

Pumpkins Album Filled With 'Infinite' Variety

Coming to a conclusion about The Smashing Pumpkins' latest album, Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness, is like trying to decide if a meal of hot wings and Dom Perignon tastes good; individually, the parts taste pretty rad, but at first you just can't decide if it all settles well in your stomach.

Billy Corgan and company's third all-new studio album, following on the heels of the mega-hit Siamese Dream LP and the popular B-sides collection Pisces Iscariot, does conclusively prove that the Pumpkins are capable of making compelling, different music and should cement wonder-boy guitarist/songwriter/singer Corgan's reputation as a song-writing master.

GREG KALISS

Music Review
Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness
The Smashing Pumpkins
A-

Corgan could never be accused of being overly optimistic and giddy, and, as the album's title suggests, the songs here aren't full of bright cheer, either.

But they move with a beauty and melody and passion that hits more often than it misses.

The band is at its best on numbers like the rousing "Bullet with Butterfly Wings," "Muzzle" and "Bodies" and the softer "33," "Stumbleine" and "Galapagos." And it pretty much stinks on scrappy, death-metal jams like "X.Y.U." and "Tales of a Scorching Earth," in which a screeching Corgan's voice is so lost in the mix as to be nearly inaudible.

And considering the broken quality of these vocals, that's not even such a bad thing.

But back to the good stuff. The production on the album, by Corgan, Flood and Alan Moulder, makes all the difference. One thing this album definitely is not is a repetition of Siamese Dream's epic, massive sound. On that album, Corgan and co-producer Butch Vig cranked up a huge sonic wall of driving guitar sound as the backdrop.

While that technique lent to the album's sweeping quality, it also tended to hit listeners over the head by the time they made it through the 60 minutes-plus of music on the album.

On Mellon, the producers go for a more spare sound, allowing for a clearer, more distinct feel.

On tunes like "We Only Come Out at Night," "Cupid de Locke" and "1979," the sound is nothing like anything the band has put out before, with industrial-like characteristics and synthesized vocals and ar-

rangements showing a willingness to branch out from the band's signature driving anthems and soothing ballads.

Things really come together on songs like "Bullet," in which a brief a capella vocal introduction by Corgan and a clean guitar/bass line open up the song for Corgan's lyrics of Prufrock-esque frustration at being unable to make a viable difference and have some greater meaning in life.

In the bridge, Corgan asks to be told that he's "the only one... the chosen one" and in the anguished refrain sings "despite all my rage, I am still just a rat in a cage/and I still believe that I cannot be saved."

Couple this with the lyrics of the song "Jellybelly" - "living makes me sick/so sick I wish I'd die" and the somber (but beautiful!) title track instrumental, and listeners may get the feeling that the album is one of those whining, everything-sucks "Generation X" LPs.

To Corgan's credit, however, and the album's betterment, some songs are even hopeful in their themes. But these are few and far between.

Although Corgan still seems tortured by a cynical world view, he does allow for moments of release when he can truly feel happy.

In the poignant "33," for example, Corgan sings "and for a moment I lose myself/wrapped up in the pleasures of this world."

And he harbors a positive outlook for the future: "I'll make the effort, love can last forever/graceful swans of never topple to the earth/tomorrow's just an excuse/and you can make it last, forever..."

From bile-laced music and lyrics to soft, sad and sometimes sadly hopeful songs, Mellon runs the gamut of emotions and textures in the Pumpkins' arsenal. James Iha's guitar work, D'Arcy's bass, and, in particular, Jimmy Chamberlin's drumming all contribute to an album that not only sounds different from Siamese Dream but moves beyond the multi-platinum album in its own right.

Hard to swallow, perhaps, because of its diversity of sounds, Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness nonetheless captures the poignant emotion of its brilliant songwriter and stretches the boundaries of music.

After the album's 28 songs, the listener is not out of breath but is somehow soothed by the cathartic sadness inherent in the album.

Although that sadness occasionally boils over too much in rage and at times seems to drag the album's pace, it is always, always compelling.

Green Day and Kravitz Attract Different Listeners

Music lovers are divided pretty clearly into two groups: people who are interested in good music and ... radio listeners. The radio listeners frown upon WXYC, dismissing it as a tangle of noise, disorienting vocals and abrasion; meanwhile, those who pursue the less popular musicians in our country (as well as in other countries) turn up their nose at G105 and their ilk, reducing every song on non-college radio to mediocre pop fluff.

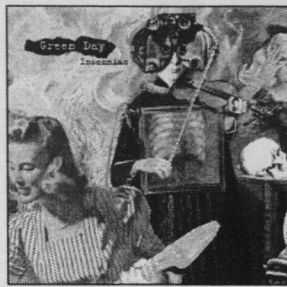
TODD GILCHRIST

Music Review
Green Day
Insomniac
(Reprise)
B

Lenny Kravitz
Circus
(Virgin)
B

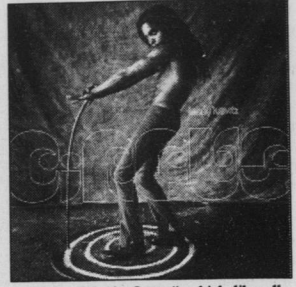
In a sense, both groups are right; each group's objections find at least some basis in fact. However, the XYCers often miss the point that there are many artists who are at least good for what they are, if not good entirely (the same holds true for pop listeners). Both Green Day and Lenny Kravitz fall into this grey area (that is, good for what they are).

