

REVIEWS

PULSE EDITOR: REBECCA WILSON

'Teen' pop gets an overdose of citric acid

■ Vitamin C's latest album stoops well below her latent level of maturity



CD REVIEW

Vitamin C 'More'

Elektra

★★★★★

By Dave Depper
For the Emerald

I was a wee college freshman when the "teen pop" phenomenon took America's music scene by storm. I remember thinking, "Hey, this stuff is pretty funny. It's kind of entertaining, it's catchy, and it definitely won't last longer than a few months."

It is now years later.

My ears ache from the constant barrage of synthesized sonic sugar that pours forth from every visible speaker. My heart yearns for a new revolution in sound, for a new band that breaks all the rules, for someone to come out of the woodwork and knock the current state of music upside down.

I am sorry to report that Vitamin C's "More" is not the answer. However, it bodes well for the future of music. I must be confusing you terribly. Let me explain:

Last year, many of us realized

that the TRL culture was not a passing fad; it was here to stay. Many fell into despair. There was little hope to be found. In my darkest hour, I turned to a wise friend of mine and asked him, "When will this horrible trend stop?"

My friend thought for a moment and replied, "The beginning of the end of 'teen pop' will be the rise of the third-class pop stars. First-class pop stars are people like Britney, N'Sync, Backstreet; acts with some degree of talent. Second-class pop stars are acts like 98 Degrees and Mandy Moore. These musicians are of dubious talent and are only famous because the first-class pop stars have paved the way for them. Third-class pop stars will be those that are so bad that even the people who enjoy the second-class pop stars will be embarrassed to have these groups in their CD players. That, my friend, will be the beginning of the end for 'teen pop.'"

Enter 30-year-old Colleen Fitzpatrick, aka Vitamin C. Yes, you read that correctly. This 'teen pop' phenomenon is, in fact, 11 years older than Britney Spears. "More" is her second album. This is just about as bad as it gets, my friend. It is hard to know where to begin describing the music contained on this compact disc.

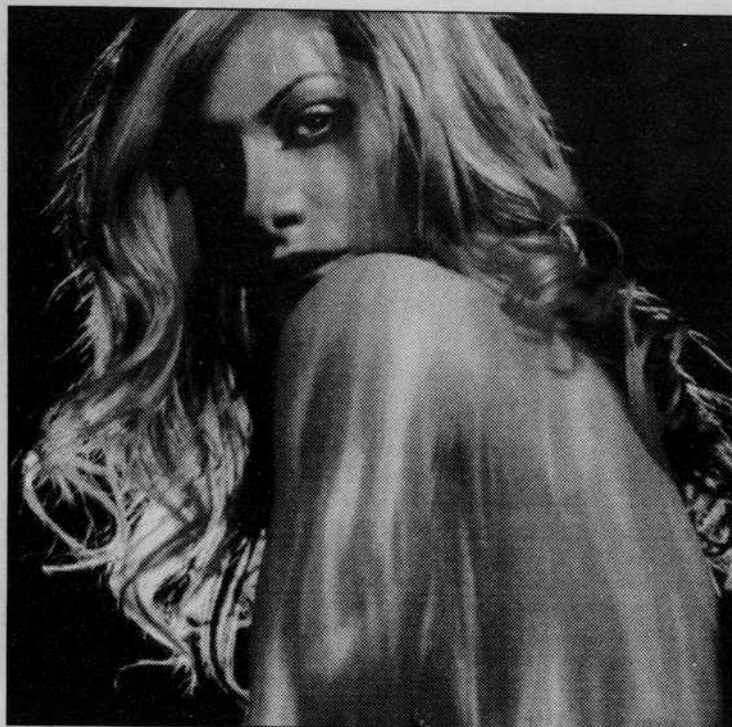
Let's start with the lyrics. Much has been made of the fact that Vitamin C writes her own words. Good for her. She has come up

with some of the most childish, banal junk that has recently graced the radio. For instance, "Busted" contains the glorious nugget "I'll never take you back/I'd rather die die die/I know you really did it/'cause you lie lie lie/and now we're not N'Sync/so it's bye bye bye."

On "Real Life," Miss C informs her man to "get a grip, baby, we're no rehearsal/it's not a game, we are not playing virtual." And there's something vaguely disturbing about hearing a 30-year-old woman coo, "You are my hip-hopper/you are my heart stopper ... /you are my eye candy/you are my phat daddy."

Moving associatively along from lyric analysis, we arrive naturally at Vitamin C's voice. Many 'teen pop' stars are talented singers who are at the mercy of poorly written material. Vitamin C is not one of them. Imagine, if you will, a castrated Justin Timberlake being hung upside down and begin forced to sing with a ball of wax paper in his mouth. This is my best approximation of Vitamin C's thin, grating, vaguely grandmother-ish voice. It is not pleasant to listen to, and it certainly does little to make up for the horrid lyrics.

Finally, we are left with the music. There is not much to say about it, other than the likelihood that you've heard it all before. Mechan-



Courtesy

Vitamin C's grown-up interpretation of bubble gum music falls flat ... to say the least.

ical drum machine rhythms, cheesy synthesizer riffs and sappy strings dominate the musical landscape of "More." Musically, it is your standard 'teen pop' factory-made-and-delivered-to-your-door album, lacking a single shred of innovation or inspiration. The less said about it, the better.

