title track is a swooning melodic song of passion, and the others are fast hard loud blasts of soul power. As ever, they remind me of someone and I can't remember who it was but I'm sure I liked them. I'll be annoyed if it turns out to be Roxette.

Quartered Shadows tape (A.V.Arts) **
Uzeda tape (A.V.Arts) *
For a moment QS sounded like a good grunge/noise group, but drifted into German folk. Uzeda never sounded like anything apart from an Italian major label support band.

Blur - Modern Life Is Rubbish LP (Food) ****
But Mods aren't rubbish apparently. The only band on Food I like, and this is the best record they've made since 'There's No Other Way' a long time ago.

I got a demo in the post the other week. It was from a band called 'Lonely'. I listened to it. It was a riot grrrl tape. There was a letter with it. I read the letter.

In the last issue I wrote a feature about riot grrrl, and I tried to indicate that I feel kinda detached from the cause. The same issue had an Ice-T review, which may have seemed out of place. I think the point I'm trying to make here is that I don't have to be a girl, or I don't have to be black to at least understand the question, even if I don't know the answer.

You've probably been fed the impression that riot grrrl is a fad that's passed, but have you noticed that you can't read any publication without finding a band talking about it on some level? Mostly the bands that are asked play down the relevance to them. I'll admit I'm guilty of being flippant, but the subject won't go away. The guise might change, but the feeling will get stronger. I only trivialise because I can't theorise.

The letter from Andrea oozed with passionate support for the whole riot grrrl ethos. Here is someone with something real to say, so I am delighted to allow her to take up a page of my space.

a riot grrrl speaks

There has been a bit of a backlash towards the 'riot grrrl' scene since its inception... why? 'Riot grrrl' bands are a microcosm of society in general. Are these women or men the total definition of feminism? No they aren't! They are individuals. Many factored ones. Some want attention for themselves purely, and resort to cheap theatrics to get it. Others have given male/female roles (mainstream conceptions of them) a lot of thought. Yes, the 'music business' tends to attract egomaniacs (some would say megomaniacs). Having a belief or having a statement/world view to convey is a very positive thing! How is the message being conveyed? Will you be easily dismissed or not taken seriously? Unfortunately female musicians have a battle to be taken seriously. I could give countless examples in both the weekly papers as well as fanzines: 'Women in Music' seems to equal a giant beauty contest. Unfortunately women who show a lot of skin tend to receive mixed reactions. Some say "I'm objectifying myself. I'm in charge". Others see it as a short cut to press coverage. Most importantly, does it make people listen to what your songs are saying? Certain male writers act as apologists for Liz Phair. Calling her the 'fun feminist'. She's a 'fun feminist' cos she likes dick. Hopefully yours boy as you dream on. Granted she has a distinctive resonant voice. That's not the issue. The issue is male writers trying to define for us what feminism is! Has she presented herself as a feminist? Apparently Madonna and Camilla Pagilla see themselves as feminist. Does Liz as well? A women band does not have to pose in their underwear or write songs about blow-job queens to be cat-called by male audience members. The Breeders don't play up their sexuality or have obviously sexual songs. I don't want to say what has been shouted at them at their gigs. It's extremely disheartening to me. Maybe these women who do play up the 'sex angle' do so cos they see the futility of being judged solely for their songs. Nah, it's a shortcut to the top.

Obviously I don't 'relate to' every other female musician/songwriter on the planet. Yet I'm ecstatic our numbers are increasing! I believe this is a direct result of riot grrrl. The rhetoric behind riot grrrl was "do it now". It was encouraging to girls to form bands and to begin to focus on writing their thoughts/experiences to other women. A very empowering thing! Most young girls are basically trained by society to look to boys for approval - not other females. Granted there are various levels of "sincerity" in the scene. It seems to involve quite a few former/still "indie pop" people. Its similar really. For some it's a trend, a pose and a pre-fabricated identity to assume. Others do feel apart from the 'mainstream' and the oppression they put down. In theory riot grrrl purports to be non-elitist. Yet (as in any indie scene) how many are truly financially disadvantaged? (No, students don't count). I wish people would hold true the ideals of riot grrrl, that is everyone should have access to recording their songs. More people need to be trading tapes/releasing 4 track recordings. If you aren't connected with a label that pays for your recordings you must come from a middle class background to pay for studio recordings/pressings. A lot of people are cut out! We need to hear from the disenfranchised! There is little real solidarity/support among women trying to make music. Let's put petty ambitions behind us and realise that other women need to experience the wonder of increased confidence and sense of purpose that real involvement brings.

