

MUSIC

Baroque pop must be heard for full effect

Grapes of Wrath

Now and Again
Capitol-EMI Canada
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Once upon a time in the short, sordid history of rock'n'roll, bands thought it rather hip to blend classical music into their sound.

Two good examples of this practice are the Stones' "As Tears Go By" and the Beatles' "Eleanor Rigby." But the band that personified this baroque pop best of all was the Left Banke, whose biggest hits "Walk Away Renee" and "Pretty Ballerina" showed how tasteful orchestral accompaniment could be incorporated well into a pop-rock format.

Nearly 25 years later, in a period

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when Zeppelin-style crunch and hip-hop dominate the alternative airwaves, Canada's the Grapes of Wrath have released *Now And Again*, one of the catchiest and most refreshing albums of 1989.

The record stands out not just because it avoids the current trend of "louder is better," for there are plenty of bands exploring quieter and generally more melodic styles in today's scene. What makes the difference here is the seamless blend of memorable hook-filled guitar rock and delicate, orchestrated melodies — a blend not heard (or at least not presented this well and this consistently) since the Left Banke's brief success in the mid '60s.

Big deal, some might say. Left Banke? Delicate, orchestrated melodies? Baroque pop?! But the Grapes of Wrath transcend this enthusiastic critic's feeble attempts to describe their music.

Now And Again must be heard to be appreciated fully.

The album begins with the haunting, somber "All the Things I Wasn't," a song which confronts the guilt, resentment and sorrow that result from a parent's false expectations for his or her child. Guitarist Kevin Kane and bassist Tom Hooper harmonize beautifully over a lush arrangement including acoustic guitar, cello and oboe. Drummer Chris Hooper and organist/pianist Vincent Jones join in on track two, jumping out of the mix after Kane's Dylanesque acoustic intro.

Here, and throughout the LP, producer Anton Fier, (the creative force behind the Golden Palominos and a

talented drummer in his own right), maintains a clean, well-balanced mix that emphasizes the band's strong melodic sensibilities.

The next three songs are straightforward, rocking pop at its most infectious. "Do You Want to Tell Me?" sounds like a combination of current Let's Active and Redd Kross, while "The Most" is full of unexpected chord changes and a knock-out chorus that is impossible to resist. Closing side one is another quiet orchestrated piece, "Blind," which features a pretty string arrangement and angelic "la-la-la" backup vocals.

Now And Again's flip side contains an equal amount of solid grooves, soaring harmonies and great melodies, and includes some nice pedal steel guitar on a few tracks — courtesy of long-time session cat "Sneaky" Pete Kleinow. There's no real stand-out cut on this side, and the songs tend to blur together more than on

side one.

The songwriting is still strong, however, and the last tune, "... But I Guess We'll Never Know," provides an outro which, like the LP's opening track, engages the listener with its understatement and spare arrangement.

Some records ask to be interpreted lyrically as much as musically, while others require a less rigorous criticism based more on general sense impressions. The Grapes of Wrath's latest LP falls into this latter category.

The power of the disc lies in its overall sound and its songs' carefully crafted arrangements; and again, it's the kind of record that must be heard to be appreciated fully. *Now And Again* will probably get lost in the shuffle of trendier current releases, but anyone who appreciates classic pop rock should investigate the Grapes of Wrath's latest offering.

It may be formula rock, but this is fluff with an edge

Babylon A.D.

Babylon A.D.
Arista
●●● 1/2

I have a weakness for men in lots of leather, with big hair. I freely admit it. I'm not a closet metalhead — I'm perfectly open and honest about it. And I'm not sorry about it either.

Metal has suddenly become the bandwagon of the music business, with every group in the world pulling on spandex and perming their hair in the hope of making it big. Take it from a veteran of the B.B.J. (Before Bon Jovi) era — that is not what metal is about. Real bands don't wear leather because it's cool, real bands wear leather because it's easy to wash — take a walk in the rain. We claim no responsibility for the bubble-gum bleach blondes currently dominating the airwaves.

But bands like Babylon A.D. are where the labels start getting fuzzy, and you're forced to throw them into the catch-all category of hard rock. Babylon is a band that manages to bridge some kind of musical gap between the all-out raunch'n'roll finally making a debut on the music scene and the pop metal dominating the charts these days. In a word, they are accessible; fluff with an edge.

Their self-titled debut album on Arista Records exemplifies this. It is Arista's first metal release, allowing both the band and the record company to play it safe while being mildly innovative. This album really breaks no new ground — it does nothing that has never been done before. But it is incredibly good at what it does do: producing catchy generic hard

ALISA DEMAO albums

rock in the hope of expanding its audience. This is an album that musical snobs will *know* they're not supposed to like, but can't quite help themselves.

I feel compelled to point out that the album isn't perfect. I do solemnly swear to never, never, never, read the lyrics before I listen to a tape, ever again. "Every time you lick my hand/ My heart begins to kick" was not the ideal way to start off a relationship with Babylon A.D.

But they do have some good hooks. The main problem seems to be that *everything* is a hook, the end result being hopelessly cliché. Fire-desire/my woman done me wrong/wild in the street is a time-honored formula, but this amounts to overkill. Lyrically they bear a striking resemblance to Gorky Park, but come on guys,

the Russians had an excuse. English is a second language and they were trying to sound like every other American band.

Derek, the lead singer, does well with the material he has to work with; what I really want to know is, what is this guy's last name? Drum-

Lyricaly, they sound like Gorky Park, but the Russians had an excuse. English is a second language.

mer Jamey Pacheco and bassist Robb Reid provide an infectious rhythm that more than makes up for any lyrical flaws, however. If these guys could bring their lyrics up to the level of their musical arrangement, they

could have a musical monster on their hands. Tracks like "Bang Go the Bells" and "Hammer Swings Down" make you sing along despite the words.

Reminiscent of (now defunct) Dokken or latter-day KISS, Babylon combines a driving yet melodic rhythm with power guitar. Guitarists Ron Freschi and Danny DeLaRosa are no better — but no worse — than any metal guitarists. The potential is there, but again they're banging their heads against a formula wall.


It's music you can dance to, or music you can bang your head to — it depends on what mood you're in. I know this seems hard to believe, but it's true.

The obligatory power ballad "Desperate" is there. With bands like Skid Row and Guns N' Roses opening up the radio market for a harder edge, Babylon's first single "Hammer Swings Down" has the potential for hit status. The real jewel of the album, however, is the bluesy "Sally Danced." Buried at the end of the B side, this

dedication to the memory of Leandra Cobb, an erotic B-movie actress, is perhaps the band's best work.

Babylon has the potential to become more than another Top 40 metal sensation. On the other hand, they also have the connections to avoid the Ratt/Dokken Syndrome in which bands score a couple of radio hits (or none at all) and become incredibly successful within the subculture while no one outside of it has even heard of you. Arista played it safe with their maiden metal release. *Babylon A.D.* is formula, but at least it's good formula.

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