

Listen to Wonderstuff once before you die

The Wonderstuff

Never Loved Elvis

Polydor

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*I'm looking on the bright side
I wear it like a bruise
I've never loved Elvis
And I've never sung the blues*
Statements like this are nothing new for Wonderstuff leadman Miles Hunt. Throughout their three album file, The Wonderstuff has never proved to be very keen to the retro-culture of the Presleys, Lennons and others who still infiltrate our "modern rock" culture (just listen to the La's and Dread Zeppelin if you don't believe me).

The Wonderstuff continues to look forward rather than backward, trying to break as much new ground as possible. Granted, because they too are deeply rooted in the sort of generic post-modern twang and rapid-fire trippy guitars that continue to thrive and surround the larger pop/rock scene, The Wonderstuff may be limited in their groundbreaking possibilities. But their new Polydor LP, *Never Loved Elvis*, is a most mature step in a new direction — more polished production, more elaborate, if not complex, song structures and a more diverse orchestration of individual songs as compared to the last two LP's, the up-tempo polyester grooves of *Eight-Legged Groove Machine* and the explosive cosmic pop angst on *Hup*.

CHARLES MARSHALL

Albums

Never Loved Elvis kicks off with a slow, mellow feel on "Mission Drive," as the acoustic guitars whisper through intertwining blues riffs that gives the British band a drivin' n' cryin' type aura. But the restless, urgent power pop that is so prevalent and so crucial to The Wonderstuff's appeal breaks through in mid-song, as the tempo accelerates into overdrive and the rhythm section races past the wah-wah cry of the guitars.

The faster, overbearing rock style continues onto the next song, "Play," which, despite Hunt's arrogant denial in the liner notes, is very Morrissey-esque. It is also present on "False Start," a brief metallic clamor that serves as a strange introduction for "Welcome to the Cheap Seats," a polka-flavored folk-rock tirade that finally brings the rustic, folksy elements of The Wonderstuff to the forefront. Previously, the violins, accordions and other backing instruments added a woody flavor to the otherwise seemingly generic pop numbers. This time, the string sections help command the rhythm section more forcefully on almost all of the tracks.

"Donation" is the most Manchester-like bass-heavy song on the record. The guitars wail appropriately behind Hunt's dour and rather helpless lyrics: "It's ugly/and it's desperate/and it's deserving if it's rot/to separate those who have and have not." Again, despite Hunt's denial, the song al-

ludes all too indiscreetly about church and state.

As the songwriting matures and the rugged diversity of the songs continue to impress throughout the album, Hunt's unpolished prose remains a debatable issue.

At first, one sees in Hunt the restless, streetwise poet who cares little for craft and a lot for content. But one has to wonder about overkill in his word choices. In "Maybe," Hunt attempts to write a kind of acoustic-based personal bio where he wrestles with the age-old fork-in-the-road identity crisis of youth. But is he not pushing it with statements like "Maybe I should take the mic/stand up tall like Michael Stipe/and try to solve the problems of the earth." To be honest, however, such blatant name-dropping and contemporary allusions to rock culture are all too typical in Britain's most popular pop/rock bands. Just ask Morrissey about the Krays, Piccadilly Square, Strangeways and the Manchester murders.

The clever soundbites that have cluttered all of The Wonderstuff's album are no doubt still present here, helping them retain their off the cuff spontaneity. "Hurry! time is running out — we've all got to do something crazy before we die," is the phone-call intro into "Sleep Alone." This ballad makes a rather admirable attempt at slow-paced pop — especially for a band who you can tell really has to make a concerted effort to slow it down from the adrenaline-based ragged rock style that seems to be their most natural musical state.

But it's these slower, tuneful melo-



dies like "38 Line Poem" and "Here Comes Everyone," which, despite climactic endings and choruses, lend so much credibility to The Wonderstuff's new, more carefully crafted melodic styles. "Size of A Cow" and "Caught in my Shadow," are the two biggies on the album, at least for college radio. Both are available on CD singles and "Size of a Cow," contains a great acoustic version of "Maybe."

