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SMASHING AND ICY!

The PUMPKINS chill out

THE BOO RADLEYS ★ ORBITAL ★ BLUR ★ STEREOLAB ★ CREDIT TO THE NATION ★ SUEDE
PAUL WELLER ★ MEGATRIPOLES ★ SENSER ★ STEVEN BERKOFF ★ SABRES OF PARADISE

Germany Dm 5.30 Spain Psa 300

Smashing Pumpkins' Billy Corgan photographed by Frosty The Lensman, Derek Ridgers

A FISTFUL OF DOLORES

● Just how did a bunch of strumming indie shysters like **THE CRANBERRIES** manage to outsell Suede in the States and become Ireland's biggest export since U2? A spellbound **DELE FADELE** has the magical answers. Fruiting stars: **STEFAN DE BATSELIER**

Picture the scene: A college town in Asswipe, Texas where men are men, cows are worried, and the third word that children learn to speak after 'Mummy' and 'Daddy' is 'nigger'. And at the local university, The Cranberries are supporting Suede.

In here a rainbow coalition of America's melting pot of races gaze enraptured at the stage. Southern belles swoon. Hefty football linebackers mouth desolate, desperate lyrics that mean more to them than the collected works of Bryan Adams. Bedroom-ridden, bespectacled bookworms shout out marriage proposals to the centre of attention, an elfin Irish woman with a voice to stop Saint Peter in his tracks. And, over a hundred fully-grown men and women burst into tears and keep blubbing throughout the full 40 minutes that The Cranberries commune with them. Only a handful remain to observe Suede, the latest big noises from Britain; there's a new phenomenon in town.

THAT WAS six months ago, when Dolores O'Riordan and the Limerick folk-popsters had only shifted 300,000 units in the Land Of The Free. Today, as the nine-eared, opaque-eyed temptress sits ecstatic, liberated and content in a West London hotel bar, the four-piece who were once derided as messed-up Catholic country bumpkins have now done what Suede, Therapy?, PJ Harvey and The Levellers haven't yet been able to: conquered the largest market in the world by selling 1.3 million copies – and rising of their 'Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We?' debut LP.

"It's very nice to see people crying in front of you," Dolores trills in a lilting Irish brogue punctuated by giggles. "It's complete freedom of expression. 'Cos human beings hide tears so much and show their happy, brave front. Why hide that side? I find the fact that boys aren't supposed to cry terrible. I wouldn't like to do that to my son – teach him to hold back. If a boy wants to cry, if a boy wants to be a nurse, if a boy wants to play with dolls, he should be allowed."

Laid-back, taciturn drummer Fergal Lawler agrees. He's as fond of Dolores as the absent guitarists, the Hogan brothers. But even he can't understand how the combination of MTV exposure, advert tie-ins, American tours with Duran Duran, The The, and



in character. We could relate to him more. The other three were really English in character and they weren't as easy to relate to as human beings."

So how did The Cranberries seduce America? Why did the runts of our indie litter become the top-dogs? How come all the other contenders with strong images, serious attitudes, modern takes on 'the song' and strong supporters in Britain got left at the starting blocks? The answers, it seems, lie in the metamorphosis of The Cranberries from shy, retiring types to cool rock monsters. In their perfect sense of timing, openness and heart-shredding nature of Dolores' words. In their sheer 'otherness' that they carry off without ever being esoteric and avant garde. In the sheer weight of spirituality that appeals to a country in thrall of fundamentalism. In the way The Cranberries' music straddles the gulf between the traditional and the new. And in the way they effortlessly picked up the baton that The Sundays got snatched away from them in America after their lacklustre shows.

All the other contenders are too enmeshed in rock'n'roll mythology to offer something unique to the Americans. Suede update David Bowie's best moves without realising that the Thin White Duke was always too strange, androgynous and ironic to register in a country where homophobia is part of the school syllabus. Therapy? try to sell souped-up metal back to the land of Mötley Crüe and don't consider the fact that Americans are content with one Nirvana. The Levellers are a joke compared to The Grateful Dead. Carter USM are too parochially English. But The Cranberries' Dolores speaks in a great white pop voice from bitter personal experience of a relationship gone wrong. Everyone can identify – women find kinship, men want to rescue her.

"I think I'll always have a strong character," she declares. "My childhood was so sheltered and religious and strong. That was really, really tough. It was drummed in. My person was formed there as a child."



