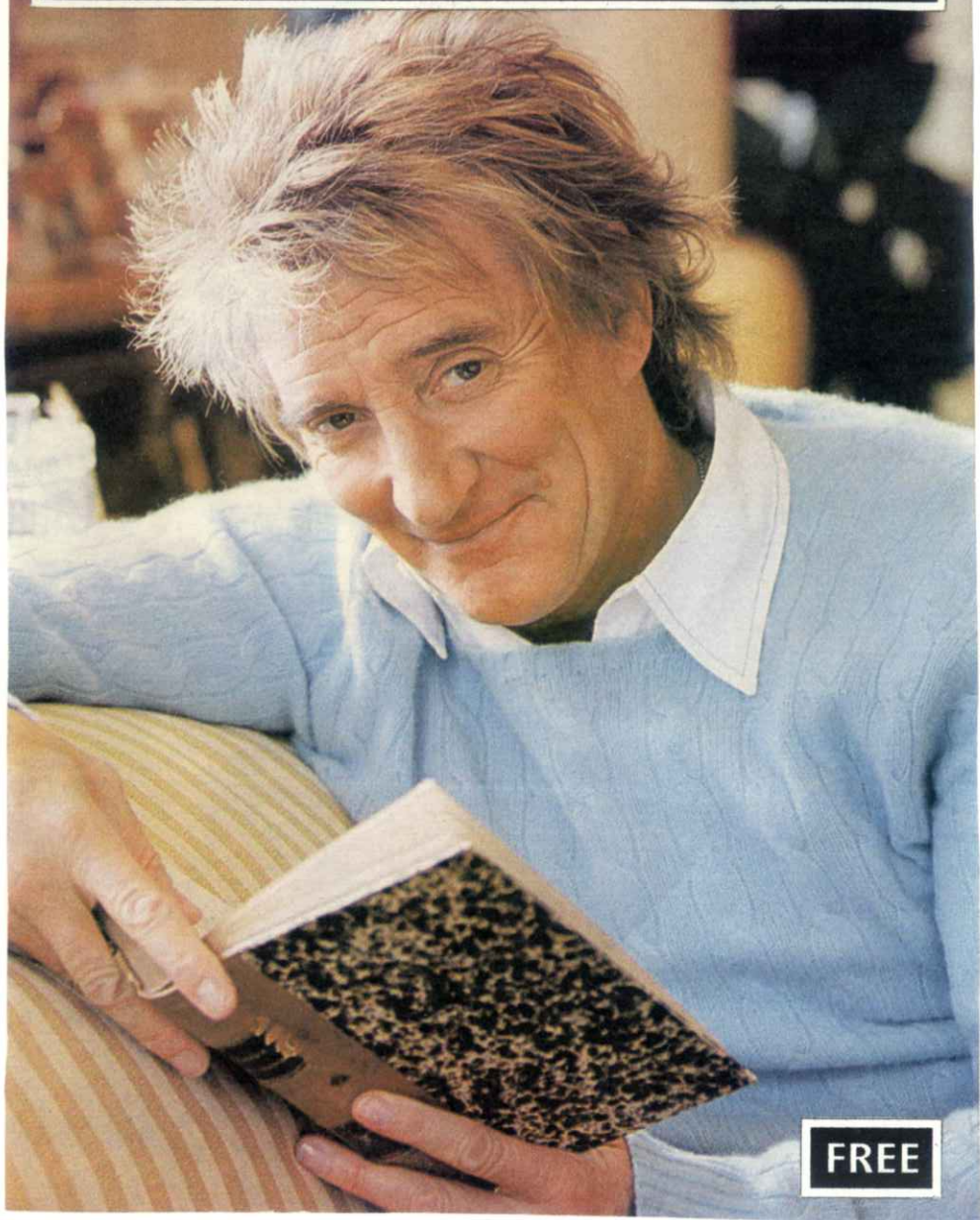


VanityProject14

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FREE

Listen With Sarah - Are You Sitting Comfortably? (WOMB).

On 'Animal Hop' there are found farm sounds, hip-hop beats, a timid miaow appearing every few bars and children's TV tuba. To follow 'Drum N' Berceuse' takes the Listen With Mother theme and, as the tin implies, underscores drum n' bass but not so as to overwhelm it's innocence. 'My Crow's Soft Sounds' are computer incidentals swept up and crushed like the already crumbed. 'Blue Parsley' is an ominous dark wood/dancing nymph/Dr. Who orchestral. This is a collection of EPs and these highlight the variant strands of Sarah Nelson's muse with ambient prog-electro ('July pt. 1'), bubbling Ozric dial-up threat ('Frogs Sing, Birds Dance'), thunderous light industry ('Om-pa-chap-pap-pa-pap') and Stevie Wonder twirling on the spot ('My Dog's Got No Nose'). Wonderfully eccentric, a la People Like Us, sampling and cutting to her quirky, cheery end. This is isolated music, but wholesome, inventive but uglybeautiful and cosy. S.

65daysofstatic, a.P.A.t.T., Mesemenie. Liverpool Barfly Loft. 25apr05.

Mesemenie are not glued down to one base but they throw out hooks in all directions. Expect one to latch on to a wider mass like avian flu. a.P.A.t.T., who are sadly less likely to garner such a span of acceptance, follow with their genius jelly-legged maniacal broadside (see opposite page). 65daysofstatic begin their set as a piercing, shining soundscape, beats developing to chop through its heart. Theirs is an agitated calm, an exhaustive, exhilarant ambience. At other times, they tiptoe the boundaries of heavy set, tight-t-shirt post-rock and hardcore punk abandon. They shrug off this intensity within their sound with a kind demeanour. At once taut, yet relaxed. S.

Super Reverb Avant Garde IS The French Word For Shit (Earsugar)

I'd say the album title clips the wing of the post-ironic as the S. Reverb calling card puts the freaky and awkward high on their list of jobs undertaken. This is a rattler; a twister; a synopsis melter; an irritator; a parasite and cleanser; a work of consideration to induce consternation; a shimmer; an opponent of basic structure; an improvisant; an intriguingling; a rascal; a tune-up; a tune down; a tune away from being day-to-day. Fair play for pushing the envelope away from the expected and mundane. S.

Marissa Nadler - Ballads of Living and Dying (Beautiful Happiness)

The vocals are cold, but spiritual. It is perhaps campfire folk for when only dying embers remain. It would seem also that Nadler would feel quite at home in a warm rustic bar, filled with smoke and little chatter. As the fingers pick the strings on 'Fifty Five Falls', the rhythm bounds quickly up and down, but the pace of the vocal schemata remains captivatingly constant. The slight echo effect lends a kind of ghostly Sioux mysticism to these death tales, suicide notes and such. The words, some of which are borrowed from Poe and Naruda, occupy a foreboding, claustrophobic woe. There have been deaths here, sure, but the souls still float around the body, swooping and dancing, turning stillness into a biting chill. For we bystanders, the memories are likely to remain vivid. S.

Emetrex - Wish Me Dead (Seriously Groovy)

There are two immediate favourites as 'Hammer In My Skull' provides a thick, swampy take on Granddaddy's twinkled eyed scuzz. The bass pulses grab the boots and clinging on while the guitars dance the seven veils. Then it flips into Kyuss-style glam rock. To follow this is 'Secret Parts', which shows up some Hefner-like Casio tenderness. Two sides to this story, the sonic adventures dense but dynamic, allowing breathing space, such as on 'Harsh Kingdom'. 'Wish Me Dead' is an LP that doesn't batter, it negotiates on the back foot, but gets what it wants. S.

The Grates - The Ouch, The Touch EP (Captains Of Industry)

From Brisbane with a message for us and it's urgent. So it would seem as they rip through with cute causticism on the opener. 'The Message' has a similar rapid-peeling and skidding guitar sound to Melt Banana, and also shares their breath-taking rhythmic stops and starts. A Riot Grrl influence is worn with pride. It is therefore surprising that 'Sukkahfish' approaches 70's blues rock while 'Wash Me' swings through more primitive blues. Taking this new model and veering back towards the energy of the first is 'Trampoline' which shows their boots were made for crushin' and that's just what they'll do. S.

Pollen - Soldier On.

Harmonious indie-rock with a touch of Muse's heightened fever, but far more restrained. Fine, confident pop music from a young band likely to affect the mainstream consciousness. S.

Countermine - Letters (BAM)

With Keane seeping so firmly into the nation's consciousness, it will not be too much of a surprise if Countermine follow suit. Anthemic piano pop-rock with the hook put on a pedestal, and strings backing things up. S.

Birdmonster - Birdmonster EP

The San Franciscan quartet may crash about but they are a deftly structured indie-rock outfit, powerful and espousing honest verve. They can do the calmer stuff with equal aplomb as 'Jaime' proves on the B. S.

Oneida - The Wedding (Rough Trade).

Upon the original idea for the wedding, Oneida put together a giant musical box out of industrial motor parts, saw blades and such. Nails and spikes at strategic intervals made for some shocking sonics and these acted as underlay for a magic carpet of romantic tunage that are captured here, having added the string arrangements of Fireworks Ensemble's Brian Caughlin. Indeed, the tracks have been developed so far that the original music box tracks are hidden or have disappeared completely. A separate release, 'The Wedding', is threatened. The individuality of the start of their journey is mirrored in it's end as Oneida have upped the ante for alternative rock bands everywhere. The back spin of 'Lavender' is allied to a strident guitar riff and incessant guitar tap that is powerfully hypnotic. In that way, it feels a bit like 'Trout Mask Replica' a thousand secrets held within, to be revealed only when you're ready and over time. Indeed there is quite a Beeheartyan rhythmic bent applied to the Druid blues of 'The Beginning Is Nigh'. The typically claustrophobic Oneida sound is given to haunting fairground melancholy on 'Charlemagne', to kettle drum menace on 'Heavenly Choir' and to squalling drones on 'Leaves'. A masterpiece. S.



Leon - Be There (Freezer)

With the height scaling emotive pull of an adolescent Coldplay allied to the quirky delicacy of Flaming Lips, Leon have one foot in the chipper Cockney end of the Britpop era but throw in honkin' Hammond and a lick of primitive electronica to up the stakes. Blighters, they be, but with a great ear for a pop tune. S.

Scarlet Soho - Modern Radio (Human).

Bridging the goth/electroclash divide this time, the drum machine patters out a showroom-dummy jive, and latches onto more sophisticated 80's pop music. Jim Knight's arch Le Bon vox and the drama in the synths set it out as Scarlet Soho's finest single to date. S.

If Fire Would Fall - Less Than Human/Salvation, I

Ever wanted to be nailed to the wall and attacked with a flamethrower? Then this is for you, aggressive hardcore with a hint of metal brutality. This is pit inducing ferocity, nailed riffs and spewed lyrics but not without a nice hint of a groove flowing in the undercurrent and soaring choruses that allow a brief bit of singing. That's not to say they can't slow it down, as 'Salvation, I' has some succulent melodies squeezed in. Powerful stuff. G. www.iffirewouldfall.com.

The Buff Medways - Medway Wheelers (Damaged Goods)

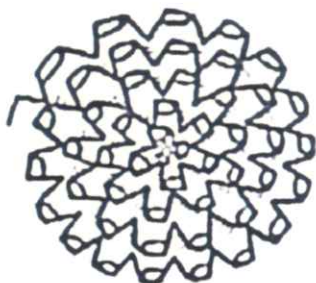
Ideally accompanied by colourised Super8 footage, this calmly rattling modish homage to Kentish wartime bike-club jauntery over to Dungeness, North Wales and such. Exquisitely charming stuff as ever from Childish and co., always acutely aware of the minutiae of social history. **S.**

Morph - The Broad Nightlight EP (Audiodacity)

The crude electro-hook flips and onto it's head time and again then has it's toes stepped on by a defiant '80's wind-down motif. Thrilling, braying electronica scooting up and being forced back by its own defences, a threatening digitalic dance-off. 'Rubber Bullets' over the way is more of a cut-up pincer movement, while 'Icecream' beats out yer lid from within. **S.**

Cranebuilders, Marlowe. Liverpool Carling Academy 2. 10mar05.

With simple tunes given lightning tumult by the dramatic arrangements on the two violins. At core they are a solid indie band, of which there are thousands. The important 'but' though is that, along with the strings, the sax and flute are on hand to wrestle the life into them. Ultimately it is a sound that could eventually fill concert halls. Cranebuilders are, at face value, more understated. On the chorus of 'Just Idleness', just three simple preceding notes are needed to prepare hearts for breaking, before it hits the highs of hymnal optimism usually found on Low records. Pop sensibilities, like the calm darkness of Black, are subtly underpinned. Its like light streaking through cracks and fixing on the dust as it lands on an empty chair. Then there's the voice. At times it appears Tommy Roberts is trying to go lower than his vocal chords can manage, but he skirts around flatness, pushing it from the glottis as though the words are hanging onto the sanctuary of the throat. When they emerge, the astute propulsion of the first three titular words of 'The Trouble Is' almost physically push me over. Pitch perfection, Cranebuilders have been on top form for well over a couple of years now. **S.**



Settlefish - The Plural Of The Choir (Unhip)

Allegedly, this lot come from Italy except for the Canadian vocalist. I say 'allegedly' as this record doesn't exude much of a European influence. This is very American indie-rock with a few post-rock and art-rock stylings. A three rock pizza, if you will. This is not without charm, however, and the band have the impressive ability to self-edit: 15 tracks in 38 minutes means it's easy to digest and nothing really outstays it's welcome. Likeable. **LMT.**

Misty's Big Adventure - Hey Man/Two Brains (SL)

The Adventure monkeys are shoutin' as though tumbling through a circus tent, while Grandmaster Gareth's vocals chase sweatily just behind, waving a fist at dem pesky kids ahead. There's a heavy 'Suffragette City' lean in the titular shoutin', but the brass parp and xylophone plink shakes like epileptic jazz-hands, as though something other worldly is learning human behaviour and started with the dancin'. 'Two Brains' gives another example of MBA's skill with treating the fantastical as boringly real. **S.**

Yuppie Flu - Our Nature (Homesleep).

I love indie-rock that has twee in the family tree and chorus vocals that dip and chime. Win win with Yuppie Flu then as this is seriously infectious stuff, they keys tweak beneath and guitars thump and sway in the same motion. From Italy, but ripe to take on the UK and win on this form. **S.**

zZz - The Sound of zZz (Howler).

