

# albums

## PIXIES Trompe Le Monde (4AD)

Well, the new Pixies album sounds pointless played at anything much less than pain threshold volume, certainly doesn't justify any of the "best band in the world" claims made for them around the time of *Doolittle* and contains nothing remotely resembling the addictive anthems ('Gigantic', 'I Bleed', 'Monkey Gone To Heaven' etc) that (rightly) made them popular favourites.

In fact, several of the new songs sound like contractual obligation material whichever way you look at them — featureless surf-jam pastiches, they work no better as commercial pop than as whatever other-worldly thing the first three albums were. The good news though, actually the leap up from where you're sitting and shout "Alrightee!" like Shree Love on angel dust news, is that against every prediction they've regained the ability to cartwheel along the brink of chaos, to make every chord sound like a happy accident or a diabolic miracle while still being as cheap, immediate a thrill as rock and roll can sell. It's not that they're particularly loud or noisy, they never have been, it's just the way a peculiarity of vocal phrasing, or a few words, or the timing of a guitar line leaps ahead of your imagination and continues to do so on the 20th play. On this album it's the cooler than cool-as-fuck guitar riff on 'Planet Of Sound', the choir of Kim Deals thrown away on the throwaway 'Alec Eiffel', everything about Subbacultcha' and all the lyrics and song titles that should set your heart spinning and your head beating faster.

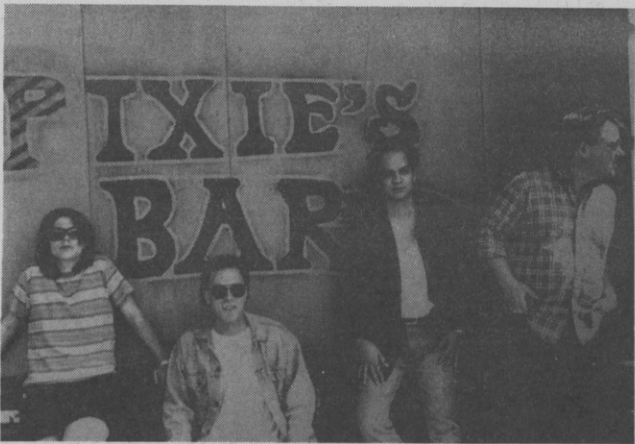
The only honourable thing for the Pixies to do now, then, is to split up. They've been resurrected after one mostly lame album (*Bossanova*) but putting out anything else as mediocre as about a third of *Trompe Le Monde* undoubtedly is might spoil their good name forever. If they give it all up now they'll be remembered not only as the wildest pop surrealists of their generation but as beautifully self-destructive too.

MATTHEW HYLAND

## THE CULT Ceremony (Beggars Banquet)

With an ever-changing rhythm section and well publicised alcohol problems, the future of the Cult looked shaky after *Sonic Temple* (which went triple platinum in America). The Cult have come back on track with this fifth record and it has certain good aspects, although it bears the mark of hastiness.

Ian Astbury finds it hard to write solid lyrics, a flaw which has plagued former releases. Endless repetition of 'baby' and 'oooh' make for hilarious rock listening but little else. This is most apparent on the otherwise excellent ballad 'If' and the chilling 'White'. The



Cult come close to an excellent song in all respects with 'Wonderland'. However, it seems that this record is unlikely to attain *Sonic Temple's* arena status.

There is a definite British feel about *Ceremony*, which certainly makes a refreshing change from the American radio rock that floods into this country. In that respect it is much closer to *Electric*, which was the Cult's first excursion into 'Earth, soul, rock'n'roll'. The songs are even more simple in structure and resound with a bluesy atmosphere, especially on 'Heart Of Soul' which could almost fit Joe Cocker.

Not the expected solid comeback, but pleasing nonetheless. More time and preparation may be needed before the new Cult can regain former glories.

LUKE CASEY

## THE GOLDEN PALOMINOS Drunk With Passion (Nation Records) THRUMDRONE Carnival Art (Situation Two) BAND OF SUSANS The Word and the Flesh (Restless)

A quick perusal of what are really the fringes of Stateside rock'n'roll but in the case of Band of Susans there's some real benefits in living on the periphery.

