

albums

PAVEMENT *Crooked Rain Crooked Rain* (Fellaheen)

There were three types of reaction to Pavement in the past: hatred, ignorance or astonishment. This time round, they'll hit your ears like a velvet uzi. This time round, everyone will be astonished.

Crooked Rain Crooked Rain is gloriously laid back. 'Cut Your Hair', 'Gold Sounds', 'Elevate Me Later' and 'Unfair' are the big wonky rock numbers here. They would all reach number one in a perfect world, but that's not what this album is about. The real melting moments come from the slow sunken tracks. 'Heaven Is A Truck' is a Pavement blueprint. Malkmus begins quietly growling over some wayward piano and bewildered guitar, then the drumming comes in and makes sense out of it all and then in comes this fantastic pop chorus — "She's just the Queen 'o Castle 'o Casadina" (or something like that) — and then you can't live without it.

The delicate country of 'Range Life' is too succulent to be regarded as merely mindbending, but it is. "I want a range life, if I could settle down then I would settle down" sings Malkmus while the intentional musical errors fall about the place. And then there's



pavement

the closer, 'Filmore Jive', a curtains down, six minute goodbye.

This offering from Pavement is messy, attractive and brilliant. *Crooked Rain Crooked Rain* is fifty blip-minutes of indie rock pleasure that everyone should get a piece of.

JOHN TAITE

JAWBOX *For Your Own Special Sweetheart* (Atlantic)

One of the more entertaining things about major labels signing alternative bands is reading the attempts of the publicity department to get down with the college crowd. For instance, here's somebody at Atlantic who's probably never heard Jawbox: 'The dichotomy between noise and melody, poignancy and sonic bludgeon that's at the heart of Jawbox . . . ' Damn, and here I was thinking they were just another Fugazi-damaged DC punk band with some good tunes. Actually, that's being a little unfair. *For Your Own Special Sweetheart* is probably their best album to date. The addition of a second guitarist has toughened out their sound. There's moments like 'Jackpot Plus' where Jawbox forget about trying to be intense and just cut loose with a good old-fashioned stomper of a song. Vocalist J. Robbins has loosened up too, he's found a nice ratio of singing to shouting that keeps an edge on the songs without them sounding like a chanted



beck

diatribe. I guess they'll never shake that 'melodic punk' tag but at least for *Your Own Special Sweetheart* is pushing the standards up a notch or two while moving away from the Fugazi Jnr sound that dogged *Grippe* and *Novelty*. To put it simply, *For Your Own Special Sweetheart* rocks.

KIRK GEE

BECK *Mellow Gold* (Geffen-BMG)

Cutie-pie Beck, he looks fourteen, but is actually 23, and he makes music like a man that has taken 36 acid trips and drunken two cans of beer.

Although it's on a major label this album was recorded at Karl's house and Rob's house and they used Beck's four track recorder, and consequently it has a very experimental and wacky feel to it.

This is one big fruit salad of a record, just about every musical sound available is present on it: whistling, chanting, whirring, guitars, percussion, rubberband bass, (what I imagine to be) U.F.O noises, Dalek noises, underwater singing noises, blowing into a large sea shell noises, everything, this is a total treat to listen to!

Throughout the album Beck is having a lovely time, taking the piss out of the music industry, himself and whoever else he feels like with great humour and finesse, to go along with the music/non music.

From the pschedelicy drawn out trippy songs, with on-purpose cliches, lotsa 'oh yeahs' and loose arrangements to the quirky, short and merry there is never one dull moment on this album. Just sitting and listening to the lyrics without the music would be a chortle in itself, but with the music it's even better.

Beck warns us on 'Whiskeyclone, Hotel City' "You shouldn't talk to squirrels", talks of Motherfuckers on 'Mutherf . . . er' (he shrieks in an underwater voice, 'Everyone's out to get you

mutherf . . . er! Fantastic!); everyday white trash occurrences in 'Truckdrivin Neighbours Downstairs (Yellow Sweat)' which has a great 'hold up yer beers and sing along now' chorus; his being signed to a record label 'Pay No Mind (Snoozer)', and of course his yummy catchy hit 'Loser', the theme song for all teenage boys. I don't usually go for 'wacky' stuff like this, but you can't help but like Beck (I knew I loved him when I saw him breakdancing on the 'Loser' video) . . . he does it so well, he doesn't try, he just is.

SHIRLEY-ANNE CHARLES

NINE INCH NAILS *The Downward Spiral* (Interscope)

There was a comic strip called *The Bumpkin Billionaires* a number of years ago. It was the continuing saga of some filthy rich folk who wanted to be poor. But the more they tried to destroy or get rid of their cash, the more money they got back. Trent Reznor is in a similar situation. He tries to sound unlistenable hard, but sells records by the millions.

Downward Spiral, recorded in Sharon Taite's mansion (site of the Charles Manson killings), is meant to be a terrifying episode of apocalyptic industrial pain. Look at the titles — 'Mr Self Destruct', 'Reptile', 'Heresy', 'Ruiner' — Trent really wants to sound scary. But the pop (industrial pop, you understand) choruses, catchy beats and the textured sense of structure mean that, though the album is a million times harder than *Pretty Hate Machine*, it's as listenable as hell.

