Throbbing Pyton of Love, Robin Williams on Cachalot Records.

"It's so good to be back in San Francisco, the city where 'God Save the Queen' has a completely different meaning." With these words, comedian Robin Williams opens Throbbing Pyton of Love, a live catalog of the bizarre refusal clutting the mind of America's best young comic. The majority of Williams' skit is observations about life in Lotusland ("Californian has only 18 words: like, fer shure, wow, totally..."), but everything else is fair game, be it the Falklands crisis, cats, cocaine, or drinking ("If alcohol is a crash, then Jack Daniels' is the wheelchair."). What makes this better than your run-of-the-mill standup act, however, is the manic intensity with which Williams attacks his subjects and his talent for creating the most extraordinary juxtapositions — who else would do an impression of Elmer Fudd singing Bruce Springsteen's "Fie."

Throbbing Pyton of Love will not withstand the test of time the way Firesign Theatre or George Carlin albums have because it's extremely topical, but it will certainly provide lots of 'laffs for a few years (or at least as long as Disneyland remains California's chief export).

Care, Shriekback on Y/Warner Brothers Records.

A very strange record, indeed. Shriekback, composed of bassist David Allen (ex-Gang of Four), singer Carl Marsh, and keyboardist Barry Andrews (ex-XTC and League of Gentlemen) have produced a laid-back dance album with a unique sound that relies heavily on old clichés, leaning on early disco for much of its inspiration. What is new about the music is the manner in which the clichés are distilled into rock-solid funk grooves: near-tribal chants layered over a percussive bottom fed by sinus bass playing. When the formula works, it works exceptionally well, as it does for all of side one, particularly "Lined Up," "Clear Trails," and "My Spice Is the Bassline." When the formula falls on side two, it produces an unfo- cused, meandering collection of partial ideas. A classic case of an album that should have been an EP instead.


From their name to their clothes to their music, the Swollen Monkeys are just plain silly. These part-time backups for the B-52's pack a big band horn section and parke percussion, but their music, the Swollen Monkeys EP on Cachalot Records, is a very strange record, indeed. Shriekback on Y/Warner Brothers Records.

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The Personal Effects are a very highly touted new band from the Rochester, NY area, a region that figures strongly in the psychedelic revival movement (spookhead- ed by another upstate group, the Chesterfield Kings). A listen to their EP reveals all the proper elements — gutsy guitar playing, modulating organ lines, and pocket drumming — but the music never seems to gel properly. The source of the problem becomes clear after the second listen: lead singer Peggy Fournier is too damned serious for her own good. She packs her lyrics with gritty, literate allusions and songs with a determined streak of gloom, all of which drags down the party b.o. and bunch really claims to be a neo-psychedelic garage band from upstate, the better start having fun soon — that's the whole reason for their existence, isn't it?

The High Road, Roxy Music EP on Warner Brothers Records.

This four-song, twenty-minutes-plus live recording shows Roxy Music at the peak of its performing powers, stripped down to the crucial nucleus — singer Brian Ferry, guitarist Phil Manzanera, and reedman Andy Mackay — plus a vocalist who's who of sidemen, the bandinjects new life into nine old standbys ("Can't Let Go" and "My Only Love") and reinterpretgs Neil Young's "Like A Hurricane." Defini- tive though these renditions may be, they all pale in comparison to Ferry's reading of John Lennon's "Jealous Guy," a song Ferry would hock his last bottle of St. Laurent cologne to have written.

Roxy has definitely grown more experienced with age, rocking this set with effort- less grace and energy. Manzanera steps up from the background to lay down some of his finest guitar playing on vinyl, and Mackay adds his trademark acidic sax counterpoints, but the show belongs to Ferry — his world-weary crooning is what makes Roxy Music the world's most elegant rock band.

The Hunting, Tears for Fears on Mercury Records.

Tears for Fears, relatively unknown in this country, are the last best thing since sliced bread in their native England, where every one of their singles has been a hit. Their latest, constitute the bulk of their debut, The Hunting, and show a band with tremen- dous promise.

Tears for Fears write densely textured songs with a strong rhythmic feel; unlike most bands with dance floor hits, they make great use of acoustic instrumentation, adding synthesizers only when they can provide the appropriate sound. It is the combination of acoustic and electric that makes their songcraft sound so fresh, especially "Change," which pits marimba against electric guitar. The other key ele- ment to Tea's sound is their exquisite lyr- ics and singing, both highly emotive and compelling. With The Hunting, Tears for Fears have Produced music for the body, the heart, and the mind. A stunning debut.

David Shaw