Mesopotamia, the B-52's on Warner Bros. Records.

The release of this EP by the B-52's has made me doubly aware of the entire trend which is being established now in the record industry. Although extended play discs are now first promised to be tasty treats between regular-length albums, efforts by the Gang of Four, the Dead Kennedys et al., have been disappointingly slapdash. EP's now seem to be little more than a way to generate quick profits without really trying too hard.

Mesopotamia is symptomatic of this development. Rather than the wild experimentation and innovation characteristic of previous albums, we get ultradisco production, a thick, bouncy wall of sound, and gaudy lyrics. The most unexpected aspect of this record is the presence of producer David Byrne, the guiding light of the Talking Heads. B-52's change in style is not much of a surprise as the overdependence on keyboards, squawks, vocals, and pretentious arrangements are blatant Heads trademarks.

The first change one notices is the absence of guitars. Ricky Wilson used to go so far as clipping off two strings in order to get the chunky, daring guitar riff reminiscent of the Gang of Four. Ricky's guitar work is still there, but it has to be listened for. In most instances the guitar is replaced by heavy, homogenous synthesizer lines, a development most evident in "Loveland," and especially in "Deep Sleep."

The second striking change is the dominance of female vocals. Previously, the voices of Kate Pierson and Cindy Wilson were juxtaposed with Fred Schneider's satiric vocals, but now the girls are almost subservient. This dominance contributes to monotonous sound throughout, causing songs to blend almost amicably into each other. There is none of the propelling back and forth of vocals that made "Donald the Backward" and others such fun to listen to.

One receives the impression that this EP was produced in a hurry, with the band not putting much effort into trying new sounds or breaking new ground. Maybe the band simply let it be dominated by Byrne's style and will reassess their individuality on their next full album. It will be disappointing if this indeed turns out to be the B-52's new sound, because after a while you notice that the comedy is gone along with the absurdities and jokes that made B-52's albums a good time. On this record they seem to be parodying themselves, their absurdities irritating rather than appealing. This band better start taking a few more risks if they want to avoid falling into a rut of boredom.

Steve Huntley
Editor's note: Steve Huntley is currently residing in his own private bubble.