



# Indie - review

**C**olin Hamilton and Jimmy Blackburntease their beards and comb their pont tails and take a long hard look at the indie releases.

## Single Reviews.

**HEAVY STEREO**  
Sleep Freak -Creation

Creation's latest Next Big Thing debut with a tribute to pop icons of the past, especially those of the early Seventies. Heavy Stereo (a much better name than Whirlpool, which didn't work when they were signed to Food, home of Blur) take a one handed Wizzard bassline, a large sprinkling of (Alvin) Stardust and a fat nineties guitar sound, and come up with...a genuinely original noise rather than the Oasis copy many might have expected. The muffled vocals make it far more intriguing than anticipated and if it gets confused at the end well, they know that their audience wont miss the last minute that doesn't get played on the radio. It's a hit.

**FLUKE**  
Bullet - Circa

Typical classy techno from the ever reliable Fluke in four mixes. Mix one is music to drive too fast to, 70 beats per minute over the limit in fact, with scenery out of focus. Mix two features scenery only, like reading the guide books, mix three is a drive in heavy traffic, where the scenery gets all too familiar and mix four (the 'jazz mix') is like hurrying in new shoes, never quite reaching a comfortable speed.

**PALACE**  
The Mountain EP - Domino



The best country artist ever produced by Steve Albini, Will Palace and friends offer a splendidly uncommercial single which clearly opens with the line 'If I could fuck a mountain then...' If you want to know how he fol-

lows this on this piece of excellent Dylanesque whimsy you'll just have to buy it, 'cause we doubt you'll hear it on the radio. Pity.

**DELICATESSEN**  
I'm Just Alive- Starfish

Probably their best song, this edgy organ led number never lets you relax, as Delicatessen show off their Teardrop Explodes side as opposed to their Bunnymen side. Singer Neil Cahill repeats the title at least seventy eight times to ensure the hook sinks in. Still, it's shorter than the live version. The sound of contemporary English teen angst.

**GUIDED BY VOICES**  
Motor Away - Matador

At two minutes eight seconds this is something of an epic for Dayton, Ohio's Guided By Voices, yet they still manage to pack in more ideas than most of the records released any week. Reminiscent of the greatest moments of the Who this elegant pop song shows that even American teachers in their forties can be touched by genius on occasion. Single of the month.

**TEEN ANGELS**  
Teen Dream - SubPop

Great stuff. They can't write much of a song, or play it too well, but these three girls sure can scream. So they do. A lot. No mix on earth can disguise their inadequacies, but the swearing will ensure no radio play. that and the



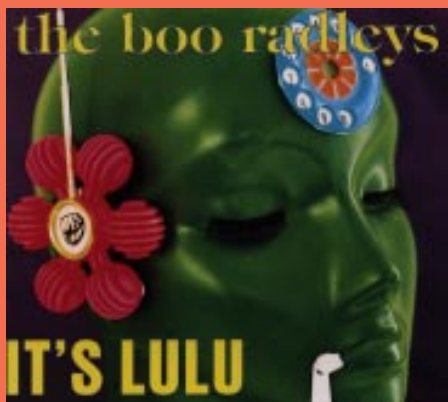
**our price**



sound of it. How Hole would sound if Courtney had taken too many drugs.

**BOO RADLEYS**  
It's Lulu - Creation

It's double toilet from the Boo's weakest album (and biggest hit) so far, but there's enough twiddly on the B sides to interest completists. 'This is Not About Me', the only new track, is pleasantly reminiscent of early Orange Juice, the High Llamas mix of 'Reaching Out From Here' is an invigorating reworking and Stereolab's take on 'Martin, Doom!' is identifiable as their work, and thus satisfactory. Number 34 with a bullet, and no mistake.



**BELLY**  
Seal My Fate - 4AD

The US radio mix of this track conveniently smoothes out the peaks and troughs that make this



one of the best tracks on the 'King'

**"No bite, no edge, no point. As flat as the Netherlands. Dam."**

album. No bite, no edge, no point. As flat as the Netherlands. Dam.

