

# A *Virgin* MAY



Howard Devoto, Magazine.

## BACK PAGES

Howard Devoto, real name Howard Trevor, left the Buzzcocks in 1977 leaving only the *Spiral Scratch* EP as official recorded proof of his time spent with the band. "Howard thought he would be unable to experiment if he remained in the band," said Pete Shelley at the end of that year just as Devoto's newly formed Magazine were opening in Manchester.

John McGeoch (guitar), Barry Adamson (bass), John Dickinson (keyboards, later replaced by Dave Formula) and Martin Jackson (drums, later replaced by John Doyle) were awesomely talented instrumentalists and completely opposite in approach to the Buzz.

"Shot By Both Sides" was the first Magazine record, a shattering single of power and menace so authoritative that even *Rolling Stone* took notice. "Touch and Go" followed, more unassuming, and it was unjustly brushed

aside because it failed to match its predecessor.

*Real Life*, the first album, arrived, however, to smiles all round. Subjectively titled, since Devoto's abstract vision was hardly the general consensus of real life, the album was a mature fusion of excellent musicianship and dark, evocative songs including "Motorcade" and "The Light Pours Out of Me". A slower different version of "Shot By Both Sides" was also included.

And the Buzzcocks seemed miles away.

## SHOT BY BOTH SIDES

Last year Magazine released *Secondhand Daylight*, an album in many respects more advanced than *Real Life*. Producer Colin Thurston (since criticized for his over-technical production) extended the natural drama of the band by

adding depth and considerable resonance to Adamson's dexterous bass playing and more tone to Devoto's theatrical vocals. The result was an album that came across as the missing link between Van Der Graaf Generator and the Sex Pistols and as such disappointed critics and fans alike.

*Secondhand Daylight* was the last word in depressants, the ultimate statement of personal withdrawal from real life. Most reviews at the time banded around phrases like "lyrically too obscure", "Gothic and melodramatic" and "theatrical and affected". All of these views were pertinent enough but they failed to take into account the overall aim of the album — the conveyance of Devoto's ideas of complete removal from reality and how Thurston and the band communicated these ideas with the most appropriate arrangements and feel. "Feed and Enemy", "Cut Out Shapes" and "Back to

Nature" were classic examples of musicianship communicating Devoto's ugly state of mind at the time.

## THE CORRECT USE OF SOAP

The band were disappointed at the criticism levelled at *Secondhand Daylight* and at Thurston's production. So for *Soap* they have used a new producer, Martin Hannett, and they have contented themselves with recording the songs virtually live in the studio with as few overdubs as possible.


The result is Magazine's most conventional and ungarnished album. Ten songs in all, five-a-side, with the First Side emerging as their most completely realised entity so far. The songs have a freer more spontaneous energy unlike the heavily considered machinations that characterized the material on *Daylight*. Devoto still sounds as if he's run out of jokes but this time he's mustered more gusto and so sounds less dejected.

"Because You're Frightened" and "Model Worker" are brisk openers whipped along by McGeoch's punchy chording. "I'm A Party" and "You Never Know" are more leisurely and deliberate giving Adamson and Formula the opportunity to come to the fore. "Philadelphia" completes the First Side with McGeoch adopting a choppy Carlos Alomar style as the band build on the funk laid down by Adamson and Doyle.

Side Two is less immediate in impact. "Burn" is Magazine being very enigmatic and droll and only imaginative playing saves the song. "Thank You" is bare, almost dub, with the rhythm section laying down a 2/4 beat as McGeoch and Formula inject their own flourishes. "Sweetheart Con" and "Stuck" are almost pop by comparison both armed with striking guitar lines. "A Song From Under the Floorboards" concludes the album with panache. It's their new single and is built on Adamson's fluent pumping bass line providing the basis for McGeoch's and Adamson's disciplined extensions and Devoto's self-parody.

"I am angry, I am ill and I'm as ugly as sin". *Soap* (another Devoto title referring to emotional expiation or pandering, soft-soaping) is the most approachable and probably most commercial of Magazine's albums. It may also prove to be their best, so if you're a stranger to their music this is where to start.

George Kay



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