



STRAWPEOPLE

and scope of Kelly's songs, and, if nothing else, the arrival of this obligatory 'greatest hits' package reminds us that this unassuming, greying Aussie can foot it songwise with anyone.

A nice bonus are fine liner notes from Kelly himself, and *Rolling Stone* critic David Fricke, a fellow who at times seemed the only American really interested in the songwriter from down under.

To these ears Kelly's best work remains the realist, Springsteen-like character sketch. 'To Her Door' still resonates a decade on, and the album ends with another beauty, 'How To Make Gravy', as sung by a jailbird as he approaches Christmas in the Big House. These, and the more personal confessional, are where Kelly shines brightest. But at times he flounders; the weak, later work like 'Give In To My Love' ('My love's as big as a Cadillac' boasts Kelly rather unconvincingly), the PG theatrics of 'Sweet Guy', or the naive sloganeering of 'From Little Things Big Things Grow'. And despite the capabilities of the Messengers, and the various outfits since them, *South* makes plain that Kelly has never found his Band, which in part explains his lack of real success in America.

South represents an introduction to a severely underrated talent, but too much great stuff just isn't here. My advice? Buy *Post* and take it from there — taste the real gravy.

GREG FLEMING

WU TANG CLAN

Wu Tang Forever (Loud)

Back in 1993, the hip-hop underground was being laid siege by an entirely new breed of MC and crew — the Gravediggaz; the Flatlinerz; and the Wu-Tang Clan. While the former two introduced the dark underworld of demons and horror to the hip hop genre and remained, for the most part,

underground, the Wu-Tang incorporated esoteric knowledge into their razor-edged rhymes, and under the production guidance of the RZA, *Return to the 36 Chambers* created a raw, thrilling, new sound that blew holes in the fabric of hip-hop, and in the process, built a business empire. The nine-strong Staten Island crew all have separate solo deals with several different labels, and a clothing line, but the acid test is if the second collective album can reach the high expectations. It doesn't — it surpasses them. The 29 tracks on *Wu-Tang Forever* contain some of the finest and most diverse MC-ing in rap today, and with the tight, multi-layered sounds behind them, this material is currently without peer in innovation, depth, and substance. All the members are in the finest of form — from Ol' Dirty's dipsomaniac ramblings, to Raekwon and Deck's diamond-hard rhyming, and Meth cutting through a blunted cloud. While the RZA's production, along with that of protege 4th Disciple and True Master, has without a doubt moved on to open a new chapter, and set a new standard for hip hop. If you do nothing else this year, hear this. The king has returned to reclaim the throne, and *Wu-Tang Forever* proves the Clan still ain't nothing to fuck wit'.

TROY FERGUSON

PAUL WELLER

Heavy Soul (Island)

MONACO

Music For Pleasure (Polydor)

Two old farts still clutching at a shred of pop's tinsel introduces Paul Weller and Peter Hook's Monaco. Weller, of course, is now the mature guru of real, meaningful rock 'n' roll and patron saint of kindred spirits like Ocean Colour Scene, but this maturity is showing distinct signs of age on the laborious *Heavy Soul*.

His previous album, *Stanley Road*, was an interesting return to city roots, but the orthodox and uninspired introspections that make up most of *Heavy Soul* only capture a once-articulate angry young man, struggling to be relevant in a scene that reveres him for his early achievements. Only rarely, as in the simmering menace of 'Brushed', does the album rise above the stale musical conservatism that Weller has wrongly chosen as a vehicle to express his personal burdens. Sincere, but painfully dull.

Now that New Order are currently in limbo between termination and rumination, bassist Peter Hook has taken the opportunity to team up with a singer who sounds virtually identical to Barney Sumner, in the shape of the unknown David Potts. So, at their best Monaco are indistinguishable from prime time New Order, and that's a virtue that they exploit on the exhilarating, criminally catchy 'What Do You Want From Me?', and on the big, poignant Morricone influenced instrumental, 'Sedona'. The rest of the album may suffer by comparison but there's hardly a bad song here. And if there ever was an album worth buying for one song, in this case the utterly infectious 'What Do You Want From Me?', then *Music For Pleasure* is it.

GEORGE KAY

PRIMUS

Brown Album (Interscope)

The stylistic space occupied by Les Claypool and Primus, falls somewhere between Frank Zappa and the Mothers, and the spilling cany barkers from the sideshows of yesteryear. Primus is not a band that affords instant accessibility or gratification, and the *Brown Album* isn't any easier than previous albums. Some very hooky pop tunes are submerged just beneath the weird exterior of the spiky, bass-driven rhythms and angular guitar off-tuning, with Claypool's nasal narrative spinning the songs off in quite different directions, than the fusion-feel tone sometimes implies. Recorded by Claypool at his Rancho Relaxo studio, the *Brown Album's* raw, primitive sound nicely backdrops the skeletal framework over which the songs come to life. There's ballads a-plenty, populated by such characters as the kid named Renegade (a vandal and arsonist), the frontier era bare-knuckle boxers who meet their end in 'Fisticuffs', and the unlikely denizens of 'Coddington' and

'Kalamazoo'. But there's no middle ground — as the old promo said, 'if you don't like Primus, you won't like this album'. Listen to the current single, 'Shake Hands With Beef', and you'll know where you stand.

