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PRESS

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“TK.” Kenneth Goldsmit

# The Consumed Guide

Brian  
Joseph  
Davis



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# ONE

A genuine Rock Band caterwauling tunefully about Things That Matter. Sorta-indie demo album, sorta-major sorta-debut, a happy-to-ironic-to-credibly-sappy paean, a heroin album, a jam band for middle-aged neurotics who gather where most of their kind gather—their living rooms.

A Yurrupean plot. A great schlock yea-saying move, but a move is all it is. A credible representation of the avant-porn clichés that mean so much to them, a little too archetypal for my tastes. A real treat for the hearing-impaired, a reminder that nothing released under the auspices of a major label stays incredibly strange for long.

Addicts of updated nostalgia and rock and roll readymades should find this a sly and authentic commentary on the evolving dilemma of Harold Teen. Adds that *soupeçon* of shit. Ad-man phrasing histrionic flights, admired by a pretentious minority of an alt-rock subculture already way too full of itself, admired more for their correct aesthetics than for how they actually sound, adolescent petulance, tingling clits, no bass player.

Sorry punk-funk gone pop-jazz, all pomp, flash, male posturing, and sentimentality, this is now the Worst Band in the World. All shallow, all pure as a result, all the street credibility of a DONT WALK sign, all-purpose synthesizers, all-too-human

guitarist, almost demands extraneous strings, almost-orgies deeply influenced by Hollywood costume drama. Amateur anarchohumanists, ambient postdance snoozemeister, American dumb, American post-rock cough cough hack hack movement ptooeey ptooeey, ampliclarification.

An argument for death metal, an aural totem, an education in mountain sensibility, an encouraging aberration, an evolution from bad poetry to obscure poetry, ancient formula for self-indulgent songpoetry, Anglodisco at its most solemnly expedient, Anglophilia's favorite androids. *Another Green World* with a chip on its shoulder, sort of.

Any group that can attach a line like "Proud and gentle was the loving of the last two island swans" to a great hard rock tune has got to be doing something wrong, anybody who buys a record that divides a composition called "The Endless Enigma" into two discrete parts deserves it.

As a white salsa band they were horn players who'd found their niche in the cosmos, as benign an evolutionary mishap as the koala bear, as certain to fall as Tom DeLay, as "funny" as Meat Loaf, as gorgeous and shallow as *Aja*, as layered as a \$100 haircut and as mannered as a Stanislavski class. As members of the international brotherhood of bored middle-class collegians, their specialty is crappy music with a concept. And the concept is—crappy music!

As much aesthetic principle as Don Kirshner, as politically suggestive as Anglophile heroes get, as pretentious goes, not stupid, as rock *épater les bourgeois* goes, it's humane. As technocrats

they instinctively conceive for formats, as with all self-made wimps, the hustle is more insidious. At a critical moment in consciousness they exemplify and counsel disengagement, self-seeking, a luxurious cynicism, at least as authentic as Tammy Wynette. At least ELP were vulgarians.

Authoritative blackboard-screechy throat, autodoowop, avant-bigots, awkward fripperies. Baroque, frantically mechanical evocation of compulsive sex. Bat-garages of L.A., bathed the unwashed in the blood of the synthesizer, bathtubs full of demijazz, drenching this self-aggrandizing and no doubt hitbound project in a whole new dimension of phony class, beating the shit out of Boston and Ted Nugent and Blue Öyster Cult.

Beethoven-lover as Neiman-Marcus girl being bored with the Velvet Underground. Believe me, I don't want the best song on the record to be about a robot in love with Dolly Parton, but that's the way it is.

Better advertisement for middle-aged sex than *Dynasty*, between the cello and the acoustic guitar and the moderato and the lyric sheet that ought to have a little typeface note like at the end of a Borzoi book, I find myself disliking their record intensely.

Big, every-hair-in-place production, bitch bitch bitch, bloat bloat bloat, blandout, blokelike croak, burlesqued melodrama, Bluroraimeemann, Bluroroasisoraimeemann, bored Gang of Four, boring rehab, Brian Eno-sponsored, bright and shiny as a new cliché, brutal guitar machine thousands of lonely adolescent cowards have heard in their heads.

I think saying fuck 93 times in one song is a riot. Bullshit thoughts rot your needs. But live doubles are live doubles, nostalgia is nostalgia, wimps are wimps, and who needs any of 'em? Calculated simplicity, calm acceptance of fate, camp-elegant escapist nostalgia. Can the flute and add track listings.

Canadian skinny-tie music, candid camp, candidly mechanical, carefully modulated amateurishness, catchiest necrophilia song to date. Cavalcade of drips, cellphone-culture song masquerading as a fast-food song. Certified Black Person in the group.

Charging head down at a stray Matisse, cheap sensationalism has its own rewards. Check out "Space Truckin."

Christian/satanist/liberal murk, Christofascism, chronic fatuosos, clever pop-punk amalgam boasting two drummers, lots of chanting. Clods have feelings too.

