

B.A.D. builds on past successes

Big Audio Dynamite

Megatop Phoenix

CBS Records
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Last year, Mick Jones suffered a near-fatal bout with pneumonia. During his recovery, the leader of Big Audio Dynamite gave extensive thought to the band's next project. The result, *Megatop Phoenix*, is a step forward, building on the unique brand of dance music that has become the group's trademark.

Jones, B.A.D.'s singer/songwriter/guitarist had called *Megatop Phoenix* "the record [I have] always wanted to make." That comment naturally raises great expectations, given Jones's history with the Clash, a band whose influence far exceeded its record sales.

With its first three albums, B.A.D. created a style based on eerie sound effects, vicious dance beats and tuneful melodies, often sounding like the third-generation, bastard spawn of the Clash's *Sandinista!*. Each album was a step of refinement for the band; songs became progressively more concise, melodic and sparse-sounding.

Megatop Phoenix contains 17 songs, two-thirds of which are extended grooves. The rest of the tunes are short snippets serving as transitions between songs. The album sounds, at times, as if Jones has attempted to

BRIAN SPRINGER albums

craft his own *Exile on Main Street*, dressing it up in dance-floor garb. While not everything works, such as the sound collage "Mick's a Hippie Burning," the album is a reaffirmation of the band's wit and craftsmanship.

On previous albums, most songs were complex constructions of sound, but on this latest release, the sound often approaches the minimalism of early '80s European synth bands. Using the sound of the title track from last year's *Tighten Up Vol. 88* as a starting point, Jones continues the trend of increased reliance on keyboards.

"Rewind," the first full song on the album alludes to Jones's illness with the lyrics, "Never had to worry/When the chips were down/Held each other's hands/And we stood our ground." The words reflect the debt Jones feels he owes his family and friends for their support during his recovery.

"Union, Jack" superimposes a biting guitar over a Tone Loc beat; the result is an irresistible groove. "Baby, Don't Apologise" recalls "Sambadrome" from *No. 10, Upping St.*, albeit in a harder form. "House Arrest," which displays the influence of house music, is this album's feature vocal for Don Letts.

Another winner is "London

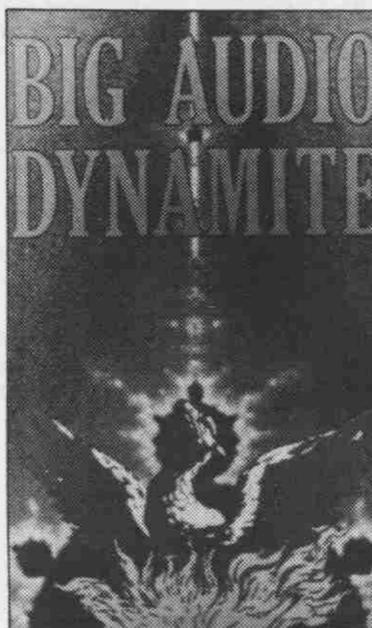
Bridge," which sounds a bit like "Stone Thames" from *This is Big Audio Dynamite*. The song is a bittersweet reflection on the collapse of England, specifically London. Singing "Give me dollars/I don't want pounds," Jones displays a lack of confidence in his home country.

The highlight of *Megatop Phoenix* is "James Brown," a song which is both witty and sad. The lyrics do little more than relate scenes from the musician's troubled life amidst backwards horns and samples of

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Brown's screams. The chorus "It's a man's man's world/In America/Jump back in my cell/Please, please, please/In America/Slipping into hell," seems to say it all.

Jones's vocals are better than ever on *Megatop Phoenix*, and keyboardist Dan Donovan is given a chance to flaunt his abilities more than in the



past. Letts is wisely more selective with his sound effects on the main cuts and is more playful in the transitions between songs. As always, drummer Greg Roberts and bassist Leo "E-Zee Kill" Williams, who always manage to find new and interesting rhythms, are taken for granted.

