

Polygram EP's "entertaining and valuable"

The Boomtown Rats



rat tracks

Review: Three PolyGram EPs

by Gisele Marie Baxter

PolyGram Records has recently initiated a series of

extended-play albums to introduce some of its overseas artists to Canadian audiences. Here are three of those packages, which I feel are entertaining and

valuable recordings.

The Boomtown Rats' **Rat Tracks** (Vertigo VEP 307) is a collection of five tunes, three of which you've probably never

heard before. "Up All Night", here in a remixed long version, and the live "Nothing Happened Today", provide the familiarity. The former, a vaguely menacing tale of night life, counters its slow, exotic rhythm with icy little piano runs and an intriguing-vocal arrangement. The latter has the Rats at a glorious frenetic pace, capturing the electricity of the live setting while retaining the sharp ironies of the song.

Of the new songs, "Fall Down" uses a sweet, lilting melody with a lightly Baroque feeling for its very sardonic lyric about the agonies of frustrated love, while "Real Different" is a quirky, lively rocker which recalls the excellent material on "Tonic for the Troops". "Whitehall 1212" starts off with a call to Scotland Yard, which segues into a detective show theme. There isn't an uninteresting song on "Rat Tracks" and as this is the last set to feature Gerry Cott (he has since left the band), I suggest you pick up this offering from one of Ireland's finest exports.

From one of England's more successful electronic bands, The Human League we have **The Sound of the Crowd** (Virgin VEP 304). At first glance, this may seem an attempt to cash in on the current New Romantic trend of fancy clothes and electronic dance music. This isn't the experimental sound one might expect from the League, but the music has enough edginess and awareness to put it quite far above disco. The title track features a nice interplay of synthetic rhythms, with an effective layering of keyboard lines and a catchy arrangement of voices. One of the instrumentals, "Dancevision", is also notable for its countering of synthesizers with rhythms. The other instrumental, "Tom Baker", concentrates on atmospheric effects, such as metallic clangings, explosions and so forth, and sounds very much like theme music for the villain in a James Bond movie.

"Boys and Girls" makes its lyrics clearer, and one cannot help but feel that these tough kids of

the title are the New Romantics, outgrowing adolescence too quickly as they add their voices to the sound of the crowd. A bit pretentious from time to time, even melodramatic, this Human League EP is nevertheless a pretty clear look at this year's trend.

And finally, there is Japan's **The Art of Parties** (Virgin VEP 306). I find this band so refreshing. As with all their new work, this EP marks a development in their musical outlook. The David Sylvian compositions are edgier, with a greater emphasis on percussion effects. Sylvian has become an expert at creating exotic moods through sound, and explores musical possibilities with an exhilarating sense of wonder. Although very young, he can assimilate his travels and experiences into a composition such as "Life Without Buildings" and make it valid both to himself and the listener. The idea is simple, but crucial: in Western society, we trap ourselves in buildings, and while we hear everything, we see nothing.

The two instrumentals - "The Experience of Swimming" and "The Width of a Room" - provide evocative expressions of their titles, and reveal talents for composition in other band members, Richard Barbieri and Rob Dean (though Dean has now left Japan). The latter's title is a line from Sylvian's masterpiece, "Nightporter", and seems a further exploration of its themes of illicit romance and obsession.

The title song, which apparently points the way to the next album, is an incredible dance tune, a clear indication of Sylvian's great debt to Motown. Crisp production, tight jabbing brass lines, and Sylvian's wonderful vocal and lyrical talent are arranged to great effect. Although Japan has been linked to the New Romantic scene, this band does not need a trend to latch onto, and seems actually to have shed some of its glamorous image. After all, Japan is already far beyond what most of the dance club pirate lads will ever achieve.

Werewolf is a pussycat



by Paul Creelman

American Werewolf in London is really a pussycat of a movie. The tried and true tricks of the horror movie are all used to maintain a taut story line, but frequent movie-goers have seen all those techniques before (in movies like *Alien* and *The Shining*). It is not the horror and suspense of this movie which make it particularly good. Any shred of recognition **American Werewolf** deserves is found instead in the occasional bits of comic relief provided by director John Landis.

Since **American Werewolf** is produced by the same people who put out *Animal House*, it is

understandable that the occasional lighter interludes are well done. The discomfort of two American youths trying to fit into place in the hostile atmosphere of an English pub in the Moors was gem of comic brilliance. The escapades of a naked David Naughton (the werewolf) escaping from the wolf pen of the zoo were definitely the high point of the movie. As for the rest of it, all I can say is that one startling and bloody werewolf attack looks exactly like the other. Furthermore, their werewolf looks a lot more like a misshapen bear than a wolf, as far as I'm concerned.

It must be said that **American Werewolf** is a movie which tries

to have something for everybody. Romantic interludes and sexy scenes are interspersed with the comedy and horror. This diversity is probably the movie's greatest failing. It is hard to laugh at the pan-faced English school-child ("Mommy, a naked American man stole my balloons.") after being terrorized by the trite but effective scenes of blood and gore.

All in all, I would have to say that John Landis and his crew should stick to comedy and leave the horror movie alone. Unfortunately, I hear rumours that there may be an *American Werewolf II* in the works. If we're lucky, maybe the werewolf will get Landis et al before they can produce it.

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