If you've never heard the Hoodoo Gurus, "Grotesque" is practically a rip off of their sweetened angst-driven pop, and if you haven't heard much of

the Inspirational Carpets (though you're not missing much), check out the eighth track, "Inertia." But despite the fact that they can replicate a lot of earlier pop styles so well, it must be noted that The Wonderstuff catalog is full of songs that sound a bit like so many different bands. It makes them that much more interesting and hundreds of times as entertaining as most of their recycled, pre-processed British counterparts. If their tour reaches the States (supposedly this month), it should once again give American bands something else to keep up with.

Music that will make your epidermis tingle

The Candy Skins

Space I'm In

David Geffen Company

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The Candy Skins are the latest addition to what might be called the third or fourth British Invasion. The first Invasion included the likes of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones; the second, the Who and Led Zeppelin. If the 1980s saw an Invasion, it consisted mainly of Phil Collins.

Today's invasion is just like those gone before: it has an immediately recognizable, distinct sound. The new wave layers progressive guitar over a

MATT MORGAN

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snappy disco beat. Among today's invaders are the Stone Roses, Jesus Jones, Charlatans UK, EMF and, potentially, the Candy Skins.

But you can forget the "Right Here, Right Now" gang and that "Unbelievable" "band." The listener will find no hair-in-the-face with the Candy Skins, and no keyboardist who hits a note after thrashing for five minutes. The Candy Skins, hailing from London rather than Manchester, share only two things with their fellow Brit-bands on their debut album, *Space I'm In*: timing and one song.

The Candy Skins attempt the Manchester sound-alike song with the opening of the LP, presumably to get it out of the way. "So Easy" (not a G'n'R remake) finds the Skins grinding their guitars and skipping along to the disco beat. Obviously, nobody told them that it's bad strategy to put your worst song at the front of the disc.

But for all the EMF posing in "So Easy," the Skins show that their difference lies in their lyrics. *Space I'm In* has a recurring theme of surreal looks at feelings of attraction. Lead vocalist Nick Cope's dreamy drone and the spacey lyrics combine to set the pace for the rest of the album.

Ditching the Manchester sound, the Skins move straight to the rock beat with "Submarine Song." Setting another style precedent, the Skins add an anthem-like sound to the guitar melody. Although this song is the only real rocker, a distinct and predominant guitar line flows through the remaining pop songs.

After the first two songs, the Skins begin their typical sound. Pop melodies and a beat with strong electric and acoustic guitar solos support and power the songs and carry the listener along. The melodies are distinct enough to be memorable, and excit-

ing enough to soar.

Accompanied by Nick Burton's rollicking guitar lines, Cope provides intelligent lyrics and dreamy vocals. Mark Cope's rhythm guitar and simple but strong bass lines and John Halliday's pop drum poundings complete the package.

"Black and Blue" opens acoustically, moving through whimsical guitar fills to the pop/rock rhythm. Cope mixes global concern with a budding relationship (if you can imagine such a thing), but returns this positive outlook and feeling to the listener: there are just as many good things as bad in life. "In this world ... there's so much to see/ The sun going down/ and the spread of disease."

The Skins expose their theme of personal attraction and unrequited love with "Never Will Forget You," the first love song on the LP. The Skins sound quite a bit like the Hoodoo Gurus' pop attempts here: a strong mix of pop and rock.

That strong mixture happens to provide the overwhelming majority of the LP. "Freedom Bus," "Without Love" and "Third World Blues" are slight exceptions. In these songs, the Skins emphasize a poppy acoustic sound, forgoing the individual guitar

solos that move the rest of the LP. The change is pleasant, but these songs don't seem to weigh in with the others.

Perhaps the most "original" idea on the disc is sampling the beat and Jagger shriek from the Rolling Stones' "Sympathy for the Devil" for their remake of Buffalo Springfield's "For What It's Worth." The combination gives the song a much needed facelift, speeding it along and lending a jazzy feel.

The Candy Skins' first major effort wins four blobs for its refreshing synthesis of pop and rock. This combination is by no means original, but it is too often ignored by the recording industry. The Candy Skins do well to leave the Manchester sound to their peers, and they set down some tracks that every listener needs to hear. Buy the disc and play it loud.

THE RATINGS

- — forget it
- — wait for a bargain bin buy
- — tape it from a friend
- — buy it
- — buy two copies

Lulling you into a false sense of security

OMNIBUS

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