

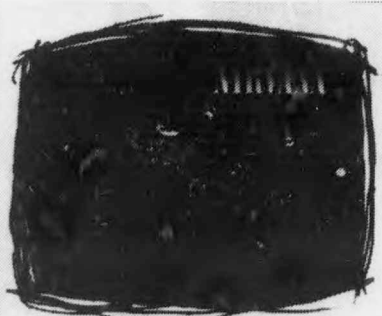
Entertainment

Genrecide: A Year in Review

It's that time of year when just about everyone sits down and looks back at the year which has just passed with a tear in their eye, a lump in their throat, and a bulge in their wallet. Yup, those reviews of the year are a jolly good way to sell newspapers and magazines, not to mention a wonderful way of filling in space. But seeing that we don't even charge for this spectacular piece of journalism (ahem), it is with the latter reason in mind that I bring to you my very own thoughts on 1994.

And how was 1994 musically? Well, there were plenty of moments which could reinstate your faith that people were making good records although it would be extremely difficult to guess this when you looked at the charts. Somehow people like the Beastie Boys, Green Day and Blur managed to cut their way through all the blandness to make it to the top end of the charts, but that is small consolation when the rest of the time we had to put up with Ace Of Base (or even Wet Wet Wet if you were unlucky enough to have found yourself in Scotland for the entire summer...). Yet there is no sense dwelling on that as commercial success rarely turns out to be a true reflection of talent. Instead I shall try to direct you towards some of the better music that came out in the last twelve months, some of which will be much more obvious than others.

The most joyous aspect of 1994 was the rebirth of British music; it had been stagnating quite nicely for the last while, but this was the year when everything fell into place. New bands were popping up all over the place and some minor gems appeared thanks to the likes of Echobelly, Elastica, and S*M*A*S*H (with no thanks to Shampoo at all). Pulp became overnight successes with their major label debut, that is if you can call 14 years overnight. A couple of old 'favourites' returned to make better albums than they had ever threatened to record in the past, namely Blur and Suede. And after five years away (and an infinite number of previous release dates), the Stone Roses reappeared with their *Second Coming* - I don't know if that's the second coming of the Stone Roses or Led Zeppelin, but either way I can't help but wonder why they bothered. Thank goodness for Oasis and Tindersticks - they released two of my favourite albums of the year, but more about them later.



**UNPLUGGED
IN NEW YORK**

Kurt Cobain. That was the big story of the year; impossible to avoid, and something that still seems to stir up controversy and emotion when mentioned. Nevertheless, the final word on the subject came via *Unplugged In New York* which was the perfect epitaph for both Kurt and Nirvana. After listening to that

album several times it became very obvious that he just wanted to be a blues singer like Leadbelly. A huge talent was lost. Courtney Love was caught up in the middle of this suicide business just as Hole's second album appeared, the spookily titled *Live Through This*. It ended up getting an awful lot of attention because of the events that preceded it, and also those that followed - Hole's bassist Kristin Pfaff was found dead of a heroin OD, and Courtney's onstage behaviour became more and more bizarre. Then there were the rumours connecting her romantically to Michael Stipe, Evan Dando, Trent Reznor, Billy Corgan, not to mention the 'love-child' rumour, more admissions of drug use, her adventures on the Internet and the Mary Lou Lord feud. It would seem that Ms. Love knows how to use the publicity machine to her absolute advantage, especially when making up for a simply average album.

But enough of this gossip - let's move on to the more important stuff, namely the music. First of all we have:

ALBUMS OF THE YEAR



I have never been very good at picking out my favourite record for a particular reason, as it depends on what I have been listening to that particular day. Five favourites would be a better idea, but even that seems a bit of a tall order so I've decided just to list some of the things that I think everyone should own.

There are the more obvious choices that seem to turn up in most 'best of the year' lists - Blur's *Parklife* (an incredibly ambitious journey through the past 30 years of British pop music that somehow works), Oasis' *Definitely Maybe* (believe the hype, this is one of the best albums you will here all year - a classic), Pulp's *His 'n' Hers* (sleazy, seedy little melodramas), Jeff Buckley's *Grace* (even more talented than his father it would appear), Stereolab's *Mars Audiac Quintet* (perfect, hypnotic pop driven by Moogs with more serious lyrics than you would expect), Nirvana's *Unplugged* (see diatribe above...), Neil Young's *Sleep With Angels* (although a bit in the bleak side), R.E.M.'s *Monster* (yet another wonderful record from them - its almost getting boring), the Beastie Boys' *Ill Communication* (more of the same, but even more so), Velvet Crush's *Teenage Symphonies To God* (Big Star, the Byrds and Teenage Fanclub thrown in a blender and served with panache), Kristin Hersh's *Hips And Makers* (acoustic angst-ridden bedsit songs with a happy side too), the Orchids' *Striving For The Lazy Perfection* (a nice slab of Scottish guitar pop), Elvis Costello's *Brutal Youth* (a return to

form by the angriest angry young man), Nine Inch Nails' *The Downward Spiral* (industrial music matures and still scares the shit out of everyone) and Johnny Cash's *American Recordings* (the Man In Black comes back even



blackier than ever).

But those are the ones that everyone should have, ones which were relatively easy to stumble across. What about those hidden gems that pass most people by? Here's five of them to point you in the right direction - you could do a lot worse than add these to your collection.

