



Stone Temple Pilots

of 'Get Away'.  
Techno/ambient/jungle/hip-hop and Tricky aside, it's virtually impossible to discuss rock 'n' roll these days without referring to a lengthening and pervasive past that must influence most contemporary bands to varying degrees. It's sufficient to say Ocean Colour Scene make the most of some of the most durable aspects of rock, to come up with a fine 90s brew that might even taste new to the current generation.

GEORGE KAY

**STEVE EARLE**  
*I Feel Alright*  
(Warners)

It may sound like an overconfident boast, but Earle's rock album 'comeback' is good enough to vilify its title. One of the finest and most underrated American songwriters of recent times (he was massive in Canada, less so in the States, as it turns out), Earle has unfortunately also insisted on enjoying the perennial trappings of the rock and roll star. Hence, his several busts for heroin and time in jail, but despite the staunch, look-you-in-the-eye swagger of the title track, much of this album deals with Earle's troubles with his addiction, the love of the woman who stood by him (Lou-Anne, to whom he dedicates *I Feel Alright*), whilst still stubbornly perfecting his hard living/out-law image (check the self-explanatory 'Hard-Core Troubadour').

At times things do get a little self-indulgent (does the world really need another song CCKMP about heroin?), but 'More Than I Can Do', 'Feel Alright' and 'You're Still Standin' There' (sung with that other great lost talent, Lucinda Williams) are superb. Yet the finest track here is no doubt 'Valentine's Day' — a bad-boy-comes-clean love letter which would be a massive hit if sung by a smoother crooner, as Earle's voice still sounds like gravel rattling round a tin.

Fans should also check out Earle's contribution to the *Dead Man Walking* soundtrack, on which he (by his own reckoning) contributes the best song he's ever penned.

GREG FLEMING

**STONE TEMPLE PILOTS**  
*Tiny Music...*  
(Atlantic)

Stone Temple Pilots' 'difficult third album' (well, isn't every album difficult?) sees them tread futher down the path they began charting with *Purple*, hence coming out an amazingly long distance from their debut, *Core*. From the eerily Doors-like instrumental intro of 'Press Play' (advice for stoners), to the beautiful Beach Boys vibe of 'And So I Know' (alright, I'm through with the comparisons, already), this is the journey of a band who have managed to mature in the face of very misguided media adversity and overkill record company marketing — don't even get me started on the stupid 'grunge' ping-pong ball that bounces between these two factions. Along the way *Tiny Music...* travels through much bittersweetness ('Adhesive Love', 'Lady Picture Show') and frustrated bar banter ('Art School Girl'), some killer pop rock ('Big Bang Baby', 'Trippin' on a Hole in a Paper Heart'), and the kind of perfectly executed epics that know how to take you there, and bring you back again ('Ride the Cliche').

If you handled the radical leap from *Core* to *Purple* happily, you'll find this one sidling up to you with no worries whatsoever. This is a band whose albums only know how to peak. The only disappointment is that *Tiny Music...* is not coming out in our summer, so we could enjoy it in the spirit I am sure it was intended for.

BRONWYN TRUDGEON

**MIKE JOHNSON**  
*Year Of Mondays*  
(Tag)

Mike Johnson's second solo LP finds the Dinosaur Jr. bass player and urban golfer extraordinaire stepping out from the formidable shadow cast by Dino frontman, J Mascis. In fact, in a neat touch of role reversal, J assumes side-man duties here, playing drums and occasional bass, while Johnson does the singing and six-strang-thang.

So, what does a Jr. Dinosaur sound like when he's not at his day job? Well, not at all like Dinosaur Jr., that's for damn sure. Johnson's world-weary, melancholy baritone is more reminiscent of Leonard Cohen or Nick Drake than the keening

slacker drawl of J Mascis. Likewise, the sedate musical pace and folk hued instrumentation (with violin and acoustic guitar prominent), has little in common with the shambling freneticism and sheer volume of prime Dinosaur. Indeed, it's not until the closing passage of the album's third track that an electric guitar is used in anger. However *Year of Mondays* is not all moody, minor-key musings. 'Circle', with its nagging guitar riffery, rocks along nicely, while 'Eclipse' is a slow burning epic in the Neil Young mould.

