

Spirit of '73
(various)
(Sony/Epic)

Newspaper

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This is a cute concept album. Like the title says, it's a bunch of hits from that great year 1973 (which saw Watergate and my birth, among other important events), recorded by modern artists and interspersed with short sound bites to help remind us of the era's great fads: Disco, lip-gloss, make-out vans, mellowness, CB radios, and the death of disco. All this in a hour or so. Fab, huh? Real groovy, man.

There's no disco, thank heavens. What you do get is a diverse range of female artists singing tunes you might recognize (and if you don't, your parents will... see above note about vans). There's Sophie B. Hawkins singing 'The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down', Ebony Vibe Everlasting on the overplayed 'We Are Family', and Eve Plum belting out 'If I Can't Have You!'

You know you like them, even if you don't want to admit it. You learned to walk to this music. So are the remixes any good? Yes, for the most part. There are a couple of lazy performances near the end by the Indigo Girls and Sarah McLachlan ain't real exciting either... but you'll be paralyzed with laughter when Sophie sings, "Like my father before me I'm a workin' man..."

Otherwise it's good stuff to listen to when no one is around to see you enjoy it. There's rock and folk and romance... and NO disco.

The fun, however, is tempered by the album's message... it's a fundraiser for Rock for Choice, a pro-choice/women's rights group. Makes the whole thing seem just a little too serious, and if you think too long about it that one little fact grounds the whole album.

(3.5) --T. Drake

Pet Shop Boys "Alternative" (EMI)

This past summer, I rediscovered the Pet Shop Boys while bustin' funky moves in alternative dance bars in southeastern Ontario. Realizing just how much I had liked them, I jumped at the chance to review their latest release: a CD double-pack featuring the 'b-sides' of singles released from 1985 to 1995.

Of the thirty original tracks, which ranged in tone from dark techno-dance to light and melodious ballads, not one was distasteful to the ear. In addition to entrancing music, the CD liner notes contained a conversation between Jon Savage and the two "Boys", Chris Lowe and Niel Tennant. During this dialogue the three uncover the motivation behind each of the thirty mixes.

To paraphrase Jon Savage in his introduction to the collection, the songs featured on this release are really a chronicle of the cutting edge in club music over the past ten years. This CD double-pack is a must-have for any dancin' fool.

--Steve Ellis

SUPERGRASS
I should Coco

Emerging from the mire of the U.K. punk resurgence is Supergrass. Danny Goffey (drums) and Micky Quinn (Bass) present a deliciously lucid collection of original songs infused with the spanking keyboard sound made famous by Madness and the articulate, urgent guitar work reminiscent of early Pete Townshend. Their debut album I should Coco is a cluster of well-crafted monster songs, crammed with melodic fluidity and innovation.

Supergrass successfully combines influences as varied and far reaching as (pre-Berlin) David Bowie, The Who, Elvis Costello, The Beatles as well as the titans of the 1970s-80s punk and ska scenes. Throughout they maintain a distinctive and thoroughly contemporary sound of their own.

--Geraldine Quinn

"Deep Forest" Boheme
(Sony/Epic)

In this case, the cover almost says it all. It depicts a dramatically sunlit forest glade. Under that, a pair of autumn leaves painted with simple runes. You can infer from this that it's an instrumental album of meditation music, and you would be right. You'd also miss the point. That's okay so did I.

Boheme is Deep Forest's second album, and it's a radical departure for them. That is, if the liner notes are to be believed. It's an attempt to evoke the feel of a Balkan forest (they refer to themselves as creating a Bohemian rhapsody... groooooan) using chants, old folk songs, and low, rustic voices. As a piece of mood-setting orchestration it's superb. I could say less about the creative process used to achieve it: each song has a long list of acknowledgements attached to it. I have misgivings about any artist who creates by taking another's work and overlaying it with their own.

But it's good music for a setting a quiet or romantic mood, much like the work of Germany's Enigma (without the disturbing religious overtones) and as such could be worth adding to your collection of make-out music.

(3.5)
--T. Drake



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