

Martha and the Muffins

by Gisele Marie Baxter

If I had to list the best artists of the year so far, I wouldn't hesitate to name the Jam, Japan, U-2, and Martha and the Muffins among the finest. True, I only heard the Muffins' new album for the first time a week ago, but it has to be one of 1981's most immediately and thoroughly impressive releases.

This is the Ice Age is an exhilarating record; the band is now making departures from past work, stretching musically and lyrically, and producing a multi-layered musical experience. The palette of images ranges from the tight, rocking ironies of "You Sold the Cottage" to the dreamlike evocative quality of the instrumental "Jets Seem Slower in London's Skies." Instrumentally, each band member contributes to the cleanly-produced yet complex orchestration of the **Ice Age** songs; the new bassist, Jocelyne Lanois, has a wonderful sense of rhythmic textures, Andy Haas's saxophone scorches and shrills brilliantly through "Women Around the World at Work," and the synthesizers are arranged both for excellent melodic lines and evocative effects.

The title, more than the title track (a jazzy juxtaposition of disconnected, dreamlike images), seems central to the album's concerns. The lyrics and music convey a coldness — not of emotionlessness, but of discordance, both in relationships and with the surrounding world. There is a sense of fear, of fragility, with only a vague but sincerely felt hope for and belief in connections between people ("now and then we connect," Martha Johnson sings in the "don't lose hope" refrain of

"Casualties of Glass").

The most outstanding songs include "Women Around the World," the exquisite "One Day in Paris," and the two songs featuring Mark Gane on lead vocals, "Boy Without Filters" and the incredible "Swimming." Gane's subtle, introspective voice contrasts well with Martha Johnson's strong, clear, declarative style. "Boy" uses electronic imagery to describe the painful, silent places in a relationship, while "Swimming" segues from the ugly screeches of urban decay to a stark yet melodic exploration of a tentative attempt at love in a cold modern landscape:

We talk of parks and simple places
Sense the thickness of the air
Highly strung like nervous guitars
My fingers make waves in you
We're afraid to call it love
Let's call it swimming

The record ends with an instrumental, "Three Hundred Years/Chemistry," which moves from wistful experimentation to electronic dance pop, and never loses its refreshing quality despite its seven-minute length.

Martha and the Muffins have always been an impressive band. **This is the Ice Age** finds them enlisting an impressive lineup of studio musicians to help them explore the musical possibilities I've felt they'd eventually face since **Metro Music**. Yet nowhere in this new maturity is there any sense that **Ice Age** represents the end of the line; rather, it more than convinces me that the Muffins are only starting to explore, and the next installment of the journey should be full of exciting visions.



Ben/Dal Photo

Teenage Head lacking energy at SuperSub

by Michael Brennan

I had great expectations for Teenage Head's performance at the SuperSub last weekend. After seeing them at a small club in Montreal two years ago, I was fully convinced that they were the best new band in Canada. The power and honesty of their frantic energy was electrifying. The music was fast, chaotic, and wild; rockabilly given a hard new edge. Of course, their sound was not completely original. The explosion and revitalization of rock and roll that had occurred in London and New York was a direct influence and they didn't give this sound anything truly distinct. But the enthusiasm and love they had for their music made the show uniquely their own. They had the uninhibited spirit of the Ramones and there was no compromising them.

On finally seeing them last Saturday night my interest in them has somewhat subsided. The show was not a bad one, but it lacked the spontaneity and passion that I had hoped for. I don't think they liked playing here, especially lead singer Frankie Venom. He didn't seem

to care much about the songs he sang and his vocals were never clear. At times the rhythm completely overpowered him and he was hardly audible. His moves were much too forced and not once did he lose himself in the power of the music. I became rather tired of his Gene Vincent imitations when it expressed no meaning for him.

The rest of the band, however, showed they were true rockers and though the night wasn't a hot one for them, they gave it everything they had. Bassist Steve Mahone was most impressive. With his bass hung practically down to his knees he moved around with the cool, tense excitement of a Sid Vicious. He really loved to play. Guitarist Gordon Gervis wasn't as energetic and his Chuck Berry riffs were at times overdone and long but he played with guts. The few moments his guitar fired inspiration into drummer Nick Stipanitz and Mahone were great.

The first set was satisfying. The numbers never became boring or undistinguishable and were kept sharp and to the point. "Let's Shake" and "Brand

New Cadillac" were the highlights and had Mahone dancing with enjoyment.

The second and final set began with a loud jolt but soon became dull. The songs ran on with an obvious familiarity and lacked any distinction. Only "Disgusteen" had a satisfying riff.

Frankie Venom was almost completely uninterested and when beer was thrown on him he over-reacted, displaying a disgust that I believe was there from the beginning. The band tried hard but the songs were just too limp to provide any spark. "Teenage Beer Drinking Party" and "Going to Hawaii" were silly songs with no sincerity and I'm sure little meaning to the band.

If Teenage Head is to continue as a creative force they're going to have to fuel some honest energy into their songs, especially the lyrics. To keep on with this teenage, fun, fun attitude seems false now. Last Saturday night may have been just an off night but it indicated that they are running out of inspiration.



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