Megatop Phoenix is not as commercial as its predecessors, but it succeeds quite well. As in the Clash, Mick Jones consistently creates new sounds and uses different approaches to make the band distinctive and innovative. This album isn't for everyone, but the infectious rhythms and witty lyrics make it a real winner.

Album Charts

Rock Pool College Radio Chart

1. Pogues
Peace and Love
2. Various Artists
The Bridge
3. Red Hot Chili Peppers
Mother's Milk
4. Hoodoo Gurus
Magnum Cum Louder
5. Pop Will Eat Itself
This is the Day ...
6. Lemonheads
Lick
7. Stone Roses
Stone Roses
8. Nirvana
Bleach
9. Bauhaus
Swing the Heartache
10. Swell Maps
Collision Time Revisited

WXYC

1. Red Hot Chili Peppers
Mother's Milk
2. Various Artists
The Bridge
3. Various Artists
Folk Classics
4. Half Japanese
The Band that Would Be King
5. Buffalo Tom
Buffalo Tom
6. The Fluid
Roadmouth
7. Billy Bizar
Blowing My Blues Away
8. Various Artists
Time Between
9. Various Artists
Mashing Up the Nation
10. House of Large Sizes
One Big Cake

MUSIC ADS
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9/19 Tuesday
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The burning world of primal Swans

The Swans

the burning world

MCA Records
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For long-time fans of the gloom-and-doom industrial noise school of music, the latest Swans album, *the burning world*, may come as a surprise and somewhat of a disappointment.

Having made a name for itself along with other purveyors of primal energy and atonal experimentation — such as Sonic Youth — the Swans have become the latest group from the quickly-dying progressive rock underground to change its approach and make its music more accessible. In this case, however, greater accessibility does not mean watered-down, made-to-order AOR fluff.

The burning world portrays songwriter/lead vocalist Michael Gira and his latest collection of bandmates as reaching out for new ways to present their art. Although some of the dirge-

DOUG EDMUNDS albums

like arrangements from previous albums remain, Gira and company rely more on softer, acoustic backdrops this time out.

From the opening strains of "the river that runs with love won't run dry," the group blends delicate violin lines and traditional acoustic guitar with lyrical images of a "dying sun" and decaying world. The addition of Gira's stark baritone voice — a cross between Jim Morrison in a blue mood and Iggy Pop on valium — makes for a striking, if not immediately appealing, sound.

But this music is not intended to be easy to digest. It requires a larger degree of emotional involvement on the listener's part than does your average major label release, and a greater willingness to immerse oneself in the visions and the songs.

The song "Let it come down," with its Eastern touches of double violin

and tabla and slow-march beat, sounds like an Indian funeral procession as Gira sings about a resigned acceptance of damnation. Much of the album deals with similar apocalyptic imagery and struggles to put faith in some god. Side two's opening track, "saved," expresses an almost guilty kind of hope for salvation.

In presenting these themes, the Swans employ everything from Gregorian-chant backing vocals to repetitive three-chord patterns, to fairly complex Indian raga-style instrumentation. The overall result is a challenging, sometimes frightening collection of songs that give new meaning to the phrase "life is hard and then you die."

Not for the unadventurous or narrow-minded, *the burning world* is worth the risk for those who appreciate emotional intensity combined with unorthodox musical textures.

When, in the final, haunting moments of "god damn the sun," Gira sings "god damn anyone that says a kind word," I don't think he necessarily intended it for music critics. But if this is the case, then let me be damned for praising this important

In Concert

The Swans, 'New York City cutting-edge rockers,' will perform Friday, Sept. 15, at the Cat's Cradle, 206 W. Franklin St. The show starts around 10 p.m. For more information, call the Cradle at 962-9053

new work from an intriguing, worthy band.

The Swans will perform Friday at the Cat's Cradle. The group's live shows are known for their hypnotic intensity, so don't miss this one.

What The Ratings Mean

- — lame
- — just O.K.
- — workable
- — quite good
- — excellent