**PJ HARVEY**  
C'Mon Billy - Island

Cor! Didja see Polly Harvey on Top of the Pops last week? Wot a rock chick she is with her gutsy rural rock sound singing about her baby or somefing, and doing all that expressive dancing. Skinny though, int she... This is a great advert for the string arranger, but we can't imagine anyone being seriously enraptured. At this rate Beavis and Butthead will be taking her seriously soon.

**WHIPPING BOY**  
Twinkle -Columbia

Despite a touch of bad language (oo-er missus!) this really is a slick, bland, inoffensive attempt at mass popularity with a smooth 'modern' production that will date it rapidly. This has the shelf life of a Tory cabinet appointee. If you can't find any House of Love records still in your bargain bins anymore this'll have to do.

**SCHTUM**  
New Year Dawning  
Big River

Wow! The New Wave of Northern Irish Operatic Rap Rock Fusion. Is this better or worse than Therapy?? Not very good.

**LONGPIGS**  
She Said - Mother

Singer Crispin Hunt fronts a piece of workmanlike indie rock, which features a touch of fairground organ like Blur, a few stinging guitar lines like



Suede and will doubtless match the chart success of ooh, Back to the Planet or someone.

**STRANGLERS**  
Lies and Deception  
Castle Communications

As ever starts okay but takes the low road when the Scott Walker path to glory beckons. Hardly offensive, or relevant but it just goes to show that you can't teach an old dog new tricks, and if the Stranglers were a dog they'd be 147 years old now. Will Elastica last so long...?



**WHALE**

**I'll Do Ya - Hut**

This bounces along above the bland but without a hope in hell of reaching the inspired. Nonetheless the idea of a roomful of Eurotrash bopping uncoordinatedly to this silly sexy bassline is rather appealing. King of Bristol



Tricky turns up on the flip 'The Now Thing' sounding confused (again), as if his big yokel accent is going to pop out suddenly.

**TINDERSTICKS**

**Travelling Light  
This Way Up**

One of the highlights of the

album, Tindersticks 2, this aching duet with Carla Torgerson is beautifully arranged, excellently performed and deserves to put the 'Sticks on Top of the Pops at last. Two new tracks make up the single, a slight instrumental and a cover of Otis Redding's 'I've Been Loving You Too Long' which successfully captures the churchiness of the original. This national treasure should be recognised. Please bribe your MP to raise the matter in the House.

**SPEEDWAY**

**Entertainment  
Fantasy Ashtray**

Name a bandwagon, and these people will run along desperately trying to catch up with it, changing their threads on the move. This attempt to combine Elastica and Oasis features the thin sound like the former, and the clumsy drummer of the latter. Leave well alone.

**SOUL-JUNK**

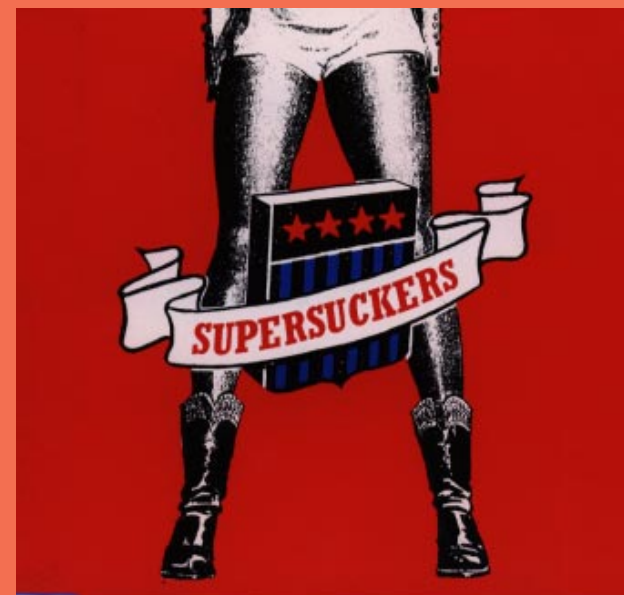
**1946 - SubPop**

In December this year a three piece band from San Diego, California will record an unprepossessing, jazz tinged EP for Seattle's SubPop label, reminiscent of early Meat Puppets. Well, that's the kind of review you get when you get the recording date wrong on

**SUPERSUCKERS**

**Born With a Tail SubPop**

'78 is the key word here. It's the speed they play at, and the year they think they're living in. A pacy singalong tribute to the devil, in a fashion not heard since Johnny Thunders' early demise, don't expect to hear Sir Cliff belting this out. A great single.



