

Briefs that span 3 decades plus take you to Neptune

Starter

Local music compilation

Crisis

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By now, everyone has that distinct feeling that Chapel Hill and the surrounding area are destined to become the new Seattle. But as the national "alternative" spotlight shines on Carolina, most believers (locals and record reps alike) tend to overlook quite a large geographical area of this New Indie Mecca ... Raleigh.

Now, don't be nasty — I know what you're thinking. But Raleigh *does* have a scene. I didn't know it 'til I heard this compilation, but they do. Honest.

Seems that some Raleigh scenesters have decided to lay to rest the pervading myth that their town is incapable of producing music fit to clean the jock straps of Polvo, Superchunk and the like. The result is *Starter*, an impressive collection of nine bands' work, worthy of purchase by any local music follower or otherwise interested person. *Really*. Buy it.

Of course, not many of the bands are mind-numbingly spectacular; in fact, lots of them are quite mediocre. ("Mediocre" in this context doesn't mean "really, really bad but I'm being nice because they live close to me" — it genuinely means "mediocre.") They're all listenable, though, and there are some really catchy songs on here. Plus, contrary to most locally distributed compilations, the production is pretty good. Anyway, on to the bands (the non-mediocre ones) ...

The Violets start off the compilation with some gritty, Social Distortion-esque barroom rock'n'roll. "Dew Drop Inn" and "Motor Man" are probably the two punchiest songs to come

briefs

out of Raleigh since Mary on the Dash's "Salt." Their stab at comedy, "I Hate the Grateful Dead," comes off almost as well as a Scatterbrain tune and might prove itself a personal anthem for some.

Jennyanykind (who're really from Chapel Hill — go figure) provide some songs that ... well, how do I describe it? "Psychedelic with teeth," perhaps? Combine all the dreaminess of '70s California bands with the fuzzpop angst so common to this area. Aloof vocals float above and in contrast to the frenetic instrumentation beneath. Trip out.

Mercyland are Raleigh's answer to Hillbilly Frankenstein. — rockabilly garage punk with Stipe-ish vocals and amazing harmonies. More hooks than your granddaddy's fishin' hat.

Probably the most Chapel Hill-sounding (i.e., dissonant, or as my parents would say, "weird") band on *Starter* and, perhaps consequently, my favorite, is Fragrant Cloud. Not the best choice for a name if one wants to be taken seriously, but their brand of postmodern punk would be embraced with open arms in the all-too-selective land of corduroy we call Chapel Hill. They should open for Erectus Monotone. The song "Tofu" does nothing but clink and twang and proudly claim, over and over and over, "I like Tofu!" You gotta love that.

So yeah, all you local music buffs who fork over two or three bucks apiece for seven-inches shouldn't mind splurging on this compilation and supporting a scene you probably don't but should know about. Besides, *Demolisten III* won't come out for a few more months. Be a well-rounded scenester — buy *Starter*.

—Summer Burkes

sound. Everything merges — no hits like "Little Fluffy Clouds" will come out of this one, since each part of the album is an integral segment of the whole. It's one great, epic journey, with seven tracks blurring together to form 75 minutes of hyperspace.

The words haven't really yet been formed to describe *U.F.Orb*, although I'm doing my darndest to pin it down. This could be dance music, this might be club music, and it's definitely chill-out music to the Nth degree.

Samples mix with synthesizers to create what, according to The Orb, Sir Carl Potter called the Third World. It's the world of objective contents and thoughts, as opposed to the first world of objects/things and the second, of subjective thoughts.

The waves, the dogs barking, the insect sounds take you on a trip to the outer reaches of your mind, where your body and your senses become lost, immaterial. Strong back beats and electronic percussion are overlaid with a melee of samples and sound effects that mix and melt and keep the sound together, but let it grow, reform and shoot off in unexpected directions.