Eighties Matchbox B-Line Disaster type Cramp-ish ghouls swap the gothic overtones for piped party garage scuzz, a Suicide thunder-electro stabbing drone undercurrent and a crooning appeal to the hips. That, to me, is the sound of zZz. They do retain a darkness but it's fairly arch, with an Austin Powers camp minced (in the more homicidal sense) through their gurgling free-jazz cinematic clatter. **S.**

Real Live Tigers - Demo

Sometimes full band, sometimes solo effort of Austin, Texas based Tony Presley. Another artist that makes some effort to make these things special by putting in individual covers and numbering the CDs. The music is achingly simple tunes played out on guitar with minimum fuss, occasional percussion provides a laid back beat while gentle strings add a mournful feel at times. This is as much about lyrics and stories as it is about tunes, each track a heartfelt exposing of the singers' inner self. Like good storytellers he transports you to the place in his mind and this conjures up wonderful pictures in the listener. Tony is heading over for a short UK tour later this year, well worth checking out. News at www.reallivetigers.com. **G.**

Thee More Shallows, a.P.A.T.T. Liverpool Hev'n & Hell. 01apr05.

Bedecked in aprons, they immediately plough into their sonic warfare, like a Devo swopping pomp for punishment. Indeed, if you feel live music performance has been missing acapella choral and woodblock quartet interludes and perhaps an individualistic rain-dance style of interpretative movement, then all your Christmas's have come at once as a.P.A.T.T. beebles from Residents-like dadaist peculiarity to bursts of 'Come To Daddy' like intensity. It is free-jazz being the irresistible force to the immovable object of an over-enthusiastic application of military discipline. They attack the concept of rhythm with force and a variety of percussive tricks up their sleeves. Ace. Thee More Shallows are a much calmer proposition, their passion sits heavy as though locked behind gritted teeth. Like American Analog Set, their instrumental periods glint like freshwater at daybreak, flowing with similar ease. The vocals though are akin to Arcade Fire, but in this case with the heart kept up the sleeve, keeping something back so as not to let all the emotions flow out at once and establish a position of weakness. They merely heightens curiosity. The occasional programmed beats and the glacial perk of 'ZAM's' atmospheric piano riff stand out but the subtle build of each tune really wows. When they do grow more and more empathic with their moments of dynamism, it is not to crush climactically. Indeed, Thee More Shallows are not about the destination, they are about the journey. **S.**

Iodo - Note To Self EP

Prodding synths and prog-psych harmonics hit the spot on 'A Lesson In Camouflage', while agitated beats take their stab on 'Language Is Cumbersome' perking up the wearied monk drawl before ankle-biting, ramshackle guitars make the big picture fuzzy. 'Stainless Steel Mouse' runs on the fuel of a deadpan rap running away from itself into a tinny tumble and glitchy scrot. To finish, the title track's ansaphone hypnotics. This is an EP which takes nothing but gives everything. **S.**

Shadowplay #14

We're going toe-to-toe on issue numbers now and, as expected, this as good as ever, with a handsome phrenologic cover, a fantastical 'Devendra Banhart letters' novella, an interview with Piney Gir, and reviews of Fonda 500, DJ Yoda, Schwervon, Joe Simpson, Hangar 18, Willy Mason and Wilco. 50p or free with an SAE from Alex Lawson, 28 Warwick Road, Mapperley Park, Nottingham, NG3 5ES. Email alexowl26@hotmail.com for more details. Well worth the effort. **S.**

Pinkie - Sharon Fussy (Planting Seeds)

For the spirit what Vapo-Rub is for a heavy cold, Pinkie spins around, arms out like plane wings. It is a free sound. A freeing sound. '5 Minute Call' is like a carousel of flickering candles, 'Someone I'll Never Be' like a droplet of water taking an age to cascade moist, unhurried, careful. Through the Byrdian melodies, the sweeping swirly synths, the tearduct-tweaking vocal melodies as well as the haunting and biting moments, it is a slow-motion flip into a collection of thick pillows. Twee, maybe, but a comfortable fit. **S.**

65daysofstatic - HOLE EP (Monotreme)

Believe the hype, 65dos are one of the most unique bands on the UK music scene. A mass of crashing guitars fused with loops, bleeps and whistles. Debut album 'Fall of Math' captured their 'live' experience giving us a slab of musical joy. This is an EP with a generous seven tracks. Tunes that lean further into the electronic field, guitars and live drums are stripped back to sampled beats and looped synths, 'Betraying Chino' is the standout track a two minute classic, quiet quiet LOUD whirlwind. Chuck in a few average remixes and its worth your four quid, but will leave you a little disappointed about the lack of real epics. **BS.**

Charles E. Cullen - Welcome To The World Of Charles E. Cullen (Sheffield Phonographic Corporation).

The sound of a man isolated in a Montana shack, cackling to himself while rocking back and forth doesn't differ radically from Charles E. Cullen's psycho-psychedelic blues schtick. If country music found itself locked naked in a dark, dripping cellar and forced to live on mosses and insects for a year or two, the eventual LP document might sound like this, once it'd been warped and melted. Severely twisted humour is yelped from his lips throughout songs like 'Young Gay Monkey On Rollerskates', 'Your Mum Smells Like Urine' and 'I Got A Rare Poultry Disease'. It is surely no surprise to learn that he day jobs as a chicken farmer, hosting a public access show on the creatures, whilst also building an empire of low-budget ultra-violent film-making. Should he be encouraged? I'll leave that to your conscience. **S.**

Th' Legendary Shack*Shakers - Believe (Yep Roc)

A colourful conglomeration of nimble New York C & W, folk, blues, rock, punk and funk with an eccentric element that is illuminated by front man and blues harpist Col. J.D. Wilkes. A friendly opening is produced in 'Agony Wagon' that has a Spanish siesta style intro, giving the Col's outfit a cultured touch before turning into a good old fashioned C & W romp. The spirit of this ebullient outfit and their diversity is on full show in; 'Where's The Devil When You Need Him?' possessing some satirically satanic humour and a marching drum beat that drives you onto the dance floor. Variety is provided by the inclusion corking cover of the Sonny Boy Williamson/Willie Dixon bold blues number; 'Help Me', whereby an appreciation of a variety of music is illuminated and, indeed; illuminating. **DA.**

Robin Auld - Diamond Of A Day (Freelunch).

South African artist, on his 15th LP, ploughs a similar furrow to Paul Simon or Steely Dan. Emotive rock music with a sensitive soul and a mature verve. 'Slip Away' skips emphatically like the AM radio hit it surely should be. The rest of the LP slips by me, if I'm honest, but this tune is something else. Can't stop playing the bleeder. **S.**

C-Jags - Paradise Park/Please Please (Voluptuous)

As featured on TV ads for the RAF, apparently. Perky pop on the sophisticated side of punk and even suggesting Suede showing off their most blatantly glam-rock swagger. **S.**

Big Num - 4/Too Clever For Words

2 EPs from a band out their doing it for themselves and gaining a reputation for putting on rocking shows. The 8 tracks on offer over these two discs show a young band aware of the past and pushing it to new places. They take big AC/DC type riffs, dirty them up and put them in a blender with Jet and have a party drinking from the cup of rock n roll. They have that family thing going on with the Boston triplets being the writing force behind Big Num and drummer Dave Slack getting a look in on When The Lights Go Out; this makes for a tight unit who produce quality rock. They know what they like and they do it exceptionally well. If you like Jet type stuff, I'd hazard a guess you'd love this. More over at www.bignum.net. **G.**

Watchers - Dunes Phase (Gern Blandsten)

Talking Heads skewed jangle and an atonal rattle, pipping and appearing over each shoulder like a particularly peppy spectre. There's remnants of XTC pomp delivered with an Oneida alt.defiance and, to steal a Family Guy concept, the ability to turn water, into FUNK with a touch of sunzoomspark, drawing day from dark. **S.**

Akron/Family - Akron/Family (Young God)

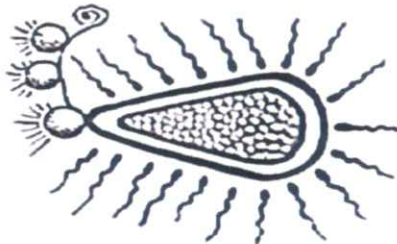
Nicely laboured pluck, bitty bleeps and backfacing swashes, vocals cracking under the pressure of nervous energy. All this in opener 'Before And Again', sets us up nicely for the rattle of stoner-country shanty 'Italy' and the slender but passionate chant of 'Franny/You're Human'. These are apparently edited version of live epics and, admittedly, it does have the feel of a sampler, but there are sublime moments such as 'Suchness' where rusty water pipes are seemingly tapped in a itinerant attempt to explore pitch. Akron/Family twist the arm of folk-music behind its own back and bark in its ear to keep up with the times. Folk music complies. **S.**

The Fat Cats - Deadbeat (10past10)

The Fat Cats have delivered an uplifting album that is a hybrid of punk, rock, ska and raw rockabilly sounds. Reading that you'd believe it was a real mess of sounds but they've managed to mix them up and integrate all the influences into one classy sound. Think of bands like The Mighty Mighty Bosstones and their crunching mix of ska and hardcore, sprinkle that with the rockabilly vibes and some good time swing and you are somewhere in the area. A fun album with all the swinging grooves, their live show must be a killer. **G.**

WhoMadeWho - The Loop (Gomma)

'The Loop' centres around an enthusiastic bubbling picked at with shimmering slide and a good deal of tribal funk. It has a perverse ambience riddled with ominous 'Duel'-like intensity. 'Stinnerbass' is an electro-prod irritant while 'Rose' is the rattling angulated with a bass kick and elasticated synth haunting the beats at the rear. Brilliant. **S.**



The Rakes - Retreat (Moshi Moshi)

The influences of Wire, Joy Division and The Jam pour out in 'Retreat', wherein the clanging instrumentals sit in nicely with Alan Donohue's compelling narrative, as the cyclical lyrics about life's mundane routine are delivered with clarity. B-side 'Dark Clouds', uncovers a Morrissey natured bleakness and depth when the topic of human life and the waste of it are come to terms with by this East London quartet. A foray into the frenetic live experience of The Rakes completes this single when a version of previous single 'Strasbourg', recorded at Rough Trade makes for a punk and clattering garage rock style conclusion. **DA.**

Little London, Red Letter Day, Autons.

Portsmouth Frog On The Front. 25mar05.

Autons kick into action with an almost electro country number, then go on to deliver a most English sounding set of quirky pop. Programmed beats and keyboards provide a solid backing for the dual guitar attack, one being a sturdy acoustic strum the other providing sheets of ice cold riffs that bounce off the beats. I'm thinking Talking Heads and XTC but with pumped up beats, very sophisticated and very smart. Today is Red Letter Day mainman Ade's birthday bash and he's up there giving 110% as usual from the moment 'Insomnia' cracks you across the face. Great street punk from these veterans of the scene and the two younger members now add a rock backbone to proceedings that really enliven classics such as '4TB' and 'Nettle'. Little London, in rock tradition, take to the stage a little under the influence of several beers. Low slung dirty guitar playing, like Motorhead partying with Turbonegro, gets the ladies down the front and a chance for the front man to take a wander and get some tongue action going while still cranking out the riffs. A drunken bash through 'I Think We're Alone Now' with half the crowd on stage providing backing vocals ends a raucous affair in fine style. **G.**



Shitmat - The Lesser Spotted Burberry EP (Planet Mu)

A 12" single to follow up the well-received LP 'Full English Breakfast', that makes wide use of samples of some Manc scally goshite in full flow. It is a tribute to pikey behaviour, with 'Elesse Warrior' happy slapping strangers with hooded gabba n' bass. These are lairy, threatening anti-social beats, all-elbows. I swear he's offering us out, goading us into gang warfare. That's the Henry Collins way to provoke, to irritate, so best to be on his side. VP is, we promise (and definitely aren't reading this off a card with a 200bpm drill n' bass sonic gun pointed at our head). **S.**

Erik Hallden - A Portrait Of The Singer As A Married Man Vol. 3 (My Secret Garden).

Gave some time the first two volumes of Erik Hallden's artistic sweep at domesticity in VP#13, and this is largely more of the same. Very low-key recordings with a similar feel to Jeffrey Lewis's sleepy folktearing embracing pop motifs (duh-duh-duh) but in a fashion to suggest that the popular must come to him, rather than he to it. **S.**

The March Hares - EP2.

The March Hares have been sending out LPs across the land. 900 at the last count. This is the second one we've got, and it's a brittle indie jangle with a lightweight modishness in the vocals. A subtle keyboard motif on 'Backbone' underpins infectious, vaguely intrusive guitar patter and puts them into Bloc Party/Others territory. A good place to be right now and I'm sure one of these EPs will end up in the right hands sooner or later. **S.**

The Invisible Surfers - Demo/Dog Killa Cat

Couple of albums worth over 2CDs showcasing, possibly in the entirety, the quality, dextrous instrumental rock n' roll of The Invisible Surfers which leans more toward Link Wray than Dick Dale's thunderous abrasive assault. This is music for a thousand car chases and a thousand veiled dances. They are the coolest, most enigmatic mutes plundering the surf in that dark corner of the beach bar. **S.**

Undercut - To Die For (Distiller)

The vocal effect is slight but gives this an anthem perfect for wowing radio punters through it's versatile guitars spanning out. It has the confidence of U2 but with more of a willingness to get it's hands dirty. For now. Until the fleet of yachts. **S.**

Stereo Total - Do The Bambi (Disko B)

A 6" LP in ten years for the Berlin duo always working on their own terms. Opening with 'Babystrich' they give a Gainsbourg pre-history to Scissor Sisters OTT glam territory, before the title-track gives marionettes music to skip to. 'Cinematic' lists their screen icons from Fassbinder to Hitchcock, the emphatic elastic rhythm of 'Ne m'appelle pas ta biche' judders while 'Orange mécanique' offers a clattering update of the Clockwork Orange overture. 'Do The Bambi' is twee-pop taken out of jeans and faded Beat Happening! t-shirts and into a slinky continental chic, they apportion their lo-fi and thick spectacled electroclash sugar in little packets, as the songs are more of the snippet than the epic, combining the primitive with the elaborate and experimental. **S.**

Kelley Stoltz - Antique Glow (Beautiful Happiness)

Shimmering and pulsating, Kelley Stoltz provides with 'Perpetual Night', Alka-Seitzer wake-up folk, a plink and a fizz creating an effervescent out-of-body thing. 'Underwater's Where The Action Is' is more caustic, but with a spring in it's step. A love of British left-field pop from 60's and 80's shines through the one-man-band rattle. 'One Thousand Rainy Days' proves that he has a good handle on the blues too, keeping the modern touches to a minimum and evoking the spirit of a 30's juke joint. 'Please Visit Soon' has the hop and skip of a Beckian nursery rhyme. A pleasingly eclectic, but rock solid record. **S.**

The Sweet Chap - Superman 3/The Girl With The Curl (Protestrecording)

Liking the underwatt funk, perhaps a contemporary for Snap Ant with their hunger-stricken Bobby Conn-like mirrorball swirl. 'Girl With The Curl' fits a pained strut into their otherwise confident moves, sweeping round a cold tea-room dancefloor with an electronic-buffed sheen. **S.** www.thesweetchap.com

Steve Turner - ...And His Bad Ideas (Beautiful Happiness)

Mudhoney man and an array of guests including Holly Golightly and Stone Gossard produce a nicely stripped down alt-country cum garage rock album. This is a wonderfully understated collection of beautiful songs that stroll through garage, country and blues. A fair few were recorded at the legendary Toerag Studios which gives you some idea of the direction this is coming from, simple but effective production that let these 13 songs shine in 30 glorious minutes. Sing-a-longs to strum on the front porch on late summer evenings with a few beers, delightful. **G.**

The Capstan Shafts - Unreconstructed Lo-Fi Whore (Ladder The Christmas Monkey)

Bastard loud lo-fi folkish knockabout. Agricultural alternative rock, like a Pavement for farm hands sweatin' and a yelpin' in them fields. However this is all done with a Morrissey-like flourish on 'Anniversaries of Genocides'. Available via www.asaurus.org distro. **S.**
deanedwardwells@yahoo.com

The Magic Band

If the internal history of Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band are a mystery, then a short introductory paragraph will never fill in all the blanks. Two illuminating books, by Mike Barnes and Bill Harkleroad are on the market which cover some of the history from inside and outside the group.

