



Miss Kittin makes New Wave new again.

electronic dance music that have unspooled since 1982: With "L'Homme Dans l'Ombre," the Hacker displays a knack for embedding the low end with melody, and vice versa, something that only a techno producer would do and only a techno fan can really, really dig. Miss Kittin would simply be another poseur in a nurse outfit if she didn't somehow fuse the incisiveness of a Marxist social critic with the comic timing of Charo: Over the achingly beautiful chords and driving, Giorgio Moroder-damaged rhythm of "Stock Exchange," she regales with tales of cavorting with Japanese businessmen, and intones, with perfect English-as-a-second-language diction, "I can smell their expensive after-shave/When they touch my bum in the lift of the Empire State." It's a gag about market-economy decadence, but the effect is oddly poignant, like walking away from an ATM withdrawal and feeling sort of empty.

—PAT BLASHILL

★★★★★

Kenna

New Sacred Cow

FLAWLESS/GEFFEN

Fred Durst signs Tears for Fears!

HAS FRED DURST, PIED PIPER OF teen-wasteland America, lost his hitmaking touch? Let's hope so — if Kenna, the latest product of his Flawless label, is any indication. Kenna is an Ethiopian-born singer who lives in Virginia and writes angst-ridden, keyboard-driven New Wave pop songs that wouldn't sound out of place on a Tears for Fears record circa 1983. Eons removed from Durst's playboy rap

rock, Kenna's out-of-step debut, *New Sacred Cow*, will be a tough sell on TRL. But it's among the most distinct and tuneful major-label records you'll hear this year. Kenna succeeds by echoing the sounds of a now-fetishized era — synth textures, muted guitars, wailing melodies — without overtly imitating anyone in particular. And his ace in the hole, producer Chad Hugo of the Neptunes' utterly contemporary hip-hop beats — sometimes Fatboy booming, sometimes Timbaland jagged — gives *New Sacred Cow* cachet as a novel fusion that sacrifices neither straightforward songwriting nor musical cohesion.

—RONI SARIG

★★★★★

Susana Baca

Espiritu Vivo

LUAKA BOP

Afro-Peruvian queen stretches out

FEARING, PERHAPS, THAT CANCELING a carefully planned New York session would mean giving in to the tragedy surrounding her, Afro-Peruvian songstress Susana Baca went ahead and recorded this live-in-the-studio album during the three days following September 11th. And what a wise decision it was. Backed by the supple sounds of her own quartet, the spiky guitar of Marc Ribot and the jazzy keyboards of John Medeski, Baca delivers a cleansing combination of passion and hope, adding playful poetry to Mongo Santamaria's "Afro-Blue" and a pinch of Latin panache to Björk's "Anchor Song." It's taken decades for Baca to become the renowned World diva she was always meant to be. Now that her mission of rescuing the black roots of Peruvian music has been vindicated, she is finally free to experiment and delight in the soaring power of her own voice.

—ERNESTO LECHNER

★★★★★

Playgroup

ASTRALWERKS

A beat-wise Londoner's U.S. fantasy

ON THIS DUBBY, ADVENTUROUS collection of dance songs, producer Trevor Jackson — the English clubland and label honcho whose remix credits include U2 and Massive Attack — poses as a hip Londoner taking cool pictures of American pop. Jackson's world is a wide-open place where Bikini Kill records jangle alongside Puffy's luxe, where the distance between new-soul early-Nineties Atlanta and Seventies singer-songwriter New York isn't far. "Pressure," a floaty reworking of a brilliant moment from soul songstress Joi's 1994 debut, sits comfortably next to "Bring It On," a track where Kathleen Hanna barks out girl-John Lydon. Perfect old-school hip-hop such as "Front 2 Back" — on which KC Flightt, a scratchy-voiced New York DJ, walks away with the record — and incandescent pop funk such as "Number One" rolls along as unstoppably as Shinehead, who takes Paul Simon's "50 Ways to Leave Your Lover" to the new Caribbean. Throughout,



Jackson digs deep into his sources and parties all the time.

