



response to the Beatles, REM represented America's response to the latest British invasion. In the summer of '83 nothing soothed burnt-out brain cells so well as *Murmur* (****), a brilliant application of understated vocals, dreamy psychedelia, rich bass lines, and high-flying guitar. *Reckoning* (****), the well-aimed follow-up, leaned towards the directness of the 1982 EP, *Chronic Town*, and proved only mildly disappointing, though it was hardly a departure. The group acknowledged its influences by recording the Velvet Underground's "Pale Blue Eyes" as the flip-side of the 12" single, "South Central Rain (I'm Sorry)".

But everyone else was listening to the Velvet Underground as well. Or so it seemed, as all the young dudes in bands began to foam at the mouth talking about what Lou Reed was doing back in 1969. Thousands who missed all this the first time around flocked to the stores as the entire catalogue

of old Velvet Underground albums was released. Meanwhile, the choppy, cutting guitar sound of Lou Reed's "Vicious" (1972) was showing up all over the place on punk recordings by a multitude of West Coast punk squads. After years of being completely ignored, Lou Reed must have been in shock to find himself suddenly in style. "The President called to give me the news/I've been awarded the Nobel Prize in rhythm and blues/And Stevie Wonder wants to record one of my songs," sang Lou Reed, sounding a little carried away with himself. *New Sensations* "rooted in the fifties but (with) its heart in 1984", was a commendable exercise in the power of positive thinking.

Sixties albums like *Mr. Tambourine Man* and *Flowers* sounded relevant once again as twelve string guitars and acoustic guitars made a comeback. But some of the new kids on the block were quite out of touch with

what the sixties were all about. In a moment of brilliant insight, *The Globe and Mail's* Liam Lacey declared The Bangles "guilty of the same sin as the Go-Gos... rendering the sincerity of the sixties' music into an awkward and insincere formula". The same might have been said of the compilation group, Rainy Day, whose self titled album (****) rolled shiny new asphalt over the darkened highways of the past. Rainy days were never like this...

More daring were Violent Femmes, who followed the adolescent lusts and startling acoustic sounds of *Violent Femmes* (****) with *Hallowed Ground*, a move into relative pretentiousness. But at least they were moving forward...

All this was highly amusing to certain followers of the alternative scene who noted that local groups had begun preaching new music just as old music was coming back in style. Revivalist bands Route 66, the Draggnetts, and The Mods had drawn large crowds in 1983 while the "forward looking" groups of 1984 were receiving almost no support from the public (shame on you, Edmonton). At Blitzkrieg Bash '83, Voice stunned more than a few people with a well-staged display of modern synthpop; but by the summer of '84 it was clear that electropop's ivory tower had fallen apart. Such highly promising groups as England's Yaz and Montreal's Rational Youth had broken up; Phil Oakey was keeping his chin up with lots of brave talk but in truth he was still "looking for a new direction in an old familiar way". The Human League's *Hysteria* (**) wasn't worth the wait, its best tracks ("I love you too much", "The Lebanon") having been available well before the album was released.

Depeche Mode opted to sit out the storm with *People Are People* (**), a premature compilation. The group was improving in terms of both its stage show and its songwriting, though "People are People" was yet another indication of the group's preference for reason over emotion.

New Order and Blancmange lost some measure of personality at the hands of New York studio personnel. New Order's "Murder" and "Thieves Like Us" were barely satisfactory in themselves but continued the

group's efforts to detach itself from fixated followers of Joy Division. And while Blancmange made the most of the 12" single format, their second album, *Mange Tout* (****) proved too clever by half.

Men Without Heads, having stumbled into success with "The Safety Dance", tried to sell electropop as the *Folk Of The 80's* (****). Nice try but no cigar. The group make fools of themselves in concert, where Ivan's mixture of the silly and the pretentious rubbed critics the wrong way.

Ska as a mass movement had died a natural death as far back as 1980, though the Villains had outlived the UK ska craze by jumping ship to Canada. *Go Crazy* (****), their well packaged, well recorded debut album, moved the group in the direction of Madness, which was just as well since the Villains were growing a bit slick for ska. Far closer to ska's original intentions was Special AKA's "Free Nelson Mandella", a wonderful 12" single produced by Elvis Costello.

Androgyny, all the rage among psychologists and sociologists five years ago, had entered the pop world for real. The hits kept coming from Culture Club's *Colour by Numbers* (****) and Eurythmics *Touch* (****) as Boy George and Annie Lennox made masculine sensitivity and feminine ambition fashionable. The Victorian era had not ended, however, as breast-beating males and helpless females remained commercially viable as cultural stereotypes. British heavy-metal heavyweights Judas Priest packed the Coliseum, demonstrating the awesome power of a purely emotional appeal. Thousands waved their fists in unison with Priest's metal-studded man in black. Shades of Nuremberg all over again. Following the MTV hit, "Love Bites", Priest vocalist Rob Halford made the front cover of *Musician* (!?!). Caption: "I was a 99 pound weakling till I discovered Heavy Metal"

Edmonton had become known as one of the heavy-metal capitals of the continent as a long series of antiquated dinosaur acts passed through town. April Wine's *Animal Grace* (**) was clear evidence of artistic stagnation, the expected fate one must suppose for a band that sold out to American interests some five years ago. In concert, the group could still cut it, however, if only on the

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