

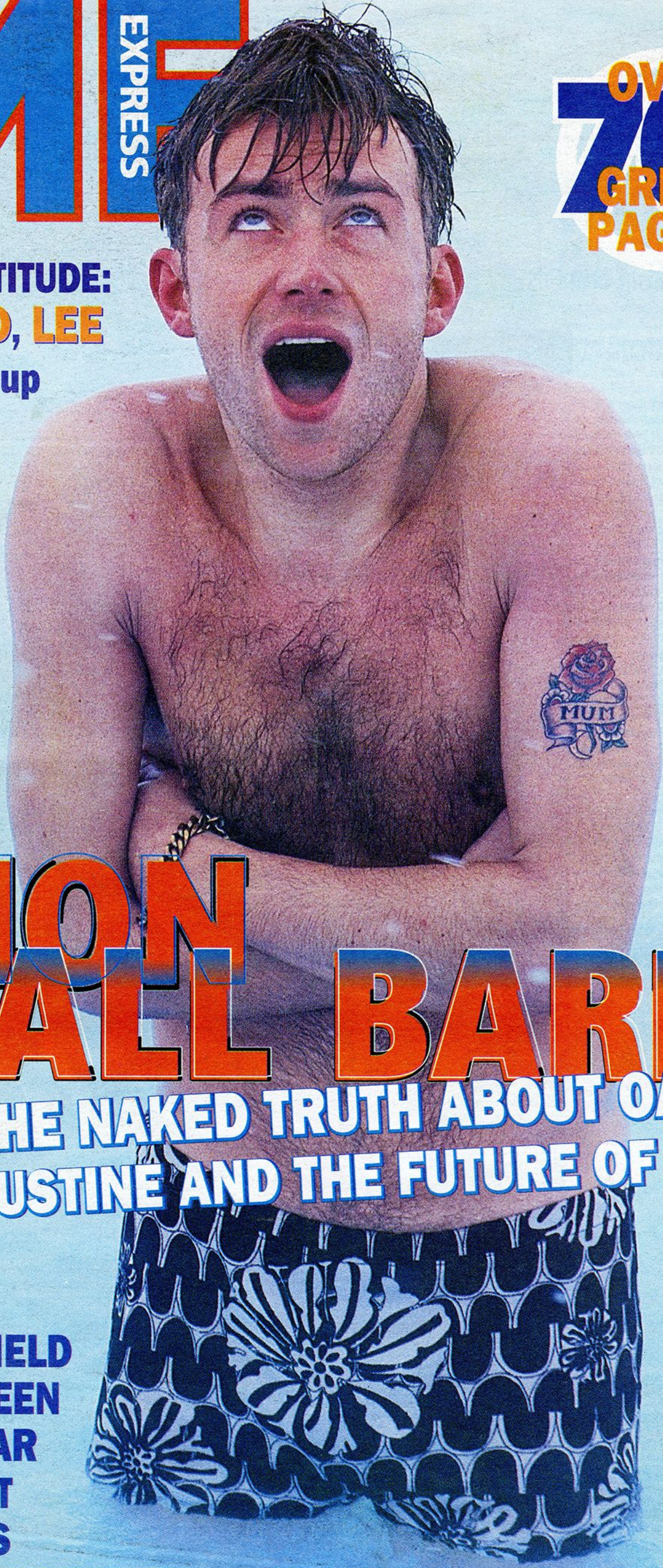
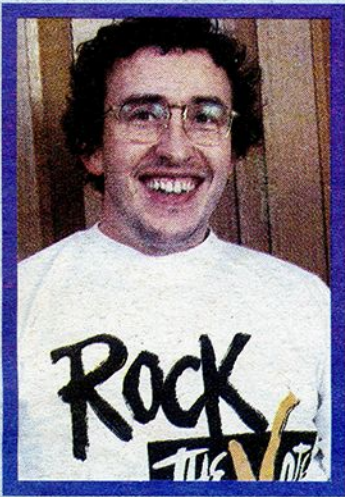
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SNIGGERS WITH ATTITUDE: COOGAN, IZZARD, LEE & HERRING stand up and Rock The Vote



DAMON ALL BARE!

