

The Replacements Pleased to Meet Me Sire

It hardly needs to be said that Husker Du have put Minneapolis on the map with their brand of English punk refined through the years and through the evolving idiosyncracies of Mould and Hart. They deserve their omnipotence but on the other side of the city, but not the coin, lurks the Replacements with Paul Westerburg worshipping in the church of Alex Chilton.

The Replacements have arrived at their essence through a distillation of mid-American love for rock and roll circa 70s punk leanness, and an individual and special obsession on Westerburg's part for the outsider kings like Alex Chilton. These influences have meant that the Replacements have been rustling around over five albums for a nose focussed and complete enough to replace the sum parts. *Let It Be* came close, but funny punky throwaways and Kiss covers may have entered into the spirit of rock 'n' roll families, but on the cold black reality of vinyl the first side barely took off. A problem of consistency similarly affected *Tim*, so much so that even more rose-coloured glasses were zoomed on *Let It Be* as confirmation that it was the Replacements' zenith.

Stick the shades, here's *Pleased to Meet Me*, 11 songs that bring together all the strands of past Westerburg genius into album totality. If you white boys wanna kick ass with some heavy guitar, man, then 'IOU,' 'Shooting Dirty Pool' and 'Red Red Wine' justify years of Aerosmith abuse. 'Alex Chilton' is a self-evident toast to that god, and it has a hook that Chilton would pay for, but it's on 'Skyway' with its precious honesty linked to *Radio City*'s 'I'm in Love With a Girl' that Westerburg really shows his descent from Big Star.

And all this small talk ignores the best: 'The Ledge' — 'I'm the boy they can't ignore' — meshes epic guitars with suicidal tendencies, one way of getting attention; 'Never Mind' builds from an intro reminiscent of 'Answering Machine' leaving 'Can't Hardly Wait' to end the album with Westerburg's vocal hovering over an unbelievably irresistible horn riff.



The Replacements

The album title's an understatement, believe me the pleasure here is all yours.

George Kay

Jennifer Warnes Famous Blue Raincoat RCA

I used to have a flatmate who when he felt depressed would play his Leonard Cohen records. An hour later he'd feel suicidal. Consequently I'm more than willing to regard Cohen the performer as a health hazard. Cohen the writer is a different story. I've often wished someone with taste and talent would re-record his work, adding flesh to those skeletal melodies. Now someone has. Not surprisingly it's Jennifer Warnes, considering she's been singing Cohen's backup for some time now.

Such experience has given Warnes the insight to avoid simply prettifying his songs (the way, say, Joan Baez might once have). Although the beauty of Warnes' singing cannot help but enrich the melodies, her sure phrasing and the, by and large, highly appropriate arrangements help maintain the old croaker's emotional ambivalence. Listen, for example, to her working with the lap-steel guitar on 'Coming Back to You' or the strings on the title track. Even

'Bird on a Wire,' the album's hitherto most well-known number, is rendered afresh by employing that brooding funk from the Commodores' 'Night-shift' hit of a couple of years ago.

Only one track fails. The self-pitying lyrics to 'A Singer Must Die' gets an arty choral arrangement that merely renders the enterprise pretentiously silly. Still, that means we're left with eight-ninths of a superb album. And that's certainly nothing to get depressed about.

Peter Thomson

Elvis Costello and the Attractions Blood and Chocolate Imp/Festival

This was the other half of last year's Elvis Costello revival that began with *King of America*. A revival because his last album, 1984's *Goodbye Cruel World* failed to move mountains with its reliance on craftsmanship and typical Costello cynicism-without-a-cause.

Seen in its true light *King of America* was a solo album, a charming dissection of hearts and neuroses with a backing that belied the expose. Back with the Attractions, *Blood and Chocolate* can be seen as the true successor to *Goodbye Cruel World*,

and as if to compensate for the latter's lack of vitality he's got Nick Lowe to produce a suitably jagged, sparse, gruelling live feel for most of the songs.

The slow, obsessive, parasitic confessions of 'I Want You' as a case in point where the emotion is reinforced by a raw guitar line and a feel of almost total resignation. Blood continues to flow on 'Uncomplicated' and 'Tokyo Storm Warning' (some dislocated tour observations) and the band just pumps it up, while on 'Battered Old Bird' Costello utters a restrained and almost compassionate plea on behalf of a few victims. And with 'I Hope You're Happy Now' and 'Next Time Round' he registers another two classic Costello set pieces, which, like 'Clubland' and the rest, dutifully avoid their commercial potential through Costello's brilliantly sneering delivery and the band's intense clatter.

As an album this is no easy trip, there are too many ugly characters with the stained sheets, pathetic weaknesses and bad consciences crawling through these songs to prevent *Blood and Chocolate* being as easily digestible as *King of America*. And that's good: just don't expect too much confectionary from Costello, despite the promise of the title.

