The Muffins
A friend told me about the new band from the Washington D.C. area which bore that strange name. I would have dismissed a band called The Muffins immediately, placing them in my "new wave to be ignored" file, but since I heard nothing farther about them, I forgot them. Months later, while browsing through a record store's import bins, I happened across The Muffins' album. I glanced at the credits long enough to convince myself that I would not be buying a stiff, then decided to take the chance and invest six dollars. That album, Manna, Mingle, is the most original music I have ever heard, music so innovative as to qualify. The Muffins as the best band in this country. The line description of their craft is provided in the catalog of Random Rader Records, The Muffins' independent label.

The Muffins are a group of diverse people who play outrageously adventurous music. It takes as many years depending on one's particular perspective. Utilizing a steady combination of electronic and acoustic instrumentation such as woodwinds and odd percussive toys they have created a synthesis of various musical incarnations that stimulates numerous styles. The spectrum of their influences ranges from the roots of contemporary American visions such as Sun Ra, Anthony Braxton, and the Art Ensemble of Chicago to the faculty of European origins, particularly Hatfield and the North, Gong, and Henry Cow... Andoid riffs, passers of quiet, and bizarre combinations of instruments lend an integral aspect to their serio-comic performances... A typical Muffin arrangement is a mixture of carefully rehearsed sound geometries, interspersed with sections of improvisation... The album opens with "Monkey with the Golden Eyes," a light, flowing tune that is a mutant version of chamber music. "Monkey," probably The Muffins' most popular piece, features the combined talents of woodwind players Tomm Scott (not the fellow with the L.A. Express) and Dave Newhouse, the group's principal composer.

A spirit of various improvisation follows, which gradually builds up to "Hobart Got Burned," a fusion-like tune that is carried by Scott's virtuoso soprano sax playing. The remaining two tunes, "Amelia Earhart" and "The Adventures of Captain Bonaventure," represent The Muffins at their best. These pieces are multi- thematic explorations that incorporate their full instrumental arsenal (including cello box whistles and squeeze toys) as well as their warped sense of humor.

This record must be heard to be believed, and once heard it cannot be forgotten. Manna, Mingle is not widely distributed, but it may be obtained by sending $5 to: Random Radar Records, P.O. Box 6007, Silver Spring, MD 20906. You will also be placed on The Muffins' mailing list. Veris: The Muffins on and off stage.

-David Shaw

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