Madness- absolutely!

Madness absolutely by Madness, obviously. On Stiff Records.

What's that? A Madness album with a color cover! These guys standing outside the Underground station look too respectable to be the old One Step Beyond gang. . . . The inner sleeve looks more familiar, with dozens of the little mug shots that made Madness' first album as much fun to look at as to listen to, but this time they're arranged in a little photo essay called "The Birth of the Nutty Boys" and including such memorable gits as "William Ellis Secondary School 3/7/78." So what's the point? But this— when the LP One Step Beyond was released in the US a little over a year ago, the group was quickly classed with the Specials, the Selecter, and the Beat, despite guitarist Chris Foreman's complaint that "we don't like to be thought of as part of any revival 'cause after that fashion's dead, the groups that rely on the fashion aren't heard of anymore." Madness didn't describe their music as Two-Tone, Reggae, Ska, or even North London— just "nutty," and those who listened beyond the first three or four cuts found that Nuttiness (if I may) transcends stylistic boundaries. It's saxophones and fairground organs, and marimbas and et caetera midway, wonderfully witty vocals, and most of all irresistably danceable. The stuff is downright manic.

It comes to imagine this consortium of North London gardeners painters and decorators, and others, is getting especially angst about anything—they're having too good a time playing.

Other notable songs on this side include "No Home Today," which Mike Barson's keyboards inexplicably turns into something that could be the theme for a strange Western, and "Solid Guns," perhaps the best rock 'n' roll ever to come from the wrong side of the Atlantic. Interpret that as you wish. "Embarrassment," however, is little more than a remake of the group's "My Girl," and not as much fun to try picking out the words from.

Side two begins with "Take It or Leave It," the most reggae-traditional piece on the album and also the most repetitious. It's followed by "Shadow of Fear," a brief (1:15) but brilliant song about dangers real and imagined with a refrain that would make Poc/proud. I wonder if it's after my soul again tonight.

So what's the point? Just this— when the London-underground station looks too respectable, and most of all irresistably danceable. The stuff is downright manic.

The power of positive Nuttiness is aptly proven in the sax and keyboards of "In the Rain," which they rescue from being a garden-party type, waiting-for-my-girl number. This song makes the listener feel good about life regardless of how rotten it probably is at the moment. Now somebody please explain to me "Return of the Los Palmas." That's cocktail lounge music, complete with a refrain that would make Poc/p proud.

In short, very interesting, as Arte Johnson used to say. If you want to know what Madness is all about, buy One Step Beyond. If, on the other hand, you already have the LP and liked all the "other" songs on it, pick up a copy of Madness Absolutely. Your turntable will never again be the same.

V. Michael Bose