

Retrospectively speaking about the year's best new rock'n'roll

By **RANDAL BULLOCK**
Staff Writer

It seems fitting to start this forward-looking retrospective with a look back at the last forward-looking retrospective which, technically speaking, looked ahead last year in a backwards manner to today. This will aid us in our look at last year's debut albums which may produce next year's rock stars. And remember, rock stars are what this is all about.

We ended up with two big, fat successes: Happy Flowers and They Might Be Giants. Both second albums fulfilled the promises of their first and rewarded them with deserved success. They are now rock stars. To offset those, we had two that either went nowhere or fell flat on their face, to wit: Balancing Act and Big Dipper. Balancing Act, with a second album as good as their first, received exactly the same amount of recognition and/or obscurity and will have to wait for another "rock star roundup." Big Dipper's second album, however, bites meat entirely, and proved that it is, indeed, harder for males the second time. They may be in luck though, their album is almost good enough for MTV.

Which leaves the remainder, all

languishing, vinyl-wise, in a black hole somewhere. Leather Nun, Opal, Dukes of Stratosphere, Andy White and Planosaurus all forgot to release a second album and thereby make it hard to predict their "important artist of tomorrow" status. It is rumored that all the members of these bands are spending their time on a joint benefit album for the victims of Live Aid, so stay tuned.

With that out of the way, and with a hearty "all systems go!" we can use our "hindsight to the future" with renewed confidence. All the rules for inclusion that applied last year still apply, but I'm not going to tell you what they are, because I plan to break them freely and it is easier if I hold all the cards. Now, without any further niggling, we will look at last year's debut albums, in roughly no order whatsoever.

First, in the "Yes, I listen to (and actually enjoy some of) this wimpy college crap, too" category comes Lilac Time, wherein an ex-Duran also-Duran put together a sentimental, gently rocking combo that writes soft, cuddly, folksy pop tunes that are the perfect sound complement for a warm rainy day and langorous sex. You aren't too hip to like this.

Next, in the "bands for the discolored teeth set" we have the Gibson Brothers and the Hickoids who have traced rock'n'roll's roots all the way back to a time when people lived in isolated little groups, love was dirty and necessarily involved your sister or brother. Yes, bodies were crusted with dirt back then, but it was honest, and so is this music. Primitive, woodsy, a bit sick and completely indispensable. Two perfect bands for yuppies.

In the "cosmetic surgery can do wonders these days" category, we have Scrawl and Chicken Scratch. These bands are from the same sort of mold as the prior two, except these bands actually interact with other people and have listened to albums made in the last 40 years. Driving, jagged and earthy, and definitely for those people who like things "driving, jagged and earthy."

In the "those Brits are so damned cute" category is Stump, who have everyone who wears novelty underwear dancing to that uneven unpredictable Stump beat. With root feeders extending from Monty Python, Capt. Beefheart, vaudeville, and the New Dating Game, Stump offers up the greatest soundtrack-to-an-asylum

to spill edgewise from that lovable, huggable island overseas. A selection that I'm sure never leaves the tape player of an infinite-capacity clown car.

On a grimmer note, there is the "disaffected Americans wielding snarling guitars" category, with entries from Band of Susans and Rapeman. Rapeman is basically Big Black with a real drummer and the results are as devastating and out of control as one who would expect anything would expect. 'Nuff said. Band of Susans uses a slide rule and a fine point drill to create the most intricately calculated sledge hammer guitar mess to smear off vinyl. Both of these albums are perfect listening for an edgy nine-hour delay at the airport, waiting for a plane that will just blow up in mid-air anyway. Americana at its street-level Americana-est.

And then, in the penultimate position, are the entries for the "American Indie label scene is a sparkling one indeed" movement. Labels like Homestead, Subpop, Blast First and a rejuvenated SST make the competition fierce, but the clear leader in the field has to be Kramer's Shimmy Disc. Kramer, legendary bassist-wildman, can be

proud of many things, but none more than having four (count 'em!) albums in Randy's Arbitrary "Bumpin'stuff in Debutland" (RABID) 1988 list.

