



XTC AND Killer Joke

by Gisele Marie Baxter

XTC has produced some impressive music, from its earliest efforts onwards: songs like "Making Plans for Nigel", "Life Begins at the Hop" and "Respectable Street" dissect modern life artifices while pushing at pop music possibilities. Spare, rhythmic and intriguing, the songs snag at your attention and keep it.

This new EP, **5 Senses**, has some good things about it: the synthesizers and percussion are consistently effective, and despite a number of producers, the sound is quite unified in its atmospheric edginess. Much of the music resembles a frenetic combination of New Romanticism and 1960's dance pop; there is an infectious cheeriness about most of this, but there is also nothing outstanding. This is more or less XTC having fun, not XTC providing any new insights into the talents of its members.

Of the songs, which are mostly British B-sides, Colin Moulding's "Smokeless Zone" is a sharp, danceable, satiric number about a normally unhealthy person struggling to

escape an antiseptic environment. Andy Partridge's "Strange Tales, Strange Tails" is the only really experimental track of the lot, with its effective countering of electronic rhythms and vocal lines, with the guitar and drum work drawing it all together. "Officer Blue" has good brass insinuations, but seems to be "Generals and Majors" in another uniform.

5 Senses is interesting but not great; still, there's absolutely no reason not to look forward to XTC's next full-length effort. The band remains more vital than most of the trendies.



Once you get Killin Joke on your turntable, the sheer force of the music demands that you listen. This four-man English band raises primitivism to an art, with its thrashing, menacing guitars and synthesizers, tribal drums, rough chanted vocals and incredible anger. They could be Public Image Limited's raging younger brother, not as complex but full of adventure-some vision.

For a second album by a young band, **what's THIS for...** is very well produced. If a touch of the original freshness seems to have gone, Killing Joke has managed to mature without sacrificing much power. This is an utterly hypnotic record.

The lyrics are only intelligible after several listenings; you have to accept them as part of the musical whole. Yet there are very real strengths in the vocals, and in the well-sustained emphasis on atmosphere throughout the album, wonderful strengths in the instrumentals. Killing Joke veers on the fringes of atonality, experimenting not for the sake of doing so but to create images of a world edging on disaster, of a society in which compassion is lost and war celebrated. As on the debut album, the synthesizers are used exceptionally well to colour effects, never overpowering.

Songs like "Unbreakable",



which brilliantly counters percussion and bass lines, and "Follow the leaders" are Killing Joke at its best. There is compassion in all this rage and invective - if only in the realization that we're all part of and victims of the madness.

"Moscow" cries out for praise

by Ken Burke

Some movies elicit the kind of praise that can put them in your best-of list before you even get a chance to see them. **Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears**, playing at the Cohn this Sunday, has gotten such praise, and probably will continue to do so from just about everybody that's seen it... but not from me. Kind of. You see, the film had a good story and excellent acting, but the part of the film that was the most enjoyable was also a subtle sell-out of the film's ideals.

The story, set in Moscow of course, follows three Russian country girls as they attempt to find happiness in life, each in their own different way. At its focus is Katerina, who overcomes the hardship of having a child on her own to gain an education and eventually rise to a commanding position in the manufacturing industry by the film's end. As portrayed by Vera Alentova, Katerina is a real image of the emerging woman - sensitive, shy, vulnerable, and unaware of her enormous underlying strength that will allow her to reach her impossible goals.

But Katerina is still terribly unhappy when she reaches the apex of Moscow success. She has no one to love her, and we sense that no one ever has loved her in the past. The solution? Enter the perfect man, just right to fulfill every sensitive woman's fantasies, late one night on a train. Gosha, or Goga (the ol' Russian inter-fileable name syndrome) turns the movie right around with his unbelievably appealing presence and engagingly left-field wit.

Now arriveth the film's problem. Gosha - played excellently by Alexei Batalov - is so wonderful and charming and riveting that he dominates the film from his entrance. Not only is it too easy for the film, which had been semi-realistic up to that point (please, no letters about the harsh REAL Russian system!) to provide ye basic Holly-

wood happy ending in his person, but he also takes the heat off the earlier story of Katerina's rise. The movie is really two films - the feminist melodrama before he arrives, and the French-styled romantic comedy after he appears.

Exactly how feminist is the film's message is also something to be considered. The subtext throughout is rather conservative - no matter what, a woman needs a good, strong and commanding man in order to be happy, and that's all. We aren't encouraged to see Katerina as a success until Mr. Right comes along and takes charge. Sure, he makes concessions to her social position (he is a fitter, which she used to be 15 years before) but is still the undisputed **head of the household**.

Socially, this didn't upset anyone down at Moscow Central Cultural Control, either. While it does throw out the whole idea of the "classless" Soviet society in Lyudmilla (Katerina's best friend) and her scheming to marry an upper-echelon-type male, it's clear that nobody really buys that nonsense in Russia, anyway. In the long run her scheming nets her nothing and we look at the other two girls - Tanya, happily married to a deceptively simple farmer, and Katerina, the ultimate propoganda vision of the hard-working, anything-is-possible Soviet system - and see that there's no reward for social climbing for any young Muscovite girl on the prowl.

Having thus stated my objections, I'm still going to tell you that it's a very enjoyable film. It has the old Hollywood emotional gut-level reaction bit down pat, which is partly why it's doing so well (and explains the Academy Award it picked up this year). You root for the heroine, hiss at the villain, and things all work out just right at the end. But a classic of modern cinema? No, it plays it too safe for that. But if you're looking for something less heavy, this'll do just fine.

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