

ROCK

BY GLENN McDONALD

Pocket Band



Bicycle

Back in the day, rock bands used to tour in squalid old vans, eating lots of Taco Bell and engaging in woefully unhealthy activities.

Not this month's pocket band. They want to ride their bicycles.

"I got laid off from my job," explains Kurt Noel Liebert, singer and bassist for the New York City power-pop trio Bicycle. "And I'm a huge biking fan. So I thought I might just strap a guitar to my back and cross the country doing acoustic shows. I told the guys in the band, and they were like, 'Let's do it.'"

So for two months last summer, Liebert, guitarist Brian Chenault and drummer Forrest Kemper biked 2,700 miles across America — with Chenault's mom hauling the equipment and a pop-up camper behind them.

They played gigs in towns along the way, turning in sets of originals and covers — including Air Supply. And they camped. No tour bus. No per diem. Maybe s'mores.

"Chicago was the worst," Liebert says. "We came through right during that heat wave. We ended up staying in an air-conditioned Burger King for seven hours."

Nevertheless, Bicycle is again on the road, making their way from Maine to Florida. "We're hoping it will be a little easier this trip," Liebert says. Should be — it's all downhill from Augusta to Tallahassee. But the trip back will suck.

For more information on Bicycle, their tour and their upcoming EP *Souvenir*, call 1-800-989-0766.

Rating System

- ***** super
- **** califragi
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- * docious

Tracy Chapman

New Beginnings

Elektra



Critics will likely slam on this album for the same screwhead reasons they ripped on Natalie Merchant's lovely *Tigerlily*. Evidently, female "alternative" artists these days must be savvy and profane, their music raw and edgy. Well, thanks for the tip.

These critics can now kiss Merchant's platinum-selling grits, and they better be careful with *New Beginnings*. Tracy Chapman's songs of youthful strivings ("Fast Car") and political activism ("Talkin' 'Bout a Revolution") made her the most successful folk artist of the '80s. With this, her fourth album, Chapman doesn't wander far from form.

The politics are a bit thin, granted. To paraphrase David Lowery, the world needs another eco-social folk anthem ("The Rape of the World") like I need a hole in my head. But you'll forgive all this when you hear Chapman's gorgeous character sketches ("Cold Feet") and intensely personal meditations ("At This Point In My Life," "I'm Ready").

Although some of the studio strings will give you diabetes, a return to generally minimal instrumentation heightens the effect of Chapman's remarkably emotive voice. Quiet and courageous, *New Beginnings* is louder in its whispers than in its shouts.

Old School Punk

Various Artists

Neurotic Records

West Coast punk in the early '80s is a fairly specific little chunk of music history. With Reagan in the White House and, like, "Mr. Roboto" on the radio, America was ripe for a subculture explosion. Thus '70s punk begat '80s hardcore punk, which seemed to spawn best in the sunny suburbs of southern California.



Rapid Fires

Garbage
Garbage
ALM



Big rock producer Butch Vig (Nirvana, Smashing Pumpkins) launches his own band with a pretty

frickin' great debut album of studio trickery, pop hooks and lean, mean guitars.

Rocket from the Crypt
Scream, Dracula, Scream!
Interscope

San Diego's premier rock stars RFTC play inventive, dynamic punk songs with rare discipline and Beatlesque harmonizing. *Scream* will stick to your brain like gum to a shoe.

Mike Scott
Bring 'Em All In
EMI

Scott, formerly of the Waterboys,

indulges his Gaelic mystical muse with a highland squall of love songs, tartan kilts and unfiltered, malted Scotch whiskey.

Junior M.A.F.I.A.
Conspiracy
Undeas/Big Beat

These mediocre gangsta MCs from B.I.G.'s crew are interesting only due to their breathtaking Wu Tang-like marketing campaign. They will sell millions, so you may as well hop on the boat.

Spain
Blue Moods of Spain
Restless

Old School Punk is a solid collection of 14 songs from the scene's heyday. X's "Los Angeles" is the keystone of the collection, representing the stoic anti-tude of the times while foreshadowing punk's inevitable popular assimilation. (Included bands Redd Kross and Suicidal Tendencies gradually drifted toward pop and metal, respectively.) Most of the other bands are long gone, although their legacy lives on in Green Day, Rancid and the Offspring.

