

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 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 re-entered the studio without the rest of the band.

The result is *Unstoppable*, released by Black under the name

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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 bizarre 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 tentacled ones will return.

Cavedogs no bunch of hippie-retentive geeks

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-*

ins, I had always intended to buy but somehow never did.

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

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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 hippie-retentive 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 rock-solid 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.

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



R. Kelly still-Born Into The 90's

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.

The rap/hip hop "Definition of a Hotti" and the title track are commendable for their smooth blend of rap vocals and R&B rhythms. However, don't expect any hip hop revolutions, or even a modest advance-

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

ment.

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 been quickly put together and lacks originality.

On the overview tip, *Born Into The 90's* is an average album with some not-so-good tracks. On the alphabetic scale, R. Kelly gets an O and a K. OK!



CHRY Smokin' 17

1. Lush.....Spooky.....4AD/Polygram
2. Various Artists.....Dope Guns and Fucking in the Streets.....Cargo
3. Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprosy.....Hipocrosy.....Island
4. Ride.....Going Blank Again.....Sire
5. Billy Bragg.....Peel Sessions.....Dutch East India
6. Rollins Band.....End of Silence.....Imago/BMG
7. Skinny Puppy.....Last Rites.....Nettwerk (C)
8. Curve.....Doppelganger.....Virgin
9. Jawbox.....Tongues.....Dischord
10. Afghan Wigs.....Congregation.....Sub Pop
11. A Tribe Called Quest.....Scenario.....Jive
12. DHL.....Machine Altar Transmission.....Fringe (C)
13. The Cure.....High.....Elektra
14. Fu-Schnickens.....Fu. Don't Take it Personal.....Jive
15. Boogie Down Productions.....Sex and Violence.....Jive
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.