THE NAKED TRUTH ABOUT OASIS, JUSTINE AND THE FUTURE OF BLUR



- ORBITAL ★ LEFTFIELD
- BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
- NORTHERN UPROAR
- MEAT LOAF ★ ICE-T
- THE CRANBERRIES
- BOB MOULD ★ TECHNOHEAD

Blur's Damon Albarn photographed by Kevin Cummins

THE CRANBERRIES

To The Faithful Departed
(Island/All formats)

WHEN SHE goes to bed at night, what does Dolores Cranberry dream of? Does she toss and turn for hours, haunted by ghosts of dead pop stars, by the sad staring eyes of Bosnian babies, by the flower of a nation's youth turned into heroin slaves? Does she slumber through rosy pastel-shade reveries of

her wedding day, and think back on the good old days with her granddad? Or, are great emerald dollar signs all that she sees, millions of them, crash-landing at her feet in the Irish countryside? It's a cynical thought, but it appears many similar have gone into the making of 'To The Faithful Departed'. For The Cranberries' third album, the monumental ego and emetic 'conscience' of Dolores O'Riordan dominate. In

DEAD AND BERRIED



LONG PLAY

common with many other Irish superstars, notably the globe-straddling folly of U2, she has realised that nothing sells quite so well in the States as a bit of bleeding-heart blarney. Who needs originality, goes the subtext, when you can snare all those dewy-eyed ex-pats with a bit of no, make that a shitload - of crass, unbelievably patronising sentimentality? To The Faithful Departed, as you may have guessed, is a frankly odious album. At times like this, we're meant to search for redeeming features, to try a little positive criticism. Well... it's hard. Apart from the just about passable 'When You're Gone' this is stoically dull indie-pop, beefed up by a few crunchy grunge guitars (think 'Zombie' to the power of ten). The whole has then been glossed over with a kitchen-sink-hello-Cleveland production from Van Halen and Aerosmith man, Bruce Fairbairn. And, of course, it's all topped off with the yodelling, yelling horror show that is O'Riordan's voice. The Irish lilt is emphasised to the lucrative max, while her formative Cocteau-ish sugar hiccup has been almost completely dumped. My, how she's changed. From being naive and almost painfully shy, she now sweeps in as 'Conscience Of A Generation', blessing her attentive flock with what are, quite genuinely, mind-bendingly bad lyrics. How bad? Exhibit one: the howling 'Salvation' single; Dolores decides drugs are... BAD! "To all those people doin' lines, don't do it, don't do it," she implores, before revealing her foolproof solution: "To all the parents with sleepless nights, sleepless nights/Tie your kids on to their beds, clean their heads!!!" One visualises, some time in the future, the

Betty Ford-style Dolores O'Riordan Clinic, where addled delinquents are strapped on racks and violently scrubbed back to purity. Ah, the benefits of a good Catholic education. Exhibits two and three: 'War Child' (cloying, hymnal) and 'Bosnia' (military drums, caterwauling, bombast, children's chorus, tinkling music box, grand arse on a Balkan scale). Dolores decides war is... BAD! "War child, victim of political pride/Plant the seed, territorial greed/Mind the war child, we should mind the war child," she coos movingly. Cheers. Exhibits four and five: 'I'm Still Remembering' and 'I Just Shot John Lennon'; Dolores decides famous people getting shot is... BAD! "What of Kurt Cobain, will his presence still remain?" she ponders in the former, "Remember JFK, ever saintly in a way/Where are you now? Where are you now?" They're DEAD, woman, that's why you've written a dreadful song exploiting their posthumous personality cults.

You know those cloddishly-rhymed, innocently glib poems written by ten-year-olds? 'I Just Shot John Lennon' is even more incompetent. "He had perceptively known that it wouldn't be nice/Because in 1980 he paid the price," she points out (Hello? Hello?), before revealing that "With a Smith & Wesson .38/John Lennon's life was no longer a debate." A debate? A bleak philosophical struggle to reconcile stardom and art? A battle to try and comprehend the divided soul of a man and a Beatle? Or a really clever rhyme for ".38"? In years to come, whole theses will be dedicated to analysing her insights. Oh, and it ends, in thunderous bad taste, with gunshots. You kill me, you guys.

