

## Television preview

## Miss America's brains and Ed Grimley's big break

By JENNY LIVINGSTON  
Omnibus Assistant Editor

The cover of this week's TV Guide sports the headline: "Inside the mind of Miss America." It's pretty scary, isn't it? A former pageant participant complains: "When I go to an audition, all they see is a beautiful airhead." So who's fault is that? Was she a contestant against her will? Did somebody force her to parade in front of millions wearing only a bathing suit and high heels (and probably a little tape to keep that cleavage up)?

I don't care what anyone says, the Miss America Pageant is still a beauty contest. So what? It's classic American entertainment: a

little kitsch, a lot of hype, a healthy sense of competition and bit of T & A. It's gorgeous. It's tacky. It's fun.

Why can't we just let these women be beautiful. I'm not saying they don't have brains — most likely some do and some don't, just like the rest of the population. I'm just saying that it's beside the point.

So, come Saturday night at 10 p.m., tune to NBC and enjoy the spectacle. Go ahead and let them have their bright red smiles and press-on nails. Let them pad their bras and sing bad show tunes. Let them smile until you smile with them. This is America. Let the mascara run!

Saturday morning, "The Misadventures of Ed Grimley" debuts on NBC at 11:30. You remember Ed, the bizarre dweeb from "Saturday Night Live." How could we forget his greased cowlick, his belted highwaters and his mismatched plaids? He's a manic dude, I must say.

No doubt this is NBC's answer to CBS's "Pee Wee's Playhouse." No doubt its debut will invite comparisons between the two (comparisons not unwelcome to the folks at NBC, I'll wager). But aside from their comic nerdiness and frenetic energy, they are really very different.

Pee Wee is prepubescent, but Ed's old enough to have his own apartment. Pee Wee is gloriously



Do Miss America contestants have brains? Does anyone care?

oblivious to all but his own reality, while Ed is desperately trying to fit into the adult world and failing miserably. Pee Wee's world is one of chaos and whimsy, Ed's is just chaos.

In the past few years, Pee Wee has successfully changed his pitch from late-night adults to early-rising children. But it's a long way from Saturday night to Saturday morning, and I'm not so sure Ed can bridge what is probably the

widest demographic gap around.

Then again, who knows? Stranger things have happened in the world of television — like Vanna White becoming a major celebrity. But whether "The Misadventures of Ed Grimley" makes it or not, it can't help but be interesting. So, fall out of bed on Saturday morning, fix yourself some cornflakes and turn it to NBC at 11:30 a.m. You *might* be glad you did.

## The pick of the summer crop of underground tunes

By RANDAL BULLOCK  
Staff Writer

OK, here it is. The very best of what has seeped up from the underground over the summer. It was a bumper crop, and hard to pick favorites, but these are the albums you can't live without, which seem to be doing very well without you, thanks just the same. If you have been privileged enough to have these crawl into your ear already, read Joe Bob. If not, on with the cream . . .

**I Crush Bozo** — Happy Flowers

The general rule for this one is that there is a little something in a surrealistic excursion for everyone. With that out of the way and the air cleared, a discussion of album No. 1 is rendered possible and more fulfilling. Because Happy Flowers have changed. But, like Voltaire said in his review of the Flowers' first album, the more they change, the more they stay the same.

And so childhood torture is still the dominant theme, although it has taken more insidious forms. The torture described on the first album was predominantly due to parental cruelty and inattention, therefore earthbound and hypothetically controllable. But on this album, the torture is also joined by visits from bad science fiction stories. So, our young friend has either been reading a little, dropping acid a lot more, or, like Calvin, his imagination is much too broad and he doesn't have Hobbes around to keep it from taking a particularly evil turn. Or, he just

doesn't bleed. And his brother was actually born with no bones. You decide for yourself.

But I get ahead of myself. If you don't know Happy Flowers, you need to know that they are funny. Perhaps even funny to people who wouldn't ordinarily laugh at the misfortunes of victimized children and cripples. These guys are charming enough, however, to get beyond all that and be funnier than your average comedy album as well. The music is, of course, your basic feedback drench; what else to better evoke the screams of exploited children? So, adopt a pre-tortured child of your own, just for laughs. Do it today. On to album No. 2 . . .

**Hope Against Hope** — Band of Susans

This features more of what one might call "music," and follows such a simple formula, it's scary. The small howl of feedback that opens up the album stays with you like a tour guide and gives the music its boundaries. The crisp rhythm section churns out a beat so righteously rock-steady, it keeps you in line like the ruler of a Catholic school teacher across your hand. And then the magic happens: the three guitars, energetic and with a controlled sloppiness, spin a sonic web that makes me realize how inadequate adjectives are in describing music.

And there is a little voice screaming in the back of my head that says this might be the sound of the '90s. It's heavy. It's melodic. It's inspiring. It burrows in me like

a chigger and makes me want to sell my furniture and send Band of Susans the money. Anything, just to keep them making music this good. The hooks grab you from three rooms away, drag you in front of the speakers and then seduce you with subtle turns of melody and harmony that leave you pale and feverish.

All this may sound a bit excessive. So it is. I maintain, however, that this is one of the best melodic-noise albums to come from the slime in a while. No big deal to your average folk, perhaps, but to diehards, this is better news than a negative EPT, eh? Now for album No. 3 . . .

**Double Bummer** — Bongwater  
Or perhaps album No. 1, since, had no other album come out over the summer, this one would have made the time worthwhile. But, since critical acclaim is often synonymous with dry rot, I feel

the urge to point out that, in this case, it's all justified, and more besides. This is not just an album. This is a cultural milestone masquerading as an album. Those who confuse it with a mere collection of songs do it a disservice and shortchange themselves of the closest thing to a holistic dream experience they are likely to encounter without drugs.

**Double Bummer** is the masterpiece of Kramer, nefarious bassist veteran of such underground denizens as the Butthole Surfers, the Fugs and Eugene Chadbourne's Shockabilly. The general thrust on **Double Bummer**, however, is disparity. Kramer collects an astounding crew of "fringe" musicians and sets them to work on songs that vary from the achingly beautiful to the brutally discordant, often within the framework of the same song. This is art. They mix snippets of political speeches, conventional vocals, tape experiments and

nearly anything else, to create a multi-layered, unified portrayal of modern life that is both nightmarish and wildly funny.

What at first listen may sound like utter confusion ends up, after repeated listenings, to be more confusing than sane people generally like things. Tough. Bongwater has fractured your life, and intends to feed it back to you, with the clarity that it warrants. You owe it to yourself to listen. So much goes on at once, it is like watching television, listening to the radio and reading "Finnegan's Wake" all at the same time. A perfect Saturday afternoon's fun. Wimps beware.

Enough gushing for you? Well, good. These babies deserve it though, as do the Membranes' album *Kiss Ass Godhead* and the Stump album *A Fierce Pancake*, which space does not allow me to put through the wringer. But buy them, too. Until then.



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