

artsweek

BRAYN SIRJUNZ REPORT:
THE WORST ALBUMS OF 1998, AND MORE!

SPEAK MAGAZINE MEET BRAD PITT JOE BLACK.

WE REVIEW: YO LA TENGO & JAD FAIR,
PAUL OAKENFOLD, VISIONARIES, THE COUP, SISTER SOLEIL



>>>UNDERWORLD GAINED WORLDWIDE NOTORIETY AND FAME DUE TO THE INCLUSION OF THEIR SONG

"BORN SLIPPY"

ON THE MULTI-PLATINUM "TRAIN SPOTTING" SOUNDTRACK, AN INTRIGUING JUXTAPOSITION OF ATMOSPHERIC SYNTHS, 808 PERCUSSION AND SEEMINGLY EUPHORIC VOCALS.

"BORN SLIPPY" BROUGHT TO AMERICAN SHORES SOUNDS OF THE BRITISH AMBIENT UNDERGROUND.

>>>THE TRIO THAT IS UNDERWORLD RECENTLY EMBARKED ON A THREE SHOW MINI-TOUR OF THE UNITED STATES, PLAYING NEW YORK CITY, CHICAGO AND LOS ANGELES.

>>>THIS TOUR WAS A RESPITE OF SORTS, AS THEY BROKE FROM THEIR CURRENT WORK ON AN UPCOMING STUDIO ALBUM DUE OUT IN THE EARLY PART OF '99. THE FEW FANS WHO WERE ABLE TO CATCH THE GROUP ON THIS SMALL JAUNT THROUGH THE UNITED STATES WERE ABLE TO GET A SAMPLING OF UNDERWORLD'S NEWEST MATERIAL AND, OF COURSE, HAVE SOME SLIPPY FUN WHILE DOING IT. UNDERWORLD ALSO PLAYED MUSIC FROM PREVIOUS ALBUMS SUCH AS *SECOND Toughest IN THE INFANTS*. THE TRIO'S ARTY APPROACH TO ELECTRONIC MUSIC HAS MADE THEM A FAVORITE AMONG FANS AND MUSICIANS ALIKE. NOTABLE ATTENDEES AT THE RECENT LOS ANGELES SHOW INCLUDED

PERRY FARRELL
OF JANE'S ADDICTION
JOSH WINK,
CRYSTAL METHOD
AND
LOVE & ROCKETS.

>>>ROB
STOOD
NEXT
TO
THEM
ALL
AND
TOOK
SOME
PHOTO-
GRAPHS.
<<<

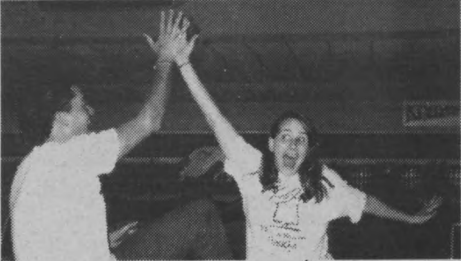
Electro-Bliss.

ROBERT HANSON/Daily Nexus

Underworld at the Mayan, November 23, 1998. For more photos, see p.5A

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"MEET JOE BLACK":

DEATH TAKES A
LONG, LONG, LONG, LONG, LONG,
LONG, LONG, LONG, LONG, LONG, LONG,
FUCKING HOLIDAY.

By JOHN FISKE
Artsweek Film Critic

To be honest, though I enjoy them by and large, I can't think of more than a few three-hour films that could not have used even a little trimming to make them stronger. I don't care if it's "Titanic," "Braveheart," "The English Patient," "Casino" or "Dances With Wolves," and especially the recent "Beloved." "Meet Joe Black," as enjoyable as it is, belongs on this list.

Adapted from the 1935 film "Death Takes a Holiday," which ran a svelte 78 minutes, "Meet Joe Black" is expertly designed to be everything that it is: entertaining, inspirational, funny, romantic, well-acted and fulfilling. That it tries to be so many things at once is, I think, a testament to the makers' confidence and ambition. It is unfortunate that while they are successful with the pieces, the time-tested motto of "less is more" could have benefited the film on more than one occasion.

"Meet Joe Black" follows the story of how death takes a break to find out what he's been hearing about all these ages: life. Naturally he goes to a man who has been successful in all walks to take him through. The deal is simple: Filthy rich

William Parrish (Anthony Hopkins), CEO of Parrish Communications, will guide him (in the body of recently deceased Brad Pitt — hell, I'd choose the body of Brad Pitt, too) through this world and its experiences in exchange for time. How much or how little is dependent upon Joe Black's (as he is named) interest in this world. Helping increase Joe's stay is Bill's daughter, Susan (Claire Forlani).

