

albums

NITZER EBB Ebbhead (Mute)

Death Las Mills! Nitzer Ebb used to be maximum austerity body-fascists, whipping us into shape with grimly minimal beat and bass constructions, but someone must have told them that a mesmerized audience would be more in their power than a merely sweaty one, because this album is, well, mesmerizing.

The formula isn't unprecedented: songs structured for hyperbolic emotional effect, slowly building fury, like Foetus minus some of the overt silliness, with the Young Gods' approach to sampling, ie each new sound from a few more light years ahead of the listener's imagination than the last, histrionic strings juxtaposed with other-worldly electronics and slabs of metal guitar. There's a precision, a cleanliness about the whole thing, though, that means it won't be mistaken for anything other than pop music, albeit of the bloodthirstiest variety. Imagine a truly convincing Nine Inch Nails or a private, neurotic Hoodlum Priest and you won't be a hundredth of the way there.

MATTHEW HYLAND

JUICE Movie Soundtrack (MCA Records)

This is the latest in the current line of films sharing the Urban Gang Experience with us. Rather impressive, I've heard. This album certainly stacks up as one of the best gang-film soundtracks too. Unlike the others, which were collections of songs put together for a movie, this one benefits from the consistent 'feel' producer Hank Shocklee (The Bomb Squad) brings.

Surprisingly, Public Enemy don't appear, but we are treated to new material by EPMD, Big Daddy Kane, and Eric B & Rakim. But its not all old school, new jacks Naughty By Nature and darlings-of-the-moment Cypress Hill also cut in. There are a couple of slow jams thrown in, including the original version of 'Is It Good To You?', which works well as a song rather than the Heavy D rap we're familiar with.

Overall, an excellent bleep-free dance / rap album, the only grizzles being that a couple of tracks just fade



Nitzer Ebb



Died Pretty

out rather strangely at three minutes. (And Salt 'N' Pepa's too-obvious attempt to sound tough through the use of the word muthfuka).

NICK D'ANGELO

THE REVELATORS Amazing Stories (Columbia)

DIED PRETTY Doughboy Hollow (Blue Mosque)

A couple of fair Aussie one-dayers starts with the Revelators. A veil for Joe Camilleri's allegiance to rootsiness, *Amazing Stories* is his continued empathy for past genres, but this time in the form of cover versions of lesser known songs from legendary performers.

Slipping into the nuances of the writers he worships, Camilleri does more than justice to Van Morrison's 'Tupelo Honey' and Dylan's 'Caribbean Wind'. The band positively excels on the great sax lead that carries Inr Walker's 'What Does It Take To Win Your Love' and Muddy Water's 'Louisiana Blues' has the riff that toughs it out real nice. According to Camilleri *Amazing Stories* was the "opportunity to pay homage to some of the great writers of our time". As enjoyable and well played as this may be, it's about

time that Joe and his various incarnations started plugging their guitars into the 90s, however transient that may seem.

Sydney's Died Pretty have been soldiering since the early 80s with an earnest but uninspired output and now with their Hugh Jones' produced fourth album they're poised on the brink of... further anonymity?

Doughboy Hollow actually straddles that middle ground of good songs searching for a band with distinction/identity; a problem faced by most bands whose material burns with perspiration, but lacks the flicker of individuality to separate them from the herd. That said, 'Doused' and 'God Bless' are intense, melodic flurries almost individual enough to forget REM comparisons and the professed Marianne Faithful influences of 'Out In The Rain' can't detract from the song's undoubted charm. In 'The Love Song' and 'Turn Your Head' you can almost ignore that vocalist Ronald Pena sounds like Ian Curtis and just concentrate on the songs.

Died Pretty are a reviewer's nightmare with their uneasy balance of melodic gifts and echoes of textures not their own. Do you praise their songs or criticise their obvious second-hand derivations? Just for

once, you be the judge.
GEORGE KAY

LOU REED Magic and Loss (Sire)

This is a long, sequential concept album, extensively subtitled, chronicling the death of friends with song titles like 'Cremation' and 'Harry's Circumcision'. Let's be frank, *Magic and Loss* would still be a bargepole's length away if it wasn't recorded by Lou Reed.

