GENRECIDE

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Before every new R.E.M. album appears, there is much discussion about how it is going to sound - another *Murmur*? Maybe the new *Automatic For The People*? Apparently they were leaning towards the latter when work started on *New Adventures In Hi-Fi*, but the end product is a lot more eclectic than any of their previous records. In a way, it could almost be viewed as a greatest hits album as there are



elements from all their previous records on *New Adventures In Hi-Fi*, and you can have a lot of fun trying to figure which album each song could belong on. Hours of fun for all the family.

But is it any good? Of course it is. It seems almost redundant to review an R.E.M. album as they have never really made a bad one. I suppose the question should be "How good is it?" and it is really very good. The loudness of *Monster* is still very apparent, and Michael Stipe seems very reluctant to say goodbye to glam rock (someone must have told him that masses of black eyeliner really suits him...), and he boasts of practising his T-Rex pose on 'The Wake-Up Bomb'. But the mellower side of R.E.M. is equally evident - the delicate 'New Test Leper' is awash with acoustic guitars, while 'Electrolite' reminds me so much of *Automatic For The People*'s 'Find The River' it hurts. But that isn't a bad thing at all.

Life with R.E.M. is never easy though - the lyrics are still on the cryptic side, and they are still picking out the least obvious songs for singles. Take the first single - 'E Bow The Letter' (named after that gizmo that makes Peter Buck's guitar sound rather weird). It's a five minute dirge where the most melodious part is sung by Patti Smith. Let's think about that - *Patti Smith* sings the tuneful part. Does anyone else see something unusual there? Maybe it's just me.

So basically, it's business as usual for R.E.M., and *New Adventures In Hi-Fi* is yet another wonderful album. And the most amazing thing about it is that all this came from a band on tour - some songs were performed at soundchecks, others recorded live in concert, and a mere four were cut in a real recording studio. Maybe their most creative days lie ahead of them after all.

I have a faint recollection from when Blinker The Star's debut album came out last year - I gave it a quick listen, decided that they sounded an awful lot like Eric's Trip and then passed it on to someone else. The main point was that it really wasn't all that memorable, despite having some 'home demo' charm, so I thought no more about it. Until now, that is. They're back. And this time, they've been given a budget to head into a recording studio and they produced something equally unmemorable. But it is unmemorable for a different reason this time - for some reason best known to themselves, they decided to recycle every single grunge cliche under the



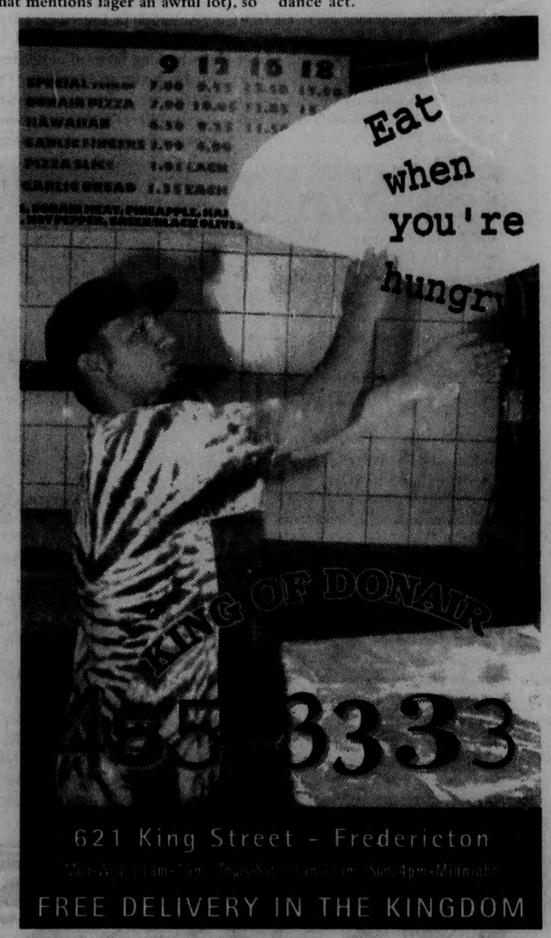
sun to come up with an album with practically no original ideas on it. I know that seems a little extreme, but I really can't help myself - there are guitar sounds like Soundgarden, vocal harmonies that wouldn't have sounded out of place on the last Alice In Chains album, and one of Jordan Zadorozny's major vocal influences appears to be the very dead Kurt Cobain. Sigh. I don't mind bands wearing their influences on their sleeve, but they really should try to do something interesting with it instead of grunge by numbers. Sigh. Oh, the album is called *A Bourgeois Kitten*, in case you care. I don't.

It used to be that the only one thing that you could depend on from a Sebadoh album, and that was that Lou Barlow would write more songs than anybody else. You could never depend on uniform quality between the songs, but that always made the good ones seem even better. But then *Bakesale* came along and proved that the theory about uniform quality could be broken. And now *Harmacy* has done the same for other rule - Jason Loewenstein writes more songs than Lou. Wow. Fortunately things aren't quite so confusing as the whole uniformity things applies once more. *Harmacy* is very easy to get into - probably more accessible than ever - but only about half the songs would rank as classic Sebadoh, and the majority of those seem to be written by Lou (remember kids, it's quality rather than quantity that is important). Still songs like 'Prince-S', 'On Fire', 'Beauty Of The Ride' and 'Too Pure' make it all worthwhile. And if you are a fan of the band, you were expecting the patchiness anyway. The rest of you will just have to live with it.

The movie *Trainspotting* has a lot to answer for (even though you can't see it in this god-forsaken town) - people speaking with bad Scottish accents, heroin-taking becoming oh-so-fashionable (or so some people would have you believe), and also



Underworld finally getting some fame. It's been hard to escape the video for 'Born Slippy' lately (the one that mentions lager an awful lot), so it was just a matter of time before their second album was released in Canada. And it's finally here - *Second Toughest In The Infants* is a massive, sprawling album that can't simply be called techno in a convenient manner. Like its predecessor, it has more guitars than you'd expect, the whispered vocals of Karl Hyde (most of them are simply a stream of consciousness), and it is also a lot more uncompromising than many of their contemporaries like The Chemical Brothers. And the way that the tracks build up slowly, shifting melody and rhythm is quite spectacular - the first two tracks clock in at about 31 minutes, and it passes far too quickly. Once again, Underworld have come up with one of the best albums of the year - pretty impressive for just another dance act.



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