All this is basically me expressing views that are likely to offend some people. (If so I'm sorry). Please contact me if you want to carry on an 'exchange'. Also, yes I do have a "mission" to encourage female songwriters/musicians. I'd really like to hear from you! Let's trade tapes. You may want to participate in a charity LP I'm releasing. Male bands are fine too. I know males reading this are too intelligent to take seriously ridiculously insulting claims made by some fanzine writers "that riot grrrl is out to castrate 50% of the male population". Remember even the most "radical feminist" (a label I've always embraced) doesn't hate men, it's just the traditional domineering male role we hate, not individual men. Which brings me neatly to: my charity compilation LP benefiting the womens refuge. This is a centre for battered women. All profits after pressing/promotional costs will go to the refuge. This LP is being released by me as a sort of exorcism of bad experiences survived by me and various close women friends. I want to raise AWARENESS - violence against women happens. It happens in the 'indie pop scene'. It happens in every sort of environment. Many women who need these services - someone to talk to, legal advice or a safe place to go aren't aware of the refuge. The LP will provide contact phone numbers. Some day, if we keep raising the issue and let them know battering won't be tolerated, the sad fact that 25% of women have been abused will change. Anyway Lois, Heavenly and Blood Sausage are among the bands that are providing tracks. I'm hoping many many others will get involved by donating a track as well as (even more importantly) telling others about the LP and the issue. Please contact me if you have a track to donate. I don't care if your band formed three weeks ago or had a two page spread in NME last week. Many types of music will be featured, both 'known' and 'unknown' bands. I'd be deeply appreciative of your contributions - I hope to hear your thoughts and music.
Thanks for listening.

Andrea
'Garden of Delights'
503 Kingsbury Road
Erdington
Birmingham
B24 9NJ

Drugstore

Hey! You know Drugstore. They were on my last flexi. But do you? I bet you haven't read anything more than snippets about them (unless it's taken you past Christmas to buy this). Always on the ball, your local fanzine detective was there first, pipped only by Blaster! who "asked Isabel a few questions". Everyone's compared them to Mazzy Star or Madder Rose or Throwing Muses - not comparisons you make lightly. The older ones amongst us bring up Marianne Faithfull, but could you name one of her songs? Me neither.

This may sound strange, but I've never interviewed anyone I know before. I'm not sure why, but I've always tried to avoid sitting in a room stumbling through a list of questions with someone I could normally manage a prolonged discussion about the state of the music industry with. It's something about the little red light that stops the flow. (Although I did once take up an hour of Heavenly's time, only to edit it down to 500 words intended for a magazine which went bankrupt). The little red light was flickering behind a tape recorder which I should know not to trust by now. Most of Mike's words got lost in the hum that engulfed the left channel. Most of Isabel's words got drowned by Uncle Tupelo strumming around the bonfire in the next room. The pictures failed to leave the camera. This lark used to be so easy!

In that awkward moment when you feel you should stop the gossip and start the interview, I look around and ask 'are we waiting for Dave?'. Mike and Isabel exchange uncomfortable glances and say 'I though you knew'. Time to get that Walkman rolling! What happened to Dave?

"Oh, man!" Isabel sighs.

"That's not fair!" Mike grumbles.

First interview, first question, and it's a bugger! Isabel rejects Mike's suggestion not to answer it on the basis that Dave's not going to be reading this anyway.

"Have you ever tried finding the perfect partner? We had a lot of problems with lead guitarists. There were flaws and the longer we stayed with him the flaws became more. And I also think he wanted to do his own thing because he's like a singer in his own right. When he joined the band he used to have his own band. He had a psychobilly background."

Not to worry. I always have anxious moments when someone fundamental like a lead guitarist or a singer leaves a band, but as it turns out John is perfectly capable of bringing the shimmering essentials to a band that was once described as 'bass led'.

"He's a little more creative than Dave," Isabel lets slips. "We don't want someone who just plays guitar. We want someone who can come up with parts."

Drugstore had no intention of revealing their previous credentials, but you can't hide anything from a roving fanzine writer. I put it to them that they used to be in The Folks Who Live On The Hill.

"Shut up!" cringes Isabel. "Bribe him now," she says to Mike, "this is the chance. Stick a fifty quid note in his pocket, man!"

Not to be outdone by any secret history I can dig up, Isabel has her own embarrassing tales.

"I once joined a band called The Minutemen thinking I was joining THE Minutemen. One day they said 'there's another band called The Minutemen' and I said 'I thought that was you!'"

Isabel made the break from her native Brazil in 1986.

"I came to England with big aspirations to play bass guitar. I'd never written a song. It took me a year though to get the guts to make a phone call and say I'm a bass player. I feel really nervous on the phone. I hate talking on the phone. Summerhill was the first band I joined. That was the end of '87, and I played with them for a fucking year, then I was sacked."

She eventually teamed up with Mike and they decided to get a band together. If only they hadn't called it The Folks Who Live On The Hill!

"Folks was our first experiment as a band. We spent maybe a year looking for a guitarist. Actually we started out looking for a singer."

