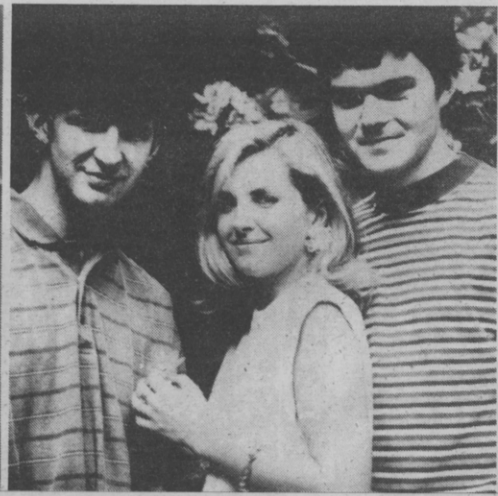




Teenage Fanclub (L-R) Gerry Love, Brendan O'hare, Norman Blake, Raymond McGinley.



St. Etienne (L-R) Bob Stanley, Sarah Cracknell, Pete Wiggs.



William Orbit & Sindy Finn of Bass-O-Matic.



albums

TEENAGE FANCLUB *Bandwagonesque* (DGC)

Defying logic, organisation and a big record company, Teenage Fanclub have muddled their way to the forefront of a British pop scene much in need of their shambolic, melodic restlessness.

Pegged as an answer to Dinosaur Jr, or more hopefully in some hearts, another Glasgow-bred Jesus and Mary Chain, ex-boy Hairdresser Norman Blake (guitar/vocals) and Raymond McGinley have their own timetable to mutation. A limited edition single version of 'The Ballad of John and Yoko' and their bizarre

instrumental album of last year showed their throwaway sense of humour. Even the first album proper, *Catholic Education*, had its fair share of oddities — notably the 'Heavy Metal' pissettes among the rough-hewn gems like 'Everything Flows' and 'Critical Mass'.

Within all this impetuous dissidence lurks a brilliant pop sensibility and *Bandwagonesque* comes close enough to verifying that. With Brian Wilson as their spiritual leader and a lazy guitar grunge as their trademark, 'The Concept', 'December' and 'What You Do To Me' are innovative creations of sweetness and jagged edges. The single 'Star Sign' is just about one of those one-in-a-million rushes of seamless rock 'n' roll while 'Alcoholism' and 'Guiding Star' tackle the Beach Boys from different angles.

The Mary Chain broke the mould when they put Phil Spector through

their white noise machine; TFC aren't in that company yet, but on *Bandwagonesque* there's enough pop ingenuity in evidence to suggest that it's only a matter of time. **GEORGE KAY**

BASSOMATIC *Science and Melody* (Virgin)

In retrospect, Bassomatic deserve some recognition as they helped pioneer that whole British dance sound that the likes of Massive have taken to such heights. William Orbit's first offerings were using all the right elements: an equal mix of reggae, hip hop and house with a roof-shaking bass sound. All these things are still to the fore in *Science and Melody* along with a lot better songs than *Set the Controls...* which means you have a pretty formidable combination here.

Tracks like 'She's On the Phone Again' have awesome, killer beats without the supercharged speed of house music and all sorts of weirdness floats around in the mix to keep things interesting. There's a real cruisy feel to the album, which probably is meant to aid the enjoyment of your recreational chemical of choice, but

actually works better at making *Science and Melody* seem like a great relaxed night or languid summer day soundtrack.

I can't think of any logical reason for why the British have stumbled onto this sound and perfected it, but as long as they keep making records as good as this I don't think it really matters. **KIRK GEE**

SAINT ETIENNE *Fox Base Alpha* (Warner Bros) *World of Twist* (Circa) *Quality Street* (Circa)

'Gospel Oak/Sao Paulo/Boston Manor/ Costa Rica...' Saint Etienne are all about finding the exotic in the commonplace. Like the Smiths they make an icon of the pale English teenager and its environs, but where Morrissey fetishized adolescent ingenuousness, limp longing for love, Saint Etienne find transformational power in the complex sub-cultural irony that only the kids (and critics like the band's Bob Stanley) understand. The result is that rare thing: truly passionate genre subversion. Some songs veer far closer to dinner party

soul than should ever be allowed, but these are worth enduring for the marvellously glacial cover of Neil Young's 'Only Love Can Break Your Heart' alone. That's not the only moment of brilliance: 'Stoned To Say The Least', a claustrophobic matrix of synth bass and shredded backwards guitar, exploits the gulf between the phrase "acid house" and the un-trip-like austerity of that music, while 'London Belongs To Me' allows a sickly-sweet girl-group pop song to degenerate into spaced out convulsions of high-gloss sound. Most startling of all is 'Like The Swallow', in which an astonishing swarm of drones and quasi-oriental chimes leads up to a brief glimpse of a huge pop anthem driven by bells and military drums, which is in turn engulfed in oceanic studio noise and finally replaced by an un-naturally amplified acoustic guitar.

In suggesting then dissolving these impossible pop universes, Saint Etienne abolish the idea of "originality" and offer what may or may not be an illusory way out of the *everything's been done before* impasse.

One of Saint Etienne's songs features the lines "To the sound of the World of Twist / You leaned over and

gave me a kiss", but there's really no comparison between the two groups. English critic / theorist Simon Reynolds has attempted to construct an idea of a "camp sublime" around W.O.T., and they've been called a Human League for the 90s, but apart from the album title (*Quality Street* is a box of chocolates) they display none of St. Etienne's dazzling wit and invention.

They're not a bad pop group, though, mixing abundant energy and a good melodic sensibility with all manner of squelchy, oozy synth noises. They're at their best when the synths take over on 'Jellybaby', which sounds exactly like its name, or like what 808 State might come up with if asked to write a new theme for *The Avengers*.

It's nowhere near sublime but it kicks a little bit of the rigor mortis out of "camp". **MATTHEW HYLAND**

SCATTERBRAIN *Scamboogery* (Elektra)

Scatterbrain's debut, *Here Comes Trouble*, hinted at possible greatness. Sure, it was dopey funk metal, but there was enough stupid energy there to carry it all. Now they've followed up

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