George Kay

The Go-Betweens Tallulah True Tone

So what's the news? Yes, the new Go-Betweens album is a bit MOR, but is it good? Er, I'd almost like to pass on that one. The lineup's extended to include new permanent multi-instrumentalist Amanda Brown and guest musicians on cello, flamenco guitar and backing vocals; the wistful words are still there, but like I say ...

Tallulah has a nice production job courtesy of Richard Preston and Craig Leon, but at times that seems to be the only thing propping up an indifferent set of songs. The tightness and emphasis on string arrangements and embellishments does bring out the best in those songs; however a uniformity of production appears to be the Go-Betweens' primary concern, resulting in a lack of real dynamics.

The songs themselves don't constitute nearly as strong a collection as their last and best, *Liberty Belle and the Black Diamond Express*. There's no 'Apology Accepted,' but 'Cut it Out' deserves to be a hit — the second part is very clever and the whole song

clicks: a half-cent disco remix would see it into the Top 10, easily. 'Right Here' has a strong verse structure let down by a limp chorus, and only the inane literary allusion spoils the Triffidsy 'House that Jack Kerouac Built.'

Of the rest, I'd soon leave most of side two, and complacent drivel like 'So I went and asked my friend the doctor / What is it I've got this time? / He said, 'Apart from that albatross / Around your neck, the tests are / Negative, you really are quite fine' makes me wonder what happened to incisiveness in Grant McLennan's lyrics.

I'd almost call *Tallulah* tired. I could be wrong, but the Go-Betweens seem to need a healthy dose of rock 'n' roll and dirt. They're okay, but if *Liberty Belle* was the Go-Betweens' maturing, 1987's middle-aged band is no longer my cup of tea. And that's a shame.

Paul McKessar

Echo and the Bunnymen WEA

It's been three years since *Ocean Rain*, the last Echo and the Bunnymen album proper, and although rock 'n' roll hasn't exactly been pining for their return, their absence had left a hole in that pocket between pop consumerism and the spotty idealism of a British indie scene scrambling for direction.

Over the last couple of years Britain has been dogged by fashionable instant promises like the Shop Assistants, Half Man Half Biscuit, Mighty Lemon Drops, Soup Dragons et al, whose reputations have been carried on the smell of a mere EP or single. The art of sustaining or developing initial potential has proved beyond them and it's into this environment that Ian McCulloch and the Bunnymen have dropped their best album since *Crocodiles* as a timely reminder of long distance endurance.

The new album, untitled — surely an indication that this is a fresh start — is a rejection of the orchestral overlay of *Ocean Rain* and a consequent move back to less indulgent basics. Quite simply this is an album of songs produced by Gil Norton to capture an integrated band feel that's tighter and lighter than *Heaven Up Here* or *Porcupine*. And McCulloch's songs carry no excess baggage on a platform supplied by Pattinson, Sergeant and De Freitas that veers from the solidity of riffs that dominate 'The Game,' 'Over You,' and 'Lips Like Sugar' to the psycho-babble of 'Bedbugs and Ballyhoo.'

On 'All in Your Mind' McCulloch comes close to social comment in a delivery nudging close to The The's Matt Johnson's asperity, while on the other hand he claims "I'm looking for a new direction" ('New Direction') and confesses "All my life revolves around laughter and crying on the naked cross" of 'All My Live.' Fab, but the two best have to be 'Bomber's Bay,' a song of great poise and phrasing, and 'Blue Blue Ocean,' with McCulloch back to his ocean imagery and a piano tune and a guitar-keyboard interchange in the face that's at least transcendental.

All this and heaven too, the smartass asked. God, who expected them to even bother again, never mind the possibility of creating an LP that could be positive and significant without the flag clichés of U2. Without doubt, one of 1987's treasures.

George Kay

Jenny Morris Body and Soul WEA

After disbanding QED in 1985 Jenny Morris signed on for a year with INXS as backing vocalist. It is this connection, along with her being one of the Sydney-based expatriates, that provide this album's creative context. The 10 songs are a mix of her originals and contributions from colleagues. The production, despite the variety of musical personnel, is dominated by that familiar Ocker hardrock rhythm sound, the one that cracks concrete at 50 paces.

In compensation one requires not only Morris's fine voice but strong songs as well. Unfortunately *Body and Soul* only provides three that are strong enough — Tim Finn's contribution being a near miss — and they've all been released as singles. One is her self-written title track (which also features tasty backing vocals from Dave Dobbyn and Mark Williams). There's also Neil Finn's lovely 'You I Know,' her current single, and 'You're Gonna Get Hurt,' a storming rocker written and produced by INXS's Andrew Farriss, with instrumental backing from others in the band.

I still think that Jenny Morris is better as a pop singer than all-out rocker, but if she's going to opt for the latter, then fronting INXS sounds like a good idea.

Peter Thomson

Midnight Oil

THE OUTSTANDING NEW LP



Diesel and Dust

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