"Isabel thought she had a funny voice," Mike chips in.

"I still do but now I realise I can get away with it!"

"We did a couple of little demo things. We didn't really know what we were doing."

"And then we started going back to the demos and realising that they weren't that great."

When did you realise Drugstore was working out?

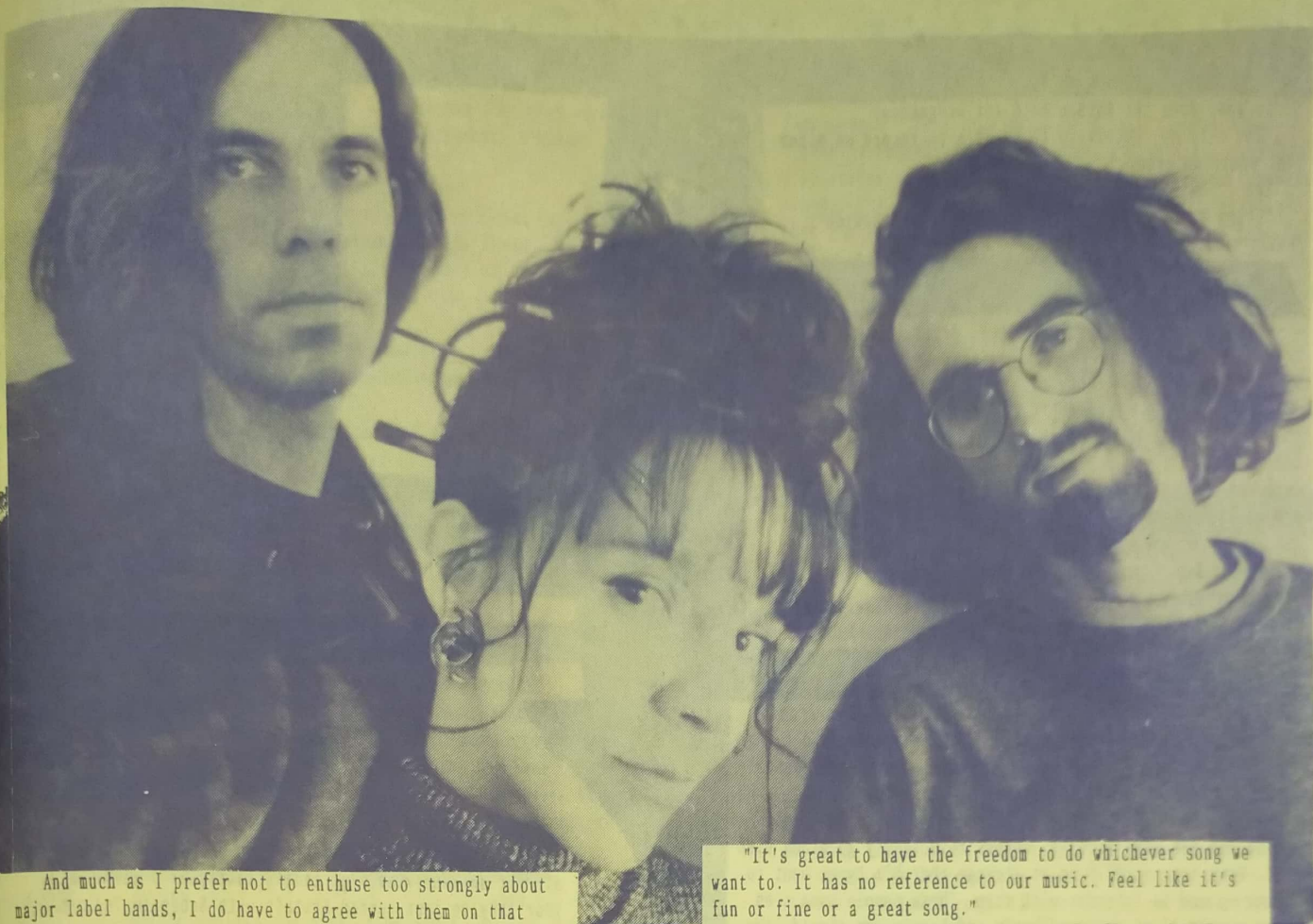
"I think the change was when we wrote 'Alive'. That was a big change, our perception of what we wanted to do. That was the first song we ever recorded and we went back and said 'yes, we like it'. We waited a couple of months before we did anything with it. That was the problem we had before - we'd record stuff and go back and say 'we hate it'."

How different was it before?

"All the songs were 2½, 3 minutes, straightforward songs. You have a verse, a verse, chorus, a verse, a bridge. We had to have a bridge, because we didn't know any better. We went through different phases. I used to listen to a lot of indie music and then I was put off by indie music in the mid 80s and I started going back to listen to country. And then when I met Michael he was listening to Costello and Replacements and all those slightly poppy rock bands that came from LA."

