

Record Reviews

The Breit Bros.
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 BMG/RCA

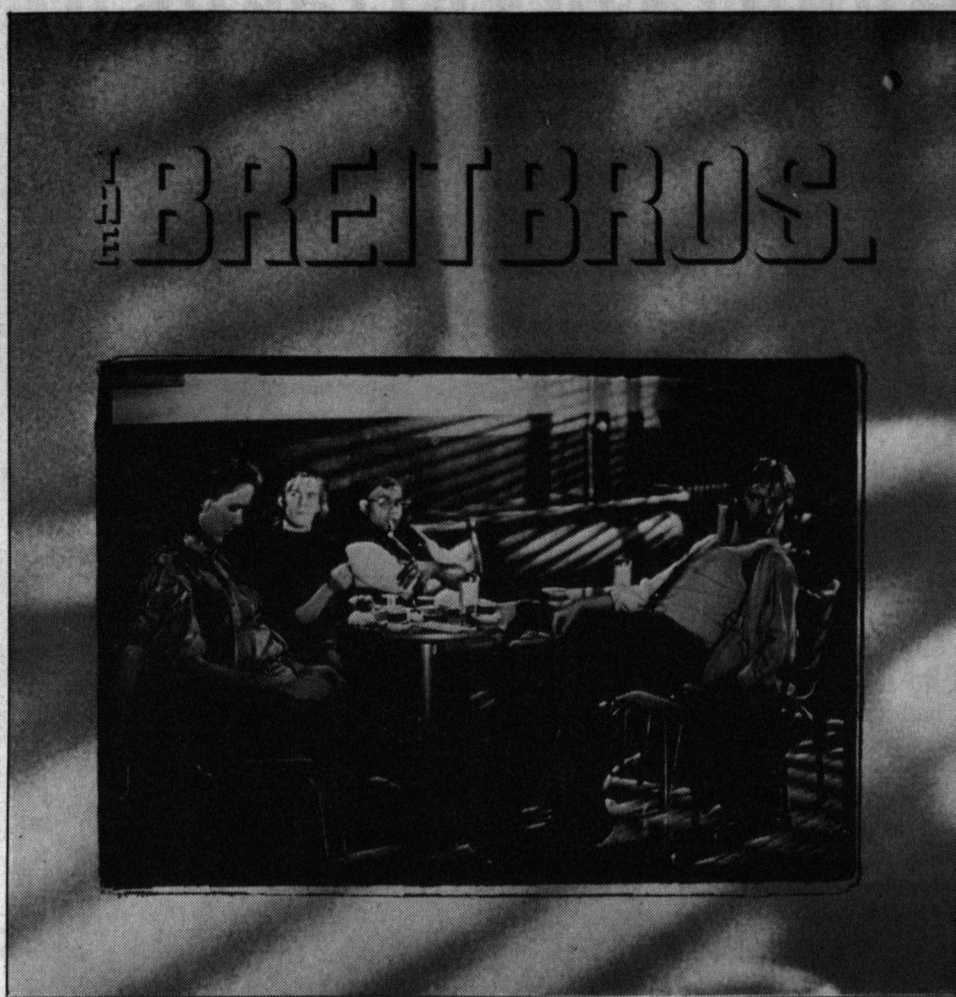
by Mike Spindloe

The Breit Bros. are real brothers; three out of the band's four members are siblings who share a house in Toronto. Their self-titled debut came highly touted from a couple of sources, and it is simultaneously difficult and easy to see why. The Bros. have combined slick production with sturdy pop songcraft to produce an album that is instantly likeable but ultimately passionless fluff.

The key word here should be pop, because the songs are tailored to good old AM radio, which doesn't like to get *too* high or low these days, passion or emotion-wise. The Breit Bros. fit right into the mold, which means that I shouldn't like it, but for some reason I do, or at least parts. Maybe there is something subtle under the surface sheen; a vitality that not even massive doses of radio-orientation could kill.

Whatever the case, you've probably heard "Going Down", the first single, on the radio already. It is the strongest track and there are two or three others that come close to it. Unfortunately, many of the rest are the kind of mid-tempo dreck that have finally made people realize how boring groups like Huey Lewis and the News really are.

In the attendant propaganda, the Bros. confess that "the biggest goal we're setting for ourselves is to do a second album." Here's hoping that they get the chance and that the second album captures more of their apparent potential than did the first.



Hothouse Flowers
People
 Polygram

by Mike Berry

Hothouse Flowers are another in the continuing parade of Dublin-based bands that are emerging as strong players in the music world. The most surprising, and refreshing, thing about them is that they are *not* U2 clones.

They are a stylistically diverse band that combines elements of country, folk, soul, R & B, and pop into a listenable, hard-to-ignore modern musical journey. "Love Don't Work This Way" is a prime example of this style melange — from high-toned

Etta James
Seven Year Itch
 Island

by Kevin Law

On the back of the album cover Etta James thanks all staff and counselors from the Betty Ford clinic. If that means she spent time there recovering from a haze of substance abuse there is no evidence of it on *Seven Year Itch*, the latest effort from the queen of gospel-soul.

Etta's powerhouse voice has not diminished. Every song on the album is marked by the clear soulful tone of her voice, which has remained unmarred by time or circumstances.

No matter the song styling, James can handle them all, including the rocking soul

sax, through R & B percussion (even the long-lost Hammond organ puts in an appearance), and the musical run-on at the end could be (minus the sax) mistaken for scaled-down Atomic Rooster. Diversity is this band's forte.

The almost-country "Ballad of Katie" does not drag as much out of a rich Irish musical past as some of the other tunes ("Don't Go" for example) do; the newer American influences are too easy to spot, but the plaintive sax wailings provide a nice touch.

Irish bands have always seemed able to successfully blend styles of music that others are reluctant (or unable) to; from the soul rock of Horslips through the Van Morrison combinations to the folk metal of Gary Moore. Irish music has remained noteworthy and this band continues that tradition.

INXS would be envious of funk/new wave groove of "Feet on the Ground," particularly in the use of the guitar to accent rather than underline the lyrics.

"I'm Sorry" is another soul/R & B-tinged piece that evokes memories of performances in small, obscure clubs; or as part of the soundtrack to some yuppie-inspired *Big Chill*-type movie. On this album, though, it works. Van Morrison is certainly not forgotten either, as one listen to the song "Don't Go" will attest.

Yet the underlying sound that emanates from the majority of the pieces remains one with a strong country flair, especially "It'll be Easier in the Morning."

If diversity of sounds in a single album is your preference, then you could do a lot worse than Hothouse Flowers.

of Otis Redding's "I Got The Will", where James aggressively growls the chorus and the sensuous melancholy blues of "Jealous Kind", where apologies are made for jealous behavior with velvet smooth emphasis.

Likewise for the jazzy, Motown-inflected soul of "Damn Your Eyes," where Etta soars above the horns and B.B. King-like guitar, making her voice the central instrument of the song.

All of the accolades are not entirely Etta's either, for all the songs on the album are more than competently performed by an ace and very tight back up band, including a superb horn section. As well, this album possesses excellent balanced sound making "Seven Year Itch" a well rounded, even definitive, Etta James album.



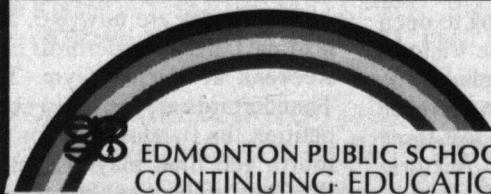
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