



Liquid Swords
The Genius/GZA
Geffen/MCA

Now here's a little something Wu-Tang fans are gonna like. After the RZA, Method Man, and Old Dirty Bastard, Genius/GZA — the mastermind behind the Wu-Tang Clan — has finally gone solo, dropping his album *Liquid Swords*. This is a slice of reality, seen through the eyes of Genius.

On the whole, I guess this album was pretty good. Basically, it is an extension of the philosophy set forth on the Wu-Tang project. With production help from his cousin, Prince Rakeem/RZA, GZA GZA delivers sharp lyrics in a creepy, haunting melodic narrative which makes for a good album. It's not the best of the Clan's albums, though, when you compare it to the Wu-Tang's or Method Man's. Actually, the first three songs on *Liquid Swords*... well...they suck. But the album picks up afterwards.

Liquid Swords also features other Wu-Tang frontmen, such as Ghost Face Killer and Method Man. Method Man appears on "Shadowboxin," in my opinion the best song on the album. A second song that caught my attention was the first single released off this record, "Labels," where Genius talks of the corruption in the record industry.

On a scale of one to ten I'd give this CD a seven. *Liquid Swords*, as Genius puts it, is about, "being sharp with the tongue. The tongue is the sword, wisdom is the water, words are like water."

MOHANAD MORAH

The X Factor
Iron Maiden
EMI

I believe at some time in my 'career' as a metal/hard rock fan, I ran across the name of Iron Maiden as one of the premiere heavy metal groups existing. Their name was ranked with bands such as Judas Priest, Black Sabbath, and other great groups of the '71-'85 era.

Well, let me say this now: I have witnessed the latest 'release' by this band, and if Iron Maiden were ever once truly great, they should have quit while they were ahead.

The problems with this album are almost too numerous to mention. For one thing, the musical style being used is far too overdone. The "soft intro/hard chorus & verse" method accounts for well over half the tracks on the album and tends to get a WEE bit tiresome after awhile. Not that a different style would have saved the album, as it is rare for this group to get any sort of cool melody going. There is a commendable bass intro for "Fortunes of War" (but it contains a gross editing error two thirds of the way

REVIEWS & SPEWS

JOANNE MERRIAM

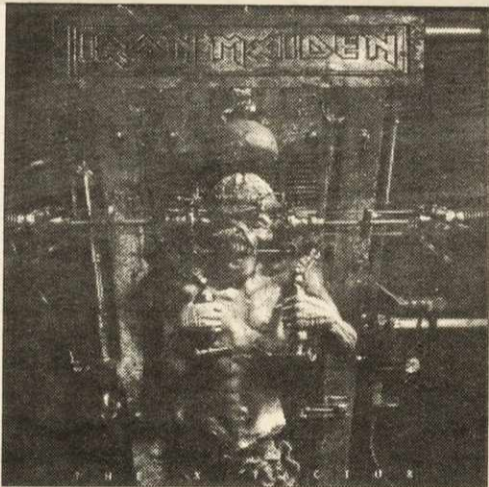
Pacer
The Amps
4AD/Elektra/Polygram

through) and Maiden utilizes a cool effect on "Lord of the Flies," but that seems to be the limit of the album's ability. It is the worst I have ever heard in my experience, and if you buy this album it should only be because you are contemplating making your own record and wish to witness history's greatest mistakes.

On top of all this, perhaps the most glaring mistake Maiden made was having Blaze Bayley on the album at all. A few times I was listening to *The X Factor* and thinking, "This might pass as reasonable; maybe they're not all that bad." And then Blaze would begin to SING. And the horrible thing is, I don't think he realizes just how much he doesn't cut it for people like me. His voice is off-key and without any of the emotion of the music. It doesn't have the anger of James Hetfield or the twisted harmony of Ozzy. It's just plain nerve-wracking, and NOT in a good way. If Maiden wishes to reform itself, the singer should be the first to go.

Summing up *The X Factor*, we have an overused writing method, very uninteresting musical pieces, the worst editor on the planet, and a singer that is contending for the vocal equivalent. I can't help but feel sorry for Maiden's bassist Steve Harris, who, if the credits are anything to go by, was the key player on the album. Steve, if I may, next time try putting together a project that at least tries to work.

