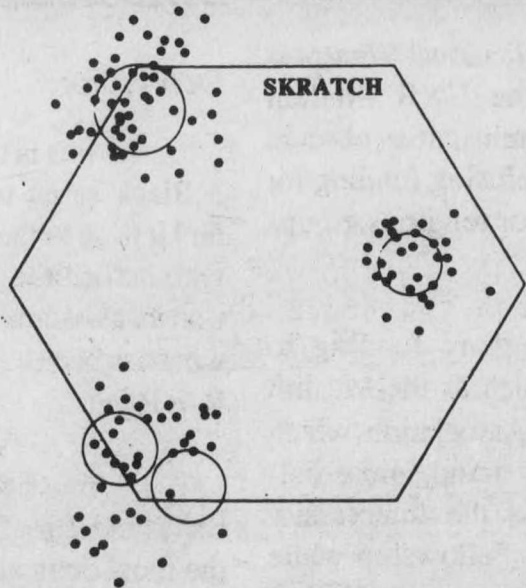


YOU CAN BEAT THE ODDS. YOU CAN BEAT ON THE BED, BUT YOU CAN'T BEAT YOUR . . .



XMAL DEUTSCHLAND Devils (Metronome)

If one were asked to produce a short list of the most influential powers in modern rock and pop over the past twenty years, I'm sure we would all pick examples such as Elvis, Hendrix, Beatles, Stones, etc., but would Joy Division be in there? Well, they damn well should be. As part of the turbulent process of growing up in today's society, the representation of the innate nihilism of teenage rebellion was, pre-1980, rather frivolous and bland. The basic need to resist the norms of society were in essence characterized by a perpetuation of the James Dean mentality of the late fifties. With the advent of punk suddenly there was a bit of anger, but really the entire movement served only to kick down the corporate statues of the music industry. Straight out of nowhere, if one had talent, it was relatively easy to be heard above the mountains of crap that stank out the airwaves. But it still didn't deal with the uncertainty, the depression the awful anxiety of

coming age. With Joy Division that void was filled. Grey, brooding and angst-ridden Joy Division were responsible for producing the most important statements of the closing seventies. We learned that we could express ourselves in any way we wished and some emotions were laid bare to the bone. From Duran Duran to U2, all of the fledgling giants of the early eighties, the profound influence of these unsung iconoclasts could be seen. This feat maybe matched by that of the Cure - but even here it is interesting to note that things only started to get interesting for this band after 1981 with the release of *Seventeen Seconds*, *Faith and Pornography*. Perhaps one of the lesser known groups of disciples of the late Ian Curtis are the gothic-noire whiners that call themselves *Xmal Deutschland*. Throughout this past decade X.D. have peppered the underground charts with such classics as *Incubus Succubus* (1981) and

Polalicht (1985): brooding but stormy little biting things that urged aspiring existentialists to rush immediately to the closet to don that ankle length black coat and scramble up the windswept hillside to cry into the wind.

As with any band that you used to think were the bees-knees ten years ago, there is a tendency to get a little softer at the edges (I mean good God! - look at U2!) and *Xmal Deutschland* are no exception. Sometimes however this doesn't have to be a completely unsettling experience. After what presented itself as a mid-life crisis on the rather bland 1985 release *Tocsin*, a lot of problems appear to have been resolved on this the latest work *Devils*. It is an extraordinary collection of well-crafted pop-songs for all those budding *Meursaults* amongst us that allows for a pouty stare and high stepping dance action all at the same time! Golly!

Sampling anything that moves is of course currently *de rigueur* in the biz, but on *Devils* the borrowing is slightly more subtle. An interesting game to play with snobby cognoscenti and trivia

buffs is to sit around with a flat of moose (natch!) and try to identify as many guitar sounds as possible. Stuart Adamson (*Big Country*), Steve Stevens (*Billy Idol*), (*Simple Minds*). Alvin Lee (*Ten Years After*) and even a smattering of the *Edge* . . . and that's only the beginning. Indeed quite often much of the material on *Devils* bends toward the pomp and circumstance *a la* Stadium Rock and it is only the rather flat and breathy intonations of the strikingly handsome Anja Huwe that wrestle the compositions back down to the lightning-scorched heath where they belong. It's true, Anja doesn't really present herself as a gifted vocalist but I think this is quite intentional. On the vocal range she's probably between the unabashed lamentations of Lisa Gerard (*Dead Can Dance*) and the rather more demonstrative capabilities of the Queen of Noire *Siouxie Sioux*. Nevertheless, the obviously sexy germanic lilt to this sort of minimalist delivery

does wonders for it, almost suggesting a vampiric Dietrich in a cyberpunk remake of *Nosferatu*.

Catchy to the point of being able to produce prickly adrenalin rushes the third time round, *Devils* is not disposable pop. Accessible and credible at the same time any number of tracks here (*Dream House*, *Sleep Walker*, *When Devils Come*) could be slipped in behind the *Cure's* *Love Song* and nobody would know any different.

In one of my favorite fantasies I am in a record pressing plant and I put Milli Vanilli labels on *Public Enemy* records, Rolling Stones labels on *Pixies* albums and Debbie Gibson labels on *Xmal Deutschland* records. Later, relaxing at home, I listen to D.J. Johnie Dickhead play some of my favorite records accidentally on the local shite commercial radio station and suddenly thousands of people everywhere start realizing that they've been listening to horrendous amounts of crap all these years. But that's another story.

Steve Griffiths



The band pout in glowing appreciation for Uncle Stevie's obsequious name dropping blow-out