

Sonic Youth born again with bold new record



Courtesy of Geffen Records

■ SY's latest extravagance pushes the envelope that they tore open years ago



MUSIC

NYC Ghosts & Flowers
Sonic Youth. Geffen Records
★★★★☆

By Rory Carroll
Oregon Daily Emerald

When Sonic Youth's equipment was stolen along with their tour van outside a downtown Los Angeles club last summer, they had to rebuild.

This is a band that is just as tied to the tone of their notes as to the actual notes themselves. And, given their remarkably long and prolific career, they are tied to their instruments to achieve their unique brand of sprawling, high voltage rock. With their equipment gone, it was as if someone cut their anchor. Anyone who has heard SY, even just once, can usu-

ally spot their entirely singular sound from a mile away. They make up a genre of one, like, say, Captain Beefheart. The tense, ominous rhythm carries coats of translucent, shimmering, expressionist guitar. Wherever they venture musically, their sound remains unmistakably Sonic Youth.

But what becomes of a group of aging musical experimentalists? Some would predict that time makes one more conservative, more polished, refined and exact. In short — dull. Others would say that true artists continue to spread their wings even if they have peaked in one area. But when you're talking about experimental art, it means the norms have been thrown out the window, rendering criticism a precarious act. You can't compare it with a standard because it wasn't created with a standard in mind. That leaves their former work as the only available device for comparison.

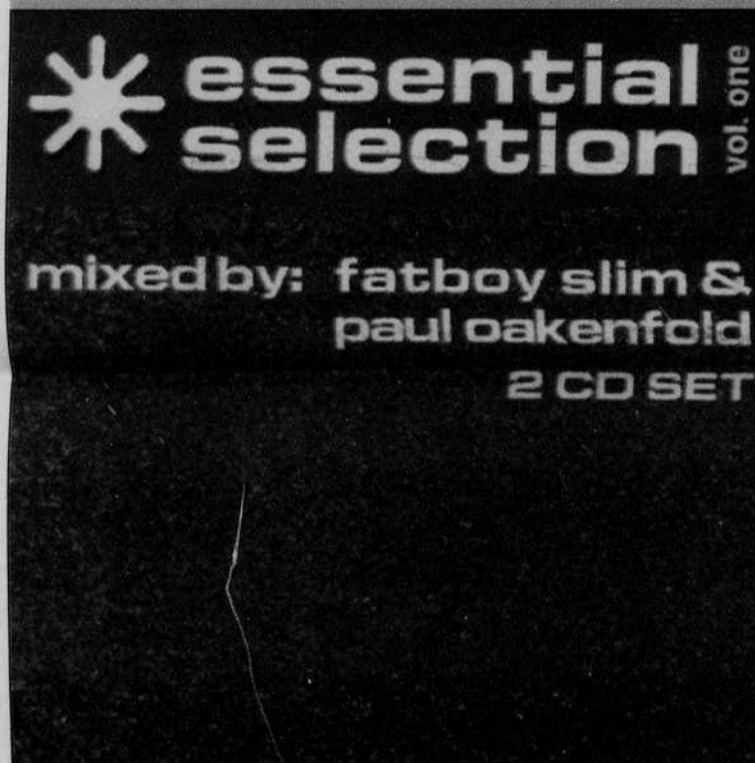
So where is Sonic Youth in all this, you ask. Exactly where they left off with 1998's "A Thousand Leaves," pushing their attitudes

and altitudes past whatever boundaries they collide with. On "nyc ghosts & flowers" they again strike oil, and they're standing ready with a Bic lighter to explode the new-found musical epiphanies they stumble upon. Emphasis is placed on lyrics here, as opposed to the embrace of "Leaves'" open-ended jamming. The lyrics are even printed in the jacket, truly a rare thing coming from a band that almost never prints its words.

There is also an unprecedented directness about this record, beginning with its title, "nyc ghosts & flowers," which, like 1994's "Experimental Jet Set, Trash and No Star," could be a cryptic description of the band itself. First, it has been the voice of New York City's hipper-than-thou underground since Lou Reed gave the job up in the late 70s. The band took over with its formation in 1981. Also, the members' combined voices have always had a haunting, ghostly vocal reverb that punctuates meditative lyrics. And their tunes have always been,

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'Essential Selection' offers tasty mix of tunes



Courtesy of Sire Records

■ An new collection of DJ club tunes offers an accessible smorgasbord for dance music fans



MUSIC

Essential Selection Vol. 1
Various Artists. Sire Records
★★★★☆

By Mason West
Oregon Daily Emerald

For music aficionados, compilation CDs are like a Vegas buffet: you can get lots of different stuff, and it's all good. But the "essential selection vol. one" takes a different approach to compilation CDs. Instead of having a montage of different performers, it devotes an entire CD to a DJ to remix popular songs of their choice.

