The Bangles, the Bangles on Faulty Records.

Don't let the deliberately cute record cover fool you — the way Debbie and Vicki Peterson spell their first names, fool you — the all-female Bangles aren't just another cute girl group, nor are they simply cashing in on the recent successes of other bands. The sound they develop on this five-song EP is only very loosely related to that of (to pick an obvious comparison) fellow Angelinos the Go-Go's.

The Bangles' sound is heavily influenced by the bands of the first British Invasion, particularly the Beatles. Instrumentally, "The Real World" is instantly reminiscent of Rubber Soul period Beatles ("Run For Your Life," "If I Needed Someone"); lyrically, it's a reversal of the story told in "Help!": "You never bring me down or make me sad...if I was insecure/That was yesterday, and now I'm sure." "I'm in Line" borrows the bass riff from "Taxi" (also one of the Jam's favorite songs)." "Man" (also one of the Jam's favorite songs) was yesterday, and now I'm sure." "I'm in Line" borrows the bass riff from "Taxi." (also one of the Jam's favorite songs),[1,0],[3] a lead guitar break from the George Harrison songbook, and well-executed Beatles-esque harmonies.

The band of the British Invaders — with the exception of the Rolling Stones — was rhythm and blues. This remains the case for the Bangles. The weakest songs are the rockers "Want You" and "How Is the Air Up There?" The songs are faithful to tradition — to the point of slurring the words in the established manner — and tell personal tales of mistreatment by the man the singer loves, and her abandonment by her boyfriend for the pleasures of high society. They do nothing the early Stones didn't do with more energy and more conviction.

The Bangles really come into their own only on "Mary Street," in which they assimilate their influences rather than wear them on their sleeves. Although it bears a generic instrumental similarity to the pure pop of bands like the Hollies, this song is unquestionably their own, and also features their most well-thought and intelligent lyrics: "You thought that cool/Was in someone else's shoes and make-up."

Rather than use an intrusive producer (e.g., Blondie's Mike Chapman) to artificially infuse the record with sales potential, the Bangles obtained the services of Craig Leon, who allows the record to sound like the band, as he did with The Ramones.

This is a strong, promising — though not flawless — debut from a band certain to improve with age. After all, they began as the Go-Go's, not a whimper.

Mark Pandors

RESTAURANT

Cafe La Ruche, 24 Dunster St., Harvard Square, Cambridge, 497-4313. The baked stuffed croissants must be seen to be believed. Elsewhere, "croissant sandwiches" are split and filled between the halves; at Cafe La Ruche, croissant dough is wrapped around the stuffing, and the entire assembly is baked. The snow crabmeat croissant, baked with cheese and served with a salad garnish, won't be soon forgotten. The crabmeat/croissant combination provides ample, but not overpowering, contrast, and the salad complements the seafood well. One of La Ruche's two owners caught a bluefish last week; the next day, baked bluefish was among the entries offered.

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Far from the madding crowd

Cafe La Ruche, 24 Dunster St., Harvard Square, Cambridge, 497-4313. Cafe La Ruche has no liquor license. Over twenty beverages are available, including cappuccino and mocha, fine teas and Italian sodas. While Cafe La Ruche has no liquor license, patrons are welcome to bring their own spirits.

It is quite a delight to find an alternative to Au Bon Pain so close in Harvard Square. Cafe La Ruche's relaxed atmosphere — soft light and soft music — makes for a pleasant retreat from the Square's milling.

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