

NEW RECORD BY

Big Muff

issue 5 50p

RELEASED 22ND JULY -

YOU ARE

BABES IN TOYLAND

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Headcleaner

The Senseless Things

Milk

All

Antenna

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Heavenly



flexi

Action Swingers

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PLUS live in NEW YORK:

God Is My Co-Pilot, Velocity Girl, Best Kissers In The World, Holy Rollers, Moonshake and Th' Faith Healers

Welcome to America. A shit place with some great music. No-one commented on the opening line of issue 4. I guess you agreed, or no-one reads this shit.

Welcome to the fanzine that named itself after a Mudhoney album two years after it happened when everyone else caught on four years later.

There's no quotes pulled out of perspective in this issue - I forgot to do them, and besides, it's only a little one. Plus I haven't read it yet.

I'm sorry if you wanted addresses or phone numbers. If you need them you can always ask me and I'll see what I can do.

The address:

Neil Boyd
PO Box 2714
London
NW6 2HS
England

There are still some back issues available. Those not listed have completely sold out.

Big Muff 4 60p + A4 SAE
Action Swingers, Blake Babies, Dharma Bums, Our American Cousins, Sunshot, Wedding Present, Young Fresh Fellows and ZuZu's Petals

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Finally, before I dive in, I'm going to do

A MASSIVE THANK YOU LIST.

These are the people you've got to blame for the encouragement to keep me going on this long. This was going to be the last issue, but I've already got ideas for the next one so I guess it'll happen.

Firstly to Gary at Wiiiija for being enthusiastic and impulsive at the first mention of the idea of attaching a bit of floppy plastic to the back of Big Muff, and for his time and effort in seeing it through. Also of course to Ned and his Swingers, and The Loveblobs for allowing me to dangle a microphone under their noses. There will be a Loveblobs interview in issue 6. Thanks too to all the crew at the Sausage Machine at the White Horse for letting me in with Sean's DAT machine, and just generally for running such a great venue. And to Sean of Wat Tyler and Vinyl Solution and Rigger Bugger and whatever else for the loan of the DAT machine and stuff.

Next has to be Charlie and new recruit Joolz at Real Time Promotions for the biggest and best pile of the best records. How come you get all the good groups?

While we're on the subject of PR companies, thanks to Karen, Chris and Brian at Wayward, Anton, Gini, Paddy, and Esther at Bad Moon, Rik and everyone at TLF, Sally and Caffy at

Hall or Nothing, Adrian and Tony at PROD, Jayne at Excess Press, and Caron at Rock Hard.

And on a similar vein, more thank you's to the following people at record companies.

Paul and Richard at Too Pure, Roger at Eve, Matt and Clare at Sarah, Miles at Food, Colleen and Tony at 4AD, Jim at UFO, Abbo, Linda and Jacqui at Big Cat, Alan at Imaginary, Sean and Rob at Vinyl Solution, Johnny at One Little Indian, Jim at Mad Minute, Rupert and Chris at Chocolate Narcotic, and Gary at Wiiiija.

And to the all-important promoters at the essential London venues.

Neil at Butterfly Evolution at the Bull & Gate, Chris and Allie at the Pop Club at the Bull & Gate, Simon at Creation 2010 at the Bull & Gate, everyone at the Sausage Machine at the White Horse, Roger at the Falcon, Jo at the Dome, Rupert and Chris at Chocolate Productions at the Union Tavern, Dave for the memory of Deptford Fountain, and no-one at anything to do with Mean Fiddler.

Thank you too to the journo types for encouragement.

Colin and Richard at Waaaaaah!, Mick Mercer at the Bull & Gate (joke), Tina Submerge, Karen Ablaze, Mark at Food Lust And Guitars (and other exploits), Trish Jaega for battling for and against Siren, Joel Amaretto at !Hype, Andy Peart, Angela Lewis, Ian Watson, Simon Williams and Steve Lamacq.

Then there's the bands who play a small part in this fiasco.

Th' Faith Healers, Heavenly, Polly Popinjay, Alex Taylor for making my first ever interview so easy and living up to expectations, Petra and Graham Charlotte, Bleach, The Fat Tulips, The Bedflowers, Stereolab, and Huggy Nation.

Miscellaneous businesses with the right spirit.

Juma for being the best and cheapest printers, Nick at Rhythm Records in Cambridge for selling for quality above profit, Channel 5 for doing the BM3 tape so well, and Drayton Press for screening the pictures in BM4 and 5.

Finally I want to say hello to the people who I can't go anywhere without bumping into.

Stuart, Mickey, Sunny and Sam, Rupert, Chris, Sonia, Steve, Monica and Ania, Puppet and Jane, Gary, Tina, Mark hair-fetish, East London Mark, Stella, Rozzie, Fuzz, Tim and La, Miles, James, Mick, Startin Andle, Dave, Jim, Colin, and Kevyn who only bought this to see if his name's in it.

And leading neatly onto the next page, thanks to the following people who were so nice in America.

Paul, Richard and Jenny at Too Pure, Christina at CMJ, Lisa and Vicky at AutoTonic, Jim of Velocity Girl, Matthew T Kaplan and Our American Cousins, Joel at SpinArt, and Jake at Elektra.

No list is ever complete.

back page question:

Should I stay or should I go now?

America

God, I need a holiday. This is after the College Music Journal Music Marathon. I thought it was going to be one. Yah! It was really. I shared a plane out to New York with Th' Faith Healers (and Neds and Eugenius and probably more), and Virgin Atlantic's free drinks policy was very nearly the downfall of Ben Healer, but once he'd managed to retrieve all the luggage he'd left behind we were ready to go out and drink some more. Jetlag? Extra drinking time more like!

It was an early morning because Th' Faith Healers had an 8 hour journey to Williamsburg, Virginia (which confused one poor soul who went looking for them in Williamsburg, Brooklyn). I hung around New York and just happened to be with Paul Cox (of Too Pure) when he popped in to visit Jake at Elektra Records (Th' Faith Healers' label in the States). Jake probably didn't know who I was so gave me a pile of records just in case I was someone important. I hope he doesn't think they're wasted.

Bleach's 'Killing Time' is kind of what I expected. It starts off badly but there are still some good songs in there.

Lucinda Williams is great, not-quite-country background music. Luna2's 'Lunapark' isn't far off the same thing, but more along the lines of REM and someone I can't quite put my finger on - American Music Club? Buffalo Tom? No.

I can't believe I even listened to the Happy Mondays 'Yes Please' CD, although it made Inspiral Carpets 'Revenge Of The Goldfish' sound good. If you ever thought "The Manchester scene" was crap you were probably thinking of Bez and co, but in fact the Inspirals have twisted their way above that to blend into non-generic pop. I expect you've heard the singles and thought "that's good" until you realised who it was.

If you like The Sugarcubes and you like remixes then you'll like 'It's-It'. A contract filler that sheds new light on old material.

Another early morning to go to Washington to catch up with Th' Faith Healers. The first band I see in America is Jane Pow. All the way from Southampton. They weren't too hot, but the PA was a heap of shit. The 15 Minute Club is a bar in the office district of Washington. Moonshake weren't too happy about the PA either and Margaret stormed off yelling something about a broken guitar string and the monitors sounding like a Hoover. The rest of the band carried on with the bass version of 'City Poison' as the drums bounced around like they were made of rubber. You know the way the bands always imagine everything is much worse than it is? This is still one of their best new songs, and I wasn't too distracted. Margaret comes back with a brave smile and a Spinal Tap joke and jumps into 'Beautiful Pigeon' like there's no tomorrow, which there may not be because we've got to get back to NY by 3pm and it took 6 hours to get here. Maybe we'll stay. But there's Th' Faith Healers to watch yet, and they blast through their usual set to the astoundment of the eager crowd. By this time the expensive, weak beer is taking effect. Don't forget they don't finish at 11 O'clock here. It's probably midnight now, and The Dentists are playing out as we leave. Another English band that the Americans are lapping up. A common trend as I later discover.

Jim, the drummer with Velocity Girl, very kindly offers me a place on his sofa for the night, but first there's pizza to be had. We go to some kind of beat cafe where various Washington bands seem to hang out. I enlighten one of Nation Of Ulysses about Huggy Bear and he leaves happily indifferent.

After a diner breakfast it's back to NYC. I register for the CMJ Music Marathon and pick up a big brown bag with loads of



goodies in it. Loads of magazines, most of which I flipped through at the airport on the way home and then left behind, and a load of CDs and tapes from major labels, which I kept. A huge thanks to Christina at CMJ for letting me have all this stuff (when all I wanted was the pass). Anything I can do for you...

'Burning Leaves - The Third Fall Of DGC' is a compilation of some of the well-known and lesser known DGC bands. Sonic Youth and The Sundays share a CD with Cell and The Candy Skins (surely not the C86 band?). Warrior Soul sound pretty cool. DGC's most famous sons are also on here.

Warner Brothers' offering demonstrates that major labels are kind of okay over here. The cover blurb tells you not to dismiss it as "major label detritus", which I probably would if it was from most majors in England. 'Trademark Of Quality' shows the good taste that Warners have in signing bands, hence negating the need for the warning. It's got 18 exclusive tracks from bands like Mudhoney, Babes In Toyland, Poster Children, The Muffs sounding like The Fastbacks, Flaming Lips rattling through a great fuzzy noise, Gallon Drunk, REM, Sister Double Happiness, Medicine, and some that I skipped.

'No Safe Haven' is a CD compilation from Radioactive which kicks off with the Breeders/Pixie-ish sounds of Lulabox and then goes into some Brit stuff - A House, Fatima Mansions ranting on about the state of England, and Cooler Than Jesus. And The Ramones are on it.

'Music That's Larger Than Life' is CD compilation from Chameleon Records (something to do with Warners). This stuff is more familiar, starting with Bleach and Whipped Cream, but there is also some other stuff like Sonia Dada who sound incredibly like Yello going into Aerosmith, and Ethyl Meatplow who sound very much like Young Gods or Ministry meets Moonshake. Lucinda Williams, Smashing Orange and Bel Canto are here too.

'Just Listen' is another CD compilation, this time from PolyGram. It starts with a dub mix kinda thing about Bush's "evolution of opinion", which is quite funny. The rest is varying degrees of crap rave/rap/Thousand Yard Stare.

Moonshake



CMJ have their own compilation in there too and it's a double CD. Volume 44 of 'Certain Damage' has a total of 36 tracks by 33 bands (for some reason there's four by Boo Radleys.

I guess someone likes them). Th' Faith Healers get a song on there and the sleeve notes compare them favourably to Sonic Youth. I guess this is the idiot's guide to radio programming. There's a lot more rap on here. Spice 1 has a very violent reality rap, followed by the melodic sounds of Groove Garden. Race Against The Machine continue the theme in a metal vein. If this is American "alternative" I can see why Americans like British stuff. Luckily we don't get most of this - it would certainly dilute the feeling that anything American is good. Working on the conspiracy theory, it's quite worrying that major labels are buying this rap/metal trash into college radio. Of course I'm not really worried because it's America and they can do what the fuck they like. Besides, I'm sure there are enough DJs who don't fall for the major label crap, possibly most of them. Come to think of it, maybe that's why the independent 7 inch has lived on so strongly in America - it's the real alternative to the major labels.

Continuing with 'Certain Damage', there's plenty of Soul II Soul / De La Soul, smooth-type stuff around like Digable Planets for example.

Disc 2 starts with Screaming Trees sounding like The Cult. Arson Garden are a bit out of place with their soaring pop rush of female vocal over twingling guitars. Ghost Of An American Airman slaughter 'Teenage Kicks', proving that anyone can cover that song and make it sound okay.

'The Grape Prophet' CD by LS Underground seems to jump between everything from metal to funk to pop. It seems to be a concept album, the concept being some orange pickers going north to pick grapes instead, and the orchard owner goes to find out what the allure is and to bring them back.

The Todd Levin 'Ride The Planet' sampler cassette seems to be some attempt at introducing avante-garde to the mainstream, like Diamanda Galas or Miranda Sex Garden.

And as well as those records there were a few magazines. Here are the ones I kept.

Rockpool mainly seems to be a comprehensive chart listing magazine, probably for the industry, with club and radio play and sales broken down into small pieces. They've got an encouraging slant towards indie, with 7 inch reviews and a cover feature of Th' Faith Healers.

I think Alternative Press is kinda the standard simply because of the unambiguous title, but I preferred B-Side which has more and better interview. And Cake is a new, newspaper-style, magazine that is pretty good too. All of these are \$3 and are available on import somewhere - Rough Trade probably.

Next is a day of sight-seeing. New York, or at least Manhattan, is actually quite pleasant for the most part. Nobody appears to be in a hurry or stressed out as you would imagine, it's clean, friendly and fairly cheap for some things. The buildings are huge and rather humbling, the roads are wide, but there's parks, and everything isn't covered in pigeon shit. They have this habit of not quite doing things completely though. Like they'll restore an area, but miss a bit. That works on all scales: they restored Manhattan way back, but missed Harlem; Chinatown has some lovely granite buildings, but turn the corner and there's a derelict one.

