

Looking for Holiday Gifts? Jim and Len Review '97 CDs

By Len Damico and James Conroy

It's just about that time of year again: the time when all music critics feel obligated to trot out a best-albums-of-the-year list. To help you figure out what to buy for the gift-giving season for the music-lover on your list, here's what Len and Jim think is worth your hard-earned cash. Since this is a college newspaper, we've included handy-dandy G.P.A.'s for each album.

Blur - *Blur*

Len: Perhaps Blur have waited so long to release a self-titled album because it's taken them four other releases to discover their sound. They still have a decided Britpop sound (check out "Look Inside America"), but this release finds the band cultivating a more indie-rock friendly aura. *Blur's* biggest successes come when the band finds a way to combine the two influences, as they do on "Beetlebum" and "M.O.R." This album also features a bit of their Eurodisco side; "Death of a Party" and "I'm Just a Killer for Your Love" would sound at home in any nightclub. This album is a challenging and disparate listen, but it's well worth it. G.P.A. = 3.2

Jim: By the end of 1995 it seemed that Blur would indeed become a blur. Although they had had minimal success with songs like "Boys and Girls" and "Country House," *The Great Escape*, which was to make them a household name here in the U.S., was largely overlooked. This had a lot to do with the success of their arch-enemies, Oasis, whose album *What's the Story (Morning Glory)?* did make them household names.

And maybe all of that is what makes their latest, self-titled release so good. It seems that the band has put the quarrels with Oasis behind them and just played music. The perfect example of this is "Song 2," you know the "Woo-hoo" song. It's a two minute romp that means nothing, yet pretty much sums up life...Woo-hoo! G.P.A. = 3.20

Radiohead - *OK Computer*

Len: From start to finish, this is a great record. *OK Computer* is informed by the current electronica trend, but not indebted to it. This balance results in a modern-sounding release that still flat-out rocks. "Exit Music (For a Film)" is hauntingly beautiful, while "Electioneering" is a tooth-rattling stomp. "Paranoid Android" might be the most intriguing single recorded in the 1990s so far. From the opening guitar feedback and

Bjork

Changing Music Once Again

By James Conroy

Is it because she is so popular that she only needs one name? Or is it because her last name is unpronounceable? Either way, Bjork has changed the face of music and one name seems to be enough. After leaving the Sugarcubes in the early '90s to focus on a solo career, Bjork's star has risen while the Sugarcubes have fallen into the "where-are-they-now" bin of your local music store.

With two full length CDs and numerous other works already under her belt, you might think that Bjork would finally place her feet firmly on the ground. But, if you expected that from the Iceland native on her new album *Homogenic*, then you haven't

stuttering drums of "Airbag," you'll be hooked, and you won't want to stop listening until the final, hushed tones of "The Tourist." Buy this album now. G.P.A. = 4.0

Jim: While reviewing this album, I was reminded of the immortal words of the ever wise Flavor Flav, "Don't believe the hype!"

Radiohead has not become an "electronic" band. In fact, they aren't doing anything their English counterparts Depeche Mode didn't do in the early '80s with synthesizers and keyboard sound effects. However, I respect Radiohead for taking a step in another direction, and trying something different, especially with their first single from *OK Computer*, "Paranoid Android."



Going well over six minutes, "Paranoid Android" is very radio and MTV unfriendly and it was a brave step on their part. But, along with "Karma Police," "Paranoid Android" might just be the best single of the year and gets honors marks. However, with songs like "Fitter Happier" Radiohead gets an F in my grade-book, but an E for effort.

G.P.A. = 2.75

Bjork - *Homogenic*

Len: Every single thing Bjork releases is worth listening to, and this album is no exception. *Homogenic* contains some of her most adventurous work to date. "Hunter" manages to be simultaneously soft, soothing and aggressive. She sings in "Jóga" (the album's first single) that "a state of emergency is where I want to be."

been paying attention to her. Staying on the course that she set out on with *Debut* and *Post*, Bjork continues to sail to galaxies far, far away. To seek out new beats and new influences. She boldly goes where no one has gone before.