As far as I've heard, people's greatest complaint about "Meet Joe Black" is not its intrusive running time (one minute shy of three hours), but Brad Pitt's abstract performance. It is in fact the film's greatest achievement. Pitt is consistently one of the most challenging and surprisingly focused of actors his age, and that he would choose such a low-key performance for a \$90 million romantic comedy shows how shrewd and daring he really is.

Director Martin Brest is a very particular director (his "Midnight Run" was a perfect action comedy, and his previous "Scent of a Woman" used every one of its 149 minutes

See JOE BLACK, p.7A

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*comment

THIS WEEK, A-DOUBLE CHARTS THE WORST ALBUMS OF NINETEEN-NINETY-EIGHT ONE AT A TIME, AS PAINFULLY AND INTRICATELY AS POSSIBLE. SO NOW THE QUESTION IS, ARE YOU UP FOR THE DISS?

BY A-DOUBLE
Artsweek Optimist

"Battling me is like Evian backwards..."
— Evidence of Dilated Peoples

In a recent interview with *Kronick* magazine, Ras Kass said something that raised my eyebrow and had me clutching my halfway washboard abs in laughter. "I used to think that people were inherently good," he was quoted as saying. "Now I believe that people are inherently pieces of shit."

Oh Ras, stop before you lose more fans than you already have with your wack second album.

In fact, there are times when I couldn't agree more. Perhaps it is this city's supply of Caspar Van Dyke-looking imbeciles. Maybe it's getting the same calls requesting Cypress Hill every week. It could be that I can't throw Ward Connerly out the window, Morninglory Music receives too many No Limit promos and The RZA's album is wack. The occasional loss of faith in humanity cannot be helped when noticing an abundance of complacency, conformity and a glib lack of awareness. Have you ever walked through a public space and had flashbacks of your idiotic I.V. encounters that make you want to plant the Rock Bottom on everybody

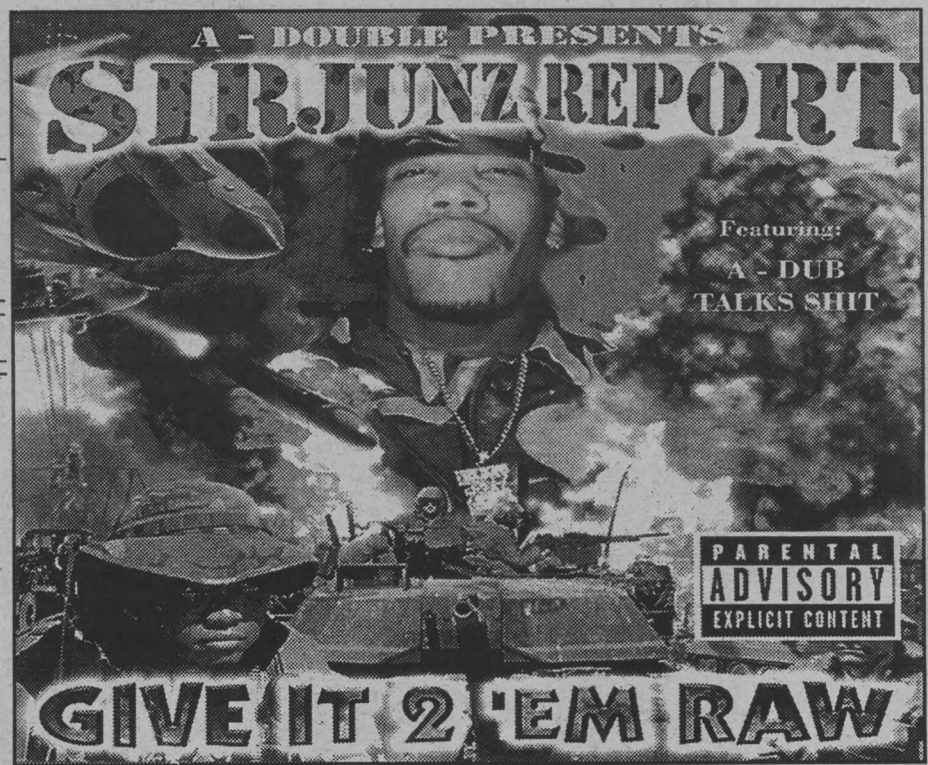
that's in your mutha-fuc-king (emphasis on every syllable) sight?

