

Enjoy pure listening satisfaction

Blake Babies

Sunburn

Mammoth
●●● 1/2

A perfectly dreadful Farrah Fawcett flick. Pinched shoulders and a hot neck. A dog pulling at a little girl's bathing suit on a cracked plastic sign.

These are a few of my least favorite things. But, unlike those other "sunburns," the second Mammoth release by Boston's Blake Babies is a lovable little gem of a pop record.

Taking their name (homage to poet William Blake) on the advice of beat poet Allen Ginsberg, the Blake Babies have been spinning out infectious snippets of hook-heavy power pop since 1985. Following the direction of last year's *Earwig*, *Sunburn* is pure listening satisfaction as it whirls through 12 solid cuts.

The Blake Babies are ready-made for college radio. They jangle. They weave glorious vocal harmonies. They stack hooks on hooks over a tight, driving rhythm section. They explore angst, pain or politics with ease.

Singer-songwriter-bassist Juliana Hatfield fronts the band with verve and a girlish charm often at odds with the Blakes' deeper lyrical and instrumental wrinkles. Drummer Freda

BRIAN SPRINGER

Albums

Boner (whom everyone compares to Mo Tucker, but only because female drummers are rare) works with Hatfield's rather simple basslines to keep John Strohm's fiery guitar style in line. At times, Hatfield's breathy vocals and the band's full-steam-ahead approach sound so much like the Primitives or the Sugarcubes that it's positively scary.

The lead-off cut, "I'm Not Your Mother," sets the tone for the entire album — big drums, lumbering bass and overdriven guitar set to fast tempos with frequent change-ups. "I'm Not Your Mother" sets a verse that literally drips hooks up against a rave-up chorus: "You're a big guy/ But you're cut down to size/ When you're left all by yourself/ I'm not paid to babysit/ Don't ask me to help," Hatfield sings as she raids the melody refrigerator.

"Train" and "Watch Me Now I'm Calling" find the Blakes in a decidedly AOR mood, turning up their guitars and turning down their tempos. "Gimme Some Mirth" is the best example of pure Blake Baby hard rock, running full throttle but leaving no skidmarks.

Lyrical, Hatfield makes things interesting, whether quoting Wimpy



Blake Babies

the "Popeye" hamburger guy ("I'll gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today" in "I'll Take Anything") or considering the environment ("A heavy metal rain upon your head/ A burning blast to bring you back from the dead" in "Sanctify"). Like their poetical namesake, the Blakes make every word count.

The only problem here is that the album lacks variety. For the most part, producer Gary Smith (Connells, Pixies) fails to give the band any diversity of sound.

There are exceptions, though, the most noteworthy being "Girl in a Box" (you can guess what it's about).

Strohm takes the vocals in this tale of true love and sexual fetish, achieving more with subtlety and humor than anything Luther Campbell has ever done. Strohm offers the soon-to-be-classic portrait of *American Gothic* gone "Married ... With Children" — "I hope I die in the nighttime/ With my TV on and a beer in my hand/ And you by my side."

In short, with *Sunburn*, the Blake Babies ease the pain of the decline of American pop music. This is a band that seems ready to break into the mainstream. For a quick fix of melody, guitar firepower, or just plain fun, take your Blakes, baby.

Where have those Darker Days gone?

The Connells

One Simple Word

TVT Records
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After playing the Connells' catchy, slick dance track "Too Gone," the radio belted out something about playing the "future classics," the best new music. Unfortunately, the only dance grooves that might become '90s classics are being made by the Stone Roses and other promising Brits, like the Happy Mondays and the Charlatans U.K.

Oh, how I long for the Connells to return to the *Darker Days*, the days of deep, intense college rock whose melodies soared with haunting pop grandeur.

But wishing for a band to confine and limit itself to its old sounds is like crying over spilt milk. Promising talents want to explore, imagine and experiment. And good bands can afford to.

Furthermore, stepping beyond its roots is sometimes necessary to expand a band's audience and sell more records. Contrary to cult belief, the glamor of club status wears off in time. Bands are human. They need money,

CHARLES MARSHALL

Albums

and they want to make it big.

The Connells' new album, *One Simple Word*, is definitely a pop record, but fortunately it's not a shallow, money-making spectacle. It manages to be an intelligent, thoughtful and musically stimulating record. But it won't take you back to the soothing intensity or rhythmic poise of previous Connells efforts.

