

Vogue set for eastern success

By KEVIN CONNOLLY

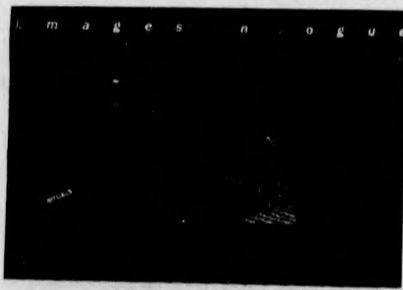
It seems strong songwriting does not always guarantee commercial success in Canadian pop music, particularly if you're a band from the West Coast. Vancouver's Images in Vogue are a case in point.

Despite a well received debut EP, and an award-winning video, this tight new music outfit have had difficulty exciting anything but minor attention in Eastern Canada. With their polished sound and an established local following, the band seemed ripe to make a move on the national level.

Theirs is a phenomenon that is becoming all too familiar these days: a promising group from the West Coast, despite strong material, seems to die when it comes to competing in the Eastern market.

Keyboardist/songwriter Joe Vizvary cites poor airplay, and the high cost of eastern touring as the chief culprits.

"Geography has a lot to do with it," says Vizvary. "You can't contact people by phone and expect to get any momentum going. And it costs so much for us to come out and play." The band spent only three weeks playing in Eastern Canada last year in support of their *Images in Vogue* EP and their video for the song "Lust for Love" was already out of date when the coast to coast *Muchmusic* network started up earlier last year. Vizvary hopes that the band's new EP, *Rituals*, and an upcoming full length record will finally bring the national attention he feels Images in Vogue deserves.



Listening to the new EP, it is difficult to argue with him. *Rituals* is almost perfect pop fare; strong melodies, an attractive aural depth, and unique vocals from lead singer Dale Martindale imbue songs like "Rescue Me," "You Can Call it Love," and "Save It" with an almost universal appeal.

Though the band relies heavily on synthesizer, they use the technology tastefully, avoiding the "wall of keyboard" that characterizes some European bands. Rhythm box and synthesizer provide an uncluttered musical context for Martindale's almost 'Bowiesque' vocals, and the band's lyrics show a familiar, unpretentious appeal.

"We're not trying to load up our songs with a lot of pretentious imagery," Vizvary says. "We prefer a simple, almost 'naive' approach. People listening to the songs often find it surprising to hear an idea expressed in that way."

Images in Vogue provide a West Coast parallel to many local Toronto in that they chose to take the 'independent' route to success. Several self-produced singles became very popular in the Vancouver area, and were supported by similarly successful live sets in various Vancouver new wave clubs. When the band sold out its second independent recording in a matter of months, WEA became interested. Vizvary feels the independent experience was an important one for the band.



Images in Vogue

"Independent recordings are great, because you have complete control over the music," Vizvary said, "which is especially important for a new band. When you're just starting out you don't want a whole lot of people around telling you how you should sound," adding that independent success put them in much better bargaining position when it came to signing with a major label.

"Record companies treat an independent record much more highly than a demo tape... they tend to think of you as a competitor," says Vizvary.

The band's first full length album, produced by Gary (*Dream Weaver*) Wright is due for release in January.

records



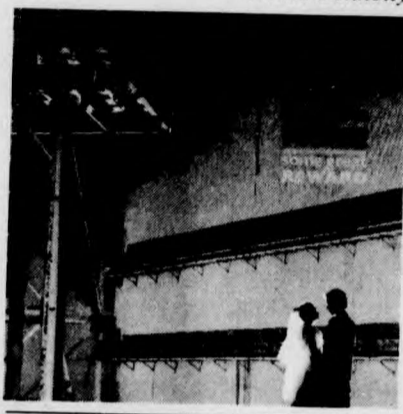
Echo and the Bunnymen
Seven Seas
(Sire)