As I said earlier, "More" bodes well for the future. It is truly a third-class "teen pop" album. With any luck, many more will follow, and teen pop will topple upon its bloated, evil self.

By the way, if I ever see this album in your CD collection, I will not be your friend.

'Runaway Sun' speaks youthful language of life, love

■ Local band Gabriel Blue's latest album shows promise with its refreshing musicality and lyrics



CD REVIEW

Gabriel Blue 'Runaway Sun'

Independent

★★★★★

By Katie Miller
Oregon Daily Emerald

Repeat after me: Keep hope alive.

Keep hope alive because life, according to Gabriel Blue, is "a sunlight letter" filled with melodic harmonies radiating through a vintage sound of '60s surf pop, western ballads and '80s punk from the days of Minor Threat.

On their second album, "The Runaway Sun," Eugene band Gabriel Blue keeps the mood mellow and light with airy guitar riffs and beautifully textured songs such as "700 Singers," which features a gospel choir. The music glasses over to "Sister Sheena," a rolling rock song of a confused nun.

The entire album is lit with youth and songs of life, friends

and love. On "USA Dowry," a picture of content friends "around the fire and the beach and the sea" sends you back to the days of grass shacks and California beach boys strumming songs on their imported ukuleles. Gabriel Blue has reached a content place between rock and pop, melancholy and future.

"The Runaway Sun" also features pleasing harmonies that weave in and out of each song, which leave the album wide open to the possibilities in life that are sung of in songs such as "Summer Shirt." The four-piece band plays the usual rock instruments, including drums and guitars, but combines the subtle sounds of the piano, accordion and various brass horns to give certain songs a jazzy flavor.

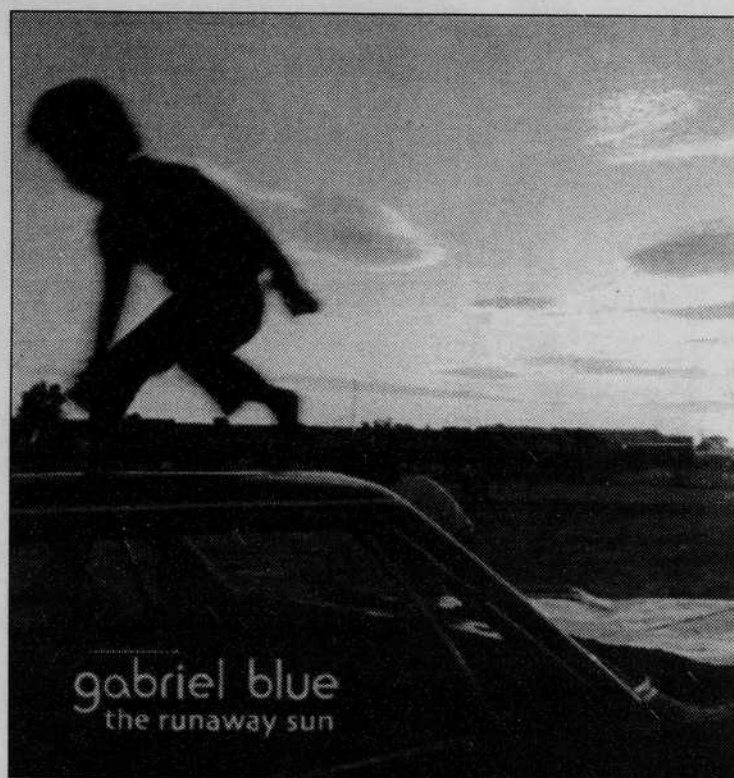
"Late Night Television" is a fun, happy story of a restless man up watching late-night TV. Mixed with sounds of television shows, the song leads into a slow, wandering western ballad about watching nighttime programs. This song is one of the highlights of the album, showing the band's willingness to take chances while being able to keep pop rock undertones. "Late Night Television" transitions to "Dirty Christian Money," an energetic, frantic punk song, which is completely different from any other

song on the album. However, the contrast between these two songs is amazing and adds to Gabriel Blue's experiments in genre.

"Old Man" is another highlight on the album, mixing the beat of a Grateful Dead song and the harmonies of a Beach Boys song. "Old Man" is also characteristic of the kind of lyrics found on "The Runaway Sun." A typical life filled with ups and downs is painted here with lyrics such as, "I was just a young man; I could see beyond the sky/I was just an old man when they laid me down."

However, the pop/rock combination does not work on every song. "Lucky" begins with a beautifully textured, pop surf sound, but then transitions to harder rock that is not as interesting or catchy as the introduction. After the introduction, you expect a continuation of the surf sound, but what you get is a somewhat disorganized rock song that doesn't deliver the same light-hearted feeling. "Lucky" does contain some of the harmonies that characterize the majority of "The Runaway Sun," but it just doesn't work as well as other songs, such as "Summer Shirt" or "Airport in Indonesia," which both contain the same harmony-driven surf melodies.

The best songs on "The Run-



Courtesy

away Sun" come at the end of the album. "A Sunlight Letter" is a flowing, peaceful ballad that ends the album with a fluid instrumental.

"The Runaway Sun" is a refreshing album of relaxed, fluid songs and youthful lyrics, which combine to make Gabriel Blue a band to watch out for in the future.

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