

Off the Beaten Groove

I scream for Beefheart

Ice Cream for Crow. Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band on Virgin/Epic Records.

In 1969 part-time critic and full-time MIT professor of political science Langdon Winner wrote a now-classic defense of Captain Beefheart's *Trout Mask Replica*. The essay (compiled in a collection called *Stranded*) analyzed Beefheart's seemingly random wall-of-noise approach, showing it to be a very carefully premeditated synthesis of delta blues and free-form jazz with cryptic but decipherable lyrics. *Trout Mask*, still considered his best work, established Beefheart's reputation as a cult hero.

Beefheart (a.k.a. Don Van Vliet) has retained his cult status for more than ten years, adding more critics to the ranks of the believers and endearing himself to rock's current avant-garde artists. Although his following includes many punks, including avatar John Lydon, none have been very helpful in boosting the Captain's

public image. He bemoaned the fact in "Ashtray Heart" (from 1980's *Doc at the Radar Station*), singing "Break out a case of the punks... You used me up like an ashtray heart." Despite the minor success of the lament and the record, arguably his best in years, Beefheart retreated to his mobile home in the Arizona desert to paint and write more music.

Ice Cream for Crow, the Captain's twelfth record for his seventh label, marks a musical retreat to his early blues roots, presenting a set of slide guitar extravaganzas and folk-like instrumentals along with his most humane lyrics to date. Beefheart's legendary seven-octave vocal range is little in evidence, due either to the toll of too many cigarettes or an effort to seem more controlled. In either case it is sorely missed; a few healthy screams would have provided much-needed accents to the all-too-regular (regular for Beefheart, that is) arrangements. Most noticeable, if only in their absence, are Eric Drew Feldman's keyboard playing — present only on



cut... tributions... and harmonica... leaving his vocals as... amongst a forest of independent... hhythms.

Two frenetic rockers distinguish themselves from the disc's overall even keel. The first, the title track, describes a bizarre Halloween ritual:

*Tonight there's gonna be
A leather treatment
Beneath the symbol
We'll all assemble
Oh how we'll fly
Oh how we'll tremble*

The second, "The Past Sure is Tense," could pass for a bona fide punk number if it weren't for Beefheart's penchant for witty wordplay. He reserves his most striking imagery for "The Host the Ghost the Most Holy-O," a warning against ecological disaster:

*Why, not even a rustler'd
have anything to do*

...um steer world
...adlong
...essel
...d this
...ull hull
...smoke

... probably go unnoticed is what a... blues album *Ice Cream for Crow* really is, with brilliant slide guitar playing that owes a considerable debt to the early Mississippi bluesmen and vocals that owe just as much to Howlin' Wolf. As much of a return to roots as it is, however, the record will be readily accepted into the canon of legend that is Captain Beefheart. Yet, legend though he be, he finally seems resigned to remaining obscure, commenting "Hardly a day goes by in this cardboard cutout sundown." This return to his roots may have caused a lack in momentum, hardly a thing he can afford. It's been a long time since *Trout Mask* lit fires under the critics, now it's time for Beefheart to do it again before he fades away.

David Shaw



Richard Midnight Hatsize Snyder/Jeff Moris Tepper/Gary Lucas/Cliff R. Martinez

S Kalamity Kate

Kiss Me Kate. presented by the MIT Musical Theatre Guild. Performances tonight and tomorrow at 8pm, Kresge Auditorium.

Had William Shakespeare seen this show, he would have stuck to sonnets. A few memorable musical numbers do not a fine musical make, nor do a few pleasing individual performances a strong production make.

Kiss Me Kate, another entry in the all-too-familiar genre of backstage musicals, projects *The Taming of the Shrew* onto the actors performing Shakespeare's comedy. Fred Graham (Michael Robson) directs *The Taming of the Shrew* and plays Petruccio opposite Lilli Vanessi (Alice Mercer) as Katherine. Divorcées Graham and Vanessi's backstage battles parallel their characters' onstage strife.

The major problem with this production is Kresge Auditorium, or more precisely, the Musical Theatre Guild's continued inability to master the building's acoustic eccentricity. The lyrics of "Another Openin'," perhaps the show's strongest number, are obliterated by their orchestral accompaniment. While less obtrusive later in the show, this weakness is, unfortunately, quite pervasive.

Musical director David Gaylin is at least partly responsible for the show's slow pace, as evidenced in "Wunderbar" and other first-act music.

Juanita Blanchette Kus's choreography is tedious and insipid. Longer dance numbers like "Tarantella" leave the audience anesthetized. The company's execution of these numbers, moreover, lacks cohesiveness and appears underrehearsed.



The highlight of an otherwise uninspired show is the team of caricatured gangsters played by B. P. Gillogly and David Smith. Their performances as the portentous pair are splendid, and their rendition of "Brush Up Your Shakespeare" is the most entertaining musical and dance number of the production.

Robson acts the part of Fred Graham/Petruccio well, but the weakness of his

voice is demonstrated in several songs, including the title number. Mercer, conversely, is almost convincing as Lilli Vanessi/Katherine, but her excellent voice redeems her performance.

Kiss Me Kate is a mediocre musical, and the Guild's production is simply dull. Shakespeare did it much better; read his book instead.

Barry S. Surman

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day at noon, the Museum of Fine...hold a gallery talk entitled "Art...k and Roman Graves" with Bar...Martin lecturing. Information is...at 267-9300 from Clementine

dan Hall, 290 Huntington Avenue...Concert Choir and BU Symphony...will present W.A. Mozart: Re...V 626 (1791) at 8pm on Sunday...admission is \$4.

on, a 1919 film which brought...e recognition to director Ernst...and Europe's famed Pola Negri...presented in Rabb Lecture Hall at...on Public Library. Show time is...at 6:30pm. The film runs for just...and one-half hours.