Not many bands show much interest in the bands they play with, but every time I speak to Drugstore they're asking me about bands they're about to play with, or telling me about bands they have played with. So of all those bands, which were your favourites?

"I really like Flaming Lips," Isabel instantly recalls. "One of the best bands I've seen."



And much as I prefer not to enthuse too strongly about major label bands, I do have to agree with them on that count. Mind you, Warners do seem to have the best bands of all the majors, at least as far as American bands go. I've got two in this fanzine, although I didn't know before that Seed is part of Atlantic which is part of Warners. The balance is redressed tonight by coincidentally supporting another Warners signing, the appalling Uncle Tupelo. But what am I talking about majors for? I really wanted to know about those lesser known bands that stand up and knock you down on their own strengths.

"I like Delicatessen. They opened for us in 'In The City'. Pretty laid-back, song-based but interesting."

Talking of which, 'In The City' was the annual accumulation of hopefuls in Manchester, a smaller version of the NY CMJ Music Marathon which Drugstore were off to the week after this interview. Unknown to them at the time, Drugstore were judged to be 'the second best unsigned band in Britain' by the 'In The City' judges, for which they received two crates of beer.

"We weren't even aware there was a competition. If we'd have known we'd have done a better gig. I didn't have my best frock on!"

At some stage I should remind you who it was that brought Drugstore to your attention getting on for a year ago. Their do-it-yourself marketing machine sent me their single in an unmarked brown bag, almost. Before the highly publicised arrival of Madder Rose (who I also predicted before they even signed to Seed - aren't I clever!) the idea of releasing a slow, brooding single was considered an unwise first move - like all those terrible (major label) metal bands who do a ballad for their third single but wouldn't dare do one as an introduction. Drugstore's first visit to the studio threw up three tracks - 'Alive' and 'Gravity' became the single, and the third track, 'Heart Of Honey' was an uptempo affair which they did have plans to give away as some kind of promo thing to show that there's more than one slice in the toaster. Of course, when you see them play live you get the butter and the honey too. There's smiling and dancing, and if you cheer long enough they may come back for a happy cover version.

"It's great to have the freedom to do whichever song we want to. It has no reference to our music. Feel like it's fun or fine or a great song."

One such song they chose to regale the first time I saw them was 'Supermodel Superficial', by Voodoo Queens of course.

"It's fun, without being fun in a cheerful sort of way. It's fun but it's got some bollocks in it."

Are Drugstore fun?

"I think they're fun to watch but some of the stuff, the lyrics are not as fun as the music might make you believe. You can listen to a jolly pop song but there might be a line in that song that frames it in a less happy mood. You can listen to something and think 'that's nice' but one day that line will hit you and you'll realise what the song was about."

It's that conflict of despondency being delivered in a euphoric way, and vice versa.

"I'm not sure ours work the other way round," Mike suggests.

"Like the slow ones are never happy," Isabel laughs. "We basically don't have any happy songs!"

The first time I saw Drugstore was when they played the White Horse back in May, or at least, that was the plan. The council turned up a few nights before and decided the music was too disgusting and closed the place down. It's now a yuppie wine bar. As luck would have it they found The Monarch standing empty and they ended up redirecting everyone there.

"We had booked that gig weeks beforehand because we'd sent the single to a lot of people and they'd called back to ask when we're playing. So it was like a showcase. We got to the White Horse and there was a sign saying closed. It was pretty depressing."

"That was the first one in six months after we went and wrote all new songs," Mike relates. "We were the last band to pull up with the equipment thinking we were going to play."

So what does the future hold for Drugstore?

"You tell me. Hopefully to be able to record an album. That would be great."

You'll be looking for a label then?

"There are a couple of little things. We shouldn't really rush into anything."

Would you sign to a major label, or is it not an issue?

"It's not an issue to me. The issue is how much freedom we're going to get. I know signing with a major implies you don't get any, but they don't know us. Whoever signs us will have to put up a lot of trouble. No way would we compromise. I'm not scared, I'll sign to anyone. I don't care who I sign to so long as I can do my thing. **The one thing that scares me is the rock'n'roll circus.** We feel like we're slowly being dragged into that. The parties and the free drinks."

That's the trouble with London. The biz is run from here, so a lot of bands come and play to two men and a dog hoping someone will notice. Sometimes it works, but usually they end up playing to a handful of people who expect to be entertained. A few bands can stick two fingers up to all that and get away with it, others reluctantly go along with it. Drugstore still find it strange that biz types want to come up and be friendly with them. These people have seen the treadmill of unsigned bands and here's one they'd like to work with. It's easy to get locked into the London perspective.

"Don't you think there's too many gigs, far too many new bands? Every night there's got to be thousands and thousands of new bands. It just takes the excitement away of going out and watching a band. It should be an exciting thing."