To understand the power and majesty of Captain Beefheart's music, it is best appreciated in a live context, and thankfully for us slightly younger devotees that is now possible, thanks to formation of a new Magic Band composed of four ex-members of the Beefheart group. While the four incumbents of the current Magic Band had never played live together prior to 2003, between them they bring experience of virtually all the variant album line-ups into one cohesive unit paying tribute not only to Van Vliet's music, but to their part in it's conception and execution. It is a tribute richly deserved all round. This is music that just needs to be heard. It defies expectation and plays havoc with conventional rhythms, whilst also remaining sturdy as some of the finest blues music ever made.

Taking on the lead vocal role in this incarnation is John French, who brings an impressive growl to the filling of some pretty big shoes. It is fitting that 'Drumbo' should be the focal point of the group as he appeared within several incarnations of the Magic Band, and aside from Van Vliet himself, is probably the most significant musician in the Captain Beefheart story. He is the ideal man to talk to as he himself is a keen historian of the group, having compiling an excellent and thorough set of liner notes for the comprehensive Beefheart 5 disc box-set of rare material, 'Grow Fins', that was released on Revenant in 1999. It was this task that exorcised a lot of demons for French, who highlights in the following interview just how intense an experience playing as part of the original Magic Band could be for the musicians. It also galvanised him into putting a group together so this music could breathe again.

I am very honoured that John took such time and care over these questions, and that he should wish to appear in Vanity Project at all. Further questions are answered on the new Vanity Project interview blog which resides at <http://vpinterviews.blogspot.com>.

>Introduce us to yourself and the other members of the Magic Band. What do you each bring to the band?

Mark 'Rockette Morton' Boston. Bassist. Mark brings to band half the essence of the unique rhythm section that was the basis of all Beefheart's groundbreaking work. He is the only bass player I know of who actually finger picks and plays chords on the bass. It is a very unique style that he developed while working on the album 'Trout Mask Replica'. Discography includes albums 'TMR', 'Lick My Decals Off, Baby', 'The Spotlight Kid', 'Clear Spot', and 'Unconditionally Guaranteed.' He went on with Bill Harkleroad to form the group 'Mallard' in 1975 and recorded two albums, 'Mallard,' and 'In a Different Climate.'

Gary 'Mantis' Lucas. A guitarist who later joined the band after co-managing Don Van Vliet for several years. Lucas had first seen the band play at a club in New York called Ungano's in 1971. He was very impressed with Bill Harkleroad's rendition of 'One Red Rose that I Mean' a Van Vliet guitar solo composition from the album 'Lick My Decals Off, Baby.' Lucas formed a vision to play in this unique style even then and it became a strong motivating factor in his life. Album credits include guest appearance on 'Doc at the Radar Station,' and as band member on 'Ice Cream for Crow.' He also appears in the video of the title track of the latter album.

Denny 'Feelers Rebo' Walley. Slide guitarist who was a member of Frank Zappa's 'Bongo Fury' touring group of which Don Van Vliet was also a member. They became friends and at the suggestion of Zappa, Denny became a member of The Magic Band for approximately 3 years while alternately working with Zappa's group, for which he also was lead singer for several years. Denny



brought a more soulful slide sound into the band and modified his style to embrace the 'Magic Band' syncopated finger-picking style of guitar that had become the trademark of the band. Album credits include the unreleased original Bat Chain Puller recorded in 1976.

John French: Drummer joined in 1966, in and out of the Magic Band over a 14-year period ending in 1980. My early tenure in the band gave me to unique opportunity to explore and develop unique drum patterns because of the extreme originality of the music. Now split between drumming and 'front man' duties, I have also enjoyed the experience of singing and playing harmonica. Album Credits include 'Safe as Milk,' 'Mirror Man,' 'Strictly Personal,' 'Trout Mask Replica,' 'Lick My Decals Off, Baby,' 'Bat Chain Puller' (unreleased), and 'Doc at the Radar Station' where my role was primarily as guitarist though I play drums on two compositions. I played with Don approximately 7 years.

>You originally wanted to put together the 'Trout Mask Replica' band.

My original vision was the TMR band with the possible inclusion of Art 'Ed Marimba' Tripp. My vision was twofold: One, as a healing experience for the members so that we could associate the music with a pleasant experience. I couldn't listen to TMR for years because of the association with all the unpleasant cult experience. Yet, as years went on, I was able to separate the two and now have good memories of the songs with the exception of Big Joan. Two, as a fulfillment to fans I had re-connected with thanks to wonderful people like Graham Johnston, Derek Laskie, Steve Froy, Theo Tleman, and Justin Sherril (apologies for missing anyone) who became webmasters of Beefheart sites and did much to re-kindle interest in the music and The Magic Band. Also, I grew up with the Trout Mask band. We were friends during our teen years.

>I am aware that you do not wish to take anybody's place by taking on the vocals but is this reunion an attempt to reclaim some of the credit for these works?

No, not at all, as that would be pointless. The primary motivation I always felt was a love of the music and the look of connection I see in the eyes of those who understand the music and enjoy hearing it once again. It's a wonderful privilege and experience to be able to travel from the US to Europe and play something this unique for audiences who still appreciate the music. My original vision of the reunion was based upon my experience while writing track by track notes on each Beefheart CD and realizing how much I missed playing the music. There's nothing like this out there, and so everything else is like a commuter plane flight as compared to a trip to the Moon. Who wouldn't want to return to their musical roots?

>What caused you to keep leaving and returning to the group?

The dread of the cult atmosphere would squeeze me out of the group like toothpaste from a tube. Sometimes I quit, sometimes I was fired by Van Vliet for simply being myself and reacting truthfully and frankly to his statements. I wasn't telling him what he wanted to hear, and in his desire for control, I was the square peg that didn't fit the round hole. What brought me back was my love of the music. There's a lot of 'me' in there... so it's only natural that I would migrate back. When it gets too cold, birds migrate South for the Winter. When the atmosphere of the group grew too cold, I would seek a warmer climate. When the atmosphere was more congenial, I would come aboard and always by invitation of Van Vliet with the exception of my re-joining to do 'Doc at the Radar Station' where I actually approached Don.

>Don, in 1977, is quoted as saying "Everything they did I had 'em do. I mean I'm a dictator". How much was this the case and how close to the truth is his claim that band members disliked him for it?

Don was the initial creative force in the band, there's no denying that. Lyrically, he is unsurpassed. Musically, however, he was not very organized, nor did he at all understand the extreme learning curve it took to actually bring his vision to life. As a result, the band members some more than others - contributed a great deal more to the actual completion and arranging of the music than Don ever realized.

If anyone mentioned this, Don's extreme reaction was to say something to the effect of 'oh, so now you're saying YOU wrote the music?' which, of course wasn't

the case. The truth lie somewhere in between. Don's musical relationship with the band was much more symbiotic than he or the public ever realized. The atmosphere that developed from this was one of tolerance on the band's part to take the submissive role of appearing to be a group of trained monkeys with absolutely no creative ability. I'm exaggerating, but that is how it appeared from the inside. The public was not interested in us, because Don portrayed us as not being very interesting or relevant. Therefore, our 'careers' (a word which makes me shudder, but probably fits) suffered because we had almost no recognition except with hard-core fans, and then only because we were associated with Van Vliet.

Frankly, Don really never seemed to appreciate the band members. He often told me he 'hated musicians.' He also had a kind of Jekyll / Hyde mannerism in which he would befriend the musicians one on one, but then in a group atmosphere verbally abuse and humiliate them.

It was part of the price paid for being a Magic Band member and was very unpleasant for all involved in the earlier bands. I saw less of this in the later bands from 'Shiny Beast' thru 'Doc at the Radar Station.' However, interviews with various band members convince me that this atmosphere, though less intense, prevailed from beginning to end.

>Bill Harkleroad states in his book that at various times, he, you and Mark Boston came to blows. How do you remember the timer?

When Don wasn't around, Mark, Bill and myself got along quite well. We were childhood friends before joining the Magic Band and had never had any major conflicts before, and haven't had any since. It is true that physical violence reared its ugly head several times during our tenure together (from TMR to Spotlight Kid). Bill told me that while writing his book, he once had to run outside and collapse on his lawn vomiting -- from re-living the trauma. The four of us have a bond that most people will never understand. I'm sure it's similar to that relationship 'War Buddies' have with each other though not as intense.

>Was this atmosphere engineered do you think?

There's absolutely no doubt in my mind, and never has

been, that this atmosphere was manufactured by Van Vliet. I didn't understand his motivation back then. Now, I interpret it as one of the methods he used to control us. I'm sure he viewed our comradeship as a threat to his leadership and so felt he had to keep us compartmentalized by nurturing hostility. He did this by betraying confidence mostly. Something said privately about a third party would be injected into a group 'talk', which would usually be quite embarrassing and sometimes humiliating. These talks would go on for days until the targeted person 'in the barrel' finally broke down, usually either in tears or just in complete submission to Don. It was very much like brainwashing combined with a very bad form of group therapy.

>In the Grow Fins box set liner notes, you say that it is difficult for you to hear the goodness of 'Spotlight Kid', for example, due to the poverty you suffered during their creation? How then does it feel now to be seeing songs like 'Click Clack' and 'I'm Gonna Boogiarize You Baby' on stage?

I am able to now separate the association of the experience from the music itself and hear the music as separate entity more as an outsider would. The essence of who Captain Beefheart was to the public is now mostly what I see and hear. It's like standing on the moon and viewing Earth just a completely new perspective.

>Were the Trout Mask sessions your most intense experience in music?

Actually, 'The Spotlight Kid' period was worse in some ways especially for Bill. The music was less-challenging, and Don was more controlling. It was less physically violent, though that did exist throughout from what I understand.

P.T.O.



>Do you think this experience changed you in any way?

How could it not change one? Yes, most definitely. I became socially dysfunctional for years after this. I would 'duck' when people would 'talk with their hands.' I became a bit of a hermit and envisioned myself as completely useless, often contemplating suicide. My spiritual beliefs helped me in real ways to overcome this on a personal level. I can truly say that my real public liberation came when I wrote the notes for the Revenant Set and people actually accepted my writing and began to understand that there was a dark underlying theme that haunted all the earlier members. I don't think the later band members will ever truly understand the extent of intensity that was reached at one point. Some of them refused to allow me to interview them for the Revenant Set. Most of the ones who did interview were ones who had gone through an equally bad experience as my own and needed to talk about it. A couple of my interviews felt more like therapy sessions, and rightfully so.

>What do you consider your finest achievements in music?

Well, Trout Mask Replica was my first. I was dedicated, as were we all. 14 hour days of playing music were more the rule. I transcribed a lot of the music, showed the parts to the players, helped with arranging. It was a great feeling when we actually recorded all those tracks in the studio in 4 1/2 hours.

I have found that most of what players themselves think is a fine achievement is usually not at all the same thing the public reacts to. For instance, the most impressive drumming I have ever done is on my drum solo CD 'O'Solo Drumbo, and is an arrangement of Van Vliet's 'The Thousandth and Tenth Day of the Human Totem Pole' complete with drum parts and melody even a few harmonies thrown in. I used 8 tom toms tuned with a guitar tuner to notes. It's seven minutes long with no repeating phrases and took me months to learn because of all the intricate interplay between drums and melody. Few people really react to it. They like 'Abba Zaba' because it's fast

>Do you intend to add to the repertoire of songs the Magic Band have thus far performed? Would you consider writing something new?

Repertoire is a problem. We are harmonica, vocal, two guitars, bass, and drums. Some of the great songs had marimba and just don't 'sound' without that timbre playing that part. Others have Mellotron, Synth bass etc. Others just aren't that interesting to begin with or are so densely-mixed that it becomes nearly impossible or counter-productive - time-wise -- to learn them. Also, we



live in remote areas of the US and so have to pick material that we can quickly rehearse and achieve performance mode. It's actually a very complicated procedure and we are dealing with very complicated music. I once calculated that there are many distinct guitar riffs on one Beefheart album ('TMR' or 'LMDO,B') as on approximately 12 more conventional Rock-Type groups albums. The sheer work involved in learning this material is sometimes overwhelming. TMR originally took nearly ten months of rehearsal. My vision was to do three concerts and stop. The others wanted to go on and I suppose that once I brought life to this monster I had to allow it a chance to breathe on it's own.

Re: New material -- I have written new material and will be recording a CD probably within the next six months or so...Musically, I feel that it captures some of the essence of the spirit of the Magic Band in a fresh and unique manner.

>What more would you like to achieve with Magic Band and otherwise?

The main thing that has always been missing in the Magic Band is that the arrangement of the music is so static and dictatorial. I would like to develop and modify the arrangement and structure of the music in such a way that each player has space to express themselves within an acceptable framework. I also hope that I would guide them away from dead-ends and unrealistic visions that would not be accepted by the fan base or would be counterproductive in general.

In my own music, I would like to inject many of the same elements that appeal to the fans, but also make it easy on the

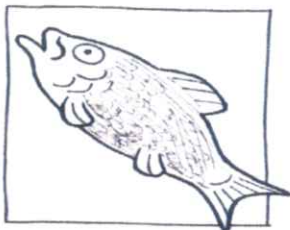
players to learn the material, to feel free to modify parts to their own style, and to open up areas for improvisational expression. We've touched on that, but I feel that every concert should be different, like a fingerprint, and that can only happen when the individuals are allowed the freedom to be themselves within the music and the framework of the arrangement.

>How do you view modern music? What are your likes and dislikes?

