

Dexy's Midnight Runners without substance

by Gary P. LeBlanc

First off, I must confess I've never heard Dexy's Midnight Runners before and was interested in getting turned on to some new sounds. Too-RYE-ay is their new album. Turned on is not what I got.

The band features a varied composite of instruments which include guitar, bass, drums, accordion, tin whistle, piano, organ, flute, saxophone and versatile vocals by Kevin Rowland. Additional vocals are supplied by a female trio called The Sisters of Scarlet. Helen O'Hara and Steve Brennan were recruited to do the fiddle playing. All are fine musicians and solos on different instruments appear throughout the album.

The character of the music is deeply set in Irish traditional music. The overall effect is like watered-down bluegrass mixed with some pop. The spirit behind the songs is very lofty and the Midnight Runners seem to be repeatedly telling us of the fun they're having without actually having it. The album is made up of lovely dramatizations about reaching out and touching souls with other people, especially friends and lovers. It all must be a great comfort to those who would like to believe that all the malice in the world exists within a television set.

The Sisters of Scarlet are generally used ineffectively. In the second song, "Let's Make it Precious", they would have made much more sense of the two gender interplay of the lyrics. Instead, Rowland does all the vocals on this one. The first side closes with "Old", which describes how the aged are "turned away" and the narrator sits to listen to what he has to say for himself. It's probably the best theme on the record.

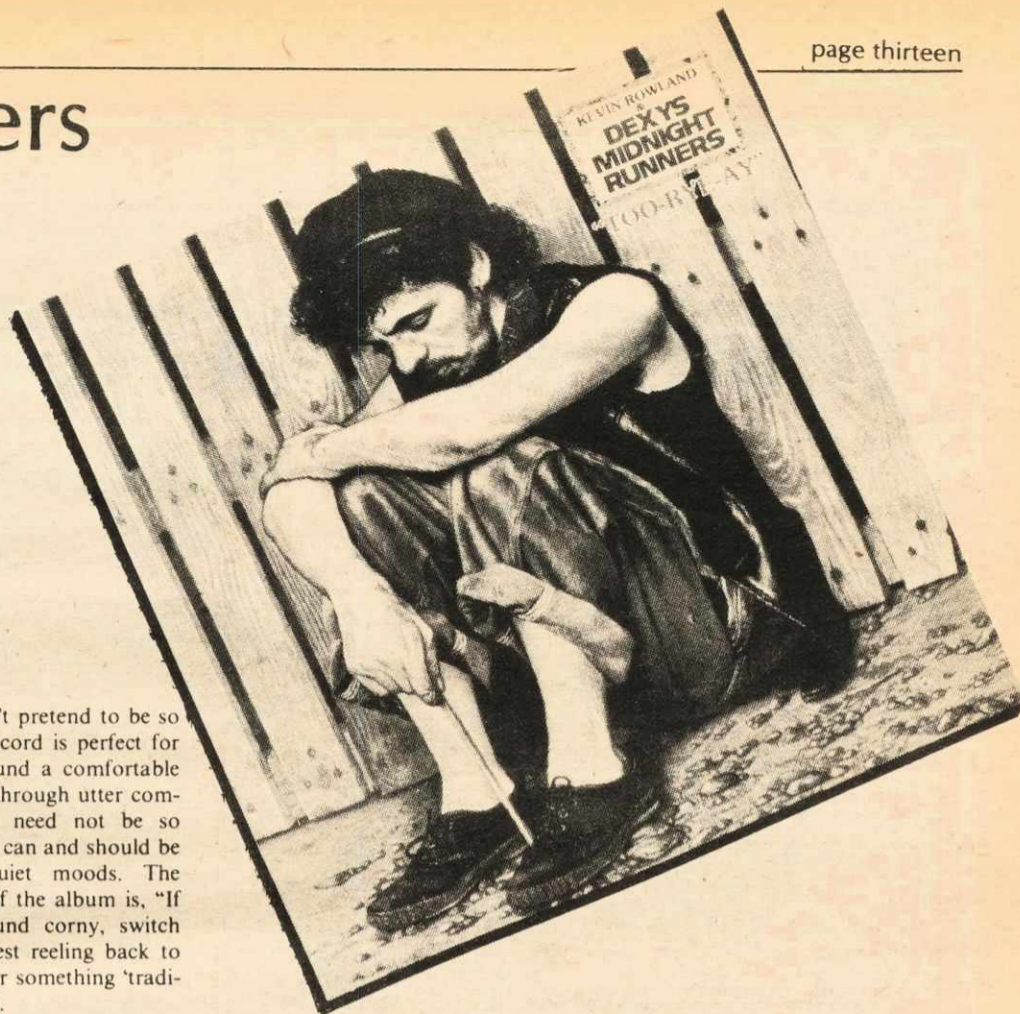
Side Two begins with "Plan B", a song about helping out a friend in distress. This is followed by "I'll Show You" where an interesting point is made. They say that bad little boys who "swapped dirty pictures and talked during prayers" and didn't "fit in...were thumped in and soon left behind", to become the extremely anti-social criminal types and scum of society. If they meant that society makes it hard for people to be different, then why integrate "alcoholics" and "child

molesters" into the idea? Dexy's are dedicated bleeding hearts. This is clearly revealed in, "If you see a man crying, hold his hand, he's my friend". This also shows how heavy earth's woes are on a man's shoulders when he stands to face his calling. I don't stand for it. Guilt like that is just plain unhealthy.

The Christian undertones of the album come to surface on "Until I Believe in My Soul". Some of the lyrics speak for the song without getting into any philosophical ramblings here. Rowland sings: "It's the battle between the body and the soul, the spirit...I'll punish my body to believe in the soul, I will punish my body until I believe in my soul." Heavy.