Of course, it can't be helped. Not everybody is exposed to the same realities that some of us have been subjected to. The ability to discriminate substantive qualities from externally subplanted metaphysical excrement isn't retained by all. These sheep-like people, or as Bönz Malone put it, 'sheeple,' oftentimes make Kelly Bundy look smart; look at her, she's unswayed by no one else's concerns and ostentatiously exerts her individual presence without the concerns of the public.

Yes, Kelly Bundy is quite admirable. Many cookie cutter muhfuckers in this world make me sick, but they make it possible to weed out the bullshit that won't sojourn with me on my travels to the earth's deep core. In other words, I'ma increase my efforts to pull everybody's card. Don't forget that to a certain extent, it's all about opinion; if you disagree I ain't mad at ya, you little mark bizznitch.

For today, I decided to reflect on the 1998 musical year as I sip an espresso, contemplate the unattractiveness of Gillian Anderson while putting a mental Disco Inferno cabbage patch drop on pseudo hippies driving beemers. Ahh yes, the beautiful millennium.

Let's begin with the longest album review ever recorded by the Guinness Book of World Records. This is a summary of music



from the past year that I would listen to while grinding on your mama and drinking Malt Liquor with Panda Express for a fucked up hangover:

All City / *Metropolis Gold* / MCA
Hole / *Celebrity Skin* / I don't care
Any Album with Master P / *Titles that are ignorant* / No Limit
Ice Cube / *War & Peace* / Priority
Mack 10 / *The Recipe* / Priority
Ras Kass / *Rassination* / Priority
Bounty Killer / *Next Millennium* / TWT
Geto Boyz / *Da Good, Da Bad and Da Ugly* / Rap-A-Lot
Killarmy / *Dirty Weaponry* / Priority
Pras / *Ghetto Superstar* / Columbia
Cypress Hill / *IV* / Columbia
Canibus / *Can-I-bus?* / Universal
Kool G Rap / *Roots of Evil* / Ill Street
Hootie and the Blowfish / *Any fucking album* / Don't give a fuck
Candlebox / *Any album* / Mercury or

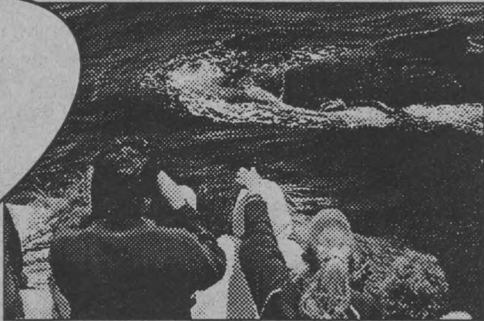
some shit
Funkmaster Flex / *60 Minutes of Funk Vol. III* / Loud
Jay-Z / *Hardknock Life* / Roc-a-fella
Various Artists / *"Sabrina the Teenage Witch" soundtrack* / Fuck the label
Vanilla Ice / *Hard To Swallow* / Universal
N-Sync, Backstreet Boyz and Five / *Don't need Skills to Pay the Bills* / Forged
Total / *Kim, Pam and Keisha* / Bad Boy
Dru Hill / *Enter the Dru* / Island
P.M. Dawn / *Dearest Christian* / Island
Insane Clown Posse / *Great Milenko* / Island
Kurupt / *Kuruption* / A&M
Onyx / *Sbut it Down* / Def Jam
Def Squad / *El Nino* / Def Jam
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Various Artists / *"Belly" and "Rush Hour"*

See BRAIN, p.7A

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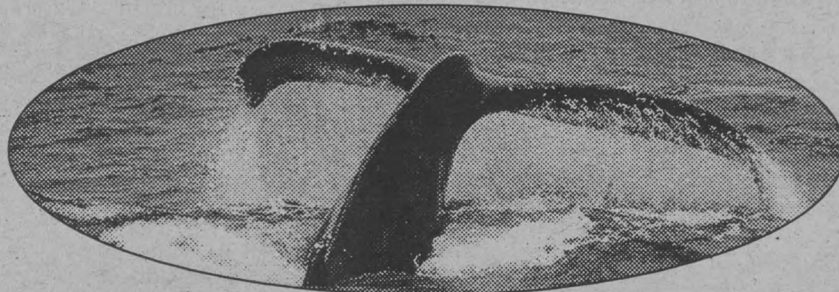
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*CD Reviews