BRANDON BUTLER



Cherry Alive
Eve's Plum
Sony/550 Music

Eve's Plum's *Cherry Alive* is upbeat, consumable, corporate, alternative rock. The cover features brightly coloured jellybeans in their plastic container, while the inside photos include the band members pushing neon yellow shopping carts and the lead vocalist, Colleen Fitzgerald, sneering at a scoop of red candies. This spoofing of pop culture continues in the lyrics of songs like "Dog In My Heart" and "Fairy Princess."

Particularly good tracks on this album are the dreamy "Only Anger," the irreverent "Jesus Loves You (Not As Much As I Do)," and the slow rock "Sticky and Greasy" (no, not erotica — she sings about getting a lollipop stuck in her hair). The funniest song is "Lipstuck," which is about a fashion slave who can't open her mouth because her lipstick glued her lips together.

Cherry Alive is guitar-heavy and brainwave-light; it's a lot of fun and contains some technically superb moments. Give it a listen, and add a little sugar to your day.

Kim Deal of the Breeders (ex?) and ex-ex of the Pixies, has started on a new venture, performing with her new band as Tammy & the Amps. They've released an album, *Pacer*, so now it's time for the smoke and mirrors rock and roll bullshit.

The CD case doesn't list who the performers are, mentioning instead that all songs are penned by Kim Deal. However, the press release I got, as well as an ad I've subsequently seen in a "rock journalism" rag, doesn't include Kim in the band although it's so obviously Kim singing and playing. There is a Tammy Ampersand listed though, an ampersand being the & sign between Tammy & The Amps. Clever, huh? The whole thing reminds me of extra tracks you have to search for, or Choose your own Adventure mysteries that all end up at the same place — in this case it's media hype and record sales. I feel so cheap.

So is the music worth all this hullabaloo? Well, the whole album is vaguely reminiscent of every Breeder's tune without totally invoking any of them. In fact, I replayed *Last Splash* to try and pick a good example of this and realized that The Amps' *Pacer* is the B side to The Breeders' *Last Splash*. If you really love Kim Deal or The Breeders, you'll probably at least enjoy *The Amps*; it's nothing new though.

I loved The Pixies, thought The Breeders were pretty good, and probably won't end up listening to The Amps much. It strikes me that the more derivative Kim becomes, the closer she gets to mediocrity.

SHELLEY ROBINSON

Fun-Tastic
Fun Factory
Attic Records

Why oh why are these people still around? Why has someone given them the opportunity to inflict their brand of techno-pop on others (again)?

Not surprisingly, the follow-up to *Non-Stop!* — *The Album* is just as bad. Fun Factory are non-starters in their attempts at 2 Unlimited meets Ace of Base. What worked for 2 Unlimited is sadly lacking in the Fun Factory camp but the average Dome/JJs/Palace DJ won't be able to tell the difference.

Fun-Tastic starts off with "Dreaming." Rod D's ambient intro sounds not terribly unlike Prince Be from PM Dawn. It then moves swiftly (but not swiftly enough) to "Celebration," a song that bears no resemblance and can, in no way, be connected to the Kool & The Gang classic.

Believe it or not, these pukifying poppets manage to sink to even lower levels for the inevitable cover version — Fun Factory's version of "Doh Wah Diddy" can at best be described as painful. The combined vocal talents of Rod D, Smooth T, and Steve are vomit-inducing, even for the jock-techno that it is. If Millwall FC supporters (ask anyone English to explain) chanted this at a match

(highly unlikely), it would sound better.

Believe it or not, the album gets progressively worse. The ballad "I Love You" is about as romantic and soothing as a dentist's drill. The reggae-ish "I Wanna B With U" is just plain crap. Ditto "Don't Fight". Ditto "Oh Yeah Yeah (I Like It)."

When Fun Factory start ripping off other people's basslines (Robin S's "Show Me Love" and Real to Reel's "Can You Feel It?"), their songs become infinitely more bearable...like "Together Forever." However, their faux-rappers soon take care of that.

Few words spring to mind whilst listening to Fun-Tastic, the main one being 'avoid.'

If Fun Factory disbanded tomorrow, no-one would notice, except maybe all three of their German fan club members. If any of you actually possess a Fun Factory album or are considering buying this one, may I suggest that you immediately go to the top of Fenwick and jump off.