Closet prog, collapsing new sound effects, collegiate existentialism nostalgia, comfy-funk bass, space-age sound effects, commendable filler-plus, commendable postpunk feminism, commercial desperation, commercial panic, committed dementia. Compassionately bitchy exposés of bedsitter hedonism and suburban, completely stiff, conflicted guitars, connected to the pop firmament, consciously antipopular, conservatory application, conservatory-trained goo. Constitutionally protected decision to dabble in the usages of drum'n'bass.

Countrypolitan, covert totalitarian structures have taken on a playful undertone. Cringe with dismay at the survival of a generation. I respect their synthesizer textures in theory.

Blackhearts as Descendents or vice versa—10 years late it's hard to tell. Crudely insistent, crunch crunch crunch, riff riff riff, cushiony electrodance, customized Penismobile. Cyborgs can grate on the ears, and I bet they don't suck dick that good either. Deep funk versus jibber-jabber, dick versus diarrhea, deep organ funk, deeply cynical, deeply tuneful, delusional in a nice way, dense and nutty, dense wordplay poised on the dizzying edge of parody, deploys a multihued battalion of respected professionals into wave upon wave of overkill. I rarely crave ambient technohorror, even when it has lead drum parts.

Designed for new sophisticates, desultory guitar, Diane Warren hand-me-downs for hooks, dignity is rarely as much fun as wreckage, diminished by the printed lyrics that are its reason for being, dire drum solo, disabled by cryogenic material and production.

Disco-identified mood mewzick for light necking, disco-porn lite for kids who have so much trouble figuring out kink isn't sinful that they flip to the jive about how it captures the truth of male-female dynamics, patriarchal oppression, human nature, or whatever else feels-good-do-it.

Disgusting because it's heartfelt, diverting placebos, dock this a notch for incipient pretensions and general meaninglessness, docked a notch for clothes sense, docked a notch for their taste in personas, docked a notch for time: 28.58.

Conveys what a bummer it is to struggle fruitlessly with your own political impotence, cool-to-gnomic, could no more make a "grunge" album than they could do double-entry bookkeeping.

Drum-hooked fucksong, dubious predecessors, dumb little songs with dumb little lyrics and dumb little hooks, dumb, yes. Samey, still. I still don't believe humans bought these songs because they liked them.

Dying in stereo, nothing left to say.

Earnest post-rock tripe, electric roar as acne remedy, emailed-in beats, emotional incompetents out of their depth, enough electronic marginal distinction to feed a coal town for a month. Marred by a kind of cute funkiness. Masters of unreality.

Escapist as a matter of conviction, essential eccentricity, establishes "It's My Party" as a protest song. Eurodisco-cum-art-rock nadir. Europercussion. Everything loud and acrid, existential resignation at its most enthusiastic, expert nonentities. I hold no brief against tuneless caterwaul, but tuneless psychedelic caterwaul has always been another matter.

Fair-to-middling political art, fans of manual dexterity, aggregate IQ, "stagecraft," faux Bernie Worrell tootle, faux-slick truths about real world horror, fearing the loss of their silly grip on America's angst-ridden teens. Feckless aura.

Fetching fuck-mantra, fine distinction between the trance and the nod, finishes with a song about an inflatable sex doll that's almost not stupid, first flush of studio infatuation, five years is a hell of a short time between live doubles.

Fourteen-minute spoken-word finale, fried brains, free to be the depressed Swedes they always were, from anybody else, this would be one more dumb concept album, and it still is.

Fucked-up Frampton cover, fully outrageous in its class hostility. Fun plus dinky doesn't make funky no matter who's dancing to what program. Fungo outfit.

Galaxy of rapping starchildren, goofily internationalist spirit, galvanizing imitation of testosterone-fueled desperation, gangsta as mystery, religious and literary, gargantuan shuck. General-interest zone, generates an illusion of context, generates considerable episodic interest. Girlophobia is their great subject. Give their image credit for having a sound. I find it hard to believe they pack an irresistible aural buzz even for those who experience their project as a cause.

Grade-C Blue Öyster Cult moves, grandiose electronic joke, Gregorian fog, grooves with the easy-swinging elite-rock sound of California's pop aristocrats, gross God-pop, guitar-hero costume drama, guitarniks, gynophobic rage. I guess I turn in my Free Grand Funk button.

Meaning-mongering for the fantasy fiction set, medium tempo romantic-as-in-movement pseudoschlock, megapathology of late capitalism, melismating croons and moans, melodic garage MOR for an audience defined by its tolerance for condescension. Melodious spirituality provides unity and renewal, mercurial young adults skilled at transforming doubt into music, merely bereft, rather than devoid of will or affect, meretricious, arrogantly bombastic flop.

Middle-class soul feels like a compromise rather than an achievement, minimalist funk of blatant entertainment value and covert sexuality, minimelodies galore.

Hackneyed manic depression is undermined by their usual sociopathic fantasies. Hard rock trash as radio readymades. Hiding political tics behind faux-formalist boilerplate. Higher convolution, highly Anglo-Saxon, high-texture also-rans process rock and roll readymades through art school sensibilities and infernal machines. Hip-hop as Afro-America's latest gift to hard-rock assholes who can't sing.

