

Rock

BY GLENN McDONALD

Pocket Band

The Verve Pipe

"My complaint about Jerry Harrison is that he's on the phone too much," says drummer Don Brown of the Verve Pipe, the poppy post-punk band recently signed by RCA. Harrison, formerly of the Talking Heads, is producing the band's third album — an as-yet-untitled collection of melodic power pop. "He's a great guy, but I just wanted to pinch him a few times."

The Verve Pipe have enjoyed a remarkably quick ascent to major-label status — to the extent that they can now playfully bitch about Jerry Harrison's phone etiquette.

It happened like this: After playing a show in Kalamazoo, Mich., last year, an RCA representative approached the band at the bar.

"We'd had a handful of reps checking us out, and I was already disgusted by all the phoniness," says vocalist, guitarist and principal songwriter Bryan Vander Ark. "But [the RCA rep] came up after the show with a detailed list — song by song — of things he liked and didn't like about the set. We thought, 'All right. This guy means business.'"

With the new album due in February, a possible European tour on the horizon and a track on the new XTC tribute album (next to such luminaries as Sarah McLachlan and Joe Jackson), the band has barely had time to catch its breath.

But the boys still find time to be occasionally star-struck.

"We were watching TV or something in the studio when in walks Andy Partridge [of the aforementioned XTC]. I just lost it. I love XTC."

"I looked at him and went, 'Holy shit. Andy Partridge.'"

For more information on the Verve Pipe, call 800-951-PIPE. On the Web, they're at http://www.uma.com/The_Verve_Pipe.

Tha Dogg Pound

Dogg Food

Death Row

★★

Genius/GZA

Liquid Swords

Geffen

★★★★

The East Coast/West Coast debate will forever rage in hip-hop, and that's a good thing.

When New York rap began faltering in the late '80s, the new style came straight outta Compton. Each camp keeps its rival crews busy, but if the latest releases from L.A.'s Death Row records and New York's Wu Tang dynasty are any indication, it's time to look east again — because the sun is setting in the west.

For all the controversy surrounding the debut release from Death Row's Tha Dogg Pound, *Dogg Food* is a remarkably safe album. This is strictly gangsta-by-the-numbers. It's solid, but we've heard it all before. When rapper/producers Daz and Kurupt bring all the traditional Death Row elements together — a fresh p-funk beat, a loping rhyme and Nate Dogg or Michel'le in the back — they can't be touched. But for every transcendent moment, you have to wade through more and more of this repetitive, adolescent playa-ho-bitch-gangsta-keepin-it-real crap. Time Warner and Bob Dole might find it all evil and destructive, but rap fans are starting to see it for what it is. Tired.

Now with the Wu Tang Clan, you may not always understand what's going on, but at least it's interesting, whatever it is. The latest solo outing from this Staten Island crew comes from the MC alternately known as Genius, GZA or Maximillion. *Liquid Swords* is filled with the arcane samples, inscrutable rhymes and twisted kung fu/comic book references Wu Tang have come to be known for. With GZA, it's all about getting on the mike, and his intricate rapping is dense and relentless. The tracking here is strictly Gotham — dark, claustrophobic textures over stomping beats and urban street-sound samples. GZA and the Wu are on to a new analogue for rap's streetscape narratives, one in which keeping it real means taking it to another level.

Rapid Fires



Shelter Mantra Roadrunner

Shelter is the bindu band in a movement they're calling Krishna-core, a branch of hardcore

associated with the Hare Krishna movement. A little too earnest, maybe, but this is among the tightest hardcore out there, straight-edge or otherwise.

Various Artists Saturday Morning Cartoons MCA

The best thing we've seen since third grade — Matthew Sweet ("Scooby Doo"), the Ramones ("Spiderman"), Liz Phair ("The Tra La La Song") and, oh, Sublime, Frente!, Violent Femmes. Get happy!

Therapy? Infernal Love A&M

With *Infernal Love*, Therapy? have abandoned their previous techno-hard rock approach for a more eclectic mix of styles. Somehow, the band manages to be two years ahead of and five years behind the times. How do they do that?