After a little sample of New York it's time to get back to the music. The Knitting Factory is a brightly lit and slightly larger, upstairs version of the White Horse, and it's the Too Pure night. It's incredibly hot because the Brit-hungry fans

can't get enough. First band on is Oren Bloedow, a CMJ recommended band. They were some kind of shit freeform jazz - apparently that's what this place is known for. Next up was Moonshake and they've got a new sampler which immediately went out of control to cause more frustration. As the local disk doctor came on and fixed it, Margaret apologised for not being at their best. Of course they were brilliant and everyone loved them, you just have to imagine how wonderful they could have been. Us in England can see them anytime, but for the people here it may have been a once in a lifetime opportunity, and it wasn't a let-down. Moonshake are masters of sarcasm, and the quote of the tour has to be "does anyone have a guitar I can borrow?"

Faced Hermans with a strong anti-sexist slant. So is 'Gender Is As Gender Does', but I'm sure I've missed the point. Write to them at PO Box 20871, Tompkins Square Station, NYNY 10009.

There was a trip to Boston the next day to see the three Too Pure bands plus Velocity Girl, but I slept through my alarm. Rock'n'roll's not for me! Instead I did a bit more sightseeing. Don't you think it's funny that the Statue Of Liberty was a gift from France and yet the French have to pay their \$6 like everyone else?! Coming back into New York from Ellis Island, looking at that famous Manhattan skyline, I'm thinking "is this beautiful?" No, I don't think it is.



Our American Cousins

I had to miss Th' Faith Healers, but I flew the flag down to Street Level to see Our American Cousins. This was a near-empty bar just down the street where people kept peering in from behind the stage to see what was going on. OAC have got a new singer who's not as good as John at some of the old songs but the ones he wrote are as good as the ones John wrote and sang. The technical problems involved Monica's dinky top unzipping, but I'm too non-sexist to mention that.

Back to The Knitting Factory where Stereolab are playing to a slightly thinned out crowd. Maybe it was the heat, or maybe there was something else on, or maybe everyone really came to see Moonshake. Anyway, it was too hot for me so I hung around for God Is My Co-Pilot. They are a kind of shambly feminist punky band that make Huggy Bear look like cheap imitators. They were great fun too, but less emphatic about that than Huggy tend to be. It's very late and my eyes are barely open.

I bought a couple of God Is My Co-Pilot singles though. They had three singles and a CD with about 50 tracks on it. I went for the two coloured singles. 'On A Wing & A Prayer' is the older of the two and sounds a bit little Chumbawamba or Dog



God Is My Co-Pilot

Next day is a big Amphetamine Reptile night at The Ritz. A big place the size of T+C with a PA that's a 2 up 2 down version of the B+G speakers on total overdrive. It seems to be a trend here to overpower a small set of speakers rather than getting an adequate PA. So I watch Hammerhead wondering where the rest of the speakers are, drinking my \$4 small bottle of Bud which is so cold I've got icicles on the roof of my mouth. So as expected the support band killed most Brit headline bands with their grunge noise. The legendary Australian metallers Cosmic Psychos then came along to show the way it's always been done. Everyone seems to have a "fuck parental advice" sticker either on their person or stuck to their home someplace. Good one SST! The grotesque Dwarves-copiers Cows are not particularly good but are quite entertaining, and they seem to be popular for it. I could have stayed for Melvins, Surgery and Helmet, but I'm told Best Kissers In The World are worth seeing. It's 10.30, but in NY it's not late yet. The subway is still safe.

Down at Tilt I can't quite place BKITW - somewhere between MTV pop and indie guitar/metal. I go upstairs where Shudder To Think are playing, and come back down again. A man walks around with a dustpan and brush sweeping imaginary litter off the floor of the half-converted warehouse. There's a bit of a freshers ball atmosphere among the convergent college music types. None of the clubs I've been to seem to have anything like thick doors between the band and the street. I guess there's no such thing as noise pollution in America.

After a while Daisy Chainsaw come on upstairs and Flop come on downstairs. While most people go and watch the anarchic punk of DC, a select few revelled in the Beatlesy tunes of Flop. The singer/guitarist has an apt Fastbacks T-shirt. The second guitarist has a Pop Defect T-shirt which I happened to notice in Times Square this afternoon - it's a distortion of Word Perfect, the word processor, and the name of a band. I did take pictures but I lost my camera on the way home from this gig. About halfway through the set they seem to be doing The Kinks' 'Is She Really Going Out With Him' a little too often so I go upstairs. Head-gear is big here, but Katie Chainsaw's head is covered in lipstick where her hair used to be. The whole house rocks when they do 'Love Your Money' which is quite good considering most of them are wearing CMJ passes. As people wander downstairs at the end I hear talk of it being the best show ever. I'm starting to drop off again when Holy Rollers from Washington take up position downstairs. I'm not really paying attention, but they may well have been the best band tonight. If Seattle is the birthplace of everything grunge then Wash DC is the home of all good indie guitar pop. This is what?, the 8th band, and I'm going home before the next two. The bands are more intensely packed here than Cult In The Park. The last band on isn't the main band. If there's a band that people will stay for, like Helmet back at The Ritz, they go on last, otherwise the last band is like a TOTP payout. Yawn.

Most of the clubs are in East Village, which is to Manhattan what Camden is to North London, so it's easy to club hop without losing much time, which is what I did the next night.

First up I went to see Arson Garden at The Lion's Den. Unfortunately I was stranded on the other side of the Halloween parade, which is where lots of Americans get very excited for a couple of hours, rather like the New York City marathon a few days later, where 26,000 people from all over the world run for 26 and a bit miles while lots of Americans stand on the

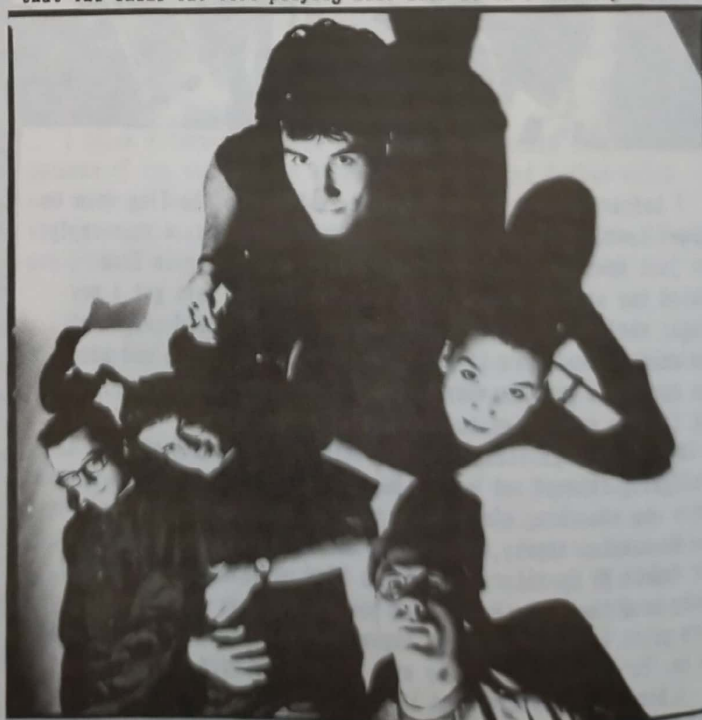
sidelines and get very excited for 2 or 3 hours. Love 'em or hate 'em, you've got to hate them really. Mainstream America.

When I get to the place I find it is shared with a rugby club - yes they have that here too. Luckily Arson Garden come on and save the day with their light jumpy angry jangly pop girlie songs. The bassist's strap is too short so immediate negative points, but the singer's got a nice velvet dress on which looks like it needs a wash. I wonder who's idea the band is? The singer looks like she wants to be Madonna and the band look like they want to be Dire Straits. This is a lazy way to watch bands - sat down with your drinks brought to you by a leggy blonde, and the stage on a TV in the corner, not that I ever sit down at gigs. There are lots of quiet muso-type things going on with the guitars below the singer's pirouetting voice.

So then it's off to the Continental Divide to see Monstherland. A fight seems to be breaking out at the front but it could just be the kids letting the Halloween spirit go to their heads, sending A&R men's beer flying as they dance recklessly to the lively guitar pop power with big time potential. The single is out now on Serial Killer Records at PO Box 2347, Birmingham, England, B23 6QS, or write to them at 30 Laurel Drive, Brookfield CT 06804, USA. They'll be over here clammering for your attention at the feet of Family Cat this year, possibly.

I leave that place as some ex-New York Dolls bands turns up, and go to CBGB's to see Velocity Girl. CBGB's is not as I expected it to be. I thought it would be like the Marquee, instead it's like a smaller version of The Manchester International before they pulled it down (just before!) and it wasn't designed to be full. Velocity Girl make a brilliant noise that beat MBV on tunes by a mile although not on volume. They left me wordless, but believe me you will love them if they ever come over here. They've just signed to Sub Pop so I guess a single will be forthcoming. You will buy it.

After that cosmic experience, the word on the street was that The Shams who were playing next door at CB's Gallery were



Velocity Girl

worth seeing. CB's Gallery was worth seeing. The walls were covered in framed one-off artistic posters advertising various well-known bands, with ludicrous prices stuck to them. They were good, but who's going to pay \$30 for a poster of Green Magnet School? The Shams are acoustic cowgirl harmonies that sent me heading back into CBGB's where Magnapop were supposed to be on, but Verve seemed to be there instead. I don't imagine they were that much different to Arson Garden. Time to go.

Matthew who manages Monsterland and Our American Cousins also writes a fanzine called Share The Modern World With Me. It is mostly reviews which worship anything jangly and Heavenly-like, and there are interviews with Senseless Things, TFC, Courtney Pine, Fat Tulips and Strawberry Story. There's also a flexi by Tropical Fish Invasion which is pretty good as flexis go. \$2.50 plus postage from Matthew T Kaplan, 70 Surrey Lane, Tenafly, NJ 07670, USA.

Matthew also manages All About Chad, an all-nonsense, silly pop band, along the lines of Young Fresh Fellows, although the first song is described as "a novelty song commonly used to start the listener off on the wrong track", but the Fellows are less novelty on record. Write to the address above with a few quid and ask for a demo and an explanation.

A friend of Matthew's is Joel, who I already know from the 'One Last Kiss' compilation which I bought when Small Factory supported Heavenly over here earlier this year. This CD is the first of an intended long stream of indie pop, and featured such amazing, but possibly unknown, bands like Whorl, Swirl, Swirlies, Suddenly Tammy!, Magnetic Fields and Velocity Girl. This is one of many essential US compilation CDs, the others being 'Throw' and 'Kill Rock Stars'. You can probably buy all of these in Rough Trade, or send £20 or so to Joel Morowitz at SpinArt Records, 1001 5th Avenue, 14th Floor, New York, NY 10028, USA. He's also got money burning a hole in his pocket to release 7 inch singles, so send demos and you may get a US release.

Not only did Joel put me up for the night, but he also pitched a load of cool tapes at me as I left.

A tape of the last Swirlies single which has three tracks sounding somewhere near 1988 MBV, ie spacey boy/girl vocals floating over fuzzy phasey guitars.

The Fresh Kills demo is fairly uninspiring but well-built 3 1/2 minute pop songs. They slow the pace down for a couple of songs and the girl takes over some melancholic singing. I can just see the couples swaying across their candle-lit table in a downtown bar. Aaaahhhh.

The Deardarkhead 'Spiral Down And Vibrate' demo is very nicely presented in an attempt to gloss over the contents. Imagine a guitar version of The Human League.

Hassan Chop! is a pretty misleading name if the songs on their 'And Grumbly For All' demo are anything to go by. They've got three guitars which seem to be somewhere between country, rock and sbhh! jazz. Kinda like Lone Justice mellowed down to meet The Haywains

'Joy!' is Summer Sampler from Studio Red in Philly PA. First up is a couple of tracks from Chupa who have the guitar of Smashing Pumpkins and the voice of Bikini Kill, maybe. And then it's into singer/songwriter Mary Lorson trying to keep a guitar wanker at bay. I lost track after that. Flying Nuns are also on here, and I've also got a whole tape of their do-do-do-do-do pop songs.

Finally there's a C60 of Noise Museum playing at being the worst Sarah reject ever and then putting the tape recorder in the next room.

I also gained an East River Pipe 7 inch from somewhere called 'My Life Is Wrong' on Hell Gate Records. A shining example of someone recording a record in their apartment and pressing it up themselves. They say Pavement started this way. The production is good, the songs are good, and basically it's alright. Send for a copy from PO Box 6053, Astoria, NY 11106, USA.

And of course I couldn't leave the country without buying a few 7 inches.

The Pooh Sticks attracted me with their picture disc of 'Tonight' on Sympathy For The Record Industry. The A-side is slow drum-machine smoocher, and the two tracks on the B-side are the more familiar yelled everyday sex type of song. I think this is quite old.