So there you go. It's one thing to hear the opinions of lumberingly stupid bands. It's another, substantially more pernicious thing, for someone to think their cretinous take on The Big Issues is important. Ultimately, the most profound questions that 'To The Faithful Departed' raises about the human condition are: does stardom make you utterly invulnerable to criticism from your bandmates, employers and oh-so-cosy family? And, hence, didn't anyone try and stop her? The answer, naturally, is of course not. Why stop something that will strike a heartwarming chord with millions the world over? Why mock the knowingly folksy, the perceptively simplistic? And why deny a bunch of arrogant, snobbish music 'critics' the chance of a good snidey laugh? That's 'To The Faithful Departed' sewn up: the absolute bollox, mate. (1) John Mulvey

SUPERMODEL

Clumba Mar (Fire/CD/LP)

YOU ARE from Egham - not a place which is intrinsically 'interesting'. The rest of your life looks grim, in a standard-class commuter sort of way. Until that is, you realise that you're going to subvert your middle-class origins, by opting (metaphorically) to defecate on the tablecloth of decency, by becoming an extremely grotty indie band. Having settled upon a suitably ironic moniker, and identified Teenage Fanclub's 'Catholic Education' as the epitome of slack-rock genius, you set yourself to work. With the requisite lazy vocals and deliberately de-tuned guitars in place, you skillfully recreate the finest moments of your good-natured Scottish cousins. With the result that 'Haircut', 'No Second Coming' and 'Satsuma' all shamble into the public arena with a subtly in-built

sense of familiarity. Of course, you realise that man cannot live by fiendishly-accurate tribute alone, so you decide to spice things up with a spot of controversy. The Sex Pistols were controversial, weren't they? Hey presto, you surreptitiously purloin the best bits of 'God Save The Queen' in the process writing a song called 'Where Do I Stand?'. Which is really good. Flushed with success, you decide to pen your own mildly controversial but devilishly catchy pop song - with a rude word in the title ('Penis Size And Cars'). This also turns out to be a brilliant idea. Suddenly, it begins to dawn on you that you can escape bourgeois-hell with your own songs, containing nothing 'borrowed' from other people. You knock out 'Chordroy Messiah', cunningly beginning it with the lyric, "I want to kill a Tory". You are banished from Egham. Mission accomplished. (7) James Oldham

JAH STITCH

Original Raggamuffin (1975-77) (Blood & Fire/LP/CD)

THE PROBLEM with the current fashion for '70s roots reggae reissues is one of context. At the time, Rastafarians were vilified from Kingston to London, and their works were seen as those of rebellious devils out to undermine decent society, much like rappers today. By '96, however, and those fiery outpourings of yore seem quaint and vaguely deluded, compared with the digital nightmares of today's JA youngbloods - and you don't get record companies hurrying to release those. In this light, Jah Stitch's claim to be an original raggamuffin is akin to a refugee from a '70s blaxploitation flick lecturing some hip-hop hardhead on his past prowess, nothing to really trouble you. Sure, he once survived gunshot bullets to the head, which changed his voice, but his brimstone 'n' fire exhortations to the youth seem cosy and conservative in more amoral and twisted times. And, anyway, whisper it, Stitch was not necessarily the most innovative DJ of his times. He might have been one of the first, but he was certainly superseded by I-Roy, Dillinger, Tapper Zukie, even. Which isn't to say that 'Original Raggamuffin' doesn't carry some weight, especially on tracks recorded before the shooting. 'Give Jah The Glory' is one of many rantings over crisp, familiar Bunny Lee tracks, that haunt with the sandpaper-voice-in-echo-chamber effects; 'Zion Gate/Every Wicked Have To Crawl' languidly combines him with Horace Andy; and 'Watch Your Step Youthman' - or indeed its recut, the nasty 'Crazy Joe' diss - percolates nicely over a Johnny Clarke version of 'Crazy Baldhead'. But then, that's the problem, you end up ignoring the messages and transpotting instead. (6) Dele Fadele

