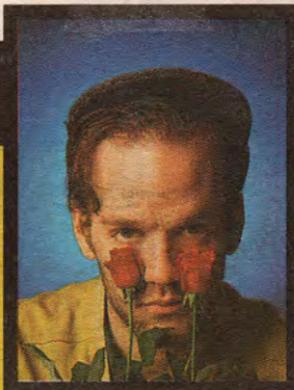


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The Shamen in double vision photographed by Steve Double



# LONG PLAY

EDITED BY Keith Cameron

## PROFESSOR GRIFF — THE XMINISTA

**Disturb N Tha Peace (Musidisc/All formats)**  
THREE YEARS and as many albums since being excommunicated from Public Enemy's cathedral of sound and fury, Griff still keeps the faith in subtle but significant ways. Both his self-styled title — a pun on his former role as PE's "Minister of Information" — and the noise-salad construction of this latest solo concoction ripple with ever diminishing echoes of past glory: crackling radio interference, apocalyptic air-raid atmospherics, language reshaped and subverted into lyrical grenades lobbed from moving vehicles.

More than ever, GBH of the earholes is Griff's intent. But the largely Old School ammunition he assembles is increasingly shoddy and second-hand, sacrificing sense and clarity to cheap melodrama and global conspiracy theories which escalate beyond mere paranoia into science fiction. Nonsense slogans are his forte ("suck you through into overweight reality") with vagueness and verbosity frequently masquerading as genuine rage. The overall message? Allah is great, the Klan are nasty, racism is bad, diddy diddy dee.

A dirtier, funkier edge prowls beneath the in-your-face bellowing of noteworthy interludes like 'God Bless Amerikka' or 'Blackdraft', suggesting Griff seeks to emulate the resurgence in gangsta rap with this self-conscious stab at a rougher, street-level sound. Certainly the vat-grown laboratory feel of much PE material has been stripped away, but he lacks the sheer brutish simplicity or lyrical firepower to compete with NWA and the Ice men on their own turf.

If he would just cool out and momentarily stem this loquacious, we might be allowed to savour a powerhouse rock-out of alleged anti-sexism called 'Sista Sista' or the Terminator X-style scratch symphony 'Two Minute War...ning'. But his empty rants keep rolling, potentially salient points buried beneath witless yap-yapping which obeys no logical guidelines and protects itself by dismissing all criticism as evil distortion, like in the self-explanatory 'Phuck The Media'.

Throughout this lumbering, unfocused sprawl of an album, however, the suspicion persists that — like most people who talk too much — the Minister of Disinformation has phuck all of interest to say. (6)

Stephen Dalton

## SHAWN CHRISTOPHER Another Sleepless Night (Arista/All formats)

HERE'S A funny thing: Arista finally get round to releasing the Shawn Christopher album, and while in certain quarters of the dance community the term 'long-awaited' will be bandied about, here's the rub — she has already been dropped from the roster.

This indignity follows a sporadic relationship which has seen long periods pass between singles like the title cut and 'Don't Lose The Magic', the latter present here in two mixes. There have been promotional double-packs with multi-mixes galore and healthy club buzzes, but a distinct lack of corporate muscle. So the records weren't

hits and Shawn is back on the shelf.

How I'd love to inform Arista that they have unwittingly and posthumously sneaked out a dance crossover milestone that will catapult the Chicago songstress into the supreme diva bracket. But unfortunately, 'Another Sleepless Night' — with producer/main composer Mike 'Hitman' Wilson getting nearly as many big letter credits as Shawn, — plops smack in the middle of the desperate major label dance mire, trying to seep into every level but ending up bogged down somewhere round the U-bend.

Between the ebullient melodic house of the two singles there are various stabs at En Vogue rap-pop, smooth ballads, swingbeat and disco — all invariably polished to the point of non-existence. Witness the debuts of CeCe Peniston and Kym Sims last year perusing the same blueprint.

But she has a great voice. So back to the underground with Shawn and let's hope it acts like a trampoline. (5)

Kris Needs

## THE CRANBERRIES

### Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We? (Island/All formats)

DELORES O'RIORDAN should not be confused with some gender warrior, kicking and screaming for equal rights. Which doesn't mean she's a victim or a simpering stereotype, just that the minutiae of life interests her a lot more than power struggles, and she uses The Cranberries as a vehicle to detail her finely-honed observations on the vagaries of love.