Also on Sympathy was a typical pop-guitar-girl single by White Flag on lovely pink/purple vinyl called 'Don't Give It Away'. Just think of The Love Dolls who I advised you of in issue 3, or Calamity Jane. On the B-side is the Blondie/Shangri-Las song 'Out In The Streets', roughened up more than either of those two disaster versions could manage. White Flag share singer Kim and bassist Ronnie with...

The Muffs shouldn't really be any secret because 'I Need You', a turquoise 7 inch, is on Sub Pop. Coarse guitars and hoarse vocals that could easily have influenced the supremely godlike Courtney Love. Needless to say then that I love this to death. Why couldn't The Emotionals have done the hard stuff instead of the wimpy cop-out they went for, and they were almost close.

There were tons of obscure singles by totally unheard of bands which maybe I should have grabbed a fistfull of, but at \$3 or \$4 a piece I didn't. I did get a rather dull record by Pinky on Harriet Records though, and a peculiar concoction by The Popsicle Melts which defies description. The latter proving that bedroom pop is still living on in some way-out places and it doesn't have to be the dreary drudgery that passes for teenage angst over here. Send for a catalog from Eerie Materials, PO Box 14592, Richmond, VA 23221, USA.

And so that was it. Four hectic days of the CMJ Music Marathon and an unrepresentative shot of America. I don't know how the bands manage to emerge from this strange new world.





Headcleaner

To get away from the bustle of everyday life, where do you go to record your album in tranquil surroundings? North Wales maybe? Deepest Somerset? I hear Florida's nice in August.

"We stayed with some friends of mine down in south London," Martin dead-pans. Well it cracked me up. Y'see there's a bit of a thing going in North London, has been for some time now. From the tiny enclave of the Camden Falcon and its surrounding alleys have burst a glut of intertwined bands. Silverfish, Rockingbirds, Hair & Skin Trading Co., Th' Faith Healers, Sun Carriage, to name but a handful.

Martin, who would probably still be roadieing for Silverfish had he not become Headcleaner's singer/guitarist, explains the magnetism of the unassuming watering-hole.

"It's a good place to meet musicians. It's a total scene in there, just because there's a lot of musicians there, not because of the clique or scene. The same as the White Horse and then further down the line the Bull & Gate, they're all venues that are big enough and small enough for anybody who's starting out. It's really important to play in a place where there's actually going to be people there."

It worked for Erick, who went from classical to techno in France to a job at the Falcon whilst auditioning as a drummer. The third Head is Guinness-drinker Pid on bass. Although they have moved up from playing the Falcon, it is still their spiritual home.

So perhaps it's not so funny after all that they chose south London as their ideal getaway. The other side of the river might as well be the other side of the pond. I hate to bring the subject up, but isn't this scene of, dare I say, like-sounding bands, similar to the Seattle story we're so familiar with? Do the bands all copy each other?

"We share ideas," smirks Erick, "and help each other, but there's nobody copying each other."

"It's so wide from Rockingbirds to Silverfish, it's this wide," Martin demonstrates, knocking a candle onto the sawdust.

"I suppose they get lumped together but individually they're all totally different. You can't say The Melvins sound like Nirvana," suggests Pid debatably. If you like both bands they are clearly distinct, but if you can't tell Bullet Lavalta from Buffalo Tom it's easy to just label them all 'American guitar bands'.

Eve Records is Camden's own miniature Sub Pop, with Headcleaner mimicking Afghan Whigs' rise to the top as God Machine left because they signed to a major label and Milk split up because they didn't.

"Every week there's a new American band over," Pid continues. "Quite often these bands aren't particularly big in America, but they've been going for a while, so they'll come over and they'll be good because they've been playing for a few years."

"I think we're in there," nods Martin. "I think we can compete."

"For me the whole thing isn't a competition," Pid remonstrates as Martin slaps himself on the wrists. "I'm not in it to score points, I just want to play gigs and make records." Would you like to go to America?

"Does a bear shit in the woods?" Martin states unequivocally. I think we cleared that one up.

What the Americans haven't got is Bingo, Headcleaner's one-man circus. You may have seen him on stage with Silverfish: he was the bouncer dressed up like a spaghetti Western bandit assisting the divers off the stage. His latest trick involves strapping sheets of metal to his chest, arms and legs, and attacking them with wild abandon with an electric circular sander, creating a spectacular riot of sparks. Don't try this at home kids! Amazingly, this chaotic display of exuberance is in perfect time with the music.

"The guy just follows every drum beat, every little tweak of guitar," says Erick. "He knows all our songs by heart. I've got a video someone did and it's really dark and Bingo had this massive curly blondish wig, and far away the only thing you can see following the rhythm is that wig."

And so to the music. Which side of the metal fence is it? Pid is the only one who fondles a liking of heavy metal.

"I don't like stuff like Saxon and Judas Priest, I like stuff like Prong, Motorhead, Slayer. Metal as opposed to rock."

"I'm sure people who listen to us very carefully can see where we come from music-wise," Erick admits, "so they can pick up that metal feeling in our music because Pid likes it, but if someone calls us a metal band I'll just send them home."

"Headcleaner is fusion of Gun Club, Cramps, Motorhead, Led Zeppelin, Ministry and Big Black," he decides, but then throws in a little anarchy, "and Nancy Sinatra."

Heavenly

Rob gives me a scrap of paper. It has 'steatorrhoea' written on it.

"Cathy couldn't come because she's studying for her medical finals, but she thought this was a good word to use in an interview. It's a condition whereby your poo is full of lard."

Rob is the nonchalant bassist with cool indie icons, Heavenly. Cathy is the latest addition to the Heavenly family, adding backing vocals and some plink plink, naff keyboards.

"I beg your pardon!" Pete is the smartly dressed member of the band. "People didn't say that to Mozart did they! I suppose if naff means not atmospheric crap then yes. They're not there to 'fill out the sound', which is what the general purpose of keyboards in rock seems to be." Pete is a fan of The Beatles and 60's Doo-Wop groups, and he's got a very nice, red semi-acoustic Gretsch. Amelia is the singer and she's got a matching guitar.

"Pete's got a Telecaster upstairs which I write songs on, but I can't stand up with it!"

Amelia is only liddle, and she's ill. In the background, Loyd Grossman dips his fingers in some gourmet food, and Amelia can't bear to watch. Pete wanted the cricket anyway.

"I think Mr Javed put on a bit too much hairspray today."

Amelia's brother, Mathew, is also studying for exams, in Edinburgh. He's the drummer and has just got a girlfriend, so is rather reluctant to come down for things like rehearsals. The rest of them are keeping their fingers crossed he'll turn up for the tour. Pete and Amelia have been a item for some time, and Cathy joined Heavenly when she started seeing Rob. Perhaps Mathew's girlfriend would like to join in the fun.

"We could do with another guitarist so I can stalk around the stage like a real rock chick," says Amelia, letting slip her secret fantasy.

They gained an extra member for the new mini-album too. 'C is the Heavenly option' on side two of 'Le Jardin De Heavenly' features the deeply baritone voice of Calvin, singer with Beat Happening and guru of Olympia, Wash.'s K Records. It's an indie duet to match any you've heard up to now where the two of them try to solve each other's boyfriend/girlfriend worries problem-page style. The Pet Shop Boys have got nothing on this.

"It had to be a girl-boy duet and none of the boys we know sound like proper boys," Amelia says, justifying the contrast between her soft, fluffy voice and Calvin's booming vocal tones.

"Your boyfriend's got no fashion sense", he bleats.

"Should I tell him to go to Next?", she responds.

"It's like a questionnaire in 'Just Seventeen'," says Rob, showing a suspicious knowledge of teenage girl's magazines. "You can choose A, B or C, and C is the one we go for."

"It is true that rock lyrics are one of the lowest and most dispicable art-forms there has ever been in the history of western civilisation," Pete decides. "And while ours aren't great literature, they're nothing to be embarrassed about."

On their recent US holiday, Heavenly managed to sneak in a few dates, including one at Maxwell's, New Jersey, where they got fed a huge American diner meal.

"It's not surprising there are so many lethargic rock bands in America," Rob postulates. "I felt like an entire lethargic rock band myself. I felt like the whole of Tad after that meal."

"Indie fans in England are all very liddle," continues Amelia. "They're thin basically, whereas they're all the same height in America but they're somewhat large."

Although this is a more adventurous album than 'Heavenly vs Satan', the first album, it took less time to record, but they "spent a lot more time talking about it," according to Rob, "which is the Heavenly disease."

The talking even extended to corny marketing ploys.

"Cathy was on the verge of getting us a major seed deal," Rob elaborates. "We were going to give out free packets of seeds with the LP and she'd managed to contact Mr Fothergill who was on the point of giving us lots of seeds."

So whilst you may not be able to plant your own 'Le Jardin De Heavenly' in your window box, you can at least add a smashing taste of paradise to your aural life.

The Scum Pups

"I bet you're going to say we're the most cynical band on the planet," Midge shrugs. Well I would have a point. Here we have a band who openly confess to being a metal band and yet denounce all the symbols of that stylistic catacomb.

The album, 'Babykill', which skimmed the lower reaches of the indie chart in March, ended with a doomed death metal dirge, 'Satan Wears Blue Stratos'. It was a joke, but favoured in some quarters over the poppy overtones which lightened the preceding tracks.

"It was a rip out of kids who wear cut-off denim jackets with all the patches. They're totally into the music but they miss the point half the time.

"Every now and then we'll stick in a monster cliché, but change it slightly, and people take it seriously. Some gigs we play I want to kill half the audience for being so stupid."

Is it strange then that they should choose to make friends by attacking 'Drive Blind' with a ferocity that leaves Ride shuffling back to the common-room? The audience laughs with them at this sassy outcast, but it's just another twist in the Scum Pups tale. Or maybe they're laughing at the glitter shirts which hint at the glam seventies look of New York Dolls or T Rex. Not that anyone at this table has heard T Rex: the closest reference point they could hang on to is Urge Overkill.

'Drive Blind' hides behind three home-grown songs on the 'Shudder' EP which represents a maturity from being in a band for something to do into three people with nothing else to do.

"I didn't go to college because I had to promote that LP," says Midge, solemnly. "And when we did those gigs I was thinking 'what am I doing? I've got to take this more seriously,' so I started thinking a lot more about the songs, and the EP is the result of that."

'Shudder' will be the best single released between Reading and Christmas. Make it a part of your life.

Side one is a monstrous love-lorn fight to the death between 'Brood' and the title track, and following the Ride demolition on side two is 'Spit Out The Pips'.

"That's about people who are really chummy with you and think they know you because of your music but they don't know you at all. I have a certain group of friends, who I call my friends and there's a lot of people that I know, I just know them."

Scum Pups are great people to know, either by being chummy with Midge and his eternal storytelling, or by flipping out to the overwhelming power of the music.

Whichever way you look at it, Scum Pups have put their grubby mark on the map.

Ed Kuepper

Do you get milk with this?, I ask as I lift the lid on my Rombouts coffee.

"You didn't," Ed grins with a wry smile.

As I return with two little pots of cream he is battling to defeat the wrapper of the complimentary coffee biscuit, which he eventually leaves opened and uneaten.

I am in this luxuriant Bayswater oasis to find out what makes Ed Kuepper keep ticking through the gradual change from 'punk before punk happened' up to the current atmospheric theme.

As well as bearing a physical resemblance to Mark E Smith, Ed shares his off-hand humour, flat singing style, and longevity. But whereas Smith has stayed roughly in the same ballpark, Kuepper has shifted his arena from raw energy to finely sculptured imagery.

1992 saw the release of four (count 'em!) albums from Ed - two solo and two as The Aints. The two distinct paths allow him the opportunity to explore different avenues. The Aints more closely follows the previous guitar led route, whereas the solo albums make greater use of ambience, with the help of a little brass. Neither emphasis is afraid to let the songs build up to ten minutes if that's what's required.

"It's also a good reason for putting out more than one or two records a year," he adds, as if the primary objective was quantity. But there's not a single unnecessary moment in those two and a half hours plus.



"A lot of writing that I do I think could work really well in soundtracks and I'm finding, especially in the last year or so, there's been quite a lot of stuff that's been used in different sort of films. A lot of surfing movies which is not something you're going to get tons of over here."

Of course 'A Good Soundtrack' wasn't intended that way.

"That's more a comment on one's life soundtrack. I sort of wrote it for my son. It's not a cautionary tale or anything, it's meant to be encouraging. I guess it's just a very paternal, loving song.

"The Aints stuff is pretty full-on. It's hard to stop the stuff. With an Aints recording session, once we start playing it's hard to keep it in check, it sort of develops a momentum of it's own."

The records also have a life of their own after you've played them. Come back a couple of days later and new detail seems to have been added. The more you listen the more you hear. Listen once and you hear a good album, listen a few times and you've got a deep layered intense set of songs.

Contradictory to the way a lot of bands operate, the mainstay band member throughout the recent lives has been the drummer.

"When The Yard Goes On Forever split up in 1989 I recorded an acoustic duo album with the drummer from The Yard, name is Mark Dawson. That really started a new period of my career. I sort of count that as record one really. The 80s and the 70s, they're there but I'm not caught up in that period of time. I've made six records in this decade. While undoubtedly there's some continuity, these last six records are very distinctly different, possibly more cohesive than the ones we did earlier."

