



JUST A BUNCH OF STUFF...

Nick Cave has always sung about dark subjects - electric chairs and the like. He has always been a story-teller too,

sticking with it as *Murder Ballads* captures the atmosphere of the theme quite beautifully.



so when these two things combine, you get the album that his entire career has been building towards - *Murder Ballads*. It is such an extreme album, both lyrically and thematically that the "Explicit Lyrics" warning is printed directly onto the CD booklet. This must be serious stuff. Not surprisingly, every song is about that most cheerful of subjects, murder, but the delivery ranges from the tenderness of 'Death Is Not The End' to the expletive-ridden, just plain scary 'Stagger Lee'. Cave is, as ever, backed up ably by the Bad Seeds, and is also joined by a plethora of guest stars such as PJ Harvey and Kylie Minogue, with each of whom he performs a rather lovely duet. And that makes for an album of stark contrasts between the subject matter and the performances, and also between the different songs on the album. It might not be the easiest of listening, but it is well worth

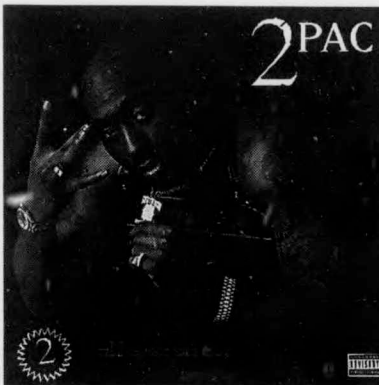
I was beginning to think that Therapy?'s third full-length album, *Infernal Love*, was never going to be released in North America - after all, it was in June of last year that it first appeared in the UK. But it has finally arrived, and it was well worth the wait. *Infernal Love* finds Therapy? finally living up to the promise that they have been showing over the years. They continue to document the darker side of life, taking angst and despair and



turning it into something pretty special. It makes for a much more interesting listen - as their argument on 'Stories' states "happy people have no stories." Of course, that doesn't mean that every band should sing about being fed maggots until they choke though - it would become so cliched. *Infernal Love* delivers something unexpected though - Therapy?'s sound now ranges from the resonant guitars they are famed for to

delicate string arrangements; it makes for a much more interesting album. There is even a double tip o' the hat to Husker Du, as they cover 'Diane', plus their own 'Loose' which sounds more than a little like Mr. Mould's Sugar. Very good stuff indeed.

It's hard to know what to make of 2Pac, or Mr. Shakur as I like to think of him (to avoid any sort of familiarity). After all, not only was he linked to a rather horrid gang rape and suspected of a drive-by shooting, he also lost one of his (presumably) two testicles as he left the courthouse one day. And if all that wasn't enough, he released that insipid song to his mother, just to show he had a more 'human' side - after all, it was him against the world. But now, he seems to have lost a little of that paranoia, and that makes *All Eyez On Me* a more enjoyable listen. It's a huge double album lasting more than two hours, and that means that there is bound to be some mediocre stuff on there - a prime candidate would be 'Only God Can Judge Me' which sees



2Pac fall back into whining mode, protesting his innocence. But if you can ignore that, and the gangsta rap sentiments, you are left with a musically rewarding album that owes an awful lot to George Clinton, and a bit less to other purveyors of G-Funk.

Let's be perfectly honest - The Cowboy Junkies haven't made a good album since 1990's *The Caution Horses*. Everything else since has been more than a little patchy, and that is so sad as their second album, *The Trinity Session*, still stands up as one of the most incredible records of the past few years. Even more incredible considering it only cost \$250 to record. So I greeted the release of their sixth album, *Lay It Down*, with not much in the way of enthusiasm. That is, until I listened to it, and then the enthusiasm came back rather quickly. *Lay It Down* has a real sparse feel to it, and that is why it



sounds so damned good - Margo's voice comes through the mix incredibly clearly, so it sounds more spine-tingling than ever. The overall feeling on the album is melancholy; there may be the occasional moment of optimism, but they don't hang around forever. Rather than long, drawn-out guitar solos, Michael uses his eclectic guitar sparingly - the effect is much more dramatic than anything Blue Rodeo did when they played in town. By having a lone guitar rather than a full sonic assault, the album retains a haunting quality that makes The Junkies' music so memorable. A welcome return to form.

And guess who else is back? Marc Almond, and his new album, *Fantastic Star*, has more camping on it than a Boy

Scout jamboree. He has returned to his synth-pop days of old after flirting with so many other alter-egos over the years,



and he is sounding not-too-bad-at-all. Another obvious influence this time is the 1970's, particularly glam-rock - T-Rex are quite blatantly ripped off on 'The Idol', and there is no denying that. Unfortunately, *Fantastic Star* is more than a little ambitious, and over the duration of sixteen songs things are a little bit hit or miss. But fortunately, when it is good, it is very good - witness 'The Idol', 'Adored And Explored' or the Buddy Holly tribute, 'The Edge Of Heartbreak' for evidence of that. Just keep one finger on the 'Skip Track' button when you listen.

Keeping with nostalgia, The Buzzcocks have just released a new live album recorded in April last year, in the city of Paris. Hence the title, *French*, I would imagine. It features songs from the early part of their career, such as 'Fast Cars', and the inevitable 'Orgasm Addict', and also songs from that second incarnation of the band. And those songs are just as good too, particularly 'Isolation' which could stand up to anything from *Love Bites*. But the best thing is the way in which the material is presented - no overdubs, and no inane chat with the crowd. All they do is announce the title, play the song and move on. No messing around. The 've still got it.

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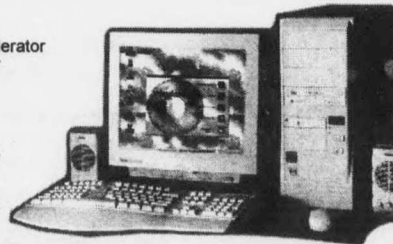
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