



Nirvana

NIRVANA Singles (Geffen)

An ironic sign of the unfinished business that was Nirvana is the fact their collected major label singles don't number enough (at seven) to fill the natty little box they're presented in here, so two blank pieces of cardboard make up the padding. A booklet would have been more greatly appreciated, and the only supplement of any kind here is the inclusion of the complete words to *Nevermind* in the liner notes to the 'Lithium' single. Frilly bits aside, this is a collection that is already standing the test of time in the way only unadulterated genius can.

'Smells Like Teen Spirit' will probably be remembered as the most entirely immaculate major label debut single of the decade, as it also includes the bitter 'Even in His Youth' and the infectious 'Aneurysm' (credited as a non-album track, although it appeared on *Incesticide* after its initial release). The familiar before its time (to Killing Joke members and listeners, at least) 'Come As You Are' includes live versions of 'Endless Nameless' and *Bleach*'s 'School'. 'Heart Shaped Box' includes the only song Dave Grohl ever wrote for Nirvana — a beautiful number named 'Marigold', that turned out to be a fine precursor of things to come. Still, with a single like 'In Bloom', you get to hear the kind of machine gun antics that made Grohl as fine a drummer as he is a one man band.

Hindsight has seen people heap some staggeringly prophetic values on Kurt Cobain's lyrics of late, so it's cool to play these singles back to back and remember the times before anyone could take such liberties. While everyone marvels slack jawed that 'he *did* have a gun', while listening to 'Come As You Are', they manage to miss many of the more subtle turns of phrase beneath the surface, which were the true testament of a damn gifted lyricist who got turned into a regulation T-shirt for the dispossessed. Two of the

most prime examples come from the single that made Nirvana superstars and the single that directly preceded the abrupt end of their reign.

'A mulatto, an albino, a mosquito, my libido,' the masses screamed along to 'Smells Like Teen Spirit', probably giggling at the wacky sound such a clever pair of juxtapositions made. The same people thought they were ready to get serious by the time they heard 'All Apologies', and the line: 'Sunburn, freezer burn, choking on the ashes of her enemy.' But it still proved too deep for them, so they still jump up and down and scream that 'he *did* have a gun', and then they go searching for hidden meanings in their Hole CDs... and their Foo Fighters CDs... That's why I like staying home, playing these singles and remembering when... And yeah, I do have a gun.

BRONWYN TRUDGEON

DEF LEPPARD Vault: Greatest Hits 1980-1995 (Mercury)

If any other band in the world balanced more perfectly on that thin line between love and hate than Def Leppard, well... I'd be surprised. There's no grey area with this band; the very reasons why millions love them to death, are the same reasons why millions equally loathe them.

Def Leppard's phenomenal popularity (two of their records are among the Top 10 selling albums of all-time) can be attributed to their unique and unstoppable ability to produce big dumb rock songs, exploding with big dumb melodies, and big dumb lyrics (even in 1992 they could pull from out of nowhere lines like: 'I'm a man / That's what I am', from 'Make Love Like a Man'). You could quite rightfully argue that Bon Jovi and Poison adopt the same approach, but that couple are quite content to deal in sweeping ballads and theatric epics, whereas Def Leppard take it to another level, and throw everything into the mix at once, to create passionate, grandiose

extravaganzas. To that end, *Vault* is undisputable evidence.

Essentially a no-frills greatest hits compilation, *Vault* collects every Def Leppard track you need, should you not already own their albums. *Pyromania*'s 'Photograph' and 'Rock Of Ages' hint at the direction future sounds would take, though it wasn't until four years later in 1987, upon the arrival of *Hysteria*, that Def Leppard would encounter true superstardom. With the title track, 'Animal', 'Armageddon It', and in particular the addictive 'Pour Some Sugar On Me', Def Leppard pushed the 'rock anthem' to new dramatic heights, and made a belated entry into over 15 million households worldwide.

Adrenalize, released in 1992, was later to become the band's most successful album, and it also saw Def Leppard at their most lyrically moronic, attitude-driven best. 'Let's Get Rocked', 'Heaven Is', and the aforementioned 'Make Love Like A Man', were testament to the hedonistic twinkle in their eye, despite the PC overdose of the early 90s.