Ed spent the latter half of the 70s in The Saints, the first half of the 80s in The Laughing Clowns, and the second half in The Yard Goes On Forever. The Saints carried on without him, but he reclaimed some of the material and some of the name when he formed The Aints.

"I've been annoyed at the way The Saints have been presented in the last fifteen odd years," he explains. "I think it's a really good name, and sure it's open to interpretation. It has an element of humour about it. It wasn't born out of bitterness or anything like that, but it is making a bit of a point but not anything that I'm grandstanding about because I don't feel precious enough about it to do it."

Ed was fairly dismissive about the name Aints, half-heartedly trying to fob me off with some excuse about being at the front of the record racks. I had loads of questions stashed away about punk and The Saints' role in it which I left unasked. Ed would have been quite happy to be drawn on that subject, but he's aware of the dangers of living off the past, and he doesn't need it. He's not clinging to the past, as would be implied if I dwelt on the subject now. Here's his potted history of how The Saints evolved into The Aints though.

"When The Saints started, when we were still called Kid Gallahad & The Eternals, we were a three piece band with vocal, piano and electric guitar. We didn't have bass and we didn't have drums, so the guitar had to be everything, it had to be bass, it had to be lead, it had to be rhythm, and the piano was something else, so I sort of stuck with that for most of my playing life. I developed that more with 'Today Wonder' where I did the same sort of thing acoustically. 'Today Wonder' is really quite spare, and yet it's quite full at the same time. That record has lot of space, it has a very big sound about it. When I completed that record it allowed me to see that I should really use this approach again electrically and that's what I did with The Aints."

The band that he brought on the recent UK jaunt was called The New Imperialists, which has another hint of appropriate mocking humour.

"We did this really big show in Hobart, the capital of Tasmania, with Billy Bragg and my band didn't have a name at the time so I had to give them something. He had something more politically correct for his band. After The Yard Goes On Forever, The New Imperialists has a nice ring to it."

With an album title like 'Autocannibalism' it's clear the humour has infiltrated the music too, but not necessarily in the obvious places.

"Songs like 'You Can't Please Everybody' or 'It's Still Nowhere' are amongst the most serious songs I've ever written, but not serious to the point where I'm being silly about it. On the other hand a song like 'Linda And Abilene' is just out-and-out 60s Z-grade porn, but that song is presented in a serious context because it has a very powerful beat, and it verges on avante-garde jazz and things, but the lyrics are totally ridiculous. There is obviously an element of humour about a band that calls itself the Aints and does what we do."

Henry Rollins

Henry Rollins. What a laugh, eh? I wasn't going to go to Reading on Saturday at all because Huggy Bear were playing the White Horse that night, but Mr RCA phoned me up and asked if I'd like to go to a Rollins fanzine press conference. Quick check of the running order showed that this means I would be able to see Therapy?, a couple of other bands and still have time to get to Huggy. Naturally it occurred to me to scrounge in on the guest list and skip the Rollins bit, but as I bumbled around looking for the list, the tour manager happened along and slapped a pass on me and dragged me off to meet the man. I was led into an area where Henry was sitting at one end on a small chair psyching himself up and a crowd of biz people were huddled at the other end talking in hushed voices. Mr RCA hustled me out to the press tent in the main backstage area where I met my other conference attendees. Or should I say attendee. Yep, only one other person of the promised 30 or so had turned up, and guess what? He had no particular interest in being there either. He was someone who's name I forget from the Falkirk based Buzz Factory fanzine. I had a couple of questions I scribbled down the previous night at the Marquee, and he was still thinking of his, in the absence of any knowledgeable participants. A few minutes later Henry turned up and after the infamous handshake we shuffled into the press tent. When he's in your face he's not so 'in yer face', he's just a freaky little guy who does weights and thinks his body is a temple. So as Therapy? are starting up in the background here is the shortest and worst informed interview you'll ever read, with lots of 'your turn' glances.

Buzz:Any plans to play Scotland at all?

Henry:Yeah. I played there twice this year.

Buzz:Any plans to further that?

Henry:Yeah, I thought it was all right.

Me:Is your image in the press how you really are?

Henry:I don't know. I don't really read it much.

Me:They make you out as some kind of gentle hard man.

Henry:None of that really matters apart from the music that we play I reckon, so I don't know how to answer that kind of shit. Why should it make any difference what a bunch of guys who sit on their asses for a living do?

Buzz:Do you think these kind of festivals are valid at all?

Henry:Sure, why not?

Buzz:Would you have done Lollapalooza?

Henry:I already did it once.

Buzz:Would you have done it again?

Henry:We wanted to do go out and do our own tour this year.

Buzz:You've got a new book out. What's the title of that?

Henry:It's called 'See A Grown Man Cry'.

Buzz:When is it actually out?

Henry:It came out last week in America.

Buzz:What was the motivation behind that?

Henry:Just writing every once in a while, I make a book.

Buzz:Just feelings that you feel had to come out?

Henry:Yep.

Me:What made you choose the kind of music you do? It's kind of funky but it's almost heavy metal.

Henry:No choice. It's just what happens.

Me:Is that what the band does or what you really wanted anyway?

Henry:We write the stuff together and that's just what happens.

Me:What kind of music do you listen to?

Henry:A lot of different kinds of music, mostly jazz.

Me:Is there a jazz influence in your music?

Henry:I don't know. You tell me. When we make music we're not thinking about our record collection like a lot of bands. We just make music. Very unorthodox.

Buzz:There's no structure thought out beforehand? It's just what actually comes out when you play?

Henry:Yep. Less thought the better I think.

Buzz:The last album dealt with the loss of your friend and that was obviously a big motivation behind that album but what's the motivation behind your earlier albums?

Henry:No, the album was finished several months before my friend died. Lyrically I just write about what's on my mind. No big deal. Whatever I'm feeling. It's just the blues.

Me>Last night you were slagging off the music papers, all the covers they had with Nirvana on. Did you realise that Kurt Cobain was stood at the front when you said that?

Henry:Do I realise that these people might be in the crowd? Sure

Me:Do you care what other people think? Other bands.

Henry:No. Must be pretty obvious.

Me:Do you get on with other bands?

Henry:I got nothing against any band. I wasn't cutting any bands down. The critics didn't like The Beastie Boys. Shows me how fucked up critics are, it's a great band.

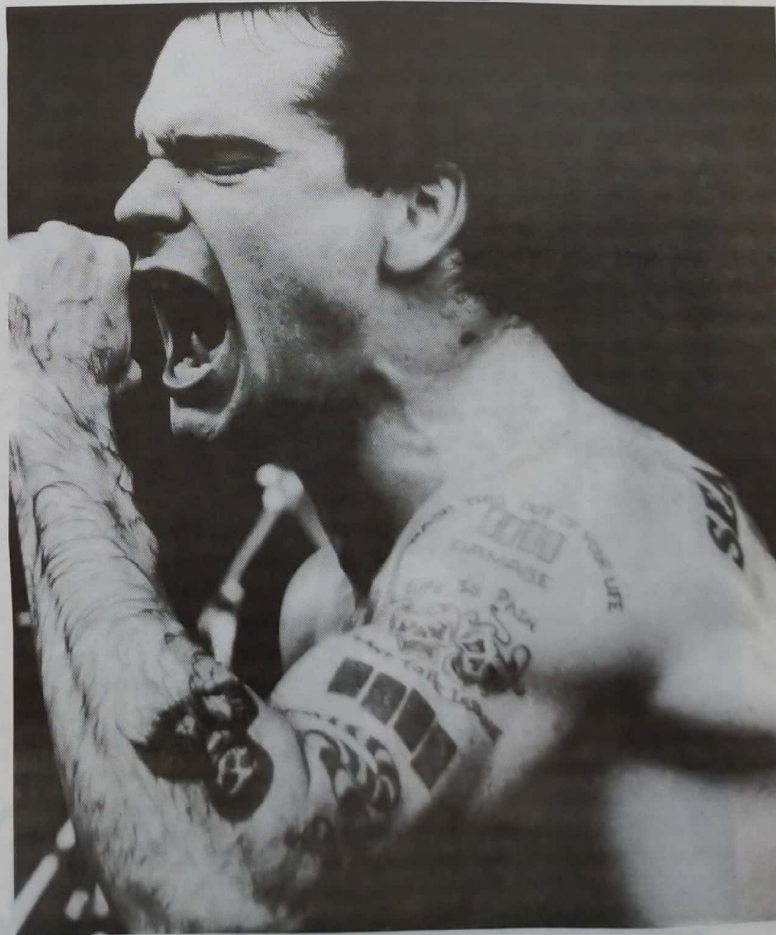
Buzz:Any bands really worth checking out on the bill today?

Henry:Public Enemy.

Buzz:Have you heard the new stuff?

Henry:I buy every record they do.

Um, that's it. Thank you and goodbye. At least I didn't miss much of Therapy?



Milk

I'd always had Milk on my list of bands to interview, so when I heard they were splitting up I decided to take my last opportunity, instead of letting them fade silently like most bands do. Taking the news rather more devastatingly was Monica, who went all wobbly and fell about sobbing all over Roger when he told her, so I've let her stir Milk for their final thoughts.

There are so many ways I could start this, so many things I could say. But let me start by saying this, there is absolutely no way I could write about Milk without being subjective or biased in any way. Milk have closed the gates to an entity of sheer originality, phenomenal talent, excellence, emotion and beauty. This is the last ever Milk interview and after this Milk will play their last ever gig.

So being the interviewer from an entranced fan's point of view, I aggregate all the things I ever wanted to ask the most meaningful band in my life. I am ridiculously nervous. The fact that this is my first interview, and that the people I am interviewing are three of the few that I admire and respect the most in all existence, is too much for my pounding heart and twisting tongue. But anyway, starting from the very beginning.

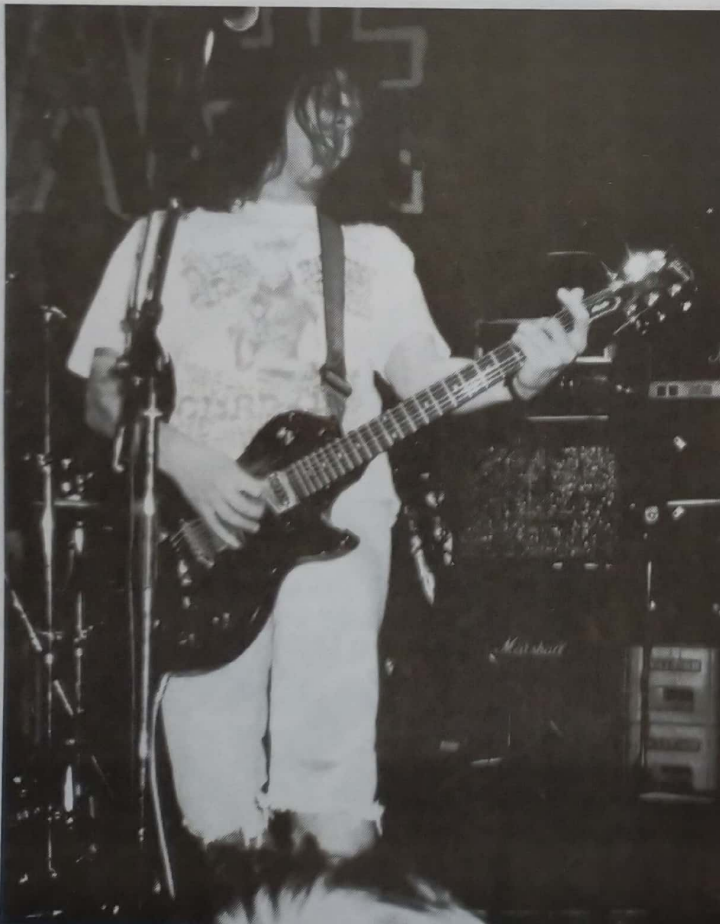
Who was the founder member?

Duncan: "They're not here at the moment."

Vic: "Well if you read the Rockingbirds interview, the guy who said that he was the founder member."

Duncan: "Sad but true."

Vic: "Sad but true, yeah. A few years ago we were playing completely different music, basically country rock."



Did you feel as if you were part of the Camden scene that was supposed to be around when you started?

Vic: "In a funny kind of way, there wasn't any scene. There's always bands around Camden. There was Sun Carriage and The Faith Healers, and then when we came along somebody sitting in an office somewhere twiddling their fingers just decided there was going to be a scene and that was it."

Duncan: "Nothing changes though, there have always been bands coming out of Camden, there always will be."

But they suddenly became successful, like Silverfish.
Duncan: "We didn't? We always try to answer this question rationally but really we should tell people to shut up and go away. The rational answer is that there are three or four pubs where bands play and they're all in the Camden area."

Do you have any strong views on religion? Are you bitterly sarcastic or extremely honest?