The music is alternately haunting and reassuring; the cumulative effect is to make your mind feel like it just had a long, hot shower on a planet like Neptune, then went off to wrap itself in cool, silk pajamas and take a nice nap in the shadow of a friendly black hole.

—Alex Frew McMillan



Neil Young: a lifetime of bad hair hair days

Neil Young

Harvest Moon

Reprise

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Listening to Neil Young's new album, *Harvest Moon*, is a lot like eating Thanksgiving dinner with the family: once a year is plenty 'nuff.

And like those annual gatherings with your kin, you'll swear you've heard some of these songs before (just like grandpa's war stories): "Such a Woman" sounds like Joe Cocker's "You Are So Beautiful"; "One of These

Days" sounds like a mellower version of The Eagles' "One of These Nights"; and "You and Me" sounds like Young's own "Old Man" off his 1972 *Harvest* album, which this one is supposed to be a sequel to (Can you rip off your own songs? "Why not?" sez Neil).

Like *Harvest* (which included such classics as "Heart of Gold," "Alabama" and "Old Man"), *Harvest Moon* is laden with ultra-mellow countrified acoustic ballads, and lacks the ear-shattering guitar of the harder-edged stuff Young did with his former band, Crazy Horse (which was some of his best).

That'd be fine, except none of these songs are very original, except for "Old King," an ode to a dog that "wasn't scared of jumpin' off the truck in high

gear." (Which explains why "that hound dog is his-tor-ee.")

Not to be harshin' Neil's gig and all, but *Harvest Moon* is basically a boring, recycled album. I know, I know, Neil Young at his worst is worth at least three blobs — even though he sings like he's constipated and has hair that the scarecrow from *The Wizard of Oz* would kill for — but Neil, listen: Thanks for not selling out (unlike most folks that survived the '60s), but next time try not to do a bad remake of a good album.

If Neil Young can do no wrong in your eyes, you'll drool all over this album. Otherwise, you'll just drool all over yourself when you fall asleep listening to it.

—John Staton

Big Star

#1 Record/Radio City (both reissues)

Stax/Fantasy

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What other American group between the Beatles and punk made any difference at all? Long one of the great '70s bands, Big Star is now more myth than band, with everyone from the Replacements, Matthew Sweet, Primal Scream, Teenage Fanclub, Magnapop and R.E.M. singing their praises. The Bangles' "September Gurls" is an outright cover; but dozens of other bands owe Big Star royalties.

Founded by Alex Chilton and Chris Bell in Memphis in 1971, Big Star was named for the supermarket. Steering clear of the pompous, pseudo-symphonic "art rock" that made punk so necessary, Big Star looked instead to Stax soul and British Beat. In fact, if all '70s bands had been as good as Big Star, we wouldn't have needed punk to kick down the doors.

"We felt that the only good records from outside of England were R&B records, and half of them were made in Memphis," said John Fry, Big Star's pro-

ducer and engineer. "We were all Anglophiles. If it came from England, it must be good."

The best of their music was edgy and delicate, well-crafted odes to lost innocence, forgotten youth, secret connections. The ringing guitars and tense harmonies may not raise eyebrows now, but they were ahead of their time in 1972.

Radio City (1973) is by far the better of Big Star's first two records, with a fuller sound and more mature, consistent songwriting. But never mind; both come on Fantasy's reissue. "September Gurls," "Thirteen," and "The Ballad of El Goodo" are songs so good they make you want to run out and start a band. For some groups, that's the way it happened.

—Scott Timberg

The Orb

U.F.Orb

Mercury

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Sense for the soul. That's what this album is — a new mantra for your mind. British ambient house DJs Dr. Alex Patterson and Thrash have brought us something truly different in the Orb's sophomore album, which doesn't follow up *Adventures Beyond the Ultraworld* as such, but instead leaps headlong into the far-distant area of the universe for which their first album aimed.

There are no songs on this album; in fact, the words (in samples only) are few and far between, and aren't really intended to be made out from any other



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