MC EHT

Death Threatz (Epic/All formats)

WERE WE not such a bunch of wusses, MC Eht (rhymes, helpfully with 'fight') would probably mean a great deal more to us. He's an actor, a frequent visitor to the American Top Ten, but above all he's jolly tough. A bit like the letter 'z', killing is a very big thing for the MC. Killing in conjunction with drugs ('Drugs N Killin'); killing whatever the weather ('Killin Season') - and should the termination of life in question coincide with a letter 'z', ('Killin Nigguz') why then so much the better! Yet strangely, we don't really give a toss. This must be because, having earned huge dosh acting (most notably in *Boyz n The Hood* - a great film for both violence and 'z's'), he has become a little removed from the environment he purports to describe. Now, it

seems, he speaks Gangsta As A Foreign Language, forced to receive linguistic advice from Street Consultants who visit him at home. He is, as he proclaims with dismal regularity throughout the entire record, "In the mother-in' house". And what a house that probably is. From the comfort of said dwelling, therefore, Eht attempts, with his pasteurised G-funk in tow, to discourse knowledgeably on the LA gang situation. Insightfully, he informs us that there exist territories ('hoods') on which it is inadvisable to trespass lest one get shot. Well, fancy that. MC Eht (rhymes with 'nice, early night') calls this attitude 'Thugs 4 Life'; he may not actually walk it any more, but for the sake of the youngsters, he still talks it. A nice thought, but his raps are rubbish and it's all a bit lame for this bitch ass. (4) John Robinson

TASMIN ARCHER

Bloom (EMI/CD/Cassette)

IT'S a slightly doleful existence for female singer/songwriters. After all, there's only so much heartfelt, acoustic woe that the general public can take at any one given time, leaving you to spend many an anxious hour pondering whether your career trajectory is going to be more Tanita Tikaram than Annie Lennox. Back in 1992, Tasmin Archer looked as though she'd successfully wooed the slightly-bland, car-driving audience, as her debut LP - 'Great Expectations' - became that year's indispensable near-life experience. Unfortunately, she then disappeared. In her absence, PJ Harvey, Björk and Alanis Morissette all set about proving that sounding like you're advertising holidays in Nashville was no longer the prerequisite for chart success. Meaning that four years on, Tasmin's faced with the task of convincing us all over again. The cover of 'Bloom' doesn't exactly inspire much confidence. Wearing a floral caftan, sporting a Toyah haircut and standing against a quasi-mystical crystal backdrop, Tasmin seems to be saying only one thing: place me in the dumper now, please. Fears are heightened by the inclusion of 'Rain Falling' - an enduring image of her strumming a little guitar as the raindrops fall, and her cat nuzzles gently against her leg, demanding some more Sheeba. Thankfully, she soon snaps out of cyber-drip mode, opting to become woebegone in the far more feisty style of Chrissie Hynde ('One More Good Night With The Boys'), before providing something for the boys with The Velvet Underground-boogie of 'Memory'. Ultimately then, this is still an album strictly for grown-ups. (4) James Oldham

GOOBER PATROL

Vacation (Them's Good/CD only)