As with her previous albums, Bjork collaborates with artists from every point on the musical spectrum, and the influences of Goldie can be heard in the Drum n' Bass texture that fills most of the album. But, the strongest influence comes with the quick beats Bjork uses, a direct effect from her experiences with the Wu-Tang Clan, a marriage that is definitely out of the ordinary.

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"Alarm Call" is fun and funky, and should be pounding out of many a car stereo this winter. Perhaps you should heed the alarm call and get your hands on this CD. G.P.A. = 3.3

Jim: I think producer Nelle Hooper said it best while working on Bjork's first solo album, *Debut*, "We are so lucky to have Bjork's voice!"

There is no one like her on the planet, and with each album she reaches new heights. *Homogenic* is utter perfection (with the exception of the album cover, which kinda scares me). G.P.A. = 4.0

The Chemical Brothers - *Dig Your Own Hole*

Len: All I have to say is, "Block Rockin' Beats" sure does rock my block! G.P.A. = 2.8

Jim: Contrary to popular belief, the Chemical Brothers and Prodigy did not create the musical genre dubbed "Electronica." However, they have brought the music to the masses, and perhaps most importantly, they have given hope to all those wannabe musicians that have little talent but lots 'o cash.

I'll admit, it isn't the most thought provoking music, but it sure does rock my...aw Len already used that one. G.P.A. = 3.0

Cornershop - *When I Was Born for the 7th Time*

Len: This is an interesting listen. White-boy hip-hop beats collide with droning sitars and bubbling tabla drums. The best way I can describe this is the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion meets Ravi Shankar. "Brimful of Asha" is one of the catchiest singles of the year. Cornershop even pulls off a quickie version of the Beatles' "Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)." If you're looking for an interesting, fun disc, Cornershop might be for you. G.P.A. = 2.9

Jim: I will start off by warning you that this album is not going to be

for everyone. However, this band plays so many different types of music, there is bound to be something in there for you. Maybe the most important thing for us Generation Xers is that Cornershop's style of music can't be defined.

It's obvious that this Anglo-Indian group has gotten its influences from everywhere. Their musical instruments range from sitars and tablas, to a turntable, which led fellow Indian musician and producer Talvin Singh to exclaim "Two turned tablas and a microphone!"

The melting-pot style of this album works for the melting-pot influences of the group, and the songs range from Alt-Rock ("Good to be on the Road Back Home"), to Rap ("Candyman"), to B-Boy type instrumentals ("Chocolat") and Scratchin' ("Butter the Soul"). But, perhaps the best songs are those sung in Punjabi, a native Indian language. I have no idea what is being said in "We're in Yr Corner," but I love it!

It seems that all British musicians must worship the Beatles, and Cornershop is not about to buck that trend. There's no better way to show their reverence than to cover the Beatles' "Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)"... in Punjabi of course. G.P.A. = 3.6

Trainspotting, Volume Two (soundtrack)

Len: This is one of those album concepts that probably should have been left at the water cooler. After last year's success with *Trainspotting*, the producers of the movie, along with EMI Records, felt the need to release a second disc. *Volume Two* sounds more like a glorified mix tape than a cohesive album. The remixes of the tracks on the first disc (like Iggy Pop's "Nightclubbing" and underworld's "Born Slippy") ruin their good qualities; in "Born Slippy's" case, the thundering groove has been replaced with a generic and boring drum loop. Cuts from Joy Division and David Bowie are too little, too late for this project. My advice is to get the first disc, instead of wasting your time with *Volume Two*. G.P.A. = 1.3

Jim: This is a weak follow up to the stupendous first soundtrack to the film *Trainspotting*. Following in the path set out by *Romeo and Juliet*, EMI Records released a second soundtrack to gobble up more profits after the first soundtrack did so well.

Although it contains what mat be the best known monologue from the film ("Choose Life"), much of the music on the album is not even in the film. Songs by David Bowie and Joy Division do nothing to raise the level of this album, and two remixes of Underworld's chart topping single "Born Slippy" are overkill.

All I can say is, "Choose life, choose a job, choose...another CD." G.P.A. = 0.8

