

audio TECH.

LAST.FM IS COOL MUSIC GEEKINESS

by Robert Tapia

For those of you who read last month's Audio Tech column about MOG, you'll find that this month's column charts a similar course into the depths of music geekiness and social networking. This time around, we'll take a look at Last.fm. As its Micronesian top level domain name might imply, Last.fm is a website that offers streaming music. While it might not sound like a new idea, or a mere combination of existing ideas, the beauty of Last.fm lies in its execution.

Basically, the site gathers information about a user's musical preferences and offers further suggestions based on them. The site uses two different methods to gather this information. After signing up for a Last.fm account,

one is prompted to download the Last.fm (formerly Audioscrobbler) software, which works with many different music player programs and keeps a running count of what the user is listening to. The site compares the data with that of other users and finds correlations, which it uses to make suggestions. In addition, the software has a streaming radio feature in which the recommended songs play and the user can give feedback to the site, letting it know whether or not he or she likes the song by clicking on a button marked either "Love" or "Ban." Last.fm then recommends more songs based on the user's updated criteria.

In addition to the user's interaction with the

site, the Last.fm website offers chances for social interaction. The site displays the profiles of users with similar musical tastes and offers the chance for them to communicate with each other. Last.fm users can keep journals, send messages to each other and view each other's individual listening charts. Furthermore, users can recommend songs to each other and join groups of like-minded individuals. These groups are often based on a particular artist or genre of music and members can post to discussion forums and view listening statistics for the entire group. These forums offer an opportunity for users to make new acquaintances and find people to share recommendations.

If not for Last.fm's ability to combine the social networking phenomenon of the last couple of years, streaming radio, and

user-feedback in such a way that makes it an engrossing experience, it's doubtful that the site would have achieved its current level of popularity. Not only can Last.fm user charts be seen all over the blogosphere and MySpace profiles, but discussions about the site are prevalent on other online music forums. The site is free to join, but members who pay for a \$3-per-month subscription have access to more features. Whether these features are worth it is up to the individual, but the site in its free, advertising-supported version works perfectly well. Personally, it's become one of my most-visited sites on the Internet these days and use doesn't seem to be lessening in the least.



TV tunes

MANCHESTER UNITED

by Liz Ohanesian

Music fans the world over know of Manchester as home to some of the most influential bands of the past several decades. Recently, DVDs have surfaced focusing on two of the northern U.K. city's legends.

The influence of The Smiths resulting from its short-lived career in the 1980s cannot be understated. In *The Smiths: Under Review* several journalists and associates of The Smiths reflect on the band's history and significance. Much of the information put forth in this documentary is not new to diehard fans of the band, but it is still essential to any Smiths collection. Although

regarding Morrissey and Johnny Marr's post-Smiths work as well as "The Hardest Smiths Interactive Quiz in the World Ever." The latter, I must admit, lives up to its name. I thought I knew everything about The Smiths but, apparently, my Smiths knowledge does not include titles of British children's television programs and streets in Manchester.

Happy Mondays: Live in Barcelona documents a reunion gig (actually, it is primarily a reunion of singer Shaun Ryder and dancer Bez) that occurred on Christmas of 2004 in Barcelona. The release of the DVD is perfectly timed as Ryder's recent appearance on Gorillaz hit single "Dare" should help revive interest in Happy Mon-



the comments from various journalists, including *Saint Morrissey* author Mark Simpson, are interesting, the best bits come from those who worked with the band. Producers Stephen Street, John Porter, Kenny Jones and Grant Showbiz all describe interactions with the band during studio sessions. Craig Gannon (Aztec Camera) discusses his brief stint as a second guitarist for The Smiths and Tony Wilson, former impresario of Factory Records, reveals why he chose not to sign the future legends. Bonus footage includes interviews with the contributors

days. Most interesting about the performance is the nature of the music itself. Happy Mondays, who famously combined psychedelic rock and acid house influences during the 1980s and early 1990s, are at risk for sounding incredibly dated. However, throughout the performance, the band's big hits (in the U.K. at least), including "Step On," "Kinky Afro" and "24 Hour Party People," all sound fresh. Included on the DVD is an interview with Ryder, a concise biography of the band and soundcheck footage.

DIE HUNNS YOU ROT ME

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