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Blur
 Blur
 Parlophone/EMI

The founders of the new wave of Brit-Pop have returned with their fifth album, the self-titled *Blur*. For fans of the band's previous efforts, this release may come as a disappointment. Blur take a bold step in rearranging their style of music dramatically. Old fans may find this too much of a

change, but after a few listens it sounds great.

The first song on the album, which is also the first single, gave me a bit of a shock. With the old Blur versus Oasis debate still ringing in my ears, I thought it very strange that the first song sounds like an Oasis tune (which in turn sounds like a Beatles song). The track is called "Beetlebum", which is interesting in itself. The song is not necessarily bad, it just came as a surprise. But this is the only moment when Blur stand in the shadow of those grumpy, boring Manchester louts (a.k.a. Oasis).

Vocalist Damon Albarn leads



the band with this fourteen track, hour long journey into new territory. Gone are the bouncy pop tunes such as "Girls and Boys" and "Country Man". Instead there is a new sound, reminiscent of a lighter, gentler Beck, with electronic sounding drums reminding me of the Smashing Pumpkins' "1979". Much of the music also brings shades of *The Holy Bible* by the Manic Street Preachers; a mix of distortion and guitar pedals.

Many of the songs on the album are short, but this takes nothing away from their quality. Examples of this are the two minute (but brilliant) "Song 2" and "M.O.R." This mature sound from the band may not make them as popular or as big as they could get, but it is still an excellent release.

STUART MCMILLAN

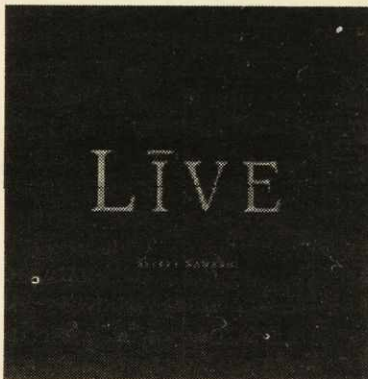
Secret Samadhi
 Live
 MCA Records

Live's third and long awaited release, after the success of *Throwing Copper*, can be most succinctly described as bizarre. Warped lyrics and heavy distortion can at

times make this album a little disturbing for some Live fans. Make no mistake — *Secret Samadhi* is definitely a departure from their earlier work.

The first single off this album, "Lakini's Juice", is a noisy little number about, as far as I could tell, some pretty messed up shit! I wasn't a big fan of this song but apparently some people are because it has started to climb the charts. I guess I still cling to the clear-cut rockin' melodies of their earlier hits such as "Selling the Drama" and "I Alone". The jagged and unsettled nature of "Lakini's Juice" was definitely hard to get into.

Unfortunately, this trend con-



tinues throughout the album and the themes and lyrics just keep getting weirder, wilder and woolier. "Graze" is a dark and hypnotic sounding tune with a X-Files theme. "Heropsychodreamer" is about murder, and "Freaks" is about incest. So, needless to say this is not a disc you want to pop into Grandma's stereo.

Despite these songs, there are several diamonds in the rough. The opening track, "Rattlesnake", is reminiscent of many of the tunes from *Throwing Copper*; both in tempo and in overall sound. The soulful "Turn My Head" is another good example of what Live can do once those musical neurons get chugging. Unfortunately, I found that powerful tracks like these are few and far between on this disc.

I suppose Live would say that they have evolved musically since the first album — but evolved into what? With inspiring and deeply symbolic lyrics such as those found in the song "Century" ("Everybody's here, puke stinks like beer"), I was definitely left

wondering. Lead vocalist Ed Kowalczyk was quoted saying, "It was really important for us to grow with this record, and let our fans know we're not taking anything for granted artistically." I guess I'm not cultured (or twisted) enough to grasp some of their messages.

All in all this album did not live up to my expectations that were brought on by the genius of *Throwing Copper*. But, if you are a Live fan and can put up with some of the freaky lyrics, you just might like this album.

DAVID LOVAS

Eight Arms to Hold You
 Veruca Salt
 Outpost Records

Finally, Veruca Salt has released a second full length album. *Eight Arms to Hold You* is a great album which exemplifies the dynamic talents of Veruca Salt, Louise Post and Nina Gordon, the lead singers and guitarists of the mixed gender rock group, still have their uncanny ability to mix heavy, distorted guitar riffs with almost eerie vocal harmony.

The band has gone through some serious changes, from losing drummer Jim Shapiro to his own musical group to changing labels from Geffen to Outpost. They have since acquired drummer Stacy Jones from Letters to Cleo and have made the label transition with amazing ease.

Unlike many bands, Veruca Salt has maintained their original sound from their earlier successes. "Seether", the top twenty hit from *American Thighs*, and "Blow It Out Your Ass...It's Veruca Salt" from the EP of the same name, were the building blocks for the new album.

The first single off of *Eight Arms to Hold You*, "Volcano Girls", contains a few obscure Beatles references in the lyrics. Gordon wails out the line, "I told you about the seether before, you know the one that's neither or nor, well here's another clue if you please, the seether's Louise [Post]." You Beatles fans out there will realize the lyric's similarity to one in the Fab Four's song, "Glass Onion".

Eight Arms to Hold You was recorded while the Verucas were "on vacation" in Hawaii. Obviously, they were having fun since every song on the album has a great beat and the music, simply said, rocks. The songs range from mellow ballads to hardcore bitch-fests to eerie Cure-esque tunes, complete with peculiar organ sounds and a backwards guitar solo.

Although Veruca Salt did not catch my interest with their first two releases, *Eight Arms to Hold You* has caught and steadfastly held my attention. The CD has yet to leave my Discman. This album rises to the occasion as easily as I'm sure it will rise in the music charts.

JEREMIAH HIERS

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