

MAY 92

SPINS

REVIEWS EDITED BY LAUREN SPENCER

JUNE 92

SNATCHES OF PINK

Bent With Pray
Caroline

Be aware that from the opening note of this Snatches of Pink release, on through to the closing, an overwhelming wash of feeling, sometimes leading to tears, will be very much a reality. Not because of anything vocalist-songwriter-guitarist Michael Rank is singing, but because of the sheer weighty beauty coming out of this threesome, which includes Sara Romweber (formerly of Let's Active) on drums, and Andrew McMillan on bass. Rank's voice seems just so ragged and bursting that certain raw connections to life and love spring to mind—sex, loss, hope.



Bent With Pray is for the most part an acoustic release—except on "Screams" where ex-Hanoi Rocks

gypsy guitarist Andy McCoy brings his flamenco licks to paint another picture. But there's nothing soft about what Snatches make you go through while listening. Rank's guitar and vocals sometimes sound like Bob Mould meets Paul Westerberg, full of reaching and falling notes. Only in places can you grasp full cohesive meaning in the lyrics, but that's really a moot point compared with the force of the tunes.

It's almost obscene to open it up this much and make the listener go along on the journey, but on songs like "Undead" and "Powder Blue" you'll want to ride it over again. Kinda rips your heart open.

LAUREN SPENCER

L7

Bricks Are Heavy
Slash

L7 is a '50s term meaning "square." *Square*: a plane figure having four equal sides, four right

angles, and edges. Sounds about right—even though these gals are anything but *plain*—the group consists of four equally rockin' entities, whose musical angles are totally correct, while there are enough edges on this disc to hurt any halfway sane person. Case in point, the first single off *Bricks Are Heavy*, "Pretend We're Dead," is a peppy little classic that'll inspire you to leap up into the air, causing your hair to fly around and your feet to leave the ground. When making the video, guitarist Suzi Gardner almost went beyond pretending when a camera crane fell on her, causing multiple injuries. But enough about death—this tune could be read as a diatribe against the zombielike times we live in with such tongue-in-cheek lines as "Just say no to individuality."

Sometimes bluesy and rockabillyish, sometimes churning and slow, the sum total is just plain cathartically groovy. Shining moments: a couple of righteous get-out-of-my-life tunes, "Slide" and "One More Thing," and some really funny lyrical treats on "Diet Pill"—"My diet pill is wearing off / I think the swelling is going down." The word *raunchy* may spring to mind. That's cool, because singing along and spewing out from

DEC. 91

NIRVANA
Nevermind
DGC

After a most fine lunch on a bright sunny New York day, *Nevermind* is blasting through the little box on my desk and the finance department here at the lovely SPIN offices



are probably going ballistic. . . . But so what. Forget the new Guns N' Roses double overkill. Forget Rush's *Roll the Bones*. Nirvana has built this one for speed—that would be speed with a capital S—and it sure is fun to drive. A little bit punk, a little bit metal, a little bit country, a little bit rock'n' roll. What the hell more do you want?

Nevermind's got a full-out rock assault on "Territorial Pissings," and a beautifully harmonic "On a Plain," and a really cool song called "Breed." Anyway, I swear you'll be humming all the songs for the rest of your life—or at least until your CD-tape-album wears out. I'm fully about this record, and you will be too. (available late October)

Lauren Spencer

March 92

CHAINSAW KITTENS

Flipped Out in Singapore
Mammoth

Hey, excuse me: The guys in this band like to dress up in their girlfriends' pantyhose, don dresses, and get onstage to perform gems with names such as "High in High School" and "Shannon's Favorite Fellini Mov-



ie." But this ain't art-rock. Lose those glasses of Chablis, grab a bottle of Jack and get real, 'cause this stuff is fast, brutal, and pretty darn relentless. Chainsaw Kittens' new release, produced by maestro-knob-guy Butch Vig—responsible for Nirvana, Smashing Pumpkins, and other voices for our times—will beat you into submission.

