

Clever bunny music



Echo and the Bunnymen
Songs to Learn and Sing
Korova/WEA

review by Doug Schmidt

Even though this album was released in late 1985, a review is still in order. This a singles collection and the last single, "Bring On the Dancing Horses" is featured on the *Pretty in Pink* soundtrack.

Will Liverpool's Echo and the Bunnymen hit it big in North America? Will they go the way Simple Minds did via "(Don't You) Forget About Me"? Time will tell.

To the uninitiated, Echo and the Bunnymen sound like a cross between U2 and the Doors. (They're known pejoratively as Echo and the Doormen by some critics.) Singer Ian McCulloch, who can sound remarkably like Jim Morrison, scoffs at the comparisons and says he just sings with emotion. Some of the band's other influences include Love, David Bowie, Joy Division and the Velvets.

However, E & B have a rich, varied sound of their own. They have a way of exploring and exploding the emotional underground like no one else. More recently they have created colourful, ethereal pop.

The 11 songs on *Songs to Learn and Sing* are culled from four albums and a repertoire of about 45 songs. The lyrics are all on the inner sleeve so you can tell exactly what is being said (though what Ian McCulloch means may be a whole different matter).

"Rescue", their debut single from May 1980, is as strong a song as any on this album. It's the only single from their highly acclaimed first album, *Crocodiles*. (*Rolling Stone* magazine even gave it a five-star rating).

"Rescue" is an ode to modern insecurity. Les Pattison's lively bass complements McCulloch's confused vocals. Like The Smiths' Morrissey, McCulloch isn't even sure

what he feels and asks "is this the blues I'm singing?"

"The Puppet" and "Do It Clean" are singles released in Britain in 1980 after *Crocodiles* but have not been available before in North America (except "The Puppet" in its live-recording incarnation on the *Urgh!* soundtrack). Both are surreal, minimalist classics that deal with the feeling of being out of control. The chorus from "The Puppet" just sounds so good: "you knew about this/with your head in your hands/all along/I was the puppet".

"The Back of Love" and "The Cutter" are both from the third album *Porcupine* and show more musical complexity. "The Back of Love" has the addition of violins and a quirky rhythm pulled off by drummer Pete de Freitas. Shankar, nephew of Ravi Shankar, plays sitar on "The Cutter", another song about alien forces.

Then comes "Never Stop". It creates a fugue-like atmosphere with its blend of synth bongos, cello, xylophone and piano along with bass, drums and guitar. Will Sergeant's guitar sound shoots right through your head if you're listening with headphones. Lyrically, it's a slap at Thatcherism.

Next are the *Ocean Rain* album singles With "The Killing Moon", "Silver" and "Seven Seas" the imagery becomes more colourful, naturalistic and indicate a more positive attitude, a resignation to fate.

With "Bring on the Dancing Horses", E & B achieve the goal aimed at with *Ocean Rain*, to drench the listener with sound. In this song they do it with a harp, a mellow synth and cloudy guitar.

Psychedelia is on of the bandwagons everyone seems to jumping on nowadays but Echo and the Bunnymen practically re-invented the idiom.

This is clever and effective pop music. Sit back, shiver and enjoy.

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The Album Playlist is based on Airplay — a combination of programmer preference and listeners' requests. Tune in every Sunday at 12:00 for the Alternative Countdown — the favorite albums, EP's singles and tapes.

Albums

1. *Colour Me Psycho* — Mr. Invisible (et al) (demo)
2. *Black Uhuru* — Great Train Robbery (RAS/Atlantic/A&M)
3. *Euthanasia* — Pro-Life (demo)
4. *Mad Shadows* — Music in the Night (New Beat (Canada))
5. *Zero Hour* — Speed Metal (demo)
6. *Peter Murphy* — The Final Solution (Mercury/Polygram)
7. *Velvetens* — Tall House (Ransom (Canada))
8. *Screamin' Jay Hawkins & the Fuzztones* — Live (Midnight (US))
9. *Radwaste* — Cooking and Nothingness (Happy Squid (US))
10. *The Project* — The Only One (For Me) (demo)

Singles, EP's and Tapes

1. *Peter Nardini* — Is There Anybody Out There? (Temple/Celtic)
2. *Rhythm Pigs* — self-titled (Mordam(US))
3. *Shanghai Dog* — This Evolution (Undergrowth (Canada))
4. *The Service* — America's Newest Hitmakers (Pravda (US))
5. *Asexuals* — Contemporary World (Psyche Industries (Canada))
6. *Mecca Normal* — self-titled (Smarten UP! (Canada))
7. *Various Artists* — Restless Variations (Restless Enigma(US))
8. *Topper Headon* — Waking Up (Mercury/Polygram)
9. *Shaun Davey* — Granuaile (Tara/Celtic)
10. *Philip Glass* — Songs from Liquid Days (CBS)