When Irish eyes are... glowering? (above) Insert (l-r) Fergal, Dolores, Mike and Noel

after the first single, and about the way Dolores got burnt by the limelight as a teenager, became psychologically ill and lost a great deal of weight. To The Cranberries' new American fans, she's arrived fully-formed as a sincere, comforting voice who is party to some insights they aren't privy to. They thrive on her current contradictions, especially the way she wants to engage the mind, but is not impartial to

her onstage these days you can't recognise the nymph of old times who was always on the verge of tears and sometimes couldn't even bear to face the audience because of chronic shyness.

She's now found a way to express joy in songs that were written at her lowest ebb. And, on a personal level, she's changed from someone who'd never seen a black person in real-life until she came to London, to an internationalist, a global thinker who embraces black and American Indian cultures because of the similarity of their struggles to the Irish cause.

"In the 1800s the British burnt the houses of the Irish and separated mothers from children. They killed Irishmen and wouldn't let them practice their own religion. The Irish people had to form schools in secret 'cos they wouldn't let the Irish be educated. Certain races in the world are oppressed through history, and I think, OK, it's kind of annoying, but unless you're messed up in the head you don't bear grudges for something that happened 150 years ago."

The Cranberries are still seen as unhip outsiders in England, but the Americans have been more welcoming. They've been spooked by Dolores' intense spirituality, her belief in superstition, in astral projection, in fate – she's believed The Cranberries would be successful in the States since she was 18 – in black magic, white magic

and the spirit world...

"I think human beings are taught not to take drugs because drugs take you to another dimension," she reasons. "These dimensions are actually there. And the drugs set the human mind free. And you leave. Jim Morrison with that song 'Break on through to the other side' – he actually wanted to leave and he actually did leave. Maybe when he got there it wasn't as great as he thought... maybe... who knows? It's kinda dangerous to go too far in that direction but I think there's definitely another side."

"All the churches across the world create something with gospel music and what this music does is communicate with another dimension. I suppose that's why people see us as 'mind music'. I started singing in church at the age of five and it's stayed with me."

Britain will soon have to wake up to the fact that The Cranberries, with their softly insinuating musical cries and whispers, are a rather precious export, a startling contrast to the studied self-loathing of their closest competitors, Radiohead. And Dolores O'Riordan is that rare commodity: a star with an inquiring mind. Just think back to that mythical Texas evening, watch her project and escape her earthly body before totally occupying the audience's mind, as if she was having a tête-à-tête with everyone present. That's something special.

EXCLUSIVE CREATION ALBUM OFFER!