While their last release, *Violent Religion*, flirted with schizophrenia, *Flipped Out* is proof that lead dude Tyson Meade has officially gone over the edge—which, insofar as it affects the music, is a very good thing. Sometimes a high-falsetto squeal or a low-boom blast, Meade's voice is backed with a real heavy-bottomed guitar and bass drive that at times can be a bit overwrought, and while comparisons to the Ramones and Last Crack wouldn't seem out of line, the tunes contained herein do cut a clear path through most of those boring wannabe punk bands (no names here—they know who they are). Mainly because these cats really are crazy.

Lauren Spencer

Feb 92

POI DOG PONDERING

Volo Volo
Columbia

Poi Dog Pondering is a 395-or-so-member Austin-based band from Hawaii with some lofty musical aims. In its native land, *poi* is a sticky food item with the consistency of wallpaper that I was terrorized with once as a small child, so maybe I tend to react negatively to anything with that word in it, but I doubt it. I think instead that Poi Dog Pondering's music is just too smooth and predictable, with its formulaic ramblings and precious lyrical content. The feeling throughout the whole disc is that the band is determined to make Art.

This stuff sounds like some new-age jazz hybrid: schizophrenic time signatures, hectic instrumental breaks, and full pseudosoul choruses. It gets tired real fast. Sometimes *Volo Volo* borders on Roxy Music wannabe-isms like "Be the



One," or world-music moshing like "Ta Bouche Est Tabou," but mostly this is kinda like a "Don't Worry Be Happy" stew that's so dull you'll be jonesin' for some raw flesh to bite into. Be very worried, because bland is bad.

Lauren Spencer

SKUNK

Laid
Twin/Tone

Smells like a hit. . . . Sorry about that, just had to lay a small pun in there. Actually, through no fault of the band's and the miracles of record companies, Skunk's new album should have been out ages ago, but this end-of-summer release will make the listening public happy enough to run to the store immediately and buy it. Now, about the music: kind of a cross between Living Colour and the Grateful Dead—no, that's not quite it. Kiss meets Color Me Badd—close, but that's not it either. Basically songs like "The Best" and "Dummy"—my personal pick for the first single—have really clean lines that lead dangerously close to '70s rock in its glory days. The trio of Matts—yes, they're all named Matt—who man the band are all only 21 or so, and the fact that they can make noise this good means that maybe there is hope for the future. (*available early August*)

Sept. 91

Lauren Spencer

Oct 91

SPINS

REVIEWS EDITED BY JIM GREER

PLATTER DU JOUR

SOUNDGARDEN

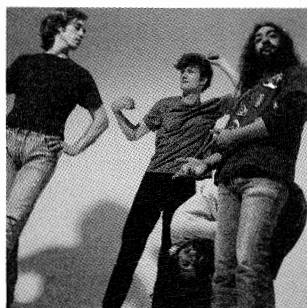
Badmotorfinger

A&M

Can you say crunchy? I know you can—and say it loud like you mean it, because upon listening to this fine 12-song sophomore major-label effort by Seattle sons Soundgarden, it's a word that comes in mighty handy. The band (Chris Cornell, alternately singing from under the floorboards and screaming for dear life, guitarist Kim Thayil, bassist Ben Cromer, and drummer Matt Cameron) stomps all over these tunes until they end up just shards of matter in your head. Soundgarden throws you to the bottom of a very deep well and leaves you there to make your own way up; forget about calling for help, 'cause no one will hear you.

Since Soundgarden first swam into the rock ecosystem, the band has been cultivating a lush and humid world all its own, and many credit the band with what has now come to be known as the Seattle sound. Whatever. There's a lot of damned good music coming out of the Northwest, but contrary to what some critics may have you believe, *Badmotorfinger* will move you in a completely different way. For those of us who were jonesin' for a dip into some Soundgarden between 1989's *Louder Than Love* and this landscape, there was the Cornell-Cameron-Pearl Jam project *Temple of the Dog*. And although *Temple* was awesome and rocked like a word I can't use here, the virgin release by Pearl Jam and *Badmotorfinger* come from different places altogether.

