

Smithereens play music to drink by

by Mac Hislop

The Smithereens are an unpretentious agglomeration of musical talent hailing from the dark reaches of New Jersey or some such place. Jim Babjek, The Smithereens' guitarist and driving force, discussed the band, its past, its present and its album.

Jim Babjek and drummer Dennis Diken have been playing together on the Eastern Seaboard for ten or fifteen years. Their musical roots lay entrenched in the 1960's rock and roll thing. Be forewarned; do not write them off as Beatlesque nostalgoids. They are not constrained by their influences. Rather, they have been able to transcend their roots to claim for themselves a distinct niche in the American musical scene.

With the addition of vocalist Pat DiNizio to the band, The Smithereens have emerged with a quiet bang in the music world. Winner of the New York Music Awards best new vocalist honours, DiNizio has given great depth to the band's sound. This is not to say that The Smithereens' music is dependent on DiNizio, but rather that, holistically, their sound has been given a distinctive tinge allowing it to emerge from among the plethora of new "revivalist" bands. Mike Mesaro does a credible job on bass, rounding out the line-up.

Babjek claims that when the band casts about looking for inspiration it looks to such diverse sources as Buddy Holly, the Ramones, Marshall Trench and on through to The Stranglers. (No, he did not mention Depeche Mode nor The Blowmonkeys.) While these influences have flavoured its sound, the band has used them to enhance their own sound, a sound noteworthy for the solid performances of each of the band members, at least insofar as their album, *Especially For You*, reflects their individual and collective competence. The band's music ranges in form from introspective balladry to energetic, good, old-times American rock and roll.

Before heading out on a tour of its own, The Smithereens opened for Lou Reed on the Eastern U.S. leg of his tour. Since then, the band has been headlining acts on the American East Coast and in Eastern Canada. Public response has been good to the band, as crowds of 1,000 to 1,500 have taken in the band's act; not bad considering the somewhat experimental nature of their sound. So, what about their "sound"?

This spring, the Smithereens released a very together and well-worked album entitled *Especially For You*. The band's musical scores are very well played, underlining the musical competence of the band. While their sound is not unique — Guadalcanal Diary, and apparently R.E.M., have a similar sound — they are talented musicians comfortable with their

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instruments and their scores are tight without being contrived, if you know what I mean. Their lyrics are rather uninspired bordering on dull, but they are sung wonderfully. Pat DiNizio has a superb voice, a god.

The lyrics are so, well, American; American in the sense of Ronnie's America — we are talking back to the rock and roll basics. Void of "a message of deep social significance" and studiously apolitical, the lyrics tell the stories of broken-hearted, sensitive, Eighties guys who cry and still believe in romantic love... well, not the stuff that made America great, but somewhat human.

What the band lacks in imaginative lyrics, it more than makes up for in talent and the tremendous delivery of Pat DiNizio. With two guitars, a bass and drums as their core, The Smithereens round out their sound with the inclusion of acoustic guitar licks which work very well by adding a tone of vulnerability to the score. That is to say that the electric guitars are not dominating the score but are made more sensitive to the music. For example, on Groovy Tuesday, the third track off the top — the Rolling Stone's Ruby Tuesday must have been somewhat of an inspiration; a suspicion supported neither by the lyrics or music — the band creates a solid Modish-Guadalcanal Diary sound. Relying on bass registers and accompanied by careful acoustic guitar work, the tune varies in tempo and tone from a melodious bass to a more vigorous beat which has a very interesting effect. Interesting and dynamic best describes this album.

Highlights of the album: Groovy Tuesday, In a Lonely Place, with the backing vocals of Suzanne Vega is another good one. The sound oscillates between a

Style Council score and a Rolling Stones at the lower registers. Hand of Glory is notable for its simple melody and relaxed lead guitar which rambles off on an unfrenzied exploratory journey of an idea before subsiding to rhythm. Check out the "electric tremolo rhythm guitar" on Listen to Me Girl for its great depth of sound. *Cigarette* effectively portrays the band's

beer happily to this song.

None of The Smithereens' tracks are offensive and a good number of them excellent. The band is comfortable and capable moving from the folksy balladry of *Cigarette* to the upbeat classic sound of American rock and roll of the album's opening track, Stranger When We Meet. (Don't be surprised to hear licks from a number of old rock and roll tunes.)

The Smithereens' visit to Edmonton will be a one-stop affair. (As of Halloween, the magnitude of the trip facing the band had not sunk in. But then again, who would expect Edmonton to be 3,000 kms from T.O.) If their album is at all similar to how The Smithereens sounds live, and they claim that it does, it is worthwhile checking them out. The band is keen to play Edmonton. Jim Babjek promises a "loud, rocking show" Friday night.

weaknesses and strengths. It features inane and weak lyrics which are, once again, sung superbly. The band's musical competence shines through, they are almost dieties; and you can drink a relaxed

No excuse for this EP

I'm An Adult Now
The Pursuit of Happiness

review by Mac Hislop

Trash.

Should the title track or the B-side, "She's So Young" make it on K-97, turn off your radio. If a friend recommends you buy Moe Berg's latest EP, end your friendship. If your mother gives you *I'm An Adult Now* as a November birthday present, leave home.

Insulting.

There is no excuse for such a poor EP. Banal.

Moe Berg has made himself ridiculous and proven himself creatively inert in allowing the pressing of this vulgar disc.

"Why is it so bad?" you might well ask.

In an attempt at objectivity, I will acquiesce and say that the A-side is merely poor. Even the lowliest "Top 40" garage

band in the musical netherworld could develop a less commercial sound. The only thing that saves this song from the AM category is its mildly ominous and somewhat incoherent lyrics. You need not bother hearing this cut.

What makes this EP unbearable is the B-side cut, "She's So Young".

This side has all the charm of an intense radiation burn. The sheer idiocy of the lyrics is overwhelming; in fact, inexpressible.

For his efforts Moe Berg should be denied, in perpetuity, the right to apply for Canada Council grants. Moe Berg should be forced to sell his offensive guitar.

Moe Berg does not deserve your support.

Do not buy this EP.

Do not listen to this EP.

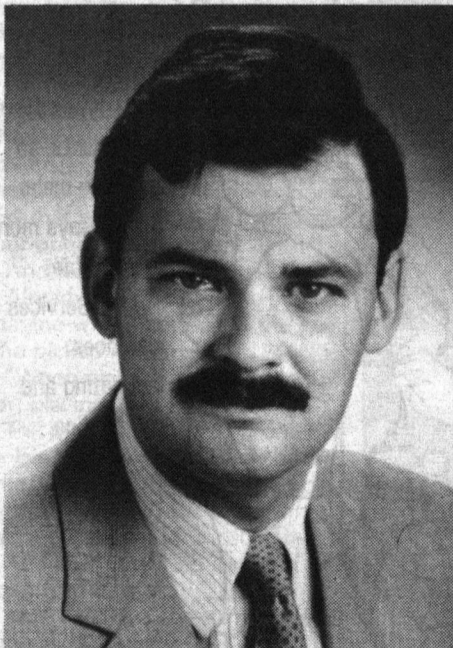
Do not look at this EP.

Do not speak about this EP.

Please let this EP die quietly and without a struggle. Good Luck, Moe.

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David Somerville
President
National Citizens' Coalition

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