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Review Board

Siouxsie and the Banshees, "Through the Looking Glass" (Geffen)

Siouxsie Sioux has had numerous monikers attached to her dirgelike, gloomy music and her wailing (ban-shee-like, of course) vocals. Call her a rock'n'roll Sylvia Plath or a punk Billie Holiday if you will, but labels aside, she's been one of the most tenacious female musicians of the new music scene. She's survived barbs from caustic critics and the ephemeral caprices of the haircut set, and has managed somehow to maintain a standard of poetic, artistic and offbeat excellence.

On "Through the Looking Glass," Siouxsie perpetuates her image of the tortured observer, peppering a patche of unlikely cover tunes with enough dexterity and moodiness to make them part of her realm.

She borrows songs from the icons who shaped her identity, like the Doors' "You're Lost, Little Girl," Iggy Pop's "The Passenger," Bob Dylan's "This Wheel's On Fire" and Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit." One of the oddest choices is "Trust in Me," originally sung by a cartoon boa constrictor in Disney's "The Jungle Book."

The problem is that they tend to blend into one flowing, wandering, whiny unit — which is usually quite evoking when the eerie guitars, violins, synthesizers and Siouxsie's vocals are put together with Siouxsie's lyrics. But juxtaposed with cover tunes, they just don't seem to work. Only the cover of Holiday's "Strange Fruit" captures the unsettling lynch imagery of the original.

Perhaps this is the album Siouxsie always wanted to record — a collection of her favorites. Unfortunately, the spirit she insets into each track is hardly commensurate with the original, and one begins to wonder why she didn't bother to simply write some more of her own songs. "Through the Looking Glass" is her unintentional way of isolating herself and her band from her own vision. If only she had decided to leave singing cover songs to Pia Zadora and Linda Ronstadt — people who lack the invention that has always flowed through the Banshee's career.

—Scott Harrah

Kim Wilde, "Another Step" (MCA)

Five years ago, Kim Wilde, the daughter of British pop legend Marty Wilde, launched her career with a self-

titled solo album and the international hit "Kids in America." Although she was basically overlooked on these shores, she developed a large following in Europe and Australia — and for a good reason. Her first album was a brooding, harsh glimpse into the maladies of youth with a quirky, if not complementary, blend of guitar and synthesizer backdrops. Although she was only 15 at the time, she came off sounding like a pint-sized, pop-oriented version of Patti Smith on a bubblegum binge.

But then the angst of her youth suddenly ended and she let producers turn her into a mindless, technopop disco diva *a la* Sheena Easton and Stacey Q. It all started with her puerile second LP, "Select," and ends miserably with her latest and worst effort to date, "Another Step."

Wilde wrote all the songs here and sings them with her usual tragic songstress soul, but one would never know if because most of her voice and lyrics are buried under an obnoxious pile of some of the most overproduced electronic rhythms since the days of '70s disco.

The hit single "You Keep Me Hanging On," a remake of a song that's been remade more times than it deserves, is the best example of the album's lack of any musical plausibility. And the rest just seem to drone together, waiting for someone to dance to them.

"Another Step" is Kim Wilde's final descent into the depths of pop pablum, proving that talent can be pathetically wasted for a good dance beat.

—Scott Harrah

Jr. Gene Wild, "Less Art, More Pop" (BYO Records)

Jr. Gene Wild plays the same joyful, light, chiming pop that everybody else on the block plays, making you wonder how the stuff ever got into the record bins marked "alternative." But the band plays with such fervor and the production is so gleaming that you almost forget you've heard the same sounds on the last nine albums you played.

But Jr. Gene Wild manages to create its own innocuous niche here. They're too happy-sounding to fall into the Connells, Winter Hours groove. They're not experimental or odd enough to be lumped into the Let's Active school. They just move their retro-pop along at a hundred miles an hour and pay cynical bastards like me no mind whatsoever.

Even the heavier cuts with pseudo-messages like "God the Father," where the band strings together every cliché about Christianity not being very, uh, Christian, never really phase you. But as the title of the album says, Jr. Gene

Wild has no interest in art of significance.

From the moment "Never Change" (one of the greatest Byrds numbers ever played by someone other than the Byrds) jumps off the turntable till the closing irony of "Why I Hate the Sixties," Jr. Gene Wild displays a devil-may-care urgency that is, in the final evaluation, totally winning.

Of course, if you asked them to name their influences, they'd probably venture into total no sequiturs like Aerosmith and Emmylou Harris, but that's just musicianese for "It's none of your stinking business who my influences are."

Completely fun and completely mindless pop with no excuses. And the album cover, Venus De Milo with Popeye's arms, is a beaut by even real critical standards.

—Charles Lieurance
Album Courtesy of Pickles Records

Big Dipper, "Boo-Boo" (Homestead)

Hailing from Brookline, Mass., Big Dipper displays eclecticism above and beyond the call of duty. Their sound is somewhere between the Byrds and Television on the opening cut, "Faith Healer," with its tense Richard Lloyd guitar part and laid-back, effortless Byrds harmonies. Dipper guitarists Bill Goffrier and Gary Waleik continue their Lloyd-Verlaine interplay throughout.

The second song, "San Quentin, CA," puts Dipper more in line with Led Zeppelin, reworking the "Whole Lotta Love" riff in a raucous cowpunk setting. Of the album's six inspired, quirky tunes, none is particularly like the other. There's a sound in there somewhere (probably the tension between their countrified vocals, tendency toward galloping bass and scraping sophisticated lead guitar parts makes for the best material) but at this point, the variety displayed here is the band's most promising characteristic.

Side two's "Wrong in the Charts" is the weakest thing here, coming off the blocks like a scorching remake of the "Rawhide" theme and basically running out of ideas and steam halfway through. The closing whoa-oh-whoa choruses are plain awful. Come to think of it, most of side two is disappointing.

The closing song, "Loch Ness Monster," is just dumb.

Side one easily makes up for the inadequacies of the second side, however and a forthcoming full album will tell which side they're on.

—Charles Lieurance
Album Courtesy of Pickles Records

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