Lyrical themes of oppression and dysfunctional religion run rampant throughout *Badmotorfinger*. Cornell

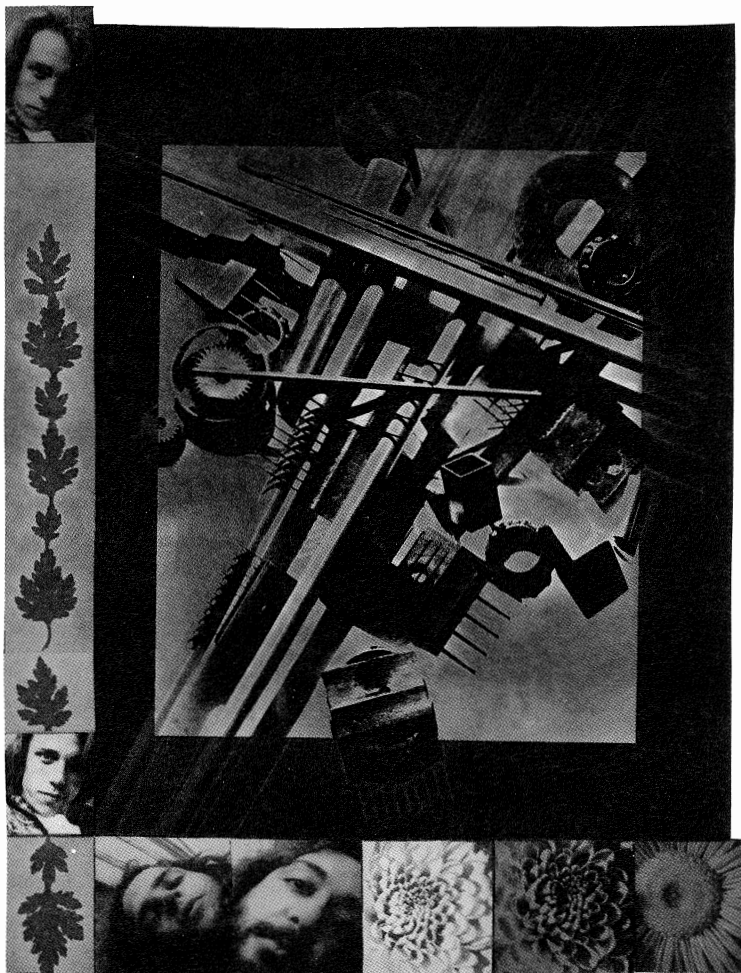


once told me, "I grew up in a repressive situation and that causes people to malfunction—so if I'm angry and want to express it, I write a song." It's easy then to see why lyrically and vocally he seems on the verge of an explosion. "Slaves & Bulldozers" threatens to slam you into a wall one too many times. Perhaps an indictment against record-biz fakery, it contains some vintage Cornell vocals as he screams, "What's in it for me?" On "Holy Water," he claims, "Holy waters rusted me." There's even some spastic horns on "Room 1000 Years Wide," which was previously released as a Sub Pop single, and an even more prominent horn section for "Drawing Flies."

Buried within this stretch of fertile earth there are some choice '70s musical comparisons begging to be drawn, and I know my colleague Bob Mack would like to throw Budgie and Jethro Tull into the mix, but suffice it to say that whatever awesome heavy rock experience you might have grown up with, you can probably find traces in these tunes. And that is certainly *not* a bad thing, because the songs aren't derivative. There are many layers from which to choose: "Jesus Christ Pose," which is the first single and makes an appearance in Cameron Crowe's new flick *Singles*, starts with a kind of free-jazz throwdown and moves quickly into the realm of rockdom. Visions of the band's early SST "Flower/Head Injury" days dance in your head during "Face Pollution," and there are some weirdly tweaked intro barnyard descriptions leading into "Searchin' With My Good Eye Closed," until the song kicks into a psychedelic swirling mass of sounds.

