

Wild Gift is almost the best record this year

by Michael Brennan

X's **Wild Gift** has been called the best punk rock album to come out of the U.S. and X the best rock band in America today.

The punk scene in Los Angeles has been thriving over the past year and as violent and as ugly as they are supposed to be, X were said to be honest and for real. On finally getting to buy their album and then only as an import, I must say it was well worth it. But, I can't agree wholly with what has been said. The Ramones are still here (and hopefully forever) and they do

have six albums out. Still, **Wild Gift** is a harsh, uncompromising album - just what is needed today. At times their stance is too much of a pose and they don't have the honest, gut urgency or sense of release that the early Clash or Sex Pistols had. But X is possibly the best new group to emerge this year and **Wild Gift** is one of the best of this year's albums.

Their music is straightforward, hard rock and roll; a mixture of early Patti Smith, Ramones, the Clash and rockabilly. Billy Zoom's guitar work is simple and tight. His controlled

distorted sound propels the energy of the group with his solos short and to the point. He really knows his Chuck Berry riffs, always giving them that strong sting. The rhythm section is very tight and together. D.J. Bonebrake's drumming is snappy and clean, mixing well with John Doe's full, resonant bass lines.

Their style isn't very original, drawing on basic hard rock riffs but the songs are all distinct and lively and, because of X's way of giving this sound such a refreshing and revitalized treatment, unique. The music is sharp and moving though not as rough and loud as I had expected it to be. I'm certain that when performing live they really wear it at you.

It is the singing that makes X's sound quite distinct. Exene takes most of the lead vocal work with John Doe occasionally trading verses with her, singing a few numbers himself. Exene's voice is high and acute, even fragile at times. Doe's is similarly high but rougher and he freely weaves his voice with the words. These two write the material and head the band. It is their decadent, desperate world that we get a piece of and they express their obsession and disgust of this world with a personal passion. They've lived it. Their songs are not pretentious or distant observations of the horror, evil, coldness etc. etc., of our modern world that we get so much of today from new wave bands talking over their heads.



False and made-up concerns is about all such bands can muster. Fortunately with X it's different: they've wallowed in the empty, urban hell of Los Angeles.

"In This House That I Call Home" is a neurotic nightmare about the emptiness and coldness of some person's place. "Universal Corner" and "Adult Books" express a loneliness and one-sidedness in a love relationship. Either there is a tormenting passion that is unfulfilled or a pure, cold, sexual desire that becomes violent. There is a similar coldness in "The Once Over Twice" but with more of a sad, suicidal desperation to it. After a while, however, too much of this hell becomes tiring and it just seems X is trying to be smart about their understanding of their desperation. Lines like, "We're desperate/Get used to it" and "When our love passed out on the couch" are just witty, affected poses with no sense of urgency. They may be expressing their

personal life but it's easy to say "look at us and see how our life is. It reflects all of modern life, all of its absurdity, etc." There is little individual jubilation or release in such an attitude, and nothing to make the individual feel good. The Clash sang about their decrepid lives but by singing about it they defeated the emptiness of it, and they go above it. Not all of X's songs are dead-ends and Year-1 is an exception. Behind a fast, Ramones-like beat, Exene shouts, "No desperate living class/ No Roman Catholic Mass/ No magazines, no T.V." It is ironic but it is also full of fired rebellious energy.

Whatever, X's **Wild Gift** is a refreshing treat. It does fall into an easy pose of decadence but there is a conviction to it and the few moments of happy energy are great. At least they are personal, trying somehow to deal with their life. No other bands are singing about meeting some man on a bus "Screaming...Elvis Presley sucked on doggie dicks."



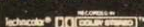
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