Do you feel as if you're working against that: if nobody's heard of you nobody goes to the gig?

"That's why you should put a single out or do something else. You can't think just because you're playing an A+R man's going to walk into your gig with a blank cheque and champagne. That just doesn't happen. That belongs to rock'n'roll folklore."

It's early days yet. Drugstore are still awakening the small inner world of London dungeons. When there's a label to push them onto the wider world, they might just become legendary.

TRUMANS WATER

Trumans Water are the band who had their entire debut album played by John Peel, who then phoned them up live on air for an interview. But that's last year's news. This year they've just toured Britain with Babes In Toyland in support of their third LP/mini-LP/EP or whatever you want to call it, '10 X My Age'. Six tracks of uncoordinated messing about which approximate to songs.

After the Babes tour they did a quick hop, skip and jump around a few parts, including a date at the new Mean Fiddler flagship, previously the T+C 2. Here they decided to wear Linus's dresses on stage, so of course I had to ask who's got the nicest legs?

"Kevin," pronounces Kirk, quick as a flash. "Definitely Kevin. Lori from Babes In Toyland gave us a picture last night and he definitely wins the nicest legs competition."

He then thrusts the Walkman into Kevin's face for a reaction.

"Yes. I try to keep my legs fit and trim. I try not to eat too many fats. I do a lot of yoga and play basketball. I like to take care of my legs."

Hmm. So anyway, still on the subject of attire, Trumans Water have always started their show with a five minute tune-up/song type thing which leaves the uninitiated wondering whether they've started yet or not. Always, until now that is.

"We kinda did that in the middle," says Kirk. "We wanted people right away to get dancing and you kinda have to have a good dance number to start off."

You never have done before, you've always done that one to confuse people.

"Yeah, but every show is different. So we did it in the middle this time because if poeple expect it to be at the beginning then it doesn't really confuse them any more."

Hmm. Continuing with the theme of confusion, when I listened to the second album, the lovingly titled 'Spasm Smash XXX OX OX OX & Ass', I was immediately reminded of The Pixies, but everyone else seemed puzzled that I should think so, so I guess I was wrong.

"They did a lot of cool vocal stuff," Kevin acknowledges. "The thing that I liked about them was all the cool vocals stuff that they did, it was really COOL!" he yells.

"We talked about them the other night," recalls Kirk. "The first EP and 'Surfa Rosa' - it seemed like they were really going somewhere special, but, I dunno, it kinda petered out."

"At least they're not still together."

"Early on their songs were really interesting in terms of parts having not any set amount of repetitions. It wasn't always four bars of this, four bars of this."

Keeping to the idea of losing it, what did Trumans think of Babes?

"It's the first time we ever saw them," says Kirk. "They never came to San Diego except when we were touring." Were they as you expected?

"No. You know what? It's funny, I saw a lot of The Melvins in their music and I used to be a huge Melvins fan. I kinda like Lori's drumming especially. It's kinda interesting."

"It was cool," says Kevin (who else?). "We were swapping moves with Kat. It was kind of a symbiotic relationship." (Keep that page of the dictionary open).

"They did have a lot of good dance numbers."

Having not seen Babes for about three years, I was totally disappointed with their performance the other night. I thought they were just playing the same old songs without the soul. Kat even smiled when an annoying stage-diver cuddled up to her during what used to be a heart-rending shout to the devil.

Do you think that in three years time when you've lost it you'll realise and pack in or would you just carry on? (and have you ever heard such a loaded question as that?)

"Yeah!" Kevin laughs, answering at least one part of the question. "You try to make music that's interesting to you. I dunno, if our tastes were to change and we started making some different kind of music..." He pauses and changes tack. "I'm gonna keep making music as long as it's fun for me. As long as it's interesting. If it gets boring move onto something else. We're not around to get into any set kind of pattern. **There's no reason behind us,** we're just trying to have fun." He chuckles.

A friend then leaves with the parting shot: "Ask him why he didn't like the Notting Hill Carnival."

"We're not going to any more carnivals, Angela, and that's final," Kirk insists.

So?

"After we played at Reading we had a day off and Angela took us..." Kirk's train is stopped as the first band leave, shaking everyone's hand as they go. Kevin then takes up the story.

"We had to spend a day at Reading, which is a people nightmare, there's millions of people all over the place, so on our day off we went with Angela to the Notting Hill Carnival and we were like 'oh, carnival, cool'. Merry-go-rounds and stuff like that, but it was just a million people all packed into the streets, and we're like 'wait, we did this yesterday. This is our day off, we're supposed to be relaxing'. So we just left."

"It was just Reading with more streets and speakers," says Kirk.

"It would have been nice if we didn't have Reading the day before and then have to play the next day. On your day off you kinda want to..."

"Relax, find wide open spaces."

