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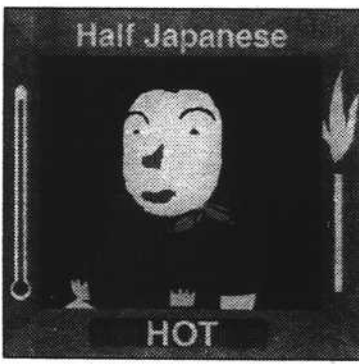
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Music Reviews

"Hot"
Half Japanese
Safe House Records
Grade: A+



Forget about whatever kids with blue hair are into or the fakiness that Epitaph is pitching to MTV execs or anything that Billie Joe has to say. Half Japanese is true punk.

Childish, honest, goofy, and damn charismatic, the band, fronted by the always-amusing Jad Fair, has been an unknown, shadowy influence on rock 'n' roll since the group began in Jad's bedroom.

Consumed with the topics of love and, oddly enough, monsters, yet without any formal musical training, Jad and his brother David have been chasing absurdist expressionism for nearly 20 years, banging away until something hummable emerges.

Their efforts thus far were recently compiled in the Safe House retrospective "Greatest Hits," which boasts 69 tracks, some of which are older than Ben Lee, but, incredibly, are still just as contemporary, just as cohesive to the independent sound.

And of course, "Hot" does not disappoint. Though Jad is nudging

40, he is still eternally youthful in his optimism, and quite the rocker, powering his troop through the album and shrieking like his one-time protege, Kurt Cobain. As if that signature wail were only native to Aberdeen.

Not quite. The majority of this new little gem is Fair's unique take on rough, fast-paced electric indie punk. This particular record's cast is quite impressive, especially the fierce drumming of Gilles Ricder. And though Jad is the center of attention, the work of John Sluggett and Mick Hobbs on guitar and Jason Willett on bass definitely do not go unnoticed, either.

On tracks like the terribly addictive "Vampire," "Well," and "Vast Continent," they hammer out tapable, powerful tunes that seem almost rushed in their creation, but are even more appealing as a result.

For the wimps, like me, there are some softer, more sissy numbers that you can't help but smile at. Bouncy, quirky treats like "True Believers" are so happy, about love and such, one can't help but wonder if Jad is being ironic or not.

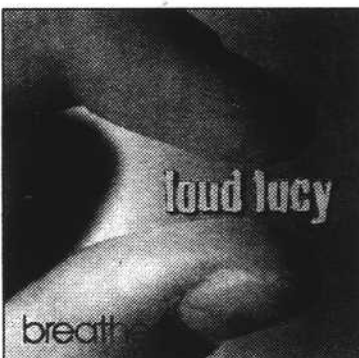
That's the kid in him. That simple innocence that proclaims "I'm so dumb," because he spilled the beans in "Sleep Talk." How could you not love the guy, who asks "Do you have any dating tips? What should I say or do?" in "Lucky Town," and then concludes, "I think she's cute. But what's new?"

Like Lou Barlow on lithium, Jad is obsessed with love, though, unlike the former, his luck can't get any better. And while his cohorts perform some really cool musical stunts with "Hot," the members of the band will always fluctuate.

Except for Jad, whose heart is Half Japanese.

— Matt Kudlacz

"Breathe"
Loud Lucy
Geffen Records
Grade: B+



It's hard to say just what the appeal of Loud Lucy is. There's nothing pretentious here. Just three guys making music. They aren't angry. They aren't depressed. They aren't a melodrama. They're just three guys making records, like "Breathe."

"Ticking," like most tracks on the album, is a vaguely appealing song. There's something suave about it, but you can't really say why. The guitar work is straightforward, the bass lines are powerful yet not flashy and the drums are basic.

"Over Me" slides in and out of being an electric song and an acoustic song, which is a nice touch. A backing female vocalist for this song adds a bit of gentleness to it, like icing on the cake.

The most interesting song by far

is "On The Table." Christian Lane, guitarist/vocalist, proves he can play gentle guitar with a very haunting sound. This song is just enchanting. Even when the electric guitar kicks in, it's soft, warm and fuzzy. If nothing else, the album is worth getting for this song. Catchy and thought-out.

Since the record was produced by Brad Wood, producer and collaborator to indie idol Liz Phair, it's no surprise that there are a few

similarities, but nothing majorly noticeable. Just the things that make a band good. Well thought-out lyrics, a sound that doesn't rend your ears with pain. You know, the basic stuff.

If anyone, Loud Lucy sounds like a happier version of Buffalo Tom, not to slight either band. Both bands are quite distinct, though. It'll be hard to mistake one for another.

There's heavy rock on "Breathe" like "Not Here" and "Clear World," but there's also soft rock like the album's title track, "Down Baby," "Meet You Down" and "Awaiting Time."

A ton of influences can be heard in Loud Lucy, but they have a good sound and a vague sense of wholesomeness. There's something good about these guys that maybe no one can put a finger on. Maybe that's why they're so intriguing. Go search for the answers yourself.

— Cliff A. Hicks

"Ages 3 and Up"
Supernova
Amphetamine Reptile Records
Grade: D-



You know, Supernova seems pretty good when you only hear one track from the band, like the song on the "Clerks" soundtrack. But when you get a whole album that sounds the same, you get tired of it.

"Ages 3 and Up" could've been called "Ages 3-12." The songs are simple, to say the very least. The singer sounds like a little kid trying to be Johnny Rotten, the guitarist plays the same riffs and chords over and over again, and the bass is often so loud that you can turn it down to next to nothing and it would still

overpower everything else. "Up & Down" by itself is a pretty good song. Nothing stunning, simple melody, simple riff, simple beat. Good song. That song, however, is the high point of the album.

"Hippy" could be thrown off the album and I don't think anyone would really miss it much. It's 14 seconds of pointless material that proves the band wanted to fill space.

"Sea Stunt" isn't bad, either. It's nothing great, but it doesn't sound like the rest of the album, which is something. "Close Encounters" is kind of fun. Mindless, but fun. But I'm grasping for straws.

The main problem with this album is that everything runs together into a big, unenjoyable mess. Unless you REALLY liked Supernova and can handle a whole album of indiscriminate songs, pass on this one.

— Cliff A. Hicks

Whoopi Goldberg 'thrilled' to host Oscars

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. — Whoopi is back on tap for the Oscars. The actress was selected by Quincy Jones, who is replacing Gil Cates, the producer of the past six Oscar shows. "I'm back and I'm thrilled, honey," Goldberg said in a statement. "Thank you, Quincy."

Goldberg, whose film credits include "Ghost" and "Sister Act," presided over the 1994 Academy Awards ceremony.

Last year, the honor went to David Letterman, who received mixed reviews and was not asked to return.

Jeff Margolis will direct the ABC show for the eighth consecutive year, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences announced Tuesday.

Jones, a seven-time Oscar nominee, was awarded the 1994 Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award by the Academy's Board of Governors.

The awards are set for March 25, with nominations announced Feb. 13.

— Associated Press

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