BABYLON ON AND ON
Squeeze, on A&M Records.

By Julian West

At first breaking up in 1982, Squeeze has had only one, somewhat disappointing, album. But the new effort, Babylon and On, is such a convincing comeback that it's like they never left. It clicks so well that one wonders how they ever had difficulties, and suggests that Squeeze can indeed bumble on and on, and on.

Chris Difford and Glenn Tilbrook were once called the greatest songwriting team since Lennox and McCartney, and while they have not sold so many records, they have turned out some mighty fine songs. Here are a dozen more.

If you liked old Squeeze, this is the album you have been waiting for. It is a close follow-on to "Classics" such as Argy Bogy and Cool for Cats, and I insist that there is not a bad track on it.

My personal favorite has been "Striking Matches," about a person waking up with a new lover and visualizing her as the perfect partner to fill a role in his life. The love affair ignites with the simple strike of a match. The metaphor of the metonymy is reminiscent of earlier songs such as "Pulling Mussels" and "Black Coffee," as are the delightful backing vocals, subliminal wit, and discordant rhymes (eyes/night, down/away the summer of a year, or a life, and "In Today's Room," which looks ahead to

For a group that still appears to have a glorious career remaining, there is a lot of talk of squandered time. "Hourglass," the first hit, pats it most directly: "I feel like I'm running up a steep hill no one can stop me from running. The hourglass has no more grains of sand my watch has stopped no more turning hands."

But there are clear references, too, in "Footprints," which regrets having parted away the summer of a year, or a life, and "In Today's Room," which looks ahead to death and pines "I'll regret not seeing her more." The same feeling is expressed in two of the most sympathetic and moving songs on the album, "The Prisoner," a lament for a woman chained to the stove by her husband, and "Cigarette of a Single Man," a lament for a man with nothing to go home to now he's one of those little lambs who strayed too far from the flock to find, he's better off without the grief that people wear between their teeth.

The genius of Squeeze is that all of this is expressed to the accompaniment of upbeat guitar rhythms, underscored by inventive percussion from Gilson Lavis and organ by Julian Holland. (Holland, the original Squeeze keyboards player, is one of their greatest assets.)

If you can dance to it, it can't mean too much, and that is precisely what makes their songs such appealing universal statements. Life can be rotten, and can be meaningful, but you can't let it worry you too much. Dance.

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