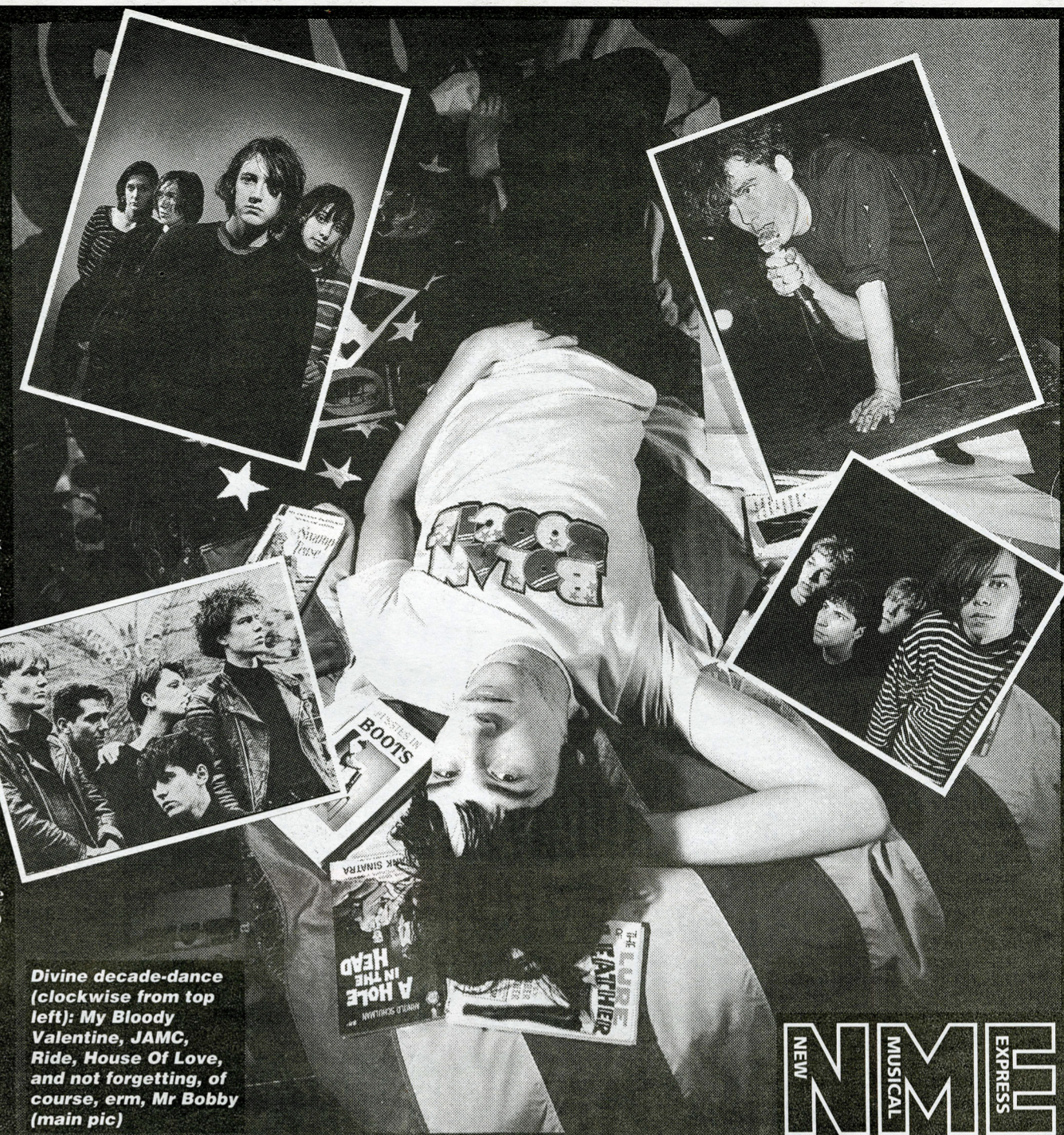
They arrived on the scene in pointy boots, stripey T-shirts, floppy fringes, lotsa leather and an unhealthy excess of attitude. They smashed up gigs and rocked your world. They were the very pinnacle of independence. Then, along the way, they diversified – came over all moody, drifted into dreamscapes, got well into dance and discovered psychedelia.

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Full details of this once-in-a-lifetime offer, and your first Creation voucher, will appear in next week's NME. Be sure you get it!



Divine decade-dance (clockwise from top left): My Bloody Valentine, JAMC, Ride, House Of Love, and not forgetting, of course, erm, Mr Bobby (main pic)

NEW NME MUSICAL EXPRESS

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TRACK DONCASTER
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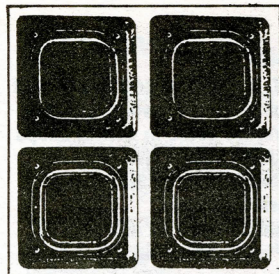
MARK LANEGAN
'WHISKEY FOR THE HOLY GHOST'
The darkly beautiful new album from the singer with SCREAMING TREES.

SUB POP

SUB POP

A solo record which is even better than his band's stuff - Cathi Unsworth (Melody Maker)
With guest appearances from fellow barflies J.Mascis and Mike Johnson (Dinosaur Jnr.)
Dan Peters (Mudhoney) and Tad Doyle.
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LIVE

COP SHOOT COP BRISTOL UNIVERSITY

"EVERYBODY LOVES YOU!" a boy at the front yells, hoping to hear his favourite song.

Thankfully, Tod A, the Cop Shoot Cop bassist and spiritual sibling of Denis Leary, is in patient enough mood to humour him. "I know everybody loves us," he mumbles dismissively. Cop Shoot Cop, y'see, don't do bloody requests.

The New Yorkers write tense, raging songs like 'Discount Rebellion', about kids buying into "rebellion at a low, low price"; wounding, caustic metal pieces about confronting suicide, nihilism and despair. They want everyone to have scalpel-sharp awareness about the shitty world we are complacently locked into. They certainly aren't here in order for some barking, piss-brain 17-year-old to get his rocks off to a natty beat.

Cop Shoot Cop nearly did *The Word* recently but pulled out, even though their record company threatened to tie their ankles to boulders and shove them all into the Thames if they didn't be good boys... just once. They deserve to be big, and never more than now. Their music gets more incisive and visionary as the indie rock kid's brain gets duller and soggy.

