

DOWNERS

danceable) ritualized invocation of the Crowleysque dark-lords, let loose after God has turned his/her/its back. A frightening piece of vinyl (why are they laughing?), but paradoxically disjointed and unsuccessful. (they've since dissolved and reformed with a new bassist and overtly occult orientation.)

Less ambivalent, and

Much media noise has emanated recently from a California congressional clown wolf-crying the presence of Satanic subliminal messages in rock 'n' roll. The revelations include whispered sweet-nothings to The Man Downstairs on back-tracked Led Zeppelin records (what, no "Bonzo is dead?"), and similar horrors, all exhorting the sheeplike youth of America to detour down the inferno-bound exit ramp.

But hell (wrong word?), this sort of neo-red-baiting ain't exactly new on the pop-culture battlefield, especially from the knee-jerk paranoids on the Christian no-fun-damentalist right flank. And while such whining does have its nuisance value (a further reminder of America's dangerous swing rightward—as if we needed another), it's also welcome evidence that rock still has the power to offend *someone, somewhere*—between institutionalized arena rock and sanitized dance music, things have gotten pretty in-offensive.

The irony, though, is that these guys needn't have gone so far as to play stuff *backwards*—I woulda pointed 'em towards plenty where the subversive content is as plain as the guilt-twists in their libidos. **Killing Joke**, whose third LP, *Revelations* (Editions EG, dist. by Jem), bunts this jolly English quartet right through their Jerry Cornelius stage of dance-banding the apocalypse (hollow and unconvincing, I thought) into a far more credible (and less

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chilling to the point of psychosis, is Sydney, Australia's **SPK** (stands for Surgical Penis Klink, if you must know)—possibly the sickest band in existence (makes Throbbing Gristle look like Debby Boone). Their first American release (fourth overall) is *Leichenschrei* (Thermidor), which, a press release helpfully informs me, translates as "corpse shrieks." Charming bunch. If the album's positively demonic blend of Luciferian hammering, overexcited noise generators and Stygian doom-muttering is too much for you, just be thankful you missed SPK's brief American tour this past spring. These *seriously twisted* Aussies filled NYC's normally well-behaved Dance-teria with viciously colliding metal, hoarse screeching, and a subterranean bass rumble—all accompanied by a slide show so hellishly deranged it would've sent Adolf Eichmann running for the vomitorium. Whew.

For the more faint of heart, there's **Bauhaus**, a sort of gothic-psychedelic heavy metal band teetering on the brink of obnoxiousness. Their two import LPs, *In the Flat Field* (4 A.D.) and *Mask* (Beggars Banquet), have some clever moments of dark-atmosphere management, but live, their overindulgent, narcissistic image-mongering strangles everything (prime offender: singer Peter Murphy, trapped in an identity crisis between Dr. Bowie and Mr. Hyde). Seeing them recently at the Ritz—smoke machines spewing—I found it easy to accept them as an opening act for Black Sab-

bath within a year (evidently A&M Records agrees with me—they've just picked up Bauhaus for American release).

Since **Chrome** don't perform live, they avoid some of the traps Bauhaus fall into, but they too seem enraptured in a heavy metal thud-rumble tar pit. Their latest LP, *3rd from the Sun* (Siren, dist. by Faulty Products)—something like their sixth or seventh—only briefly equals the brilliance of their 1977 *Alien Soundtracks* (confined to "Off the Line"). The rest is just ex-Pearl Harbor rhythm section John & Hilary Stench thrashing dazedly behind a droning, treated guitar and from-beyond-the-grave vocals of a sf-apocalyptic nature.

These sourpusses could take a lesson or two from **Nash the Slash**, the Canadian one-man banditeer, who tempers his horror-film imagery with Vincent Price-y camp humor. His latest release, the all-instrumental

feeling that I have only a limited appetite for (their second, 17 *Seconds*, included on the double American issue . . . *happily ever after*, remains a contender for Lou's All-Time Top Ten).

Likewise, I find the latest **New Order** release—the single “Temptation”/“Hurt” (Factory, through Rough Trade)—to be something of a disappointment. Where the Cure have embroidered, New Order have refined, and by machining off the blurred edges I think they’ve lost something essential (producer Martin Hannett perhaps?). Their 1981 *Movement* is another member of Lou’s Hall of Fame.

Import of the Month

Second only to a top-tied Residents and Yello, **You've Got Foetus on Your Breath** (nifty name, eh?) are my current favorite band. The music imprinted



Decomposing (Cut Throat), is an EP that can be played either at 33 or 45 (my preference is the latter)—running times for both are helpfully provided. Good, evocative stuff.

Weariness of all this optimism? Ready to take **the Cure**? Over the course of four increasingly depressing albums, this British trio have tracked the death-beat from every possible angle. 'I'm beginning to worry about them.' *Pornography* (A&M) only elaborates further on their obsession, filling in with florid sonic flourishes what used to be sparse and airy. It's a choking, near-claustrophobic

on their LP *Deaf!!* (Self-Immolation Deaf!) is alternately ugly, hilarious, ironically coy, intensely biting, and brazenly tuneful. I know absolutely nothing about them. I think they're great.

—Lou Stathis

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