Pogoing went out two years ago


Reviewers dream of such built-in paral-lels: two successful, imaginative bands (and a third lurking in the background) explode out of a single Liverpoolian three-piece, asserting commercial viability, and refine the definition of pop classicism. And you thought you were busy. The Teardrop Explodes is formed by Julian Cope (although rumor has it that his band, on the eve of their departure for America, has cut out, leaving Julian to fend for himself...), while Ian McCulloch leads Echo and the Bunnymen, both in the Crucial Three, along with Pete Weule, leader of the less acclaimed but equally significant Wally Heat, in Liverpool in late 1977.

While Teardrop and Echo are not on speaking terms, they're both ripe: Teardrop a meteoric rise to celebrity in England, and are now seen by major US sta-tions. Teardrop is admittedly ahead in the US-acceptance game. I like Echo and the Bunnymen a little better for precisely the reason that they are harder to like. The Teardrop Explodes, with their instant-aneous likability, make me suspicious—nothing should be that easy to enjoy.

Echo and the Bunnymen participated briefly in the psychedelie-revival (viz.: Psychelfyri! that occurred in England a year or two back, but have toughened up their sound image and now, most importantly by lacking it. "Echo, for flesh-and-blood drummer Pete De Freitas. This will stilt a little with I's friend hippy-psychodliic (a run-off track on their new LP Crocodiles mentions "Flowers in his hair", beyond even the human psyche depths of sorrow to heights of euphoria in 1. Teardrop and Wah! Heat, Echo and the Bunnymen are oddly ascetic musicians. The Teardrop Explodes have a sound so rich and voluptuous that only a steady diet of Black Sabbath could render you insensi-tive to them. LR. Kilimanjaro. What's nice about this album is that, like some ultimate brewtastic cereal, it tastes good and is good for you. Clouds of dreamy synthesizer; candy floss guitar; graham-like verses. Ian and Julian cope bravely, aggressively, but about being betrayed, lost, about dreaming and trying to understand. One critic labeled Cope's voice "one of the days/jamming with a phlegm and emotional bata." It's such a combination that even its vague intellec-tual pretensions are salutary.

The Teardrop isn't the only album that's getting a fair hearing, "Saul on a laugh, but what a wealth of talent—groups promise—enough vitality in spiciness to blow Bob Seger away forever. Research by Spencer

The Castainers perform Handel's oratorio, Saul at Sanders Theatre, Feb. 16 and 17; 7:30 pm.

Last Wednesday night Peter Sells at- tempted to murder Handel. Fortunately, Handel's music is too great to be destroyed by his small-brained monstrosity. It will rise again, despite the fact that Sells is long forgotten, when someone with more than a micron of sensitivity and feeling for Handel's music is able to do it justice. The dramatic quality of Handel's work is in the music itself. It can rise from the depths of sorrow to heights of euphoria in instants. Perhaps it took the ultimate genius of Mozart to penetrate fully below the flash, beyond even the human psyche and flesh. But Handel came pretty close. To the strains of a flute, an organ, a harp, the human voice pure, vulnerable, alone, concert one of the means of emotion. Subtleties of voice inflection, of discreetly-wrought gestures, she can change her vocal style in tears. But, there could be no tears for Sells's production of Saul.

In a weak apology in his programme note, he demonstrates his ignorance of the essence of the drama, which forms the basis of Handelian dramatic music. A du cary aria is, quite simply, one which starts with Statement A, moves to Statement B, then back again, rather than moving from C, reverts to Statement A. In physical dramatic terms, this could be said to hamper continuity; the fact that the aria is sexually sung solo, with all attention focused on one singer is also highly un-realistic. In musical terms, though, it can be highly effective in framing out a picture of the character's emotions. Arias come as a series of individual set-pieces, each one a rounded portrait. The aria, in fact simplifies the links, the dynamic that makes the drama live. Handel did write operas. And, given careful treatment they can be successfully staged so as to allow the music to speak for itself. The Handel Opera Society in London has for years produced brilliant stagings of Handelian oratorios: wordless and some of the singers would have had to be quite Platonic, and sent peals of laughter through the audience. At times the music did shine through. To towards the end, there were moments of gravity: the Dead March was solemn, the ensuing chorus and tenor and soprano arias dignified. Sells couldn't let the pieces end like that, however, because--and on having a tape-recorder spew tape onto the stage, and the Chorus stamp backwards and forwards for the final number, simultaneously firing toy pistols.

That this effort is a sad waste is simply brought out by the fact that orchestral playing under Grist Smith was excellent, and some of the singers would have had potential had not their concentration been distracted by the spurious nonsense im- posed upon them. Don't get me wrong: I find it essentially a good production, but it's not as good as when performing work of later periods, where music of itself is no longer enough. But, Sellers's version of "realism" is hideously wrong here.

Soul

It was never meant to be staged. Physical action can only detract from the drama of the music. It is this basic concept which eludes Sells. His production is full of cheap gimmicks: presumably some perverse attempt to give "reality." Thus, the singers are in modern dress, Merck's rends Cosmopolitan, the High Priest wears a Christian clerical collar and plays piccolo, and Saul, smoking a cigarette, speaks to Samuel, whose local witch (while holding a can of Tab) has kindly summoned the ensuing chorus and tenor and soprano arias dignified. Sells couldn't let the pieces end like that, however, because--and on having a tape-recorder spew tape onto the stage, and the Chorus stamp backwards and forwards for the final number, simultaneously firing toy pistols.

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Jonathan Richmond

This Saul may be good for a laugh; but Handel is so much more, and to laugh during his moments of greatest emotion is to degrade his mastery.