There are always a few records that manage to slip by me somehow. They get buried under my laundry, borrowed by my friends, and sometimes I just forget about them until someone asks me "Why didn't you review...?" Well, I've found the culprit records and discovered that I have enough for another infamous Random Record Roundup.

Dig the New Breed, the Jam on Polydor Records.

When the Jam first appeared, they wore short hair and dark suits, said "rock" a lot, and reminded most people of The Who Sing My Generation. Six years later the Jam still looked the same, but by November of 1982 leader Paul Weller announced that he was packing it in, effectively putting an end to the band. Unlike their mentors, the Who, the Jam decided to stop before they became a parody of themselves. Their final testament, the live album Dig the New Breed, lends credence to Weller's intuition — the Jam stopped none too soon.

Most of the tunes on this set lack conviction — most, but not all. "In the City," recorded in 1977, captures the Jam at their early angry best, as does the medley of "All Mod Cons," "To Be Somebody," and "It's Too Bad." Not surprisingly, however, the bulk of Dig the New Breed's material is culled from Sound Affects, the Jam's best recording. The double single "Dreams of Children" and "Going Underground" benefits from a sparse stage treatment, but "That's Entertainment!" cries out for more than anaesthetic guitar treatment. What is surprising is how "Start" escaped unscathed — the additional horn section and audience singalong are a real treat.

One could also carp about the song selection (where's "Down in the Tube Station at Midnight" and "Eton Rifles," for instance?) but probably to no avail. The Jam will have to be judged on their recorded output, and Dig the New Breed will have to be regarded more as a souvenir than as a definitive live statement.

Hello, I Must Be Going!, Phil Collins on Atlantic Records.

It seems Phil Collins has found some free time again. Last time this happened (when he wasn't recording with Genesis, or Brand X, or Monty Python) he released Face Value, a disc that showed a different facet of Collins' personality. Well, Hello, I Must Be Going! shows us the same (but better polished) different facet — in short, it repeats the formula of the first album but avoids the mistakes. "I Don't Care Anymore" is a tense, angrier "in the Air Tonight." "I Cannot Believe It's True" improves upon "I Missed Again," and "You Can't Hurry Love" is so faithful to the Supremes' original that it has earned Collins a hit single. Other than the above distinctions, however, Hello and Face Value are interchangeable records. If you want a Phil Collins album buy the new one — it contains fewer flops.

Is There Anything About?, Brand X on Passport Records.

While Phil Collins is still fresh on my mind, I might as well mention the latest release from his jazz/rock fusion band Brand X. A big sticker on the front cover proclaims that this is a reunion album of sorts, since all of the original members are featured. What the sticker fails to mention is that the original lineup (Collins on drums, Perry Jones on bass, Robin Lunley on keyboards and John Goodall on guitar) plays only one of six the tunes, the very weak title cut. The rest of the material is clearly borrowed from their earlier and most consistent album Product. "A Longer April" is just that: a longer version of Product's "April," while "Modern, Noisy and Effective" is nicked from it predecessor "The Streets of Soho." What seems clear is that this album could have been called Product, for that's obviously what it is. In response to the question posed by the existing title: Absolutely not.

A Broken Frame, Depeche Mode on Sire Records.

I was all set to slag this group before even listening to the record, basing my opinion of their previous records. Depeche Mode's three singles and one album contained the worst attempts at electrosex I had ever heard, but none. Yet, out of a sense of fairness (and loyalty to the adage "Don't judge a book by its jacket") I gave A Broken Frame a listen. And another. I have only recently been able to tear myself away from this album, and then only because my neighbors threatened death if they heard it again.

What caused such a sudden conversion was Depeche Mode's (the name's French for "fast fashion") abandonment of their original formula. What has taken its place is an almost intelligent soulful approach to synthpop that I find refreshing; the group has put the gospel influences they hinted at in their singles to good use. It's not that their messages are fundamentally different. The new single "See You" expresses a simple sentiment: "I want to see you," but does it so cleverly you can't help but get sucked in. And so goes for most of the tunes: "Leave in Silence" grabs with its subdued vocals and piano chording. "My Secret Garden" cleverly interweaves two simple melodies into a complex riff, and there are even two substantial instrumentals. The only shame will be that A Broken Frame will get lost in the shuffle of end-of-the-year releases before it has had its chance. Buy now, before it disappears.

David Shaw

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