It's not just that Cop songs like 'Surprise Surprise' flatten you with a whirlwind of focused energy which the skate fraternity — deprived of an absent Gunshot tonight — make the most of; it's also that they're developing in range and style. From the sensual and snarling bash-metal fest that is 'Lo Com Denom', to the skwerled, lock-tight percussive propulsion of 'Nowhere', they manage to unify their mood-swings with dynamics that are consistently *frightening*.

Main man is the growling Tod, who lays down astute, questioning lyrics. If it were possible to take his mind and chop it up so a piece could be given to all of the crowd here, the world would be a more intelligent, compassionate place. But to his side is second bassist Nantz, a chap about as approachable as a bottle of leaking acid, the ultimate Mr Unreasonable. Nantz is the fuse that was born to blow: when his eyes shine, you know he is in a particularly filthy, spiteful mood. As he opens his mouth, you feel a meat cleaver hovering around the back of your neck.

"Are there any trainpotters in the house?" he sneers. Chop. He knows we don't deserve Cop Shoot Cop. A lethal weapon for the mind.

Angela Lewis

UNDERSTAND

SILVER LONDON ISLINGTON SMASHED!

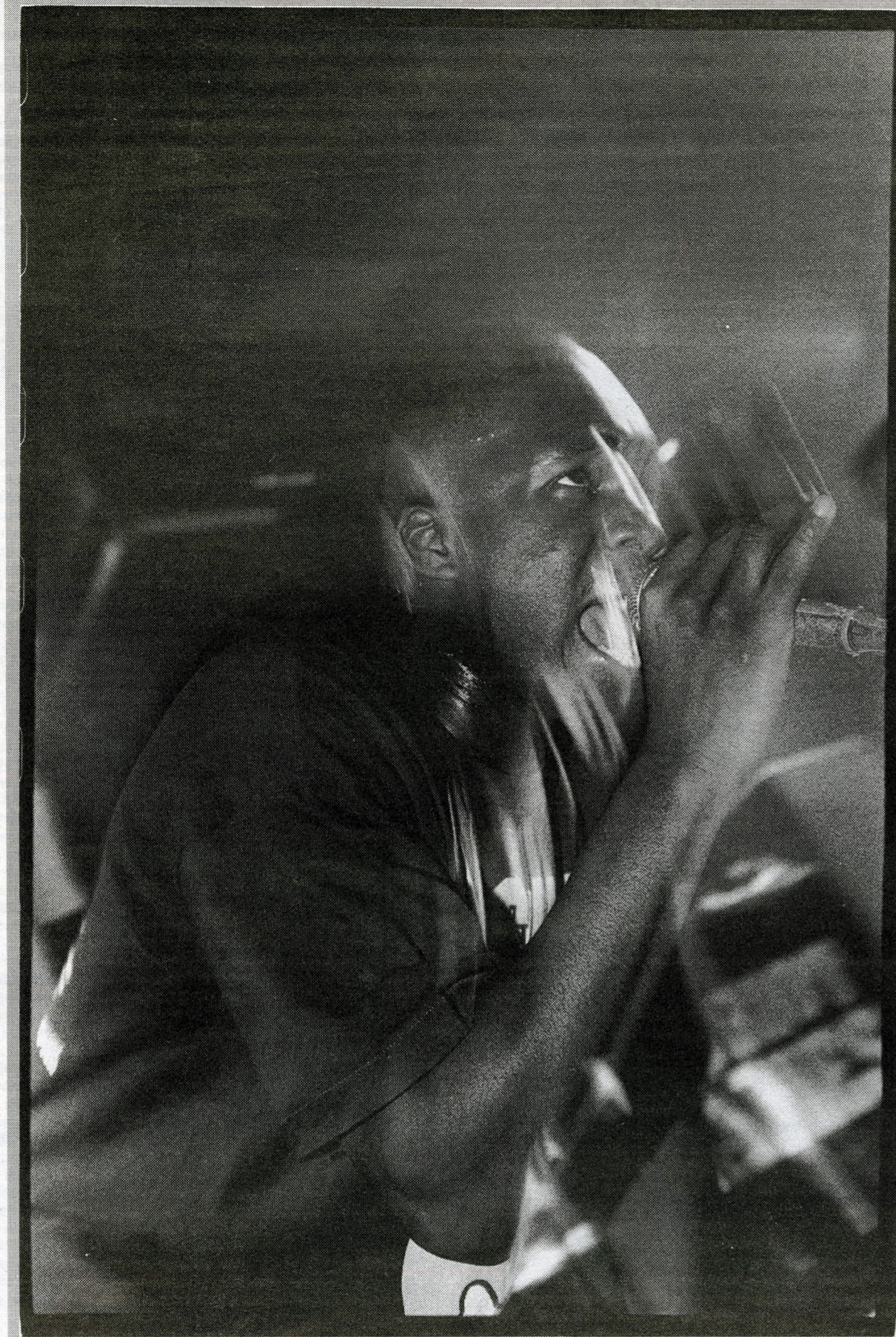
AS 1994 gets into its stride, there's more than one New Wave breaking. In addition to the much documented skinny tie uprisings, angry punk rock types like Understand, Done Lying Down and Jeyfat are taking their cue from American hardcore, jazzing it up via the no-holds-barred intensity of collision pop and ending up with a fantastically righteous noise.

