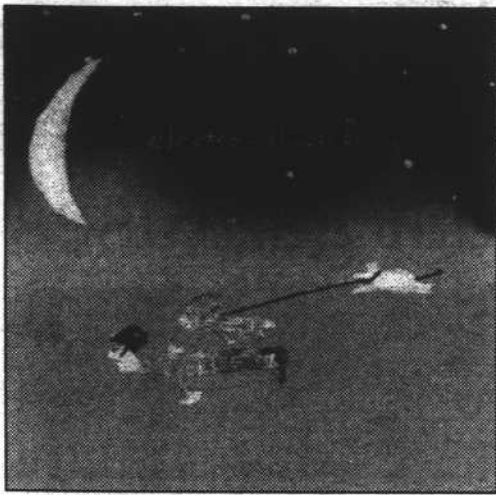


New Releases



Eels
"Electro-shock Blues"
DreamWorks
Grade: A

A man named E seems more like a character from a sadly surreal Kurt Vonnegut novel than a living, breathing and even serious musician.

Born Mark Everett, his father was a world-renowned physicist, who handled his success by becoming increasingly withdrawn from his family until he died of a heart attack when E was only 19.

His mother provided no comfort for her son, who had steady drug and auto-theft habits by the time he was 13.

She found solace in the bottle, a situation that only worsened as it became increasingly apparent that E's sister was suffering from severe mental illness.

After several attempts at suicide, his sister finally met success. E buried her two years ago, shortly after he floated across the screens of MTV viewers everywhere with the gravity-defying Eels hit, "Novocaine."

This time the floating sensation was real. Desperate for expression, E, who operates as the chief songwriter for the band, crafted a 16-song album dedicated to what he calls the "greatest American taboo since sex."

He's talking about death, and "Electro-shock Blues" unwinds like an ethereal liturgy for a soul damned to the eternal torture of... Earth.

Although inspired by his sister's suicide, "Electro-shock Blues" struggles with issues of life and the painful journey of existence after death.

But the album doesn't wallow in pity and is far from sounding weepy. In fact, it's riddled with complex pop tunes that defy their somber inspiration. The first single, "Last Stop: This Town," is the most infectious tune to be released this year, and it will stay stuck in your head long after you've moved on to a better place.

E, who has always been more of a post-modern poetic conscience than anything, has finally penned his definitive work. And the scornful

nature of his songs are not lost in the pop-candy bliss.

From start to finish, "Electro-shock Blues" unearths E's despair, and he never fails to comment on the most minute of depressing details. The first track, "Elizabeth on the Bathroom Floor," is almost entirely silent save for a tinkling piano and soft guitar. The brief song ends in the couplet "My name's Elizabeth, My life is shit and piss."

With other tracks such as "Going to Your Funeral Part I," "My Descent into Madness" and "Hospital Food," E takes the phenomenon of death down to microscopic levels of isolation, pain and the hopeless irony of salvation.

But that's not all. Instrumentally, the songs manage to challenge their stunning lyrical complexity. Radiohead, Morphine and Pavement are the most obvious influences, but E deserves credit for weaving the seemingly incompatible elements of grief rock and pop rock into a seamless, gorgeous fabric.

E may be grieving, but he's not nostalgic. The pop beauty of Eels' last release, "Beautiful Freak," is found here, too, but without seeming like reincarnated leftovers. "Electro-shock Blues" manages the precarious balance of genuine emotion with pop sensibility: a feat many have tried and most have failed to accomplish.

E cannot bring his sister back, but her death has inspired his greatest achievement and brought her to life for thousands of listeners.

This is the irony E sings about.

- Bret Schulte



Reel Big Fish
"Why Do They Rock So Hard?"
Mojo Records
Grade: D+

Just as last year's alternative backlash struck and ska acts hit the mainstream, Reel Big Fish jumped in at the right time. The band released the sarcastic debut record "Turn The Radio Off" and soon they were going from playing small clubs to amphitheaters.

"Turn The Radio Off" worked well because the band played a lively blend of ska and punk

while ripping on shallow individuals in songs such as "Trendy" and "Sellout," and singing of teen-age pessimism in "Everything Sucks." However, in the band's new release, "Why Do They Rock So Hard?," Reel Big Fish not only does its typical ranting, but it also plays the style it is making fun of, namely rock music.

"Why Do They Rock So Hard?" is full of bad electric guitar that takes away from the act's strong horn section. Not only do "Brand New Song" and "Everything Is Cool" not work with the rock-fueled formula, but they prove to be less rhythmic and more childish than anything on "Turn the Radio Off."

The remakes of "Thank You For Not Moshing" and "I'm Cool" aren't any better than the original versions, and "I Want Your Girlfriend to Be My Girlfriend" is the band's worst live song and only takes up space on the record.

Only a couple of the songs here work at all. "The Set Up (You Need This)" is easily the best track, as it is able to fuse the rock guitar with the horn section in a way that is complementary. "Scott's A Dork" is an enjoyable and humorous listen, simply because the chorus is so pointless.

For the most part though, "Why Do They Rock So Hard?" sounds like a long and weak ska-rock remix that only Puff Daddy would consider. If they know what's good for them, Reel Big Fish will put more ska chords back into its songs, because this album will probably never see the light of a compact disc player again.

- Patrick Miner

The Mighty Mighty Bosstones
"Live From The Middle East"
Mercury Records
Grade: B+

The Slackers
"The Question"
Hellcat Records
Grade: B

Last year, hybrid ska music hit a commercial peak. Albums and tours by bands such as ska-core The Mighty Mighty Bosstones, ska-punk Reel Big Fish and ska-reggae Hepcat swept the nation and held radio by its ear.

