



BY JENNIFER BECK

STEPHEN FEARING is either a songwriter who does wonderful things with a guitar, or a guitar player who writes wonderful songs. His most recent release, *Blue Line*, is a collection of pieces written over the past seven years that resonates with sustained hope and regained innocence.

MUSIC
Stephen Fearing
Blue Line

The first song on *Blue Line* is 'The Bells of Morning', where Fearing writes his way through his horror in the wake of the Montreal Massacre:

Tonight I am speechless
My head is filled with pouring rain
As the darkness falls on Montreal
When violence is shrieking
The city streets will run with pain
Till the moon can shed no light at all

and offers his conviction that the fuel of violence is silence.

"The topics of sexual abuse and violence against women should not be reserved for 'heavy' conversation," Fearing says. "We have to get away from the fear of discussing them, because this closed-mindedness generally guides your attitudes and effects the way you think."

"For me, these aren't irregular or surprising things to write about, these are regular topics of conversation."

When it comes to politics, Fearing writes with an emphasis on trust.

"It's another part of human relations. It's crazy that half the world — women — can't trust the other half — men — and it's a sad cliché of life now that no one can trust a politician."

You built your platform on shallow words

All mind and thought
And the heart was never heard
(from "Our Father and the Big Wheel of Fortune")

anthem of hope

Fearing's



"I'm not saying we all have to love each other, I'm just saying all relations should be based on respect, mutual respect and honour, if not love."

Most of Fearing's songs sound like painful odysseys of self realization, with eventual resolution sung like an anthem of hope.

"It's so much stronger to write from the 'I' perspective than the 'you' perspective. These songs are about living, and they include elements of other lives as well as nuggets of my own."

And I spent thirty odd years at war with myself

I wore my drink like a disguise
Till the silence exploded on white sheets of gin

And the room filled with hideous lies
(from "Little Child Eyes")

"Little Child Eyes" was written by Fearing about an alcoholic. The work is so powerful most people assume the experience was his, as in the song "Turn Out the Lights":

Just a baby and my Father knew it well
The old man always told me
That good kids never tell
And no one dared to ask me
Why I lay awake at night
My arms so still beside me
As he turned out the lights
Turn out the lights

"I'm not a survivor of abuse, but we have so many experiences in com-

mon that cut through gender, that cut through race, and we need to talk about them. I deliberately made the gender of the child ambiguous so that it could represent anybody, because so many people are in denial."

"I see it around me a lot, the roots of problems people have in their lives go back to childhood, back to when they had no control. If you can find the child in someone, it's easier to forgive, and to let go."

But wisdom and age aren't the same in my eyes
And trust is not based upon wrinkles
(from "Our Father and the Big Wheel of Fortune")

Fearing has lived in Canada, the United States, and Ireland. His years

in Ireland taught him that "it is a land of amazing contradictions. There has been culture and society for so long on such a tiny island—three million people now. It is uncanny how much culturally has come out of Ireland when it is so incredibly backward considering the violence and oppression going on under the combined banner of religion and politics."

"I think critical mass is being reached concerning women's issues in Ireland. All kinds of young people are uniting against the oppression of church and state, and the first woman president has been elected. This woman is really making the most of a bad situation, where the prime minister holds the real power in Ireland. She just isn't being the figurehead they expect her to be."

"Things seriously have to change in Ireland with the EEC tariffs being dropped, and Europe opening up. You can't just forbid a woman from leaving the country, for any reason. That's ludicrous. It can be a great and wonderful country, but it simply has to change."

Stephen Fearing applies the same faith to his songs as to his politics. His constant hope for a better understanding and an elimination of barriers makes even the most brooding songs shine with promise:

I saw the words that came from rotten lungs
Eagles twitch in toxic sand
A loaf of bread, a withered tongue
A pocket filled with empty hands

Everyday may your joy protect you
Everyday sweet love respect you
Heart and mind in rhythm
Everyday, everyday
Everyday a destination
Everyday friends and relations
A life we only dream of
Everyday, everyday
(from "Blue Line").

Too much of a good thing

BY SHANNON GOWANS

I DON'T KNOW much about music but I know what I like. And I like about half of the alternative compilation *More Bands than Punters*.

MUSIC
More Bands than Punters
PolyGram CD

However, seeing as the two CD set is about two and a half hours long, there is still a lot of music I like on it.

More Bands than Punters features 28 bands ranging from the Pixies, to Billy Bragg, to Queen Latifah, and almost every other type of alternative music style ever produced.

The compilation is the seventh in a series put out by PolyGram, highlighting all types of alternative music.

There is definitely something for anyone into the alternative scene, however in some ways there is too much diversity on this disc. In trying

to get a little bit of everything there is no real focus. There are just too many different styles for most people to like everything on it.

Most of the tracks I don't like, not because they are poorly done, it's just that I don't like that style of music. Friends of mine who like different styles raved about tracks I didn't like, and hated ones I like. It's just a matter of preference.

However, I was looking forward to the two tracks by Kate Bush. I was sadly disappointed in them. They are covers of Elton John's *Candle in the Wind*, and *Rocket Man*. I have never liked Elton John's music, and Kate Bush covering his music is simply torture.

But other bands that I had never heard of before, I discovered I really liked.

Listening to *Eye Doctor's Office* is like eavesdropping on a hilarious phone conversation between a very confused patient and various people

in an optician's office. If you want to hear more from this group they can be found "at a price from Vinnie Scleroso Enterprises, 3rd floor, behind the water pipes, beside the dumpster 10055" according to the jacket.

*There is
no real
focus*

Some of the changes between bands are a little painful as you completely switch music styles, for example Kate Bush follows directly after the Pixies.

There is a lot of good music on this disc, and if you are lucky enough to have a programmable CD player and can edit out the tracks you don't like, then *More Bands than Punters* is a great compilation.