Sticking with the relaxation motion, '10 X My Age' isn't exactly a great work to listen to. Watching you play live is a cool experience, but it's difficult to transfer to vinyl.

"Yeah," says Kirk. "We hope not. Some people say that. Some people like listening to it a lot. I think that hopefully something about it grabs you straight away but it also stands up to lots of listens. Those are our favourite albums, the kind that at first you go 'this is okay' and then you just happen to keep listening to it and then three or four years later on it just gets better and better. But then there's a lot you listen to two weeks and you're sick of."

"Those are the predictable ones," considers Kevin.

"I dunno," thinks Kirk. "'10 X My Age' is probably easier than the double album. It's a little more bite-sized. The songs are shorter and the album's shorter."

This one seems to be less song-oriented and more like what you do live.

"Yeah," Kirk shrugs. "The improvisation is kind of on it's own rather than in the middle of songs. A big part of what we do is this free form."

What was that second track where you're teaching the drummer his part?

"There's a band in San Diego called Drive Like Jehu," Kirk explains, "and they've got a song that's really, really good called 'Sinews' and it just slowly comes together adding part by part, and at first it sounds really sparse but it becomes this incredible song. So the whole idea of that was like a poor man's version of that. Showing the song beginning as an introduction, so the second song is actually an introduction for the third song. It's us learning the third song. If you have it on kinda mid volume its got this weird hypnotic quality to it too. We think **it's a pleasant thing to listen to as well as a funny thing.**"

Hmm. Did anyone ever tell you Kevin, you look like the guy from Wayne's World who throws up all the time?

"Who me? No. I've never heard that one before. That's a new one. The guy who hurls all the time. Um. I never heard that one before. That's a new one," he responds, in true Bongwater fashion.

"It's just that Kevin makes you want to hurl," the drummer chirps.

"Hurling and me are synonymous," says Kevin. "I often inspire vomit."

"Are they a band?" asks Kirk.

"Hurl?" wonders the drummer.

"No, Wayne's World," Kirk answers.

Stop that now.

"Yeah, they are a band. Well, they play drums and guitar."

"That's all you need I guess."

"I heard them play some stuff that was pretty funny."

Hmm. Who needs Trevor and Simon?

Who is 10 X yr age?

"It's funny, Kirk grins. "I guess what inspired me originally was this guy at Homestead. Nobody ever talks to him but he's the owner and kinda like the corporate ogre guy, which shouldn't be - it's an independant label, and we had this idea of it as different - but yeah, I actually talked to the guy and he doesn't sound like he's 10 times my age, but there's this mystique about him before I actually talked to him."

A different corporate ogre's monkey then comes to clear away any signs of jollity. "Who's the roadie for the main band?" Mr ThrowEmOut asks. Trumans Water look at each other blankly and shrug their shoulders and say "we all are".

the MUFFS

Before The Muffs, Melanie, Kim and Ronnie were in The Pandoras, who you can do your own research on, but somewhere in between, the three of them joined White Flag, a band of floating membership formed in the 70s to take the piss out of Black Flag, and released a single on Sympathy. This was a lighter affair with just a hint of what was to follow, with 'Out On The Streets' on the B-side - a Shangri-Las song later covered by Blondie. So which version did White Flag base their rendition on?

"Do I look like a boy today?" Kim shrieks in her Californian 'oh my gahd' drawl.

The man in Burger King has just asked "can I help you sir?" as she approached counting a handful of dimes, and someone at the airport earlier made the same mistake as the ultimate personification of that favourite genre, punk-pop, entered our blessed country for a sole, bearily-announced date in rainy Camden.

Kim and Melanie (or Mel & Kim, as someone who remembers perfect pop prefers to call them) have joined me and my ailing tape recorder in an Anglicized enclave of American culture to get their party hats and to hint at what I can expect later when they join bassist Ronnie, and new drummer Jim on stage. Little known to me at the time, but as their manager keeps pointing out, they're on the line between pop and punk, and the live show is more punk. If I'd paid more attention to their Sympathy 'New Love'/'I Don't Like You' single I'd have got closer to the live picture, but I've been blowing my mind with the recently released Warners album which is more pop. To me, Blondie seems the obvious yardstick, with those clean guitars and singalong vocals.

"Really!?" Kim seems pleasantly shocked. "Wow. I love Blondie. I think Blondie's great."

"The Ramones and The Buzzcocks," Melanie says are the usual references, and upon checking my back-catalogue, The Muffs do indeed have the solid guitar sound of those bands, circa 1978.

"We're really loud and trashy and chaotic but supermelodic," says Melanie, doing my job for me.


"When you see us live you'll understand what we're talking about more because we're just real chaotic," Kim explains, repeating the buzzword. "It's hard to be chaotic when you're doing multi-tracks of things in the studio. It's very... oh shoot, I lost my train of thought." The burger takes over. "Oh well!"