Vic: "Most people I know are anti-Christianity. Normally it's because their parents say, 'Christianity, take it or leave it. It's up to you'. My parents brought me up to be a staunch atheist. When I was younger I was really anti-Christianity, but I'm not any more. I don't really care."

Is there an underlying reason for some of the titles you use - Girth, Milk, Tag, Birthquake, Tantrum, Perambulator - do you have a fascination with infancy?

Duncan: "The main reason for that was that Chin was doing all these pictures of genitalia and bodily functions and it went on from there."

If it was physically possible would you like to give birth?

Vic Sticks: "If I could dispose of it again. I'm not sure."

Vic: "I haven't got the hips for it!"

Vic Sticks: "But you've got the tits."

Duncan: "Yeah, I think I would."

Do you regard each other as being sensitive?

Vic: "I do bruise easily."

Do you feel as if you've missed out on any success?

Vic: "We've done alright. We were never playing mainstream music so you can't expect a lot. A lot of it is just pure luck. It depends what people are in positions of power at the time."

What has being in Milk meant to you?

Duncan: "Bad complexion, being overweight."

Vic: "Bags under the eyes."

Vic Sticks: "Insufficient money. Tinatus."

And so Milk play their last ever gig. And oh, they shine like the star that always twinkles and shines the brightest in the sky. And there seems to be a final, beautiful, effort and sparkle emanating from within, creating an electricity in the air that sends shivers up my spine. Tonight Milk play with magic. Vic's vocals filling the entire room, one minute cooing a lullaby, the next in a mad rage. The bass, drums and guitar all intertwine, running round each other so gracefully and working off each other. And all three, along with Vic's dynamic, powerful and affecting vocals, create, well... a huge, enormous 'Tantrum'. 'Wings' positively shimmers, 'Pyrosulphate' boils to almost explosion level. They finish with 'Treasure', and as the song and the band come to an end I walk away, totally moved, permanently impressed, yet heartbroken. The most inspiring and talented band have just played the most moving gig I have ever experienced, and it's their last. For a band who have received none of the acclaim they deserve, they make an unforgettable, tremendous noise. For those who have missed out on Milk, you haven't lived.



Kurt 'n' Courtney

'n' Frances Bean

Pavement



In America pavement is the big slabs of concrete or whatever that they lay roads with when they don't have time to lay a proper tar road. In England a pavement is a pedestrian walkway on the side of the road. In America they don't have pubs but in England I'm in the upstairs conference room of a pub between Rough Trade shop where Pavement have just played and Heavenly records where a grinning ex-soundman is sitting on a horse. Yep, it's a Pavement fanzine press conference which starts with the obvious question, why did you decide to do a fanzine press conference?

"We were pressed for time here on your small island," one of them explains.

"Okay, you're next," shouts Gary, the flamboyant drummer, pointing an accusing finger at an unsuspecting girl in the middle of the front row. She immediately spouts a spiel about not having time to think of any questions. In fact, only about two people did have any questions and most of the 40 or so fanzine writers are just here for the free beer.

"Karen Ablaze," shouts someone else, knowing he'll get a response. Kind of! She asks Gary if he has any problem with slugs or greenfly.

"What are those two things?," he responds. Karen helpfully explains and it turns out that Gary has a major problem with them, but prefers to use pellets rather than powder. Isn't that cruel?, Karen asks.

"Do you think it's cruel for the human race to be put out of existence by those little wierd things?"

The rest of the band then start to ask Gary to tell his rat story and his lobster story, and best of all was the watermelon story. Gary is a big fan of vegetable stage props. The others were a bit wary of the lobster idea, but he assured them he was going to keep them in the cooler and give them to his mother, so they let him buy them. You think the lobsters stayed in the fridge? Silly boy.

Excuse me if I keep on about Gary, but he's the only one whose name I know, and besides, he was the funniest. Even when one of the others was answering a serious question he gets his toothbrush out and starts cleaning his teeth, which totally detracts from whatever was being said.

They admit to being surprised at the huge reaction they've been getting from their first tour of Europe. Someone asked

about the reaction in Germany and one of the band droned on about how people say the Germans are stiff but in fact they just follow the English press but don't believe it and want to see for themselves before they decide. Guess who interrupted the flow with "why did they take the wall down? I wanted to see it."

Someone asks about the fanzine network in America. Gary says "the fanzines I read are Playboy and Penthouse."

"He's got a huge collection of fanzines!"

They describe the kind of crowd they've been getting, think of 600 as a good turnout in New York, or 150 as good in Iowa City on a Monday night. They decide that maybe they're not the kind of band that you can watch packed in like sardines, as was the case the night before this in Windsor, comparing it to Maxwell's, New Jersey, where if it's too crowded "you can only have so much of a good time. You've got to wait for 15 minutes at the bar and you miss three songs."

They put out the first single themselves, then Dan from Drag City records heard it at a party and said he was starting a label and he wanted Pavement to be on it.

"He also signed Royal Trux, that's why we thought maybe they're kinda legit because the first Royal Trux album is really great, and we thought if they're doing that Royal Trux album it's probably good enough for us."

Someone asks if they all played on 'Slanted & Enchanted'.

"Just the three of us."

So who played the bass?

"There's no bass, weren't you listening! It sounds like bass, it's a guitar that's tuned down and played through a bass amp."

There was then a question about major labels which solicited an interesting perspective.

"We don't know much about it because we've never talked to any bands that are on major labels. We don't know if it's good or bad really. Normally if I hear a record that's come out on a major label I'm always sceptical like 'oh, this is going to be shit'. But it seems like there are good records coming out on major labels too. We tend to try and not concentrate on that side of music. People ask us these questions. I think it's really boring when you read an article about a band and all the questions are about being on a major label and they have to spend an hour saying 'it doesn't matter, we got full control and it's just more distribution'. Unfortunately it does have to come into the equation because people like the underdog no matter what. I always like losers and I've always thought of our band as being the underdog. When you get in that situation you're no longer the underdog. That's why we made our shirts in real messy colours."

"We're the Luton FC of rock."

Naturally the tone returns to jollity after some serious pondering about the meaning of life. This press conference was done in July when Pavement were in the UK for the first time and it was still all a game. I wonder how things are now. Probably still the same. The last word has to go to Gary. Even after the tape had run out he was still entertaining everyone with his fantastic tales. I remember the one about being a shopaholic and if the only shop open in a town was a woman's clothing shop then he would buy women's clothing. But the last words on my tape were a fair conclusion.

"Most of the bands that I see that we play with just stand there and that's not a lot of fun. I think life needs more action."

Senseless Things

Thirty fanzine writers scoff stale sandwiches in a stifling hot Sony basement. And it's not just the temperature that's stifled, because despite being fans who ask for autographs afterwards, none of them have got any questions. And you think I have? So the meaningless drivel starts off with the chart potential of a single called 'Homophobic Asshole'. The assembled panel think they haven't got much chance with Radio One, but Top Of The Pops have said they can go on and do what they like. So TOTP rules The Chart Show which has got so many stupid rules because it's kids TV that they said no way. You've only got to watch The Chart Show to realise they only play the crap songs.

"I'm not going to mention any bands," Cass says limply.

Go on, urges the madding crowd.

"Okay, Supermarioland!"

That says things to me, admits a straight-faced media studies project girl.

"Really!" says an amazed Cass. "Plink plink fizz means nothing."

So having done the chart thing, talk turns to small venues versus big venues and festivals.

"Festivals are the best big gigs because they lay on the best hospitality," offers Mark, much to the shock of the teeming populous who think they're in it purely for the satisfaction of thrilling muddy pop kids.

"We're not talking about the people who've got stuff we did originally, we're talking about people stealing our master tapes and bootlegging them and selling them. People who bought the original material and want to sell it on at a profit are quite welcome to do so - that's not a problem. Even people who want to tape our gigs and sell them, I think they should do because I always liked getting tapes of bands that I went to see."

"With Way Cool when we were on them we were doing all the stuff really cheap and then after we left there was a lot of shit going down - putting stuff out for £20 a CD. The good thing about Decoy is they've kept the stuff available and Decoy have been alright about it. They're just happy to see money coming in without trying to re-package it or all that rubbish that goes on. If anyone's thinking of starting a band, Way Cool is not the label to be on."

Several hours of apathetic questioning and pregnant pauses later Cass has been lubricated by a few deft mouthfuls of red wine and is ranting on about the American national pride.

"Every single shop you go into they go 'so, how you finding it?' How are you finding what, the cheese Ritz? And they go 'no, how you finding America?' and you go 'it's alright' and they go 'don't you think it's the best place you ever been?' and we said 'shut up man and give me my Slush Puppy!'"

"As Bill Hicks would say, there's all these people going 'my Dad died for that flag' and he goes 'no he didn't, I bought this from the shop. Your Dad died for freedom and that is also the freedom to burn the flag.'"



"I don't think any of us like playing in big indoor venues. Kilburn National just seemed like a bit of a drag. I wouldn't go back there. I used to really enjoy that as a venue. We did one gig opening Snuff's last ever gig and that was one of the best gigs I've ever seen. Everyone in there was just going crazy. They were so good, and then we played there and it was just shit. We're not really a big venue band."

So it'll be ten nights at the Mean Fiddler? suggests someone near the front.

"No way! Wouldn't play there! Doubt it! That place is ropey!" comes the simultaneous reaction from all four band members.

"How does anyone get home from the Mean Fiddler?" Mark asks the inevitably burning question. "You get a night bus into Trafalgar Square and get home five hours later."

Another hot-blooded fan thinks the re-sale value of his 'Postcard CV' album might go down if new owners Sony re-release the old stuff which they've just bought from Way Cool.

"We just really want to stop people bootlegging it and selling it for £30."

What have you got against people selling the early singles?

Mark keeps the ideology sound by pointing out that they've been massively generalising.

"Generalising is the root of all prejudice. You cannot generalise about a whole country, apart from cowboys - all cowboys are fucked."

Cass is off again: "In Miles City, Montana, which isn't actually a city, it's just a fill-up station, this big cowboy gave me a load of grief for beating his wife at pool, which is a completely redundant, stupid thing to do because she was crap and I was better. I played American rules which means that when you pot the white you can pick it up and put it anywhere you want on the table and have as many goes as you want. Plus they have this rule that if you pot something by mistake then you lose automatically because that's playing 'slop'. But then again it's easy to beat them because their tables are smaller and the pockets are bigger."

Another fanzine press conference fruitfully accomplished and I can go home belching egg and cress with a head full of nothing and a handful of paper and vinyl. What could be more perfect?

All

All or nothing? All is a gameshow that always promises bigger and brighter things. As new contestants demand more and better prizes it continually exceeds it's outrageous intentions.

As well as being the name of the band, All is the carrot that this donkey is chasing after.

"All is the word in the English language that means the most. You're always striving towards it and you're never going to get it because there's always more, but you always gotta try for all."

Bill and Karl are at the end of a phone line impressing upon me their total dedication to making All live up to their own high expectations.

"We practice six hours a night when we're not touring, and it would be boring for us if we weren't striving for all with the music, trying to bring in new things to it all the time, trying to make ourselves do things that we weren't capable of doing six months ago. We never reach a point where we say 'damn, we're too good!'"

Do you think you spend too much time with the band?

"I don't know. What's the option? That's kind of funny. We spend all of our time with the band, every single minute of our lives. We all live together, we all tour together, that's all we do. We like it. It makes you a little crazy after a while but what doesn't? Working 9 to 5 makes you crazy. If you do anything a lot, you repeatedly do the same thing, you're going to get sick of it and have problems with it but then usually they go away."

Surely this incestuous way of living dries up the inspiration for songwriting. 'Missourri 63' seems to be about being continuously on the road, and 'Hotplate' seems to be about eating in diners up and down the country.

"No, we don't really write any songs about being in a band," comes Bill's irate response. "I just wrote that about whoever cooks for me. Just usually people's moms and stuff cook for me. The biggest influence on lyrics would be our personal lives obviously. It gets to things about our girlfriends, or sitting watching TV in shock disbelief at how stupid the human race is, or seeing how your sister and her husband live and wondering how they can live that way. It's all real human basics, we're not going to sing about cosmic solutions."

Are they self explanatory?

"They're not deliberately obscure."

Unlike their alternative version of the sex'n'drugs'n'rock'n'roll lifestyle.

"We have a lot of sex and coffee and play music six hours a night."

"I don't know if we as band members have more or less sex than other people do, probably about the same. I suppose every night, about 11 or 12 at night, most folks are crawling into the bed and fucking someone and we're not much different than they are. Just because we're in a band doesn't make us more degenerate or less degenerate than the human race in general."