So at the end of the day, *Badmotorfinger* is waiting to be used and abused, shredded and spindled, and just generally rocked to. Tend to this garden of sound and I guarantee a fruitful crop will rise up and take over the world. (available mid-September)

Lauren Spencer



AMY GUIP

SCREAMING TREES *Apr. 191*
Uncle Anesthesia
 Epic

Although the Trees dislike their music being referred to as psychedelic, their major label debut LP is very groovy in a way that hearkens back to all your fave psych-grunge bands from the early days. And that's a good thing. Singer Mark Lanegan's vocals conjure up images of early Iggy, while the Conner brothers—Gary Lee on guitar, and Van on

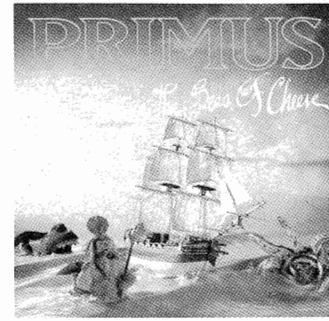


bass—weave some grungy Trogg-like string work, especially on the excellent "Ocean of Confusion." The Trees have toured endlessly in the six years they've been together, and while that seems to have helped tighten their sound, it's taken its toll on their personnel lineup. The latest casualty is the exit of maestro-drummer Mark Picklerel.

Oh yeah, the Screaming Trees are

from Seattle, but in this case, that just happens to be their hometown—not their musical influence.

Lauren Spencer



PRIMUS
Sailing the Seas of Cheese
 Interscope

On its major-label debut, Primus sails the seas of silliness while maneuvering, with the help of many guest stars, through waves of wackiness. Some call the band's sound psychedelic polka, some call it metal with a funk edge, but whatever you want to call this disc it's filled with awesome bass slapping from lead dude Les "Grandpa" Claypool, thrashy guitar work from Larry "Ler"

LaLonde, and solid drum stuff by Tim "Herb" Alexander. From the 42-second intro, "Seas of Cheese," to the star-studded "Here Come the Bastards," which features Mike "Puffy" Bordin from Faith No More on drums and Butt House from the Limbomaniacs on bass, these tunes are definitely big fun. Tom Waits is the voice of Tommy on "Tommy the Cat," a track that originally appeared on Primus's first album, *Suck On This*. And there's even a sound bite from one of Larry and Les's fave U.K. comedies, *The Young Ones*, on "Los Bastardos."

What is the thread that connects all these musical types—besides the fact that they all live in the Bay Area? They all have funny nicknames. Must be something in the water.

Lauren Spencer

JUNE 91

FUDGE TUNNEL
Hate Songs in E Minor
 Relativity/Earache

Earache-label bands do strange things to my sound system. While listening to Godflesh, the alien sounds coming out of my box had me convinced that someone was breaking into SPIN's offices. Now, while writing this Fudge Tunnel review, my tape deck keeps turning itself off. Are these signs? If I give the Fudge Tunnel release a bad review, will un- things happen to me? I will never find out the answer to this last question because this album has been in my Walkman for the better part of the month. Hope that doesn't mean my earphones are going to explode on my head.