You don't have to strive for something new, you have to strive for something exciting. If you wanted to keep one step ahead you'd be using the latest creation from Yamaha. If you stick with the proven formula of loud guitars, you can't help sweeping up a little of what's gone before. The late 70s punk explosion threw out a lot of great ideas, which provide the foundation of many a band living in the shadow of 'punk'. What shocked and inflamed in 1978 can sound tame now, but it's an essential grounding for the faster-louder-harder late 80s/90s continuation, and it's well worth re-living, especially if you weren't there the first time. 'What Do I Get', 'Teenage Kicks', 'Love Will Tear Us Apart', 'Down In The Tube Station At Midnight' - aren't they just pop songs?

"The Blondie one," answers Kim, "because that's the only one I heard, so when Bill Bartell wanted me to sing it I said 'yeah, cool', and then I heard the other version and went 'oh my god, I can't sing this'. It was the first thing I ever sang... on a recording. ...lead vocals."




Still on the subject of 70s pop bands, although there's no musical similarity with Abba, The Muffs share their talent for singing about nothing much in particular, but with such heartfelt conviction that it seems to matter.





"I don't believe that lyrics really need to mean anything," Kim confirms. "I think it's more like filler for the melody. I'm not into lyrics that mean anything really big, but I'm into lyrics that are cool and the way they sound is cool. **Our lyrics are just a bunch of bitching**, just complaining. I mean it every time I sing it."

On reflection, they're probably less like Blondie and all their twiddly synth bits (although Melanie did play keyboards in The Pandoras), and maybe more like the UK version, Kim Wilde, whose first punk guitar-laden hit was aptly about how 'the kids in California live for the music'. To pick a more modern contemporary you'd have to go for The Fastbacks, or my old favourite, Hole. And then again, they've got more in common with fellow LA metallers L7, than Warners' fading pop icon, Madonna, who's strutting her stuff on the other side of the North Circular this very night.



The Muffs album came out in America around April, and they've been on tour ever since and loving every minute of it, but this is the first time they've left America/Canada. I asked what made them come to our fair shores when the album hasn't even been released here and I later got told off by the Warners press person for asking that because apparently it's been out for three months (since July). Well, you wouldn't know. It's been on import from America for ages, and a few weeks ago it cropped up apparently on a cheaper import from Germany, which is where they're headed for after this brief UK touchdown. Which leads neatly onto a discussion on the relative merits of major label vs indie.



"Most of the majors in America suck," Kim surmises, "and Warners is really cool though - the only people that were into giving us creative control. The big advantage with being on a major is that the record gets in the stores - all that business crap that I don't care about usually."

They had all the usual problems in the studio - equipment breaking down, Kim's voice breaking down, spending too long, trying to capture their live sound - and yet right from the first drum beat to the last guitar wail, it's a rush through 16 perfect pop gems. 'Lucky Guy' kicks straight into gear with a raging song of pop lost love simplicity carried along by crashing cymbals and revving guitars. Kim's words are a clear, sincere shot from the heart, with 'oh well' sentiments, delivered in a 'don't you dare' kind of way.

The Chart Show middle-8 guitar solo comes along at just the right place, although it tends to rush past a little hastily. The guy backing singing joins in at exactly the right moment for that sultry stroll around the TOTP studio. The axe strikes at precisely the Hammer House climax.

'Big Mouth' jump starts the middle of the album (or start of side two if it was on vinyl), expressing the typical straight-talking rant of 'I don't like you and I won't pretend to' which is quickly backed by the rest of the gang of guitars. No compromise, no hidden depths. What you see is what you get. 'Another Day' bounces it's way through at 15 to the dozen like a go-cart on a dirt track, with a trademark yell at every corner. 'Eye To Eye' dips and dives an almost melancholic ballad, with only a few loose yelps to electrify the quiet storm.



'All For Nothing' closes the album with an acoustic ballad which enters with the warm crackle of surface noise, a rare visitor to the shiny world of CD.

"We wanted it to sound more like it was off a record," Kim explains, "and we had a record called 'The Best Of Marcel Marceau' and it was just blank, and it was an old record and it had popping noises on it and we thought 'oh, that's perfect', and that's how that came about. We should have just put it on the whole thing, that would have been great."

And before the album is allowed to finally die, a secret track pops up with 20 seconds of manic thrashing.

"The punk rock song," Melanie calls it.

"Just a spontaneous burst of shit," says Kim. "We just did it every once in a while on stage, but we didn't want to name it anything because it didn't have a name. Just a bunch of jibberish."

Do you get a lot of stick from people about your name? I occasionally used to get student types using it as an excuse not to buy the fanzine.

"Because it's Big Muff?" Melanie exclaims. "No way! That's stupid."

"If they don't want it because of that they're stupid and they should go die immediately," supports Kim.

