Liz Phair's new album continues sexual assertiveness

WHIPP-SMART
Liz Phair.
Matador/Atlantic Records.

By Scott Deskin

Liz Phair's career is probably as close to being on the fast-track of up-and-coming "alternative" rock acts as one could hope for. Phair's debut album, Exile in Guyville, was released last year to moderately good sales and — more importantly — widely enthusiastic critical acclaim. Ostensibly a sharp reply to the Rolling Stones' masterpiece Exile on Main Street (1972), Guyville's 18 tracks proudly displayed Phair's unabashed sexual and emotional openness with the male subjects of her songs.

After a year of stage-fright from touring, media exposure, and time to soak in her success, Liz Phair releases Whip-Smart, a surprisingly succinct and coherent follow-up to Guyville. Although it lacks some of the grand, sweeping conception that the prior album had borrowed from its male-dominated, classic-rock roots, her new album breaks off into new directions, reasserting female sexuallongings and independence and respect.

Both albums have a sound that is simultaneously unremarkable and refreshing; as such, both albums are eminently listenable, because either of the two albums is easy to dismiss. Phair has a flair for the melodic pop hook. It's both albums are eminently listenable, because either the album is easy to dismiss. Phair has a flair for the melodic pop hook. It's likely that the rhythm, but not able overuse cliches of love. song represents another facet of Phair's spec- phantastic with the opposite sex, whether it be the stic songplay of the MTV-hitbound "Super-

Pulp Fiction is gruesome, gitty, and darkly comic fun

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involve maybe 15 to 20 minutes of acting, real dialogue. Pulp Fiction has these huge chunks of dialogue that move the script along. It's totally engaging.

The other element that really gives Pulp Fiction its unique personality is Tarantino's love of the shocking, the unpredictable, and the absurd. The most memorable scene in the movie is the infamous "ear" scene, in which the jeweler Otis Theron is cut off a captive policeman's ear. Certainly there are scenes of the same gruesomeness magnitude in Pulp Fiction, including an adrenaline shot given to Uma Thurman when she is overdosing on cocaine, and a scene involving Bruce Willis and two redneck homosexual rapists.

Pulp Fiction's got everything going for it. From top to bottom, the performances are dazzling, the dialogue is cracking, and the story never hits a flat. Tarantino's twisted mix of

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