Four years back they were the only band in New York with three Susans and now by their third album they're down to bassist Susan Stenger but with guitarist/vocalist/writer Robert Poss still calling the shots. The gothically titled *The Word And The Flesh* conceals their best three guitar maelstrom ever with an opener in 'Ice Age' that's like being run over by an ice-berg. That goes for a lot of the sonic, crystallized crunch of most of the album with Poss's vocals philosophically accepting that they can't compete with the forces of electric guitars.

'Plot Twist' and 'Silver Lining' hurtle straight into a headbanger connection that's totally unstoppable leaving the big descending chords of 'Estranged Labour' and 'Bitter and Twisted' to chill shattered heads. But the mother of all guitar heroics has to be the 13 minute closer, 'Guitar Trio' where the three

lead guitars worry to death some poor innocent riff into hypnotic overkill. Absolutely magnificent.

Magnificent is the last thing on the minds of LA's latest bunch of weirdos looking for uncharted rock'n'roll — Thrumdrone. On the inner sleeve they yell that 'Hey Buffalo Tom, we're label mates' which sorta judges them by the company they'd like to keep. Actually Thrumdrone, at heart, aren't all that bad; on songs like 'Mrs Pear's Reptile Homework' and 'Mr Blue Venis' they get close to Beefheart humour and delivery with some perception on the side. 'Ruth's Advice' is a neat rap piss-take and on the more conventional fare there's some real value behind the twitching, gawky deliveries of 'Blind', 'Hammer and Nails' et al. Thrumdrone are on a mission to irritate, to be different and



Mr Bungle

that makes them worth investigation but too often their songs lurch into convoluted turns that are too unnatural to be appropriate. Eccentricity isn't enough in pop music.

The Golden Palominos are a part-time loosely based collection of musos organised and produced by very early ex-Pere Ubu drummer Anton Fier. Perennial helper Richard Thompson is here on *Drunk With Passion* as is Mike Stipe whose contributions to the fairly impressive 'Alive and Living Now' make it the best thing in a fairly mediocre album.

Bob Mould pays a visit with 'Drying From The Inside Out' and right from the primal scream as an intro it's an over-the-top performance and even more harrowing than the title suggests.

The guts of the album is left to Amanda Kramer whose ethereal folkish waspishness falls somewhere in between Clannad and Sinead O'Connor but failing to capture the saving graces of either. 'A Sigh' and 'Thunder Cries' are pleasant enough but are too insubstantial to make you wish the Golden Palominos were a permanent feature in rock'n'roll.

GEORGE KAY

## MR BUNGLE Mr Bungle (Slash)

Those rock stars are a crazy bunch huh? This recording here is a case-in-point, as it's none other than wild and wacky Mike Patton's band and outlet for depravity. The basic premise is Mike and some SF buddies get together and play music in celebration of porn, Nintendo, being obnoxious, pure noise and even more porn. Mr Bungle sound very much like a goof around project at times, as they are free form in the extreme, veering from funky bits to total metal to outright weirdness without warning. Production is handled by seriously lunatic death metal jazzman John Zorn which probably accounts for some of the lunacy, and also for the really punchy sound which helps make everything a little more bearable. As far as the songs go, it's a mixed bag. At times this stuff can seem really indulgent and in-jokey, especially the home made between song inserts, but the same can be said about most any 'avant-garde' music. There are moments of real cleverness though, and a pop song (if you really stretch the definition) in 'Squeeze Me Macaroni'. I definitely wouldn't

who are now profoundly unfashionable but once made some very good records and were adored by a great many people who now pretend to have been born listening to the Jesus Lizard. They approximate, without ever quite repeating, New Order's bass sound, the kind of cigarette-in-bedsit vocals of Psychedelic Furs or Eyeless In Gaza and the shimmering, over produced (compliment!) guitars of the sort the Cocteau Twins left behind around the time of 'Treasure'. They also perpetuate the 80s (and 60s and 70s) folly of writing detailed, socio-sexually realistic confessional lyrics and expecting us to analyse them according to the discredited terms of hermeneutic literary criticism, but that doesn't really matter because singer Patrick is deft enough with the English language to fill his personal-problem stories with phrases that actually sound good half-heard over the music. So hearing something like "the only weapon is a beautiful fresh bottle with memory collapsing under its tidal waves" sung over appropriately oceanic guitar noise is all in all a very pleasing experience. But of course whether "very pleasing" (as opposed to "jaw-droppingly awesome") should be enough to drive anyone to actually buy a record, rather than simply thinking kindly of it, is a point of some controversy.