Although the craze has since shifted to swing music, the ska-influenced acts continue to release quality albums, with the aforementioned Bosstones and reggae-ska act The Slackers hitting the stores with new albums this month.

As anyone who has been to a Bosstones live show will explain, the band's concerts live up to all of the hype they have received over the past decade. "Live From the Middle East," named after the club where the songs were recorded, portrays the band's boisterous ska show as well as possible without the listener actually being there.

The album is a solid mix from the band's

five albums, from classics "Hope I Never Lose My Wallet" and "Cowboy Coffee" to more recent hits "Royal Oil" and "The Rascal King."

What makes this record great is that it combines interaction between lead singer Dicky Barrett and the crowd as well as great-sounding renditions of classic live songs.

"Where'd You Go," best known from the film "Clueless," and "Hell of A Hat" sound best here, with Barrett's scratchy voice and the Bosstones' horn section taking over.

While it would have been nice to hear the complex "Awfully Quiet" or Barrett screaming



on "Issachar," it's hard to argue with 21 of the band's greatest hits.

"Live From The Middle East" can give casual Bosstones listeners a glimpse into some of the band's greatest work, and it gives longtime fans a good live mix with some slight changes to the tunes thrown in by the band.

In contrast, The Slackers album, "The Question," is much more laid-back than the lively Bosstones' affair. The record is The Slackers' second in the past year on Hellcat Records, which is co-owned by Epitaph head Brett Gurewitz and Rancid's Tim Armstrong.

Fronted by the genius songwriter Vic Ruggiero, The Slackers were the final band to play at the July 19 Warped Tour date in Lawrence, Kan. There they played several songs from the then-unreleased "The Question," and the band received a tremendous response from the crowd.

Simply, the songs on "The Question" are more reggae-edged than last year's "Redlight," which had a more soulful sound with the ska grooves.

"The Question" flows well with a continuously relaxed sound, with songs such as "Knowing" and "Do You Know" sounding similar to the grooves of labelmates Hepcat and "And I Wonder?" sounding like a ska-laced oldie.

There are two versions here of the title track "The Question," including "The Question (Version)," which features toasting (reggae-style rap) by artist Paul Perkins, adding another dimension to an already solid record.

- Patrick Miner

Wannabe Spice Girls strut girl power for ad

■ Four New York preteens chosen from thousands of hopefuls.

NEW YORK (AP) - Many parents would cringe at the sight of their preteen daughters baring their midriffs and sporting rub-off tattoos, platform shoes and clip-on navel rings.

But thousands of mothers and fathers accompanied their scantily-clad offspring to an audition Tuesday. The children were vying for a chance to be their favorite Spice Girl in a commercial.

"She loves the Spice Girls, Baby Spice in particular, and Mom had to work," said 34-year-old Bill Sanger of his 7-year-old daughter Brittany. "I don't want her to look back as an adult and wonder if she had the stuff to be a star."

Out of a sea of miniature Baby, Scary, Posh and Sporty wannabes - no Gingers, thank you (she quit the group earlier this year) - only one set of Spice Girl look-alikes were chosen.

The winners were Carissa Farina, 10, as Sporty; Sarah Back, 10, as Posh; Dina Lorraine

Moakley, 9, as Baby; and Nirine Brown, 12, as Scary. All the girls are from New York.

The commercial, for a line of dolls and other Spice Girls products, begins filming next week.

While the auditions were limited to children between the ages of 5 and 12, the competition was hardly kid stuff.

One 9-year-old Scary Spice imitator, sporting oversized plastic green glasses and a spray-aided hairdo that can be described only as untamed, coolly surveyed a rival and said, "You look nothing like her."

The response was immediate and crushing, and it came with a faux British accent.

"Well, Scares-me-Spice, I can sing. I can dance. I can act. We'll see what they say inside."

Parents could offer only wan smiles for each other. And many didn't pretend to know a thing about the British pop group.

"Honestly, I don't know Baby Spice from heather spice," Sanger said.

"Oh, Dad," said blond pony-tailed Brittany, covering her eyes. "Please, not so loud."

ropped notes

Former Nebraskan opens exhibit at Haydon Gallery

A former Nebraska resident returns home from Arizona to open an exhibition at the Haydon Gallery, 335 N. 8th St., on Friday.

Robin Smith, a former resident of Ashland, makes the trek from Arizona State University, where he is a professor of art.

His exhibit "Still Life Paintings" explores the minute changes that light and placement make upon forms in space. Described as "both inviting and confounding," the collection will remain at the Haydon through Nov. 21.

Like Smith, his pieces have spanned the country, having been featured in exhibitions in Oklahoma City, Rochester, Minn., and Salt Lake City.

Friday evening's reception runs from 7 to 9. For more information call (402) 475-5421.

YOU CANNOT WIN IF YOU DO NOT PLAY. PLAY THE DN NEWS QUIZ AND WIN.

www.unl.edu/DailyNeb

SWING DANCING EVERY THURSDAY Lessons from 7 - 8 Dance from 8 on

Coming To The PLA MOR Classic Rock n' Roll by The Rumbles Saturday, October 24th Doors open @ 7:00 Show starts @ 8:00

The PLA MOR Call 475-4030 for more info.

abortion care kind, confidential services

- Outpatient Care • Awake or Asleep • Parental Notification Assistance • Immediate Appointments, including Saturdays • Total OB/GYN Health Care • Full-Time, Board Certified OB/GYN Physicians • Dr. G. W. Orr & Dr. CJ LaBenz

OMAHA • 554-0110, TOLL-FREE • 1-800-922-8331 201 S. 46th St., Omaha NE 68132 http://gynpages.com/omaha

Womens Services P.C.