I really honestly do not listen that closely. I have a teenage daughter and I have heard some of the groups she listens to, but for the most part, I feel that in order to be a different fish, you have to get out of the school, as Don used to say. If I immersed myself in studying what everyone else is doing, how could I possibly compose something unique without second-guessing myself? Many groups seem more interested in being visually a bit 'out' while playing music based on the same old beat and chord structure that's been around since I was a kid.

>Do you have a particular favourite Beefheart tune? Why so fond?

Orange Claw Hammer. It is totally Don, simple and direct, no band help, no mish mish of players ideas. The story is clear and precise, filled with poetic images and sung in a straightforward manner. It was created during a memorably happy time when there were no immediate conflicts, and was given relatively quick birth. I can sing this song with pure abandon, because I love every word of it. Also, I feel sometimes like I'm the old peg-legged guy coming back to my 'daughter' after thirty years by revisiting this music.

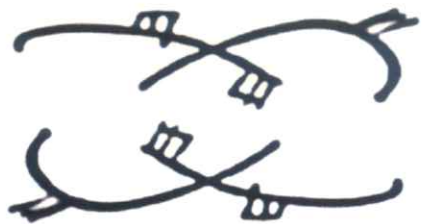


The Magic Band - 21st Century Mirror Men (Proper)

With The Magic Band, you get intricacy, but you also get the blunt blows of raw blues, John French's grizzled roar echoing the retired Captain Beefheart perfectly. It may sound, at times, like it's all over the place, haphazard, but it's all in the script and when you get locked into that expert atonal subgroove, such as on 'My Human Gets Me Blues', there is no desire for, or possibility of, escaping it. This music may be an acquired taste, but once acquired it scripts your very love of music from then on. For me, it changed the rules and opened up a whole new range of possibilities. If you've not seen the Magic Band live, this excellently recorded concert CD is ESSENTIAL, for 'The Floppy Boot Stomp', for 'Electricity', for 'Moonlight On Vermont', and frankly all the others pieces on here. Amazing songs forever shrouded in mystery, now reborn, brought back to life by those who played out such significant roles at different stages of the Beefheart enigma. In a world dominated by pedestrian rhythm and lazy marketing, we need the Magic Band now more than ever. S.

The 55s - Cobra (SL)

'No Stop'. Quite so, as the 55's kick in with a rock n'roll that sticks a cattle prod behind unsuspecting knees creating a new skiddy judder a dance style all of their own. The rhythms get slippery and Beefheartian on 'Humdinger', while 'Spanish Song' is one part scatter-gun-ho and the other part reflective. On 'Aim At Me', they offer up a rattlin' jangle that Weddoes fans would appreciate. The root of excitement is not over-indulging and not allowing time for people to get bored. The 55's understand this and shake music by the lapels to get it to wake up to this fact. That said though, they only make dents in their own mould during the 16 tracks. If it ain't broke though... S.



Disco Drive - What's Wrong With You, People

Vibrant and expressive controlled chaos, like Porno for Pyros with an even bigger tiger in their tank or perhaps a more streamlined Mars Volta. 'Forward!' has aspects of Beefheart's desert sound flecked by new wave posture. Their angular swing is kept light, the bursts of energy (sheens, squeal and guitar-sirens) not being too much for my radar, but probably better appreciated in the live environment. S.

Snuff - Six Of One, Half A Dozen Of The Other 1986-2002 (10past12/Fat Wreck Chords)

All you need of Snuff spread over two discs for a cheap price. Disc one comprises punk pop gems, so called greatest hits like 'Somehow', 'Martin' and 'Whatever Happened To The Likely Lads'. Blasts of shout-a-long choruses, punked up guitars and true nuggets of joy. Put together like this it's easy to see what an influence they have been on the whole pop punk genre. Disc two contains all the rare and unreleased tracks and those cover versions such as 'Hokey Cokey', 'Any Old Iron', 'Don't Fear The Reaper' and 'I Think We're Alone Now' plus various b-sides and live tracks. It's been an absolute joy to trawl through the 50 tracks on here and there is not many albums you can say that about, essential for lovers of pop punk. G.

Alto 45 - 101101 (Happy Capitalist)

Alto 45 have a formula but like to fuck with it. 'Let's Go Out' marches to a musket and fife drumbeat, encircle themselves with dreamy electronica and a voice in need of a first full night's sleep in a good while. 'The Plan' is more like Clinic without the wiriness and with more attention to feeling relaxed than to intricate detail. 'Fell Down Stairs' is a campfire acoustic strum, a touch of the isolation of living at a geographical extremity, cut off from bustle. Whether or not alto45 live near the action, I know not, but they capture the feeling in a similar way to many of the more eccentric Welsh acts. That is just the albums first 3 tracks. Like Fonda 500, they verge on the ramshackle but are remarkably deft. Bowlie-pop given a little electronic pizzazz, but with a root (such as on 'Moses Gunn' and 'Sleep & TV') in Sufjan-like upbeat folk. S.

Ariel Pink's Haunted Graffiti - Worn Copy (Paw Tracks)

Three-part ten-minute epic to open and 65 further minutes of high concept to follow, this odd release is all the work of Ariel Pink on an 8 track recorder. It is certainly used to it's full potential whilst retaining a lo-fi abrasive bent. 'Trepanated Earth' is the sound of Blue-Nile calm aggressively minced through early 80's radio-pop, but allowed to indulge its warped-prog with discor(-)dance. It goes on like this, in that it's not like this, consistently regenerating. Indeed, it is a single-minded eccentric record that encompasses the spirit of Beefheart, Krautrock, 80s US hardcore, grime, glitchcore and dada-ism whilst not really being of or like any of it. In fairness, you'll likely check your watch throughout, but be glad that you stayed the course. S.

Venetian Snares - Rossz Csillag Allat Szuletett (Planet Mu)

The most pretentious press release quote I've ever come across? (sample: "one moment in time can take on such an important significance that it becomes an endless world unto itself") Possibly. But I can forgive an artist for that when the music is so good. Baroque strings and eastern European melodies are mixed with intense breaks and brass swells. It's a bit like Squarepusher covering Classical Hits of the 19th Century but that only helps it stand even further above the rest of the electronica pack. LMT

The Conway Story - Ghostwriter (IRL/Kooba Cuts)

Everything's MOR, or something. This ranks up with Nickleback in the arena of puffed chest anthemic rock. The harmonies could work a little better, as it feels a little flat, but nonetheless there is something oddly intriguing about it. Tool-like detached piano spoof 'Hopeless With Our Hands' makes more immediate sense. S.

The Mules - Grab Your Musket (Organ Grinder).

Alternative or mainstream, we all love a ceilidh. Indie kid or townie, nothing beats a solid hoedown. Midway through this 6 track EP is 'Rhino' and it is the Celtic party to bring us all together. Elsewhere they cater more for us lovers of the esoteric with their Coral high-drama psyche, Waitsian gruff storytelling and a Talking Heads jerk. Fiddles and bar-room piano sluice their inventiveness throughout. Joyous. S.

Miss McCabe - Demo

Miss McCabe are one of those bands that don't really fit into any pigeon holes, they have that feel that they could have been around years ago while still sounding fresh. At the centre of this band is song writing; classy, catchy piano led pop-esque romps with stunning female vocals. If you like pure indie, rock etc then this will not appeal, but if you want some quality emotional tunes that you can sing along to then this band are right up your street. You can just see fat cat labels rubbing their hands at the quality of this material but with previous burnt fingers Miss McCabe could do with finding a label that will allow them complete control to develop their sound. 6 tracks of pure quality on offer here, sounds ready to go out on a proper release already, ones to watch. Keep an eye out on www.missmccabe.co.uk. G.

Kinski - Alpine Static (Sub Pop)

Immediately with 'Hot Stenographer', you can appreciate Kinski's love for deep, old school metal guitars, and the intensity of repetition that comes from Krautrock pummeling unrepentantly. 'Wives Of Artie Shaw' cuts and kids a bit more, but it's not long before the bulld. This is such an emotional album, a surprise for something so direct, tough and, as it be, without words. It guides the listener through the science of heightened feeling, and causes a similar effect in itself. Intense, but not brutal, such as the atmospheric breeze of 'The Snowy Parts Of Scandinavia' that blows gently toward the avalanche cacophony. S.

Autokat - The Driver/Television (Akoustik Anarchy)

Repetition and sonic build are monotonous to some but I love to get locked in a groove (which explains my ever-growing respect for dance music). The lyrical circle of 'The Driver' allows such a lock, the subtle derivation of the guitars being the key out of perpetuity. 'Television' has a pop vocal hook worthy of Cheap Trick while the buzzsaw bursts beneath, are like hopping between channel after channel of encrypting static. Perfect, considering. S.

Math and Physics Club - Weekends Away (Matinée)

Archetypal Matinée stuff with Marr-like guitars rattling like a sunbeam chased around a barrel, drums tap-tapping like entertained feet. 'Weekends Away' then, where matters of map-reading and driving duties are divided up. 'Sixteen And Pretty' and 'When We Get Famous' cup their ears to a jaunty 60's hark, a la the Housemartins tickled with Simon & Garfunkel folk tambourine. S.

Nerina Pallott - Everybody's Gone To War (Chrysalis)

It is when crisp and caressing vocals shroud passion and angry feelings that you really pay attention to what is being said, which is truly the case with this single from London born songstress Nerina Pallott. This encapsulates the vibrancy and poignancy of Thea Gilmore that propels itself out of a platform of Bjorkesque lushness and Sheryl Crow crispness. Despite having a title that looks like a single minded banner slogan, Nerina's lyrics transcend any single issue, as she speaks of a deeper wisdom and defies acrimony. The backing vocals of Susannah Melvoin help to punctuate the piercing points made by the song, as this peaceful songstress questions the wisdom of the acting prior to thinking mentality of the modern world. With a voice like hers you feel compelled to listen. DA. Download at www.nerinapallott.com

Red.Star.Line - Red.Star.Line (Pronoia)

East London's Red.Star.Line's chugging, glottal-scarred, Black Crowes swaggering ruck isn't too heavy for sensitive ears, nor without the spark that appeals to the more adventurous. Very much a first step on a musical journey, but a step in the right direction. S.

Pale Sunday - Summertime (Matinée) The Young Tradition - Northern Drive (Matinée)

It is spring after all, the ideal time for flowers like these to bloom. The Young Tradition, Swedish multi-instrumentalist Erik Hanspers and Japanese-American voxman Brent Kenji, adopt Belle & Sebastian style skippiness with a nod to Teenage Fan Club's approach to pop music. 'Northern Drive' is lightly tanned West Coast harmonic jazz. Brazilian outfit Pale Sunday tuck an ever-present melancholy inside their palm-tree jangle, with vocals pitched like Dave Gedge only higher, and Hookian basslines. Two albums perfect for the apparent heatwave that we are due. S.

The Scaramangas - Eight And A Half (Mate)

Considered college radio alt.rock from Helsinki, with goth-tinged atmospherics pitched between the dark of Joy Division and the distorted melancholia of the Radio Dept. Roger supplies a boot-up-'arse remix, throwing it further into New Order speed with an unpretentious electro thud that appears as though adorned with a thin slicked moustache and a sly wink. S.

The Crimson Ghosts - Leaving The Tomb (Fiendforce)

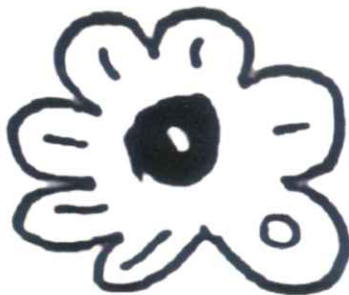
German band that started life as a Misfits cover band, hence the name and have taken that influence, beefed it up with a serious amount of metal and are now Leaving The Tomb. They sound, as you would expect them to, fast paced horror punk rock with slabs of metallic guitar driving it to death. This is fun in that dressing up in white face paint, calling yourself Reverend, Vlad, The Jackal, Monstrosity and running around a graveyard naked and drunk at midnight. The rotting whiff of The Misfits leaves it's mark all over this but these Ghosts have reanimated the corpse and are proudly howling away. G.

Billy No Mates - We Are Legion (10past12)

Solo project of Duncan Redmonds, vocalist and drummer of Snuff who plays and sings every note of this album. This obviously retains the melodic nature of Snuff but is much heavier in delivery and has more of an alt-rock feel about it. He whips through twelve tracks in half an hour with little let up in the frantic pace but each track is top notch in the quality bracket, brimming with chunky guitar, lush vocal melodies and non-stop clattering drums. How much talent can one bloke have? G.

Kinesis - You Are Being Lied To (Captains Of Industry)

This is it. The second and final LP. Kinesis' last hurrah. And so young. However check the distorted, thunderous and gripping 'Everything You Thought You Knew To Be', and you can see for why they'll be missed. A Rage Against The Machine with a few Muse's histrionic flourishes and a pop-hardcore aesthetic. They have certainly grown in stature since being the recipients off too-early hype, and are astute and powerful rock songwriters (although the ballads need thinking about, perhaps). As individuals, we have not seen the last of them. S.



HACKPEN RECORDS

Record labels should be a dull brown colour they should lurk, they should have no profile hence the reluctance to talk about Hackpen Records. It's nothing sinister - what's important is the music not the machine. We started by getting involved in the local scene and then discovered Scotland and its individuality. Across Britain, towns and cities seem to have evolved their own special unique music we want to tap into this energy. The label believes in being open, honest and straightforward and trying to do something for music and society. *The Nyquist Theory* compilation (see review below) is our manifesto.

We have achieved a lot - Cayto nominated to head T in the Park by 2010, Toupé's track selected as one of the five greatest bass riffs by the BBC, Won Mississippi's album in the top 100 Scottish albums of all time, plus much more. That's not bad for a label without an A&R policy. What about the future? We want our releases to sound good and in particular look and feel good. Expect releases from Toupé (the difficult but brilliant second album), Bonemachine and Simon Heartfield. We also want to grow our publishing company Late Callows Music. And we're still in the red or should it be brown! **Steve, Hackpen**

Various - The Nyquist Theory (Hackpen)

I like this compilation as I like the ethics behind it - put together a bunch of interesting bands of various styles and bang out and see who will bite. There is plenty to excite on here too, from Khopek's opening choral appeal to the heavens (that beat-wise, harks back to DJ Shadow's moment in the sun) through to Deepark's haunting 'Burning Photos' at the finish. The second track appears to show that once the Yellow Submarine was decommissioned and a new psychedelic fleet built, the Sways were likely given the job of writing the folk-shanties for the surrealist mariners. 96 Tears, with 'Keep A Clean Nose' get a poked buzz and post-baggy lick out of a bee as synths wash over the perky post-rock hymn. Elsewhere there is the Cocteau-treacle of Oom, the empathic Big-band funk of Rusty Sheriff, the chugging guitar shriek of Detwillej and the tricky squirt of Anon. Plenty for everyone with an interest in the new and exciting. S.

