



**August and Everything After
Counting Crows
(MCA)**

I don't know what to say: this is one of the best albums of the last ten years. And they remind me of the Band. I can give no higher praise.



**Pearl Jam
Pearl Jam
(Sony)**

Pearl Jam's 1991 debut, *Ten*, was sometimes awesomely powerful and sometimes dull due to the band's spotty interest in melody, which they so surely displayed on the likes of "Alive," "Jeremy" and "Even Flow." On the strength of those singles, *Ten* became a wacko-crazy smash (it's still in Billboard's top thirty) and has made their sophomore effort one of the year's most highly anticipated releases. In the interim between albums, Pearl Jam expanded its influences, covering the likes of Neil Young, Bob Dylan, the Who and the Doors, as well as contributing a hauntingly understated song, "Crazy Mary" to the *Sweet Relief* compilation (a wonderful album). The new album, *Pearl Jam*, shows that the band hasn't really changed that much: they still rely more on sound and fury than songs, but the band's sonic impact is astounding. *Pearl Jam* features the same angry bursts of *Ten* on the likes of "Go" and "Blood," but their attack is far more complex and diverse, incorporating many of the strange ideas of Stone Gossard's side-project, Brad. They're tracts from what really gets this band across: Eddie Vedder. Regardless, this is like nothing I've ever heard.

Pearl Jam is indisputably more consistent than *Ten*, but nothing grabs me as directly as "Jeremy" or "Even Flow," and the album's flashiness is almost progressive. Nonetheless, everything here works in its own hedonistic way, and I dig hedonism as much as the next guy.



**Fumbling Towards Ecstasy
Sarah McLachlan
(Netwerk)**

Atlantic Canada's own Sarah McLachlan has returned with *Fumbling Towards Ecstasy*, the follow-up to her breakthrough album, *Solace*, a foggy affair that was short on melody. With *Fumbling* she adds some contemporary touches -- dance beats, distortion -- which lend her music a new urgency and subtle intensity, but it's the mournful melodies of "Good Enough," "Wait," "Mary" and the first single, "Possession" that make this memorable. She still has a tendency for swelling, gloomy stuff and it's still kinda dull, but overall, her first solid album.