Zuriani Zuriani AIX

The work of this Malaysian-born artist is being hyped as alternative world

beat music, combining structural traditions of both the West and East. This multimedia CD (PC and Mac compatible) sufficiently dazzles, but it's the music underneath that matters.

Bad Religion The Gray Race Atlantic

West Coast punk institution Bad Religion's albums continue to get more melodic and complex, and having '80s pop maestro Ric Ocasek (The Cars) behind the boards streamlines the sound nicely. Yeah, they're getting older — but hey, so are you.

Rating System

- ★★★★★ Rumpelstiltskin
- ★★★★ Hansel and Gretel
- ★★★ Goldilocks
- ★★ Tom Thumb
- ★ Ol' Bleedy and His Magic Soul Kiss



Frank Black

The Cult of Ray

American

★★★★

Frank Black knows a little something about punk rock. As frontman for legendary '80s deconstructionists the Pixies, Black (then known as Black Francis) took his obsessions of sex, sickness and outer space and wrapped them around furious rhythms and Iggy Pop guitars.

With *The Cult of Ray* (a reference to sci-fi legend Ray Bradbury), Black is coming in hard, fast and low. More aggressive than any of his previous solo releases, *Ray* is a bullying response to the current crop of bubble-gum punk rockers. The guitars crunch and wail, mutating any innocent melody that happens along into a freakish punk-pop moon-calf. Occasionally a few Doolittle-era pop riffs peek through ("The Marsist," "I Don't Want to Hurt You"), but for the most part Black's got the pedal to the metal and the volume on 11. Take it from the man himself: "I like distortion/When I bar chord."

Right on.

Barenaked Ladies

Born On A

Pirate Ship

Reprise

★★½

When these Canadian upstarts hit the States four years ago with their solid debut album *Gordon*, their pure pop sensibilities earned them a sizable cult following and a legitimate radio hit, "If I Had A Million Dollars."

Unfortunately, the Ladies haven't been able to capture the effortless grace of *Gordon* since. 1994's ambitious *Maybe You Should Drive* suffered from a lack of oomph, and *Pirate Ship* fares little better. Many tracks drag, and some are so boldly unappealing as to make you wonder if somehow you're not getting the joke. And you shouldn't have to worry about that kind of thing, especially when great songs like "This is Where it Ends" and "Break Your Heart" jump out and remind you how good this band can get.

But, hey — records, schmecords. They're still a stellar live band, infamous for loopy covers of Public



RADIO, RADIO

1. Smashing Pumpkins, *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*, Virgin
2. Boss Hog, *Boss Hog*, DGC
3. Rocket from the Crypt, *Scream, Dracula, Scream!*, Interscope
4. Pharcyde, *LabcabinCalifornia*, Delicious Vinyl
5. Sonic Youth, *Washing Machine*, DGC
6. Meat Puppets, *No Joke*, Island
7. Oasis, (*What's The Story*) *Morning Glory?*, Columbia
8. The Amps, *Pacar*, Elektra
9. Flaming Lips, *Clouds Taste Metallic*, Warner Bros.
10. Sunny Day Real Estate, *Sunny Day Real Estate*, Sub Pop

Chart based solely on college radio airplay. Contributing radio stations: KRNU, U. of Nebraska; KTRU, Rice U., Texas; KUCB, U. of Colorado; Boulder; KUOM, U. of Minnesota; KWVA, U. of Oregon; WCBN, U. of Michigan; WFAL, Bowling Green State U., Ohio; WUTK, U. of Tennessee, Knoxville, and WWVU, West Virginia U.

The U. Radio Chart is sponsored by

VIBRANCE.

ORGANIC CARE



Guest Expert: Dick Vitale

On music:

"I used to love the Platters — You know (in a not-so-pleasing timbre) 'In the sti-ill, of the nill-ght.' I can't sing, man. (In an even-less-pleasing timbre) 'On-lee youuuu.'"

Enemy, Duran Duran and Metallica. Check them out when they come to town, and bring a box of macaroni and cheese. They'll explain it to you later.

More reviews, more releases, plus sound bytes at <http://www.umagazine.com>