But first... a more traditional and inoffensive band than Silver you couldn't hope to find. Clean-cut, mild mannered and flaunting pristine guitars, they study at the same school of cool as Suede and The Auteurs. And while they're very, very good, in the light of current events they can't help but look well, inoffensive. And there's little point urging them to change — attitude would look terrible on them.

Attitude, however, suits Understand down to the ground they're busy stomping all over. Indeed, it's pretty much their entire *raison d'être*; this is the musical equivalent of a clenched fist shoved in your face. "Choose sides now!" it barks.

And yet, despite the fact that Understand never

BLAST PUMP-ACTION HEROES



Gunshot's MC Alkaline: no soft soaping for the indie kids!

GUNSHOT LONDON CAMDEN PALACE

SAD TO relate, but British hip-hop has never quite managed to set the world on fire. Derek B, Monie Love (disqualified for being an ex-pat with a disgraceful fake Yank accent), Cookie Crew, Ruthless Rap Assassins, MC Buzz B, Krispy 3, Blade, Wee Papa Girl Rappers, Black Radical MkII, Katch 22... and MC Tunes, lest we forget. All have had their moments of brilliance, none have yet achieved a place in *The Sun* with their American peers.

Worse, British hip-hop fans seem a tad snobbish when it comes to embracing home-grown talent which — in a logical world — would commercially trounce American dullards like Onyx and Snoop Doggy Dogg. But enough grumbling, because for roughly 27 minutes tonight you're tempted to believe things can change.

Two years ago, Gunshot would probably have been met by 1,000 bored expressions from an indie-kid crowd like this, but the moment they heave into 'Reign Of Terror', a queue of suitably tossy-looking stage-divers constantly endanger life and limb like over-sized lemmings on angel dust. Despite the Cypress Hill-ish, slow, lurching basslines, Gunshot might as well be *Senser* or *Rage* tonight, such is the unrelenting frantic pace and visceral hardcore buzz.

Except there's more to it than that (even if the washing-machine sound mix makes it hard to detect): ruthlessly infectious sample-riffs; marvellously simple basslines; triple rap assaults merging in and out of beats, spiced up with MC Alkaline's speed-ragga toasting and the obligatory yo-ho-pumpitup/all-waveyehandsintheair chants. We love those rap clichés. No, really, we do, actually.

While American rap prefers to slow down, skin up, and bump and grind these days, Gunshot pump fists and ROCK at a ball-breaking speed all night, which can be a supremely splenic dizzy treat (witness the forthcoming 'Mind Of A Razor' collaboration with Napalm Death) or, when legs start to wilt and the sound becomes a sonic stodge and drowns the intricacies, too much of a good thing to take.

However, we're ultimately spared our haemorrhages when the mayhem reaches bottle-throwing level, some beer hits the DAT machine, and the whole sound dissolves in a puff of pint glasses. Which is, of course, how all good gigs should end.

'Shot by both sides, and how. Johnny Cigarettes

STING

LONDON ROYAL ALBERT HALL

LIKE JOHN Major, Sting has supposedly gone "back to basics", but seems confused about what that really means. 'Ten Summoner's Tales', while undoubtedly sparkier than the moribund 'Soul Cages',

still finds room for jazz-wank ('Heavy Cloud No Rain'), literary pretension (erm, 'St Augustine In Hell') and a smart-arsed country pastiche ('Love Is Stronger Than Justice') — as well as the occasional cool, clear pop song.

Truth is, he's gone from anguished self-absorption to a smug playfulness, which can make life even more annoying.

