

# Music Reviews



**"Once Blue"**  
Once Blue  
EMI Records  
Grade: B+

Take the feel of the legendary Sundays, combine it with a voice along the lines of Jill Sobule and add the skillful acoustic guitar work of Mark Curry, and the sound of Once Blue starts to come into focus.

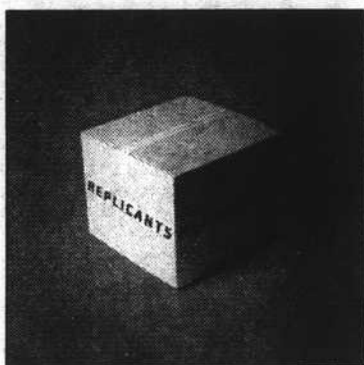
The duo of Rebecca Martin, vocals, and Jesse Harris, acoustic guitar, has a lovely feel. They are a coffee-shop group at its finest. An acoustic guitar and Martin's voice comprise the basic feel of Once Blue, a gentle soothing sound.

"Once Blue" contains some excellent songs with meaningful lyrics, something lacking in so much modern music. On "Stardust and Snow," Martin sings "Come into town on the ferry/For Saturday's vaudeville show/Things must have really been good then/Seeing you in stardust and snow."

Once Blue is not a band to listen to when you are feeling anything but tranquil (or, in many cases, when you want to feel tranquil) because the sound is something you're more likely to hear on a light radio station than anywhere else.

Is an acoustic guitar and a warm female vocalist enough? Almost. While "Once Blue" does need a bit more variety, since so many of the songs sound similar, it's the band's debut album, and it's worth a listen on a chilly November day.

— Cliff A. Hicks



**"Replicants"**  
Replicants  
Zoo Entertainment  
Grade: A

The Replicants transform great '70s pop songs into a fun '90s mix of Weezerish guitar and synth-pop. The songs all remain the same, with a little post-punk distortion thrown in, making this one great album by default.

Is there a great '70s artist not covered on this album? T-Rex, David Bowie — the glitter-glam gang's all here, as well as rockers like Pink Floyd, Paul McCartney and Neil Young.

There are a couple great '80s-era tunes thrown in too, like Missing Persons' "Destination Unknown" and Gary Numan's "Are Friends Electric?"

The Replicants' creed argues that there's no point in writing merely good tunes, when there are so many great songs already, just waiting to be played again. After all, how many songs did Frank Sinatra or Elvis Presley write?

If this album isn't an instant success, something's wrong.

With every Replicants cover, fluff equals excellence. If respect for guitar gods like Neil Young stops the Replicants from going crazy on "Cinnamon Girl," they rage ballistically with bubble gum majesty on the Cars' "Just What I Needed."

These songs are fairly formulaic, but then, so is rock 'n' roll. Smile and enjoy. The Replicants are good fun.

— Patrick Hambrecht



**"Ben Folds Five"**  
Ben Folds Five  
Passenger/Caroline Records  
Grade: B+

So much has been said about Chapel Hill, N.C., you might think would be in a new band's best interest to distance itself from the city's personality. Move to Durham, save itself from the scrutiny that goes along with playing at Cat's Cradle. Nonetheless, it's safe to say that the Ben Folds Five doesn't have to worry about being compared to Superchunk.

Folds, who fronts the trio, is taking the atypical path to post-punk rock, dropping the guitar in favor of his furious piano-playing. Instead of chunky, angry anthems or swervy Polvo experimentation, Ben, bassist Robert Sledge, and drummer Darren Jessee coat their debut with a more sensitive glaze. It's quite different than Folds' recent contribution to Bachman's Barry Black, but still adhesive to the indie mentality.

There is something refreshing in his positive, soulful, tongue-in-cheek approach, which teases alterna-rockers with its mockery in "Underground." The piano jangles and the backing vocals lay their smooth sounds on thick on tracks like "Jackson Cannery" and "Alice Childress."

It's still hard to be completely convinced that anything genius is going on. Perhaps the pop elements are too strong, or maybe the contrivance is a little too apparent. Folds is hip, nonetheless.

— Matt Kudlacz



**"4, 5, 6"**  
Kool G Rap  
Cold Chillin/Epic  
Grade: B+

Since his early days with the Juice Crew and DJ Polo, Kool G Rap has established himself as one of the all-time great lyricists and storytellers in hip hop. Songs like "The Symphony" and albums like "Road to the Riches" highlight the lyrical skills of this Queens native.

On "4, 5, 6," G Rap splits with DJ Polo and adopts a crew of producers to give him a gritty sound of the street.

Tracks like the first single, "It's a Shame," pull you in with a catchy sample, but they make you listen again and again to the rapid-fire lyrics put down by G Rap.

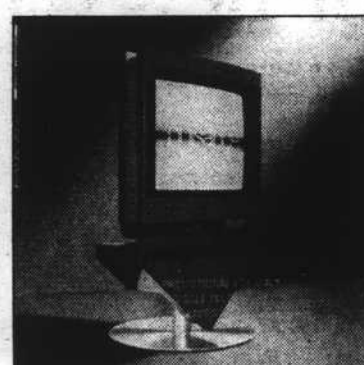
The second single, "Fast Life," features "the team from out of Queens with the American dream." Fellow Queens native Nas flips an old school style back and forth with G Rap. This is the dream team of lyricists.

Painting pictures with words, "Ghetto Knows" and "4, 5, 6" talk about life in the ghetto and rolling dice on the corner, both of which G Rap claims a great proficiency.

The only tracks that disappoint are the features of two new jacks, B1 and Grimm. Two tracks are almost exclusively for these two, two tracks better left for G Rap's stories, especially since there are only 10 songs on the whole album!

There's enough here, however, to keep fans going all the way through.

— Greg Schick



**"Nuisance"**  
Menswe@r  
London Records  
Grade: B-

Menswe@r is exactly what it sounds like on a first listen — another typical British pop band. "Nuisance" is just another British pop album.

With the flood of similar British pop that has hit the shores in the past few years, Menswe@r may be good, but the group certainly doesn't stand out. It could be another Blur/Oasis clone.

Perhaps part of it is simply that the band hasn't found its voice yet. Figuratively, of course. Johnny Dean has got a great voice, but it is too far in the background and not as upfront as it should be.

The lyrics, however, both hold Menswe@r back and push it forward. At times, they can be abysmally bad, such as in "The One," with "Isn't it strange how people change?/I never liked you anyway." During others, they form excellent images, such as in "125 West Third Street." "Tess," he said, "I don't understand"/how they grow tomatoes in a can/' Tess," he said, "now wait a while"/my teeth don't glitter when I smile."

Menswe@r has a good start, but it's too new to make a fair judgment of its future. As far as "Nuisance" is concerned, if you really like British pop, give it a shot. Otherwise, wait for Menswe@r's next album and see if it has gotten better and perhaps unique.

— Cliff A. Hicks

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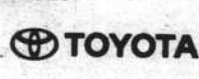
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