'March of the Pigs' is the single — a pleasurable pounding of beats that sound like machinery in hyperdrive with digitally ravaged vocals.

Downward Spiral is a direct descendant from *Broken* but he doesn't want to desensitise you. There are light and dark shades throughout. The human screams which back the electronic blitzkrieg of 'The Becoming' give way to acoustic guitar in the middle, which reverts back into a monster Sepultura type riff and "It won't give up, it wants me dead, this goddamn noise inside my head."

The violent 'Big Man With A Gun' leads into a delicate instrumental called 'A Warm Place', there's grand piano on 'I Do Not Want This' and finally on 'Hurt' where the music turns to head in hands bewilderment.

Trent may not be the beast he feels he is, but *Downward Spiral* is a varied slice of industrial that very few can better.

JOHN TAITE

SOUNDGARDEN *Superunknown* (A&M)

It's like I'm having a love affair with this album. At first I took it at surface level and thought it was a bit of a spunk, it was handsome, it was heavy, but then I really got to know it — the little sad guitar meows, moody bits, loud punk tantrums, songs that squeeze your heart . . . and now I can't live without it. I'm secretly hoping that it won't become too popular. It's like sharing the one that is dear to you with people that are not. But it will.

This is not *Badmotorfinger*, *Louder Than Love*, *Ultra Mega O.K* or *Screaming Life* (fantastic as or they all are) or a 'typical' Soundgarden record (if there is such a thing). It's certainly not an easy listening album, it's about 70 minutes long and gives your ears and brain a huge workout. There is much digging to be done on this album, if you don't — well you don't and you miss out on the beauty of it and will see it as another Soundgarden album that sounds a bit kookier than the others.

In the 'Rock Out/Soundgarden' category we have the songs 'Let Me Drown', 'Superunknown', 'Spoonman', 'My Wave' and 'Kickstand' (punk rock!, dumb lyrics, basic song, appreciate it!) which are all songs we would recognise as being Soundgarden songs. In the 'Gorgeous/Beautiful/Move Your Soul' category we have 'Limo Wreck', 'Fell on Black Days' and 'The Day I Tried To Live' that make all the hairs on your body stand up, well not all . . . and give your body that sad rush of adrenaline, and are songs that would not make the everyday person recognise them as Soundgarden songs. They also demonstrate what a fantastic songwriter Chris Cornell is, which brings us to the more familiar Soundgarden territory of 'Slow n' Heavy', '4th of July' (really slow, really heavy & distorted), 'Like Suicide', 'Fresh Tendrils' and 'Mailman' (which has a spooky organ bit to go with spooky lyrics about a criminal of sorts, where Chris sings "I know I'm heading for the bottom/ but I'm riding you all the way").

The final category is the Beatles-ish/Dreamy/Spacey-With-Heavy Bursts category, and this is my favourite. 'Black Hole Sun', 'Head Down', 'She Likes Surprises' and the very Indian-like 'Half' (which has guitars, violas, cellos and bassist Ben Shepard singing like an Indian woman. I don't actually like this one and am not going to just because it is Soundgarden).

Altogether this album is too good to describe, all the songs are unique, special and life-inspiring. I think there's so much variation in it that everybody should be able to find at least one song they like from alternos to Nu FM/Mainstreamers (I'm afraid) and that in itself is what's gonna make this album big. Oh well.

SHIRLEY-ANNE CHARLES

THE CHARLATANS *Up To Our Hips* (Beggars' Banquet)

The Charlies have outlasted all the Manchester crowd. The Happy Mondays burnt out, the Stone Roses took ten years off between albums and Inspiral Carpets, well, they were always boring.

The album title refers to the band being "up to their hips in shit" when keyboard player Rob Collins was busted for assisting a robbery in 92. They recorded this while Rob was waiting for his sentencing late last year (he got eight months).

Their mood has changed with the circumstances. And one of the album highlights, 'Inside Looking Out', is about the impending incarceration. Their slower songs were weak in the past, but tracks like 'Autograph', 'Up To Our Hips' and 'Another Rider Up In Flames' show that it's not a problem any longer. And poppy bits and pieces arrive in 'Patrol' and 'Come In Number 21' for the old fans of *Some Friendly*.
Between 10th and 11th hung on the hit 'Weirdo' while everything else was plastered with excessive reverb and effects to cover an ordinary album. *Up To Our Hips* has a huge hit, 'Can't Get Out Of Bed', but the sounds surrounding it have been dressed down. The Charlatans' songs have come out of hiding, and the pop is all the more welcoming.

JOHN TAITE

POSSUM DIXON *Possum Dixon* (Interscope)

You can just imagine Interscope's A&R people: "Yeah, great, hey love your stuff guys — kinda Pixies meets Violent Femmes, yeah. Brilliant, just great. It's just, well, the name, Possum Dixon. What is that exactly?"
It doesn't really matter what their name means.

open your mind



get into the groove

get tranced