Obviously, there are too many to go into, so here — Bongwater, King Missile (Dog Fly Religion), Gwar, and Fred Lane and his Hittite Hotshots. Any mention of these bands in this article is redundant. Before I tell you the most "important" debut release of last year, there are one or two other things I must say. Poi Dog Pondering. Tiny Lights. There. Can I go on?

Now, for the most Bumpin'stuff in debutland, and not only because they are from my hometown (I told you this was arbitrary), but because they are concerned about the future and ruthless in their consideration of it, and that they put the whole thing to the most intense, bristling, electric dance beat that hardCore kids, and maybe anyone else, have ever put out. We need energy to run this country, and Fugazi could provide it. Flex Your Head.

Here's hoping we have a future, rock stars or no. Listen to WXYZ and if you can't love thy neighbor, at least stay out of his face. Until next time.

RANDOM THOUGHTS

Barbecue may look like cat food but only chickens should eat stones

By **ELIZABETH ELLEN**
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Regardless of whether or not the uninitiated think barbecue looks like cat food, Catfish Hunter definitely likes the barbecue at Bullock's in Durham. Gracing the restaurant's wall is an auto-graphed photo of him grinning as he stuffs in those succulent, greasy morsels of spiced pork. He certainly looks as though he believes all is well in the world.

That's why you have to wonder why a photo of U2 is hung right next to the one of Catfish. The caption underneath it reads "U2 Band from Ireland," just to distinguish this group from the U2 Band from Arkansas (which has been voted best musical group in ratings by the Arkansas Tech Wonder Boys every year but one since 1974). The men in the picture are blissfully luxuriating in the delights of Bullock's barbecue, but they sure don't look like the Gaelic lads most folks outside of Arkansas associate with the name U2. Somehow contentment doesn't suit Bono and Company.

With the barbecue, Catfish and the Edge are eating hush puppies, a cornmeal miracle originally designed to shut up yapping mutts and Irish musicians. Eating pebbles shuts up chickens and helps them digest their food.

Some lunatic dogs eat rocks because they think they are afflicted with chicken stomach syndrome. (There's nothing wrong with having a chicken stomach, provided that one is a chicken, of course.) Unless these canines do indeed have chicken stomachs they will probably die of rock ingestion.

Speaking of rock ingestion, isn't it oxymoronic to speak of the Dead doing a live show?

Chickens who eat pebbles, and even those who do not, may lay brown eggs. This is not an irrelevant bit of trivia; empirical evidence suggests that raw chocolate chip cookie dough made with brown eggs is darker in color than the same stuff made with white eggs. Eating too much of the darker variety may cause one to believe in the chicken stomach syndrome.

Chickens cross a lot of roads, and sometimes bridges, I suppose. Because of this, "Bridge ices before road" is a vague bit of propaganda which should not go unchallenged. That earth retains heat better than air is a logical claim, but the wording of the road signs proclaiming this is weird. Is the word "before" being used in its temporal sense or its spatial sense? Does the bridge only ice on the section one comes to just before returning to

the road? What about the verb "to ice?" Can a bridge spontaneously form frozen water? Can a bridge in New Orleans ice over in July?

Maybe the signs should read, "Relative to the adjacent road, bridge tends to be coated with ice earlier, during cold spells." Or maybe the signs shouldn't be put up at all. Empirical evidence shows that bridges with "Bridge ices before road" signs get icier than bridges that don't know any better. Write to Speaker Mavretic about this.

During rainy spells, drivers tend to use windshield wipers, which are fine visibility aids. They are also annoying distractions when they go too fast over dry glass.

The light that emanates from squid fleets in the Sea of Japan is an annoying distraction to anyone looking at Earth from space. The lights may attract squid, but their visibility at such a distance grossly exaggerates the relative importance of Japanese squid fishers in the grand scheme of things. Talk about warping perceptual dimensions.

If Herbert Marcuse discusses "One Dimensional Man," how would he characterize woman? As zero-dimensional, which in geometric terms is a point? Or is she pointless? Is Marcuse pointless?

Maybe we're all living on a two-dimensional plane, and our visions of spherical heavens emblazoned with supernovas and red giants

are only the deluded dreams of flatlanders intoxicated with notions of infinity. If so, it would probably make sense to the squid.

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