MARTIN BELL

**VARIOUS ARTISTS**  
*Songs in the Key of X*  
(Warner Bros.)

Free actual X-File hidden in the copy-right notes on the back! 'This compact disc does not fully conform with Phillips' 'Red Book' specifications in that the 'pregap' may not play on all CD players.' Where's a technical advisor when you need one? Here I am, actually. By fiddling with your back tracking button right at the beginning of track one, you will break on through to the other side. Take it back to just over the nine-minute mark, and you'll be mightily rewarded with the secret '0' track by Nick Cave and the indescribably awesome Dirty Three, and another, which I'm guessing is the Dirty Three, doing far better things to the *X-Files* theme than the tragic closing PM Dawn remix does.

Seeing this bunch of specially recorded toons is a complement to the coolest TV programme since *Twin Peaks*, it's only fair that it features the coolest remake since Sonic Youth's deconstruction of the Carpenters' 'Superstar', by the coolest band since its frontman's previous band, in Foo Fighters' Gary Numan tribute 'Down in the Park'. Nick turns up again with 'Red Right Hand', in some ways the catalyst for this whole album. Filter turn in the time warp sampling 'Thanks Bro'. The man who could be the subject of an *X-Files* episode on the living dead, William Burroughs, does the vocals for REM's 'Star Me Kliten'. That Frank Black is included should go without saying. So are the Meat Puppets, Screamin' Jay Hawkins, Danzig, Soul Coughing, Elvis Costello, Rob Zombie and Alice Cooper, and — aw, shit — Sheryl Crow. Now that really is incredibly strange, Scully.

BRONWYN TRUDGEON

**FLYING SAUCER ATTACK**  
Chorus  
(Domino)

In the right state of mind (or with the right combination of drugs), you could truly believe Bristol's Flying Saucer Attack are onto something special. Then again, you could think it was all a bunch of self-indulgent old loss. In reality (or, at least, FSA's version of it), both viewpoints are equally valid. That's the problem with creating music from rolling, elliptical beds of fuzzed-out, wah-wahed, reverbed guitar, the occasional mumbled vocal, and even more occasional drumming. When you're operating in that twilight zone between ambient and indie, using noise and incidental melody to create sonic sculpture as art, the conventions of most 'popular' music cease to be a relevant reference point.

And if that sounds like a bunch of pretentious critical twaddle, I can't imagine FSA being so precious about it.

On *Chorus*, a compilation of tracks from a John Peel session, and various other singles and obscurities, they're just doing what comes naturally. For the Saucers, that means creating music from a unique perspective where many of the usual cues we listen for in music have been turned on their heads. Example: on most tracks the rhythm and melody are derived from the seemingly random collision of oscillating feedback and tone. The pulsing, reverbed delay, if not exactly a driving rhythmic force, at least provide some sort of framework from which FSA can cajole and harangue their noise into 'songs'. Think the Jesus and Mary Chain heard through ears wrapped in layers of silk stockings. Think Dimmer at half speed with a pastoral west country accent. Think My Bloody Valentine with the speakers facing the wall and the listener in the room next door. Think 'White Light/White Heat' at the moment all the fuses blow. You're getting close. Now do you understand where the Saucers are coming from? The only question left to answer is whether you want to go along for the ride.

MARTIN BELL

**APE MANAGEMENT**  
*Simply the Beast*  
(Zero)

Christchurch's self-confessed 'exponents of scuzz rock' have strapped on their pseudonyms and sucked down a couple of kegs to record an album of fission powered, swampy blues funk and hard-nosed rawk 'n' roll. All the essentials are delivered here — driving riffs, plenty of humour, buckets of lager lout vocal attitude from front-ape Rock Hardman, and primate-power-pounding from drummer Ken E Bear (who, if I'm not mistaken, used to beat banana skins for legendary Auckland rock monsters Supercar). Personal favourites are 'You Really Lose Me', and the dub version of 'Groovier Than the 59th St Bridge Song' included in the album's six bonus tracks. Just the ticket if you're a Frisbee groupie and only feel subhuman after the eighth can.