MATTHEW HYLAND

## STEVE WINWOOD Keep On Running (Island)

This is a retrospective of Winwood's career beginning with his early days as the teenage prodigy who sang, played



Kitchens of Distinction

keyboards and lead guitar on, and sometimes wrote several of the greatest examples of 60s blue-eyed soul. The five tracks taken from his time with the Spencer Davis Group cover all the essential hits with the possible exception of 'When I Come Home'. (Although for a full appreciation of Winwood's astounding precocity it's necessary to hunt out the 1966 album featuring his performances of slow blues and jazz numbers).

KIRK GEE

## KITCHENS OF DISTINCTION Strange Free World (One Little Indian)

Kitchens of Distinction are a curious kind of anachronism: they're a throwback to one of the least past-obsessed times in recent musical history. They sound (and certainly look in the silhouettes-on-the-beach back cover photo) like a vague hybrid of all those early to mid 80s English groups

recommend this to anyone looking for a Faith No More styled sideline, but if you've ever wondered what FNM would be like if they cut loose totally and took all their little perversities beyond the logical extreme, then this is it.

A further five tracks are deservedly given to his work with the early — and best — Traffic lineup of 1967 and '68. 'Paper Sun' in particular still shines as gloriously as it ever did. (The only thing new listeners need bear in mind is that the original Traffic featured another fine singer-songwriter, Dave

Mason, whose gems aren't represented here).

Thankfully only one track represents Blind Faith, that most over-hyped of "supergroups", and then it's on to a few examples of the 70s editions of Traffic. The compilation purportedly closes with two numbers from Winwood's 'first' (ie the first put out under his name alone) solo album of 1977. However, my review copy is missing the advertised 'Time Is Running Out', certainly one of the original album's best tracks. *Caveat emptor.*

As an introduction to Steve Winwood's illustrious past *Keep On Running* is very good if not definitive. (For example, the track he contributed to Stomu Yamashta's 1976 project *Go* would have been very welcome). In recent years Winwood has become the acceptable, though somewhat safe, face of adult-orientated rock. It's good to be reminded of his glorious pedigree.

PETER THOMSON

## NIRVANA Nevermind (D.G.C.)

Darlings of the indie rock set and hippest name to drop, Nirvana have followed a lot of their peers and signed to a major, in this case going from Sub Pop to the home of Sonic Youth, the David Geffen Company. Nowadays this no longer reeks of sellout, as with weirder and weirder groups doing the sales thing while the mainstream flounders, the big companies are willing to allow all sorts of artistic control along with a big promo budget and efficient distribution. It's that 'artistic control' bit that really counts, and with Nirvana that's really paid off as they've made the rather brilliant album their Sub Pop work was suggesting. The key element seems pretty much to be a damn good sense of melody. There's plenty of angry and messy guitars here, with big loping melody lines running through them turning the sound from dirge to delight. The single is 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' and it's an absolute loud pop gem; to the point, punchy and hookladen, and the track after it, 'In Bloom' is even better, like the Replacements before the booze got 'em. The second side is where things get real noisy, tracks like 'Stay Away' are downright punk, and there's even some ballads on this that thoroughly fail to convince me that these delinquents are really gentle and nice. It's probably not hip to be digging this sort of stuff, but hell, I've always liked lots of fucked up guitars, but being the sensitive guy I am, some melody is nice, so *Nevermind* really is close to Nirvana. Oh yeah, the cover's really cool too.

KIRK GEE

## TOM PETTY & HEARTBREAKERS Into The Great Wide Open (MCA)

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