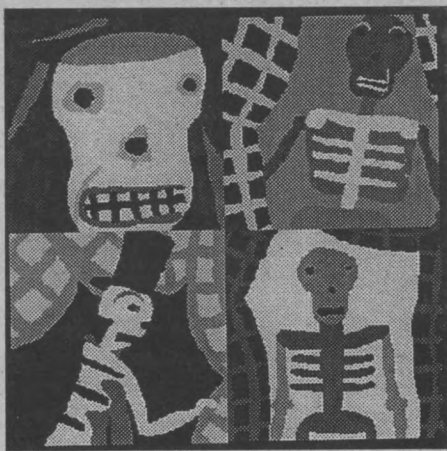
*CD Reviews

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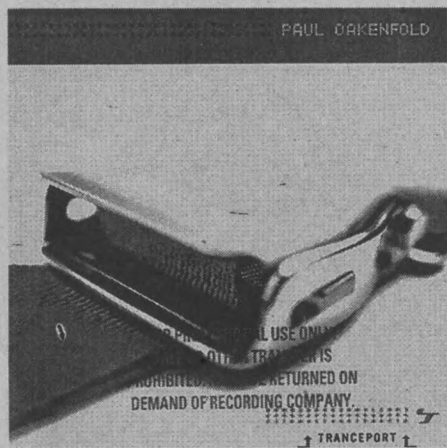
Jad Fair and Yo La Tengo / *Strange But True* / Matador

Continuing on his quest to put out more records than anyone else who ever lived, the no longer adolescent prodigy Jad Fair teams up with indie-rock faves Yo La Tengo to bring us this lovable CD. The 22 short songs therein are all based on particularly silly supermarket tabloid headlines, with lyrics by Jad's brother David.

This is definitely one of the better releases in Jad's considerably large and spotty non-Half Japanese output, and that has a big something to do with Yo La Tengo, who provide a typically nice background, textured and tunefully rocking, to songs with titles like "Helpful Monkey Wallpapers Entire Home" and "Ohio Town Saved from Killer Bees by Hungry Vampire Bats." Jad just speaks mostly, like he's been doing for the past several years, but there are some nice examples of his own peculiar brand of "singing," though unfortunately still nothing close to the brilliantly twisted adolescent fury of the early Half Japanese records. But that's expected.

The whole thing is worth the price just for the second song, "Texas Man Abducted by Aliens for Outer Space Joy Ride," which is one of those absolutely perfect rock songs that seem somewhat familiar but are just amazing and simple and hit that exact "rock song" balance of volume and song. And it's always great to hear how Jad, who's got to be pushing 40 or something by now, still manages to sound like a 14-year-old boy.

— Josh Miller has absolutely no idea what he's talking about



Paul Oakenfold / *Tranceport Vol. 1 / Reprise*

Eleven continuously mixed tracks of steady upbeat electronica. Most easily classified as "homework music." Very easy to listen to, due in part to its steady beats and lack of wall-shaking bass as well as the slightly generic quality it seems to possess. If you still have a difficult time grasping the mood of this CD, think of Enya and Olive collaborating on a project.

Despite its general mellow electronic sound, Tranceport does have its ups and downs with two progressive climaxes. In case you haven't noticed yet the name of the CD, "Tranceport" doesn't completely comply with the description of the music given here. The only way this album could be classified as solid trance is if you had hearing trouble; although each track consists of somewhat soothing hypnotic beats, the back beats are far too strong to give this CD any real trance feel. Although this CD didn't quite meet the

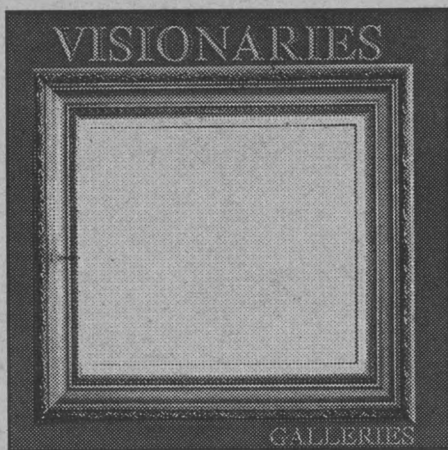
standards of full blown trance or ambient it was well on its way there, for it had the often used odd high-pitched whale mating calls and the mandatory transcendent female voice talking about nothing in particular.

