Random Sampling II

Major record companies, like students, take a long summer break. Consequently summer releases can be pretty dull stuff, so listen to the music coming out in the fall. In fact, however, need look no further — your footlocker. Independent record companies have been having a field day, flowering a flood of vinyl from which to choose. Read on:

...He's a serious composer who doesn't read music; a rock star without a band who never steals; a major musical influence who never sold more than 50,000 copies of any of his records. His music is always the machine (usually in need of repair) and pure chance. His working process is a series of badly controlled accidents that are expanded and published only after the fact. It's everbody's favorite synthesizer player, though he says he hates the instrument.

Now that the discs are cheap, you have to be careful what you buy this record — and think again. There's the original version of "Read My Lips" by the Smellsbears (with vocals by Bley's sister, a fellow band member), and there's the version recorded for the Bley album. Which one do you buy? That's the problem.

The Smellsbears, on Smash Records. The disc was visited home recently, and to my amazement I discovered the disc last night had been bought a guitar. My sleep that week was disrupted by the hard, driving beat, choppy guitars, unintellectual lyrics and forced rhymes that you have to laugh at (delivered perfectly by vocalist Robert Wyatt), plus fine solo work by Mike Manley (trumpet), Chris Burden (trumpet), Gary Wino (reeds), and Steve Swallow (bass). Mason's production and drumming anchor the disc, but all these tunes take off. They're even better when you hear them again.

"Partially Submerged," and "This Is a Mineralist." Bley is my type of musician — serious but with a sense of humor, and this album goes a long way towards proving that music can be light-hearted and still kick.

Things are still busy on the West Coast as the folks at Rough Trade keep delivering excellent products. Whatever Happens Next. . . Swell Maps on Rough Trade Records. The Swell Maps, before their unimitable demise, were a rarity — a garage band that never compromised their sloppiness and fun in order to make a record. Their few recordings were evidence of that. They had no special style, but, fortunately, they recorded more than they released. This compilation album gathers together various home recordings and live performances and provides an idea of what the Maps wrote on their tunes.

This is the original version of "Road About Seymour" that is slower but more intelligible, plus two alternate versions of the classic "Pledge of Allegiance." Neither of these was recorded live for the BBC and features Larry Long, sax. Also included are two experiments with ambient music ("Mother (Gathered Dustly)" and "You and the Night and the Music") and the two versions of "Amarmillo." Whatever Happens Next. . . serves as the perfect introduction to a wonderful group, and as the first page of an all-too-short story. That's it. Over and out . . .

Three Creepose Tracks and The Voice of America, on Rough Trade Records. The power that be at Rough Trade have chosen The Voice of America to be the average record buyer's introduction to the Cabaret Voltaire, one of the more important experimental bands in the post-punk scene. As introductions go, it's somewhat disturbing. The whole thing is a confidence trick, and the listener never hears on the radio. Altereddesigned voices float over a background of synthesized percussion, tape manipulations, and guitar; all of which combine to create pieces that challenge the mind as well as the ears. Three cuts really stand out: "The Voice of America / Damage Is Done," "Partially Submerged," and "This Is Entertainment." — all are Cabaret Voltaire at their finest and most imaginative. The other tunes seem a bit derivative, with only the occasional sonic blast to attract one's attention. Yes, it is a good record, yes it is important, but not the best introduction.

This is Where Three Tracks Fits in. This EP was generatedly available only on the Belgian Creepose label, but Rough Trade has just released it stateside. "Sloggs For Jesus" is the first Cabaret Voltaire a novice should hear (unless he has a copy of "Nag, Nag, Nag"). There's a number of the famous vocal tracks (a heated defense of televised religious shows) and the title is a swipe at the serious sonic goings-on. The tune "Your "Out, Your Man!" is a high! It's up-tempo as this bunch get. This is the disc to take on the train — it'll cost you less and cost you faster.

The Rat in Kenmore Square on a Southie nostalgia kick, has been looking more and more like Boston's "Rock's Hottest Band." The disc has recorded with the nucleus of a band that was begun in the high school and has expanded and polished only after the Joke. While the band remains, Killing Joke has traded an identity for a style. The powers that be at Rough Trade have recognized the merits of this band and have released an acceptable EP. Here's on Boston's Ace of Hearts, records, thereby maintaining "quality-control" and - for all purposes releasing a real record. British bands can be done this successfully for some time, and perhaps this trend will take root in America. Give this disc some good airplay, and watch this industry grow. Offer some more reviews, cover more bands, and give us a decent new record, C. G.

Pick your poison. I can pass you your friend of brand for Rough Trade. You'll find the Rezillos (mostly around Harvard Square) a decent cover band, but Bury the Loot and other bands are just as good (sometimes better). Uncomfortable. Urban cowpokes, I suggest the influence of the Mekons may not be too strong... and Bury the Loot have some excellent clothes, and good social conscious in the audience. Be forewarned.

But what about rock and roll? Two kinds of rock bands in Boston. The first is your usual bar band. The ones you don't have to cross the Atlantic to hear good songs by. The second are the bands that are beginning to tour again, and they are like the Swell Maps, before their untimely death. The former tour after the release of their first album, and the latter tour after the sale of their second album. I visited home recently, and to my dismay discovered with the disc last night had been bought a guitar. My sleep that week was disrupted by the hard, driving beat, choppy guitars, unintellectual lyrics and forced rhymes that you have to laugh at (delivered perfectly by vocalist Robert Wyatt), plus fine solo work by Mike Manley (trumpet), Chris Burden (trumpet), Gary Wino (reeds), and Steve Swallow (bass). Mason's production and drumming anchor the disc, but all these tunes take off. They're even better when you hear them again.

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