—JAMES HUNTER

★★★

X-ecutioners

Built From Scratch

LOUD

DJ crew invites Linkin Park and others on uneven turntable trip

NOWADAYS, EVERYONE RESPECTS DJs. They're de rigueur in rap-rock bands, and in the hip-hop underground, turntable wizardry is respected as both skill and art. Accordingly, for their second album, pioneering four-man DJ crew the X-ecutioners have pulled out the big guns. M.O.P. bring their signature bashing style to "Let It Bang," and Joseph Hahn and Mike Shinoda of Linkin Park import crunchy guitars and mild rap-



ping on "It's Goin' Down." But these collaborations reveal one fatal flaw in the album's formula: All the imported noise makes the X-Men's delicate routines of cutting and juggling seem hopelessly obscure.

Elsewhere, the X-ecutioners remake the seminal DJ cut "Marley Scratch," bring in Biz Markie to spice up their version of "Genius of Love," and, on "A Journey Into Sound" — an impressive team-up with the stunning beat-boxer Kenny Muhammed — nod heavily to M.A.R.R.S.' dance-floor classic "Pump Up the Volume." But DJ'ing is an act of finesse: When the X-ecutioners' sample sources jump off their vinyl and come roaring to life, the overwhelmed DJs are confronted with more than they can scratch.

—JON CARAMANICA

RS/HALL OF FAME

★★★★★

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers

Damn the Torpedoes

BACKSTREET, 1979

IN 1979, TOM PETTY AND THE Heartbreakers had been crafting professional, appealing straight-ahead rock for three years without wowing the masses. But the band reached its peak when the rootsy Petty finally accommodated the Heartbreakers' need to kick the sound up from classic rock to modern. It's no coincidence that *Damn the Torpedoes* was released in a year crucial to punk and New Wave's explosion into the mainstream.

Merging folk-based Sixties rock with free-form Los Angeles pop and pressing more urgently than ever before on the roadhouse tang of Petty's Southern youth, the Heartbreakers' third album coexisted peacefully with its harder-edged, synth chart mates.

Damn the Torpedoes has got all the shimmer and curve of the Byrds without the dirty sandals. The whispering menace of "Refugee" showcases Petty's mature songwriting; "Don't Do Me Like That" is something like New Wave R&B, its short lines popping like corn kernels before the shouted rock & roll segment takes the whole thing back to FM radio, which is exactly where this song resided for umpteen weeks. "Shadow of a Doubt (A Complex Kid)" features fast-ticking drums that don't slow down even during the quiet bridge; you can hear hours of careful attention to Mick Jagger in how Petty's trademark nasal

blurt slops over lines and moans fiercely on the chorus. Petty's Florida roots make a hick's joke out of the driven blues rave-up of "Century City": "Like modern men, and modern girls/We're gonna live in the modern world," he draws to the shiny corporate towers of L.A.'s glittering necropolis. This is about as deep as the album gets, beyond Petty's earnest examinations of high-school-level sexual discomfort. But the timelessness of the Heartbreakers' best songs has always been a purely musical proposition; *Damn the Torpedoes* is ineluctable roots rock that's built for the modern world.

—ARION BERGER

FURTHER LISTENING:

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers (Shelter, 1976) ★★★★★
Full Moon Fever (MCA, 1989) ★★★★★
Into the Great Wide Open (MCA, 1991) ★★★★★

Stan Lynch, Mike Campbell, Tom Petty, Ron Blair, Benmont Tench (from left)



COURTESY OF GIRLIE ACTION (MISS KITTIN); CHRIS WALTER/WIREIMAGE.COM (TOM PETTY AND THE HEARTBREAKERS)

★★★★★ CLASSIC
 ★★★★★ EXCELLENT
 ★★★ GOOD
 ★★ FAIR
 ★ POOR

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