

Monster riffs, intense grooves Colour funky release

Living Colour

Stain

Epic



Q What's black and white and red all over?
A: Living Colour's new album, *Stain*.

Actually, it's a black and white album cover in a red plastic case. Musically too, though, *Stain* rejects the broad palette of styles that colored the group's earlier albums in favor of the bold hues of intense hard rock.

Living Colour's earlier albums drew praise for their unique blend of guitar rock, funk and soul with occasional jazz, Latin and reggae influences. But on *Stain*, Living Colour achieves a more solid, consistent sound, sticking to the metallic riff-rock of earlier hits like "Cult of Personality," from 1988's *Vivid* and "Type" from 1990's *Time's Up*.

There are few, if any, bands today that can match Living Colour's technical command of their instruments without sounding overbearing or mechanical. Guitarist Vernon Reid and drummer William Calhoun are nothings short of virtuosic.

album

MIKE BRADLEY

Calhoun and the group's new bassist, Doug Wimbish, create incredibly tight, powerful grooves that propel the album, even when Reid takes off on a stratospheric solo.

Living Colour also knows how to hold back and focus their talent into an intense groove. "Never Satisfied" features a monster riff that sounds like funky Led Zeppelin, and "Ignorance is Bliss" employs a riff reminiscent of funk-rock masters Fishbone. "This Little Pig" is the kind of speed metal that Ice-T can only dream about.

Stain's lyrics complement the music's harder edge. The songs still feature Living Colour's critical, sarcastic tone, but this time around the lyrics are often intensely personal rather than socially focused. A quick glance at the song titles ("Go Away," "Nothingness," "Wall") reveals the album's dominant theme — alienation.

The idea of alienation crops up throughout the album. On "Nothingness," vocalist Corey Glover sings, "All that I can feel is my loneliness/Nothing in the attic /cept an empty chest." Many of the songs are rife with cynicism: On the

album's opening cut, "Go Away," Glover sings, "I paid my 20 dollars to Live Aid/I bade my guilty conscience to go away."

Not all of the songs on *Stain* are directed inward. On "Aslander" (German for "outsider"), Glover sings, "Everything that I want/Isn't everything that you've got."

Filled with Reid's dissonant guitar wails, the song is a fiery expression of an outsider's rage and pain. On "Wall," the album's bombastic closing track, Glover sings, "We hate each other /cause of race and religion/We hate each other /cause of class and position." Only in the final song's chorus does Glover make a plea for unity: "The wall between us all must fall."

Despite most of the songs' serious themes, Living Colour's sense of humor still shows up on *Stain*. "Everybody loves you when you're bi," sings Glover on "Bi," a funky ode to bisexuality.

What separates Living Colour from riff-rockers like Metallica and Helmet is the group's subtlety. Reid's versatility and the soulful passion of Glover's voice keep *Stain* from becoming bogged down in metal boredom.

Reid's use of guitar synthesizer on "Nothingness" and "Hemp" is haunting and beautiful, and Glover's melodies show an expressiveness foreign to most hard rock singers. And the funk



They're not just glamour boys anymore

grooves of "Bi" and "WTF" give the album another dimension without sacrificing consistency.

Tight, powerful and moving, *Stain* is Living Colour's best album yet. The

group finally seems comfortable settling into a hard rock groove, refining but not giving up the stylistic depth that marked their earlier work.

Colour me impressed.

Quick! Dodge this one

Quicksand

Slip

Polygram Records

Q uicksand rather unfortunately proved to be the generic grunge rock crap that Arson Garden managed to escape. There's not much to say about Slip other than don't buy it.

The album gets a blob because I must admit I'm not an expert on grunge, and some people out there probably would like this album. But if they do, they're REALLY out there and need to get their eardrums examined — maybe they've had one huge slamdive too many.

If Quicksand aren't from Seattle, it's pretty obvious they wish they were. Their sound is not a million miles away from better grunge bands — only about a thousand — but the bad news for Quicksand is that no matter where they're from, they look

album brief

ALEX McMILLAN

condemned to visit that hell for musicians: obscurity.

The most puzzling thing about how this album got produced is that none of it makes any sense.

Here's a sample lyric from "Lie and Wait": "Inequity solace in your driven state seize your right to earn the same she wants it." I'm not making this up. And I wish Quicksand hadn't either.

The sleeve is the best thing about this album because it lists all the profoundly deep lyrics and has great grainy shots of people in '60s bathing suits diving around. There are also a few photographs of the band "playing" their "instruments," and somewhat tellingly, you can't see any of their faces.

This is probably so that they don't get attacked by angry music reviewers who were forced to sit through their whole album while their ears ruptured.

Garden grows an edge

Arson Garden

Drink a Drink of You

Vertebrae Records



A rson Garden's limited edition EP came as something of a surprise. With a name like theirs, I was expecting more generic hard-rock/grunge-sounding fodder, but things turned out differently.

Arson Garden turned out to have a sound somewhere between 10,000 Maniacs and The Cure, with Siouxsie from the Banshees on vocals. The vocals are the focal point of their music, as the lyrics drift in and out, up and down and leave you feeling happy. The vocalist takes a lesson from Natalie Merchant's

album brief

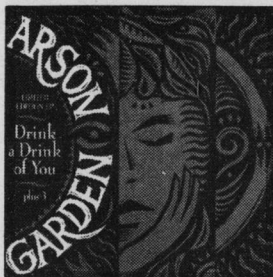
ALEX McMILLAN

sidered she" wonders "who follows who, swallows who, follows who? There's none so lucky."

This EP has a harder edge than most melodic college music. Their grinding hint of anger belies otherwise pretty tunes and adds a touch of ambiguity. The feedback and grunge guitar mix with cymbals, scales and lots of percussion to produce a fascinating form of harmonious discord.

"Two Sisters," one of two live tracks on the 4-track EP, has a kind of Eastern slant to it, leaving an impression that you just invited a band of whirling dervishes to come have a party in your head. Perhaps some of you who had particularly adventurous Spring Breaks can relate.

The only downer about this EP is the last song, a live version of "Trem Two." This is not an amazingly bad track, but it could be a whole load better, judging from the preceding three. It seems a bit like Arson Garden wanted a filler to round out an otherwise five-blob EP. Nevertheless, if you've got enough left-over dough, go out and give them a try.



Drinking with Arson Garden

book, though, in that, although the sound of the lyrics leaves you happy, their content is not always quite so upbeat. The words switch at times to punning and biting humor, such as on "She Reconsidered," where "the recon-

music charts

WXYC

1. **Graeme Jefferies**
Messages from the Cake Kitchen
2. **Superchunk**
On the Mouth
3. **Pearls**
Sleeping With the Enemy
4. **Charlie Feathers**
Hardcore Devo Vol. 2
5. **Angels of Epistemology**
Fruit
6. **Tom Waits**
The Early Years, Vol. 2
7. **Basehead**
Messages and Portraits
8. **Digable Planets**
Reachin'
9. **Various Artists**
Soluable Fish
10. **Various Artists**
Music at Matt Molloy's

Top 10

1. **Snow**
Informor
2. **Peabo Bryson and Regina Belle**
A Whole New World
3. **Dr. Dre**
Nuthin' But A "G" Thing
4. **Duran Duran**
Ordinary World
5. **Whitney Houston**
I'm Every Woman
6. **Silk**
Freak Me
7. **Whitney Houston**
I Will Always Love You
8. **Arrested Development**
Mr. Wendal
9. **Jade**
Don't Walk Away
10. **Bon Jovi**
Bed of Roses

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THE CRYING GAME

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