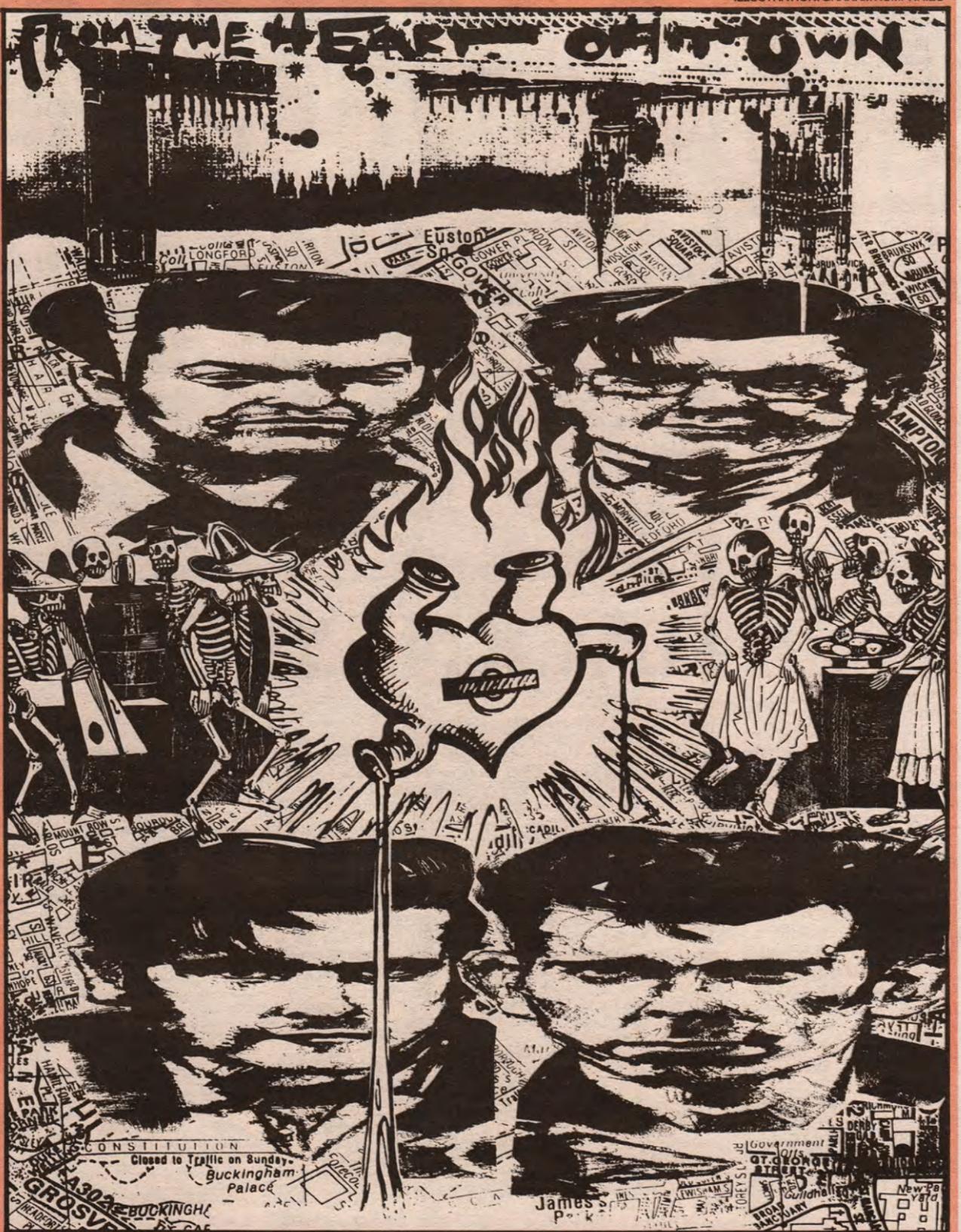
For her pains, the group continue to be perceived as backwoods oiks from Limerick, West Ireland, suffused with too much innocence for their own good, and the long-awaited debut LP goes only some of the way to dispel this.

For better or worse, The Cranberries exist in a timewarp of their own making where sometimes jangling, only faintly unconventional songs are stretched out on the rack of a smooth production — complete with occasionally excessive ornamentation — with just sudden jarring blasts of guitar left to disturb the tasteful, muted backdrops. What separates the 'Berries from the herd is the grain of Delores' flighty voice — a signature instrument that swoops, ducks and dives, or just snuggles up close to the speakers, stretching vowels and consonants, investing a line like "if only you could see beyond your nose" with all the gravity of Dostoyevsky.

Possibly due to the almost endearing conservatism of the group, they manage to craft heartfelt, straight-talking songs with no hidden metaphors or double meanings (unless you search real hard). The assertive 'Still Can't' and the super-catchy 'Dreams' make for fine contrast to the emotional nakedness displayed on the big-ballad 'I Will Always', the defiant 'Not Sorry' and the stormy acrobatics of 'Waltzing Black'.

