



the summer in music
by kirby ferguson

grunge etc.

As tired as the attitude is, grunge remains a vital musical force, frequenting the tops of the chart for the second straight summer. The season's smashiest hit came from the Stone Temple Pilots, a band frequently slagged by grunge purists (what's next?) as wagon-jumpers. Personally, when I saw the video for "Plush" (a grunge classic) I thought Eddie Vedder had become a big Johnny Rotten fan. Regardless, *Core* (3.5) rocks real hard, though the enormous heavy metal production blurs the detail of their attack.

Former Replacement Paul Westerberg's *14 Songs* (4) received an undeservedly cool critical response, but apparently the boys and girls understand as it sits at the top of the U.S. college charts as I write this. Without the Replacements, Westerberg is a little like Graham Parker without the Rumour or Elvis Costello without the Attractions: still a super songwriter but lacking the personality of his former group. The Replacements had a sloppy rock'n'roll sound as inspiring as that of the Rolling Stones, Crazy Horse or Husker

Du; this is a facsimile of that sound and it sounds it. *14 Songs* is a bit of a patchwork and his words aren't as sharp as usual, but in the end Westerberg's way with a tune saves the day. The sound of a genius wingin' it. Unfortunately, Westerberg's two fine songs from the *Singles* soundtrack are not here.

The summer's sleeper was Soul Asylum's *Grave Dancers Union* [sic] (3.5), a platinum smash after about a decade of obscurity. Like Paul Westerberg, Dave Pirner was raised on junk; unlike Westerberg, he doesn't always transform it into something wonderful. Thus, there's moments here that wouldn't sound out of place on a Bon Jovi album and Pirner's lyrics are cloyingly sincere. But he's a superior melody maker and his rockers exude the kind of spirit Westerberg hasn't been able to muster since *Pleased to Meet Me*. The discovery of Soul Asylum was almost enough to give you faith in human nature.

Former Jane's Addiction head cheese and inventor of Lollapalooza, Perry Farrell's latest project, *Porno For Pyros* (3.5), was an unexpected success. But despite the name change, this is really just the most concise Jane's Addiction album yet. Farrell is monu-

mentally silly, almost Jim Morrison-ish, but to ignore the wallop of his music would be perverse.

Urge Overkill have acquired quite a cult following over their first four indie releases -- and it ain't just because they wear big, goofy medallions either, it's because they're kinda wonderful. Coming off like Hendrix meeting



the Stooges meeting Cheap Trick meeting Sonic Youth, *Saturation* (4) is campy fun and one of grunge's most distinct releases in ages. Despite the campiness, it's easy to take Urge Overkill's music seriously, a hooky amalgamation of 70's shit filtered through an imaginative songwriting style that provides surprisingly long-lasting listening pleasure. And unlike most grunge, they swing.

Matthew Sweet's *Altered Beast* (4) is a rock solid set of pop melodies and shit-load of guitar.



Think of a more precise version of Crazy Horse led by Paul McCartney and you've got the idea. One of the primary draws of Sweet's albums is their warm, beefy production, the kind you just don't hear any more. "Time Capsule" would've been a smash in a just world.

New Order came up with an unexpected hit in *Republic* (3.5), led by the memorable single, "Regret." The rest of the album is a little less inspired, basically just traditional New Order disco: sing-song melodies, intricate texturing and melancholy bass lines. And if it sounds a little inhuman, that's just because it is.

melt down