**Album Reviews**

**Verve**

**A Northern Soul - Hut**

There was a time that people would travel to Wigan from miles around just





to have a good night out. The highs reached at the Wigan Pier left a long time ago and all that's left is a city centre full of fun pubs. Today Wigan's entertainment is strictly concerned with rugby. This is all about to change and from the remnants of past musical glories come The Verve, renamed from Verve to avoid being confused with an American jazz artist ( a really massive change of name, not - Ed) . The Verve have moved forward and now use a variety of styles. There's the simple blues on Drive You Home and On Your Own, both heavily focused on Richard Ashcroft's dreamy vocals. So It Goes drifts lazily along with a Hammond organ playing over a wah wah guitar sound. The finest moments though, occur during the extended melodic jams which feature loud fuzzy guitars, the opening track, A New Decade, being an excellent example. It gradually fades in, bites and then doesn't let go until it's complete. The title track, A Northern Soul, harks back to the good old day's when Wigan was the centre of the North West. It's another swirling haze of guitars and keyboards sound not unlike The Stone Roses. Wigan has had little glamour during the last ten years maybe The Verve will put it back on the musical map.

**Neil Young**  
**Mirror Ball - WEA**



Neil Young had his fiftieth birthday this year, and is just two



years younger than Mick Jagger. While Jagger spends his time doing what he did thirty years ago Neil Young has managed to age gracefully. He lives in California, but in the San Francisco area rather than star packed LA Neil Young has managed to create a fan base which consists of a full spectrum of ages, from the old who've stayed with him from the Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young era through those who followed him when he embraced punk as his peers ignored it. To those who've recently discovered him via MTV's unplugged. Over his career he his experimented with a number of different styles including country, blues and even techno (What !! - Ed). Despite the variety, there is a

sound that is instantly associated with Neil Young, it's the sound of rough and ready rock and roll of which Mirror Ball is an example. It was recorded quickly in Seattle, with Pearl Jam playing the backing instruments. The high point of the album is Throw Your Hatred Down, a slice of Neil Young at his best, singing simple but heartfelt lyrics over the typical Young guitar noise. Yesterday and Fallen Angel are acoustic numbers which are also typical and complement the more guitar oriented songs. The powerful I am the Ocean has Young state that People my age don't do the things I do, which is sad because we could do with more like him. Neil Young is the proof that being old and popular doesn't necessarily mean that the music produced will be dull and bland. Mirror Ball is a great album that you can listen to with your grandparents.

**Fun-Da-Mental**  
**With Intent To Pervert The**  
**Course Of Injustice.**  
**Nation**

In press releases Fun-Da-Mental have said that they believe that politics and music mix, and understatement if we ever heard one, they believe that politics and music are joined at the hip. Their first album, Seize The Time, warned of the uprising of racism, which happens during times of recession. It called on the weak to empower themselves against Nazis and their ilk. The focus of the album was the strong



heartfelt lyrics, and the idea that they would follow it with an instrumental album was practically



inconceivable. This, though, is what they have done. The album features a variety of sounds collected from various cultures, but most revolve around a central drumbeat and heavy bassline. Politics have not been put on the backburner though. Dog War a nine minute dub extravaganza uses samples from a telephone message left by C18, a pro-nazi organisation who've named themselves after the position of Adolf Hitler's initials in the alphabet. "We're gonna hang you for burning the British flag" comes the

"Tricky makes a few appearances, probably due to some new EC regula-

repetitive threat as the driving beat plays on. When I Want

Your Opinion I'll Ask For It features quotes from Mahatma Ghandi with an empty oil can being hit in the background. Listening to the album is an engaging experience which satisfies at many levels, Fun-Da Mental manage to make their points without forgetting that people buy albums to be entertained.

