

Forget the film — go get the soundtrack

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by Prasad Bidaye

Critics usually pigeonhole 'alternative' pop groups as depressed, agnostic poets infatuated with death. The soundtrack to Wim Wenders' latest film, *Until the End of the World*, challenges the stereotypes and offers a refreshing sample of those established in modern music.

Take Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, who have been heralded as the godfathers of existentialist punk. "(I'll Love You) Until The End Of The World," is a black comedy/waltz of crazed romance amid apocalyptic ruins. By underlining his own naked emotion with exaggerated realities, Cave successfully combines melodrama and sincerity.

A similar quality can be found in Julee Cruise's "Summer Kisses, Winter Tears," whose facade may be equivalent to that of a perfume commercial. But over the charming arrangements, the vocals are wistful, even meditative.

Lou Reed's "What's Good" begins with an awkward Slayer guitar solo. The rest of it, like a jam session warmup, is filled with Reed's monotone voice questioning life's trivialities and confessing that "life's good... but not fair at all."

Realism from rock's famous manic-depressive is followed by another cheesy guitar solo. But on



Solveig Dommartin and William Hurt share an Excalibur moment in the film *Until the End of the World*. As it happens, this is a review of the film's soundtrack, but we figured you'd rather see a picture of these two than a picture of, say, Nick Cave and Julee Cruise, or David Byrne and Elvis Costello, or Michael Stipe and...

"Days," Elvis Costello chooses to be less satirical than usual. It is an informal eulogy to a friend, whose death

he accepts as a simple end for which only the "days" can be remembered.

Depeche Mode's "Death's Door" is similar. Bypassing silly fears of going to hell or facing an abyss of gloomy eternity, Martin Gore sings of coming home to his parents as he passes through his last moment of life. As an alternative, most of the artists on *Until The End of The World* are able to confront such subjects realistically and optimistically, without superfluous sadness.

However, there is one case where

angst is a necessary ingredient, and surprisingly enough, the song is a favourite: "Fretless," by REM. Stronger than anything on *Out of Time*, it was produced by Scott Litt, who worked with the band on some of their earlier recordings.

A ghostly piano plays as Michael Stipe delivers some of the most incoherent lyrics he's ever written. Until, suddenly he cries out, "don't talk to me... about being alone," and it somehow makes sense. Echoing the frustrations of Ian Curtis, it is one of

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various artists
Until The End of the World Soundtrack
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the most potent moments on the album.

Other notable songs include Talking Heads' "Sax and Violins;" pseudo-funk, underlined with Brazilian bells and charged with David Byrne's nasal tantrums, the band's final recording revives some of the better moments in Heads history.

T-Bone Burnett's "Humans From Earth" is another favourite. Television, electricity, planetary imperialism — the cold lyrics are better fitted to Front 242. But the bluesy guitar chords bite, making this the album's hardest track.

There are a few mundane spots on the soundtrack. Neneh Cherry's "Move With Me" is a monotonous dub, hardly comparable to her previous work on *Red Hot & Blue*. The less said, the better.

U2's "Until The End of The World" is okay, but does not necessarily work in the context of the album. Bono sings in hope of enlightening a former lover that it really isn't "the end of the world." He restrains the passion in his voice, making the supposed climax of the album sound callous.

Fortunately, "Finale" by Graeme Revell and Narada artist David Darling, who score the soundtrack, is a formidable closer, with an intriguing collage of ambient noise and gritty cello.

How Wenders is able to integrate all 19 songs into his film is unimaginable. Rather than call it a soundtrack, *Until The End of The World* is better referred to as an alternative compilation.

Never mind alternatives, MTV strictly mainstream

by Ira Nayman

I find it hard to accept a band that sells millions of albums as "outside the mainstream."

Yet *never mind the mainstream*, vol. 2, an imported collection of songs played on MTV's *120 Minutes*, contains songs by REM ("Orange Crush") and Depeche Mode ("Personal Jesus"). Sounds pretty mainstream to me.

Not only that, but if punk has to be represented on the album, why choose a relatively tame act like the Ramones instead of true anarchists like the Dead Kennedys? And, if you have to have a song by the Ramones, why choose "Do You Remember Rock 'n' Roll Radio?" instead of "Teenage Lobotomy" or "I Wanna Be Sedated?"

Obviously, MTV's definition of mainstream and mine don't jibe. Whoever chose the songs for *never mind the mainstream* decided to play it safe, straying a little from the pop mainstream, but not very far.

Society has an uncanny ability to incorporate anything different (and,

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never mind the mainstream... vol. 2
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therefore, threatening) into itself, neutralizing its ability to shock or, more important, get people thinking about change. Rock and roll was co-opted a long time ago. As long as 'alternative' music stayed on the fringes, though, at least it could fulfil rock's danger and creative promise.

The ability of society to incorporate and neutralize threatening ideas even benefits those whom it would seem to stifle: teenage rock listeners. Let's face it: at the same time they're rebelling against their parents, most teenagers are conforming to their peer group. Their rebellion is circumscribed within limits that don't seriously threaten the society which, after all, they will become a part of.

This is the credo of the MTV Generation.

Thus, the Violent Femmes, a good choice for an album of alternative music, are represented by "Gone Daddy Gone." The song "Add It Up" is more representative of their work, but it contains a four-letter obscenity beginning with "f" — civilized rebellion has limits.

Don't get me wrong: *never mind the mainstream* contains some great music. "The Killing Moon" is easily the best song Echo and the Bunnymen ever did; John Lydon's Public Image Limited cannot help but play raw rock and roll, even if the song chosen for this album is a dance version of "This is Not a Love Song." In fact, I can honestly say that there isn't a song on this album I don't like.

There are even a couple songs from truly non-mainstream acts: Ministry's "Stigmata," for instance, or Husker Du's "Could You Be the One?"

But, generally, *never mind the mainstream* is about as threatening as porridge.



Morrissey strikes a pose. If "Every Day is Like Sunday" is your idea of an alternative song, you'll love this album.

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