Hipoisie, hippie imitation of the year (sad division), hipster kitsch. Humanist industrial, hunglikealbini, hurdy-gurdy synths, and android girlies. Macho disco, made their arena-rock move before there was an arena in the world that would have them, magnificent testament, make Simon & Garfunkel sound like Marx & Engels,

I admit it, I have a problem with death freaks, if this band can't be maturity's answer to 'N Sync, it can be patriotism's answer to Travis.

Impassive disco powermongers, imperialist wimps, impertinent electro-squelchers, impervious to consumer guidance. In a boutique economy, this shit, like all other shit, is probably here to stay. In life, abuse justifies melodrama; in music, riffs work better.

In search of the perfect makeout music for ex-hippies—ill-advised Roy Ayers-Donald Byrd trip.

In the mildly overrated tradition of Massive Attack and Soul II Soul, in thrall to moribund aesthetics, increasingly sinuous singing, indie-rock as borderless utopian collective, indubitably dangerous and full of shit, infested with hypertime electrobeats, inheritors of the Grand Funk principle, insecure about playing funk and samba, insipidly insinuating tempo, interesting, intricate, unlistenable, intricate meaninglessness, irony-pop gone hermeneutic—with nothing to say. Jazz samples were a doomed fad.

Jangly modesty, jarring without valorizing the random. Music for some other species, musical equivalent of Tammy Faye Bakker's false eyelashes, musical gastroenteritis. My favorite parts are the cheapest.

Mysterious nostalgia, neatniks, just gnostic enough, Neil Diamond chords, neither Burundi beats nor overzealous voice practice do anything but accentuate the jaded professionalism that takes over.

Just what the world needed—prog jungle. Just what you've always wanted—protest disco.

Irresistibly dislikable exercise, is this Chic as anti-Depression concept? It feels weird to call this a great record, it's effete, ingrown, stripped to inessentials, it's enough to make you miss the Maharishi. It's touching to watch the latest indie-rock generation flail around in search of a form, its creators deserve credit for finding each other and making their obsession real.

KISS for college kids. Long enough to make an avant-gardish statement but stopping short of actual boredom, long-winded young wankers so insularly indie they're incomprehensible to anyone who hasn't been softened up by *Wowee Zorwee* and the Meat Puppets. Look, all you young white people, I know fate has dealt you a shitty hand.

Obscene megabucks, obstreperously ordinary group and album, old cheapjack ennui, old-fashioned raunch, one of the cutest little hardcore tantrums extant. One problem with the cosmic is that it doesn't last forever. One side of live "blues," one of dead "rock."

Nice juicy fuck music, no less despicable for its putative naiveté, no less than three superstitious attacks on space travel. Looks cheap, loud and cunning. Low-level Anglo-Saxon anxiety, low-profile funk? Orthodox North American neohip, overpriced juvenilia, overrated good album.

Lullabies are universal, crib death needn't be. Lyberated twaddle. Lyrics and poster are included.

Moderately arresting sci-fi soundtrack noises, moderately cute lo-fi punk tunes await your shovel. Modern love for the postmodern English—sad, kind, contained. Modestly likable. Most Intriguing Use of Roots Riffs in an Eclectic Context Nobody Comprehends.

Modestly sensationalistic, moist piece of patisserie, mold-breaking dull tempos, moments of cool femme treacle, moments of guitar anarchy, monofunctional but potent, more consistent than the Gap Band, neither natural alienation nor critical

overanticipation, neither their funk nor their tone-poem dub has gained much pizzazz.

Neoprimitivist shtick, New Age fuck fiends, new-wave Black Sabbath, complete with technoprofessional arena echo guaranteed to attract music-lovers who will either take the band's superstitious yet not altogether worthless political doomsaying as gospel or else ignore it altogether.

No other band better evokes a giant mechanical lizard. No redeeming antisocial value. Noize-toon energy fights lo-fi breakdown to a draw. Non-charismatic, professional rock and roll.

Not-for-profit self-indulgence, nostalgia-cum-nausea factor, not a one-joke band—a two-joke band, not as stupid as they sound, not every icon deserves a think piece, not fascist, just German—and also, not fascist, just industrial, not Fredric Jameson, but better-informed than the skinheads they play for. Not unlike the Kingston Trio, now I think it's also for those who hated it.

P.C. record of the year, palpitating as the voice of genius emanates from a dusty reel of tape, panders so ecumenically it's been covered by Wayne Newton. Paradoxically mellow limits, pathologically laid back. Pavementy noises, perfect language for this brutal fantasy, perfect punk-cum-early-Kinks song, perfect sleazy-slick background rock for the glass-table scene in a porn flick, perilous psychedelic sturm und drang, peripatetic bass, perpetrating banal verse in three languages. Phil Collins's discoid-fusion drumming.

Pipes of Pan my patootie, please-not-more piano, rapping almost exclusively about rap, poised provocatively between revolutionary powerhouse and droning bore, political chamber music, polyurethane disco, pop medievalism equals pop exoticism and both are the worse for it. Pop's old reliable women-are-angels scam.

Post-Allmanites, postamateur Raincoats, postceremonial drums, postrock chauvinists, postsituationist agro.

