

Big Black, The Smiths offer exciting releases

**'Strange Ways,
Here We Come'
The Smiths**
★ ★ ★ ★

So, guitarist Johnny Marr has broken up the Smiths, but what difference does it make? None. Thousands of 16-year olds across the globe will just have to wait a while to hear Morrissey's self-pity wail over lush strings or Marr rock out in some other

Short Spins

Reviews by Chris Metzler

band.

The Smiths also have a couple of singles coming out and possibly a live record around the new year, so there's no need to worry.

In the new album Morrissey is basically himself. He even asks "Stop Me if You've Ever Heard This One Before." Well, to be quite frank, Mr. Morrissey, nothing's changed. Marr is the one who saves the record by creating some of his best compositions yet, showing variety, unlike the past albums that were plagued by dull, uninspiring filler.

Marr combines many instruments into each song, giving them a more accessible sound for all us Americans to thoroughly enjoy.

The first cut "A Rush and a Push" sounds as though Men at Work is back to haunt us, and it is an easy hit despite Morrissey's voice, which many people still have a hard time adjusting to.

"I Started Something I Couldn't Finish" could now be interpreted as The Smiths breakup, but it is just another

Ramones, Dukes of Stratosphere flunk in originality

one of Morrissey's personal dilemmas.

Bassist Andy Rourke appears to be listening to a lot of McCartney as he rips off the descending line from "Dear Prudence" in "Death of a Disco Dancer." He also steals from Wings for the first single off the record "Girlfriend in a Coma" — which is the safest place for a girlfriend of Morrissey to be.

The second side of the LP starts out with the magnificent, dramatic number "Last Night I Dreamt Somebody Loved Me," which seems to be lacking a middle.

"Paint a Vulgar Picture" is a follow up to "Panic" where Morrissey whines about a record company's exploitation, and the song contains a wicked Framptonesque guitar solo. The album ends with a squeamish appeal for faithfulness, "I Won't Share You." (I told Morrissey never to trust Little Johnny Marr.)

For those of you who are not over burdened with The Smiths' personal afflictions, "Strangeways, Here We Come" is a really good album. But, personally, I've had my fill.

**'Halfway to Sanity'
Ramones**
★ ★

Heh ho, it's another Ramones' record. These kings of idiot rock, these gurus of speed, give us yet another dosage of their antidote to art rock.

Like a lot of Ramones' albums it starts out strong but it just doesn't know how to end. Latest drummer Richie Ramone has left the family apparently because life in the Ramones

isn't exciting enough... what?

Ex-Blondie drummer Clem Burke has now been adopted to fill the void plus Debby Harry guests on the first and hopefully last Ramones collaboration.

The new album starts out with a college-rock band number "I Wanna Live," which has a very pretty guitar sound making it a nice song.

Ramones junkies have their fill here with "Bop 'Till You Drop," "Go Lil' Camero Go," "I Know Better Now," "Death of Me," "A Real Cool Time," and the '50s "Bye Bye Baby."

"Death Of Me" is an answer to the purveyors of the punk rock future with Joey singing, "We've got to stop this crazy carrying on." The Ramones even make a stab into the world of Gothic death rock with "Garden of Serenity."

DeeDee has a strong hardcore-metal influence on "Weasel Face," "I Lost My Mind," and "I'm Not Jesus," which blew me away. (I always thought that was Joey on my Last Supper wall carpet.)

The Ramones give us a lyric sheet again in hopes that some pinhead philosopher finds out the true meaning.

You can save your money by recording the last two records in a different order or you can waste that hard earned cash of your parents on "Halfway To Sanity." By the way, what year is it anyway?

**'Psonic Psunspot'
Dukes Of Stratosphere**
★ ★ ★

Andy Partridge is wetting his purple, paisly pants because he can release almost any record he wants.

After being stifled by the strong arm of producer Todd Rundgren on the last XTC

release, "Skylarking" — the group's most successful LP since "English Settlement" — Partridge gets more realistic with his second major venture into the all-too-groovy '60s with his Dukes of Stratosphere's first domestic release "Psonic Psunspot."

The Dukes of Stratosphere is basically Partridge and Colin Moduling on psychedelics, existing within a '60s time warp. Each song on this LP is stolen directly and purposely from the Beatles, Kinks, Hollies, early Pink Floyd, The Bryds, Beach Boys, and tons of strange '60s stuff I know nothing about.

The first song "Vanishing Girl" could be a hit but for some odd reason, if it is allowed into the top 40, "You're a Good Man Albert Brown" brings back an early Ray Davies when he knew how to write the best songs around.

The album is narrated by a flowery English youth who tries to take you into the heart of the "Psonspot" — but flounders, as does the songs on the end of both sides, especially the last song "Pale and Precious," which could turn a Beach Boy in his grave.

The biggest problem with much of this album is that it fails to takeoff with enough "Psonic power" as did the Duke's first way out LP, "25 O'Clock" (available only on import). The album is too polished to earn itself a truly outlandish jolly time, and many of the ideas are half-baked XTC reruns.

As usual, for Partridge, this album is a bit too clever, but hey, what college student isn't clever.

So, if you are one of those people who completely missed the '60s and pretends you

didn't, this album should be a good, cheap education.

**'Songs About F---ing'
Big Black**
★ ★ ★ ★

Big Black never made its switch to Windham Hill, maybe they just aren't pleasant enough. Before I even heard this album I knew what it was going to sound like: a lot of people probably did too.

The songs on "Songs" are big, the music is huge, and it could sound gargantuan if it weren't for the poor production. "Songs" was released just a week after the band broke up, just when every music publication in the world was trying to figure out what they were about.

"Songs" is about two lawnmower guitars killing a vulgar bass on top of a drum machine while Alan Ginsberg is shrieking. By listening to this album very loud — there is really no other way — it all fits together in a strange fashion.

Big Black gives Kraftwerk's "The Model" a whole new meaning and the intense "Ergot" could be early Gang of 4 run amok. Vocalist Albini shouts out "he's got his eight track playing real f---ing loud" on the cynically comical "Fish Fry." (just what I wish I was doing). Somehow, there is even a hint of melody on "Pavement Saw."

In the same vein as the Butthole Surfers, Foetus and the industrial slime rock, Big Black borders on pretentiousness but they dissolve. Big Black earns respect by closing all the steel doors around us and all we can do is wish we had more — even though this is all too much.

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