

## ARTS

# The Sugarcubes: Short and sweet

BY MICHAEL GRAHAM

THE SUGARCUBES' long awaited third album was finally released last month, much to my jubilation. It has been about two years since I happened upon an interview with Björk, the lead singer, on *Much Music*. Although I only saw a minute or so of her and maybe 15 seconds of their unforgettable song "Birthday", I was hooked.

## MUSIC

## The Sugarcubes Stick Around For Joy

The first two albums (*Life's Too Good* and *Here Today, Tomorrow, Next Week*) are great pop oddities. *Stick Around For Joy*, continues in more or less the same direction, but I have a few complaints. The long wait is one of them, but I suppose that the band has a good enough excuse. After releasing the second album, The Sugarcubes went on a world tour which lasted 8 months, taking them from Iceland to Japan. After the tour they then took a "break". Björk recorded a brilliant Icelandic jazz album (*Gling-Glo*), sang two songs and appeared in one video for 808-State's *Ex:El* and did a few background vocals for some fellow Icelandic bands. The rest of the band were active in writing, playing in and/or producing other bands, and taking care of their company, Bad Taste Ltd., which signs Icelandic bands and publishes Icelandic authors.

The Sugarcubes sound is undeniably "pop", but it is good pop! This may be an oxymoron for some, but not for the 'cubes because of the way in which they seem to twist and stretch pop to suit their own purposes. Their arrangements are very unique and the vocals make things really interesting.

Björk and Einar are both vocalists in the band. She has a very dynamic, innocent and fun-sounding voice with a high range and pure tone, whereas Einar doesn't. Björk does all of the singing and Einar mainly talks or half-sings. This combination opens up many possibilities for two perspective songs. Often Björk will be singing along and then Einar will pipe in, offering another point of view within the song. The overall lyrical/vocal interaction is part of what makes the band unique.

Through the use of electronic mail I recently asked Einar (he actually has a computer account) how the band writes lyrics and his reply was, "we meet up and start throwing ideas around while we drink coffee then we drink more coffee then we realise we are late for something else so we go home". Think whatever you want of that response. In interviews, Einar is renowned for his witty and sometimes absurd double-speak.

I really like *Stick Around For Joy*, but it is a bit short – only 38 minutes. You put it on and then it ends (at least it sometimes seems that way). Another thing I dislike about this album is the "booklet" which comes with it. Simplistic cover art, no lyrics, no pictures of the band... it doesn't even mention the band members' names. Maybe I was spoiled by the tome included with U2's latest. With regard to the music, there are two songs which I could do without; "Happy Nurse" (too cluttered) and "I'm Hungry" (painfully straightforward). "Vitamin" is another song that is just ok. Big deal – I don't like two (and a half) songs. The problem lies in the fact that this is approximately 1/3 of the total playing time.

The other 2/3's of this album is fantastic. *Stick Around For Joy* is very much groove oriented and the grooves are infectious to say the least. I don't think that is possible to listen to this album without bouncing around or at least tapping your fingers on your desk. My favorite song on the album has to be "Walkabout" (call up CKDU and request it!). "Lucky Night" is another tune that stands out. It has a great Jah Wobble-like bass line coupled with beautiful guitar playing and, of course, Björk's beautifully mesmerizing voice.

If you have never heard the Sugarcubes, then I would hesitate to recommend this album as an introduction. Start with the first one, *Life's Too Good*. It had the entire English music press wetting their pants in stunned amazement. It is also about 20 minutes longer and is the band's most diverse album. I would also highly recommend *Live Zabor*, their video compilation of interviews and



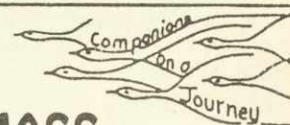
Björk braces as she belts out the Sugarcubes' Icelandic brand of pop with Bragi on bass.

live performances – they are definitely a band to be seen!

If you are already a 'cubes fan and you have the other two albums, then I would suggest picking up *Stick Around For Joy* – it's well worth the outrageous cost of buying music around here.

Overall, this is a great little album, regardless of the 2 songs which I didn't particularly like. With *Stick Around For Joy*, The Sugarcubes have once again cleverly avoided falling into the stagnant and downright brain-dead world of formulaized dance/pop.

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