Pretty lively for socialist moralists with no sense of humor, primitives of choice among admirers of heavy machinery, prissy expertise, privileged formalism. Privileged phonies have identity problems too.

Processed gouda electro, prodigious roundhouse drumming, producer's pawns, voices changing, they hang in there, projecting cynicism with that chansonier-derived Bowie-thrice-removed theatricality the Eurofied slip into like a thrift-store tux.

Promiscuously praised, proof negative, protest-tinged sincerity cries out for jolts of junk guitar, provincial lads make a go of Tony Blair's morass of neoliberal compromise.

Pseudohistorical middlebrow muddle, puffs of tune and vapor trails of feeling, pure dance-peak ideology. Still finding naive new truths in disillusioned hardcore truisms, stingy with their famous killer riffs, Stooges for airports. Stop the violence in hip hop, but make an exception if these guys will shoot the piano player.

Strictly for the dimwits liberation front. Strong professional commitment, studied vulgarity, studio obscurantism as street credibility, studious detachment, stupid cover versions of heavy-metal orthodoxy, suave and synthetic—brilliant, but false. Subfunctional dance music, subtle logic, suggested parental advisory: “Features nine-track bonus CD containing ambient remixes.”

Super-catchy fluke fashion-plated pandering, sure beats sexual exploitation as an artistic specialty, surges into something resembling life, swelling Springsteen-cum-Lizzy pseudoclimaxes, syncretic asshole, synthesized pseudorathskeller clink-and-chatter, synthetic funk rhythms make me laugh out loud. Terrified high-school boys can call them their own.

Tests one’s faith in democracy itself. That’s the problem with art-rockers—they don’t know much about art.

Read-my-title outbursts, real live pseudoferal yowl announcing the cock-crazy, reassuringly literate clatter of avant-garde background rock, recidivist screech-and-crunch, recombined riffs rarely break the shambolic surface, recommend this to all the gentle people, while they die of the droops, recommended to those who like the idea of Grand Funk Railroad better than the reality. Reedy if not weedy quaver cries. Remember the Consumer Guide rule: never trust a group with a logo.

Remembrances of their avant-bullshit roots, reminds me of the Ernie Kovacs theme. Rendered the static song cycle stupid fresh again, renormalized pop at its most unnecessary. Respectful, highly intelligent dud, revisionist Anti Schlock and Assumed

Schlock, rhapsodically technopastoral, rhythms and melodies are as unfocused as a bad light show. Richer and truer than Haircut 100.

Sarcastic handshake with authority, say hello to—and not for the last time, God help us—soundtrack-rock.

Self-designated revolutionaries, self-made airheads, self-pity this rank is usually reserved for teen romances and tales of brave avant-gardists callously rejected by the mass media.

*Self-Portrait* was at least weird.

Seminal DIY, bullshit included, semipop action, semipopular music, semistiff, semiunrehearsed spontaneity, sense of stoned entitlement, sentimental woman-haters, seriously strained second album, sexy at worse, shallow but ingratiating popcraft, shallowness at its most principled, shameless ripoffs to be proud of.

Smug croaking—snurfle—so dirty they drool on demand. So much theoretically unpretentious rock and roll sounds forced, so multifaceted its functionality is fungible and forgettable, so passive you want to put crystal meth in its apple juice, so perky you think they're about to break into a cereal commercial, so programmatic that they function as a critique of casual hedonism. That's what indie obliqueness is for, the absurd aura of artistic respectability.

Soundtrack to the horror movie in your dumb young mind, sour two-man sax, sour violin counteracts the ick factor, space

doodlers, special castrati award, speck of dust at the speed of light, spiritual exhaustion, splitting the difference between horrible and hilarious, start monitoring your insulin levels. The diligently realized sound of exhaustion, the duo's success is essentially statistical. The everything-clashing model of passionate cooperation, the indie-pop conundrum in a nutshell too slippery to crack, the level of simple effort is so sappy it's startling, the lyrics recall the liberal fantasy of rock concert as Nuremberg rally, equating sex with victimization in a display of male supremacism, the most obnoxious band currently making a killing on the zonked teen circuit, the most readable album since *Quadrophenia*.

Yeah! Appropriate that vibraphone! You want everything ever recorded by these English-speaking, English-singing, English-yelling, English-murmuring Swiss maids. You'll never feel as shitty as this record, you'll remember every song but you'll never know why you bothered. **D-**



# TWO

A born liar, showing all the imagination of an ATM in the process, a certain petty honesty and jerk-off humor, a man without a context, a pompous, overfed con artist, a preening panderer, mythologizing his rockin' '50s with all the ignorant cynicism of a punk poser, a propulsive flagwaver attached to UNESCO lyrics about people all over the world joining hands, a simpleton, but also a genuine weirdo, a spoiled stud past his prime, so that while he was always sexy he wasn't always seductive, a stinker, from Jesus-rock to studio jollity, a tedious ideologue with a hustle, a tough talker diddles teenpop's love button. Act authentic for too long and it begins to sound like an act even if it isn't.