If these were less austere, more settled times, The Cranberries would have accounted for a completely valid LP. As things fall, at least the bolder, more majestic melodic sweep of 'Put Me Down' suggests things are just beginning for them. The next step would be to throw some much-needed curveballs. (6)

Dele Fadele



# NW1 FROM THE HEART

## GALLON DRUNK

### From The Heart Of Town (Clawfish/All formats)

LONDON KILLS you. Literally. Health studies now place the capital of this septic isle well towards the bottom of the European quality of life league, and as the dream of a politically unified Euro-state inches closer to fact it takes only an hour or so on a Number 36 bus to realise just how wide the social and cultural gap still yawns. Next to Prague, Amsterdam, Hamburg or Edinburgh, London more and more resembles a ramshackle fop, addled on his fading memories of better days and heading for the gutter.

Gallon Drunk are on first name terms with the bloke. They've followed him on his travels along the city's main arterial route — the Northern Line, colour code: black, of course — from the guilty poor-man's sleaze of Soho, up to Camden and its tatty Bohemia, before staggering off to whatever perimeter bedsit hell constitutes home this week. All along the way, they've kept the drinks coming and lent a sympathetic ear to the old sot, soaking in the salient details of this saddest of hard-luck tales in preparation for one day telling their side of the story. And this is it: 'From The Heart Of Town', a stunning Cinemascope vision of a city in terminal decay. Rarely has squalor sounded so sublime.

The Drunks find both repulsion and rapture in the low-life forms they've documented with such verve for the past three or so years, but now for the first time those outside the GD inner sanctum can see what they've been getting at. While the previous two albums really worked only as companions to the band's vicious live shows — nostalgic reminders of a great night out but not essential documents in their own right — 'From The Heart...' is an aural treat, revealing these smoothly kitted-out flakes to be artful manipulators of time-warped noise. Verily, it's the Gallon Drunk record you can listen to all the way through without checking to see if the stylus is bugged.

It's also by no means necessary to have completed a tour of North London's premier ale-houses in order to get the gist. Thus, although those with the requisite local savvy will recognise the so-called 'Temperance House' outside of which 'Arlington Road's' wrecked protagonist is sprawled, everyone can marvel at the Drunk's new-found sonic sobriety.

The 'Road', spattered with vomit and broken dreams, culminates in a brass burn-out from Terry Edwards, one of many vital contributions from the one-time Higson. As well as him, the hired hands include Geraldine Swayne and Stereolab's Laetitia

Sadier on cool backing vox and producer Phil Wright's strings and Hammond organ. Unlike many bands who, after exhausting their initial set of tools mistakenly equate instrumental profusion with progression, Gallon Drunk actually take on a new stature from broadening their scope — doubtless because this cornucopic worldview was lurking in their well-oiled genes all along.

It's James Johnston's vocals, however, that prove the greatest revelation. Specifically, they're intelligible now, when in the past it's been debatable if the lad was actually bothering to write lyrics. As a consequence, a vivid new dimension to Gallon Drunk opens up, as Johnston tires of being merely the most adept hiccuper in rock and decides that the debauched croon is much more his style. The opening 'Jake On The Make' might well be a blast of self-referential fantasy — "Peeling notes off his roll/And the alcohol's taking its toll/And he is a sight to behold" — and if so the massed organ stomp-track clinches the neon-dazzled scene, a sort of Camdenised 'Hey Big Spender'.

Whether out of boredom with their former selves or simply the disposal of greater resources, Gallon Drunk are now far less inclined to adopt the kitchen sink approach to orchestration. Lyrically, 'Keep Moving On' is a poisonous farewell to a former acquaintance ("You left the old place smelling stale/Good riddance to bad rubbish") but coyly built around a plangent piano theme that momentarily ducks out to usher through a surprise dissonant blast. 'You Should Be Ashamed' is a finger-clicking marvel, as James et femmes swap cocktail harmonies and Edwards pops by for a nimble sax break. Perhaps best of all is the fully-fledged groove monument 'Push The Boat Out', where James stands astride a sinful Mike Delanian bass riff and proceeds to lash the metaphorical lariat 'til the neighbours get stropky. Follow that, is its impossibly rhetorical demand — the only way out after this is 'Paying For Pleasure', a hangover reverie for banjo and broken heart.

Gallon Drunk's lasting achievement lies in how they've cast back to the pre-rock era, magnified those optimistic years into high melodrama and shot through a multitude of genres with their own punkish bravura and wicked humour. Look past what some consider their retro look and you'll find an utterly contemporary band, making music the like of which we've never heard before. Yeah, London kills but these suave citizens are going down triumphantly. (8)

Keith Cameron