

GENRECIDES

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PICK O' THE SUMMER (PART II; ONE MORE TO COME...)

I felt a strange mix of happiness and sadness when I finally got a copy of the reissue of Elvis Costello's *King Of America*. I was happy because I have been waiting for this one for a long, long time as it is one of my favourite albums ever. But I am also sad as it means that the series of reissues are coming to a close with only one more album to come. And that really does make me sad as Rykodisc have done such an incredible job making Elvis's back catalogue available once more, bonus tracks and all.

1986's *King Of America* finds Costello in incredibly fine form with what might be his best album to date (along with his other 1986 album *Blood And Chocolate* which is due out in the next couple of weeks). Not only does he use his usual band the Attractions, he also found himself another backing band when he hit American shores. And that other band had a fine pedigree as the Confederates had also played with none other than Elvis Presley. The songs are among his most venomous ('Little Palaces'), his most tender ('Indoor Fireworks') and also some cover versions too ('Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood'), and it makes for an album which is unmissable in its original state. But it also now has five bonus tracks which bring the album up to over seventy minutes. And if that wasn't enough, there is a second disc with six more tracks recorded live on Broadway in 1986 with the Confederates. I really can't gush enough about this album - there is no better place to start collecting Elvis's old albums than here, and if you are already doing that then you will know just how essential this is. It is absolutely essential, and quite simply one of the best albums of the summer despite being a reissue. Buy it.

No matter how hard I tried, every time I started to play *Soup*, the new album by Blind Melon, all I could see was that damned bee dancing around. You know the one - it was near-impossible to avoid their video for 'No Rain' which was their big hit before they dropped into relative obscurity for a couple of years. So I kept playing the new album until the bee-like vision dropped from my mind, and what did that leave? Umm - nothing much except a very meandering, not very exciting album. It peaks on the first song 'Galaxie' and then wanders through all manner of influences, not really doing a good job at a cohesive song. Maybe I am being a little hard on it as it isn't the most unpleasant thing I have heard in the past few weeks, but *Soup* is just so forgettable. No dancing bee. The catchiness and quirkiness that made 'No Rain' so memorable is nowhere to be found, and this album really suffers as a consequence. By trying so damned hard to be weird and enigmatic, they forgot to write decent songs.

Oasis's favourite band are, apparently, the Verve. Now, I am sure that most of you haven't heard of the

Verve, but don't feel too bad as neither have most people in the UK



from where they hail. Despite having a relatively faithful following, the band haven't really had much in the way of commercial success. Nevertheless, the release of their third album, *A Northern Soul*, did bring with it a certain amount of media fuss as it was heralded as being the one that would catapult them into the major leagues.

But it doesn't seem to have done that. And that is a pity as it is a rather good record. The thing that really hits

you about the songs is the big sound - lots of FX pedals that let the guitars sweep across the soundscapes they produce. A very big sound. It can be a little on the intimidating side as a combination of that sound and songs



that tend to clock in at around five minutes makes for a somewhat intense experience. And they do have soul - that is the one thing that allows them to carry off an album of such epic proportions (in the same way that the Stone Roses couldn't on *Second Coming*) without too many problems. While *A Northern Soul*

might not take them to the top of the heap, it has surely brought them a few steps closer.

Another UK band that aren't all that big here, but have reached demigod status in Britain are the Pet Shop Boys. After being around for ten years now and releasing a whole bunch of singles, it seems only fitting that all the b-sides are collected together in one easy-to-swallow package which



sprawls out over not one, but two CDs. And even though these songs are b-sides, they are not lesser songs by

any means. In fact, *Alternative* contains some absolute gems which catch the Boys at their very best, and also has a wonderful interview with them talking about all thirty songs in some detail - it's worth having just for that.

Anyone from the UK will recognise 'In The Night' as the theme music to *The Clothes Show*, and it still sounds wonderful after 10 years. Those early days are well documented by some real disco-like moments, but as time progresses things become a lot more sophisticated. I mean, who but the Pet Shop Boys would cover songs by Stephen Sondheim, Noel Coward and Kurt Weill? The whole thing is best summed up by a rather over the top epic called 'Shameless' which tells of the lengths that some artists will go to in order to achieve fame. Fortunately they haven't had to resort to crawling on their hands and knees, but I have a sneaking suspicion that they just might do it if they had to. But they never will as they have far too much talent for their own good.

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