Overall this CD is one not to be overlooked. It succeeds in appealing to fans of trance and the general public, and in general helps relieve unfavorable stereotypes held by the hoi polloi.

— Filip Ostrak

Visionaries / *Galleries / Up Above*

What elements distinguish an album between good and excellent? Certainly opinions will vary on this question, but I think that versatility void of hypocrisy (along with the skills to communicate these different ideas) can be agreed upon as an important factor. Versatility has separated many a good



one-dimensional album (like Rasco's *Time Waits For No Man*) from an excellent multi-dimensional one (like Aceyalone's *Book of Human Language*). Thus, up step the Visionaries with their first full-length offering, *Galleries*. The question is, can these five emcees and one DJ avoid dealing with the same topic from the same view for an entire album?

The answer is a surprising "Yes!" While most multi-emcee groups spend all their time worrying about being color-coordinated, the Visionaries serve up 20 songs that touch on all sorts of topics. They walk the fine line between independent thought and organization and manage to keep their balance for the entirety of the album.

LMNO and 2Mex really stand out lyrically, as they both have a couple of solo tracks that showcase their skills. On "Pope Mobile" 2Mex paints a vivid picture of the future, Antichrist and all, where Catholicism serves as the headquarters for Satan's New World Order. 2Mex succeeds in breaking into the Vatican and taking out Lucifer's Guardian, only to wake up and wonder whether it was a dream or a nightmare. As for LMNO, he shows a very refreshing spiritual influence throughout the album, using his "mind-boggling simplicity" to convey his beliefs. On "Bottom of the Barrel" he even examines the view of a homeless man, explaining that he *Lives in regress / used to be a threat / now he's done / Living his punishment / steadily stayed soft / laid off from his short term / germ spreading / missed his wedding ...* The story goes on to tell about how he became homeless and the price of greed.

Beat-wise, the Visionaries have put together a solid array of beats that range from old school to stripped down basslines to innovative stratoms of organized noise. The names behind the boards speak for themselves: Evidence, J-Rocc, Key-Kool and Rhettmatic all know how to make a dope beat. Rhettmatic also holds down the DJ duties for the group and even goes for self on "Rockin' the Sure Shot" and "The Gallery," which serves as an introduction to the group.

The Visionaries stray from the norm on *Galleries* with their display of contrasting ideals between themselves and the rest of the hip-hop universe. They may make plenty of enemies among the closed-minded crowd, but the rest of us should admire lines like LMNO's on "Hands in the Sky": *I went to*

Santa Barbara / I didn't smoke weed ... / anywhere I go Jehovah's all I need. With continued efforts like this, the Visionaries are definitely "Here to Stay." Don't sleep.

— Trey Clark



The Coup / *Steal This Album* / Dogday

It's been four long years since we dabbled in Genocide and Juice while politicking with the Fat Cats and Bigga Fish. After being dropped by a fucked up Wild Pitch, hip-hop's black rage in the form of The Coup are back, stronger than ever and still carrying the yoke of the proletariat. This time, MC Boots and Pam the Funkstress (with E-Roc on hiatus) are telling you to *Steal This Album*.

The first track on the album ("The Shipment") sets the tone for the album's content, displaying a polymorphism of the blues, funk and street poetry oriented toward witty social commentary. Acknowledging the Bay Area's reputation for cheap, tinker-toy, Casio-keyboard, porno-music-sounding beats, folks unfamiliar with The Coup may dismiss them upon connecting the words "Oakland," "Funk" and "Rap." In fact, Oakland has always been a hotbed for musical talent, and producer/emcee Boots Riley does no shame as a skillful student of the Ohio Player/Funkadelic/Stax records school of respectful funkified musicianship.

Compared to their older material, the instruments sound overly engineered, displaying a loss of raw, organic qualities that may detract from its appeal. Several tracks retain similar qualities with the Bay's popular (Read: generic) Ant Banks/Khayree/Mike Mosley beats, although thankfully sounding 20 times more sophisticated.

The true appeal of this album is in its lyrical offerings. MC Boots is like someone's loudmouthed uncle at a barbecue: grumpy, yet humorous, and low on preachiness. The album's various topics speak on working class issues and proletariat anti-capitalist struggles. "Like, I'm not ghetto, dude!" some may say. However, folks afflicted by AmeriKKKa's economic/racial stratification know that life is PHUKKED up. It doesn't change the fact that album guest Del (from Hieroglyphics) may come gank your shit as "The Repo Man." Be aware that revolution is slowly approaching, as "20,000 Gun Salutes" will signify bullets for Newt, racists, greedy capitalists, Linda Tripp (naaw, just my personal bias) and the "U.C.P.A.S. (Undas, Cops, Pigs and Shit)." Support these cats, cuz these fools are broke as a joke because of a consuming public that would rather be complacent than be inspired; art's true purpose, no doubt.