Interviews with several bands featured on the Nyquist Theory can be found via the Nyquist link on www.vanityproject.co.uk

Slims - Utunc (Fat Northerner)

Tasty modern sounding rock, riff driven yet tuneful. Utunc is classic rock vocals surfing on a wave of distorted guitars and driven drums, very catchy, strangely familiar but fresh at the same time. 'Babe' takes the more traditional ballad route with heavy moments and would appeal to classic rock fans. Personally I prefer the balls out rocking first track with offensive words, far more fun. G.

The Chemistry Experiment - The Melancholy Death Of The Chemistry Experiment (Fortuna Pop!)

One assumes this is a band familiar with smoking jackets and the playing of wine glasses. This debut LP proper highlights their assured, but reserved, sophistication. Gentle brass and hollowed out torch keyboards wind down heavy evenings on 'Starlite Ballroom', while 'pop-nugget' 'You're The Prettiest Thing' gets mesmerised by the slow turn of a disco ball. Wispy flute crops up on 'Good Morning' and plaintive violin likewise on 'Stopped Clocks' amongst the tock-tock glock. On top of, Steve Kirk has a fine smoky, glottal croon that adds richness to their melancholic folk-soul, which hides an electronic glint behind drooping eyelids. S.

Holly Golightly - My First Holly Golightly Album (Damaged Goods)

There's a whole lotta Golightly to go around and this sampler is just the ticket for dipping those first toes into the water, preceding as it does a full back catalogue re-release. Not that older fans are left out as older non-Damaged Goods tracks and new bits are offered as new recordings alongside a smattering of tracks from 6 of her 13 solo LPs. Considering the Headcoates efforts and White Stripes collaborations are overlooked, you will get an idea of the plethora of material that exists. There surely is no finer modern day purveyor of the ol' fashioned slinky garage snake dance. S.

Melys, Persil. Liverpool Cavern Club. 06mar05.

Stripped down from 3 to 2, Persil play a wildly different set to that which took on the Wedding Present's audience on their tour a week or two prior to this, so it's refreshing to hear some of their more electronic-based material. These tunes are also slightly more brittle and combine that with the fact that the duo have been fairly ill this week, means they teeter on the brink of collapse, but the format still gives David room to throw gusto at his guitar by way of defiance. They have a similar basic structure to Melys, but the Betwys-y-Coed five piece flesh out their indie-pop with slightly more aggressive programmed beats and vibrant bass. Singer Andrea Parker, sounding part little-girl-lost and part rally-caller, also gets chance to batter a Red Triangle road sign by way of increasing percussiveness. Melys capture yearning, nostalgia, all the emotions that lie teetering between positive and negative, with 'Chinese Whispers' knocking on the door of nursery rhymes and Sea Nymphs mediaevality. Elsewhere, in amongst the gentle numbers, tunes like 'Eyeliner' are gigantic sounding pop/rock truffles, their synth sound polishing off the worst excesses of 80's hair rock and putting it to slightly more twee-leaning use. S.



Vetiver - Between (DiCristina)

A between LPs EP recorded in living rooms, radio sessions and on the evenin' stage. Andy Cabcic's folk music is bruisable but polished, wistful but emotionally strong. American done with a pleasingly deft touch. S.

Yeti - Never Lose Your Sense Of Wonder/Working For The Industry (Moshi Moshi Music)

A cruising and upbeat AA single that encompasses snippets from skiffle, garage, folk, anti-folk and Mersey beat, but also exudes enough individuality to hold Yeti out as bright and bold newcomers. The two A sides are catchy and will have you shuffling around the room like bargain hunter, as the topics of emotional integrity and exploitation are tunelessly summarized. Lurking behind the melodic and endearing front of this John Halsall led cockney quintet is the strange and shocking 'Midnight Flight'. Halsall's vocals take on a longing and quirky narrative. With the aid of a haunting accompaniment Halsall takes us on a dark journey through the mind of a sleepwalking serial killer. Yeti has descended upon us and it is going to be nigh on impossible to ignore them. DA.

amusing paper issue one

Al Maceachern, who has contributed to this issue with his Magic Band sketches, has been a comrade of ours for some years, but this is a new venture after 'A Cheery Wave From Stranded Youngsters' and 'beat sketching' (still available at www.beatsketching.tk). It is like a scrapbook of introductions to the worlds Al has given life to, including the excellent 'Alternativ e Sam', which lampoons the 15 fame-filled minutes of the fanzine writer. It is sublime and wryly comic writing and observation. This can often be let down by poor artwork but Al's sketches read excellently and don't overabound. £1 + A5 SAE from 6 Angotts Mead, Stevenage, Herts, SG1 2NJ. Highly recommended for self-aware indie-kids everywhere. S.

Tokyo Dragons. Liverpool Academy. 19apr05.

We're only a few seconds in and already 2 unrelated feet are on monitors. Hair drips over shoulders and I spy a redneck 'tache arching over the ol' singin' hole, as though contemplating the possibility of a full Sanchez to come. "Thith ith our nextht thong" he announces. My giggles make me a very bad man indeed. The music, as you might already have guessed from all this, is In Deep Purple, perhaps Free, territory. Classic style rock with anthemic harmonious hooks. No arguments from me. S.

Yankee Nine Niner - Oh Yeah/Giving Up (New Black Corporation)

How many tunes called 'Oh Yeah' in the history of rock? Well, now there's another courtesy of Yankee Nine Niner's scorched backwater rock, particularly notable for the striking backing vocals. S.

The Scaramanga Six - Horrible Face (Wrath)

Hefty balladeering from their excellent 'Cabin Fever' LP with added stringy things that build and tone the muscle of the quasi-Latino guitars and Paul Morriconne's spectacular voice. The pendulum sway of the chorus focuses the bristling tension amongst their otherwise chipper demeanour. B-side's a good 'un, 'Throning Room' coming on like a Middle Eastern garage-prog Wolfsbane. Rök. S.

Giant Haystacks - Blunt Instrument (Mistake)

"I like short songs" sang Jello Biafra, for about 20 seconds. It appears from this rapid-fire LP that Giant Haystacks second that emotion. The 'stacks cut, chime and clip with their guitars at once recalling Beefheart atonal-blues, whilst also submersing themselves in electrically-charged, post-punk waters a combination best espoused on 'Valour'. 'Catastrophic State' is perfect as an opener, fitting with the pop of the recent new-wave cap-doffers (Franz, Futureheads) without being verbose or over-produced. While skirting with the zeitgeistiness, Giant Haystacks nonetheless stand alone. **S.**

Earl - What Are You Waitin' For? (Fat Northerner)

Ruth Daniel and crew up a Garbage-like electro-rock tempo with a ripple of disco soul while also being as accessible as the most mainstream 80s pop. **S.**

Red Jetson, Zelega, You're Smiling Now But We'll All Turn Into Demons, FOBA. Portsmouth Frog On The Front. 08Apr05.

Intelligent rock, hints of the grandness of U2 and a smidgen of Nirvana discordance are what trio FOBA offer up. A band going for that epic feel with well constructed tunes, clever lyrics and plenty of passion. The Demons opt for a straight-ahead battering ram approach tonight; tight, fraught riffs and clattering rhythm sections permeate through their sonic waves as these rum drinking pirates run us onto the rocks and cut our throats in the name of rock n roll. Zelega follow up with their own sonic attack, wave upon wave of guitar noise that washes over you and drags you under to calm shallows before spewing you back out in to the eye of the storm. A perfect soundtrack to prepare for Red Jetson who provide cold crashing bleak landscapes. Moody flows of post rock noise that build and fall, they have that look of a band that will soon be filling bigger venues with their angst. **G.**

Loose Canon - Altercation (Akoustik Anarkhy)

Builds up from a melancholic riff and bursts out magnificently to the point where the pull back is a little disappointing. Soon back into full tilt though. A song that'd run through walls for you. 'This Empire WE've Created' is more shoegazey in style, the slight distortion raising neck hairs. **S.**

Lorna - Static Patterns and Souvenirs (words-on-music).

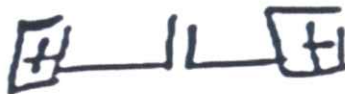
'Understanding Heavy Metal' is not an easy task, but it's a novel approach to go about it using dreamy pop with horns and harmonicas flailing limply, rather than chucking in the screaming grindcore. It works though, brings goosebumps to my face. It comes in 2 parts n'all with a glitchy, glockenspiely, but relaxed instrumental bringing our understanding to a steady, beautiful close. On 'Homerun' they hold notes teetering, tilting up before the emotive drone plummets. There are touches of Mazzy Star, of Tindersticks, of 'Dog On Wheels', of Low in their sheet silver sonics. This is a perfectly paced record perking up when necessary, allowing good notes the floor when worthy. With pedal steels, theremins and banjos in their arsenal, its like it brushes against your arm, light to the touch, but enough to spin you off your axis. **S.**

The Free French - A Place Of Our Own (hitBACK)

The Free French's first LP dealt with breaking up, the second with getting together with someone. As the title suggests, this is all about taking it up a gear and setting up a new home. Concept LPs about urban domestics make a welcome change to fantastical tales about King Arthur, certainly. The inlay card is like a brochure for the dream apartment, while the record sums up deal with the problems and pleasures of moving in together through lounge-jazz electronica, ambience with the soft pull of classic indie-pop and 80's era mainstream-skirters like Johnny Hates Jazz and Then Jericho. A hint of Gene's learned melancholy also adds to the sense of sophisticated dapperness summing up perfectly the excitement and ennui of getting' all mature. **S.**

Mek Obaam - You and I (Earsugar)

Rhythmic tap-tap-battering, an intravenous method of creeping beneath skin to enliven. The bombed scuzz of guitars and the pleading nature of the vox make for grippin' and a-not-let-go-in'. 'Different Universes' be the song of which I speak, and what a cracking opener. 'While You're Sleepin' is peppy, like a Weezer eyebrow, but not overly poppy. At the rear of 'Knowledge That I Keep' there are even echoes of a dub scatter-rum creeping up on the alt-rock proceedings. This is a record that won't announce itself at parties, but will be met with eager handshakes by all in the room. **S.**



Amy Smith - The Landing Tapes (Universal)

Steadfast but flighty folk rock in a Joan Osborne vein with echoes of Joni Mitchell and Emmy Lou Harris, Nick Drake in full perk and Neil Young's country favours. Another Liverpool find, back by a solid and impressive band of bar-room blues troubadours. An act you can see Radio 2 audiences warming to greatly, now that KT Tunstall has laid out a new path. **S.**

Demon Summer - Burn (Waterside)

Low key anthemics in the vein of yer Athletes n'such, with a Bunnymen-esque shoegazey sheen. There's also a touch of Mark Owen's post-'That revamp, while 'No Feelings, No Pain' has a subtle brooding dynamic. **S.**

Lovejoy - Everybody

Hates Lovejoy (Matinée)

No Lovejoy, don't be silly. There's plenty out there who like you, I'm sure. Nowt to be insecure about, it's a very decent indie-pop LP this. The vocals are breathy, like David Gedde given whispering lessons by Ella Guru. Certainly the Wedding Present influence here seems heavy, although the cloudy synths push it more into Cinerama territory. There's a delicate plink around the piano upon the Windmills cover 'Drug Autumn' while 'Soundcastles' twists the guitars back upon themselves. An easing LP with a title that suggests they need a bit of shoulder themselves. **S.**

Masque - Sometimes I Might EP (Topplers).

Kicks into life full of industrial menace, like Ministry sans the PCP. Blusterous drones with detached robotic semi-harmonics bolted on and although not impervious, it is a caustic, grazing, hammerblow of a record with perky beats bubbling temptingly beneath 'Hatred and Violence (There's Not Enough)'. The vocals take me back to days of Mick Prolapse chuntering into his mths, while 'Sometimes I Might' takes Earl Brutus twisted glam to dangerous doom-metal depths. Nasty, in the best way imaginable, of course. **S.**

Bilkis - Demo

Another female singer-songwriter to join the pile? Not so in the case of Sophie Pathan, as there is a disguised haunting quality in her low-key folk and expert harmonics. Like with 'early-music', there is an innocence and sincere emotive weight contained within the spartan arrangements. A sharp balance of ukulele pluck, pinpoint guitar strum, basic percussion and programmed sounds complement the gorgeous vocal soak. **S.**

Magic8 - Demo

Strident, a brisk new-wave like gait with intricate and filmy guitar work at the core of their verve. Polly's vocals have more than a touch of Debbie Harry's classic cool, indeed their pop music (skewed, but not obstinately so) is so handsomely self-assured, they don't need the shades and tacked on aloofness to tell their rock n' roll story. **S.**

The Dirtbombs - If You Don't Already Have A Look (In The Red)

Think the bass is the most uncool instrument? Dirtbombs'll give you two. Drums then? Nah, two sets of them too. The Dirtbombs, you'll understand, DO rhythm, a funky soul-ridden garage rock n' roll kinda rhythm that refuses to follow any set pattern, any set of rules that have been laid down prior. Show the evidence? Well, on the 29 track CD of original music, they scream "I'm saving myself for Nichele Nichols" into a diction mic during 55 seconds of undulating, passionate distortion, before 'Here Comes That Sound Again' skips and scuttles through a kind of disco-hop thang. The 23 track disc of covers versions sees them paying tribute to expected suspects such as the Rolling Stones, Stevie Wonder and Smokie Robinson alongside Soft Cell, Yoko Ono and The Bee Gees and a wide range of underground (and overground) heroes. The ultimate Dirtbombs collection. S.

Scurge - Cat With The 45 Calibre Claw (Jaunty)

Got to admire a band that set up a label to get their sounds out there, and what a sound it is too. This five-track affair heads off up the highway with a massive filthy metallic groove, foot to the floor the whole way. Think Raging Speedhorn jamming in the desert with Fu Manchu on the highway to hell. Pure adrenaline mainline to your head and feet that will go into overdrive and burn out. The secret is in the addictive groove flowing through the heavy riffs and beats, if raw and dirty is your baby head over to www.scurge.co.uk and support these worthy noise merchants. G.

British Beef - Without Me (Fat Fox)

Not sure what to make of that name. Reminds me of that bloke who always turns up dressed as John Bull to protest at a threat to English culture/parade his petty jingoism. On the inside though, British Beef couldn't actually sound more American. Their Swindon-based skate-punk veering towards the trans-Atlantic with the thickness of the production and depth of their snotty croon. S.

