Barking Snakes Don't Bite

Bark Along With the Young Snakes, the Young Snakes on Ambiguous Records. Shortly after my return to Boston in January of 1981, a friend and local music critic dragged me to the Channel to see "what could be the most exciting band in Boston." What I saw was a tall blond woman dressed in second-hand sartorial finery and a switching jack-of-all-trades drummer who not so much played his guitar as hacked at it visciously, being calmly watched by a drummer who seemed in the safety of his drum set. I later learned that this pleasant assault on my senses was a band called the Young Snakes, and that I had seen one of their first gigs. Two years later the Snakes are still striking, both musically and visually. Lead singer/drummer Alene Mark's voice is as varied as her attire, sometimes operatic, sometimes sardonic, sometimes harsh and hard-edged. guitar player Doug Vargas has refined his technique, coaxing all manner of sounds out of his instrument while retaining his rhythmic attack. The new drummer, Mike Evans maintains the role of his predecessor — an observer who provides punctuation — but his jazz-derived style seems more suited than the talents of former drummer Dave Baus. The EP Bark Along With the Young Snakes presents the work of a band that has greatly matured since their initial vinyl pressing of "Brain's Eggs" on Modern Methods Records' compilation "Junkyard Dog!" The Snakes' talent is for combining other styles into new constructs, which makes it difficult to fit them into any preexisting category. For example, the opening cut, "Give Me Your Face," begins with a Gang of Four-ish tempo but almost immediately slides into Latin shuffle. "Suit Me!" would almost be a typical angst-ridden post-punk observation if it weren't disrupted by Mann and Vargas' quirky, folkie-affected harmonies. "Don't Change Your Mind," is the record's high point, a ballad that centers on Mark's wordless singing and Vargas' gentle harmonics-laden guitar strumming, which includes a short, unadorned solo reminiscent of Robert Fripp's fluid guitar improvisations. In "The Way the World Goes" Mann pushes her voice to its aural limits, but her vibrant soprano doesn't always land back in key — it's difficult to decide if this was a desired effect. "Not Enough" closes the set with a frenetic, all-stops-out moshing of forces. Despite the excellence of the material presented and its satisfactory production, Bark Along hasn't captured the ears of many listeners, a state of affairs that can best be attributed to reluctance to listen to truly unique music. The band is usually perceived as being "too weird" for a mainstream or even a punk audience, but the fault lies more with the audience than the band. Because the Young Snakes aren't easily categorized, the listener can't lean on familiar reference points in order to decide whether he likes the band or not. This general reluctance has taken its toll on the Snakes, and after a few more gigs this month they will disband in order to decide whether he likes the band or not. Until then, Bark Along With the Young Snakes will be the only proof we have that these snakes can be charming.

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Off the Beaten Groove

Today through Sunday, the "Automania" Car Show will be at the Northeast Student Center in Worcester. Admission is $5.

Christmas Lights will be on in the Student Center, the Fens, and along Massachusetts Avenue at 8pm. The event is sponsored by the Student Center on Saturday night in the Student Center. Music will be presented by the MIT Symphony Orchestra. Admission is free.

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