This two-CD album is mixed by two of the biggest name DJs in the world today, Fatboy Slim and Paul Oakenfold. Each DJ has their own disk with over 70 minutes of

music. The CDs' tracks are mixed together to create a continuous flow of music simulating a live performance by the DJs, making it the perfect CD set for a long road trip.

Fatboy Slim, a.k.a. Norman Cook, has made a name for himself as a DJ in the pop music scene. His songs "Rockafeller Skank" and "Praise You" were heard all over television and radio last year. His sound is easily distinguishable from most other DJs and can be labeled almost comic. His songs are very upbeat and make you want to get up and jump around. Just by listening to his music, you can tell that he is loving his job.

However, his lighthearted music doesn't take away from his professionalism. Fatboy Slim has been intensely involved in the world of music since the mid '80s. He has undergone many mutations since that time but always seems to end up on top.

Oakenfold is another survivor in a constantly changing industry. While his name may not be as

well known in the world of pop music, it is assigned almost god-like status among electronica fans. He's so cool that in the millennium edition of the Guinness Book of Records he was given the title of "the biggest DJ in the world."

Oakenfold's mix is more trance based than Fatboy Slim's, but it also brings in some house and other beat styles. However, Oakenfold is always so close to the edge of music trends, one should be careful defining just what it is he's doing. It might be something you have never heard of before.

Aside from being a great DJ, Oakenfold is a very successful producer and has been responsible for bringing many great artists into the public eye. As a matter of fact, he helped launch the career of Mr. Will Smith himself back in the '80s. Betcha didn't know that.

In a market where there are so many DJs with albums available, a consumer must be choosy if they are going to get good music. Luckily there are artists such as

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Avant's album steeped in 'Thoughts' of love



MY THOUGHTS AVANT

Courtesy of MCA Records

■ The rapper offers songs about love, lust and everything in between



MUSIC

My Thoughts
Avant. MCA Records
★★★★☆

By Jessica Blanchard
Oregon Daily Emerald

If his lyrics are even the slightest bit autobiographical, R&B singer Avant needs a shoulder to cry on, a good dating service to get the hook-up, and someone to tell him that women no longer are solely responsible for running a household.

That said, let me add that he will definitely not need help selling copies of "My Thoughts," his debut album on Magic Johnson's new label with MCA Records, once these tracks move into the regular rotation at radio stations.

On "My Thoughts," Avant tack-

les the ever-complex subject of love and lovers — finding them (My First Love), winning them over (Reaction), dealing with jealous lovers (Serious), leaving them and whining about it (Separated), losing them (Get Away), and dealing with being heartbroken (This Time).

Avant's voice sounds a little like fellow R&B artist Ginuwine — they both have similar voices and rhymes, and use the same slow, mellow tempos. Avant lays down 12 tracks on this album, which is a must for anyone who loves R&B — trust me, these slow jams are so mellow that you won't really care what Avant's singing about, just how soon you can use his tracks for background music for a serious make-out session.

He has major-hit potential with his track "Reaction," a pop/rap-flavored tune with the requisites: naughty sex references, a catchy beat, and two guest raps (both of which almost steal his thunder).

This was my personal favorite track, one I still can't seem to stop playing. Even though I know the beat was borrowed from some-

where (it sounds an awful lot like one Brandy used for her hit single "Sittin' On Top Of The World" a few years ago), I still like the flavor of the song.

His track "Happy" has a different tone, but with all the same attitude. The mushy lyrics say things like "I want you to be happy in love with me," but Avant's provocative delivery and the thumping chords in the background make it sound more like a cheap attempt to get a woman into bed.

For balance, he has songs that speak about the downsides of losing or falling out of love, with tracks such as "Separated" and "Get Away."

"If I never see you again I won't be mad at all/ because I believe that you're my downfall," he sings in "Separated," in which he plays the wronged lover well, wavering between being bitter and wistful over a separation with a girlfriend.

In "Get Away," a great song to play to yourself when you're pining after an ex, or need a good cry.

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