"I would automatically think of the Big Muff pedal," says Melanie.

"Muff," repeats Kim. "Isn't that more the term they use here more? Let me lick your muff!"

"Well I would think they would know it from hand muffs," Melanie ponders, "because it's cold here."

"Ear muffs," adds Kim. "Muff also means to goof up, to blunder. And we do that often."

Which interpretation of the word did you name yourselves after?

"All of them actually," answers Kim. "I like the blunder muff. Oh, and also the pussy. Why not? Doesn't matter. We almost didn't get in the country because of our name here. I think muff in America isn't that bad of a thing."

"It is," Melanie retorts. "We never really have had a problem with it."

"It's better than being called The Cunts."

"We were thinking of snail trails." As a name?

I know getting sued is a bit of a problem in America, but it was still surprising to look at the LP sleeve and see pictures of audience participation, where the audience had black stripes over their eyes. Is this Crimewatch or what? Even the T-shirt slogans are blacked out. Is someone excessively paranoid?

"Warner Brothers did that," reports Melanie, "and it's not because of us at all, it's because they're so afraid of being sued. And the funniest thing about it is they blacked out everybody's face and people's T-shirts and there's a picture of me in there and my dress is up and you can see my pussy and they didn't black it out. They didn't notice."



That was in Flipside as well, I point out. "They had a real nice close-up of it," Kim remembers. "It was enlarged, you can see every detail." Is getting sued a big problem? "Everyone in America is sue happy," says Kim. "People have no other way to make money." "Commercials on TV are just all lawyers for suing," adds Melanie.



The Muffs have had singles out on a few independant labels, which isn't something that happens to bands here. In America everyone releases singles by bands that are signed to other labels, so doesn't the label that you're supposed to be on mind?

"Warner Brothers are pretty cool about it," says Melanie. "They just gave it to them because it's going to do some promotion for them, the independant circuit."

Don't they think they're missing out? "They don't even do vinyl any more," Kim whines. "We want vinyl."

"What they do is release stuff as promotional items," Melanie continues, "like they had a CD 5 and it had two of the same songs that was on the single that was sold on Sympathy, but they handed it out to stores and radio stations."

"Singles are not big with the general public, but they're big with underground people," Kim says. "It's not like mass market at Tower Records."

"Two entirely different things," Melanie states, "major label single and an independant single. Don't even compare."

Ronnie then comes in to drag them away for a soundcheck, and asks "did you talk about farting?"

"No," says Kim. "We talked about business stuff. You should ask us other stuff too. Like instead of business. I kind of keep my nose out of that business stuff."

I don't know. What can you ask a band you know very little about in 15 minutes? Presumably this is why a band would get a manager and sign to a major - so they can lose touch with reality and get on with the business of charming their way across the globe. They did offer to continue the interview when they came back for Halloween, but when the time came I felt like a party, and so did they.

Ronnie confirms his obsession with excretory bodily functions later by barfing on stage. This causes less concern in the Muff camp than his alleged dropping of a few bum notes.

If only I'd known what to expect when The Muffs attack a stage I might have been more in tune with their hard-rocking madcap ethos. Having changed out of her stripey jumper and ripped jeans, into knee-height stockings and white-rag dress, Kim is unlikely to get mistaken for a boy, and her band is unlikely to get confused with Blondie. They're nearer Action Swingers as they go at it with their chunky 2 1/2 minute punk rock anthems.

In a comment on my previous night's activity watching Liz Phair, I pass a reference to Throwing Muses, of who Ronnie admits a liking of their first record.

"You wouldn't like them if they didn't have a girl singer," Kim accuses. "He's a GBC."

A what?

"A Girl Band Guy."

If that's what it is to be a Muffs fan, I'm glad to be a GBC.

FLINCH



Flinch are three hearty souls based around the south east corner of our capital. 'Salt' is just one of four sparkling pop gems on the 'Dummy To Love' EP, out now on New Ground Records, distributed by Southern. Paul (guitar), Grog (bass, vocals) and Ashley (drums) will also be releasing a 7 inch single on Dental Records in February. You'd be a jerk to miss out.

PEACH

Peach will sap your juices with their rhythm'n'power that is neatly sliced up by Simon on gtr & vox, Ben on gtr, Justin on bass & backing vox, and Rob on drums. 'Burn' is a demo version of the title track of their second single.

Their stunning debut single, 'Don't Make Me Your God' was recorded under the psychedelic influences of a tour of Los Angeles. The third single, 'Spasm' would only fit onto the essential 7 inch vinyl experience. All three singles are available on Mad Minute Records, distributed by Backs/RTM/Pinnacle.



Once again, I can't thank the bands enough for their efforts that have made this flexi happen. Thanks also to Rhythm King Publishing for allowing me to use the Peach track.

Who said that?
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