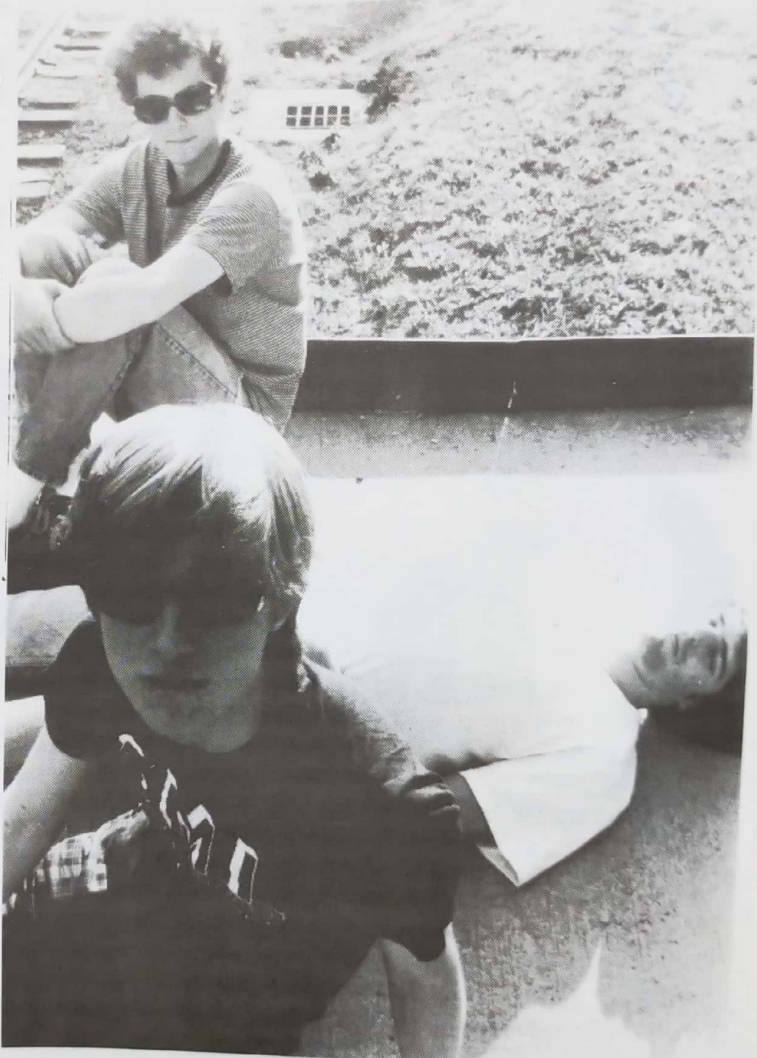
And coffee as their choice of drug...

"It's the caffeine we're after. The medium is coffee over here for the real high concentration. You guys do tea, right? When I'm in England I drink tea because your tea's pretty high octane."

Take a wiz through 'Percolator' to fuel your craving, but remember - one shot of All is never enough.

Antenna

You remember The Blake Babies. They had that incredible 'Rosy Jack World' EP last year. Well anyway, they split in two in rather too amicable circumstances around the same time as that EP came out over here. Juliana Hatfield stayed in Boston and made a solo album with guest appearances from the likes of Evan Dando from The Lemonheads and Todd Philips from Bullet Lavalta, and John Strohm sloped off to nearby Bloomington, along with Jacob and Freda, to form Antenna and record the 'Sway' album. With a seperation like that it becomes apparent who was pulling the punches. I was kinda surprised. Being the superficial kinda guy I am the singing counts for a lot, but Juliana's 'Hey Babe' was like a pie with the filling removed. Meanwhile 'Sway' was an orchard of invention, stuffed with all the ingredients that were concentrated into 'Rosy Jack World'.



It's apparent that The Blake Babies were a straightjacket on John, although Juliana would have preferred to carry on, albeit on a path convergant on Antenna's. But John left and left Juliana floundering. They still keep in touch though. At least on a personal level.

"We're still friends," he tells me on the phone from the studio where they're recording a new album. He doesn't see any change in the way Juliana's going now.

"It's very definitely the same thing. Which is good in a way because that whole thing is very much still going on. She's still working with Gary Smith who produced Blakes Babies records and had a lot to do with the sound."

John started Antenna a year before Blake Babies officially split up, so there were inevitable similarities between 'Sway' and the Blake Babies material.

"That was my perspective at that time. That's what I was doing so there's definitely more of that on that record than there is on this one, and now I don't think in terms of that at all. And also you have to consider that a lot of the songs on that first Antenna record are songs that I wrote for the Blake Babies, and some of the songs we even did.

"When Antenna started the form that it took was just I sent a demo of my acoustic material to Mammoth and they really liked the tape and said 'why don't you do a record' and I said 'okay, great'. They gave me the money and I got a band together and I found that I really liked the band. I really enjoyed Antenna a lot more. But the band formed in the studio, the first thing we ever did was go in and make 'Sway'. We never played a gig before that, we never even played, so it's sorta wierd in that way, you can tell that when you listen to that record.

"It's hard for me to talk about that record because it was ages ago. We're working on a new one right now. It's less of a pop record. It's more linear. I still write real pop songs but our approach to it is sonically a lot wierder. The songs are more isoteric, more abstract. It's got a lot of different guitar pictures. We used a lot of wierd percussion stuff, which is good, it's not important or anything."

It seems a bit pointless harping on about 'Sway', but that's all I've got. That has a nudge towards 70s pop more than 80s/90s pop. Elvis Costello, ELO, that kind of thing.

"I like more punk rock stuff," he says. "I'm totally into 70s music, mainly Television, The Only Ones."

The 'Sleep' EP bridges the gap between 'Sway' and the new album, with a 1978 Wire cover plus another song which will be on the new album. What can you say really? I agree with what he said a couple of paragraphs ago, although I wouldn't have put it quite like that.

Reviews

The reviews seem to be getting shorter and more frivolous. Never mind. Remember, size is not important - just because a record's got a short review doesn't mean it's crap, it just means I listened to it quickly. The stars are supposed to be an accurate indication, but three minutes of indifference isn't always a good measure. The more recent stuff is first and the oldies are at the back.

RATINGS

- * Ah well
- ** Ho Hum
- *** Yeah yeah
- **** Yeah!
- ***** Wow!
- none Not graded (assume the best)

Bettie Serveert - Palomine LP (Guernica/4AD) ****

It's true: they are the cool version of PJ Harvey. Sounds better when you're not in need of noise.

Poverty Stinks - Enough Rules EP (Snap) ***

The Wannadies - Things That I Would Love To Have Undone EP (Snap) **

The Euro-noise-pop that's okay to listen to but still best avoided.

Bad Actors - Spinning demo ***

Hazel O'Connor goes rock, stepping over the ghost of The Butterflies.

Tabitha Zu - On Reality single (TLF Pagan) *****

Electro-acoustic pop-punk.

The Flesh Eaters - Sex Diary Of Mr Vampire LP (SST) **

So-so 'veteran LA' rockers.

Pat Smear - So You Fell In Love With A Musician LP (SST) *

Ditto but more obnoxious.

Chainsaw Kittens - High In High School single (Mammoth) *****

The glam masters. Also from LA. Sounding just as good without Butch Vig.

Revolution Come & Gone - compilation LP (Sub Pop) *****

The best of a good thing.

Afternoon Delight (Love Songs From Sub Pop) compilation LP (Sub Pop) ***

If you haven't heard Smashing Pumpkin's 'La Dolly Vita' then you're missing an important piece of history. Aside from that it seems a little unnecessary to group these tracks in this way - it's not a love compilation of the K-Tel type and it's not what Sub Pop is known for, or wants to be known for.

Tumbleweed - Fish Out Of Water double single (Waterfront) ***

Both of them are orange. Where's the adventure in that? Something akin to The Alan Parson's Project or Crazy Arthur Brown, and I don't know what the fuck I'm on about.

Polyphemus - Great Village Trip EP (Placebo) ***

Quite good if you like fast psychedelia.

Whipping Boy - Submarine LP (Liquid) ****

I can't find this now, but I remember it was really good.

Bowlfish - Dogberry single (20:20) *****

Their first single jumps up and gives you a cheeky nip. I'd forgotten how good this is, and the next one's out soon, if not already.

Beat Happening - You Turn Me On LP (Sub Pop) *****

Of course it's brilliant. Don't let it being on Sub Pop put you off.

Vertigo - Ventroliquist LP (Amphetamine Reptile) *****

I did have a completely OTT review I did for Siren full of meaningless flamboyant phrases and crap puns about dizzy heights and guitar puppets. None of it had much to do with saying that this is just a great album that gets better just as you think you've heard the best. The album Hair & Skin should have made.

Weird Sex LP (Ugly Music) ***

More perverted psychopaths with guitars. There must be something in the water in York that makes bands mix trashy thrash with telephone sex lines. Widely available, or send £6 to Graeme Martin, 106 Vale Royal House, Newport Court, London WC2H 7QA.

Lovehappy - Change Yr Ways demo *****

There was a lovely letter with this which I've lost now but it said their main influences were The Charlottes and Huggy Bear. I hate it when bands do things like that because they're setting themselves up for a defiant rejection. Lovehappy are amazing and will be on lots of compilation tapes and flexis because lots of indie kids will send £2 to Sean, 41 Hitchin Road, Upper Caldecote, Biggleswade, Beds, SG18 9BU.

Lunachicks - Binge & Purge LP (Safe House) ***

This came out months ago and you've heard nothing about it. That's because it's exactly the same as the first one which came out years ago.

Dillon Fence - Rosemary LP (Mammoth) *****

Dillon Fence - Daylight EP (Mammoth) ***

If everyone's debut LP was this good life would be a lot more pleasant. There wouldn't be all those fumbling efforts that they have to apologise for years later. They keep getting compared to Nirvana which is no novelty these days, and they're not musically all that similar, but they have that 'access all areas' kind of pop feel even though they're basically just another guitar band. Oh, I'm sorry, they're American - I know everyone wants to believe English bands can be this good too. The EP is three tracks off the LP plus Blondie's 'Dreaming' and a song that sounds like Peter Gabriel.

Naked Truth - Read Between The Lines EP (Sony) **

Funk-jazz along the lines of Peakadelic (that's Chilli Peppers to you) or Bad Brains maybe.

Presents Of Mind - Dog single (Moodswing) ****

Something else I inherited from my NY jaunt. Four gals from East Village, who claim not to be interested in reaching the rest of America above 14th Street. When people said Come were a raw expression of painful memories using a compulsive guitar-scraping soundtrack I thought this is what they meant. Send \$3 or so plus postage to 40 Harrison St #14D, New York, NY 10013, USA.

Buffalo Tom - LP (Beggars Banquet) ***

'Sunflower Suit' made it's debut appearance when this LP was released first time round. It's since been on most compilations featuring the band. This is the first album released for the first time on CD, with two extra tracks.

Rain International Compilation Volume 2 *****

Lots more healthy young men from all over Europe remembering where punk started. Israelvis from Germany sound like Slayer, The Subversives from Wales sound like The Levellers, and the Mega City 4 sound crops up a few times. The bands are generally up to the standard without copying as closely as I might have indicated. Send £1.50 + 18p/24p stamp to Julian Smyth, 10 Maes y Dre, Ruthin, Clwyd, LL15 1DB, N.Wales. Foreign customers can send something good in exchange.

Carter USM - The Impossible Dream EP (Chrysalis) ***

Why do I think I've heard this before. I'm sure I haven't. Maybe it's because it's a cover version or maybe they all sound the same. Is it from a musical? (ho ho ho!) I don't dislike Carter, and "they're nice people".

Sunshot - Spacetribe Audition (Deva) *****

'Playtime' is a guitar-dance version of the earlier single. The other two tracks are out-and-out club mixes with the guitar toned down. It doesn't say who remixed these so I guess they did it themselves, thus retaining their own perspective rather than let some trigger-happy prat come and ruin it. 'Loose My Grip' was just practising for 'Big Mistake'. The only mistake is the extra 'o' in 'loose'. It really is good. I was trying to whizz through these records and I've listened to it twice.

Popinjays - Flying Down To Mono Valley LP (One Little Indian) ***

Would you rather your pop records came from airheads like Vanessa Paradis, techno twats like Dr Spin, artificial soul like Boyz 2 Men, or nice young ladies with an indie bias and a happy up-beat melody? So why are they so beleaguered? Smile and make the world a happier place.

Sprinkler - More Boy, Less Friend (Sub Pop) **

Signing to Sub Pop is a trend that needs to slow down.

Codeine - Barely Real EP (Sub Pop) ***

The slowest band on Sub Pop, and they're three times better than most slow bands.

Mercury Rev - Yerself Is Steam/Lego My Ego LPs (Chrysalis) *

What? They've got loads of 'Yr' left over? I'm not surprised. It sounds like a Pink Floyd concept album, and after that bee thing it's obvious they're on another planet. The second one is more left-overs.

Scissormen - Nitwit? mini-LP (Eve) ****

Maybe it's the old "not as good as they are live" or maybe I haven't got it loud enough. And are they forgiven for sacking the old bass-player yet?

Monster Zero - Wreck LP (Eve) ****

Crazy Alice - Wheel LP (Eve) ****

Monster Zero/Crazy Alice - Black Eye/Problem Flower single (Eve) ****

A couple of groups from MA that are worthy of having their records released by Eve. Both produced by Tim O'Heir who did the Six Finger Satellite EP which you should have by now, and these two share that eclectic excitement. If you don't believe me go and buy the single as a taster. Quick - it's yellow and it's limited.