Perhaps *Vault*'s single mistake (the fact tracks run in no logical order is not a problem) is the inclusion of a new song, the insufferable ballad, 'When Love and Hate Collide'. Three years on since the last album, a tune such as that won't subdue fears their creative spark may have deserted them. Who knows what the future holds? But for now there's *Vault*, courtesy of the only band who could write the following lyric, *and* get away with it: 'You got the peaches / I got the cream / Sweet to taste / Saccharine / 'Cause I'm hot / So hot / Sticky sweet / From my head / Down / To my feet / Do you take sugar? / One lump or two?'

JOHN RUSSELL

THE BEATLES Anthology 1 (Apple)

Lennon's brutal assassination in 1980 caused a global trauma (unlike most rock 'n' roll martyrs, the legend had been created

or maybe because the music was just so damn good. This, the first of three volumes, and accompanied by the inevitable videos, TV shows, box sets, etc., covers the period 1958-1964, and contains the "new" track 'Free as a Bird', which has its moments but isn't gonna change the world, proves George still can't sing and Jeff Lyne is still a lousy producer.

But what really matters is the rest of the package, a feast of rarities, out-takes and live tracks, interspersed, like last year's BBC album, with interviews. Hardened Beatles fanatics like myself will own much of this stuff on bootlegs, but it's a joy to hear it so well mastered and cleaned up. The 1958 Quarrymen recording of 'That'll Be the Day' has always been rough as hell on the boots, but here it's listenable, and actually sounds like the Beatles; the Decca sessions tracks still don't really cut it (on the strength of these their A&R guy made the right decision); 'Love Me Do', with Pete Best on drums, is kinda weird and clumsy (Ringo was a better drummer); 'Money' and 'You Really Got a Hold on Me' live in Sweden are magnificent vocals from John that surpass the studio versions; the new, old George Harrison track is passable; and the electric version of 'I Love Her' is very cool. In between these you get 60 glorious tracks in varying degrees of roughness. from the greatest rock 'n' roll band the world has ever produced.

Despite my cynical reservations a month or two ago, essentially this album works, and I can't wait for the next two, where the really interesting stuff should be. Even Ringo sounds OK.

SIMON GRIGG

DAVID BOWIE 1. Outside (BMG)

The '1' at the beginning of the title is no misprint, this is the first in a yearly series of records by David Bowie designed to reflect the state of the world in the last years of the millenium.

Ambitious project, but the early signs on *Outside* suggest that Bowie, reunited with old pal Eno, may have struck a seam of direction almost as lucrative as their past collaborations.

To start with, the thin white one has opted back into his favourite niche of futurist role player, a diamond dog of various parts caught amidst the investigation into the ritualistic murder of Baby Grace Blue. Sometimes pretentious, gothic and in questionable taste (the photo of the disembowelled Baby Grace is a bit gratuitous), the scenario has nevertheless given Bowie the opportunity to be imaginative, indulgent and provocative, an opportunity he's largely taken advantage of.

With the songs written from the points of view of various characters, the innocent subject Leon Black emerges with the best songs, largely because Bowie invests this character with the poignancy of innocence and naivete. And amidst the industrial clanking and biographical narratives, even scene setters like the impressive opener, 'Outside', and 'I Have Not Been To Oxford Town' are strong enough to confirm Bowie and Eno haven't rejected melody in their attempt at recreating nightmare.

So, *Outside* is undeniably one of the best records in a vintage year, and one of the first Bowie albums in awhile you don't have to apologise for liking.

GEORGE KAY

MICK HARVEY Intoxicated Man (Mute/Liberation)

After years of giving all the best bits to other people (Nick Cave, Anita Lane), Mick Harvey finally takes the wheel. ("don't worry, baby, I always drive this fast") and releases his own album, albeit a one-artist tribute album to the musical work of the late French musician, writer, director, actor, bad boy Serge Gainsbourg. Gainsbourg's best-known song, 'Je T'aime... Moi Non Plus', recently appeared as a B-side on an Anita Lane single (a duet with Nick Cave) produced



Def Leppard