This musical treat is actually far more user-friendly than either Fudge Tunnel's name or the title of the re-

lease would suggest. Hardcore meets guitar rock at its loudest and finest. The guys dedicate the album to the Nuge, they're from England, they do an unremarkable remake of "Cat Scratch Fever," but redeem themselves with a remodeled "Sunshine of Your Love," which totally steams. "Tweezers" and "Bed Crumbs" are awesome grunge feasts. Blow through this selection of finery, since every good girl and boy deserves a Fudge Tunnel. (*available mid-August*)

Lauren Spencer

SEPT. 91

Lauren Spencer's Fine and Excellent 1991 List

- 1 Most Fun Office Experience No. 1: Tripping the alarm system in the office on weekends and making the police come in the rain.
- 2 Most Fun Office Experience No. 2: Making up this list.
- 3 Most Fun Out of Office With SPIN People Experience No. 1: Breaking Tony Guccione's portable phone at Bob's birthday party. I swear I didn't mean to.
- 4 Most Fun Out of Office with SPIN People Experience No. 2: Moving the offices to Columbia, Missouri, for our college issue.
- 5 Most Fun Office Expression No. 1: "How tweaked is that?"
- 6 Most Fun Office Expression No. 2: "Let's go to Prix Fixe for a meeting."
- 7 Most Fun Had With No SPIN People Around at All: Proving that the security system at Boston's Howard Johnson is lax at best. And that made me very happy.
- 8 Most Sounds That Rocked My World: Screaming Trees, Teenage Fanclub, Nirvana, Soundgarden, Smashing Pumpkins, Corrosion of Conformity, Metallica, and Pearl Jam.
- 9 Most Insane Facts Learned in an Interview: Florida '91. How to apply an inverted cross on various parts of your body and still have a career as a human being . . . not.
- 10 Most Insane Facts Learned in an Interview No. 2: Learning that I really like interviewing people.

TEN THINGS THAT MADE LAUREN SPENCER HAPPY IN 1990, IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER:

- 1 Faith No More. Yes, they rock the house the best, with Mike Patton acting just like someone's bratty kid brother.
- 2 The return of Masters of Reality. Just when I was giving up hope, they came back to show us all how rock'n'roll should be. It's about time.
- 3 Soundgarden. Especially live, there's something about those bare chests and yards of hair . . . I just can't explain it (at least not in print).
- 4 Michael Lavine's photography. Coolness deluxe. Like being on acid, without having to take it. Must be all those colors.
- 5 Mother Love Bone. Sadly, much attention has been given to the band only since the death of lead singer Andrew Woods, but this Seattle band really were a motherlode of sound and fury. Here's hoping the remaining members will carry on the tradition in form.
- 6 Learning how to program a CD player. What can I say? I took my time on this one.
- 7 Things from San Francisco. The Bay area just looked better and better this year.
- 8 Osgood Slaughter. Not just a joint disease but a great band from, where else? San Francisco. Keep your ears open.
- 9 Belly-button rings. No I haven't got one . . . but they look cool anyway, and you never know when that piercing mood might strike.
- 10 Loud music. Basically encompasses everything mentioned above.

20 BEST ALBUMS OF THE YEAR

(In order, as rated by SPIN's editors)

1. Teenage Fanclub, *Bandwagonesque* (DGC). This Scottish band's last record, *A Catholic Education*, was a powerfully loose shot of punkish guitar pop that proved to be among 1990's finer releases. *Bandwagonesque's* refinements (better playing and production, more standard song structures) take a good idea even further—this record would be hard to equal in any year. Rock music doesn't get much better than this. (Blackwell)

2. R.E.M., *Out of Time* (Warner Bros.). This disc leaves you out of breath with wonder. Understated beauty, moody eclecticism, and guest stars galore. Jefferson, I think they've found their way. (Poulson-Bryant)

3. Nirvana, *Nevermind* (DGC). What can I say? Are you tired of hearing me rant about this album yet? Well too bad, you won't get tired of listening to it. So just buy it. (Spencer)

4. Pixies, *Trompe le Monde* (Elektra). In the distant future, a friendless historian may well look back and select this as one of the most sublime and thorough expressions of a late-20th-century mannerist style in popular music that was known as "college rock." (Wice)

