

MUSIC

Playing Catchy

The press release for **Charm (I.R.S.)**, the debut album for a British rock duo named Intimate Strangers, says, "The LP is literally pregnant with singles brandishing melodies that seem to take hold inside of seconds." You may wonder, from this, whether it's safe to listen to Intimate Strangers. Well, yes, it is. And it's fun, too, if somewhat mysterious.

Intimate Strangers—singer Richard Spellman and guitarist Sean Lyon—have a catchy, propulsive way with music and a catchy, oblique way with words. On "Raise the Dragon" they proclaim that "in a world that cannot find a cause for celebration," "we're gonna raise the dragon." What does this mean? Maybe nothing. But it's easy to sing while you're dancing.

The beat is, after all, what these guys care about most. The studio musicians they hired to play bass, drums and keyboards, for instance, give this essentially Europoppish music a much more tantalizing, almost jazzlike foundation. So what if you don't know whether the woman in "The Blue Hour" is a prostitute, or what they mean by "flame on, you human torches." The lyrics may be obscure, but the pulse isn't.

RON GIVENS



Dynamic duo: Intimate Strangers care about the beat



Roadhouse night: Harrison's solid rock

Fool for Love

The cover art for Kodac Harrison's **Tear the Old House Down (Luckie Street Records, 2989 North Fulton Drive N.E., Atlanta, Ga. 30305)** is a grainy pen-and-ink drawing of a little bar by a donut stand. The drawing is simply, sweetly evocative of roadhouse summer nights—if you could walk inside that bar, the guy onstage would be playing plain, honest rock and roll.

If the guy onstage is Kodac Harrison, he is. Harrison, a 10-year veteran of the Atlanta bar scene, covers ground that might at first seem familiar—romance so potent it makes you do crazy things; heartache

that ages and grows stronger, like Georgia moonshine. But just when you think you've heard it all before, he gives the material a sharp twist. "Dangerous Dance" sets a lovers' meeting to an ominous reggae: "The heat went to my head / The night turned red..." In "Call the Game" he's an older man in love with a young girl, knowing all the time that "old fools burn easy / Old fools burn fast..." But before you dismiss Harrison as one more busted-up cynic, listen to the album's best song. Set to loping acoustic guitars, "Come Alive" holds out the promise of True Love around the next corner, or the next: "Turn around / come alive..." Harrison may be a fool for love, but he's got a rock-and-roll heart.

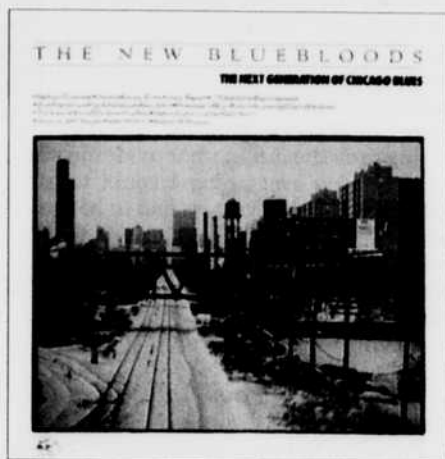
BILL BAROL

True Blues

Chicago has long been the home of the blues. And the best blues record label in Chicago—or the country, for that matter—is Alligator Records. That's why **The New Bluebloods** is such a treat; this new album from Alligator, subtitled "The Next Generation of Chicago Blues," shows that the musical heritage of such greats as Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf and Hound Dog Taylor still thrives. "Bluebloods" collects 10 songs by 10 currently emerging blues acts in Chicago. Some, like John Watkins, have been sidemen for such blues legends as Willie Dixon. Others, like Valerie Wellington, are relatively new to the blues.

This generation owes an obvious debt to its forefathers. The relentless boogie blues of Lil' Ed and the Blues Imperials on "Young Thing," for example, may remind some of J. B. Hutto and the Hawks. (For good reason, since Ed Williams is the late Hutto's nephew.) And on "A Fool for You," the growl in Valerie Wellington's enormous voice resembles that of Koko Taylor. But there are other nonblues influences: "Nothing Left to Believe In" by Maurice John Vaughn, for example, doesn't sound that much different from the best of the Steve Miller Band. Even if some of the songs lack an emotional edge, because of greater musicianship, "New Bluebloods" shows overall that these performers can rock and stomp till midnight with the best.

R. G.



Chicago style: Carrying on the tradition