“Adult” grit and phrasing, affluent spirituality cum cornball romanticism from a florid New Age keyb maestro, ain't nobody gonna boogie to the moons of Saturn. Air-kiss soul, alienated patriotic, all clotted surrealism and Geddy Lee theatrics, all form and no conviction, except for the conviction that form is everything. All he proves is that when you dwell on suffering you get pompous. An archetypal indie whiner.

Another Wu mood record, anthemic grandiosity, antiquarianism permits him to use such words as “withers” and “blackguard.” Anyone naive enough to believe there's nothing more distasteful than a middle-aged man pretending his hormones are too much

for him has never encountered a middle-aged man trying to act cute. Arbitrary ebullience.

Are there really adults who find sustenance in folk-pop that blurs all distinctions between the lyrical and the moony? Arrogant and enervated all at once, arrogantly catchy, artificially ripened singing, which goes down like a store-bought banana daiquiri.

Ass man, schlockmeister, cosmic slimeball. Attracts admirers by means of a principled arrogance that has no relation to his actual talents or accomplishments. Attributes not present: wit, joy, jokes, hooks. Auteur, whatever that means. Cocaine slanger, catchy on jezebels and dull on world peace. Close observation is still Creative Writing. Compares himself to Picasso whilst suing black people who sample his hooks. Docked a notch not just for muttering, "Hey baby, I'd like to buck you," but for having some hired b-boy chime in with the requisite "Word."

Double-hoohah, doubly coy, doubly tonic, down from 48 percent to 35 at *amiannoing.com*, doyen of depression, dramatic paradiddles and sculpted streams of molten garage guitar, draws his phony drawl so tight he sounds like a singing penis.

Even his haphazardness is getting predictable, even his unnecessarily ideological heterosexuality is more an expression of mood than a statement of policy, even in 1968 he had too much dinosaur in him. He's a case study in the moral inadequacy of authenticity, he's a pomo sociophobe of a familiar and tedious sort, he's about as hip hop as Christian Marclay, or at best the Art Ensemble of Chicago, he's big on locations, spends an entire song convincing her to do it in a chair, he's convinced me that

I'll get off on a white R & B singer from Savile Row the same day  
I give up Jack Daniel's for sherry and join the Dartmouth Club.

Expert on tenderoni, expert trivialization of murder, explores  
realms of vocal inexpressiveness undreamt by Stephin Merritt or  
the Handsome Family. Limp aural satire, literary malfeasance,  
logical successor to Shaun Cassidy.

Fizzle-prone chart charges, flute solo and a middle-aged man  
gasping in the throes of sexual excitement. For a dumb tribulations-  
of-a-rock-star epic, this isn't bad.

Funnier than the Chipmunks, give him that. Furious negativist  
then, goofy nature mystic now, fusoid, fussy as Streisand,  
ugly as sin, touched with grace. Makes much more than most  
out of waving his dick, expanding his mind, makes music for  
stewardesses if ever there was such a thing, makes the sex life of an  
aging punk in an overgrown college town sound active, raunchy,  
and not without spiritual rewards, making callow belligerence  
seem an unmitigated virtue.

Generic American hunk, only whiter because he's Canadian.  
Likable protest novelties, like an English Grand Funk gone  
disco, like Ian Hunter or Roger Chapman though without their  
panache, like Kinky Friedman with a sense of humor, like most  
hereditary bohemians was brought up to think he's better than  
normal people, like protest singers, novelty artists put too much  
strain on the words, like *Star Wars* or *Windows 95*, he unlocks  
the gate to a luxurious passivity, like the dripping labia of Mom's  
Apple Pie. Limited sentiment in any case.

The motherfucker realizes that metalheads will throw money at you long after your hip cachet has gone the way of your hard-on. Minor popster, major wiseass, and great lost indie-rocker. Genius teensploitation, genuine Americana, gets chicken grease on a young thing's pantyhose, gets sloppier and samier as his adolescence becomes more figurative. More dreck from your unfriendly doomsaying hitmaker, more entertaining than Anthony Braxton and Wallace Stevens put together.

Gosh, what a terrific idea—a concept album about a cocksure rock and roller who Cannot Love. Manipulative pseudocertainty, manly empathy and world-weary remorse of the big-rock balladeer, the mess a lesser talent would have barfed up years ago. The modernizations of sometime coproducer Dave Stewart mitigate the neoconservative aura somewhat. Has Indie Lifer stamped on its copyright notice.

Hayseed manqué, he chose metal over Vegas because Vegas wouldn't have him. He denoodled. He even has jowls. Maybe he's better off not aiming for masterpieces.

He grooves his overpaid pickup band, he tells Jeff Beck what to do, he writes love songs for every occasion, he hectors like a crank politician would hector if the politician were a rock singer, he makes with the free-love smarm, he may yet give a fuck, he pixilates his pseudosex with studio sensationalism, he reclaims his perpetually threatened manhood.

He shrivels into irrelevancy. I find his success very depressing. The work of a man who thinks he's too big for music. The

reactionary stratagems of one more crappy pop star. The rich are always with us.

He speeds up the schlock and, it still sounds like schlock, he still can't resist ballads, a big mistake for a man who spells l-u-v like c-u-m.

