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# albums



Throwing Muses

## THROWING MUSES University (4AD)

Time to roll out the mortar boards and dust off the academics — Throwing Muses are back, and this time their poetic and intellectual aspirations seem to be nakedly admitted in the album title, *University*. Actually, the title alludes to universality, and not to any higher learning many have thought was a pre-requisite for cracking Kristin Hersh's cryptic, internal world.

Relax 'cause *University* is their most accessible, orthodox and least intense album ever. For these reasons, arguments that it's also their best are pretty persuasive. The idiosyncratic energy of the band and Hersh's often strident attempts at conveying her own songs are still there but *University* rocks and rolls with a consistency they haven't previously mustered.

Enough has been written in this issue about the merits of 'Bright Yellow Gun', and that could be joined by 'Hazing' and 'Shimmer'. 'Crabtown' crawls delightfully, with veiled sexual undertones, and the doubts of 'Teller' are delivered in a haunted, inescapable tread. Mere highlights from an album that should convince the sceptics you don't need advanced psychology to appreciate the Muses' rock 'n'roll.

GEORGE KAY

## SIUXSIE AND THE BANSHEES

The Rapture (Polydor)

It's getting to the stage where one can almost be called old fashioned for clutching a disc from these old devils with eager fingers. It's almost two decades since Siouxsie's early public appearances as a wild punk princess in a pair-of-tits T-shirt. That early footage and the incendiary albums which followed blew my mind. These days, each new album shocks me with news of the band growing older. Siouxsie is still holding the grand dame of Gothic look well. And Budgie... well, Budgie is starting to bear a remarkable resemblance to a sort of damned Danny Kaye. Good on him too, but I'm jolly glad it hasn't rubbed off on his drumming. I was a little afraid at first, for the shuffling drum loops of the lovely but light 'O Baby' open this album. True fans will have to hang in there for his relentless intro to 'Not Forgotten'. It is also here that Siouxsie's banshee returns to its house of howls, but that's later. It's still relatively light on the instrumental side for track two, 'Tearing Apart', but the vocals get tantalisingly closer to their wilder origins. Well, as wild as you can be in the presence of a poppy keyboard lead. The more inspired stuff begins with 'Stargazer'. It's here you realise aging has benefitted the band's experience, even if it is at the cost of their previous abundance of evil intent. Instead, we get some breathtaking moments of beauty, such as the cavernous guitar intro of 'Fall From Grace' and the intricate strings and guitars that grace the melancholic 'Forever'. 'The Rapture' is the soaring epic of the piece (clocking in at 11.32). This is a true modern symphony, which quietly screams to be picked up for a dance work. In fact, it's mostly quiet

screams for attention here, except for the climax of 'Love Out Me'. This track is as good a reason I've found for programmable CD players. I've ridden waves of ambience to Nighty Night Land with this album, only to wake bolt upright, in a cold sweat, hearing the lyrics: 'I smash the glass into my face / Cutting through to my disgrace.' I certainly didn't mind being jerked screaming from sleep for the album's finest moment, all I can say is it's a bloody good thing I don't sleepwalk!

BRONWYN TRUDGEON

## MASSIVE ATTACK VS. MAD PROFESSOR No Protection (Virgin)

The Mad Professor, aka Neil Fraser, has produced more than 100 dub albums since he started with a four-track studio in his front room. Now's he's taken the mixing desk to Massive Attack's second album. The result is a mind altering musical attack. At times unsettling, at times un-nervingly good. The cut and paste approach doesn't always improve on the originals, especially the Horace Andy tracks, but this is *serious* dubwise stuff.

Deep, deep drums, vocals that drift across the soundscape, music that ripples and changes in character with the Mad Professor's sure hand on the controls. It's what the Massive Attack soundscape would sound like after an earthquake had sent great shuddering cracks through those smooth sounds.