Clothed in designer sackcloth, he looks revoltingly healthy and relaxed, encouraging his ever-so-accomplished band to play cheeky little improvised cameos and then smiling at his own cleverness. He even covers 'A Day In The Life' — "Just because it's the only song I could think of with the words 'Albert Hall' in its lyrics." For sure, he can still deliver

moments of simple, sublime pop, but they're nearly all over a decade old: 'Every Little Thing...' is indeed rather magical, and 'Roxanne' is spoiled only by a pointless diversionary jam. Only last year's 'If I Ever Lose My Faith In You' shows that he might still know how to write the kind of songs that bypass Hampstead coffee tables and head straight

for the lips of the everyman. And therein lies the crux. Born with a talent for writing pop songs, Sting has fallen into that ancient trap of believing he's somehow above the practice and, like too many of his peers, he's probably far too rich, cosseted and clever-clever to claw his way out.

Sam Taylor



PICTURE: JOHN CHIVERS

stray from their knife edge walk between adrenalin-drenched antagonism and full-blown apoplexy, there is an irrepressible *joie de vivre* at work in songs like 'Error Margin' and 'Fence Falls'. This is not anger as a fashion statement, it's crushing anger at the futility of life and this is the important bit: it believes it can make a difference.

Successfully mixing an inflammatory though undeniably melodic sound with an ineffably joyous approach is an astoundingly difficult trick.

Yet the fact that Understand are clearly having the time of their lives fails to shave one ounce of purpose from the Fugazi-esque seriousness of their method. And, conversely, the comprehensive absence of light relief fails to deter a nearby gaggle of fascinated indiegrits from dubbing them the "punk Take That".

Understand have even bypassed hardcore's traditional dead end of peaking too soon. Set-closer 'Blue Touch Paper' erupts in a brawl of power-riffing and glottal-stopped fury as singer Dom hollers "I'm so tired of good intentions, I'm so tired of being used". It doesn't matter that these are practically the only words audible tonight; they made their point almost as soon as they appeared.

Understand? Absolutely.

Mark Sutherland

PICTURE: ROGER SARGENT



Dolores, the Princess Di you can slap around, gets a big hand

FOR A FEW DOLORES MORE...

THE CRANBERRIES FIN

LONDON ASTORIA 2

CONTRARY TO what you may have heard, siding with the Americans on matters of musical taste is not always a wise idea. After all, to generalise horrifically, this is a nation renowned for preferring Snoop Doggy Dogg to Public Enemy, The Flxx to The Jam, Pearl Jam to just about anything and, most ridiculous of all, The Cranberries to Suede... Woooah! Hold on one cotton-picking moment!

Yup, The Cranberries spent most of last year trudging around the American heartlands, supporting (and, according to legend, thoroughly upstaging) Brett's gang while being stoutly ignored back home. And yet, two squillion album sales Stateside later, London is now playing the 'We Saw Them First' card with a desperation that verges on hysteria.

The posse of biz types (most of whom spiritually dumped The Cranberries when it was still *de rigueur* to swoon over the Sundays) are propping up the bar and proclaiming that they "always loved the album", which is to be expected. But the true test is The Kids — and The Cranberries pass with flying, nay, hurtling colours.

The Astoria 2 is rib-crushingly rammed with people displaying all the signs of lifelong devotion. They moosh wildly to even the most fragile of jangles. They holler along to every vocal swoop. And they are sent utterly gaga by the merest twinkle of singer Dolores' eyes. There can be little doubt that we're witnessing this year's answer to Radiohead, and then some...

TEARS FOR FEARS

LONDON WEMBLEY ARENA

'80s NOSTALGIA, eh? Steer clear, good reason cries, but that craving to suspend discernment in pursuit of a bit of a laugh increasingly wins out.

Which is why — presumably — settled couples turn out in moderate droves for Tears For Fears. Or rather Tear For Fear, now Curt Smith (the small one who looked like Tin Tin) has departed most unamicably, apparently driven bonkers by Roland 'Leo' Orzabal's astrology obsession.

As if the man's ego wasn't enough. This is a man who pulls faces as he pulls guitar strings, anticipating mass wetting of underpants. A man whose voice sounds like it's coming through his nose, while being amplified by his flapping cheeks. A man who, though the architect behind hit tunes (18 million sales — whoah!) has a tepid personality and barely disguised contempt for the audience.

