



TRICKY Maxinquaye
(4th and Broadway)

Bristol. The concrete Hamilton of England. No wonder all these groups escape with a laid back, pained and haunted sound. But you wanna know why Tricky is heralded as the best of Bristol's ghostly trinity? Massive Attack needed squillions of collaborators to keep on top. Portishead slipped into 'stop me if you think you've heard this one before' syndrome. But Tricky's got it all: the beats, the variety, the voice and the suss.

Before falling out with Massive Attack, he sucked out any worthwhile creative marrow (without him 'Karmacoma' and 'Eurochild' would have been nothing). The chorus of 'Overcome' pokes fun at them as Martine sings 'Karmacoma' and sneaks in 'Jamaican in Roma'. 'Hell Is Around The Corner' rips the backing from Portishead's 'Sour Times' and makes it a squillion times cooler.

But beyond the musical wind-ups, Tricky's fresh ideas and brilliance rise above his stoned, numb, unambitious counterparts. A cover of Public Enemy's 'Black Steel In The Hour Of Chaos'. Brilliant. Even the simplicity of his samples are stunning, like an alien informant from *Star Wars* that's been looped and scratched on 'Brand New, You're Retro' (song title says it all).

Then there's Martine, his vocal partner in crime. The delicate, breathless beauty to Tricky's smooth, evil beast. Check out 'Suffocated Love' — not speedy or wordy, just dirty, velvety, smug and sexy.

Maxinquaye is dripping with confidence and paranoia. The beats are crusty and stealthy. The tracks are catchy. What else do you need?

JOHN TAITE

PUMPKINHEAD Sloth
(Wildside)

Sloth is a collection of big-hitting, hard, heavy pop tunes. Not grunge, or garage, or any other irritating label. What you've got here is 'pop', even if played at 150 decibels.

Sloth is the sound of a band that's already found its feet, the sound of a band that's played 500 gigs before recording their debut album. For the bulk of the songs, the production enhances the melodies, showcasing the big-hitting choruses and catchy riffs of songs like 'Water', 'Third Eye' and 'Holed'. However, the sound captured is not that of Pumpkinhead live. Those eager to relive the raw Pumpkinhead should simply kick in one speaker, crunch the volume to 10, smack yourself in the head and crowd surf on the kitchen table, or wait for the live album. Nope, what we've got here is a classy, polished debut, a million miles from the irritating lo-tech misguided fools think epitomises the so called 'New Zealand' sound.

Stand out tracks include 'Scapegoat', which alternates between a grunty, driving riff and a sweeping anthemic chorus, and the brilliant 'Between the Lines', showcasing departed member Jason Harmon's guitar genius. Apart from 'I Like', the heavier tracks end up sounding forced and lifeless in comparison to the more melodic material that comprises the bulk of *Sloth*. Given the vast majority of tunes fall into Pumpkinhead's "poppy/melodic" groove, it would be churlish, nay blackguardly, to quibble about the odd bottle of meth's amongst the champagne. 'I Like' these songs a lot.

KEVIN LIST

GENE Olympian
(Polygram)

Not so much charlatan as chameleon. Not so much chameleon as a musical blob taking on

sound of the instruments start making more sense.

Nathan must do a lot of composition at the keyboard, as this is a surprisingly keyboard dominated album. Kevin Field creates some exquisite 70s fusion feels with his Rhodes and synth playing, and the rest of the playing is equally tasty. The strings fit in perfectly, in contrast to the scratching, which is a bit predictable, adding more of a late 80s feel than lower East Side 90s. Still, even this minor blemish becomes endearing after a few listens.

This album will sound good anywhere and is refreshingly international in focus. It is also the first New Zealand studio 'acid jazz' album, and as such is a landmark in New Zealand music. You may hear it a lot in cafes, but you'll still want to hear it at home.

NICKY J

CRITTERS BUGGIN Guest
(Sony)

Loosegroove is the new label founded by Pearl Jam guitarist Stone Gossard, and *Guest* is one of it's first releases. Recorded last year in his 24-track basement studio, it's a collection of eight instrumental jams and one song, 'Naked Truth', which features Shawn Smith (ex Brad) on vocals.

The band comprises three former New Bohemians and Skerik (saxitar), who was a member of the now defunct Sadhappy. They were active from 1989-1992, and included Hendrix and Coltrane in their repertoire. It is from here Critters Buggin take their cue.