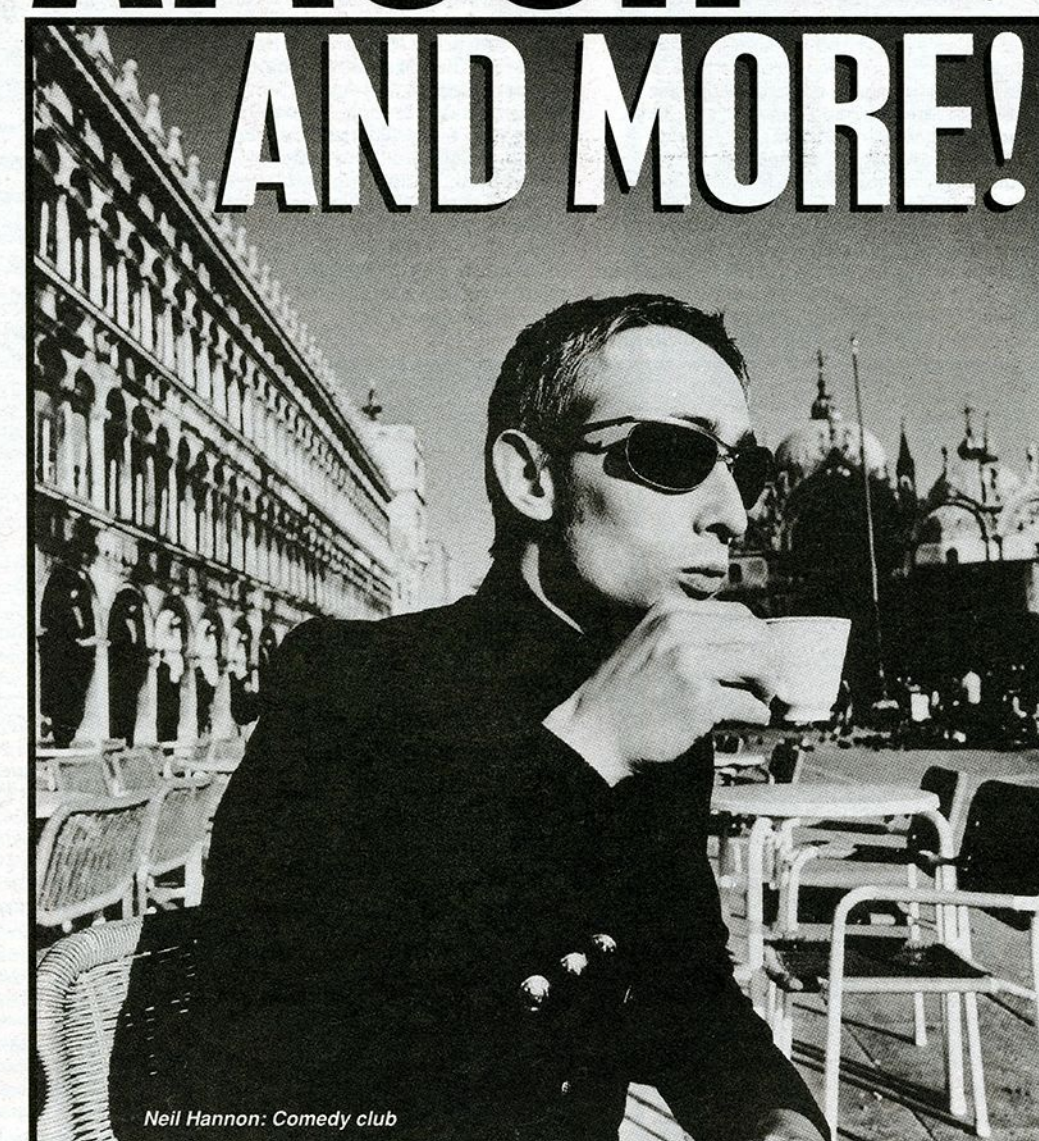
SCUZZY POONK rockers off the port bow, Cap'n! Stand by to sink 'em with a load of cannonballing jokes about bondage straps and smelling like Special Brew vomit. But shiver me bloomin' timbers, if the Norwich foursome don't level a broadside of superfast happy-core and send us to Davy Jones' locker with an idiot grin on our faces. Yep, Goober Patrol's third holiday on wax (previous conceptual outings being 'Truck Off', about living on crisps in the back of an unhygienic Transit, and 'Dutch Ovens' based around the Kafka-esque notion of, erm, farting under the bedclothes) sees the East Anglian loon-punks going for the more serious approach with *Question Time*-type musings entitled 'Duvet Rising', and 'Egghead', all played at one zillion miles an hour like a scrapper, messier, kebab-stained Stiff Little Fingers. While 14 songs in the space of just over half-an-hour doesn't leave much room for experiment, 'The Biggest Joke' does manage to drop a gear for a splendid shouty skank. But mainly it's all a heads-down sprint through the shopping centre with a TV under your arm. 'Vacation' is the kind of cider-blurred record tartan-trousered punkers would usually swap for a tub of glue, but it's so full of a silly-wigged lust for life that anyone can join in for a mental pogo. Daft punx rule. (6) John Perry