— A-Double says fuck the millennium, but listen to the BraynSirjuz on KCSB 91.9 FM

Sister Soleil / *Solarium* / Universal

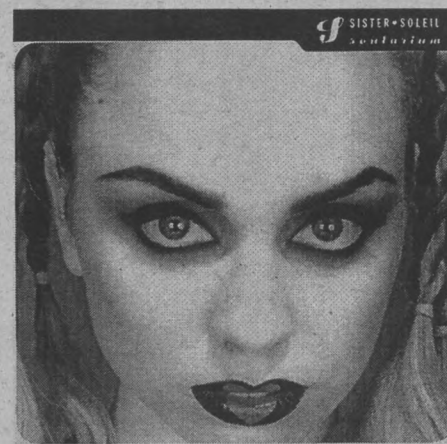
Are they techno? Trance? Alternative? Swing? No, no, no: They're simply confused. The grab-bag principle just doesn't apply to music. As varied as your musical tastes may be it's very unlikely that they encompass the wide variety of genres incorporated into this CD. They just tried a little too hard; they tried to appeal to fans of hardcore and techno as well as the ever-fading alternative generation. The result is a sound similar to that of Garbage.

They incorporate electronica with a heavy guitar and drums, and on top an out-of-place young female solo sings lead. If you can follow this, imagine an evil Ace of Base crossed with the new Marilyn Manson and you have Sister Soleil.

The band may not have it all together yet, but they're certainly not without potential. Their roots are set, they just don't know which genre to grow into; it seems as if the only genre they want to grow into is mainstream, which, unfortunately for them, doesn't happen to be a genre of music.

Some evident traces of their other efforts to be cool were two annoying tracks, six and eight, which, when combined, comprise 40 seconds of mumbling and odd sounds. Track seven is a song about America Online. Yes, that's right, America Online.

Two small details that must be mentioned: The words in the track pamphlet don't always match the words sung, and their

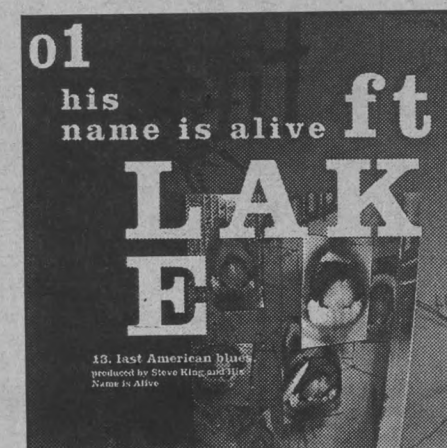


pictures make them look like fiends; trying too hard again, or did I completely miss their message? You decide.

— Filip Ostrak

His Name is Alive / *Ft. Lake* / 4AD

The first 20 seconds of this album may make some wonder, "Gee, is His Name is Alive doing an electronic album like everybody else seems to be these days?" Then it suddenly turns into something completely unexpected and wonderful. Of course, HNIA is one of those bands from whom one learns to expect the unexpected, and from that perspective, this album makes perfect sense. And this one is even more varied than their last one, the incredible *Stars on E.S.P.*



