

the TOP 20

in approximate order of preference

1 > 10

August and Everything After, Counting Crows
A flawless collection of gorgeously rendered songs.

Beaster, Sugar

A volcanic half-hour whirl-wind that devastates anything by Husker Du.

Sweet Relief, Various Artists

A haunting and remarkably coherent tribute and an excellent introduction to a sadly overlooked songwriter in Victoria Williams.

For the Beauty of Wynona, Daniel Lanois

Like his best productions, a work of fascinating experimentation and rootsy integrity.

Traffic From Paradise, Rickie Lee Jones

A cumulative, highly original work from one of rock's most underrated artists.

The Juliet Letters, Elvis Costello and the

Brodsky Quartet

Despite some operatic bellowing from

Costello, a triumphant pop/classical hybrid.

In Utero, Nirvana

A stripped-down, brutal album from Seattle's biggest and best.

Mercury, American Music Club

A melancholy blur.

Ten Summoner's Tales, Sting

A flawless work of pop craftsmanship.

Zooropa, U2

U2 hits the dancefloor and comes up with a sound almost as resonant as that of old.

Altered Beast, Matthew Sweet

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Come On Feel the Lemonheads, The

Lemonheads

Saturation, Urge Overkill

Stain, Living Colour

Last Splash, The Breeders

You Gotta Sin to Get Saved, Maria McKee

Vs., Pearl Jam

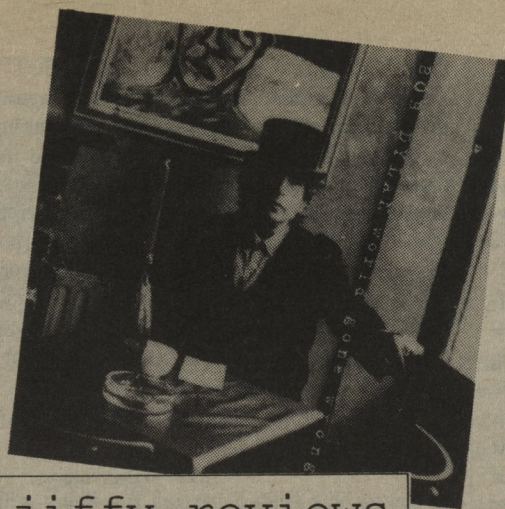
No Alternative, Various Artists

Judgement Night, Original Motion Picture

Soundtrack

Become What You Are, The Juliana Hatfield

Three



jiffy reviews

12 albums in
a 1/2 hour

Bob Dylan's latest album, *World Gone Wrong* (3), is another set of solo-performed traditionals like last year's *Good as I Been to You*. Less blues-based than its predecessor, it's really just a lot of tiring strumming and mumbling, without the melodic appeal of *Good as I Been to You*. Still, these folk tales do resonate (especially the title track).

Guns 'n' Roses' new one, *The Spaghetti Incident* (3), is an odd jumble of bludgeoning covers of hardcore, punk, glam and seventies drivel. What do they prove? That metal, despite its higher volume, can't match the power of punk. Duff McKagan gets hold of the mike more than he should be allowed, and when Chris Cornell said, "I know what to do, I'm gonna fuck fuck fuck you," I knew he was being ironic; in Axl Rose's hands it sounds like an anthem. The band's interlocking guitars are undeniably forceful, though. Guns 'n' Roses are the ultimate in rock excess -- I hate everything these guys stand for, but there's no two ways about it, they do rock, and I admire the gumption of this weird little collection. I've heard the album's uncredited closer was written by Charles Manson. Once again, I HATE them.

Big name alternative compilations are all the rage nowadays, but there's major gaps in the quality of these releases. The pro-choice benefit album, *Born to Choose* (2.5), is the kind of incoherent barrel-scrappings that gives compilations a bad name. The REM track is worthwhile, but almost everything else here sounds like dumpster plunderings. Worse is the Jimi Hendrix tribute, *Stone Free* (2), a collection of tediously honest Hendrix covers by acts ranging from mainstreamers like Eric Clapton and Spin Doctors to alternative

honchos like Belly and M.A.C.C. (that's Temple of the Dog). At best spirited, this is pretty much a complete write-off. Those evil Beavis and Butt-head guys have invaded the music industry with *The Beavis and Butt-Head Experience* (3), sure to rot millions of young minds and probably initiate the fall of Western civilization. Their humour wears real thin real quick, but millions of thirteen-year-olds are probably gathered around their ghetto-blasters as you read this, excitedly whispering to one another, "Did you hear that?! He said 'monkey ass'!" The names are impressive, though, including Aerosmith, Red Hot Chili Peppers and Nirvana, whose track is called--get this--"I Hate Myself and Want to Die." I must admit I love it. The pick of the litter is easily the AIDS benefit, *No Alternative* (4) (see review in the top twenty albums thing). [Sorry, it never got done. --ed.]

Kate Bush's *The Red Shoes* (3.5) is her first album since 1989's *The Sensual World*. Bush has evolved into a highly accessible, even commercial composer, but her instrumental flavourings add spice. Her voice, as usual, is the big drawback: her Betty Boop-gone-bohemian vocals can sound like an absolute joke next to her sometimes strikingly gorgeous soundscapes. *The Red Shoes* is a solid set of memorable songs, somewhat reminiscent of Peter Gabriel's *So* with a dash of Prince (he appears on one track). A massive influence on the likes of Sinead O'Conner, Sophie B. Hawkins and Sarah McLachlan, Kate Bush's descendants easily outstrip her, but she is a modestly compelling artist.

SUPER QUICKIES: A John Prine Christmas (3.5) is my choice for holiday listening. Prine is on a winning streak nowadays and this one is another fine example of his earthy wit and effortlessly melodic ways. * I love Buffalo Tom's sound, but their songwriting just isn't at the same level. Nonetheless, *Big Red Letter Day* (3) is a likeable set of relaxed, guitar rock. * Cult legends Big Star reunited last year for one show, spawning this live album, *Columbia: Live at Missouri University* (4), a positively charming, punchy amalgamation of the Beatles and the Byrds. Big Star's glimmering pop crescendoes and glorious imperfection make for an irresistible album that will hopefully trigger interest in the band's earlier work. * Teenage Fanclub's sophomore effort, *Thirteen* (3), is another pleasant set of electric... pop... stuff, the kind of thing I'm rapidly running out of words to describe. * Moncton's Eric's Trip's full-length debut, *Love Tara* (3), is a very unique blend of pop smarts and noise. Promising but not revelatory.