Venera - One Louder (Bad Taste)

Swedish take on punk with influences such as Bad Religion, The Ramones and Gang Green. Full on in your face melodic punk rock spread over 14 fists in the air attacks on your senses. This is pretty straightforward music; you either love it or hate it, the question is are they any good? In this case, yes, they carry it off with spiked hair and tattoos in place; you can dance to it, jump around to it and bellow along with whoa whoa backing vocals. All in place to make this a darn good melodic punk release, plenty of riffs and attitude and no let up in pace as it careers along the punk superhighway. G.

Various - Function Records Sampler (Function)

Cracking little compilation and free from the website and highly recommended if you like a bit of rock action. 8 tracks from Lebat, Escanna, Menendez, Push To Fire, Bulletproof, You're Smiling Now But We'll All Turn Into Demons, For Trucks and sr-o. Not all is in your face noise though, as shown by Menendez who produce quite floaty rock and For Trucks who offer up slide guitars galore. At the other end is Push To Fire who sound like The Blues Explosion on bad drugs. Get to www.functionrecords.com and ask for a copy before they all go. G.

Emiliana Torrini. Manchester Life Café. 02apr05.

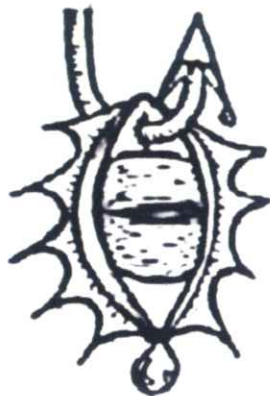
Emiliana Torrini scattered tranquillity around the room like snow drops, as each note of the soothing instrumentals ably provided by a tight-knit supporting trio inexorably with the singer's caressing voice. Parading tracks from her recently released second album 'Fisherman's Woman' with pride, humility and emotion like a proud mum bringing home her new born. The opening double whammy of 'Today Has Been OK' and 'Snow' started the comforting mood off nicely. The leading lady was calm and crisp throughout all the songs, despite the occasional buzzing technical difficulties, as her effervescent personality and cheeky humour made the time between songs almost as compelling as the main set. The Half Icelandic and Half Italian young madam was at her ironic best when introducing the meanderingly dreamy; 'Lifesaver' that was introduced as their 'Trash metal song in slow motion', promising to dabble in that genre in the future. There is a slight haunting edge to this quartet's music that adds to the listening experience and its captivating nature. Judging from tonight's dazzling display it is predicted that this polished performer's voice will pop up in many weird and wonderful settings in the near future. DA.

Okkervil River - Black Sheep Box (Jagjaguwar)

The crisp and flowing vocals of Will Sheff give this dreamy and poetic offering an earnest feel. The yearning and damning blues tainted; 'A Stone' sees Sheff stoically proclaiming that love is hurtful and painstaking at times. The power of dreams is scrutinised by way of nifty number; 'In A Radio Song'. This is done by incorporating a soft and tingling piano introduction, before the twanging acoustic element demonstrate darkly and poetically bedtime dangers. Instrumental diversity that incorporates the utilisation of a variety of effects, carefully extracted from equipment as varied as children's keyboards and distorted guitars to a pump organ and a Wuritzer is apparent and appealing. Thus helping to glide through a variety of genres from dark, yet warming indie/pop in 'Black' to folk/country in 'Get Big' and sprightly power pop in 'The Latest Toughest'. Trickles of Clem Snide, Idlewild, Tom McRae and Hall & Oates run through this offering, a brave and thought provoking journey of emotion and unrest. This journey is elongated by the maudlin marathon that is 'So Come Back, I Am Waiting'. This fourth album shows that some seemingly still rivers really do run deep. DA.

Arcade Fire. Manchester Academy 1. 04may05.

The Montreal sextet who combine to make Arcade Fire had a reputation for soaring orchestral and choral keyboard fuelled indie. This fact made for an intriguing atmosphere, you knew you'd be witnessing promise, but that the real sparks and fulfilment of potential would be produced later down the line. Leader of the pack, Win Butler, ably assisted by a scintillating string section and robust bass lines, as well as ethereal backing vocals seemed oblivious to the weight of expectation that has been dropped upon them from a great height. Tonight, they performed a close knit and compelling set mixing lushness with power and grit. A thoughtful and contemplative moment descended upon an enthralled 1,500 plus crowd, when the enchanting Regine Chassagne produced a commanding vocal performance in 'Hail!' taken from their 'Funeral' album. A recurring feature of Arcade Fire by way of marching instrumentals and commanding falsetto vocals, produced by Butler giving off a Bravery, Talking Heads and hint of Phil Oakley feel reached a highpoint towards the end in 'Rebellion Lies'. Butler's enigmatic personality came out via exuberant stage dives and crowd encouraging handclapping that was juxtaposed with sobering comments about drunks being good for "shouting and fucking up", as well as discouraging crowd chat during one of their quieter musical interludes. Although their rise has been swift and meteoric; this simmering sextet will not properly come to the boil for a few years yet and their effect will be scorching when they do, as they are already a mesmerizing live act. DA.



Back in 1997 when working on the Portsmouth student paper, I got hold of the Dawn Of The Replicants debut LP 'One Head, Two Arms, Two Legs', and it knocked me sideways. It took me 7 years to see them play live and last summer's York show reignited my passion for their subtly eccentric indie-rock and unique songwriting, so got in touch. More of this DOTR Q&A can be found at vpinterviews.blogspot.com. Skif.

>Introduce yourself and your Replicant associates.

DAVEY COYLE: My name is David on bass and car. Codenames include: The Colonel, K V Doyle and The Coll. Paul sings and makes me laugh. Roger turns a fine tune but is shite at smashin' guitars. Mikey is a regular compositional genius often to be found muttering away to himself in darkened rooms. Dottie is our man in the embassy, responsible for recording almost all our output, bankrolling the adventures - a purveyor of moral and spiritual guidance.

PAUL VICKERS: I co-write the songs with the guys and sing them all with a little help from my friends, who are: Roger, who adds nearly all the weird sounds you can hear on our records; Mike, who explores all the melodic possibilities and then tries to figure out how to play them; Dave, who to use a quote from Mike "is as good a bass player as John Deacon from Queen"; and Dottie, who is the George Martin of Galashiels but more relaxed when it comes to drugs.

EL HOMBRE DOTTE: El Hombre Dottie on the drums and the backing vocals. Qualities include, "Follow me, I'm right behind you" - not too close, of course - and "Don't over egg the pudding".

MIKE SMALL: Paul and I talk about football. Dave, Dottie and I talk about astronomy. Dottie and I talk about politics. Dave and I talk shite and computers. Roger and I argue (we're brothers). We all talk about music, women and TV.

>How did you come together?

RS: Lightning struck granite three times on the seventh day of the seventh month in the Year Of The Porcupine. **EHD:** Don't think we ever did come together, at least never all in the same room at the same time. **DC:** I won this gig in a raffle, don't know about the rest of the c*nts. **PV:** Man walks into a bar. Band walks into a bar. Band walks into a deal. Band walks out of a deal. Band walks into a new deal etc. **MS:** Roger and Paul released a record and people liked it. When labels started calling they didn't have a band yet so they got their friends in to help. **RS:** No, you're all wrong! Lightning! Granite! Year Of The Porcupine!

>Which album should they start with, and why?

PV: They should try all the albums; we are one of the most interesting and useful bands to come out of Gala in the history of the world.

>Was losing the East/West record deal DOTR's breaking or making?

DC: Fuck 'em. **EHD:** Duh! DOTR still here, innit? **PV:** No, it was only the hardening of our shell. We will never die 'cause we is made of heavily soiled underwear. **MS:** It was the point we realised we weren't in it for the money.

>What inspires you?

PV: The world we live in, and the ones we have yet to visit - including parallel dimensions. **MS:** The only true way to achieve success during your life is to create something that is a positive contribution to the development of our species and that will continue to exist after we're dead and gone. Most people do this through the continuation of their Gene Pool but as I can't stand kids and I can't paint very well I write songs instead. **EHD:** Music and lyrics of the tuneful, groovetastic, quality, inspirational kind. **RS:** For me - Beefheart, The Stooges, VU, Sonic Youth, Patti Smith, Howlin' Wolf, The Fall, Blondie, Tom Waits, Pixies, Beatles, Stones, Brian Eno, PJ Harvey, Bowie, Madonna etc with whatever's currently intriguing me thrown in - eg TV On The Radio or Betty Davis - plus stuff snatched from musical genres like dub, blues, jazz, folk, funk, country, film music or what have you.

>Suggest a publicity stunt to increase the DOTR profile in the UK.

RS: Spontaneous Internal Combustion? I don't think I'd like that very much. Paul once had an idea about the zoo and some polar bears. **PV:** We could turn into a woman.

>What do you consider your best achievements in music?

PV: Being part of 4 albums that I am very proud of and coming out the other end. **DC:** John Peel liked the band. That's about the most important thing that's happened to the band. Making some of the music that made JP grin is a nice feeling. **RS:** Persistence and the ability to mix our many influences into a soupy mix which tastes fairly fresh.

>What more would you like to achieve with your music?

RS: We'd like more people to sample our tasty soup. **MS:** To write a perfect song that moves people in the way that I have been moved occasionally by songs. **PV:** A big selling album and to appear on Top Of The Pops with a shetland pony. **DC:** I'd quite like to be massive in Japan. Only Japan though - not interested in anywhere else because my feet stick to the floor.

>If the musical world was ideal, it would...

DC: It would encourage, develop and sustain. **RS:** Probably be quite boring. There'd be nothing to butt your horns up against. **EHD:** It would pay better - a plumber's wages would be nice. **PV:** It would be shit. **MS:** Pay everyone involved in every aspect of the industry £150 per week (maximum) and those who are still hanging around after the new law was imposed would more than likely be in it for the right reasons

>On a DOTR curated festival bill, who would play?

RS: I'd like to see the London-based band Linus on the bill, plus Willie Nelson and Destiny's Child. I'd also like to put together a Sex Pistols / Country & Western combo for the event, called Johnny Cash For Chaos. **EHD:** Ant & Dec, The Woggles, 400 Blows, and Paul Vickers cos' he's a star! **PV:** Wesley Willis, Wreckless Eric, William Shatner, Ivor Cutler, Alvin Dann and Fleetwood Mac. **DC:** Main Stage: Sting, Eric Clapton and Celine Dion would be handing out drinks at the interval. Dance Tent: Eric Prydz would be responsible for pegs. Acoustic Stage: That little fucker Bright Eyes would be pedaling that pushbike electricity generator.

>If you weren't in a band, what would you do with your evenings?

EHD: Play scrabble in the bath while listening to White Rabbit by Jefferson Airplane. **PV:** Become a long-distance runner. **MS:** Buy a telescope and become an Astronomer. **RS:** Read books, talk on the 'phone, watch films, play games, eat soup, get engrossed in projects, think about sex and noodle around with instruments. Occasionally, go out into the wider world for adventure. Pretty much what I do now.



Dawn
Of The
Replicants

Replicants...

>What are your future plans for gigs and recordings?

DC: Yes, that's right. More of that. **PV:** We're hoping to get album number 5 in the can, which we're doing in May, but if Dottle gets a booking for the Selkirk Pipe Band we could get held up. **RS:** It may be called 'Pterodactyl', 'Fuck The Backlash!' or 'If The Lizard Boy Eats Then He Will Grow'. There are a couple of labels interested in working with us, who love what they've heard so far, so hopefully the finished album will blow their cotton socks off.

>What, with regards the UK music scene, upsets you?

EHD: Most of it, except the bits that delight me. **PV:** Bono. **MS:** The People, The Bands, The Music! **DC:** Well, the usual complaints: fast food music, quick buck shite that does nothing to help the kids coming up and the ones who've been round the block a couple of times. Finally Radiohead songs never fail to reduce me to tears. **RS:** There's no longer any kind of network for left-field or unusual music to thrive in. Not as many 'zines or indie labels, Peel's gone from the airwaves and NME's a joke when you compare it to what it and the other two music papers used to be like before Brit-Pop fucked everything up.

>What, with regards the UK music scene, delights you?

EHD: The bits that don't upset me. **MS:** Very Little. **PV:** Bono. **RS:** We used to produce some of the best music in the world. Maybe that'll happen again some day. **DC:** Ivor Cutler. Cliff Richard Christmas songs always make me giggle.

>What are you passionate about in life, apart from music?

PV: Boadas Serrano ham, football, photography, writing children's rhymes. **EHD:** The cat, the universe, chocolate and talkin' sense. **RS:** Love, sex, food, humour, spirituality, culture, psychology and the kind of stuff I'd be able to check out on the Discovery Channel if I had satellite. I'm not much interested in cars, sport or mathematics. **MS:** Science, Politics, Sport and the occasional Person. **DC:** My Family, Politics, Animals and Plants. Slugs will save us when the oil runs out. Don't drill the Arctic, save the penguins.

>Any other words of wisdom?

PV: The grass is always greener; you've got to sniff the lawn. **DC:** Don't get involved in or start any wars or fights. It's a waste of time, money and thought. **EHD:** Slow down, watch those kerbs, listen and enjoy. **RS:** "A dog is not reckoned good because he barks well, and a man is not reckoned wise because he speaks skillfully," as me old mucker Chuang Tzu used to say. **MS:** The wisest people had a habit of getting assassinated so I'm keeping my mouth shut.

'Bun Magic: SXSW Special' is out now.

Various - Sunday Nights: The Songs Of Junior Kimbrough (Fat Possum) Junior Kimbrough died of a stroke in 1998, but while the records aren't flying out of the shops, the influence of the man remains strong. There are stellar bunch of names on this record, such as Iggy Pop & The Stooges, who bring an oddly restrained rattle to 'You Better Run', Blues Explosion who, as might be expected, stay pretty true to tradition with their 'Meet Me In The City' cut, while the Black Keys make 'My Mind Is Rambling' smooth and scuzzy all at once. Overall, this is very definitely a tribute record as most of the tunes stay close to the age old blues dynamic. Except for perhaps Spiritualized's dirgy morris frug, there are no wild tangents, but certainly a heart-spattered sleeve of affection. **S.**

Tern - Demo

Slow and murky melodic rock opener 'You Owe Me', shunts along on the back of the yearning and echoing Staind style vocals of Andrew 'Beano' Bennett to provide a memorable intro to Tern's way of music. Rattling percussion provided by Craig Stapley steals in on second track 'Push One Stop' to give life to this expose of grit and determination from a candid Cambridgeshire four piece. This offering features a consistently rising tempo that reaches a crushing crescendo in final number 'BIGBADBALL'. **DA.** www.ternonline.com

Bizzy B - Science EP Volume III & IV (Planet Mu)

Despite the title alluding to this being a collection of previously released material, this is a release of all new material. Hardcore jungle breaks are punctuated by catchy stabs and riffs. It would be easy to claim "we've heard it all before." But while the beats rarely stray from established ground, the whole adds up to something a bit special. There are some choice, tasty sounds at work here and the Darth Vader sample on 'Merda Style 2004' even manages to sound threatening. **Buzzin'.** **LMT**



Ivy's Itch - Beneath The Skin

Excitingly dark offering coming at you from a Queen Adreena scare the sh*t out of you meets the rolling bass and tribal drums of The Banshees. Demented female vocals exorcising demons then drifting into sweet lullaby as walls of raw tunes fall from dark clouds. It's pounding, a possessed child screaming for attention in extended tantrums while birds chatter away, hallucinating in the background. Inventive twists and turns in dark shadows marks this out as an outstanding effort and my mouth is watering at the prospect of what they will produce next, discover more about at www.ivys-itch.co.uk. **G.**

Life Bitter Soul - Demo

Decent demo all the way from Australia of modern sounding slightly quirky electronic rock. Yeah, I could see this making an impact on the likes of MTV, it's catchy bright and attractive but with sinister undertones and is odd enough to stand out. It has swirling interludes between crisp processed riffs over bastardized pop with plenty of eyeliner in a goth-lite kind of way. I wasn't sure at first, but this has taken me in, it's a real grower and it does have the potential to be all over the radio and TV while retaining some credibility. **G.**

Dugong - Quick To The City (Bombed Out).

