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Releases represent best, worst selection

The Oregon Daily Emerald would like to thank Mike McAdams and the Record Garden, 927 Willamette St. on the downtown mall for providing several of the albums reviewed below.

The Icicle Works
If You Want to Defeat Your Enemy Sing His Song
Beggar's Banquet

The Icicle Works have made a lot of changes in its sound since the band released its self-titled debut album a few years back. That one consisted of an almost minimal musical background: a lot of guitars and basic drums. And there was a very nature-orientated theme throughout

By Carolyn Lamberson

the album, as shown in the individual song titles: "Whisper to a Scream (Birds Fly)," "As the Dragonfly Flies," "Factory in the Desert" and "Nirvana." On "If You Want to Defeat Your Enemy..." the band takes a different approach. More specifically, it makes a progression from a band trying to find a distinctive sound to one that has found a distinctive sound. "The Icicle Works" was an album that seemed to precede the recent popularity of groups trying to espout values of the 60s in both message and musical style (like the Dream Academy and most recently 10,000 Maniacs).

While "...Defeat Your Enemy..." still has its basic roots in the 60s, this record is much more rock 'n' roll that its predecessor. Songs like "Evangeline" and "Understanding Jane" have that irresistible beat that made the band a hit in its native England. Vocalist/guitarist Robert Ian McNabb's intriguing vocals highlight this record, as does his guitar performance. Bassist Chris Layhe and drummer Chris Sharrock's steady, solid rhythm section add the other important component of any album with great success.

However, don't think under

all the rock there isn't a thought. That's not the case at all. "Sweet Thursday" sounds as if it took many of its themes from the John Steinbeck novel of the same name. "Up Here in the North Of England" is an insightful look at "life in a northern town," so to speak. McNabb and company put the national battle between the British political parties on a local level, and make careful observations at the difference between countrymen.

All in all, this is a solid American release from a band who has hit it big across the Atlantic. The Icicle Works has avoided the dreaded sophomore slump. And if this album doesn't break the band in this country, all it has to do is keep up the progression. At this rate, the next record's going to be a knockout.

Heroes
Here We Are
RCA

I must say I had some high expectations for this record. Fronting Heroes is Darren Costin, whose departure as Wang Chung's drummer after the release of that band's best record "Points on the Curve" seemed to trigger a degeneration from the interesting to the mindless. Maybe Costin had taken that old Wang Chung sound and improved it, I thought.

I was disappointed. "Here We Are" started promisingly enough. The first chords of "Driftaway" were vaguely reminiscent of Wang Chung's "Don't Let Go." But as the song progressed, things went rapidly downhill. The song is horribly over produced; so much so one can't even understand Costin's vocals. It's a good thing the record company included a lyric sheet. As the needle moved across the grooves, Costin was more

understandable, but a lot was being drowned out in a sea of monotonous drumming and repetitive guitar.

The bad even reaches the level of the ridiculous on "Living on a Time Bomb." The background music is completely forgettable, but Costin isn't. His vocals reminded me of a young George Michael and Andrew Ridgely trying to be tough rappers on "Young Guns (Go For It)."

As a matter of fact, a lot on this album sounds vaguely familiar — too familiar. "My Heart Beats" could almost double for Wang Chung's "Let's Go," off of the latest "Mosaic" record. But maybe that can be attributed to the fact Wang Chung's bassist Nick Feldman co-wrote many of "Here We Are" tracks with Costin.

Well, regardless of the rhyme or reason of it, "Here We Are" is no way to present a new band to the public. I suppose it'll make good dance room fodder. Aside from that, Heroes take a fall.

Silencers
A Letter from St. Paul
RCA

It's easy to see why Silencers thanked Elvis Aaron Presley in the liner notes of "A Letter from St. Paul." The band's straight-ahead music owes much to Presley, at least in the days before he became a fat, annoying Las Vegas celebrity.

The overall production of this record is clean and clear. And the musicians: Jimmie O'Neill, guitar and vocals; Martin Hanlin, drums; Cha Burns, guitar; and Joe Donnelly, bass, knit together an interesting little record highlighted by the recent hit "Painted Moon."

For a band that writes a lot of up beat melodies, the subjects of the songs are nothing light and fluffy. "Can't Cry" is a desperate plea for attention with McNeill singing "So I sit here insane on the floor/And I make up my mind who to kill." Pleasant thought, huh? Yeah, well, "Bullets and Blue Eyes" is even better. What starts off sounding like a nice, pleasant ballad turns to a fast-paced attack on violence in the home (a child who plays with toy guns) and the the consequence of life in the nuclear age. However the band isn't pretentious about it, like so many politicized bands these days. And even without the message, the music itself makes the song exciting.

These guys sure do seem facinated with the spiritual relm. Not that they are a Christian band. The songs seem to mention religion, God, angels and the such but do not preach or glorify. And they don't present a negative position about a certain belief either. It's simply used as a base or subject. But its there and it can be thought-provoking. That's refreshing in these days when everyone is ready to scream if someone so much as criticized another person's beliefs.

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