The disappointments come in a variety of stylistic areas. First of all, the Connells have stretched their diversity to new but less lively extremes. On *Boylan Heights*, a Hammond organ added a placid, lulling effect, and a trumpet was used as a colorful thematic introduction. But these new anti-garage elements are no longer used sparingly. Many of these added "attractions" dominate the songs, often, though not always, drowning Mike Connell's standout guitar work — a brave and rollicking jangle-derivative sound.

On "Link," George Huntley plays a resoundingly hazy keyboard as his only background noise and sings a humble melody for all of about 70 seconds. Technically and creatively, there's nothing wrong with the song.

But like the 12th track, "Waiting My Turn," an acoustic number with Doug MacMillan on lead, it's just not stimulating. The song lacks the ever-present enticing hooks and makes you wonder what's happened to the group's grit.

As on *Fun and Games*, MacMillan shares the spotlight with George Huntley, while Mike Connell headlines the inside sleeve. Huntley's vocal additions on *Fun and Games*, songs like "Sal" and "Inside My Head," did nothing more than pay homage to early Beatles and Monkees tunes. This was a marked departure from the gritty, exhausting MacMillan-led "garage-pop" inhaled by college kids in enormous doses. This time, Huntley adds more grind to one of the album's high spots, "The Joke," which is driven by drummer Peele Wemberley and features the rigorous guitar phrases of both Mike and Dave Connell.

"Stone Cold Yesterday" is an attractive opening anthem. The rousing electric pop-pop of the melody emerges after quiet, crescendoesque origins, a style that emulates some of the band's previous battle-call anthems — "Something to Say," "Scotty's Lament" and "Hat's Off."

"Set the Stage" is like a follow-up to "Uninspired," a grueling, glowing tune that builds itself piece by piece. It's a rock ballad that moves with live feeling, something noticeably miss-

ing on the other tracks.

As for MacMillan, he's still a standout vocalist. He expands his range as a pop singer, leaving the throes of *Darker Days*, but soars beyond the song's original construction, capturing his feverish live sound on record. But as the styles of *One Simple Word* change, MacMillan is forced to submit to hollow-sounding vibes that come across as more stale than the band may have wished.

Listen to "Speak to Me" and "All Sinks In," and you'll find songs that have the feel of incomplete anthems, songs that just miss the pleasuredome but continue to stab at it. A more subtle approach to pop, something like earlier works "Fine Tuning" or "Home Today," would have fit more appropriately in their place.

Many of these songs aren't dressed in typical Connells sound garments, but after getting used to the group's new pop experiments, the sound begins to grow on you. Nevertheless, the catchy, ear-pulling appeal is missing, and the inconsistency between some of the tracks cause the album's downfall — the need to use the fast-forward and rewind buttons as much as the play.

The Connells are still Triangle superstars and may make it as an intelligent, aspiring pop band. But as for their college appeal, the imagination is there, but the feeling is gone.

MUSIC BRIEFS

Dreams So Real

Gloryline

Arista

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Leaving the whispering murk and modern texture of "Golden," which was featured on the 1986 movie/soundtrack, *Athens, Ga.: Inside/Out*, *Dreams So Real* pulled in hotter-than-hellfire reviews with the burning, passionate pop of *Rough Night In Jericho*. The lesson to be learned on *Gloryline*, however, is that pop hooks can't burn by passion alone.

Driven by dynamic rhythmic tension, electrifying choruses sown with fiery harmonies and polished, biblical allusion-filled pop, the anthemic sound of *Gloryline* is not in itself a bad idea. But trying too hard to overwhelm doesn't work as well as one might think — once you've hit the right chord to perk up the ears, you've got to do something to keep them peeled. Otherwise, the music loses its effectiveness.

Go see them live — it's much more memorable.

—Charles Marshall

The Stone Roses

One Love (12")

Silverstone

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These guys have stirred up more early acclaim and hype than any group since Led Zeppelin or U2. The Roses follow admirably in the footsteps of earlier '80s British giants like the Smiths and the Cure, releasing new material rapidly enough to feed the hungry ears of the press and of fanatical fans. "One Love," the successor to "Fools Gold," keeps the house-based groove intact, modernizing '70s disco beats and adding a linear melody, all the while wrapping vocals into the midst of a seven-minute, post-modern, psychedelic warp — a feat that has managed to mesmerize the alternative and dance circuits, as well as carve a sizeable swath through a host of Floyd and Zeppelin fans.

The two b-sides include a shorter version of the title track and "Something's Burning." Look out for a new album.

— Charles Marshall

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