5. Pet Shop Boys, *Discography* (EMI). Anticipation, envy, bitterness, and longing. All the little things that make life worth living linger inside this peerless collection. Beautiful, eloquent, heartsick echoes of another England from the greatest blue-eyed soul duo since the Righteous Brothers. (Bernstein)

6. Robyn Hitchcock, *Perspex Island* (A&M). Robyn's "straightest," most convincing record ever. "She Doesn't Exist" is possibly the best song he's written. (Greer)

7. Public Enemy, *Apocalypse '91: The Empire Strikes Black* (Def Jam). Not as sprawling as *Fear of a Black Planet*, not as lean as *It Takes a Nation of Millions*, but tight, funky, and engaging. (Poulson-Bryant)

8. Soundgarden, *Badmotorfinger* (A&M). You may think you've heard the riffs before, which is always comforting, but this big, churning album will blow you right away. (Spencer)

9. Smashing Pumpkins, *Gish* (Caroline). Lush, textural sounds that hit hard, soft, and everywhere in between. Without a doubt the debut album of the year, and if you were smart

and got it early, you're allowed to be smug and say, "I told you so." (Spencer)

10. R.M. Dawn, *Of the Heart, of the Soul and of the Cross: The Utopian Experience* (Island). A long, pretentious title for an album long on pretensions. But the hooks hook, the samples excite, the ambition amazes. Debut of the year. (Poulson-Bryant)

11. Metallica, *Metallica* (Elektra). Heavy, heavy, rock'n'roll that packs a wallop steel-fisted punch. This sixth effort is the band's tightest, most mature, simple, and commercial (nothing wrong with that) release yet. (Blackwell)

12. Massive Attack, *Blue Lines* (Virgin). Cascading melodies over big sexy beats; rhyme-styles in an elegant, soothing mode. Perfect balance. (Poulson-Bryant)

13. Fugazi, *Steady Diet of Nothing* (Dischord). A collection of beautifully constructed, tighter-than-ever songs that quake, rant, and shudder with the simple frustrations of everyday life. One of the more disparate and talented bands to emerge in recent years. (Fidler)

14. Urge Overkill, *The Supersonic Storybook* (Touch and Go). If I were a major label, I'd sign these dudes tomorrow. Sartorial splendor aside, they rock. You need this. (Greer)

15. Pearl Jam, *Ten* (Epic). Not just the founders of Seattle's Long Hair Club for Men. These guys are also clients. And in *Ten's* groove-laden

tracks you'll find hair-raising inspiration plus follicle stimulation. (Foege)

16. Seal, *Seal* (Virgin). Sultry grooves with folky edges. A poet dressed up like an icon, Seal broke out, wry observations and oblique asides with the assured and polished flight of a pro. Lyric of the summer: "In a sky full of people / Only some want to fly / Isn't that crazy?" Indeed, indeed. (Poulson-Bryant)

17. De La Soul, *De La Soul Is Dead* (Tommy Boy). Long-winded, self-indulgent, immature, flatulent. . . . But the songs were good. (Wice)

18. Mudhoney, *Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge* (Sub Pop). Always sonically rich, now Mudhoney is just plain rich. Cheers to college-rock stardom. (Foege)

19. Guns N' Roses, *Use Your Illusion I & II* (Geffen). On which Axl frustratingly challenges Bob, our boss, to a brawl, something we do all the time around SPIN. But it looks like Axl's gonna back down from Bob's ready acceptance to fight, which we never . . . oh yeah, um, we do that around here, too. But anyway, these two fine records of signature G N' R tracks, come complete with all the fire and fury of *Appetite* and a hell of a lot more swearing. (Blackwell)

20. Hole, *Pretty on the Inside* (Caroline). An album that starts out with a tune called "Teenage Whore" and gets louder, more brutal, and better is destined for a little corner of music history. Snarling and clawing its way—always prettily—into the a(n)nals of rockdom. (Spencer)