One exception is the Circle Jerks (who recently recorded with, no fooling, Debbie Gibson). Their 1980 anthem "Wild In The Streets" is almost perfect in its two-chord, melodic glory. Other definitive moments are turned in by the Germs ("Richie Dagger's Crime"), T.S.O.L. (the necrophilic "Code Blue") and Agent Orange ("Bloodstains"). In fact, only the conspicuous absence of seminal scenesters Black Flag and the Dead Kennedys handicaps this capable collection.

Emmylou Harris

Wrecking Ball

Aylum

EMMYLOU HARRIS



Every now and again, when you're so lonesome you could cry, nothing hits the spot like a good old country song. Not the foot-stompin', Stetson-wearin', achin' breakin' yee-haw country of Clint and Garth — but the deep, bluesy strains of the old school.

Emmylou Harris is among the last of these traditional country proponents, and her sadly beautiful voice is just the right medicine for your cheatin' heart. Teamed here with uber-producer Daniel Lanois (U2, Bob Dylan), Harris has undertaken a boldly progressive agenda. *Wrecking Ball* includes songs by Jimi Hendrix, Steve Earle, Lanois, Lucinda Williams, Dylan and Neil Young, among others.

Harris interprets these songs with her usual grace, her voice steeped in sorrow and promises of redemption. But the real story here is the alchemy of her traditional sensibilities and Lanois' progressive production. "Where Will I Be," with its stuttering snare drum (supplied by U2's Larry Mullen) and delay-pedal guitar, could have fit in just fine on *Joshua Tree*. On "Deeper Well," Lanois paints an arid, abrasive soundscape as Harris' voice bottoms out into Johnny Cash territory. It's an odd marriage, but one that works.

A true meeting of the minds, *Wrecking Ball* is a testament to traditional country's enduring appeal — and one of its finest moments.

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RADIO, RADIO

1. Superchunk, *Here's Where the Strings Come In*, Merge
2. Kids Soundtrack, *Various Artists*, London
3. Mercury Rev, *See You on the Other Side*, Work
4. Palace Music, *Viva Last Blues*, Palace/Drag City
5. Rancid, *...And Out Come the Wolves*, Epitaph
6. Supergrass, *I Should Coco*, Capitol
7. Garbage, *Garbage*, ALM
8. Charlatans UK, *Charlatans UK*, Beggars Banquet
9. NOFX, *I Heard They Suck Live*, Fat
10. The Verve, *A Northern Soul*, Vernon Yard

Chart based solely on college radio airplay. Contributing radio stations: WUTK, U. of Tennessee, Knoxville; KRNU, U. of Nebraska; KUCB, U. of Colorado, Boulder; KWVA, U. of Oregon; KTRU, Rice U., Texas; ACRN, Ohio U.; KUOM, U. of Minnesota and KVRX, U. of Texas, Austin.

The U. Radio Chart is sponsored by

VIBRANCE.

ORGANIC CARE

Superchunk

Here's Where the Strings Come In

Merge

Superchunk is probably the most lovable band in rock. Remarkably generous, they crank out album after 7-inch after B-side after album of unpretentious punk-pop nuggets for their legions of fans. Staunchly independent



— they own and run their own label — they never come off righteous or cranky. And they smile big in all their photos.

Strings finds the band in top form, the complex arrangements and generally speedier pace resulting in a more compact sound. The first single, "Hyper Enough," rocks with a kind of desperate abandon, flailing around like a heartbroken 10th grader drunk on Dad's beer. If frontman Mac McCaughan keeps writing songs like this, it won't be long before Superchunk makes the leap from great indie band to legendary indie band. No kidding — those making the Hüsker Dü /Replacements comparisons ain't just whistlin' Dixie.

If there's a problem, it's that McCaughan's distinctive voice and the guitars' often limited tonal range make every Superchunk song sound like a Superchunk song, if you know what I mean. Which isn't bad, but a little stylistic recklessness never hurts. Maybe next album.

Sort of a high-brow Cowboy Junkies, Spain make slow, sad music for slow, sad moods. Some jazz, some R&B, some country, some soul. Some kind of wonderful.

The Next Chapter
Compilation
Immortal Records

In hip-hop's never-ending quest to "keep it real," here's a compilation of 16 unsigned artists from all over the country. The results are mixed, but some stellar moments from America's young MCs make it a chapter worth reading.