Supersuckers - The Smoke Of Hell LP (Sub Pop) ****

At times sounding like Mudhoney, but faster.

Headcleanser - Au Fou LP (Eve) *****

Thank god for that. I've been putting off listening to this in case they lost it in the studio but of course I needn't have worried.

Billy Childish - The Original Chatham Jack LP (Sub Pop) ****
Probably the inspiration behind the Mark Arm blues album.

Passing Clouds - Creation's Happy Reel single (Bite Back) ****
Affecting and unaffected.

Earwig - Under My Skin I Am Laughing LP (LaDiDa) ***
Earwig - Every Day Shines single (LaDiDa) ***

In another world there'll be no feedback, no shouting, no chattering. Monoland will replace Therapy? and Earwig will replace Mudhoney. We'll all be quietly contended, mellow and relaxed. It won't last long though.

Rubicon - What Starts, Ends LP (Beggars Banquet) *
Last time XFM was on they kept playing The Mission's dance record advert. This time round they kept playing a Rubicon advert. I can't say I noticed much of a difference. ex-Neff.

Buffalo Tom - Mineral single (Beggars Banquet) ***
Some kind of promo thing. I suppose it's some of the good stuff off the last couple of albums. The best bits are pretty good.

Neds Atomic Dustbin - Are You Normal LP (Furtive/Sony) *
Damn, a tape. I'll just listen to the first track. I don't know why I bothered, I know what Neds are like.

Whipped Cream - Observatory Crest single (Snap) *****
This is AWESOME. You can't possibly live without it.

Eggstone - In Lemon Grove EP (Snap) *
Naff soul-pop a la TOTP. Housemartins.

Freefalling - My Star single (Mad Minute) **
Caught out by the demise of shoegazing. Undecided.

Peach - Don't Make Me Your God EP (Mad Minute) ****
A nifty side-step from those around it.

Mint 400 - Gas single (Mad Minute/Food) *
Go and join Jacob's Mouse.

Strangelove - Visionary single (Sermon/Food) **
Radio friendly.

Bark Psychosis - Scum single (Third Stone) *
"Free-form", "avante-garde", boring.

Come - Eleven Eleven LP (Placebo) **
Come - Fast Piss Blues single (Placebo) **
No, not really.

China Drum - More Tales From The Bunker demo ***
More Megas meets Leatherface. That's what they say, and it sounds about right.

Neurosis - Souls At Zero LP (Alternative Tentacles) *
What a bloody racket. Like Hair & Skin gone wrong. Another easy reference.

Submerge 5 fanzine

Going the way of Ablaze, which in theory is not a good thing, but this is the best one so far I think. Nice, to-the-point interviews with Sundial, Spitfire, Buffalo Tom, Megas, Midway Still, Eugenius when they were still Captain America, Young Fresh Fellows and Cat's Paw. Comes with a flexi with Young Fresh Fellows, Cat's Paw and Jacob's fucking Mouse. Who are Cat's Paw? you ask. Tina Submerge's band - nothing like a bit of self-publicity! It's justified though if you like American wimpy pop. No price on the cover but I think they go for about £1.50. From Tina, 35 Lickey House, North End Road, London, W14.

Between The Lies fanzine issue 4

The editorial slags off all the bands that played the legendary Snuff/MC4/Senseless Things gig at Fulham Greyhound (y'know, the one that everyone was at even though there were only 20 people there) for selling out. Anyway it's got Th' Faith Healers nestling in amongst the usual crap (Sugar, Family Cat, Venus Beads, Sugarblast). Kind of a cross between the traditional fanzine (pics from NME, bad typing and top 10 crisp charts) and a proper magazine (waffle waffle waffle. "blah blah", says Bill). I can say what I like really because he thinks fanzines don't count for anything anyway. He's wrong. Fanzines don't count for much, but they have a point. If I slagged this shitless he would probably (and rightly) have a go at me. Most fanzines are shit though, and most of them know it but think theirs is a bit better. Why do you think it's taken me so long to write this one? Because I'm sitting here with a pile of mediocre interviews that no-one's interested in anyway, and the bands I like you won't read about. I don't care. Between The Lies - you mean the music papers are shit but people believe you? Wrong again. I'm going on a bit here, that's because I'm half-way through a tape and I'm waiting for it to finish before I write up another interview. 60p + SAE from Davey Do-nothing, 27 Brandville Road, West Drayton, Middlesex.

Daisy Chainsaw - Eleventeen LP (Deva/One Little Indian) *****

Contains both the singles, plus 'Future Free' which has resurfaced after all this time. If they'd released 'Dog With Sharper Teeth' instead of 'Pink Flower' they would have put themselves firmly in the world of TV pop shows, which is probably why they deliberately alienated themselves. They are now big in the longer-lasting 'alternative' realm, ie people who like Sugar or Suede are probably not going to like DC but people who like DC probably don't like those mainstream alternative bands. Perfect wierd punk.

Antenna - Sleep EP (Mammoth) ****

Includes 'All I Need' which could be their novelty hit given half a chance. Also a couple of cover version which I'm too uncool to know - sounds like Elvis Costello.

No Man - Ocean Song single (One Little Indian) **

Poor little One Little Indian. They've lumbered themselves with all these bands that are almost very good. No Man are not quite the saviours of the western world they are hailed as, but this is a fair Creation-esque electro-backed soul-stirring thing.

The Haywains - 4 Fresh New Cuts EP (Vinyl Japan) ***

Bristol's answer to Beat Happening, except Americans are allowed to re-live 1986, and it's kind of sad when we do it. Don't believe it.

Space Cowboys - Locked 'n Loaded LP (Our Choice/Rough Trade) ***

There's two types of Euro techno: the Dr Alban/Dr Spin obvious trash pop, and the KNFDM/Young Gods (ish) do it properly. Er... where to now? This is closer to the latter.

This Perfect Day LP (Snap) ***

Disposable pop, with the emphasis on disposable. I think they would probably disagree because the lyrics are quite detailed and upfront. They look like Spacemen 3 on the sleeve, and come to think of it the last track has some similarities. Oh, and they're Swedish.

Whipped Cream - Tune In The Century LP (Snap) *****

More of the same from Whipped Cream, but in this case that's a complement. It lacks the immediacy and solidness of the last single, leaning a bit more on some of the folkly traits of the 60s. When you consider that they're coming from the land of Leather Nun you have to applaud their optimistic outlook and their congratulatory avoidance of metal power. The accompanying booklet pictures the band showing off their exclusive brand of Whipped Cream knitwear. Warm sounds from a cold country. Track 9, 'Observatory Crest' is a compulsory soundtrack to a perfect night of music and love. I'm going to listen to it properly now, without typing at the same time.

Rein Sanction - Mariposa LP (Sub Pop) ***

It's okay.

God Machine - Ego single (Fiction) *****

If it had been anyone else they would have just looked like pretentious egotistic twats using major label dosh to prat around making experimental sounds. But they're not anyone else. They don't call themselves God Machine for nothing. Three holy epics of the kind we're used to now from the scrungy beach bums.

Smashing Pumpkins - I Am One single (Hut) ***

They can do better than this but they're not responding to the pressure. Putting your first single on your first album is one thing, but releasing it as the second single off the album is another. The B-side doesn't know when to stop, but that's fine. Great band, weird marketing.

Cudgels - God's Children LP (Bring On Bull) *****

They said it was good, but I thought they meant good relative to all that other wimpy, jangly, indie shit. There is that as well (insert your own Field Mice reference), but along with Dalek Beach Party (albeit at a slight tangent) this record marks Bring On Bull breaking out of Richard's obsessive cutesy wutesy world.

From the massive intro track through bouncy pop and watery-eyed gems, this is a big thumbs up to everyone who thought indie bands couldn't get it together in the studio. Put all your best C86ers in a box, shake them up a bit, remove the fluff from the top and the dregs from the bottom, wrap it up with silver paper and a pink ribbon, and you've got a handsome parcel of joy. That was an metaphor. What I really meant was think what it is about jangly indie shit that you don't like, throw that out, and just

imagine the ideal that was intended. Talulah Gosh had guitars and tambourines, but with a little application and a few Bikini Kill records they can be transformed into Huggy Bear. That was an analogy. This could well be seminal.

Young Gods - Gasoline Man single (Play It Again Sam) ***

I'm not really one for three mixes of the same song on one record, especially when one is a 'radio edit'. It is a pretty good song though, but not that good. Story of their life really. When I saw them at Kilburn it would have been brilliant on any other night, but as it turned out I think I would have had a better time at Throwing Muses.

Whipped Cream - Wait For A Minute single (Snap) *****

Record three from Snap and already they've got rid of the artistic styling that I thought might have been going to dog all their records. It's quite funny that a song that started out as 7½ minutes has been cut down to a 'radio edit' which is still 5 minutes long, both of which are included on the single. Fazed vocals, fuzzed guitars, dreamy, creamy, luscious, sloppy goo. It makes me go all burbley. When you wake you're still in a dream. MBV said it, Whipped Cream live it.

Hyperhead - Teenage Mind single (Devotion) *

If you know anything about U2's rave mix you'll know what this is about. Remixed by the same guy.

Walt Mink - Chowder Town single (Quigley/Caroline) *

Produced in Butch Vig's studio! Bloody hell! Look at the sleeve and see why I could go into some 'blow up' puns. Unashamed college band.

Seconds Out Round One LP (Imaginary) *****

There's few better ways of starting an album than with Leatherface in top form doing 'Not Superstitious'. The other side is The Boo Radleys who aren't too bad either. Scorpio Rising on side three took me by surprise by being umpteen times better than I remember them from donkey's years ago. Then Doctor Phibes come along and spoil the party. You might consider yourself lucky if you get the limited edition 12" single with Boo Radleys and Scorpio Rising again. Mine was number 693. I'm looking forward to number two.

Mudhoney - Piece Of Cake LP (WEA) *****

I don't really need to say anything other than this is a Mudhoney LP. The only reason it doesn't pack any surprises is because I always expected it to be this good. It's unfair to put them in the same section as all this other stuff, kinda. They make it look so easy.

Naked i demo ***

A mad busy pop band of young tearaways who've been listening to Things and Mondays and Cure and varied it a bit. Much better than Hungry i. Usual price from Fair Oak, Huntshaw, Torrington, Devon, EX38 7HD.

Juliana Hatfield - Hey Babe LP (Mammoth) **

Somewhere along the line is the single review which uses the word 'disappointing'. This has its finer points, but it's difficult to listen to. Pop music shouldn't be this much effort. Get yourself a band and maybe the same ambitions can equal 'Rosy Jack World'.

Overwhelming Colorfast - LP (Relativity/Roadrunner) **

Another AGB that has been improved by getting Butch Vig to produce.

Afghan Whigs - My World Is Empty Without You single (Sub Pop) **

I think The Supremes did it better, but a new angle sometimes works. The B-side samples the last two albums. Don't buy this, buy the album.

Poverty Stinks - Another World LP (Snap) *

Poverty Stinks - Going Going Gone EP (Snap) *

60s style pop tunes. No-one has ever ruined 'Paranoid' this much.

Eggstone - In San Diego LP (Snap) *

Eggstone - ...At Point Loma EP (Snap) *

What is this? An indie version of Wet Wet Wet or Take That. Stick it.

Ultraviolence - Vengeance EP (Safe/Food) **

Not another one. About two minutes in I started to wonder if maybe it was supposed to play at 33rpm. Not that that really changed my opinion of it. I can vaguely tell the difference between Snap or Soul II Soul and Felix or any of those morons. Quote: "this is not faceless", and they sent me a face. I hate the way this stuff is more popular than 'indie' (in it's widest generalisation). I wish I liked it less. And I bet I'm the only fanzine writer who's heard of Colin Faver.

Big Ray - Naked LP (City Slang) **

It's not that there's anything wrong with this, it just doesn't belong in my house. It's quite good if you want to listen to a singer-songwriter type thing that leans slightly towards a heavier way of life.

Throwing Muses - Red Heaven LP (4AD) *****

There's something special going on here. Anyone can tell this is more than your average run-of-the-mill pop music with iron guts. The lyrics are lucid and foggy at the same time. You could be tempted to try and understand the deeper meaning, but you would only be digging into your own mind, which may or may not be a good reason to just take them at face value. Just sing "la la la la la", and rock to the beat!

I guess it's too late to get the free live LP with this now, but it lacks the atmosphere of the Borderline show anyway, so don't be too upset. You should have been there.

Food, Lust & Guitars fanzine

The trouble with, well, to be honest, most reviews in here, is that I'm not really paying attention. Fanzines in particular - I'm not going to read a Manics article because they're shite, and I'm not going to read a Blake Babies article because I know what they've got to say. But I did read this, and the writing is enthusiastic and constructive. He knows there are a lot of people who don't like Echo & The Bunnymen, but he's still going to rave usefully about them, so you want to read it. He hates AGBs, which is fair enough - don't they all sound the same anyway? Damn, no price again. £1.50 + SAE should cover it, from 14 Woodlark Gardens, Petersfield, Hants, GU31 4RQ.