MARK REVINGTON

## JPS EXPERIENCE

Jean Paul Sartre Experience (Flying Nun)

## THE CLEAN Oddities (Flying Nun)

Another couple of re-releases dredged up from the catacombs at the nunnery. Any more of these will almost amount to a tacit admission from the New Zealand's premier independent record label that their best is behind them. Hopefully the justification for these albums is based more on commercial reasoning than desperation. There must be an awful lot of recently converted Nun acolytes (many of them in overseas markets) who would be hungry for the re-release of such seminal (and difficult to obtain) recordings. This is also known as money for old rope, but I'm not about to complain when the material is as good as that contained on the JPS Experience CD — a collection of all the tracks from their first eponymous EP and debut album *Love Songs*.

It's not overstating the matter to compare that first EP favourably to other classic Nun EPs — the Verlaines' *10 O'Clock In The Afternoon*, the Clean's *Boodle Boodle Boodle*, Straitjacket Fits' *Life In One Chord*, Goblin Mix, Tall Dwarfs, Doublehappys — actually the list goes on. Moving from delicate to moody, not a note is wasted and the five tracks from that EP (including the monumental 'Flex') seem to make even more sense now than they did then. The following debut album was somewhat berated when released, and perhaps did suffer a touch from 'how-do-we-top-the-first-effort' syndrome. Hindsight, however, reveals it as a compelling wistful, almost goofy, pop record,



PJ Harvey

where the band release their inhibitions and do what comes naturally. Occasionally that meant some ill advised white-boy funk, as on 'Crap Rap' and 'Let the Good Thing Grow', but it also spawned the gorgeous 'Grey Parade' and the totally dumb, but totally addictive 'I Like Rain'.

If time has been (for the most part) charitable to the JPS Experience re-release, it is markedly less so for the Clean's *Oddities*. Originally released on cassette, the 'Oddities' sessions were recorded in 'very relaxed' circumstances in the band's practice room, on a borrowed two-track. The album does contain its share of minor gems — alternative versions of Clean classics such as 'Thumbs Off', 'Getting Older', 'End Of My Dream' and 'Sad Eyed Lady'. But, if these are the rough diamonds, then the rest is very much coal from the Clean slag heap. Too much of it sounds like little more than practice room doodlings and the 'fi' is intrusively 'lo' to the point of irritation. At the time of its release, *Oddities* may have sounded like a breath of fresh air, inspiring countless fledgling garage bands to 'have a go', but, removed from its own time frame, it simply runs out of puff.

MARTIN BELL

## TRANSGLOBAL UNDERGROUND

International Times (Sony)

Well, at least they've got a sense of humour. "Good things come to those who wait," says the sample that opens the album. Considering we were expecting this last July, then watched its release overseas and still waited, the salivation was hydrodam filling. And, yeah, it is quite good.

What puts the Transglobals ahead of all the other ethno practitioners (poxy Green Forest etc), is their ability to merge the coolest eastern and western sounds of surround. It's not just African tribes for the sake of it. Bassy dance beats merge with bongos, snake charmer clarinets interwangle with violins, rap compliments Indian choirs.

*International Times* is more cloudy than their debut. The crystal clear production is gone and they've opted for a warm, less jarring sound, akin to old tracks like 'I Voyager'. It does have its share of uneventful background music. Like 'Protean' which starts off like a third world version of a Prince intro and turns into the theme from *Bombay Vice*. Their attempt at dub, 'Dopi', is just plain dull.

But then 'Dustbowl' is stunning — jumbo bass and trickling vocal sounding like some crowded ancient Indian Colosseum. 'Holy Roman Empire' is about as hard hitting as they get, with a stomping rap and metallic guitar riffs. 'Topkapi' sways around, dazed, like the living dead on downers. And, after the initial amazement at their fluidity of sound, the taste of their melting pot, there are over 70 minutes of other worldly pleasures to experience.

JOHN TAITE

## PJ HARVEY

To Bring You My Love (Island)

'I was born in the desert / I've been