Mummer, XTC on Virgin Records Import.

Reports of the death of the lovable English popsters collectively known as XTC have been greatly exaggerated. Despite the health problems of band leader Andy Partridge and the sacking of drummer Barriefoam Chambers, XTC has turned out yet another collection of pop for the thinking person. The new album, Mummer, continues in the pastoral mode first hinted at on English Settlement, while incorporating various strands of the band's earlier sound into a seamless fabric.

Mummer's strongest element is its lyrical content; one finds oneself reading ahead of the songs on the first listen. Consequently, the musical background, while just as imaginative and expressive, seems less strong than that of previous XTC albums. This seeming imbalance does not detract from the ability of the new material to captivate the ear. "Beating Of Hearts" opens the album with a slinky Oriental theme sustained by a dark instrumental motif, followed by a crystal-clear serenade, the aptly named "Wonderland." Other tunes incorporate a more folksy sensibility, even echoes of Van Morrison, as found in "Ladybird." Other songs feature mutated reggae ("Human Alchemy"), Beatlesque strings ("Great Fire"), and psychedelic dance with mellotrons and everything else ("Deliver Us From The Elements"). Ironically, "Fuck Pop A Roll" repudiates the band's earlier fusion of music. The tune departs the synthetic dreck that has infested the airwaves in the name of "new wave," but falls to the temptation of too many tracks. XTC need not criticise the less creative movements. Make the best of what you've got; its statement: the quality of its own work. It seems to jibe with the record-buying public, as well as the band's current sound. The last is Devoto's best to date, "Parade" and "Because You're Frightened." This last is Mummer's "Cold Imagination" and "Rainy Season" records in England has already released three singles from the album, giving the band a chance to introduce itself to the public. These singles are "Love On A Farmboy's Wages," with its gentle acoustic musical backing, while just as "commercial" as those of bassist Andy Partridge. "Making Plans For Nigel" is a catchy, but the arrangements and production (by Devoto and Greg Walsh) simply do not work within the context of this record's songs.

This style lies a good country mile away from the cleverness and irony of Partridge's earlier songs. His voice has moved from the eccentric, mannered hiccupping on XTC's first two albums to a more communicative instrument. As if to make up for XTC's long absence from the market. Although XTC's distinctive, artistic stance. XTC's distinctive, artistic stance.

Howard Devoto seems to be at his best when he is unhappy. Someone unfamiliar with his work might be better to investigate a Magazine record. Other fans of his wry, almost apologetically hangdog lyrics. "Some Will Pay (For What Others Pay To Avoid)" becomes a falling love affair?

It's just a matter of time. Oh, how my memories press together. And the dream is catching up. While it is not the ground-breaking collection of songs that XTC usually produce. Mummer is yet another example of what this talented collection of musicians can bring to the seemingly tired formats of popular music. XTC finds the right mix of old and new, personal and best conventional and novel, that is to the top, and on Mummer, it alights whatever veneer of irony that had marked it as being "too clever for its own good." Robert P. Krajewski

Howard Devoto's cold imagination

Jerky Versions of the Dream, Howard Devoto on IRS Records.

Howard Devoto at the Paradise, Thursday, Sept. 29.

Howard Devoto brought his own particular Jerky Versions of the Dream to town last week, and he seems to be sleeping better than he has been in years. His newest release shows him to be at least concerned, if not truly happy, with his lot in life; a marked change from his previous work. It has been said that a musician's work suffers when he is in love. If is the case, Devoto must currently be involved in the relationship of his life. The Dream continues more "silly love songs" than any of his earlier albums, although the genre undergoes a vast lyrical transformation when attack by Devoto.

It is virtually impossible to separate Howard Devoto from his past, since he has had such a big impact on popular music in the new wave era. As co-founder of the Buzzcocks, one of the seminal punk bands (along with the Sex Pistols and Siouxsie and the Banshees), he has a horde of followers to adopt his angry young man pose and stinging, bash-it-out performance style. Devoto opted out of the Buzzcocks in 1976 before they achieved the minor star status they would eventually hold. His new band, Magazine, tended toward a heavier status they would eventually hold. His new band, Magazine, tended toward a heavier sound maintained by a dark instrumental motif added to a crystal-clear serenade, the aptly named "Wonderland." Other tunes incorporate a more folksy sensibility, even echoes of Van Morrison, as found in "Ladybird." Other songs feature mutated reggae ("Human Alchemy"), Beatlesque strings ("Great Fire").

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