Strangelove - demo (Food) *

It's a different world on a major label (not that Food is one of course). You get a 'wage', your music has 'layers', and your demos are recorded in nice studios and get mailed out with a patronising 'zine press release'. It doesn't make it sound any better though.

Razorblade Smile - This Accurate Pain single (Chocolate Narcotic) ***

I'm sorry. I know you mean well and try hard and the songs start so well, but 30 seconds in they die on their feet. The music is well played and varied, and the singing has snatches of a tune. It's not that he can't sing, but maybe he should do so less, or quieter, or add some effects like everyone else does. Then we'll see who's laughing.

Gorgeous Space Virus - demo **

Another band that think they can inject feeling into their songs in the studio but probably just make a pretentious tuneless effect that you shirk away from at gigs.

Rain International Compilation tape ****

I dunno. I know what to expect now. I knew I was going to get loads of pretty good European bands that I'm never going to hear of anywhere else. So what? Depending on the political situation in the country of origin, it varies from punk through to hardcore. The usual £2.25 inc p&p from Julian Smyth, 10 Maes y Dre, Ruthin, Clwyd, LL15 1DB, N Wales.

James T Rao - Soundtrack Mind cassette (Root Beer Floats) *

Nevertheless - Uncles Ernie's Sailboat cassette (Root Beer Floats) *****

Musical Chairs - 1988-91 cassette (Root Beer Floats) *

Her Tears - Loop-De-Loop cassette (Root Beer Floats) **

James T is some kind of one man wimp bucket. This kind of 60s psychedelia meets Sarah wannabe is to be avoided at all costs. There's hours of the stuff. Musical Chairs is/are not much better. Her Tears are not wimps but they sound like an amateur early New Order (not the later New Order I've taken to comparing people to recently).

The Nevertheless are unaffected by this company and are a great song-centred band, well up there with Thin White Rope and American Music Club. This is an amazing thing to find hiding away on self-confessed 'bedroom pop' label. Everything about this tape is wonderful - the lyrics, the singing, every instrument, the arrangement, the production. I can't believe it's not butter! I meant to say I can't believe it's just them and a four-track. You must buy it.

\$5 each from Joe Smile, 348 Litchfield St, Thomaston, CT 06787, USA.

Parasites - Last Caress single (Shredder) ***

Parasites - En Homage Aux Beatles single (Shredder) ***

Parasites - Paramania single (Shredder) ***

First is a fast, high energy, light pop song. Second is exactly what it says it is. Third is by far the nicest colour vinyl and also owes a fair bit to those 60s mop-tops.

For a Shredder catalog, send SSAE to Shredder Records, 181 Shipley St, SF, CA 94107, USA. I suspect that these singles are less than normal price, but see what else there is, and let me know.

Our American Cousins - Memory Man single (Spontaneous Generation) ****

Madder Rose - Headshot single (Spontaneous Generation) ****

This is the Cousins single that was promised to capture the live excitement, and it has got that rush of stage adrenalin whilst retaining the studio pop power of the previous two singles. One of these days they'll record an album and it'll have the whole range everything they're good at. I'll buy it.

In a similar vein, Madder Rose is more noisy but not heavy guitar pop tunes. Side A flexes the la la muscles, while the B-side, sorry AA-side, is dreamy girlie sadness with a hint of anxious anger.

Both available for the usual import 7 inch price from Spontaneous Generation, 335 Grove Street, Box 269, Jersey City, NJ 07302, USA.

Blaster fanzine + single

If you don't want to send your money so far for American Cousins product, you can get a taste with the Blaster 7 inch, along with Young Fresh Fellows, White Town and A House. Never before have four such good bands been together on one fanzine record (modesty prevents me from mentioning Big Big 2!). The fanzine includes interviews and stuff on Drive, Shonen Knife, Redd Kross and others. It's one of those that doesn't put the price on the cover, so send as much as you think all this is worth + SAE to Blaster, c/o 3 Dove Lane, Bristol, BS2 9HP.

Chainsaw Kittens - Flipped Out In Singapore LP (Mammoth) ****

I know everyone's sick about hearing how anything American with a guitar is some kind of superhero, but there must be something in their electricity that makes things sound right. It's a lot better than the last album, but not as much better as it should be considering Butch Vig produced. I'll stick with the New York Dolls comparison though.

Action Swingers - More Fast Numbers EP (Wiiiija) ****

More songs about Ned and his unstoppable mission to bring proper rock to the attention of anyone that'll listen, except 'Courtney Love', which is about someone else's alleged manipulation of music to better herself. Don't believe a word of it.

Wat Tyler - I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles LP (Rugger Bugger) ****

You have to see the sleeve illustration to appreciate the oh-so-subtle pun in the title. Wat Tyler are a joke, and not a very funny one. So why is it then that you can watch in hysterics as they prat around a stage for 20 minutes, and still be rolling around the floor 20 minutes later singing "you should have turned right you should have turned left"? Sean's sleeve-notes include all the lyrics he could make out, and a description of what each song is about, although when describing Tuck's songs, the word 'Arsenal' starts to become a bit tedious. Available only on a CD bearing the comment 'CDs are for wankers'. The sleeve promises 54 tracks, but the technology beat them and there's only 52. I was advised to start at about 30, but if you're unfamiliar with Wat Tyler, you're better off starting at the beginning and taking small doses. I've had today's dose, and in case I don't come back to finish it, here's the address. PO Box 357, London, SE19 1AD. It costs somewhere around £4 inc p&p. That's about 7p a song. Some of them are worth almost 9p.

The Chameleons - Here Today Gone Tomorrow double LP (Imaginary) **

It seems The Chameleons were something of a legend, hence the quite reasonable sales of what appears to be an over-priced piece of leftovers. LP 1 is a couple of radio sessions and LP 2 is a live recording. Both are available seperately. It's a shame I don't like this really, because I'm sure I ought to.

Sunshot - Mental Health EP (Deva) ***

Uh oh, Sunshot in crap record shock! No, not crap exactly, but it lacks the spontaneous excitement of the first two singles. Go to see them live and they can still put that on.

Foam - Hinckley Had A Vision EP (UFO) ****

As soon as you listen to 'Effortless' on Foam's debut EP and you've decided they sound like The Bollweevils (that's another band who are surprised at the Jefferson Airplane comparisons), 'Scratched' comes along and makes you re-think your theories. All About Eve? Please no! The singer's rough but sweet, light but ferocious shout is fighting off Sugarcubes comparisons off from the south and Curve from the north. Who needs it? Luckily the title track is all the ammo they need. A voice this powerful is too great to grace a southeast London girl (Slough is just a diversion). They've been given that Sandie Shaw pop touch by Stephen Street's production. Foam can handle themselves in a fight, which is more than the Cocteau ever could.

Sun Dial - Fazer single (UFO) ***

I still wouldn't go as far as to say I like Sundial, but this is much better than the psychedelic shit they produced last time. It's enough to say that they would probably go down quite well at Camden Palace, and may well have already done so. I guess there's a secret soft spot lurking in each of us for a band that can beat Happy Mondays/Blur at their own game. Or more New Order really. I like(d) New Order. If music is the food of life, this is a deep-crust pizza with all the toppings. You'll still be belching in the morning.

Tumbleweed - Theatre Of Gnomes EP (Waterfront) ****

Hippy happy pop. More Americans displaying their amazing ability to blast out a haze of potent guitar draped in sun-bleached lazy vocals. Wallow in the fuzzy lather.

Belly - Slow Dust single (4AD) ****

If I said this sounds like a cross between Lush and Throwing Muses would you be surprised? If I said this is pretty good would you be surprised? You know what to expect and won't be disappointed.

China Drum - The Bunker Tapes demo ***

Produced by Frankie Stubbs of Leatherface and recommended by Mega City 4. That's a good balance - fast-talking gtr pop with power.

Radiohead - Creep EP (Parlophone) *

Don't swear, you're on a major. Leave that to me. Fuck off. Next.

Seaweed - Bill single (Sub Pop) *

The longest runout groove in history, but that's about as good as the record. Next.

Cerebral Corps - Perihelion single (Alias) **

Track 1: The Beatles. Track 2: 1920s barber quartet. Track 3: AC/DC maybe. Track 4: BMX Bandits. All on one honey-coloured 7 inch. Next.

Hypnolovewheel - Wow single (Alias) **

Next.

X-Tal - The Humboldt Desert single (Alias) **

Caring for the world without destroying music (cf Sting). Next.

Beastie Boys - Frozen Metal Head single (Capitol) ****

If I wasn't so cynical I could get to quite like this. I like the way it sounds as if they've sampled some pre-James Brown type obscure soul bass line. I like the way it doesn't sound highly commercial. I like the way they're not trying to cash in on the white-boy-making-black-music-so-it'll-be-a-bigger-hit thing too much like New Kids. Basically it's a shame they started out like Run DMC instead of Public Enemy.

This Perfect Day - In The Mood single (Snap) ****

The first record in Snap's bid to re-introduce the world to non-disposable pop that has caught up with the re-introduction of the guitar to big pop tunes. I think it does that okay.

Freefalling - My Star EP (Mad Minute) ***

Everyone knows it's all been said and done before, so what would be the point of mentioning that Freefalling are reminiscent of mid-80s thoughtful rhythm & hum bands like The Colourfield and A Flock Of Seagulls? None at all, because I'm sure that when you listen to this you'll hear a classy, melodic misery tune, and not a dull Icicle Works rip-off.

Cats Paw - On My Mind demo ***

Here's a band who knows what they are with no world domination pretensions - 'a shambolic garage band without knowing about C86'. They fled from their original base of Boston USA to become unloved bastard kids in London. American a little too late, jumbley a lot too late.

And here's a spooky thought. A few days before listening to this I was listening to some old 1986 Edinburgh type indie-pop records, including 'You're Not Scared' by The Vultures. I listen to this and think "what's that underlying riff they've got there?", and guess what?

Blind Mr Jones - Crazy Jazz single (Cherry Red) ***

And talking of bass lines, apparently BMJ don't sound like The Cure, but they do, if you know what I mean. I wouldn't know, but how can a band that sound like Ride also sound like The Cure? I liked Ride the first time I saw them, and BMJ have got that energy that blasts out of the guitars without the need to jump around. Now you know what I mean.

Peach - EP demo (Mad Minute) ***

It has the gtr/bass power we've all become accustomed to, but the difference here is that it sometimes pauses and sometimes doesn't let the not-dumb and not-yelled lyrics across.

Surgery - Little Debbie single (Amphetamine Reptile) **

Melvins - Night Goat single (Amphetamine Reptile) **

Hammering in the right direction with all the wrong footholds. More AGBs veering dangerously close to metal.

Afghan Whigs - Turn On The Water single (Sub Pop) ****

With a few less of those heavy chords and some light pop structure thrown in you can see a miraculous transformation into the type of AGB that set light to the world spirit. I meant compared to the two records above, not that they've suddenly become another Nirvana copier (yawn). I guess we've done the grabbing at any old American bit so it's too late to say don't bother and stick with the ones that were there before all this started.

Alice Donut - Magdalene single (Alternative Tentacles) ***

What makes me think they're from New York? Does it say so somewhere, or is it getting easier to pinpoint a sound? Action Swingers meets Lydia Lunch, but count those stars to see how close they get. Throw in some Beasties.

Swineherd - Swill EP (Elemental) **

More from the mixed school of funk punk anarchy.

Bel Canto - Shimmering Warm & Bright LP (Crammed) ***

Sylvian/Sakamoto meets Ofrah Haza. Propaganda/Hard Corps meets Dead Can Dance. A fine mix of ambient and ethereal from the icy Scandinavian regions that's destined for the bargain bins. All the more reason to look in them.

Flop - The Fall Of The Mopsqueezer LP (Frontier) ***

I love those murky red vinyl 7 inches, but a pinky red LP can be a bit much for the eye to comprehend. Another damned Seattle band, but one of the jovially enthusiastic type rather than the stupidly serious type. Produced by Kurt of Fastbacks and Young Fresh Fellows. What is this? The Monkees or Dave Clark Five?

Drop Nineteens - Delaware LP (Hut) ***

I was just thinking that some of the songs sound a wee bit like a guitar laden Blake Babies, when I read the sleeve to discover that they're from Boston. I have to say, I expected more. At times beautiful, but flimsy. I suppose 'Winona' is something of a classic, but then so was 'Real Wild Heaven' or something else by REM.

Juliana Hatfield - Everybody Loves Me But You single (Mammoth) **

And talking of which, Juliana gave up Blake Babies to pursue a rockier and poppier theme. I heard the Magnapop single before I heard this and I thought it was this. I wish it had been. Ya wimped!

Antenna - Sway LP (Mammoth) *****

Staying with the Blake Babies thing, this is John Strohm's band. They manage to combine the pop of Squeeze with the rock of Bryan Adams. Oh my God! That means it's shit! Of course it isn't, but it's too mighty to sink to menial indie. Every single song is the purest music I've heard in a long while, and reduces the throwaway phrase 'perfect pop' to dust.

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