We feel we should grant him the indulgence because of his achievements in the past: a rock'n'roll life spent deliberately translating big and self-possessed subjects into simple words and melodies. He is prolific but not a best-seller, commands respect rather than awe (though I bet *Rolling Stone* have commissioned a big pedestal for this one). He has few laurels to rest on because he avoids praise and bombast on the part of himself or his press. In interviews he is reductive, declaring himself an unpretentious "rock'n'roll person" (a middle-aged backdown from "rock'n'roll animal") determined to deal in the fundamentum: bass, drums, guitar, some songs. So *Magic and Loss* earns a look-in, if only to determine

whether or not Uncle Lou has gone back on his word — or maybe returned to the carefree singalong days of *Metal Machine Music*.

As an overall package, *Magic and Loss* is patchy. It groans under the weight of Reed The Writer's ambitions: the subtitles ('In A Chapel Bodily Termination') are superfluous and the emphasis on narrative sequence is stating the obvious — the album format is one which most people will listen to from beginning to end anyway. There is dulciful dischord ('Power and Glory II' and 'Gassed and Stoked') and the rockier material is showing a paunch. A cosy number like 'No Chance' is a little too comfortable.

Where Reed comes into his stride is in the reflective stuff — loose, spoken narratives and chiming choruses — a style predated by the single 'Last Great American Whale.' It's a relief to hear a dry aside on 'Dreamin' ('I don't know what drugs they had you on') and, yep, 'Harry's Circumcision' is a good song (even if the title does set it up as an alarming sequel to 'Andy's Chest'). Despairing at the family resemblance, Harry takes to himself with a razor: the slashes are a rite of manhood, like the circumcision ritual itself. By turns droll, frightening and kind of stupid, Harry is the sort of guy you'd find in an old VU song.

'What's Good' sparks with trademark wordplay ('What good is seeing-eye chocolate... Sanskrit read to a pony... rain that falls up?'). The best type of rock lyrics: clever but dumb, nonsense with meaning. 'Power and Glory' compares modern miracle workers with old ("I saw isotopes introduced into his lungs... And it made me think of Leda and the Swan") but 'Sword of Damocles' self-consciously disowns the musing ("I know you hate that mystic shit.") 'Goodbye Mass' is a tremendous piece of work: vivid, sad, moving. It's so clear in its intention — and its musical actions — it shows up the weakness of complicating the song's meaning by fitting it within an umbrella concept.

Magic and Loss is an album of contradictions, not always intentional. "You can't be Shakespeare, you can't be Joyce," Reed notes in the title track. True, but if you have the power to be Lou Reed, why muck about?

CHAD TAYLOR

WEDDING PRESENT Sea Monsters (First Warning)

Currently out of favour with factions of the British music press, David Gedge must be wondering why, as he gets better, the reviews get worse. A case

in point was *Bizarro*, their obviously monumental second album which was given six out of 10 by *NME*, a reduction of two through editorial policy.

Sea Monsters, another major Wedding Present advancement, fared even worse and here's the American CD release with a few extra tracks confirming its undoubted worth. 'Niagra', in keeping with the tone of the album, rises in intensity leaving the boys' own instrumental 'Dan Dare' to release a little tension and 'Fleshworld' as a stuttering last wave. This 13-track beast should be owned.

GEORGE KAY

DIGITAL UNDERGROUND Sons Of The P (Tommy Boy) NAUGHTY BY NATURE (Tommy Boy)

A couple of oddities from the Tommy Boy stables. Digital Underground have dedicated themselves to reworking and updating the P-Funk thing, which might not really be necessary, but it is totally O.K. by me. The D.U. squad have got a great feel for a groove in the same way the Clinton mob had, they take a hook and stretch it on out with a nice loping beat and plenty of silly-ass vocals. The concept of updating it all is fine too, as this involves better sounding beats and free form rapping, which sounds great with stuff of this tempo.

The D.U. people have even created a whole universe of characters a la P-Funk, so obviously they are taking this a lot more seriously than the rest of us. Never mind, it keeps them off the streets and it's a real funky album, definitely worth the price of admission.

On a totally different trip are Naughty by Nature, who are posing on the cover of the album in a very staunch style complete with machete. Surprisingly, the sounds within aren't sub N.W.A. kill 'em all, but come from the Native Tongues funky and concerned school. Needless to say, these guys aren't exactly De La Soul as 'O.P.P.' proved, but they do use some pretty jazzy sounds and the lyrics tend to veer towards the peace and love stuff. There are definite moments of nastiness, all of which I strongly like, particularly '1, 2, 3', and it's these which lift the album above the usual crop of concerned rap.

Obviously Tommy Boy are having no problem finding a little diversity over there in the U.S. of A., so how come the majors have such a problem?
KIRK GEE

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