The enfolding tentacles of rock

by Chris Smets

'Making music is the only way that I know how to survive in an age when the airwaves are loaded with bullshit E hits," proclaims Brad Black, quoting his own lyrics. "If you have to distill everything I'm about to one little phrase, that's it: doing what you want to do, making the music you wanna make, distributing it the way you want to distribute it."

So far, Black has done just that. As lead singer of Squidhead, a trippy alternative metal outfit, he's gigged around Toronto since 1988. Last spring, in the downtime following the recording and release of their debut cassette Tooling For Goodness, he reentered the studio without the rest of the band.

The result is Unstoppable, released by Black under the name

MUSIC Squiddly

Unstoppable Squiddly Approved Recordings

Squiddly. It's a four-track EP that combines synths and drum machines with noise guitar, blues pentatonics and breakneck rapping. It's dance music with a brain and an agenda.

According to Black, the idea behind Squiddly is "to bring the longhairs and the club-hoppers together in one big orgiastic frenzy."

He's got a good head start. The title track from the EP, his self-proclaimed synthesis of the street and the studio, is already getting a good deal of airplay on at least one commercial station. The tape is available at most downtown record outlets.

But just who is this ubiquitous

young man, and where did he come from?

"We're sheriffs of misfortune from a different galaxy way beyond here!" chortles Black, describing Squidhead's origin in true D.C. Comics style. He's referring to the bizarro stage names that he and the other band members go by: Roddy Rocks (Brad's brother Rod, guitar), Johnny Teeth (John Bierl, drums), Squiddly himself, and the Gnasty Gnit (Pat Ruffalo, bass), who's "from a planet of complete evil."

The band name originally came from Black's fearsome, tentacle-like hairstyle, but as he explains it, the outer space stuff is merely metaphorical. "When I say I'm from another planet, it just means that I'm coming from a different mindset than most people in music."

Black and the "Masters of Gimp



Squidhead are (from left to right) Johnny Teeth (drums), Roddy Rocks (guitar), Squiddly (vocals) and Gnasty Gnit (bass). Squiddly (aka Brad Black) broke away from the band to release his own solo album, Unstoppable. But, fear not! The tentaded ones will return.

MUSIC The Cavedogs Soul Martini Capitol

play drums for them despite his "admission that he'd cut his teeth on bad 70s music: Rush, Kansas, and Yes among others."

That's when I lost it. Since when does Rush constitute bad 70s music?!? Just try telling that to the half million or so neo-progressive hardcore funk o'metal outfits (Voivod, Living Colour, Fishbone, Primus et al) who cut their teeth on Toronto's groundbreaking power trio!

Needless to say, I started planning my ultramega negative review before I'd even ripped off the plastic.

My first impression: Boy, you can tell these guys are a college radio band! They've got all their formulaic po-mo pop influences in the right place: a pinch of Byrds-ian jangle, a dash of Neil Young guitar squall, add 3 cups of the Beatles (minus Ringo) and stir. This would be ok, 'cept the Cavedogs carry it to heretofore unheard-of levels: Bassist Steven's voice is eerily close to John Lennon's (especially on "III"), and one of the guys in the band photo looks a helluva lot like Roger McGuinn!

In case you're worried that this band is yet another bunch of hippieretentive geeks a la the UK rave band craze, let me assure you that there are also stylistic nods to the Buzzcocks, R.E.M. and early Squeeze, just so the post-punksters don't get too restless.

My second, third and subsequent impressions: This album contains some of the best examples of pure, crystalline pop songwriting in recent memory. It all seems so natural heartfelt vocals punctuated by rocksolid rhythms and big, friendly guitar hooks. Lyrics are unimportant: individual words float along on lovingly crafted melodies like fallen leaves sailing downstream. This is the kind of album you could play once and forget about forever, although you'd be doing yourself a great disservice if you did. Listen to it a second time and it all comes rushing back to you at once, like a divine case of deja-vu. And later, I dare you to try and get enigmatic songs like "Sorrow (Boots of Pain)" and "Tarzan and his Arrowheads" out of yer noggin. Not bad for a record I was intending to stomp all over. Soul Martini is not a great album by any means, but its giddy pop naiveté makes for a very rewarding listen. Definitely worth buying.

Rock & Funky Love Buffoons" have been together since 1986. Their sound is a volatile mix of death riffs and metal heroism, groove-laden drumming and boinging bass lines, capped off by Black's David Byrne-with-anasty-attitude vocals. "If people see metal in it, fine," he says. "But there's other people who see dance, art rock, the new psychedelia ... "

"Clock the News," Tooling's hardedged rap boast track, was an influence on the techno-dance music direction taken on Unstoppable. With all due respect to Ice-T and Body Count, Black wants to take the rap/metal dichotomy to new levels with a marriage of acoustics and electronics. "I'm not content to ape old Sabbath licks, or satisfied with your standard braggadiocio swagger," he declares.

