

Bronski Beat debut challenges traditional British wave music

By Scott Harrah
Staff Reporter

The British have always had a reputation for trying to top others in the record business. A generation of punkers, mods, gender-blenders and pop cultists from across the Atlantic have added outlandish fodder to the often staid American music scene.

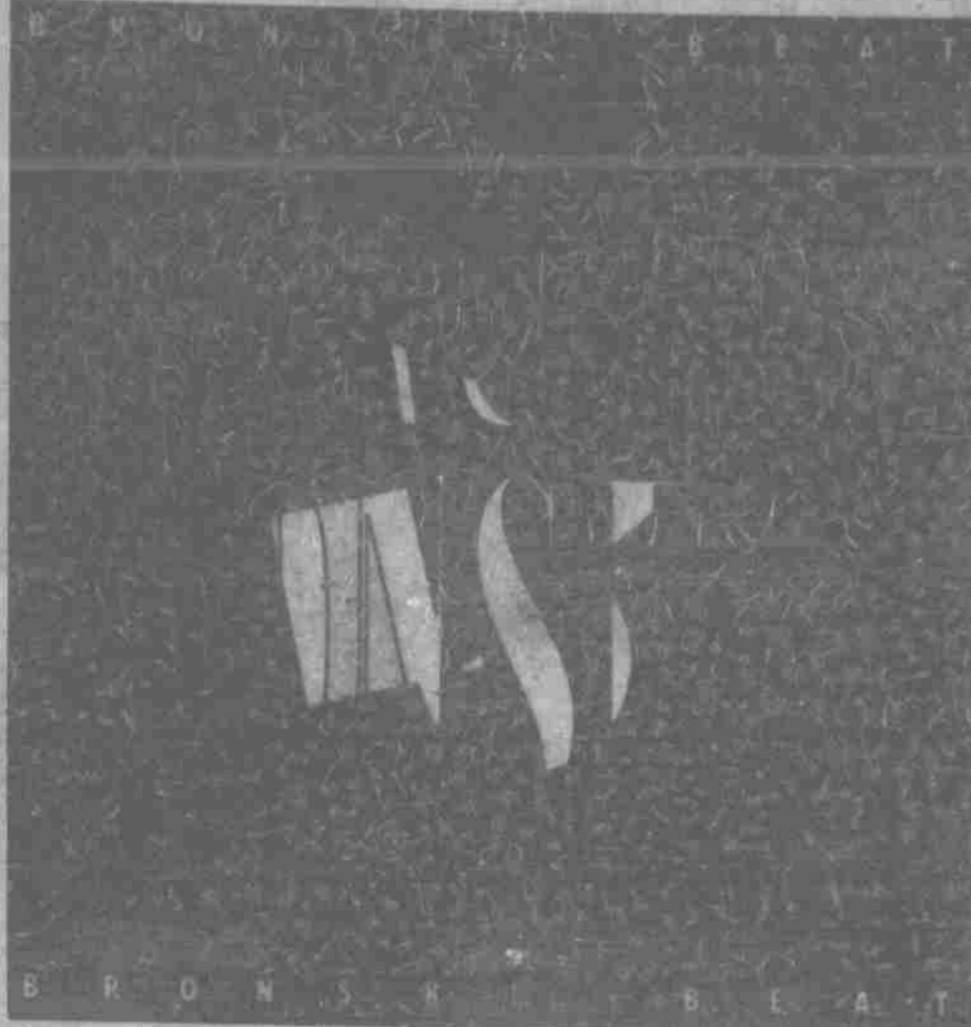
The look and attitude of British bands has somehow changed the way Americans feel when they turn on the radio. A decade ago, groups like the Clash and the Sex Pistols brought us social commentary with a beat, while the fathers of freak culture, David Bowie and Iggy Pop, established irreverence as an art form.



Now the Bronski Beat, the latest addition to England's collection of off-beat bands, are giving their predecessors a run for their subversion on its debut disc, *The Age of Consent*.

This threesome of average-looking punkers may appear to be just another group of commercial rockers out to burst musical bubbles with flamboyance, but they are not. They possess a unique sound that's based on the falsetto vocals of lead singer/lyricist Jimmy Somerville, and the wailing saxophone sojourns and synthesizer arrangements of Larry Steinbachek and Steve Bronski.

They display their unusual talent on the first side's numerous songs that protest everything from nuclear war and poverty to their own neurotic feelings about their homosexuality. Most of the tracks range from eerie cover tunes like "It Ain't Necessarily So" (from the Gershwin musical "Porgy



and Bess" to highly emotional tracks like "Why."

Somerville's falsetto caterwauling is often high-pitched and melodramatic, but it rarely sounds campy or cheap like many vocalists who sing in falsetto. A perfect example of this is on side two's first cut, "Smalltown Boy" — already a smash hit in dance clubs worldwide. The song's screeching sax matches Somerville note for note as he belts out lacerating lyrics that reveal the pain from his past:

"Mother will never understand why you had to leave/for the love you need will never be found at home/The answers you seek will never be found at home."

The Age of Consent is a danceable pastiche of new wave, disco and

technopop that has the rare ability to affect listeners' emotions while providing entertaining music with a message. It establishes the Bronski Beat as one of the more innovative bands to land on these shores in a long time.



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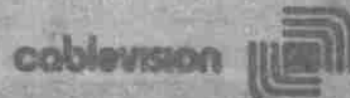
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