

New releases from XTC, Robyn Hitchcock aim to please



ORANGES & LEMONS
XTC
Geffen Records

By DEBBY LEVINSON

HOW MANY GROUPS START OUT with punk fervor and end up regressing to Beatlesque pop? Not many, I'll bet, except for XTC, whose guitar thrashings spiced up early recordings like *White Music* and *Drums and Wires* and whose last album,

Skylarking, was a musical trip through Pepperland courtesy of producer Todd Rundgren. XTC did show their psychedelic side in two releases by their alter egos, the Dukes of Stratosphere, but they were never accused of consciously copying the Beatles until recently. Their latest release is the double album *Oranges & Lemons*, and it should clear up any remaining doubt about where their sympathies lie; the cover is a swirling mass of cartoonish colors and absurdly stretched images à la Peter Max, and some of the songs are so obviously

homages to the Beatles it's a wonder that they weren't credited to Lennon, McCartney, Harrison, and Starr.

The most apparent Beatles imitations here are probably "The Loving," which begins with cheering (see "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band") and the overtly political "Here Comes President Kill Again" (alias "Because"), which damns both Americans and British for their international meddlings in the name of saving the world from communism. Not that the songs aren't catchy or worth listening to; "Mayor of Simpleton," the current single, is charmingly naive in sentiment, and "Chalkhills and Children" casts a slow, peaceful musical spell.

There is one limiting factor to *Oranges & Lemons* — the best songs are all on the first two sides. XTC had already created the world's most perfect double album in 1982's *English Settlement*, and *Oranges & Lemons* seems stuffed with filler by comparison. Peel away a few extraneous songs, and this could become a highly enjoyable Beatles tribute album.

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QUEEN ELVIS

Robyn Hitchcock 'n' the Egyptians
A & M Records

THERE IS NO WAY TO ADEQUATELY describe the warped sensibilities that pervade the average Robyn Hitchcock album. No one else seems to be able to write about death, flesh, and amphibians in Hitchcock's consistently baffling style. Somehow he mates the cheeriest, bounciest music to the most outrageous topics, as in "Furry Green Atom Bowl," a song from his *I Often Dream of Trains* LP which completely defies explanation. To make matters worse, the cover shot depicts Hitchcock meditating on a large-rooted vegetable, and the inner sleeve contains one of his odder short stories, this one dealing with the dead rising from the grave to make phone calls.

The music itself is as strange as always.

Yes, there is the obligatory single ("Madonna of the Wasps"), and yes, guitarist Peter Buck guests on three tracks to draw in any wayward REM fans, but Hitchcock still churns out songs like "Veins of the Queen." This song shows Hitchcock imagining himself shrunk down to the size of a match head and injected into the veins of Queen Elizabeth to have a look around:

*But nobody pretends
That they really know the Queen
So I'd love to say I'd been
Somewhere deep inside the veins
Of Her Majesty the Queen.*

"Veins of the Queen" and "One Long Pair of Eyes" are both songs Hitchcock performed on his acoustic tour this summer, and fortunately, neither suffers from the fleshing-out they get from his band, the Egyptians. Hearing "One Long Pair of Eyes" performed with bass, drums, piano, and additional harmonies is certainly a change from the sparse, elegiac version I heard in concert, but the song doesn't suffer at all for it. It's still wrenchingly beautiful and one of Hitchcock's best love songs. Likewise, this is one of Hitchcock's best albums, eclipsing *Element of Light* and even *Fegmania*.

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Three more albums that may require some diligent rooting around to find but are definitely worth it:

Beleza Tropical (Fly/Sire Records) — various, compiled by David Byrne. Still trying to satisfy his itch for newer and more esoteric rhythms, the head Talking Head flies to Brazil and returns with sambas and folk music galore. The collection is heavy on Caetano Veloso and Milton Nascimento (they perform six of the fourteen tracks), but when the music is this glorious, it doesn't matter. It begins with the utterly infectious "Ponta de Lanca Africano (Umbabarauma)" from Jorge Ben and skips from samba to bossa nova to folk and back again. All, of course, in Portuguese. (Please turn to page 11)

Interviewing on Campus

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