BEN FOLDS FIVE

Ben Folds Five (Passenger/Caroline/CD/LP)

BEN FOLDS Five sound like all the artists that any self-respecting cool person should avoid at all costs: Randy Newman, Steely Dan, Supertramp, ELO, Elton John, Todd Rundgren; the very stuff punx sought to destroy. Dispensing with guitar in favour of a baby grand piano and high-pitched harmonies, Ben Folds Five are at odds with 1996. They hail from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, bedrock of the US indie ethos and hometown of Superchunk and Archers of Loaf. But while his peers gnash on their six strings, Folds plunked the keys, playing songs that have more in common with Gershwin than Cobain. The rub is, it works. Realistically speaking, their

AMOUR AND MORE!



Neil Hannon: Comedy Club

THE DIVINE COMEDY

Casanova (Setanta/All formats)

SOME THINGS, thank the lord, never change. For six years, The Divine Comedy's Neil Hannon has watched from his Merchant Ivory

tower as the decade's pop pretenders have scrapped, bickered and mutated like mere slimy things with guitar pedals below him. Occasionally he'd offer down his sprawling yet magnificent records like a toffop Rapunzel, but most of the time he reclined upon his tattered Victorian chaise longue and dreamed his grandiose cartoon dreams. The records - '93's 'Liberation' and '94's croissant-flavoured 'Promenade' - were increasingly sumptuous affairs, bulging with cinematic string cascades, obscure references to long-decomposed poets and huge dollops of archaic, upper-class romanticism. And with every release the record-buying public nodded sagely as one and declared, 'Hmmm, very nice... Erm, anybody got any Veras...?' Luckily, with 'Casanova', Neil has a few tricks up his elegantly-ruffled sleeve. The Scott Walker mannerisms and tales of betrayal, adoration and nights spent wandering lonely as a waltz are still present, but they're inhabited by loose women and even looser trousers, innuendos of the decidedly 'fruity' variety and proof that Neil does, in fact, Do It With Girls. Is that the sound of Coleridge spinning in his lime-tree bower we hear? Well, no. For however far Hannon indulges the Northern Uproar side of his muse, he always retains his trademark wry aloofness. Indeed, read between the horn-breaks and you'll find lusty ladrock getting a bit of a kick to the knackers. Hence 'Something For The Weekend's rattling seduction romp finds Neil cast as the last of the clueless international playboys acting the gullible

sucker to, well, Kate Beckinsale apparently, while 'Becoming More Like Alfie' takes the cocky mockney philosophy of sexual megalomania and rams it sideways up Alex James' arse. With trumpets on. But it's when Hannon cuts out the characterisation middleman and invites us into his magnificent world with open veins that things really take off. When 'Songs Of Love' turns out to be as stark and affecting a paean to teenage lust and heartbreak as the title suggests, all echoing vocals and twinklesome 'Golden Brown' harpsichords. When 'The Frog Princess' - the operatic, spite-dripping highlight of the album - relates a brush with the Partner From Hell with joyous hilarity ("How was I to know that just one kiss/Would turn my frog into a cow!!!" Neil croons) and the best-timed whistle in recorded history. Or when 'Through A Long And Sleepless Night' takes us on a six-minute trawl of tumultuous, meaningless paranoia - a purging of those nagging nuggets of tunes and fears swarming through Hannon's crazed cranium. Pure class. And yet, so assured is 'Casanova' that it even has its own easy-listening closing credit segment ('Theme From Casanova'), whereupon Hannon retires to his deserted boudoir to contemplate another few years spent mouldering in the record collections of the snobop elite, lost among the debris of alphabetically-organised student bedsits, still too shrouded in classical class to infiltrate the hearts and anoraks of the Noelrock hordes. Something's gotta change, surely... (8) Mark Beaumont

MANTARAY



NEW SINGLE

"I don't make promises"

OUT APRIL 22nd

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