



Frank Black and the Catholics
self-titled
spinART records
Grade: B

Frank Black's latest rock 'n' roll endeavor almost didn't happen.

Recorded live during three days in March of '97 to the most primitive of devices, the 2-track, the new album had trouble finding a label willing to take a chance releasing such an unpolished effort.

Intended only as a demo tape, no digital remastering or overdubbing was performed on the recording before Frank Black and the Catholics handed the 12 raw tracks over to their record label. The label refused to release the album, saying it wasn't "commercial" enough, or in other words, not capable of capturing a significant audience and making the label a lot of money.

So Black took his creation elsewhere to locate someone willing to take a chance on a project without "sucking all of the heart out of it."

Needless to say, Black found a label, New York's spinART records, to release his album in the United States. However unfortunate that "Frank Black and the Catholics" won't establish the band as the next big thing in rock 'n' roll, it does include some of the most original and poignant pop songs that Black has created during his storied career.

Choice cuts on the album include the pulsating punk of "I Need Peace" and "Suffering," to the post-Pixies rock of "The Man Who Was Too Loud," a song which seems to be about Black himself. But other than those three, none of the rest of the tracks stands out except for the cover of Larry Norman's country ditty, "Six Sixty-Six."

While the album may be raucous and ready, a rough diamond if you will, it fails to provide anything as adamant as the opening tracks from his first two solo ventures, "Los Angeles" and "Whatever Happened to Pong?," not to mention any of his work with the Pixies.

Black said he thinks "Frank Black and the Catholics" is the best recording he has ever participated in, and you have to respect him for staying true to his sound.

Yet as a forefather of modern pop-punk, Black's lo-fi efforts with a 2-track leave his "cult" hungry for more substantial fodder.

— Jim Zavodny

Black in the U.S.A.

Answers from the innovator of indie

By JIM ZAVODNY
Staff writer

As the frontman for the seminal indie band of the modern rock age the Pixies, Frank Black almost single-handedly shaped the course of the '90s pop-punk scene.

Now, with more than a decade of guitar rock experience under his considerable belt, Black returns to domestic audiences with "Frank Black and the Catholics," which debuts in the United States today.

The record was released in most of the world, except North America, on May 4.

The Catholics have been touring with Black since 1996 and are now officially a part of his legend. Their line-up for the new album consists of bass player David MacCaffrey, drummer Scott Boutier. San Francisco free-lance guitarist Lyle Workman finished the album, but has since been replaced by Rich Gilbert.

On June 16, I had the chance to interview Black, who was appearing at Omaha's Ranch Bowl in support of his yet-to-be-released album. Calling from his home in Los Angeles, Black commented on the new album and his intimate experiences with the people, places and the supernatural phenomena of Nebraska.

Daily Nebraskan: What do you think about this new album compared to the work you've done as a solo artist and with the Pixies?

Frank Black: It's the only record that I've ever recorded live. It probably has more songs of a universal and/or personal nature than usual, and it's got a few more universal kind of songs, I think, lyrically than usual. Other than that, I mean, it's another collection of rock songs by Frank Black.

DN: You seem more reflective on this album than your past solo efforts. Are you satisfied with the direction you career is heading?

FB:
Well, I

don't know what direction that is. If you're going to base it strictly on numbers, it's headed nowhere.

DN: No, not based on the numbers, based on whether you're satisfied, not what the label thinks.

FB: Yeah, I like the guys I play with. I just do it. I do it every year. I put out a record. I try anyway, though I didn't get a record out last year. But I write songs, I make records and I go play gigs with my band.

DN: I heard you had trouble releasing the new album with the Catholics because the record label thought it wasn't commercial enough. Do you know what their reasoning was behind saying that?

FB: Big difference between rocking out and sounding commercial, or, you know, sounding like it's going to get on the radio.

DN: Ben Marts (Black's tour manager at the time) said you were extremely popular in Europe compared to the U.S. Do you have any idea why?

FB: I suppose rock 'n' roll music in Europe is a lot more of an export from America, culturally speaking, as opposed to here. It's way more part of our culture. They kind of worship rock music a lot more than they do here. Here, people just listen to it because they like it. Over there, it's way more of an institution or something.

DN: Does the band sell a lot more records in Europe, and is that why you decided to release the new album over there first?

FB: A bit more, I suppose. In a sense you're right, definitely the Europeans were a lot quicker to get a contract and release the record, but it took me some time to get out of my American Recordings contract. So that delayed me probably six months.

DN: Do you have a special connection with Nebraska since you were exposed to your first UFO here in 1965?

FB: Yeah, I suppose that I do. As a matter of fact, a couple of years ago, I returned to Nebraska to the site of the incident, a small town out

in western Nebraska. And I hung out there for a day and a half and tried to do a little research. I went to the local library and looked through the microfiche and tried to find some scraps of information from that time period that might be informative. I didn't come up with anything. But I had my own little version of the most boring episode of the "X-Files" ever.

DN: What were you doing in the Cornhusker State when the saucer flew overhead?

FB: We (Black and his family) were driving through, headed to California and staying with some relatives in Alliance.

DN: Do you find yourself looking to the sky when you enter the area to see if they've come back for you?

FB: No, like a lot of modern people, I don't look into the sky probably as much as I should.

DN: Do you believe?

FB: I don't know.

DN: You grew up in L.A., so how did you end up going to school in Massachusetts, and how did you hook up with the Pixies?

FB: My senior year of high school and the two years of college that I took were in Massachusetts. And Joey and I started a band and we moved to Boston. We looked around for a couple other musicians, and we found them. So it wasn't anything really dramatic.

DN: You've said that the Pixies broke up because you got bored with them, yet you continued to play with Joey (Santiago, former Pixies guitarist) on your first two solo albums. Were you two the closest out of the four in the band?

FB: Absolutely, yeah. We'd been friends since before we were in the Pixies.

DN: Do you still hang out with Joey and play with him?

FB: Sure, I see him all the time.

DN: How about David (Lovering, former Pixies drummer) or Kim (Deal, former Pixies bassist), do you see them anymore?

FB: No.

DN: Do you want to?

FB: (laughs) No, I guess I don't. I mean, I'm sure I'll see them. You're kind of twisting my arm to say something negative here.

DN: Do you have a favorite era of rock music that you listen to the most?

FB: Good question. Probably the '60s, I suppose.

DN: Do you get tired of people asking you what it was like being on the forefathers of the "alternative" music scene?

FB: No, no. Not at all. I guess it's a part of my status or whatever.

DN: For the sake of argument, say the Pixies were one of the more influential bands during the late '80s and early '90s. What other bands do you think helped play a part in forming the genre called "alternative" rock?

FB: The Violent Femmes, Husker Dü and the Replacements. Those are, I'd say, a big three.

DN: When you became a musician, why did you decide to work under an alias instead of just being known as Charles Thompson?

FB: It's part of show-biz.



COURTESY PHOTO
POP PUNKSTER FRANK BLACK has changed the face of power guitar rock with the Pixies and as a solo artist. Now he fronts Frank Black and the Catholics, who celebrates the American release of their self-titled album today.