TROY FERGUSON

LUNA

Pup Tent (Elektra)

Yeah, so the old influences (Velvets, Television) haven't disappeared entirely, but on their fourth album, *Pup Tent*, Luna sound as if they're trying to break the mould. Compared to the frothy guitar jangle of early Luna, the nooks and crannies of *Pup Tent* are bathed in light of an altogether darker hue. The otherworldly guitar textures and sonics, courtesy of Sean Eden, flesh out the signature guitar/bass/drum sound which has been Luna's stock and trade since their 1992 debut, *Lunapark*. And Barrett Martin (Screaming Trees) has tagged along from Luna bassist Justin Harwood's extracurricular side-project, Tuatara, to add some, er, Tuatara-ish flourishes on marimba and

MELVINS

Honky (Amphetamine Reptile)

Never try to second guess this band. Just as everybody was expecting a compilation of the Melvin's 1996 monthly AmRep single releases (each limited to 800 copies), a brand new album arrives instead, recorded over five consecutive days, and containing all the uncompromised incoherence of the Melvins at their best. There's less in the way of conventional song structure here than was evident on last year's *Stag*, but in a twisted way this makes as much sense. The sparse arrangements of *Honky* present the flipside to the majestic clutter of *Stag*, and the essence of the band is laid bare.

The opener, 'They All Must Be Slaughtered', is an eerie and unnerving duet between Buzz and Kat Bjelland. And between the squalls and distorted screech of 'Lovely Butterfly', the lyrics cut especially deep. Record companies are indicted on 'Laughing With Lucifer At Satan's Sideshow'; things speed up with the agit-grind of 'Mombius Hibachi'; weird out with 'Grin';

be limited to vapid, forgettable, planned-obsolescence made for short attention spans.

TROY FERGUSON

CAN

Sacrilege (Liberation/Mute)

A recontextualisation of one of rock's most influential and wonderfully beguiling bands. Teutonic funksters, masters of the minimalist hypno-rhythm. Can remain responsible for some of music's most obsessive and eerily beautiful moments.

Theirs is a sound and approach that can be traced in much of today's electronica — the same way that it could be traced in the punk rock of the Buzzcocks, the drone rock of Stereolab and Snapper, and the post-rock of the current Thrill Jockey core and their structureless friends. Truly a band for all ages. Can may be back, but really, they've never been away.

Sacrilege is a series of remixes that put Can in shiny new surrounds. Tellingly, the bulk of the tracks come from the 'dance' end of the spectrum, with most of the rock mob citing over-reverence and the sheer pointlessness of trying to top the originals as reasons for shying away.

True, nothing here threatens the initial blueprints and indeed, some fall laughably short. Many of the tracks are just tenuously related to the source and one wonders too, amidst all the drum and bass flurries, about how wise it is to fuck with one of the world's greatest rhythm sections.

But the album's intent, captured in the title, cuts you off at the pass. If nothing else, *Sacrilege* succeeds in evoking the spirit of Can, whereby a series of moments are ridden wherever they happen to take you.

Can the band may be only physically represented in parts, but their ambience hangs all over this record much like the spooky strands of vocal floating ghostlike in the mix. It is an approach that represents the Can philosophy far more heartily than a power pop tribute featuring Veruca Salt ever could.

BUFFY O'REILLY



PRIMUS

vibes. All of which helps to make *Pup Tent* a dense, but involving listen — even if sometimes it is a little short-changed in the tunes department.

So, Luna are a little bit older and a little bit weirder. Overall, the unsettling, yet strangely compelling qualities of *Pup Tent* make for a most intriguing trip to the dark side of the Luna.

MARTIN BELL

and the album closes with some frenetic analogue rock courtesy of 'In The Freaktose The Bugs Are Dying', a 30 minute track, of which the last 25 are silence.

Popular culture may indeed have murdered art, but there are outsiders like the Melvins who still mean something, and they encroach on an area close enough to 'art' to indicate that the future of rock music may not necessarily

BRAD

Interiors (Epic)

Seattle supergroup (Jeremy Toback, Regan Hagar, Shawn Smith, Stone Gossard) Brad's second album arrives as sales of most 'alternative/grunge' bands nose-dive. Strange then that *Interiors* is so good, and that singer Shawn Smith is still a cult figure. It's his strangely affecting, unearthly voice, married with

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