**WHALE  
We Care (Hut)**

Sweden really is the home of Europe's best pop music, a country where all musical cultures seem to

meltdown into some of the most wilful and knowing stuff around. And possibly the nearest that we come on this side of the pond to the American ideal of youth with too much money and time on its hands producing playful trash for fun, but improved by added Euro-irony. As a band made up of a children's TV presenter, a hip hop producer and a comedian, and a couple of MEPs for all I know Whale really have made the record you'd expect- it's all over the bloody place. Last years non-hit, MTV favourite 'Hobo Humpin'

Slobo Babe', a bizarre collision of Sugarcubes and Jane's Addiction still stands out, but recent singles 'Pay for Me' (heavy Beasties, sorta) and 'I'll Do Ya' (a funky nursery rhyme) hardly lag. The omnipresent Tricky makes a few appearances, probably due to some new EC regulation, not least on the acoustic strumalong 'Kickin' and the magically titled 'Young Dumb 'n' Full of Cum', sounding no less confused than he usually does, and it all seems perfectly natural. The splendidly shoddy cover art, and blurry photo credited to the possibly fictional Eddie Monsoon complete the impression that Whale really don't give a toss about their image. Despite the limp joke closer of 'Born to Raise Hell', which fights it out for pointlessness with compatriots the Cardigans and their Black Sabbath covers this really is a wholly laudable record.

(JB)

**SCARCE: Deadsexy  
(Paradox/A & M)**

This is a bit of a tough one to write about seeing as Scarce frontman Chick Graning is currently in a coma in a hospital in Providence, Rhode Island. Having suffered a brain haemorrhage and pneumonia that very nearly killed him a few weeks ago. Apparently as I write the signs are better, but it certainly casts a pall over this excellent





album. Anyone who turned up early to the shows on the recent Hole tour may have been aware of an indistinct fuzzy noise coming from one end of the hall, where a dapper man and woman and a drummer were going through their paces. That was in fact Scarce, though it's only now listening to this record that I can tell the songs apart. Thanks for sharing the PA Courtney, or didn't you think that people were there to listen to the



music? Whatever, 'Deadsexy' is a fine record, cocky and abrasive in equal measure, and not scared to approach the poetic, which must have appealed to Grating's ex, one Tanya Donnelly. And when the limitations of the three piece sound are approached, sheer verve pulls them through. A few dreaded Bowie-isms sometimes scar the music (Scarce cover

'Ashes to Ashes' on stage ) but tracks as good as 'All Sideways', 'Days like this' and recent single 'Glamorising Cigarettes', to name but three, transcend this. An impressive album. I hope there will be more.

**BUFFALO TOM**  
**Sleepy Eyed (Beggars Banquet)**

Boston's Buffalo Tom ,forever on the brink of the big time, present their fifth album to a less than expectant world, and it starts with a surprise. It sounds just like the Clash! Okay, this impression lasts for one full line of the excellent opener 'Tangerine', but it's certainly a new weapon in their armoury. The rest of it sounds like Buffalo Tom as usual with deeply sincere and gritty vocals from Bill Janovitz, and the continually churning rock trio sound the band have made their trademark. 'Summer' is something of a standout, with its delightful detuned lead guitar offering a different texture, and bassist Chris Colbourn, who contributes a handful of corny, catchy songs to each album comes up trumps this time with the entertainingly prosaic 'Kitchen Door'. But all too often this record just wanders off into sweaty predictability, and the songs seem to lack the vigour of past favourites like 'Taillights fade' and 'Late at Night'. Janovitz's passion has unsurprisingly led to the crack of 'Buffalo Springsteen' being aimed at

the band, but I can't help but wonder if some new blood is needed to revive the formula. Doubtless they'll soon prove me wrong live, but this album is too often the sound of a talented band treading water. Good, but not exciting.