With Squiddly, he also gets to contribute musically, a chance he doesn't usually get with Squidhead. "People get this impression that it's all samples, but it's not. The samples are basically contained to just vocal snippets, because I'm playing guitar. bass and drums on all four of the tracks, though in some cases, I'm bringing Rod in to play lead."

Those vocal snippets include the hefty Jim Morrison lift ("I wanna have my kicks before the whole shithouse goes up in flames") that leads off the tape. Black explains that he used the sample because he could relate to the sentiment "whether Morrison said it or Paul Anka said it," but it resulted in an interesting situaElektra Records, the Doors' old label. Elektra soon called him back, explaining that they weren't signing any new acts. They also warned him that they had noticed recognizable samples from their back catalogue.

Black responded in typically twisted fashion: "I never sampled Morrison; his spirit was in the studio with me, and if you keep bugging me, I'm going to go to the National Enquirer with this story."

They haven't talked to him since. So far, both tapes have been released independently on Black's own label, Squiddly Approved Recordings. Next up is Squidhead's Every Good Girl, on CD by late March/ early April, followed closely by a full-length version of Unstoppable, also on CD.

Other release plans include B.B.I. (Black Brothers International), which Black refers to as "Iron Maiden meets P.M. Dawn." Tapes from prospective signings are also welcome, as Black is "always looking for people to interact with."

Black's first gig as Squiddly (featuring members of Squidhead) will be at the Rivoli on April 9, opening for Acid Test. He describes his approach as "techno-punk." To say much more would be unfair; just understand that Black's tastes in music (Gary Numan, Motorhead, Renegade Soundwave, Talking Heads, Kraftwerk, Geto Boys and the Doors) are as unlimited as his goals.

"To me, it's all an experiment in

Cavedogs no bunch of hippie-retentive geeks

somehow never did.

by Chris Smets

I was fully prepared to hate Soul Martini. It wasn't because I had anything personal against the Cavedogs, a trio of scrappy lads from Boston whose 1990 debut, Joyrides for Shut-

Nope, it goes much deeper than that — it's more a case of national pride. See, this album's press releases says guitarist Todd Spahr and Bassist Brian Stevens invited Mark Rivers to

ins, I had always intended to buy but



R. Kelly still-Born Into The 90's

ment.

by Colin P.

R. Kelly is the newest jack to hit the streets with his own version of the Teddy Riley-coined "New Jack Swing" (NJS). After listening to Born Into The 90's, it's hard not to believe that Kelly's first release, "She's Got That Vibe," and others are actually not Teddy and his boys (the musical group Guy).

Luckily for Kelly, he moves out of the swing and tries some other forms of music. It's not that the NSJ songs aren't good - they just sound a lot like everybody else's material.

Hotti" and the title track are com- originality. mendable for their smooth blend of rap vocals and R&B rhythms. How- 90's is an average album with some ever, don't expect any hip hop revolutions, or even a modest advance-

R. Kelly Born Into the 90's **Jive/RCA**

Kelly's most mentionable moves come when he slows it down. Of the three ballads on the album, "Slow Down" and "Dedicated" definitely have got "the vibe." The third, "Honey Love," is not as good as the others, although it isn't bad.

As for "Hey Love," a bonus track, it's ... well ... shit. It seems to have The rap/hip hop "Definition of a been quickly put together and lacks

On the overview tip, Born Into The not-so-good tracks. On the alphabetic scale, R. Kelly gets an O and a K. OK!

All the same though, I think I'll go throw on my copy of Rush's A Farewell to Kings and dream of elfmaidens and rocket ships.

tion when he sent the tape off to

sound. It may be rap and metal on this tape, but the next tape might have four synth players. I wanna keep changing. I don't wanna be predictable. Every time they come to see us... I want them to be surprised."

CHRY Smokin' 17

1. Lush	Spooky	4AD/Polygram
2. Various Artists	Dope Guns and Fucking i	n the Streets Cargo
3. Disposable Heroes of	HiphoprosyHi	pocrosy Island
4. Ride	Going Blank Again	Sire
5. Billy Bragg	Peel Sessions	Dutch Fast India
6. Rollins Band	End of Silence	Imago/BMG
7. Skinny Puppy	Last Rites	Nettwerk (C)
8. Curve	Doppleganger	Virgin
9. Jawbox	Tongues	Dischord
10. Afghan Wigs	Congregation.	SubPop
11. A Tribe Called Quest	Scenar	ioIive
12. DHIMac	chine Altar Transmission	Fringe(C)
13. The Cure	High	Flektra
14. Fu-Schnickens	Fu. Don't Take it	Personal live
15. Boogie Down Pro	ductionsSex and	Violence live
16. Phleg Camp	Beaker.	Cargo(C)
17. Love Battery	Dayglow	Sub Pop

C denotes Can Con. Chart compiled by Matt Galloway and Gary Supurgi. Matt's pick of the week: Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprosy.

