

ultra-hip indie label 4AD's latest signing from Holland, Xymox. But along with all this praise has come mention (in every review) of another band, one called New Order ...

And justifiably so, not only because in amongst the dark dance machine thuds of 'A Day' and 'Stranger' emerge rhythms and sounds that one would usually associate with a certain other band, but even the lyrics (occasionally clumsy in their English phrasing — writing in a foreign language ain't the easiest thing to do well) concern the same old soul-searching, loneliness and despair themes. Mixing lonely bedrooms and packed dance floors ... pretty bloody familiar scene, eh punters? But let's not say "new order" anymore — apparently Xymox don't appreciate the comparison.

To be fair to Xymox though, their dense, layered moods set them apart, into an area sparsely populated by synth-dance groups, and that distinctive sound emerges as a dark celebration of something that I can't quite comprehend through the heavy Dutch accents ...

Chris Roberts in *Sounds* said, "the frightening thing is, they could be even better" and that's true. But, I'm convinced that what is also true is that they're not as good now as he and the rest want to think. Still, they're not bad, but that's hipdom for ya.

Paul McKessar

The Waterboys This Is The Sea Island

The Waterboys' Mike Scott isn't one to address himself to the mundane things in life. Nope, as a sensitive, serious-minded visionary, on *A Pagan Place* his mind was moved by nothing less than epic patriotic sagas (Red Army Blues), big personal philosophies ('The Big Music') and religious metaphors ('A Pagan Place' and 'Church Not Made With Hands'). And because lyrically he's brushing against mountain peaks Scott has felt obliged to ram home his ideas with an equally BIG exaggerated production technique.

This Is The Sea follows the same path as *A Pagan Place* but it's fair to say that Scott has trimmed one or two of his excesses back to a credible level. It still sounds as though it's been produced in a fjord with the odd

wave crashing for good effect, but, on Side Two especially with the business-like aggression of 'Medicine Bow' and 'Be My Enemy' and the nagging piano riff prodding 'Old England', Scott shows that there is real intent behind the shades.

The first side is reserved for three statements that could have been abbreviated into three workmanlike songs. The trumpet fanfare that croaks the entrance of 'Don't Bang the Drum' is a vacuous flourish for a song that has the occasional Dylanish sting in its tail.

'The Whole of the Moon' plods along innocently enough and ironically makes a nice point about reaching 'too far too soon', but neither it nor the spiritual searching of 'The Pain Within' have the pulse to make them convincing. So, *This Is The Sea*, despite some refinements on *A Pagan Place*, still leaves the question as to whether Scott's pilgrimage is really gonna be worth the trip.

George Kay

Various Artists Outnumbered By Sheep BiFM By-production

I'm rilly pleased that my favourite songs on this BFM Auckland compilation are not from the old established artists, but the up and coming local bands. It shows the talent that's there.

All four of these bands provide absolute to gooeey garage pop — the out-outstanding song being 'Travelling Grave' by Goblin Mix. The Pterodactyls play the Buzzcocks-poppy 'Everytime it Rains', and both the Bird Nest Roys and changed line-up Able Tasmans outdo their older, but recently released material with 'Who is the Silliest Rossi?' and 'Carolines' respectively.

Also worthy of mention are the (unfortunately, now terminated) Children's Hour two-partner 'Creeping Flesh' and the (alive and menacing) Headless Chickens 'Trigger'. And Fetus Productions, usually tending to be carefully restrained on record, really let loose on 'Sparks Fly'.

Chris Knox provides 'Indigestion', a *Canned Music* out-take, while the Fold's 'Need of Want' sounds like some sort of chopped-up Birthday Party out-take.

The rest is: 'Liberal Cad', an Expendables track from early 1984; 'Dragons in Eden', a Kiwi Animal soundscape; 'Oceania', a

monotonal ode of sorts from Kim Blackburn; and 'Testament', a raw acoustic number from Nick Smith.

The "wild sheep on the town" David Mitchell is great, and it's obvious that Debbi Gibbs and a lot of people have put heaps of hard work into this whole project, so support this record cos it's got some mighty moments. Remember too, to support student radio. Martin Phillips sings his BFM ditty in the end grooves: "There's only one station worth listening to" Believe him.

Paul McKessar

UK Squeeze Cosi Fan Tutti Frutti A&M

Having reformed last year after their 1982 split, Squeeze have been in the game for nearly 14 years, five if you convert that to albums. Based around the Difford-Tilbrook songwriting team, the band's East End grittiness and way with a good tune haven't really netted them the returns they've deserved. In fact Jools' Holland is probably the best-known member of the band and that's because he fronted Channel Four's *The Tube*.


Cosi Fan Tutti Frutti (Mozart meets Little Richard), domestic bliss was never like this, won't catapult them onto high-rotate playlists; gleaming the worth from the density of most of the songs here steers the album well clear of any real commercial potential. But there's gold in these grooves.

The leanest pickings lie in songs like 'I Won't Ever Go Drinking Again' and 'Hits of the Year', too drab to make the grade. Things get better with the adulterous hi-jinks of 'No Place Like Home' and the murderous 'Last Time Forever'. But the best has to be the typically Squeeze happy families, 'King George St.' ("She left in the middle of the night with the kids, wrapped in a blanket with a packet of crisps") and the touching little humiliaties of 'By Your Side' and 'I Learnt How to Pray'.

Like all the best songwriters, Difford and Tilbrook have a knack of pulling back the curtain to expose that glimpse of reality that you've always taken for granted. *Cosi Fan Tutti Frutti* needs patience and so it isn't the ideal introduction to their repertoire. But as an example of substance before marketing, you'd be a mug to miss it.

George Kay

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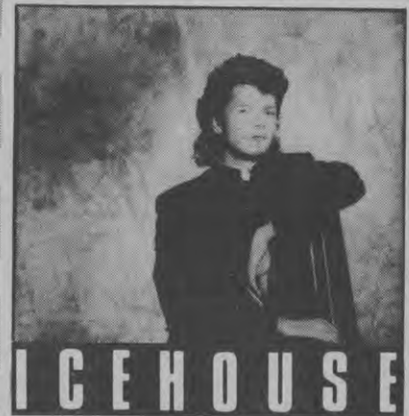
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