**PALACE**  
**Viva Last Blues (Domino)**

Will Palace is a strange looking bloke, make no mistake, with his big hat and even bigger forehead, which makes his mysterious tales of rural America sound just that bit more authentic. He really seems to have carved out his own niche just perfectly, with his wavering voice, and semi- famous friends backing him. This record evokes nothing more than prime 'Blonde On Blonde' period Dylan, where each instrumentalist seems to have their own path to follow, yet no one ever gets the better of the excellent songs. This may well be the first Steve Albini recording to feature the word 'blues' in its title, but recording techniques don't dominate here. 'Viva Last Blues' moves from an alternate take of the exquisitely uncommercial single 'The Mountain low', through the seriously rocking 'Work hard Play hard' and 'Cat's Blues' to the fragile one-man-and-an-acoustic closer 'Old Jerusalem' with serious grace, and all the time that exquisitely untamed voice pulls you in. It's nothing new of course, but it really is an addition to a tradition that goes from Hank





Williams through Dylan and Gene Clark to the present day. Lovely. (JB)



**NYACK:**  
11 Track Player (Echo)

Nyack is an American combo, (see this months feature section for more info) apparently named after their home suburb in New York State, that loved British pop music so much that they came here to live the life and share their vision with us. Cute, but sadly their take on Anglo pop seems to consist of nothing greater than a revival of the dreaded 'Shoegazing' craze that plagued us a few years ago. So a couple

of tracks on the Foo Fighters album sound a little bit like Ride? That's no excuse for putting us through this one dimensional, rather flat sounding debut. I just keep thinking about excellent and currently inactive US Anglophile bands like The Posies and Gigolo Aunts and wishing I was listening to them instead. Two things to note- this album includes an interactive facility when put into a CD ROM drive, giving information on the band, and also singer Craig Sterns chose to 'come out' in the Melody Maker for Christ's sake. The lack of ambition this second fact demonstrates is matched by this record.

**PITCHBLENDE**  
Au Jus (Matador)

Mmmm, lovely sleeve guys, various body parts in soft fleshy close up, but once you've got over the oh so predictable attempts to shock this really is one of the best records of its type that I've heard in a while. That type being wholly unlistenable American white boy rock which sounds like they're following the changes off sheet music, or at least had a lot of time on their hands to learn all the complicated twists. Pitchblende are from Washington DC, this is apparently their third album, and it is a vicious scalding racket that pounds away with astonishing power and focus. In reality this is of course the anti-funk, an exact opposite of loose limbed and rambling,

and quite as uptight as young Americans should be making before they go on to their manifest destiny of



success, wealth and working for fifty one weeks a year. Painfully reminiscent of Breadwinner if that means anything, this is a fine record for those that like such things. The other 99% of you can safely live without it. Big bonus points for using the expression 'Vex me' in the lyrics.

**RAILROAD JERK:**  
One Track Mind (Matador)

Now this is a pleasant surprise. I know nothing about this New York based combo, even my friend The Oracle of All Knowledge can't remember the name of their previous outfit, but I bet





they were equally obscure if not actively made up. Whatever, Railroad Jerk have come up with the best fake Rolling Stones record of the year so far. Lots of country-blues acoustic slide guitar, some neat harp playing, the bizarre sound of Americans impersonating an Englishman impersonating Americans, and an attractively clumsy grinding sound that at its best approaches Captain Beefheart (R & B phase). Okay so it's overlong, and derivative, and frequently unconvincing, but so are Royal Trux and they cant even sing in tune on their own Jagger steals. Best tracks include the impossibly inauthentic 'Home=Hang' and the excellent 'Rollerkoaster', and the singer is called Marcellus. What more could you want?