I find this middle-of-the-road extravaganza completely abrasive in that the struggles they sing about are false and unbelievable with the music being so light-hearted. Dexy's Midnight Runners are disconnected from the realities of the world. This would be a definite

plus if they didn't pretend to be so sensitive. This record is perfect for those who've found a comfortable niche in society through utter complacency. MOR need not be so melodramatic. It can and should be enjoyable in quiet moods. The redeeming line of the album is, "If these words sound corny, switch this off." I suggest reeling back to Steeleye Span for something 'traditionally' uplifting.



Neo-funk-disco has no culture

by Kim Rilda van Feggelen

On my first listen to **Kissing to be Clever** (and the band), I dismissed the record as slick disco. If you liked listening to disco music, you'll love the **Culture Club** — it's mellow, smooth, melodic disco. Of course, this album has nothing more to offer than disco either — it is boring, lobotomized dance muzak. Sort of the-Laurie Bauers Singers-meets-Chic type of thing. The excellent production on this album makes it very listenable — once again proving that money, not talent, makes money (sorry, music) in the music business. This album is SAFE. C100 should play it to death soon.

The line up of the Culture Club is written on the record cover as Boy George (a girl) doing vocals (mostly backing), Jon Moss on drums, Roy Hay on guitar and keyboards and Michael Craig on bass and "Heavy Culture". From a listen to the album, 'heavy culture' is leading vocals and, one would

presume, most of the band's stylistic influences and vocal topics. He is, after all, the only black in the Club.

On top of this, the entire first side consists of love songs — how I hate bands who, even collectively, have no more ideas to offer beyond the worn out redundancies of boy-meets-girl! The only interesting moment comes in the last track, "Love Twist (featuring Captain Crucial)" involves an interesting dub-vocal section that at least tries to capture the soul and feeling of Jamaican Dub Reggae. It also contains the line "I chant for the white and the black" — for the first time they've said something worthwhile. Perhaps this band does have a message? On to the second side...

Sorry. If these guys have some sort of black and white culture message, then it is defeated by the first song on the second side, "White Boy". This is an anti-white disco trilogy. In fact, three of the songs on side two are anti-white songs. Culture Club comes off, on the second side, as a representation of a bitter black and a bunch of white followers, singing about a society of equality brought about by creating anti-white racist/hatred material — all to that monotonous disco lag. I wish that such warped theories never got airplay or support, but this album is guaranteed to be popular, as the music is commercially designed for 12-year-old giggling girls who missed disco first time 'round and disco-lovers who have become old and tired.

This band joins the new profusion of white boys playing "reggae" with no understanding of the black music save an empathy with the black people. These neo-funk-disco bands are extremely annoying — witness, for example, the Clash. They started out playing 'punk', a music form that expressed a vibrant (and sometimes violent) alternative to the boring, complacent disco scene, and now they're playing disco music! This is a sell-out. There are no new ideas here.



The Blasters turn out a medium bang-up job

by Michael Brennan

The Blasters' new E.P. entitled **Over There - Live from the Venue, London**, is okay, but not what I had hoped. The six songs, with the exception of one original, are covers of fairly well known rockabilly hits played fast and furious. The band is live and kicking, and I enjoy the record, but to be introduced to the Blasters only through this would be a shame.

The Blasters have to be one of the best new groups of last year and their self-titled debut L.P. easily one of the strongest charges of primal rock'n'roll to come out in years. The Blasters play real roots rock'n'roll and by that I mean the fusion of blues, country, swing, gospel and whatever that made the first rockabilly of Elvis and Chuck Berry so intense. And their album made that music wonderfully alive and energetic again without ever

sounding nostalgic or imitative. They sound as contemporary as the Ramones.

From the yodelling of Jimmy Rogers to the shaking of Howling Wolf, the Blasters captured it all on that first record; it was a wealth of American music expressed in a personal rock'n'roll. It came from the groin to the gut and all the way back again. "I'm Shakin'", "I Love You So", and originals "Border Radio" and "American Music" are great numbers. And that's mostly because of Phil Alvin's powerful, distinct voice and Dave Alvin's fiery guitar — they rock their hearts out.

Their live E.P. just doesn't move me, though. Energy and speed alone don't make wild rock'n'roll. There has to be a personal expression to the songs — they have to hit hard and passionately — and it is this that is missing here. Maybe it's

the songs they perform (Little Richard's "Keep a Knockin'" and Roy Orbison's "Go Go Go" in particular) that robs their individuality. They do them well but very distantly and coldly. They're not the Blasters style. At moments it sounds like it could be any good rockabilly revival band.

I'll still recommend the E.P. to anyone though; it's good, just not great or as strong as a live Blasters album could be. On "The New Music" (from City T.V.) a few weeks ago, The Blasters were featured live from Toronto and I loved them. They did two of the better numbers from their debut L.P. and played them just the way they sounded. If this E.P. had that, I'd be satisfied.

Anyway, the band does play very well, always tight and sharp. It becomes too much like a tiring jam at times, but they certainly hit a

groove. "High School Confidential" they do best. Phil Alvin gives a great introduction; "This one's for the KILLER, Jerry Lee Lewis." Lewis himself wouldn't say Killer any better. The band sets a fast pace (maybe too fast) with Alvin singing that lilting Jerry Lee Lewis quaver beautifully.

It's nice to know there are bands today playing rock'n'roll in the true spirit of the originators and without any of the trappings of a trend. The Stray Cats, Joe Ely, and George Thorogood, as well as the Blasters, are all making great American-influenced rock, blues and country. The Blasters may be the best of these artists but not on this live E.P. I have to tell you to get their album first. It's a must. And if you have that, this one's an O.K. addition. Hopefully, the Blasters' next studio album will be as strong as their first.