Lenny Kravitz, who seems eons away from his first album (temporarily, at least), certainly hasn't changed in his three subse-



quent albums, and frankly I'm beginning to wonder if he's not getting bored. *Circus*, his latest release, follows the same psychedelic-rock formula as the others, and especially seems like a companion volume for *Are You Gonna Go My Way*. The first song, the ballsy-titled "Rock & Roll Is Dead," is as much a suggestion of his source of influences as it is an outward comment on modern rock. A repetitive bundle of power chords, this isn't exactly the kind of radio-compatible single that would fit into the omnipresent "feel-good" music that inundates the airwaves. "Circus," "Beyond the Seventh Sky," and "God Is Love" are all performed in Kravitz's trademark bor-

rowed style, and "God Is Love" uses the same echoing effects that made "Believe" from *Are You Gonna Go...* such an interesting song, but this time its effect is much less dramatic. On "Can't Get You Off My Mind," Kravitz channels the Eagles circa 1974; the harmonizing brought to mind images of "Lyn' Eyes," it's his version of "Interstate Love Song." "Magdalene" is a perky little bastard of a song that would do the Partridge Family proud: "She was only... seventeen!" Green Day may have lost any and all credibility as a serious punk band, but their music is well done, consistent, and fun. Their "fourth" album (their first was a collection of singles and EPs), *Insomniac*, is an enjoyable piece of pop-punk fluff that is tied just tight enough to their roots to please both the public and their punk fans. The majority of the album's songs are *Dookie*-style punk, impolite and incoherent, but a few of the songs, such as "Geek Stink Breath," are curiously placed rock ballads. Then I heard it on G105. "No Pride" sounds like it would better fit on *Kerplunk*, but its appearance on the album only proves that they haven't completely sold out their style. "Bab's Uvula Who?" is great punk, but "86" belongs on the "Clueless" soundtrack. The punk is decidedly radio-palatable, except for a few tracks,



including "Brain Stew," which liberally borrows from Led Zeppelin and is a great song, and "Tight Wad Hill," which sounds more like 1,000 *Slappy Hours*-era Green Day than their more contemporary albums. Like my roommate remarked, "I don't know if I like their albums anymore, but they play fun music and I like them." The band's charisma smooths over a grand majority of their loss of purity. There's an oversight by the music listening "aristocracy" who run in terror of anything that more than four people want to buy because they don't consider that success. Popularity doesn't necessarily have to spoil music's quality (even though it often does).

Bad Religion Explodes Back Into Punk Rock

Armed with leather jackets and thesaurus, everyone's favorite educated punk rockers, Bad Religion, exploded onto the L.A. Hardcore/Punk scene way back in 1980. What followed was a story, punctuated by nine albums and several lineup changes, that continues today.

STEVE FERRARA

Music Review
All Ages
Epitaph Records
B-

Along the way (sorry, bad pun), the band has had its share of ups and downs. From their ill-advised venture into prog-rock, the album *Into the Unknown*, to the Cinderella-like success they created by themselves on ex-guitarist Mr. Brett's independent label, Epitaph Records, the band has endured.

This set, *All Ages*, is a retrospective of the band's work while on Epitaph. From the first LP, *How Could Hell Be Any Worse?*, to the last true Epitaph record, *Generator*, this record presents a cross-section of these albums.

Kicking off the record in true BR fashion is the opening solo of "I Want to Conquer the World." This song is a perfect opener as it is analogous to most of their work. Hella-fast, supermelodic punk rock, backed with intricate, vocal harmonies are

the norm here.

The lyrics in this song also expose another facet indicative of the BR experience; big words and social commentary are common. They sing: "Hey moral soldier, you've got righteous proclamation / and precious tomes to fuel your pulpy conflagrations." I think I passed my SATs by listening to these guys in high school.

Following this song, the collection works its way through five albums of material and two previously unreleased live versions. Only two very old songs (pre-1985), "We're Only Gonna Die" and "Fuck Armageddon... This Is Hell" are included. The majority of the set comes from the second era, '88 to '92, of the Epitaph years. The albums *Suffer*, *No Control*, *Against the Grain* and *Generator* are all represented here with their title tracks and several others each. It all adds up to 22 songs in about 50 minutes, which isn't bad for a bunch of old guys. Classics like "Flat Earth Society," "Automatic Man" and "Do What You Want" make this a good introduction, not a substitute, to an extensive discography of West Coast Punk Rock.

Basically, *All Ages* serves to demonstrate how good a band Bad Religion used to be. The music here speaks for itself. It tells of a time before the band left their creation and home at Epitaph for bigwig Atlantic Records and of a time before Brett made a



fortune with Offspring and decided to quit the band. Because of the loss of the

songwriting of Brett, who has developed into a much better writer than singer Greg Graffin, and the disruption of their previous chemistry, (Brett was replaced by Brian Baker, ex-Minor Threat, Dag Nasty), the future of Bad Religion is uncertain. *All Ages* gives new listeners a chance to hear the band the way they should be remembered - in their prime, before recent events brought about their decline.

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