(JB)

**LIQUORICE:**  
**Listening Cap (4AD)**

Liquorice is a three piece led by Jenny Toomey, formerly of Tsunami, an American band that someone I once knew liked 'because they look like nurses.' Well, I'm sure she'd give him a kicking for saying that, but even the often feeble if well meaning Tsunami had more life than this coffee bar soundtrack. A recent live showing proved my point as the trio (guitar, acoustic, drums, no bass) failed to grab anyone's attention. Some moderately perceptive lyrics

can't make up for the sheer lifelessness of the music. Power is not always equated with volume, as say Palace prove so unequivocally, but this is just dull, dull stories of other peoples dull lives. Great. Tell me another. One of the songs is written by a Franklin Bruno, by the way, so we'll assume that one's okay. 'Night Cap' would be a more appropriate title, ho ho.

(JB)

**HARDSHIP POST:**  
**Somebody Spoke (SubPop)**

It's not very long since Seattle was Rock City USA and SubPop was the label that waved the flag for others to follow. But more recently a different style seems to have set in among North Western bands, with only the Supersuckers currently trading in stupidity. Hardship Post are yet another introspective three piece dealing in well crafted if somewhat understated pop tunes, tunes which will never grab the attention of millions but are hardly likely to lead to offence either. So no danger of any Cobain style rags to riches to heartache story here, but songs like 'Your Sunshine', 'Slick-Talkin' Jack' and closer 'If I...' will gain them a place in the hearts of those who think they can sniff out a new label identity. Underwhelming, but not unpleasant.

(JB)

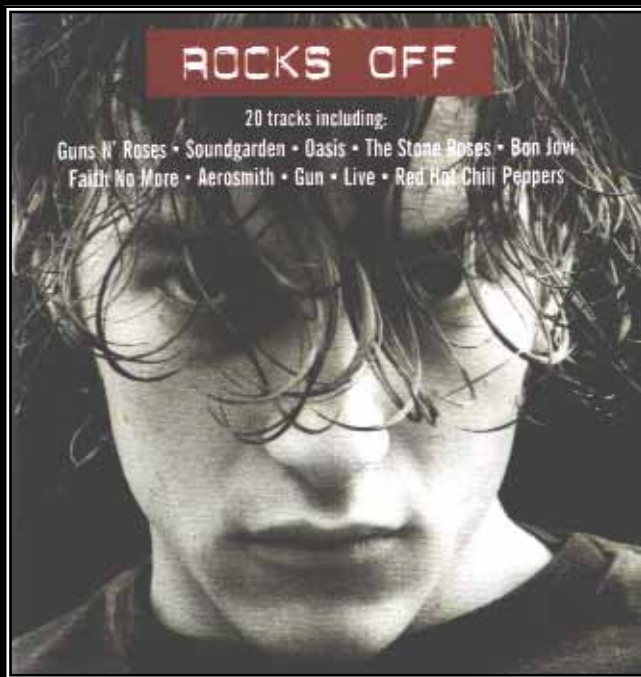
**NED'S ATOMIC DUSTBIN:**  
**Brainbloodvolume (Sony)**

Hmm, whatever happened to Ned's Atomic Dustbin? That's the question on the lips of absolutely nobody, as the world of teeny pop seems to have been through about five cycles since their last contribution to the joy of the world. In fact 'Brainbloodvolume', (a reference to trepanning, the ancient art of drilling a hole in one's skull for mysterious effect- you may have seen the queues at the trepanning stall at Glastonbury this year-) was released in the USA months ago. Though their original Stateside success may have had more to do with the free record that came wrapped with each T-shirt, Ned's used to at least have some young spunk and spirit to back up their increasingly obvious chantalong choons. But this, this is so polite you wonder what their intention was. A nice sound sure, but producer Tim Palmer ('a fine English fellow') is best known for working with Tears for Fears for God's sake, and it's rare to find a record with no standout tracks at all. Recent flop single 'All I ask of myself...' opens and it gets no better from there. And don't print the lyrics please. They only show the world that you dropped out of education to join a rock band. Come in Ned's, your fifteen minutes are up. I listened to this, honest.

(JB)







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