New jack love man, he's even more adenoidal than his worthy forebears, he's the worst singer I've ever heard. Nastiest wimp since Ron Mael.

Label-changing ceremony, laid-back contagion, leftwing, hyperemotional, supercompetent persona, legacy beats, less experimental beatwise, lesser clichés, lesser horrors. Lets you know he has balls by singing as though someone is twisting them.

His amused, mildly funky self-involvement at its sharpest and sexiest, his breakthrough is a mutation, not a fruition, his child-voiced consort, his foil-wrapped condom turns out to be Chanukah gelt, his follow-up crossed PG-13 thug and subpar Luther Vandross, his imitation of Joe Cocker's Ray Charles imitation is almost OK, his life in the bush of a fully-formed middle-class music scene. His PG rating isn't scruples, it's cowardice. Suffers from Jackson Browne's syndrome. They've let him put some of his art therapy on the cover. Thinks up reasons why the planet should adjust to his mental reflexes.

Theoretical dandy, sounded hot, acted cold, ran out of riffs, sounds as if there's more to a man's life than the parlous fate of his latest erection, sounds like a strangling werewolf commercial, sounds like he should leave his therapist, not his group, sounds

like Jello Biafra discovered the Stooges in 1977, sounds like Steve Miller bunny-hopping with Gary Lewis & the Playboys toward the Isle of Wimp. Stereo potato into overweight lover. Stevie Winwood is no longer the best Stevie Winwood in the world, this no-talent is masscult rock at its most brazen.

Takes the aimless vapidity of ambient another step toward total stasis, talk-sings like a demented trucker, drag racer, or metal animal tantrum set to music. Ten years of falling-down flakedom only a cultist could love or even appreciate.

His productivity isn't exuberance, it's greed, his purity is a candid affectation—a standard variation on late alt's agoraphobic cultivation of ineptitude as a token of spiritual superiority, his record is a case study in the Europeaness of English heavy metal, his seducerama is in the manner of an aging matinee idol who isn't quite as famous as he thinks he is. His short-lived “new-wave” bent surfaces. Sings as if he's doing sitar impressions, sings like there's a cattle prod at his scrotum. Six fucking years, genius by acclamation.

Serves up his progress in modest and reliable doses, oversinging like Michael Bolton at a Perot rally, raps better than Rodney Dangerfield, and sings dull tunes landscaped with eerie licks, odd bridges, and a hyperactive rhythm section. Over-the-hill blowhards gotta stick together.

Song-doctored fabrications, songs are as pissed off as a millionaire can be, packs the voice of Merry Clayton into the body of Gertrude Stein. His wet croon, nuanced adenoids, historical anguish, histrionic understatement and vague specificity, hologram soul,

homemade Beatles, hostile but not asocial. Pussy comes so easy now that he no longer bothers to hone his come-on. How little guitar gods know of the world.

Jocularly misogynist, now officially a menace, just a handsome dilettante enjoying his easy tunes and found beats, just another case of “substance” as novelty. No matter what your voice teachers tell you, wackiness is not something to modulate.

Populist intentions far outstrips the depth of his populist perceptions, poseur maudit, poster boy of the American Agony Association. One thing alt-rock produces in superfluity is nice guys, one thing’s sure—this is shitty background music. Oneness with nature under conditions of artificial gravity, one-sided masterpiece. Ooze is embraced. Rock bricolage, rock-or-die drums, romantic egoist of the old school, ruthlessly atypical young careerist.

Scarcely less pompous when servicing the marketplace than when expressing himself in the privacy of his own throwaways—schlock has roots, too. Sci-fi ecopessimism, seems smarter than anybody in *A Flock of Seagulls*, self-congratulatory, self-consciously Artistic, self-consciously noncanonical market ploy. Wiggy abstraction of his self-regard. Whatever his significance, a cornball is a cornball is a cornball.

Sixties Schmixties, slacker version of the pretentious asshole, slightly salacious humanism, slogging toward stardom for so long he never noticed what happened to Shaun Cassidy. Slowly receding into alienated resignation, small but engrossing orgasms stretching into an infinite future, smarmy piece of sexist

pseudosoul. Too-idealistic-for-this-world straight-edge avatar, smarter than Cat Stevens, sexier than Norman Vincent Peale. So R & B that for incomprehensibility's sake he outsources some patois.

Sociopolitical inauthentic, solicitousness that's strangely chilling, somehow sui generis and foreordained at the same time. Sometimes I think the little girls don't understand a damn thing.

Vaguely anti-authoritarian, vaguely irritating pop exotics. Very few listeners actually enjoy songs in which snobbish dandies trot out their sexual egomania—*actually seems to boast about how fast he can ejaculate.*

Vocabulary of grunts, squeals, hiccups, moans, and asides is a vivid reminder that he's grown up. Voices promise whipped-cream sex that'll taste of mackerel in the morning. Wallowing in otiose thug fantasies and bathetic hater-hating, hiring big names who collect their checks and go, he is indeed hateful if not altogether devoid of musical ideas.