'See Dugong can cover several bases. Spirited emo with guitars ringing out every last bead of fevered sweat, clattering indie-punk and more reflective, claming, bluesy missives. The opening pairing of 'Quick To The City' and 'Gravedancer' give no quarter as they rattle without a pause. Come the centre coupling and a Marlboro country wisp of smoke wafts around the tune that twists through intensity and cracked histrionics. 'Ain't Seen No Trouble Like Mine' finishes the job with a crazes professionalism verging on the hardcore. **S.**

Sunshine - Victimisanothernameforlover (Custard).

Thunderclap and we're into to electro-goth territory, infectious choruses, dark pulsing beats and skulking vox from the Czech quartet. I can see the black-clad and PVC'd getting into a low-key lather over this potential dancefloor filler. Der Weisse Engel and Fischerspooner provide remixes and variations on a theme, but the main version does the job perfectly well. **S.**

Dead Blonde Girlfriend - Letters Home (No One Son/bmi)

Combining the fuzzy guitars of new wave, the rustic and friendly vocals oft seen in the folk genre and most importantly firing deep, witty and dark punk style lyrics reminiscent of the late great Joe Strummer, Dead Blonde Girlfriend eclectically quench diverse musical thirsts. The darkest and most poignant number on this lacerating offering that dissects the topic of loneliness and the power of love (especially when you don't possess it) is 'February 14'. The plight of a lacklustre jilted lover who explores all the ways of coming to an untimely end on Valentines Day, in the hope that the object of his desire will discover his body on that very day is delivered in a brusque manner. There is little respite from the bleak subject matter as the prospect of love hanging itself is raised. It is akin to being handed a crude bloody heart wrapped in the prettiest pink wrapping paper with cupid posing proactively all over it. Deep stuff; dive in and enjoy the depth. **DA.** www.deadblondegirlfriend.com

The Hair - Haircuts

Imagine, like, The Coral with a bigger penchant for Bonzo than Beefheart, for Arthur Brown than Arthur Lee, and you might end up with The Hair. A pop sensibility stolen from the 80's turns up in the lost and found, and remains unmoved throughout. Musically though, the Hair transcend at least 4 or 5 decades. 'Bunny Boller' holds sample friendly Hammond funk together with regimented drumming and a friendly yelp. Top larks. **S.**

Plans and Apologies - Tree Dee Pee EP (Artists Against Success)

Plans and Apologies have their influences, but they shave merely a flake from each and apply to a much bigger sonic concept. Not that amongst their psyche quirkiness, Morrisseyian dapper, shards of crazed-yelp style hardcore and Camberwick Green folk-music, there isn't a great deal for a mainstream audience to cling onto, and dig. Potentially satisfying to all then. Indeed, such a load going on there be, that the 6 tunes seem to occupy more than their 16 minutes. Not through any ennui at all, simply the disbelief that they could weave that much material into such a short garment. It is one of many colours. Wear it 'til it wears out. **S.**

Maximilian Hecker - Lady Sleep (Kitty-Yo)

Frail piano torch songs delivered as though melancholia is both symptom and cure. The gap between useful catharsis and total heartbroken collapse is cigarette-paper thin. The vocals are pitched high not so vulgar as to be full of whine and shriek, rather these are careful whispers offering a close-up of a soul weighed down by this world where swords will always be crossed rather than melted down. This is a heart always full of life and love. It is like a resigned sigh expanding its musical repertoire, but when the guitars crash on 'Yeah Eventually She Goes, the woe becomes emphatic. **S.**

Olog Broström - In A Trailer Park EP (My Secret Garden).

The warped bleakness of the vocals on the title track could give rise to rumour that Nick Cave has been melted down, and the process recorded. Genuinely arresting and unsettling, and a bit like Sid Vicious at the beginning of his 'My Way'. This is melancholy without any of the yearning, dark and direct. 'World Of Islands In The Sky I Would Live In You Even If You Were A Videogame' captures more of a lo-fi yelp and dowses it with sparkly electronica and beats. These get more and more pronounced and intrusive as the EP goes on, but it makes for an engaging 13 minutes. **S.**

Anonymous Tip - Greetings From Wasteland (10past10)

Everything you would expect from a band that Snuff are putting out on their own 10past10 label, six tracks of breakneck punk pop dripping with sweat. They try to fool you by slipping in some dub elements in the middle of songs so you look an idiot while having a pogo round the dining room but it just adds to the good time feeling of these raw songs and chanted choruses. **G.**

The Exploits Of Elaine - Demo

It arrives in a fold out Hessian sleeve, held together with string; inside are two CD sleeves, one holding a polite note about the demo, the other holding some of the most exquisite sounds I've heard in a long while. Opener 'Alaska' is a big trance like flow of guitars and rhythms while 'One More Soldier' opens with dream inducing melodies before gently rocking you awake. 'Drop' continues the big instrumental theme with a nod to prog rock and 'Funeral Song' rounds this off with a mellow lament that drifts and floats on a current of nothingness. This band really is rather special, they've created a lovingly stunning demo and you should head to www.theexploitsofelaine.co.uk to check them out. **G.**



Duri, These Two Hands, Apnia.

Portsmouth Frog On The Front. 25feb05.

Apnia are a dark delicious treat. Female fronted metal with deep melodic twists and quirky arrangements designed to lure you onto the rocks in gentle calms before snapping your neck with blasts of power. They have a great number head banging in front of them, slaves unto their masters. These Two Hands are obviously good musicians, the problem is with people like that is that their bands can be a bit, well, boring. TTH seem to be caught between metal, indie, punk, prog and ultimately fail to grab you. Duri meanwhile grab you with both hands and slap you about with their excellent tunes. This is a band now brimming with confidence. Jaye has a quite wonderful voice, her vocals big and powerful and the music now has enough guts to back it up. They spend most of the gig in the pit lapping up the attention that they well deserve and it's time to take their big rock tunes and fly out of Portsmouth. **G.**

The Charade - The Best Is Yet To Come (Skipping Stones).

A sampler for an LP rather than a single, this is brisk and breezy, capturing strolls on sunny days cut into by bitter cold. Unsurprising then that The Charade hail from Sweden. Sugar sweetness drips from their steady jangle pop, which owes as much to the 60s as to the ubiquitous C80's. **S.**

Absent Kid - I Burnt Down The Family Business (Fierce Panda).

Absent Kid build through the opening elliptical '(...)' and 'Quiet Playground' until the full unleashing of the latter. It feels harnessed, like they could delve deeper, but its an effective introduction to their atmospheric indie rock. Theremin-style spook tops up 'Static Soul's swirling dramatics, while a quality pop vocal hook on 'This Town Works Backwards' takes it higher. Pepped-up n' plucked post-rock dynamism in places with a Scott Walker-like confidence, and a punkish drive elsewhere, and we like that. **S.**

Ryan Adams & The Cardinals - Cold Roses (Lost Highway)

Prolific Ryan Adams throws out yet another duet collection of Young/Parsons like country-rock that appears to float light as a feather but captures an emotive weight that few can master, aided and abetted by God's instrument, the steel guitar. The simple melancholy of 'Meadowlake Street' pits Banhart against the farm while 'Beautiful Sorta' is T-Rex for rustics. It is an LP pitched so as not too maudlin, but enough to tap at the tender spots that are generally bettered for occasional exposure. **S.**

The Books - Lost And Safe (Tomlab)

"Yes and no are just distinguished by distinction, so we choose the inbetween". As a lyric, it's quite apt to sum up the nature of the LP. Think of two poles, the Books would occupy the space between both without ever touching the central points. Flickering whining tones, hide n' seek subtle guitar motifs, a vigorous shake of a full cutlery draw. Sounds without genre, without obvious equal. For example, on 'Be Good To Them Always', latter day radio commentary is given to windy electronica, with a touch of the stubborn cuteness of 'O Superman's' vocoder poetry amongst. 'It Never Changes To Stop' sees banjo duel with cello and a vocal that causes them to embrace. 'Venice' is warm and humorous, a recording of surrealist art taken to extremes bobbing on a salivary rhythm. S.

Sarandon - The Miniest Album (Banazan)

At the behest of Crayola, these three guys came together for 3 rehearsals which led to one gig and one recording session, and these 7 songs (lasting 10 minutes) are the fruits of that session. You can feel the spontaneity in the sustained angular chops, the agitated basslines and the enthusiastic rattle from the drums. AS many quality ideas as you might expect on the biggest of LPs. 'Your Devotion' and 'Bored' are the most iconic pop songs of the lot, frenzied jangling and cheeky vocal hooks. A pleasurable irritant and great rock n' roll 7" value. S.



Damon & Naomi - The Earth Is Blue (20/20/20)

Two former members of Galaxie 500, Damon and Naomi utilise these records to push the envelope of cloudy, fluttering pop music. 'A Second Life' takes Sandy Denny to it's modern calm and ambient conclusion. Gorgeous. On 'Malibran' they perform a naive-jazz with Wyatt-esque fragility, which they also apply to their cover of 'While My Guitar Gently Weeps'. This LP is a soft, empathic rubs of a sufferer's forearm, accessible but with something for Wire-readers to latch onto. S.

Keren Ann. Lille Splendid. 19may05.

The crowd I was proud to be a part of yesterday was one of the most enthusiastic crowds I've ever seen. The four encores Keren Ann gave in the end of the show might help in illustrating this. Indeed yesterday was probably the first time yours truly went to see a 'real' French gig- and got completely swept by its dynamics and vibes. Ann is a unique singer-songwriter and performer who manages to put much more into her songs when on stage. The evening unfolds the multifaceted talent of Ann, combining rock with tender gothic touches, light jazz (à la Porter, Baker), blues, psychedelic pop harmonies and more- without being too boring or too much. Most of the songs were sung in English, though they have been written originally in French, and offered simple and naive lyrics, the kind you would hum to yourself on a sunny summer day. The best way to imagine a show like this, I would say, would be thinking of Tim Burton's aesthetics coming to life in a sweeter, more soothing form of a song. True magic! DF.

Ascoltare - Giving Set 1 (Strange Lights)

Ascoltare - Giving Set 2 (Tripel)

Perverse, toughlove electronica and found sounds released over a 7" release on Strange Lights and an mp3 download courtesy Tripel records (www.tripelrecords.com). The 7" deals with the shorter material, which features skidding, the clack of snooker balls + pipes and pips in its hypnotic cleansing. 'Tour de Force' bullds like an engine trying to stoke itself into life, rattling like a whisk and rippling with cold electronic desire. The mp3 set comprises 4 longer tracks, 'Futures Market' all tortuous static with angels trying to pierce through with a message of harmony. 'Shrewd Trainer' wobbles like a bass heavy steel-drum attempting Black Sabbath, warping into drones and piano taps. The 'Photo Finish' is like alien probing, life flashing before eyes stiff, a discordant typewriter tapping out your existential hymn sheet. S.

The Boy From Space - Don't Call Me Sir (Interstella)

A bold drum motif, perky but polite brass, a sarcastic Half Man Half Biscuit cadence, car chase squalling and a chorus with 'I Could Be So Good For You' barra' boy charm. Can't go wrong. 'In Possession' is a more loopy ambient effort, while the Belle & Seb nursery hymnal 'Where People Are Going To Be' closes a distinct playful single. S.

Kathryn Williams - Shop Window (Caw)

The Emily Davidson of modern indie-pop music throws herself in front of the stampeding mass of have a passable voice will prostitute for chart success acts around at the moment. The Liverpudlian singer/songwriter proudly parades a lucid, poignant and tender offering 'Shop Window'. Williams utilises her vocal hybrid of Bjork, Nina Simone and Dido and back drop of Nick Drake instrumentals in order to place her seductive and relaxing story on full show. It is going to be hard to pass this colourful and candid songstress without, at the very least an admiring glance. DA.

Schizo Fun Addict - The Atom Spark Hotel.

The first take of the title track (replayed later) is a Velvet Underground/Cocteau Twins piano-trinkets with the bass backing vocals trouble the stomach (in the best way). 'Fashion Crisis Hits New York' is lo-fi Sonic Youth-like clatter with psychedelia settling like dew. 'The Venus Probe' is spartan, stark pop which grates at dead skin. The 1" side of the LP is studio recorded, with the second side put together with laptop and boom box. This allows a nice change of pace and an extra dimension to be added, and they explore the nuances of their sound as 'Jet Blew' runs backwards through Royal Trux style blues and 'Jellstar' slaps down Beasties-esque hip-hop. S.

Slate Pipe Banjo Dragers - Seafo Od recip Es (Mandolin)

Fascinating collection of tunes composed from found sounds, acoustic/electric instruments, sampling, playing around with toys and borrowing the talents of friends and relatives before mixing it all up on the computer. It's impossible to put a tag on this dark brooding weird electronica collaged with live sounds, experimental snapshots of lost moments. An album to listen to repeatedly and still be able to hear things you didn't notice before, I recommend a comfy cushion and pitch black room to enjoy this trip; it may conjure up places in your mind you don't want to find but it's one hell of a journey from the 'Alpine Sin Balloon' via 'The Ice Cap Cracks Jesus Puzzle' to 'The Morning Chocolate Drowner'. Discover more over at www.mandolinrecords.co.uk. G.