EUGENIA BAYADA

Plastic Planet
G/I/Z/R
TVT/Cargo

Who is Geezer Butler, you may ask? Why, he is only one of the founding fathers of heavy metal. The original bassist from Black Sabbath joins forces with some guys from Fear Factory and Ozzy Osbourne's group to release this extremely heavy solo project.

Geezer has said that in Sabbath they did songs that were dark but had a glimmer of hope in them. He has since lost that glimmer and G/I/Z/R reflects this totally dark vision. He wrote all the lyrics himself and co-wrote the music with the guitarist from Fear Factory.

The song titles contain a lot of word-play and are a little corny. Examples: "Sci-Clone," "Seance Fiction," and "Drive Boy, Shooting." Don't let that throw you. The lyrics are very good and read like a commentary on the state of the world, particularly on the younger generation. They can also be seen as a warning.

The title of the CD, *Plastic Planet*, contains the theme of most of the songs. The world is so seduced with technology that we are choosing it over nature, turning Earth into a planet of plastic. It is also about the people who get caught up in technology and get lost.

The music is very heavy in a crunchy sort of way. There is not a lot of variety and it is hard to distinguish one song from another on just a few listens, but it consistently sounds good. There are no stand alone great songs, but no really bad songs either. The vocals go between aggressive shouting and eerie crooning.

It is surprising to hear someone from the old school like Geezer doing something so modern, but he has pulled it off. If you like heavy metal, go buy this.

NEIL FRASER

Mr. Smith
LL Cool J
Def Jam Records

An appropriate title. I picked it up thinking LL — known for intense hip hop experiences like *Mama*

Said Knock You Out and Ain't No Stoppin' This — would produce a new and innovative album. The cover looks excellent — the graphic design is superb — but the judging-a-book-by-its-cover law also applies to CD's. The musical content isn't as impressive as the packaging.

LL speaks directly to North American youth in the credits, encouraging them to stay away from drugs, gangs, sex in general, and tells them he loves them. It sounded pretty refreshing coming from an icon of a musical genre which is on the firing line for its treatment of women and glorification of gang culture and violence. The message doesn't show up in his music. This CD, while stylistically different from Snoop Doggy Dogg and Coolio, contains all the core elements of the usual rap album. If LL wasn't hyping his ability to simultaneously please his woman and yours, he told you looking at him wrong gets you to the cemetery, courtesy of his personal shotgun blast.

LL Cool J has the abilities to be one of rap's biggest stars and to do it being completely original and different from loser rappers like Snoop, Dr.Dre, N.W.A... (fill in gangsta rapper here). He has incredible lyrical capability — *Mama Said Knock You Out* and *14 Shots to The Dome* are evidence enough. It's too bad that LL thinks to be good is to be like everyone else — *Mr. Smith* is a sub par effort from a talented performer.

PAUL WOZNEY

Long Gone to the Yukon
Stompin' Tom
EMI

Ahh...he truly is one of Canada's great wonders. With 39 albums under his belt, *Long Gone to the Yukon* just proves that some things do get better with time.

For those of you not familiar with Stompin' Tom's style, it's a blended concoction of Hank Williams/Johnny Cash old style country, toe tapping folk, and even a little rockabilly. This CD has 17 tracks and with Tom's wit and *savoir faire*, who would want to skip over any of them?

Topics vary from cashing the lotto ticket after the divorce is finalized in "Case Closed," slumming through all night cafes after the break-up in "Cafe Blues," to the state of the country in "How do you like it now?"

"Polka Playin' Henry" is my top pick! A tribute to the late great Henry Kelneck (look it up) with lines like "to the boogie and the oompas in the oompa-pa halls" backed by trumpet, sax, slide trombone, and, of course, an accordion.

Do yourself a favour and go out and by this thing, use the excuse that it's for your parents if you have to. It's Canada packaged and wrapped in plastic. He's got the attitude, he's got the talent, and god knows he's got the longevity. Stompin' Tom Rocks!

KATRINA HAWCO

Rising
Yoko Ono/IMA
Capitol Records

Rising's first song, "Warzone," is a shock to those expecting Yoko Ono, now 62 years old, to perform more suitably to her age.

She shouts, "Guys flashing/ Kids slashing/ Out to chill/ Out to kill/ Towns burning/ Throats choking," with a musical barrage of industrial power not unlike