Bark Psychosis' *Hex* sounds like the album that Talk Talk were threatening to make before they disappeared. Vast sprawling soundscapes that seem to take over your entire world for fifty minutes.

And then there is *Bee Thousand*, the latest from the very prolific kings of low-fi Guided By Voices - every song sounds familiar, but yet you are never quite sure which songs they are ripping off. A rare talent.

Its a sad thing that most people need an introduction to Nick Drake, but *Way To Blue* does just that. Nick Drake is one of the most talented songwriters ever, and this album will make you want to own everything he ever released (sadly only four albums).

Scotland's Paul Quinn along with his Independent Group sneaked out another treasure at the end of last year with *Will I Ever Be Inside Of You*. This man could sing the telephone directory and it would be the most compelling thing you will ever hear. Torch songs for



the nineties.

My final pick turns out to be a bit of a cheat. The self-titled album by the Tindersticks was released in 1993 in the UK, but didn't turn up on this side of the Atlantic until this year. So it gets my vote for that reason. Downbeat doesn't begin to describe it. Claustrophobic doesn't do it justice. Simply one of the most incredible debut albums ever. Until Portishead came along, but more about that next week.

SINGLES OF THE YEAR

Some bands are very hard to take over

the duration of an album. Lack of material, lack of talent - whatever reason it is, the single can more than make up for that. There is nothing quite like a few minutes of pure pop delight, so here are my candidates for this accolade.

If sheer catchiness is what you are looking for then one of your best bets is *Girls And Boys* by Blur - wonderfully atypical of what else is on the album, its the sort of thing that stays in your head for days after every listen. In a similar vein is *Basket Case* by Green Day. I mean, I liked the Buzzcocks the first time around, so how could I resist this?

More Stateside joy came thanks to Veruca Salt's *Seether*; the best damned Breeders impersonation I've heard in a long time. This by itself makes the album a worthwhile investment. If you had the stamina to dig around then two more US bands proved their worth on some very independent labels. If you can find *anything* by either East River Pipe or Aberdeen then I recommend that you pick it up as they are both bands to watch in the coming year. If you need help then get in touch with England's Sarah Records as they are li-



censing releases by both.

The British invasion brought us the likes of Oasis with their best effort being *Live Forever*. But even more impressive on the single front were Echobelly's *I Can't Imagine The World Without Me* (egomania has never sounded more delicious) and Elastica's *Stutter* which finally got a wider audience after last year's ludicrously limited release. And for all those people who just couldn't wait any longer for the return of My Bloody Valentine, Secret Shine came up with *Liquid Indigo* which will do very nicely in the interim. But the greatest two-and-a-bit minutes to emerge from the UK last year came from S*M*A*S*H with *(I Want To) Kill Somebody* - an venomous anthem which culminates with a list of members of the Conservative party that they want dead. And I didn't hear any arguments from anyone.

REISSUES OF THE YEAR

It looked as if it was going to be a no contest here with the Rykodisc Elvis Costello reissues running away from their nearest competition. They have wonderful packaging, sleeve notes by the man himself and tons of extra tracks that make them simply essential. And best of all, they still sound as inspired as they ever did.

As I said, it looked like we had a winner but then something quite unexpected happened. A new album from the Beatles. This was an event of almost mythical proportions - technically not a reissue as much of the material was new (unless you had been picking up some

of those 'illegal' bootlegs that I've heard are available...) but it goes in this category as it deserves to win something. I simply don't have enough space to gush fully about this right now, so for full details see next week's column.



CANADIANS OF THE YEAR

This was another year where Canadian bands and artists proved that Canada can produce more than maple syrup. The Crash Test Dummies cracked both the US and European charts while Jale made their mark on the British music press with 'Single Of The Week' accolades piling up at their door. Jale also released their debut album, *Dreamcake*, which showed once and for all that they have learned how to play their instruments. Sloan returned with *Twice Removed*, an album which turned back time to the days of jangly guitars and shiny harmonies which got my whole-hearted approval. More 'thumbs up' to Deterium for *Semantic Spaces*; not quite as ambient as we have come to expect from them, but the presence of Rose Chronicles' Kirsty Thirsk helps to elevate its angelic, otherworldly quality quite nicely.

On the live front, there was a whole bunch of Canadian talent on show at the second Halifax Pop Explosion in September. Splendid performances were put on by Change Of Heart, the always excellent Hardship Post, Local Rabbits, Zumpano, Thrush Hermit and Bruce McCulloch. Equally splendid shows were put on here in town by the Rheostatics, Sarah McLachlan, Jimmy George, and Big Sugar. A great big tip o' the hat to all of them.

DEATHS OF THE YEAR

Let's finish on a sombre note - Kurt was not the only talent to disappear last year. Indeed, 1994 seemed to be a bumper year for folk to shuffle off this mortal coil. Final respects go to Cab Calloway, flamboyant jazz singer best known for *Minnie The Moocher*; Derek Jarman, punk film director who worked with the Pet Shop Boys amongst others; Harry Nilsson, who hopefully didn't have to hear Mariah Carey's version of his big hit *Without You*; Fred Smith, the founding member of the original punks MC5; Henry Mancini, composer of such gems as the *Pink Panther Theme* and *Baby Elephant Walk*; S.E. Rogie, the best palm wine guitarist who was on the brink of breaking through at long last; and Michael Clarke, the original drummer from the Byrds.

And with all these people gone, there must be a hell of a concert going on somewhere right about now.

By Michael Edwards