Kaiser Chiefs - Employment (B-Unique)

The overhype does nothing for the Kaiser Chiefs potential longevity, and the backlash will come quick, and those ambivalent will find themselves provoked to comment to the negative, rather than saying nothing. Such is the lot of the new next big thing that becomes the big thing before you can finish the word 'potential'. However I have a soft spot for Kaiser Chiefs. Why? Well, during my year in Leeds I spent a fair shake of time at the Joseph's Well venue and half of these boys were working behind the bar at that time. It's very superficial I know but if you want a backlash to these dapper fellas and their post-baggy, post-mod thing, it'll begin somewhere else than here. S.

Hell Is For Heroes - Transmit Disrupt (Captains Of Industry)

Hell Is For Heroes emerge alive and kicking from major label hell and get back to doing it DIY style and sound all the better for it as they clatter into Kamichi, the opening track on this album. It's a big middle finger to the corporate labels as they power through an intense set of songs with a new found fire in their bellies. HIFH sound fresh and can vary from delicate guitar lines to full on rage within seconds as on 'Quiet Riot' that is dark and brooding while 'Models For The Programme' starts with a drum machine and is lean bass led exercise in flexing muscles. Overall an impressive return, playing to their strengths. **G**

Vibration White Finger - 5 Minutes To Live

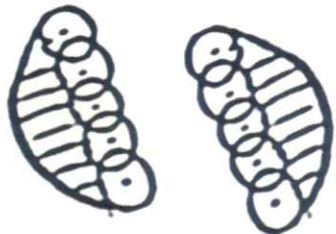
Brass infused funky 80s rock, glamorous and spirited like Do Me Bad Things, the horns giving a sense of undone bow-ties and crushed velvet. 'Let It Go' takes the bragging rights at the rear of this entertaining EP. **S**

The Flesh - The Flesh (Gern Blandsten)

The Flesh set up shop with a cacophony of synths, imposing drums and a gothic hip-hop vocal echoing Mike Patton's less vigorous moments. There is a darkness, but in the sense that there is camp poppy fluidity tip-toeing like a comic-spectre. This is particularly so on the tricky 'Sweet Defeat', which also nods toward the ragged splendour of Dexy's. You expect intensity, but get a candle-extinguishing rush, like Suicide dismantling the 'Monster Mash'. **S**

Detwijje - Would You Rather Be Followed By Forty Ducks For The Rest Of Your Life (Gizeh)

Post Rock is fast becoming a packed, trendy and exclusive club, which is starting to spill out in to mediocre copies of the greats. With this in mind I listened to Detwijje debut offering with trepidation. It would be too easy to lazily compare Detwijje to Explosions in the Sky meets 'A Silver Mt Zion' and although they are similar, Detwijje manage to bring something new to the Post Rock scene, namely, four tracks of superbly written and beautifully crafted music, lulling you in to a dream like soundscape, you can almost feel your heartbeat syncing with the rise and fall of the music. Plus the opening track features the most stunning full stop ever. **BS**



The Gasman - The Grand Electric Palace of Variety (Planet Mu)

Portsmouth's very own The Gasman (AKA Christopher Reeves ... no, really!) is something a bit special. Yes, I do have a auto-reflex bias for acts from my hometown, but even taking that into account this stands head and shoulders above the crowd. Reeves' real talent is in simply being himself. For sure he is influenced by the Warp Records stable. But rather than rehash derivative loops he conjures up soundscapes that come across like Lynch-ian nightmares. Could this double album (like most doubles) benefit from some trimming around the edges? Maybe, but that kind of misses the point. The Gasman is the most uncompromising artist I've come across in a long while. Exceptional. **LMT**

Clor. Liverpool Barfly Loft. 18Apr05.

A vibrant opening, the beats not overpowering, a bit like a jab n' trot back, a new-wave boxer toying with his opponent, hinting at the inevitable. Second song up and its Kling Klang lounge jazz sliced at with crisp chops. Like 70s science infatination with prong junctures and naturalistic tangents. Two of the group may be in suits but it is the quirky but strident set of twists and turns that reveal the band's true sharpness within their stellar funk drone. **S**

Snap Ant, The Veras, Japanese Cars, Peter & The Wolf, Liam Frost. Liverpool Zanzibar. 07May05.

This Anti-Social Club evening begins calmly with Liam Frost's classical pickin' and Damien Rice style folketeering aided and abetted by echoey drum, violin and mandolin. Peter & The Wolf apply a CSNY-harmonious leaning and catholic instrumentation to their perky shtick. Excellent and honest folk music with a distinct groove beating through and given oomph via the bite-size orchestrality. Japanese Cars are very much like Interpol only with 70's rock widdling attacking the over-sleek and a hint of gothic camp gathering in the intrigue. The Veras base themselves around Brit-rock chuggery but keep up pace with Stroke-like strides. To top, Snap Ant and his sartorially adroit bunch pitch their thrilling alienate harmonies and elementary electronica at grounded avant-funk. The next extra-terrestrial prog disco you're at, they'll be the house band. **S**

Mira - Pieces (Projekt)

There are times when you hear the first note of a track and fall in love straight away, 'Pieces' is one of those. Musically this hints back to the shoegazing era, swirling guitars that chime away in that Cocteau Twins style creating quite remarkable dark pop tracks. Each a mini epic, none more so than the smookey, dreamy 'No Other Way', a song to get lost in. A cover of 'Todd Space Is My Day Job' sounds more like Siouxsie And The Banshees than the Banshees, big drums and threatening bass full of eastern promise, Staircase Mystery type power. Mightily impressive music on the dark side. **G** www.projekt.com

Various - Sunsets & Silhouettes (Planting Seeds)

A game of two halves this, but nonetheless 18 cuts of hazy cut grass from the finest popletiers around. Fonda skip through fields with a puffed-chest tweeness that recalls Echobelly. Astropop 3 apply a Stone Roses pinch to acoustic melancholy, which contrasts with Fiel Garvie's Cranes/Cocteau crystallisation of heavy wintry breathiness. Mark Gardener's West Coast burnt; Parsons-esque country is mirrored later by The Voyces and the Asteroid No. 4, with the latter more rugged in their approach. Camera Obscura's live acoustic yearnings and Linda Draper's cutglass innocence are highlights, while Xavier Pelleuf's cleansing shoegazey gospel and Sister Vanilla's minimalist 60's girl group melodies capture the imagination. **S**

The Fog Band - The Law Of The Sea (Purr)

The megaphone vox appear as though a beam of lighthouse awareness through the mist. Nonetheless we hit the rock. The rök! It's a rök that's sharp-suited, incessant and captivating. It lies somewhere between Cramps Island and Whoville, a vividly and defiance in their hip-led swagger. Like Devant and The Fall, they have a crack at 'Ghost In My House' that flits between rockabilly sweat and crooner glow. It works. The Fog Band work. There will be more to intrigue us. **S**

Rob Reynolds - Sightseeing (Invisible Hands)

Paul Carrack-like vocals laid smoothly upon ethereal jazz weaned on 80's AOR-pop, like Joe Jackson's mid-period perhaps. A good accompanying relaxant to a Radio 2 tea-break. A big sound though, perhaps a little over-produced by lo-fi standards of most of the stuff sent to VP. Has me in mind of Bruce Hornsby's 'The Way It Is' in that respect. I always liked that tune, despite it's ubiquity. **S**

Captain Wilberforce - Mindfilming (Blue Tuxedo).

A Leeds and Birmingham based duo, not exactly as wide a divide as The Kills in their early days, but still inconvenient. Despite their gap, they create seemingly quite flighty indie pop-rock, but with guitars providing an intriguing underbelly. It's commercially appealing, being tip-top songwriting given a subtle quirk, such as the bounce of 'I Haven't Got Any Famous Friends' and the Ben Folds chirp of 'A Very British Earthquake'. **S**

Capital X - Turn Up The Silence EP

Hardcore Korg synths rule the school with electro-metal duo Capital X. Using just the synths, they create a Suicide-like pulsing darkness, the vocals like Helen Love gone lo-fi goth. A Kraftwerk influence is present but with the Howard Hughes obsessive cleanliness replaced by a brooding dank. **S.**

Team LG - Big Man (Earsugar)

Melodica drags a wearied beat and vocal like a bindle tied to a weather-withered stick. This is a journeyman's music hotfootin' and ridin' the rail, but in a modern indie-pop melancholia style. Yet this is a product of love. The love of Mister L and Little G, and the warmth is highly visible, particularly on the hollowed-out brittle beats of b-side 'Jesus In A Show?'. **S.**

Orange Street, Counter Clash, Young Squire, Flesh. Portsmouth Frog On The Front. 04mar05.

I'm convinced Flesh wanted to play tonight just so they could wear a pink cowboy hat in front of a skinhead audience! Their classic rock sound has developed at quite a pace, think Exile-era Stones played through a Hendrix wah wah solo and you have a band living out their rock n roll dreams. Young Squire look too young to even be in the venue, kitted out in the latest Atticus clothing and the short back and sides with floppy fringe haircuts. They play a tight set of that American influenced punk, think Blink 182 etc. Plenty of style, very tight if a little one paced but should be worth picking up again in a year or two. Counter Clash turn out to be a Clash covers band; workmanlike and they drag up a few semi-forgotten gems for us old timers. Orange Street are a ska covers band, hence all the skinheads in attendance tonight. Now usually I avoid cover bands at all costs, but OS get the Grebo vote because they a) manage to squeeze 8 members onto a tiny stage, b) are actually very good and do a couple of their own tracks, c) do a cracking version of 'Teenage Kicks' that they dedicate to John Peel and finally d) they have everyone gurning like loons, hell, even the bouncers are skankin' away by the end. **G.**

The Peppermints - Jesüs

Chryst (Pawtracks)

Particularly sacrilegious cover and title, but we can forgive that. Cyclical alt.rock with that kind of stomping bass-heavy thing that scatters all underfoot, but twitchy also. Kinda like The Fall's 'The Classical', but distributed in glorious small chunks. No meandering, the ideas flicked off before moving on to swat away musical pomposity with another careering swipe. A couple of mantra-like harmonious pieces aside, 'Jesüs Chryst' mirrors Melt Banana's spirit, but it's more of a sonic uphill spurt than a down gradient slip-slide. **S.**

People In Planes - Talking

Heads (Remote Control/Pinnacle)

They play a kind of thick pop-rock that surveys as much of Ride as of, say, the Doobie Brothers (as an example), a vague country-rock peeping above. 'Remember Sammy Jenks' gives a greater insight, i.e. the hesitant shoe-gaze ethic taking centre stage. It also pushes Ben Folds piano twinkles into a chorus area and builds to a gigantic crescendo, a bit like recent tour buds Oceansize. No bad thing, that. **S.**

Revere - Chloroform EP

Something of Ben Folds and the Divine Comedy sophisto-pop but leaning further still towards higher art. The eight-piece, at least as far as this track from their forthcoming EP indicates, spin and snowball into a large mesh of orchestral histrionics. Posh music, no dirt under the fingernails and impeccably turned out. Nowt wrong with suit and boot. **S.**

Viarosa - Porous (Pronoia)

Containing members of Willard Grant Conspiracy and Cornershop, Viarosa play a brand of Celtic mountain folk bleeding with funeral intensity, but yet charmingly unpretentious. The vocals capture Cave, Cash and Cohen, swooping like eagles, aware of their prey but also of their own majestic grace. The violin similarly is fussy about appearances coming on strong only when necessary and most effective. Aside from the less successful and vocally gruffer finale, smoke envelopes these tunes which themselves start as a wisp but then solidify into a tightening grip. **S.**

Sunshine. Liverpool Barfly Loft. 26apr05.

Goth punk with stadium-filling post-rock guitars and gripped nasal vocals might seem an odd filling to a garage rock sandwich of the Bellrays and the Veras but, after an initially coolness, single 'Victimisanothernameforlover' wins over the audience. Unsurprising that this should grab the attention as singer Kay (pronounced K-eye) spends the song stalking the crowd, in a manner befitting the brooding beats, and stood upon a chair in the empty dancefloor arc that support bands always suffer. It's an excellent half hour, their dynamism causing a perceivable light to jet out from the stage rather than remain contained within their performance 'box'. **S.**

Marmaduke Duke - The Magnificent Duke (Captains Of Industry).

Jorge Stibero, a Portuguese chap now resident in Glasgow, with no musical experience embarked on a project to record a trilogy of LPs based around novels written by his parents: The Magnificent Duke; Duke Pandemonium and The Death Of The Duke. This single LP, recorded with fellow musical miscreant Brian Jessop highlights the three schizophrenic personalities of 'The Duke' by dividing the songs into categories: 'When the world explodes'; 'When the world implodes'; and 'When the world corrodes...'. So a concept album then, and a complex one, as it deals with each personality song by song from the Mike Patton style croon2scream2croon and rhythm-breaking cut n' paste jazz-rock of 'The Red And The Number' to the ominous pulping tread of 'Fridge and Fromage' picked at with castanets. Then the cycle begins again and it skarts, blugs and fricks with projectile over-excitement. At the same time it is also prog taken to sub-marine depths, swaying on the pulses beneath the ocean floor. Intricate yet bludgeoning, and amongst the chaos, genuine balladeering pearls like 'A Conspiracy & A Devil'. Genres jostling for position, this is like to be of interest to students of human behaviour. Astonishing. **S.**

Various - Static Disaster: The UK In The Red Sampler (In The Red)

Gnarly, grizzly, scuzzy, garage rock. Some names already well known in the UK (Dirtbombs, Piranhas, Jon Spencer Blues Explosion) to ease access into lesser known acts. The sound quality flies about, and perhaps it's too much for one sitting, but if you want (hey! need, fella) to know what's happening in the worldwide garage scene, In The Red can provide a plethora of pointers. **S.**



Six By Seven - Artists, Cannibals, Poets, Thieves (Saturday Night Sunday Morning)

Cockroaches everywhere can count themselves fortunate that, when the nuclear holocaust comes, they'll be in good company. Confronted with the sort of challenges that would have broken lesser bands the loss of a major label record deal and two founding members, as well as a criminal lack of public interest and recognition Nottingham's Six By Seven are somehow still standing. 'Artists, Cannibals, Poets, Thieves' produced by the band at their own Peveril Hotel studio and released on their own label is their fifth full-length album and, like its predecessor '04', takes a little while to make an impression. Its abrasive edge means James Flowers's keyboards take a back seat. Opener 'All I Really Want From You Is Love' is classic Six By Seven, but the real surprises are 'Stara Paris Rescued Me' and 'You Know I Feel Alright Now', which are more than enough to satisfy anyone disaffected with Trent Reznor's latest offering. **BW.**

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Vanity Project is produced in Liverpool by myself, Skif (S), with major contributions by Grebo (G), the Black Squirrel (BS) and Leon Michael Tricker (LMT) in Portsmouth (where VP was born and raised), Ben Woolhead (BW) in Birmingham, David Adair (DA) in Warrington, Katherine Tomlinson (KT) in Oldham and DubFlower (DF) in Roubaix, France.

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