Wayward metal freak seeking X-rated thrills, weak-mindedness passing itself off as spirituality, weird and tricky. You've been middle-aged and liberal since you were fifteen. **E**

# THREE

As ill-informed about astronomy as she is about love, as sexually obsessive as Kim Gordon at her most slatternly, bionic Joan Baez, concocting a persona of interest out of one dynamite musical trick and a bad patch I wouldn't wish on Lindsay Lohan. Critics flock to her uneven product the way liberal arts magnas flock to investment banking.

Dazzlingly clever piece of teen self-exploration cum sexploitation, deadening beats from beyond the grave. Debbie Gibson, all is forgiven.

She already has seven albums hanging from her nose ring. She demonstrates her usual staunchness of principle with an amazingly dumb piece of satire. She disguises the banality of her exoticism with psychedelic gimmicks. Depressingly boy-identified for a protofeminist icon.

Karen Carpenter with an unlocked pelvis, keeping the dream alive—Minor Threat's, not MLK's. More Yoko Ono than Judy Collins.

Disco queen sings flat enough to make Andrea True sound like Linda Ronstadt and Tom Verlaine like Art Garfunkel. Diva-elect doffs her S&M drag to suffer and yelp emotional piano-woman pop. Endless parade of Diane Warren-fueled divas-by-fiat hitting

high notes. Enya-lite, unthreateningly dusky disco-dolly-next-door, untouchably dreamlike, walking all over some Limey masochist in her most impractical shoes.

Upped a notch for meaning well. Even her summer TV show was more fun than this.

Exactly as pretentious as the college girls she represents for. Female-identified canons of pseudoconfessional sensitivity. Femmenoizetoonfrom Ohio. Give me Left Eye any day.

Hardly the first not-terribly-bright teenager to approach self-knowledge via the words of others. Has less bottom than Audrey Hepburn.

Hebephrenic, heedlessly beautiful alternative, heply dissonant, her music is synthesis without thesis or antithesis, her penchant for the mundane renders her intensity as bogus as her mannered melismas and pronunciation. I prefer her now that she's imitating a cynical young woman—when she gets all soprano on your ass you could accuse her of spirituality.

Her perspective remains distinctly female even when she's impersonating men, her Timbaland album has the paradoxical effect of bringing out the Canadian in her, her voice is as unequal to her vaguely admonitory politics as it was to her declaration of sexual availability. I say her next step is to take up the Moog.

She goes for melismatic pain whenever she sees an opening, she writes lyrics like a paper gangster, she's cranking ditties so insignificant they're precious, she's matured into a sententious

liberal, she-cat with a bitch's vocabulary, yowling and whining the basics, shifting but reliable bass-and-drum pulse. Should raise tips all over Grrrland.

The emotion fueling her pretense is cathartic nevertheless. Sincere SWF, enjoys tunes on acoustic guitar, likes technology and musos with glasses, sincerely trying to impress consumers. Sounds as if she caught on to the autonomy fad kind of late. That's to her credit as a human being but not as a singer. The theoretical allure of her persona, mystofemme aura. Postliberated axe-women of Emma Goldman's version of the Contortions. Neither jailbait nor hottie. They want you to know they were gurls, leaving the grrrl question open.

Not only am I glad she rhymes "New York" and "dork," I'm glad she put her kabbalist on the guest list, not that she could sing in the same shower as classic Cyndi Lauper anyway. Patty Scialfa is Shonen Knife by comparison.

This bid to whiten the Spice Girls, the official pep song of the daughters of *Ms.* and Pepsi-Cola. Sade for androids, samey samey samey. This record is perilously close to the ostrich nostalgia of her dumbest fans. Blame its inferiority on the inferiority of her corporate consultants. Too bad she'll turn 21 like every other teen idol. Too catchy for their fan base, too cerebral, too damn significant for her own good. Transcends the popped seams and middling Midlerizations of her first two LPs. **C+**



# FOUR

The Nostalgia Squad loves these guys. The overall effect is more Martin Denny than Varèse, the perfect commentary on the vacuity of competence. The putrefaction isn't as extreme as on last year's hit album.

The sarcasm is as vapid as the optimism, the shape of bubblegum to come, the snot-rock of their dreams, the sociologically perfect and metaphysically weird, the sound is so crystalline you can hear the gism as it drips off the microphone. The supersession form is deadening. The tragically neglected legacy of Rick Wakeman. The usual abortion, the wages of retro.

Their commitment to sexual integration, their dubious pro-am musicianship and unavoidably spacey ambience. Their fatalism lacks conviction, their idea of a funny is to rhyme "shiny" and "heinie," their idea of soul is Bono, their misogyny is more alarming than usual.

When "rock" gets this creamy, it functions as disco for racists, when Kraftwerk goes to the disco the best you can usually hope for is air conditioning. White rap the way Led Zep were white blues, white rappers cum dance-music guerrillas, whoziwhatsis.

Theoretical hits march over us in their digital boots. There are worse ways to come down off a multiplatinum high, there's even

a mirror metaphor you can look in the eye. These cheesy media sluts want to Grow Musically, these guys are Not Joking, Ever, these guys combine the worst of Sparks with the worst of the Circle Jerks, these hateful little twerps are sensitive souls, they can't play their influences, they condescend to American culture as much as American counterculture condescends to them, they convince you (but not themselves) that they're the heroes America deserves, they could be nauseating urban skeptics for years, they could make you think a banality was a serious truth, they do Coldplay better than they did Weezer, they do what they can do to rub a body the wrong way, they have a grand old time faking artificiality.