The only highlight is co-singer and bassist Gayle 'Pisces' Ann-Dorsey's contribution to 'Woman In Chains'. It's a pleasant stirrer, atypical of the old Tears For Fears forte — wide-angle emotion blown up further by a monster arrangement — which induces mass swaying, to be followed by the handclap frenzy of 'Everybody Wants To Rule The World'.

Most telling, however, is Roland's solo spot, an all too heartfelt cover of 'Creep'. "What the hell am I doing here? I don't belong here, Wembley," he whines. And there's the problem; he doesn't actually like himself very much. Poor fella.

Angela Lewis

RANCHO DIABLO

LONDON BULL & GATE

BLIMEY, WHAT a racket! Rancho Diablo are acolytes of that most sinister minister, Revoluting Al Jourgensen. Consequently, they blend big-bottomed replicant drums with grinding guitars, ooze designer malice, and favour the stormtrooper chic of the primal Mindwar.

The sheer enormity of the drum machine mashes the live guitars into porridge, as sexless pelvic thrusts add impetus to the deeply distorted vocal. The delivery is humourless, yet seductive; the bleak croon of Nick Cave and megaphonic intensity of Iggy Pop's Berlin period occasionally bob to the surface, only to be consumed once more by the spiralling maelstrom of grinding, minimalist graunch.

This multi-layered, ear-splitting cacophony is a merciless, sonic hybrid of all that is loud and irritating — blasts of sampled Laibach brass wah-wah guitars, and howling feedback — but tear down the relentless bombast and sun-glasses-after-dark desperation and you reveal a living, breathing heart of darkest subterranean pop.

The tongue-swallowing vocal and enormous Link Wray guitars of 'My Mistake' help to save a set which occasionally teeters on the brink of cliché. The climactic 'Last Blood', however, is a frenetic collision of drone feedback and wig-out that — fittingly — ends with the blood-curdling squeal of brutalised mic, and the relieved sigh of a traumatised audience.

Ian Fortnam

Which makes Fin a singularly appropriate choice of support act. There is a sturdy, belt'n'braces indie rock sound that you wouldn't have to be a five-gigs-a-week music hack to dismiss as slightly unremarkable. Such bands are, after all, two a penny over here.

But whick them off to the States where they're as rare as Communism and — bingo! — we'll soon find their robust guitar clangs being flogged back to us. So save yourselves a lot of bother and start liking Fin now.

And while you're about it, put in your orders for The Cranberries' masterfully-titled album 'Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We?'. They've always conjured magic from the purest ingredients — charming, chiming guitars, homespun melodies and Dolores' cartwheeling voice — but it comes as some relief to find them unswayed by their American experiences. True, Dolores has — not unlike Princess Diana — been transformed from painfully shy colleen to flirting stadium rabble-rouser who simply *must* scream, "THANK YAAA!!!", after every bleeding song, and you wish she could sing the stunning 'Linger' (surely a 'Creep'-sized hit the second time around) without a boorish crowd choir taking over.

On the whole, however, The Cranberries' all-round charm hasn't altered a bit. New songs such as 'Dreaming Bad Dreams' and 'Everything I Said' are, if anything, more delicate than the rapturously-received likes of 'Not Sorry'. And as the set swaggers to a close, innocent bystanders are filled with the irresistible urge to dash up to each other and shout, "Look! There! Right under our noses! An absolutely fantastic pop group! And they were there all along! Etcetera!"

Justice is done. Again.

Mark Sutherland

THE MIGHTY DIAMONDS

LONDON BRITTON ACADEMY

FEW ARTISTS in the reggae pantheon are as dependable as The Mighty Diamonds. You can always count on these escapees from Trenchtown, Kingston, to stay mature like a fine wine, offer pearls of wisdom, be tasteful and never disrespectful to the female sex, and most of all, to transport you to a land, far, far away where restrained militancy always conquers oppression. Simply put, this most fluid of vocal trios keep the flag flying for black music year after year, no matter how many obstacles are put in their way.

Tonight's KISS FM showcase celebration, despite also featuring gravely-voiced Lieutenant Stiche and the prolific crooner Frankie Paul, belongs to the Mighty Diamonds.

Aided and abetted by the very capable 809 Band, they have the well-heeled non-reggae crowd eating out of their hands by means of mellifluous harmonies, an almost scarily high lead voice, roughneck rhythms and brilliant, timeless songs. You also get the feeling The Horns Of Jericho are in attendance when three cool, middle-aged hipsters blow for mercy, like life was ebbing away.