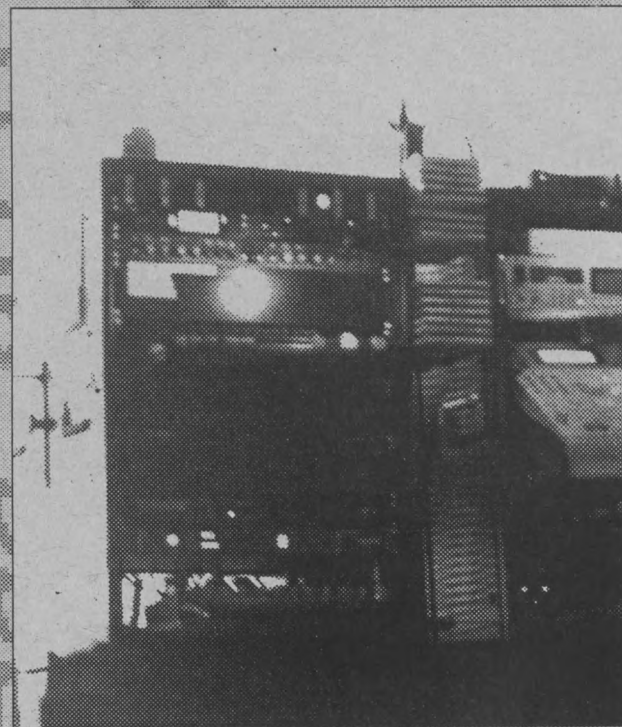
HNIA speaks pop in at least a dozen different languages, many of which are represented. Unfortunately, they're not quite as fluent in some as they are in others. The R&B-ish numbers don't really do it for me, while the Motown-influenced tunes and the occasionally new-wavey "raw ethereal" stuff is great, as usual. Each song leads into the next, often with little electronic experiments in between, making *Ft. Lake*, as a whole, a fantastic (if occasionally flawed) piece of work.

— Josh Miller is much, much more than just a piece of work. He's a piece of, well, never mind.

I really felt like filling this little space with something, but I wasn't really sure what. All sorts of little narcotic-based references came to mind but I figured enough of that had been done already.

— Robert Hanson has found his true calling in the service of the Lord. God bless.

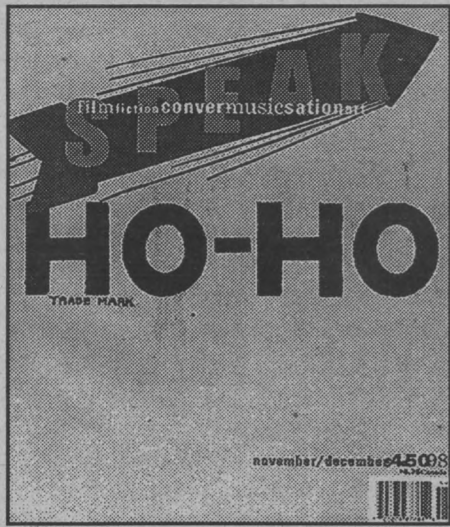
[[[UNDERWORLD @ THE MAYAN 11.23.98.]]]



PHOTOS BY ROBERT HANSON

*reads

By JENNIFER RAUB
Artsweek Editor



The November/December issue of *Speak*.

I discovered *Speak* magazine two years ago in a bookstore/cafe on Newbury Street in Boston. Initially, the overwhelmingly pastiche layout caused my eyes to burn, but I found myself on the second attempt of reading remarking out loud, "Goddamn, this is really beautiful!"

In the world of magazines increasingly polluted with new upstarts with supposed "cutting-edge" graphics and fonts, *Speak* has managed to avoid looking like all the others, and actually fills the artistically placed text with a healthy dose of content. At the time of my first purchase of *Speak*, I also bought *Raygun* and *Surface*, two comparable magazines in terms of focus and "hip" layout, but inevitably unable to cover the wide spectrum of material the sharp writers at *Speak* do.

Thankfully, last fall, when I was a sulking freshman detesting my boring intro-level classes and the unbelievably uninterested professors, I rediscovered *Speak* one rainy November day. Back in the confines of my smelly dorm room, I pored over the interviews, politics and fiction within *Speak*, and had read, at the end of three hours, more thought-provoking articles of substance than anything I had spoonfed

myself from the troughs of politically correct academia all quarter.

The material in the current *Speak* is as well-rounded as seen in previous issues. The interviews with radical architect Christopher Alexander and literary critic Harold Bloom allow both to articulate and elaborate on their given fields in a way that is accessible and interesting. Articles include in-depth looks at PBS's television show "Antiques Roadshow," the case of Stephen Lawrence and the history of Joy Division. Combined with book reviews, interesting news from the rest of the world, Chris Ware's comics and a plethora of fiction both short and long, *Speak* manages to truly portray a wide variety of subjects considered avant garde, common and underground.

No issue of *Speak* has yet let me down. Whether covering the life of Ché Guevara, discussing punk with Mike Watt or letting Calvin Johnson of K Records interview Beck, *Speak* consistently provides facts of fun and intrigue, exposure to lesser-known musicians, artists and writers and, most importantly, provides a healthy dose of food for thought.

Jennifer Raub is the Artsweek editor. She wishes desperately that her left gland would stop swelling, her head would stop throbbing and her left sinus would clear.



