Electricity in the airwaves

The British, always ahead of new trends, have cashed in on the American marketability of their electronic noodlings with remarkable success. What follows is an overview of the second wave of technopop from its primary British (and one German) experiment.

Heaven 17, on Virgin/Arista Records:

In the beginning there was the Human League, one of Britain's first electronic pop bands. Dissatisfied with their lot, the group split. One half retained the original name and recorded the platinum album Dare. The other half, Ian Craig Marsh and Martin Ware, renamed themselves the Heaven 17 (from Anthony Burgess' A Clockwork Orange) and recorded the less-than-successful Penthouse and Pavement. The massive nationwide success of the Human League should have tipped off another company to immediately release the Heaven 17 album, but more than a year passed before it graced our turntables in other company to immediately release the Heaven 17 album, but more than a year passed before it graced our turntables.

The new tracks for the weaker cuts. The resulting disc, an altered Penthouse and Pavement, is stronger than successful Penthouse and Pavement.

To the failure of the Human League's recent "Mirror Man," it gives us with the answer in "Vienna": Ure provides us with the answer in "VIENNA": "Reagan's president else: Russian god in motion."

The true highlights of this disc are the new tracks. "We're Going to Live for a Very Long Time" and the hit "Let Me Go," a plaintive song about love lost and hope for its renewal. Comparing the success of "Let Me Go" to the failure of the Human League's recent "Mirror Man," it seems Heaven 17 will indeed live for a very long time.

Time-Linse, Renaissance on I.R.S. Records:

Renaissance, once the most full-blown art-pomp band, has taken a cue from the electropop movement and updated its sound. Singer Anna Hadjam has infused her clear soprano with a healthy dose of emotion, songwriters Jon Camp and Michael Dunford are writing stronger tunes, and the band has radically trimmed its former wide-screen sound. Orchestral arrangements have been eschewed in favor of synths and louder, more agile, guitar playing, backed by powerful drumming.

The new elements fuse together in "Auto-Tech" and "Orient Express," a pair of tunes that proves this band has truly experienced a renaissance.

Side Kicks, the Thompson Twins on Arista Records:

The Thompson Twins' first album, A Product of the Thompson Twins, showed it to be a witty band with a knack for ethnic funk. In the Same of Love, the group's second release, tempered the funk with electronics (provided by synth wizard Thomas Dolby), creating a minor hit with the title track. Now the Twins are pared down from the original seven to just three, and it seems the move also pared away some of the creative spark, because Side Kicks is the band's weakest record.

Singer Tom Bailey sounds as plaintive as ever, and Joe Leeway and Alannah Currie add interesting accents to the sound, but the disc is no more than rehash material. "Lisa," the first single, doesn't provide enough substantial material to carry a whole song, "When You Love On Your Side" is just another version of "In the Name of Love"; it even goes so far as to quote the same riff as a wry reference. The Thompson Twins will need a good swift kick — just west of the side — to get out of its current rut.

David Shaw

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Einstelt, Falco on A&M Records:

The success of After the Fire's "Der Commissar" has prompted A&M to reissue the original German version by Falco, along with an album of other Falco material. I prefer the original "Der Commissar" — it snaps and bounces along nicely, unlike its leads English counterpart — but the rest of Einstelt ("Solitary Prison") is only so much man candy. The all-German lyrics force most Americans to concentrate solely on the music, which proves this and declarative. A shame, because the titles suggest some interesting ideas, particularly in "Nie Mehr Schale" ("No More School"), which all in, is a universal sentiment, nicht war?

New Gold Dream (81-82-83-84), Simple Minds on Virgin/A & M Records:

Simple Minds' cinematic approach to new wave is an anomaly. It layers sweeping washes of guitar and synthesizer over a solid, funky base, producing music that is simultaneously arena and entrancing. New Gold Dream (81-82-83-84) alternates the harder funk of the title cut and "Promised You a Miracle" with the bouncy "Somewhere Somewhere in Summertime" and "Colours Fly and Catherine Wheel." The band, unlike other synth-based ensembles, is not carried solely by its vocalist; in fact, the instrumental "Somebody Up There Likes You" stands out as one of the stronger cuts. Vocalist Jim Kerr adds just the right touch of drama to the music making this Simple Minds' finest album to date.

David Shaw