

records

Alternative bands make changes in music scene

THE RECOMMENDED RECORDS SAMPLER (Recommended—British Import)

An important development along the peripheries of the music industry in the past five or six years has been the growth of an "independent" or "alternative" music scene. This development has involved hundreds of small record companies, whose dedication to meaningful integrity and social relevance contrasts starkly with the shallow, profit-oriented mass-acceptability values of the dominant music industry.

(The industry's dominance, incidentally, has hardly been affected—in 1981, 98 percent of all record sales were controlled by eight multi-nationals, including the WEA, RCA, EMI, and CBS conglomerates. We know the result: REO Speedwagon, Foreigner, Van Halen and a hundred clones thereof, although, in all fairness, a bit of flexibility seems to have set in since the "new wave.")

One of the stronger and more influential of the independents has been Britain's Recommended Records. Formed in 1978 by Chris Cutler (of the progressive—for lack of a better term—rock ensemble Henry Cow) and Nick Hobbs, Recommended Records has steadily pursued a dedicated course of making available obscure but *important* music, re-releasing hitherto unavailable albums by the early-seventies German band Faust, by Sun Ra, and by others. Similarly, they have promoted records by the European alternative association of "Rock in Opposition" groups (in opposition to the cultural monopoly of values and thinking represented by the corporate entertainment industry).

This double album (120 minutes of music—closer to a triple-album) reflects their dedication to quality. The production is generally excellent, and the packaging unique while still managing to be economical.

Musically, the album is a showcase of a diverse spectrum of styles, by artists and groups from 11

European and North American countries (including Mexico). Many of the bands fall into a "hybrid" category, somewhere between rock, jazz, classical, folk, punk, electronic and experimental, although some are more categorizable.

Art Zoyd and Univers Zero, from France and Belgium respectively, take a somewhat darker and heavier neoclassical approach. With typically unconventional instrumentation (trumpet, two violins, sax, piano, bass, guitar, and *no* drums), Art Zoyd generate a dramatic rhythmic intensity that seems to announce the final onslaught of apocalypse.

In a more humorous vein, San Francisco's renowned Residents provide some of their comically bizarre, electro-wangy buffoonery, in their story of "Walter Westinghouse." Also from the States are the Muffins, a light-hearted and very refreshing progressive jazz-rock bunch from Maryland, and R. Stevie Moore, a New Jersey one-man band, whose irresistibly quirky, idiosyncratic quasi-pop stylings have gained him some notoriety.

The rest of the compilation continues in this unconventional fashion. Outstanding contributions include the brilliantly anarchic frenzy of Faust's "The Voice of the Pumpkin," and the two tracks by Britain's left-wing progressives, Henry Cow. Both of these groups, though now defunct, are considered by some to be among the most important and influential trail-blazers on the fringes of rock (and music in general) in the past 15 years.

Other groups whose names may be familiar include the Art Bears (a Henry Cow spin-off), This Heat, and Robert Wyatt, whose amusing synthesizer/drum/vocal rendition of the "Socialist Internationale" closes the album.

Even a Canadian group appears on this compilation—Quebec's Conventum, offering an exquisite mostly acoustic instrumental, charged with feeling and expressiveness. This is a trait common to most of the artists featured here: the music is rich and expressive, sometimes urgent and forthrightly aggressive, at other times classically reserved, skillfully contorted and idiosyncratic, or humorously satirical.

All in all, a highly Recommended Record that proves Chris Cutler's point that "Much of the most interesting music now isn't in the hands of the industry at all but is independent." And though these artists and independent record companies have hardly displaced the overgrown and faceless dinosaurs

that rule the music industry, some—like Recommended Records—have at least managed to survive on their own perseverance and integrity, while providing an interesting and refreshing alternative. And isn't that, after all, what a democratic and pluralistic society should be about?

(The *Recommended Records Sampler* is available at Records—on—Wheels at Yonge and Isabella and at The Record Peddler, 115 Queen St. E.)