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JOE BLACK

Continued from p.7A

well) and does some good work here. It's just too bad that on many occasions he really pulls so hard for the tears, he only succeeds in undermining his next overwrought attempt.

Due to Parrish's approaching death, his last day, and our last hour, is an anthology of goodbyes, teary connections, teary redemptions, speeches on life and love, and triumphs of the soul. Each one works well on an individual level, but line them up and there are maybe seven or eight deafening musical crescendos.

However, it is still a well-crafted piece of entertain-

ment. At the movie I attended, the audience was about 95 percent female. By the film's end they had all cried an enormous amount, and though I hadn't, it shows that filmmakers were at least doing something right.

"A
WELL-CRAFTED
PIECE
OF
ENTERTAINMENT
..."

The film ultimately comes off as Joe Black himself: interesting, handsome, mildly triumphant, but not someone you wish to spend a whole three hours with.

BRAIN

Continued from p.3A

soundtracks / Goddammit, Def Jam again!?!?

Various Artists / "Armageddon" soundtrack / Don't care

Joe Pesci / Vincent LaGuardia Gambini Sings Just For You / Columbia

Noreaga / N.O.R.E. / Penalty

E-40 / Element of Surprise / Jive

Fat Joe / Don Cartagena / Jenny Craig

The inability of these artists in constructing solid product is uncanny. In other words, this shit is wack like making a Friends movie. The utter lunacy in the creative degradation, blasphemous song plagiarism, played out subjects and generic, copy cat teeny bopper bullshit makes me want to burn these albums with my stomach acid. Fuck these albums and many others like them.

What will the 1999 year be like? Imagine like John Lennon what the world would be like with a few changes. If Ice Cube got his skills back. What if Onyx grew hair? What if Fat Joe and Big Pun became Jenny Craig's nutritional advisers? What if Timbaland learned how to rap? What if Usher got slapped for trying to rap on "My Way"? If Jada Pink-

ett left Will Smith for putting Tatyana Ali on?

I visualize Dave Faustino making a rap supergroup with Everlast, Vanilla Ice, Kid Rock and Limp Bizkit's Fred Durst. I wish that Jennifer Love Hewitt and Lisa-Nicole Carlson would do more R-rated movies with nudity. How about a variation on silicone breasts (like getting a third implant in the middle of the chest)? Perhaps Eagle-Eye Cherry will never think of releasing another album, Madonna will retire, Michael Jackson will get his melanin back and Kool Keith will finally get props.

Finally, I would like to advocate the hexing of all CD-mixing equipment for the survival of vinyl, the cornerstone of hip-hop. It's sad knowing that there's so very few of us who have good musical taste. See you in the inferno of 1999.

Fuck y'all, peace out.

A-Double has been the cornerstone of happiness here at Artsweek in 1998. Without him, the exceeding amount of joy, appreciation of the mainstream and adoration for all lovers of music would not have happened. Thank you, A-Double, for your incredible support of top-40 music and your abundance of positivity.

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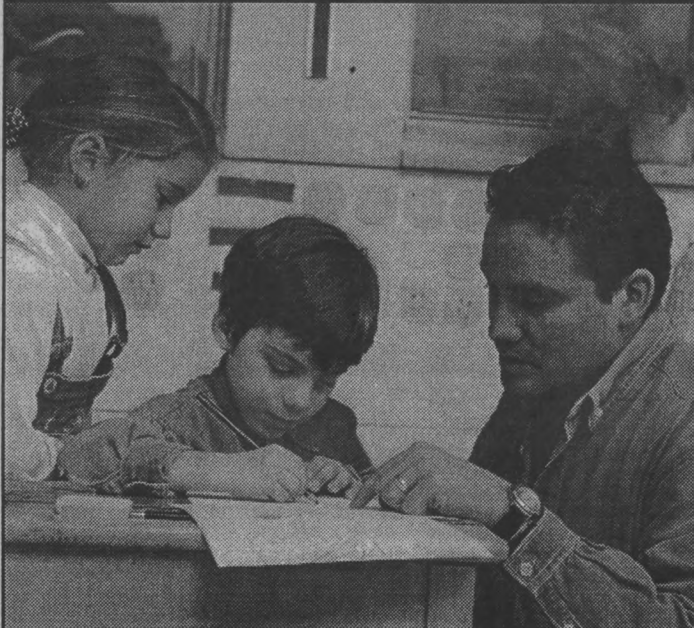
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