There's a feeling of multi-racial community enshrined in the mass singalongs conducted to the apocalyptic 'Right Time', the reflective 'Shame And Pride', the homeless plea 'I Need A Roof' and the sensimillar ritual of 'Pass The Kouchie' (the original version of the song made pop by Musical Youth). Of course, The Mighty Diamonds milk it for all its worth by adopting showbiz moves and cajoling the band to "rewind" by using stop/start techniques. And why not? Still lethal after all these years.

Dele Fadele

BAR-TIME DISPATCHES

Swedish bands so cute they make Sarah sound like Earache playing in the loin-moistening marketplace that is Hamburg?! The words 'good' and 'grief' spring not unreasonably to mind, not least to JOHN MULVEY...

THE REEPERBAHN is the electric blue equivalent of Blackpool's Golden Mile. An area where chapels for the celebration of Sex Masses jostle for space with condom shops, where a gay bar called Ramrod stands opposite the Salvation Army hostel, where prostitutes come permed and dressed in shell suits. As Europe's epicentre of sin, it's more than a little innocuous. Sleazy, but hardly shocking...

Unless, that is, you're one of the pasty-faced gang of Swedish teenagers huddled outside the Prinzenbar. This is RED SLEEPING BEAUTY, POPRACE and the ACID HOUSE KINGS; drunk, overwired and here to satiate Hamburg's unlikely love of Cutie bands. Very poor quality cutie bands. All three are signed to the city's Marsh Marigold label, an operation whose indulgence of the terminally twee makes Bristol's Sarah Records look like Earache.

"What is your favourite flower?/Tell me and I'll crush it," simpers the Acid House Kings' singer, as he practises his Morrissey postures with remarkable accuracy. He flounces round the stage, while his band (who, spookily, reappear later as the marginally rockier Poprace) strum along lamely. They are terrible. And hilarious. No-one in the Prinzenbar laughs.

Jangly pop is a serious business in Hamburg. Perhaps it's an understandable reaction against some tossy Teutonic stereotype of being stern, and muscular, and industrious, but bands like this — and the significantly better, jokier and drunker locals DIE FUNKE FREUNDE — are worshipped, along with the tackiest garage bands in Europe. DIE MOBYLETTES, a knowingly bad, kitsch pick-up band, are at least intentionally funny, all matching suits and disastrously wobbly dance routines. So symbolic as to make Mambo Taxi sound like their musical arranger is Phil Spector, their German language version of 'My Boyfriend's Back' will stay with me, like the scars from a third-degree burn, for a very long time. And still no-one laughs.

No wonder, a few nights later, one of the Mobylettes refers to the Marsh Marigold crowd as "wimp fascists". It's New Year's Eve, and their manically hamming bassist is now fronting another pick-up band, the GOLDEN TOAST QUARTET, gabbling through 'The Wanderer' and making out like an acid jazz Pavement. At least people laugh this time. No such fun for next band on, THE POETS OF PEEZE, an unwittingly cute German Beastie Boys with the last remaining human beat-box in the western world. Thankfully, no-one breaksdances.

There is, though, one fine European band to be uncovered in a week of trawling round Hamburg's clubs. 18TH DYE have a Danish drummer, a German guitarist, a Danish/German bassist, a quite unattractive name and an often breathtaking way of hammering layer upon layer of feedback over sneakily addictive songs. It's hardly a new trick, of course, and the influence of Sonic Youth and My Bloody Valentine is, inevitably, well in evidence, but 18th Dye carry it all off with a bloody-minded purpose and glee. And when the bassist stops smacking her instrument into the amp, holds it flat, doubles up and screams at it, it becomes apparent they've actually got a few new tricks to bring to the noise-pop party...

All of which makes them the ideal support for Americans YO LA TENGO, vaguely ignored in Britain, authentically adored here. Over a thousand people are crammed into the Markthalle, and with good reason. Imagine Spiritualized with unnervingly gentle songs, Moe Tucker on drums and Gallon Drunk's James Johnston staggering between his guitar and his organ. This is the kind of fragile, intense and more than a little insane wonder that is Yo La Tengo.

Take Ira Kaplan — the Johnston flail-alike — pummelling his keyboards to oblivion in 'Sudden Organ', or Georgia Hubley's angelic lullaby, 'Nowhere Near', or the epic, hushed unravelling of Daniel Johnston's 'Speeding Motorcycles'. There's an awesomely controlled madness here — an absolute beauty-out-of-chaos moment, if you like — that's rarely equalled by any current band. That good. And, thankfully, no-one laughs.