—ADRIAN IWACHIW

Keen Kean

SHERRY KEAN
Mixed Emotions
(Capitol)

Vocalist Sherry Kean (formerly Sherry Huffman) and guitarist David Baxter are all that remain of The Sharks, a popular Toronto band. At one time The Sharks were hailed as the local group most likely to break out of the Toronto music scene into more widespread popularity, ahead of such bands as Blue Peter and Spoons. In the end, however, Kean and Baxter, the group's songwriting duo, shed the Sharks and moved to New York.

Mixed Emotions, a five-song EP, is the duo's debut on vinyl (excluding Kean's back-up work with Blue Peter on "Chinese Graffiti"). The record's strong pop sensibility, coupled with Kean's unique voice, promises to abruptly end their stint in obscurity.

Kean has a voice that demands attention, in the same way as Chrissie Hynde's or Carly Simon's do. It is sharp and powerful, and what it lacks in range it makes up for in dimension.

"Universe of Two" is reminiscent of Buddy Holly, and a type of rock-and-roll which retains its country origins—Kean's voice is at home in this context.

"I Want You Back" is a powerful dance tune, and the best candidate for airplay, though the title track and "Your So Minor" would also make good singles.

On *Mixed Emotions*, Kean has chosen to forget the ballads and stick with short, catchy pop songs. The lyrics are witty and unpretentious, dealing with familiar themes of love and rejection rather than political or social statements.

In short, Kean has chosen a proven formula for success without compromising quality. All that remains is for people to listen.

—KEVIN CONNOLLY

Weird name

Alan Alda's real name is Alphonso D'Abruzzo

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION DAY

Aboriginal Rights, Acid Rain, Environmental Health, Great Lakes Pollution, Recycling, Toxic Waste Management, Wildlife Conservation are just some of the issues being tackled by a diversity of citizen/environmental groups across Ontario. If you want to find out more about environmental action at the grass-roots level in this province, please join the Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University, 5th floor Scott Library on **Wednesday 12 October from 1-7 p.m.** Representatives from environmental groups have been invited to set up information tables and be on hand to "talk shop" between 1 and 4 p.m. They'll have pamphlets, books, posters, buttons and memberships forms. A panel discussion ("Environmental Ethics") has been planned between 4 and 5 p.m., followed by a beer, wine and cheese cash bar.

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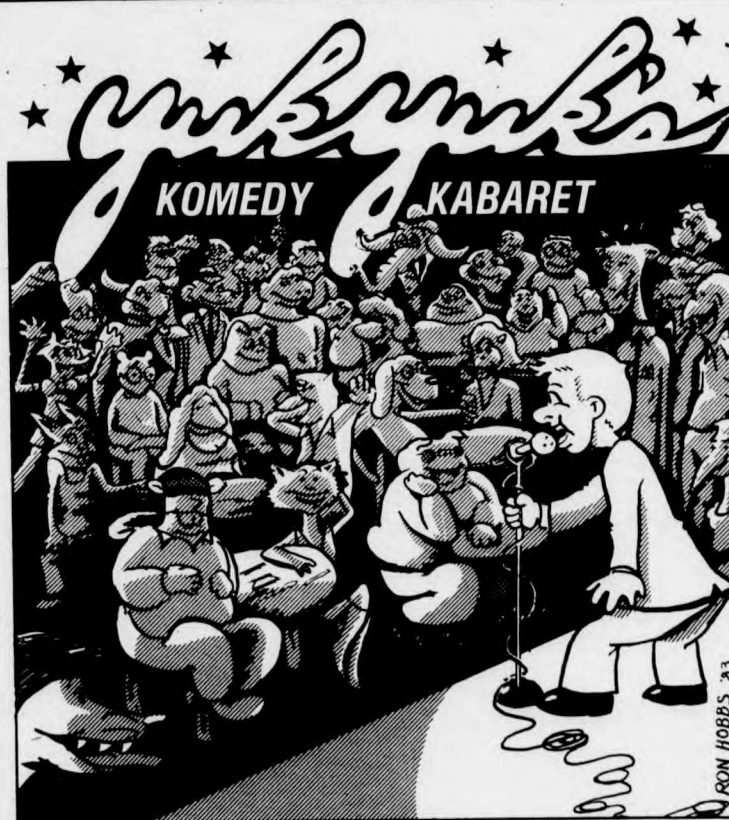


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