A surprise bonus for Echo and the Bunnymen fans, this five-song EP includes an extended studio version of the excellent title track and four outstanding live cuts, recorded in rather primitive fashion at Liverpool Cathedral. Originally recorded for a British radio program, the songs are pared down to their absolute essentials; and apart from the addition of saxophone and bongos on "Villier's

Terrace," the acoustic guitar is left to shoulder the bulk of the burden. "The Killing Moon," which is undoubtedly one of the best pop songs of recent years, is given a quiet rock-and-roll treatment here, and it provides a nice complement to the almost orchestral studio version. "Stars are Stars"—a track off the band's first album *Crocodiles*—is similarly effective, while "Villier's Terrace" is almost miraculously transformed with the added rhythmic interest and the addition of some inobtrusive saxophone.

Perhaps the only sore thumb here is an inexplicable cover of the Beatles' "All You Need is Love," presented with an oddly false Ian McCulloch vocal, and a slightly slowed tempo. It is an almost outrageous surprise coming from this band, and though we are not sure exactly how to take it, the song serves as a comforting reminder that the band has not (as some critics have noted) lost its 'strange' edge after the critical success of *Ocean Rain*. It seems that Echo and the Bunnymen have retained a healthy dose of the weird to ward off that demon success.

—Kevin Connolly



Big Country
Steeltown
(Polygram)

The first impression one is left with after listening to this album is that it is incredibly *loud*. Nearly all of the tracks are dominated by that overproduced but interesting 'bag-pipe' guitar, and though we are left with the same sense of "sameness" that marred the band's debut album *The Crossing*, it is still difficult to argue with the strength of the melodies. Big Country relies both musically and lyrically on the British folk ballad, and the instant familiarity of their songs is perhaps a necessary function of their musical goals. Echoes from the Scottish folk tradition are expanded to provide passionate rock centrepieces, while insistent military rhythms provide a raw power to the aural assault. Lead singer Stewart Adamson (whose voice is strictly for studio) remains the source for all of the band's

lyrics—stories of doomed love, working class pride, and patriotic fervor. Though perhaps not as well paced as *The Crossing*, *Steeltown* offers a greater emotional and lyrical consistency; all of the melodies contribute to an overall sense of doomed splendor, while the lyrics form a collection of Romantic vignettes.

While some may say that *Steeltown* is just a variation on a relatively simple music theme, the new album manages to refute the suggestion that Big Country is just a novelty band with a musical gimmick. Perhaps more than any other pop band, Big Country must be approached in their own context; if there is a redundancy here, then it is an occasionally splendid one.

—K.C.

Cat Stevens
Footsteps in the Dark
(A&M)

Here it is—just in time for Christmas shopping—the perfect gift for all those aging friends who just haven't been able to cope with the electro-beat revolution.

No, Cat Stevens hasn't come out of retirement; *Footsteps in the Dark* is merely a second volume of "greatest hits." And since all Stevens' real hits are included on volume one ("Moonshadow," "Wild World," "Morning Has Broken"), the material on this album is less familiar, making it, almost by necessity, more interesting than volume one.

Much of *Footsteps in the Dark* is truly magical stuff. It's easy to forget the impact Stevens made in the early 1970s with his gruff, slurry voice and his simple, introspective folk songs. It all comes back here with tunes like "Katmandu," "The Hurt," "Where Do the Children Play?" or the achingly emotional "How Can I Tell You." And to lure fans who already own all his albums, there is some rare material here: two songs Stevens recorded for Hal Ashby's 1971 film, *Harold and Maude*, and an old B-side.

There are also liner notes from the Cat himself revealing why he left the music business in 1978 to devote himself full-time to the Islamic faith—there's even an address so you can write to join up too.

The singer-songwriter has become an extinct species in pop, and *Footsteps in the Dark* is a thoughtful, well-programmed collection from one of the genre's best. But, I hasten to add, if you really want the best of Cat Stevens you need look no further than his *Tea for the Tillerman* LP.

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