They segue effortlessly from Bach to harpsichord to bluesy rock and roll and don't mean to be funny.

They still take gangsta's Reaganomic equation of crime and self-help too seriously, they survive "writing their own songs," they trivialize every stupefyingly obvious piece of music they touch, they were quintessentially inauthentic, they'll tour, fill small venues, sell some T-shirts. And to what end?

They're art-rockers without the courage of their pretensions, they're children in search of a magic place, they're dumb enough to want to fuck, and all they know about the world is that they deserve to run it because they're clever.

This defenseless album, this grotesque hodgepodge of soul horns, flash guitar, deadpan songspeech, and indifferent rhymes, this is the opposite of recontextualization, this isn't risking foolishness—it's flaunting it.

This mildness is a *détournement*, this music belongs on an aircraft carrier, this record brings its cliches to life, this slop bucket of shit-aesthetic covers, this sound may speak to your condition, and far be it from me to suggest volunteering for Rock the Vote instead. This Tom Dowd-produced Doobie-disco job swings just like Jesse Colin Young, this wasn't just weird, it was revolting. This year's Prestigious Pink Floyd Tribute by a Long-Running Band of Some Repute and less distinction.

Thoughtful and sexy, three white jerkoffs and their crazed producer, tiny banjo fills, grand guitar solos, solo-acoustic, nuclear holocaust, tumescent ache. Tired bohemian fantasy, transient punk-style agitprop with announcements. Travelogue techno, truly doobieous, truly repulsive music imposes the most stringent of aesthetic standards, tunelessly hooky allure, tunelets, typical piece of cock-rock nookie-hating, typically ironic-optimistic futurism.

Wimp bohemianism so self-congratulatory it'll be sucking its own wee-wee next time we look. Wimpoid royaloid heavoid android void, wimp-turned-acid-casualty, wisecracking arrogance, wish fulfillment for boys who make passes at girls who wear glasses.

With its Doc Severinsen blare and Paul Schaffer beats, its gross secondhand nostalgia and showoff guitar, the most preeningly stupid record to mount SoundScan all year.

Without fear of humiliation or venereal disease, wrinkle in the gestalt, unambiguity from the near side of cool, unavant unfunk trio, uncanny after the manner of Fox Mulder, unclassifiable funky objects, uncool polysyllabic and self-aware, unfortunately,

there are also vocals, uniform arena-jangle, unimaginative sexual acts, unless songs about the Metro make you wet your pants, unmitigated consumer fraud, unrad agglomeration of semiprofessional entertainers, unrelenting in a vaguely threatening way. What do people *hear* in this murky, overblown, incoherent piece of shit?

What intelligence must have gone into this album! What craft! What personal suffering! What tax-deductible business expenditure! What jerks melody inflicts on us, what little pleasure contaminates this music is like a Stryper solo, or a folksinger who's decided a drummer might bring his or her message to the masses, what makes me feel guilty is succumbing to the blandishments of liberalism. What Ralph Nader was put on earth to prevent.

What's most depressing about them is that their success makes sense.

Most Overrated Group This Side of the Moody Blues. The most overrated underrated group in America, I told my diary they reminded me of the Swans. I'm missing something. C-

## THE CONSUMED GUIDE

by Brian Joseph Davis © 2011

Insert Press December, 2011

*The Consumed Guide* is thousands of negative words and phrases assembled from 13,090 reviews by Robert Christgau and turned into a single review in four sections. The original reviews can be found at [robertchristgau.com](http://robertchristgau.com)

Excerpts from this work previously appeared in *Vol. 1 Brooklyn* and on *WFMU*

BRIAN JOSEPH DAVIS is the author of *Portable Altamont*, a collection that garnered praise from *Spin* for its "elegant, wise-ass rush of truth, hiding riotous social commentary in slanderous jokes." *Slate* called his novel *I, Tania*, "The book of your fever dreams." A co-founder of the literary website Joyland, his short stories have been collected recently in *Ronald Reagan, My Father* and included in *Against Expression: An anthology of conceptual writing* (Northwestern University Press). His music and radio productions have been acclaimed by *Wired*, *Pitchfork*, *Salon*, and *LA Weekly*, which wrote, "Davis has an amazing head for aural experiments that are smart on paper and fascinating in execution." He's written for *Utne*, *The Globe and Mail* and *The Believer*. He lives in Brooklyn. **B-**

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rooms. A great schlock yea-saying move, but a move is all it is. A credible  
death freaks, if this band can't be maturity's answer to 'N Sync, it can be patrioti

them. A real treat for the hearing-impaired, a reminder that nothing releas  
o-squelchers, impervious to consumer guidance. In a boutique economy, this shit

for long. Addicts of nostalgia and rock and roll readymades should find th  
ork better. In search of the perfect makeout music for ex-hippies—ill-advised Ro

Admired by a pretentious minority of an alt-rock subculture already way to  
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