

> ALBUMS <



BLACK GRAPE

BLACK GRAPE Stupid, Stupid, Stupid (Radioactive)

How's that for a perfect Black Grape album title? The UK lager lads, led by the ex-Happy Mondays walking pharmacy Shaun Ryder, are renowned for their non-stop partying and tabloid-filling behaviour, so why not play it up? *Stupid...* is the Grape's third album and keeps pretty closely to the styles and sounds heard on *It's Great When You're Straight... Yeah!*

The album begins with a classic Black Grape number, 'Get Higher', complete with fabricated dialogue samples of Ron and Nancy Reagan talking drugs ('Despite our best efforts, shortages of marijuana have been reported'). It's not hard to imagine Black Grape taking their own advice as they recorded this, and every song on the album. Although Ryder's vocal sidekicks Kermit and Psycho chip in regularly with bite-sized raps, it seems that Black Grape are definitely Ryder's band on this album. Ryder, despite years of indulgence, is one of the cleverest songwriters in Britain, and it's his voice heard most on this record. His ability to string together succinct doses of cute, oddball dialogue is

almost unequalled (eg. "I know you'd swap a kidney for a stone.")

Sure it's all pretty dumb but equally, it's a hell of a lot of fun. The perfect album to get pissed to in the sun this summer.

DOMINIC WAGHORN

DAVID BOWIE The Best Of 1969/74 (EMI) SUEDE Sci-Fi Lullabies (Nude)

A coincidental and irresistible pairing — the spiritual godfather and his 90s godsons appear simultaneously with retrospective collections.

The Bowie *Best Of*, and note the dates, is a cynical and shoddy overview of his *Space Oddity* to *Diamond Dogs* phase, in other words it's a 20 track glimpse of the young freak in his glam rags. Less than enlightening liner notes from one Kevin Cann and a track listing that doesn't bother to give release dates, or details, or albums of origin, reveals how cheaply this package has been compiled. And a dozen of these songs have already appeared on the much worthier *Singles Collection*. It is nice to see that two of Bowie's less paraded classics, 'The Man Who Sold the World' and

'All the Young Dudes', are included, but they're not enough to legitimise this opportunistic release.

By comparison, Suede's double album, *Sci-Fi Lullabies*, has impeccable credibility. It is an orderly and chronological compendium of their singles' b-sides, with Anderson's vivid lyrical flashes of modern life lovingly presented in a booklet containing shots of a derelict jet.

So, always crashing in the same jet, the Suede b-sides have always been evocative complements to the main act. Right from 'The Drowners' companion pieces, 'My Insatiable One' and 'To the Birds', to the poignant highs of 'Stay Together's' 'The Living Dead' and 'We Are the Pigs' 'Killing of A Flash Boy', Anderson's and Butler's extended plays constitute a brilliant album in their own right.

The second disc is post-Butler, with guitarist Richard Oakes taking over as Anderson's sparring partner. By inclination, our Brett is a cracked balladeer and so Oakes' out-front and up-tempo guitar flourishes can't bring out the best in his fragile psyche. Yet there's enough promise in haunting stuff like 'Another No One' to suggest that the Anderson/Oakes partnership can continue the Suede tradition of great b-sides, that is so comprehensively captured on *Sci-Fi Lullabies*.

GEORGE KAY



SPLIT ENZ

SPLIT ENZ Spellbound (Mushroom)

It's 25 years since a couple of like-minded young blokes, Tim Finn and Phil Judd, got together to form a band in Auckland called (initially) Split Ends. In the dozen or so years that followed, Split Enz developed into New Zealand's most successful and respected acts, perhaps peaking (at least commercially) with the early 80s breakthrough single 'I Got You'. To celebrate the Enz's Silver Anniversary, the band's original label Mushroom, has released this comprehensive two-disc, best of collection, to remind us all not only how important Split Enz are to New Zealand's musical history, but also just how bloody good they were as a band.

Beginning with 1982's 'Dirty Creature', the collection promises to be "The Ultimate Collection of Greatest Hits." And that it is, with all old favourites included, spanning the band's major recording period of 1975 ('Maybe', from *Mental Notes*) through to 1984 ('I Walk Away', from *See Ya Round*). Split Enz collectors won't find many rarities inside, the only slightly unusual inclusion being 'Semi-Detached', a track that has only previously seen light as a b-side. My only disappointment is the lack of in-depth liner notes — I would have thought this was the perfect

opportunity for those involved to reflect on the history of Split Enz. Otherwise, a comprehensive and timely collection.

DOMINIC WAGHORN

JANE'S ADDICTION Kettle Whistle (Warners)

This collection from the magnificent Jane's Addiction — whose psychedelic take on epic rock was both inspiring and heavenly — is like a more thoughtfully compiled version of 1991's *Live and Rare*. Some of the live material from 1990 will be familiar from earlier video releases (Farrell's "moron with the Birkenstock" speech is here), but 1986 renditions of 'Whores' and 'Slow Divers' (a song left off the debut live album), and a Lollapalooza 'Jane Says', are exceptional additions to the studio versions.

The demos of the *Nothing's Shocking* songs show that even in their formative period, these tunes were destined for greatness — full of personality and dynamic, and with superb ensemble playing. The unreleased 'My Cats Name is Maceo' is cute, and a swingin' vocal on an attempt at 'Been Caught Stealing' is, er, interesting.

The two new songs, recorded by the 'relapsed' line-up (Flea on bass), don't have the magic of early Jane's (but they don't sound like

Porno For Pyros either). 'Kettle Whistle' is languid and evocatively mysterious, and 'So What!', incorporating loops into Farrell's loopyness, succeeds in stretching their horizons.

Jane's Addiction was the realisation of collective genius, the sound of coming out the other side of a dream, knowing nothing will ever be the same again. You haven't outgrown them.

TROY FERGUSON

ERIC MATTHEWS The Lateness Of The Hour (Sub Pop)

If Eric Matthews' debut album, *It's Heavy In Here*, was a statement of intent, then this sophomore effort is a further distillation of his skewed pop perspective. Generally, *The Lateness Of The Hour* rocks a little harder than its predecessor — the baroque quotient has been turned down and the guitars have been turned up — but you'd hardly mistake it for Deep Purple. Matthews' breathy vocal style carries a conspiratorial air, as it weaves its way through a landscape of finely crafted musical arrangements. It's as if Matthews is trying to entice the listener on a journey into his own musical universe. Indeed, in the album's most telling lyric ('The Pleasant Kind') he sings 'Deep inside



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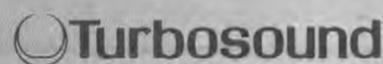
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