The album is well paced, moving through funky, up-tempo numbers like the opening 'Shag', which dispenses with foreplay altogether, to slower meditative pieces like 'Critters Theme', which proves that 'Shag' was no premature ejaculation. More use could have been made of keyboards, especially on slower tracks like the closing 'Los Lobos', which shows up the band's compositional limitations. Still, a sporadically impressive debut for the new label.

MARK DONOVAN

SILVERCHAIR Frogstomp
(Sony)

'Age and treachery will always triumph over youth and idealism' — an old geezer.

Right, seeing as how the public has already been afflicted with a million boring articles about how young Silverchair are, I'm not gonna waste your valuable time by mentioning it. Neither will I fritter away valuable column space comparing Silverchair with Nirvana. They don't sound anything like bloody Nirvana anyway. They sound like friggin' Soundgarden, or Metallica, or maybe Led Zeppelin covering a Soundgarden song.

On the plus side for *Frogstomp* is the fact that after a couple of plays nothing sounds as dire as the appalling 'Tomorrow'. On the debit side of the great reviewer in the sky's ledger, nothing really sounds that good either. Most tracks give the impression a bunch of reasonably skilled but unimaginative musos are jamming riffs from their favourite records. What's missing from *Frogstomp* is the ability to turn a really good riff into a song that is memorable and catchy. Nevertheless, despite my opinionated ramblings, I'll wager *Frogstomp* sells millions, so in that case I'll bow to public opinion and lick the backside of a brilliant publicity campaign...

Silverchair are three spunky boys and we'd all like to shag the little blighters — apart from us guys, we wish we were them. Not only are

they extra spunky and talented, but young, like not getting into pubs young. So good luck lads, make a mint, sow your wild oats and forgive this sad 'youngish' man's negativity.

KEVIN LIST

BOMB THE BASS Clear
(Island)

Tim Simenon's always had it sussed. From his sound engineer assignment ('Beat Dis') that turned into hip-hop history, to his anonymous money spinning production credits (Naomi Campbell!), to this. *Enter The Dragon* was fun, timely. *Unknown Territory* was pushing the limits and being cool. This, well it's so confident that you might try not to get sucked into this accomplished manipulator of sounds — but really, you've got no choice. There's just so much here.

'Bug Powder Dust'. Wow, whadda beauty. Justin 'B Boys On Acid' Warfield over some deadly rhythms, *Naked Lunch* samples and scream scratching. But you know that already. 'Sleepyhead' gives us some Bim Sherman/Skip McDonald On U bizzo. And 'Darkheart' with Spikey T is a stomping, grinding Robo-Jah™.

The singles are the biggies (and I'm sure Sinead O'Connor's 'Empire' can't be too far off). But then there's 'Tidal Wave' that finally answers Simenon's little prayers for an original, smooth soul number. And '5ml Barrel', Will Self doing some spoken word about the deterioration of a morphine addict, is vivid, disgusting and brilliant.

Everything to all people? Almost.

JOHN TAITE

MIKE WATT Ball Hog Or Tugboat?
(BMG)

Paradoxical kind of guy, that Mike Watt, and now he's made an album to prove it. After Firehose finally limped to the grave, Watt has now done a solo album that features about 40+ members of the alternative rock glitterati, just about everyone famous you can imagine, and a few more besides. At times this isn't so good. Evan Dando reinforces every prejudice I've ever had about grunge/slacker/whatever (*take a bath and get a goddamn job*); a bunch of Seattle millionaires who have built careers on rehashing Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Sabbath et al, sing about how the kids should be 'Against the 70s' and so forth. Of course, this works both ways, and luckily there are more great moments than bad in this talent pool. Joe Baiza and Nels Cline on guitars stand out, as do the vocals of Carla Bozulich (Ethyl Meatplow/Geraldine Fibbers) and the efforts of various Meat Puppets, Beastie Boys and more. The fact that Watt can write songs helps a great deal, however. Even though he only sings on 3 of 17 tracks, it's obvious the material is his. Try to forget who the supporting cast are and just enjoy the ride.

KIRK GEE

MAD SEASON Above
(Columbia)

The sticker on the front says all that's needed to lure prospective buyers. Mad Season are: Layne Staley (Alice in Chains), Mike McCready (Pearl Jam), Barrett Martin (Screaming Trees) and John 'Baker' Saunders. Mark Lanegan (Screaming Trees) provides guest vocals on two tracks. Consequently, this collectively spawned baby shines with sheer accomplishment.

It's a sobering collection of songs, with all

