

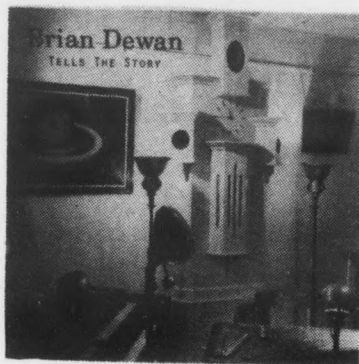
GENRECIDÉ MICHAEL EDWARDS

"WHAT DO YOU WANT A JAPANESE TO DO?"

Vinyl Japan are one of the more intriguing record companies to emerge over the past few years. It was founded in 1989 in Tokyo by Tetsuya Nakatani, himself a vinyl fiend, with a view to catering to the Japanese market despite being co-ordinated from London. Now it is the largest independent label in Japan, and is rapidly building up quite a reputation for itself elsewhere.

But that isn't the most interesting aspect of Vinyl Japan in my eyes. That particular accolade belong to its roster of bands which is unusual to say the least. A large proportion of the bands fall into the indie-pop category, and one of my absolute favourites can be found there; namely the Fat Tulips, a band that shambles along through their rather melodic guitar pop. They also have quite a few Japanese bands that I would otherwise be unfamiliar with; some sound really promising. Even Scots the BMX Bandits turned up here for one album too (probably their best...) and also have had their debut album reissued through Vinyl Japan. That is one of the other services that they provide - reissuing some of the more obscure indie classics that didn't get widespread distribution the first time around. They also seem to have the ability to encourage reunions of some rather important indie bands such

as the Monochrome Set, the Chesterfields and also Alison Statton and Spike of Young Marble Giants; and when this does happen, they still make as wonderful music as ever. I personally am looking forward to the forthcoming album from the Chesterfields as their glory days were quite wonderful.



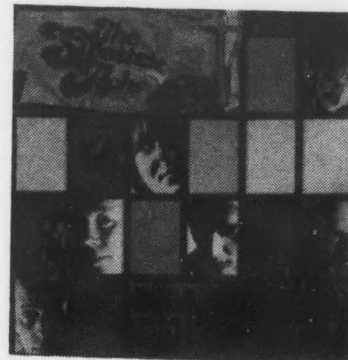
But the final source of bands is the most peculiar one - they have picked up most of the bands that have left Sarah Records. This means it is possible to find St. Christopher, the Sweetest Ache, and also Northern Picture Library (which comprises the remnants of the Field Mice) on Vinyl Japan. I'm not exactly sure why this is; Sarah is very popular in Japan and so their is still quite a following for the bands but it has helped to define an identity for the label. And it gives Sarah a chance to make jokes about how they never

needed the bands in the first place. But as long as the music is still as enjoyable, why should anyone complain? One of the forthcoming releases from Vinyl Japan is by Sarah cast-offs The Sweetest Ache with their new album "Grass Roots." We haven't heard from them since their fine 1991 debut album "Jaguar." And has anything changed in the interim? An awful lot it would seem. It sounds as if they have entered a time warp back to seventies to produce an album which has absolutely no pretensions, and that is such a refreshing change these days. It almost reminds me of the Pooh Sticks in the way that they evoke such a perfect sound circa 1973 with laid-back guitars and sweet harmonies that melt together effortlessly. But rather than the rather energetic pop of the Pooh Sticks, this is a much more mellow affair that could induce sighs from the hardest of hearts. From the gospel-tinged 'Little Angel' to the subtlety of 'Carry Me Home', this is one of the finest albums I have heard all year.

The best way to explore the delights of Vinyl Japan is through the pair of CD samplers that they have released, one last year and one this year, entitled "What Do You Want A Japanese To Do" and "What Do You Want A Japanese To Do Again" respectively. Both have 24 tracks and include a good cross section of what the label has to offer. And if you write them a nice letter, they will

send your complete catalogue so you can have your pick of their releases. Get in touch with Vinyl Japan at: 281 Camden High Street, London, NW1 7BX, England; make sure you include an IRC.

One of my old labels of the month, New Jersey's Bar/None Records, have a new



trio of releases out at the moment. First up is Greenhouse 27, a four piece from Ohio with "Smashed" which has some really good pop songs on it. Alas those songs only make up about a third of the album; the rest are mediocre at best with some rather contrived lyrics. The whole affair is pleasant and inoffensive, but really just passes by without leaving a lasting impression. Ambivalence city I'm afraid. Ben Vaughn is someone that, I must confess, I am not familiar with even although he has released five albums to date. This one may not be the best place

to start as "Mono USA" is a collection of 8-track recordings (or rather 7-track as one track is broken on his machine...) made between 1988 and 1992, all in glorious mono and every one a cover version. Still, that isn't a major problem as this labour of love shows an incredible amount of respect for the original artists (including Willie Nelson, Lobo, The Ventures and Nancy Sinatra) while still adding his own personal touch to the music. A wildly eclectic collection that makes me think I should check out his other albums. Best of the bunch is Brian Dewan's "Tells The Story." Dewan is a true Renaissance man; not only is he a musician but also an artist and a craftsman. He performs using an electric zither which he designed and built himself - it has an unusual sound which can produce delicate, cascading sounds or loud growling noises that would appease Jimi Hendrix. On "Tells The Story," Dewan does just that providing a narrative to such tales as 'The Letter,' 'My Eye' and 'The Cowboy Outlaw' in his baritone tones. These stories do tend to be about more unusual topics but that is why they are so engrossing, and why this album is such a find. Definitely one to search out. (Contact Bar/None at P.O. Box 1704, Hoboken, NJ., 07030, USA.)

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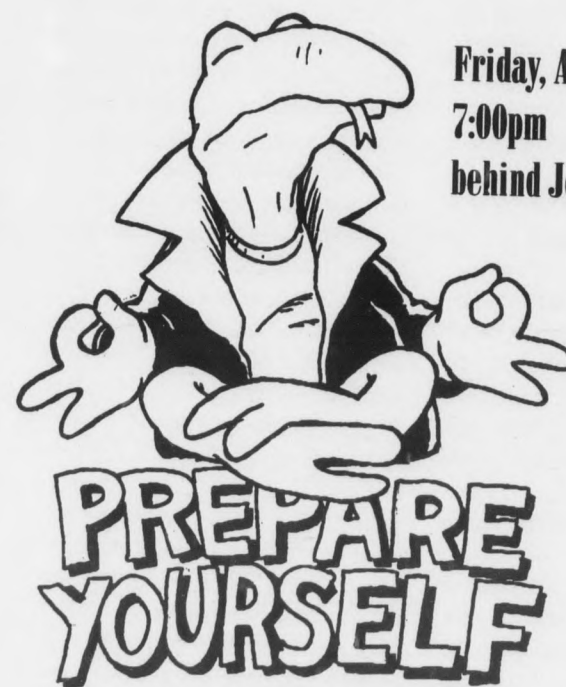
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