DAVID HOLMES

**CRACKER**  
*The Golden Age*  
(Virgin)

Whilst never a huge Cracker fan, I couldn't help but be swayed by lyrics like: 'What the world needs now is another folk singer / Like I need a hole in the head.' Cracker's (really main man David Lowery's) was a tenuous cynicism — one not as powerful as, say, Greg Dulli's from

the great Afghan Whigs, but then there weren't too many records around where a belly-laugh might be an appropriate reaction. Cracker's third album, *Kerosene Hat*, sold a million copies, with the help of the acerbic (and bloody catchy) 'Low', and *The Golden Age* hopes to follow the example with 'I Hate My Generation', which is lazy cynicism in anyone's books. Nevertheless, things improve markedly on the country tinged ballad 'Big Dipper', which is just plain beautiful, as is the title track, which should be released immediately as a single. 'Useless Stuff' is a drunken autobiography that works, and the seven-minute epic 'Dixie Babylon' possesses a filmic sweep, perfectly poised. Highly recommended.

GREG FLEMING

**LUSH**  
*Lovelife*  
(Cortex)

Lush: ethereal vocals, loads of reverb, heavenly guitar, lightweight lyrics. Wrong! Forget the past. With *Lovelife*, Lush are reborn.

It's an album about two passionate and powerful women bashing out great guitar pop. Then it's an album about the same women using their beauty and charm to full effect. Then it's the two of them wallowing in glorious, inevitable pain. Because Lush is the lives of Miki Berenyi and Emma Anderson. And

*Lovelife* sounds like one (er, a love life, that is).

It opens with the snarling single 'Ladykillers', about sleazoids in Camden, which is a step on from *Split's* 'Hypocrite' — it's even got an 'I Love Rock 'n' Roll' handclap! Then 'Heavenly Nobodies' is like the best moments of *Spooky* rolled into one. There's a duet with Pulp's man of the moment, Jarvis Cocker, 'Tralala' is a sad, sexy little track, singing about wanting 'all the people to know just who I am'. And then 'Last Night' is this evil, gluttonous smoothie, with slow acoustic guitar and violins; Lush at the height of their feminine powers.

There are the typical moments of imperfection, 'Runaway' is dull, '500' is twee, and 'The Childcatcher' is a bit, urgh, folksy. But where they used to be limp and lifeless, now they're al dente and flavour-some. I never thought a Lush album would sound this good in 96.

JOHN TAITE

**CHINA DRUM**  
*Goosefair*  
(Mantra/Beggars Banquet)

Quite fond of the geese are China Drum; a whole gaggle dons the front cover of their new album *Goosefair*, while a couple of pretty funky looking chicks make up the back cover. As for the music, well... it's hard to tell

China Drum are a three-piece from

Northumberland who put a new spin on the easy listening format. It's easy listening in the sense of being forgettable, devoid of any uniqueness or outstanding character. By the end of the 14 songs you're neither excited nor annoyed by the sound of China Drum, purely because you haven't even noticed you've been listening to it.

If, like me, you make yourself listen, you may pick up signs of a serious rock/indie nature. You may be reminded briefly of lesser moments of a Therapy? record. If you're still concentrating you might... nope, sorry, my mind drifted towards the paint drying on the house next door. Nice geese though.


DOMINIC WAGHORN

**CAST**  
*All Change*  
(Polygram)

Well, I've got no idea what Noel Gallagher sees in them. John Power used to be in the Las, only he didn't sing. Cast is John's new band, and he sings in this annoying nasally whine that just gets on my tits. And it's not that the songs are all that bad — for 1974 — but this is the type of banal English guitar pop that gave English guitar pop a bad name.

So, forget Cast, they don't even deserve the rest of this review. Try the Bluetones, they're the real band of the moment. Yeah, I know *Learning to Fly*

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