

music

cd reviews

MAKING THE GRADE: A EXCEPTIONAL
B WORTHWHILE | C MEDIOCRE
D SAVE YOUR MONEY
F WILL BE ON HELL'S JUKEBOX



DEPECHE MODE

Exciter and *Ultra*
(Rhino)

It's a good thing Depeche Mode didn't release *Exciter* and *Ultra* as a double album. That would have been a major mistake, given that the two strike an all-too-blantant resemblance to one another to the point where either of the albums could have been recorded and played on repeat.

With the Rhino Records reissues of 1997's *Ultra* and 2001's *Exciter*, Depeche Mode takes a stroll down memory lane to revisit two albums that exemplify the signature semi-goth, gloomy-pop sound that



the English trio has developed in their 27-year career.

Depeche Mode fails to deliver anything truly noteworthy on either of these releases. Keeping a solemn, sluggish tempo and a desolate tone, both *Ultra* and *Exciter* are quite the bore except for a few select tracks.

Though the albums are nothing special, they do illustrate the evolution of the band's instrumentation and development of their sound that once was sugary pop – remember “Just Can't Get Enough?” – and is now as dark as frontman Dave Gahan's black leather pants.

Grade: C

—John Ochoa

Ultra and *Exciter* are currently available.

music 101 | artist feature

THE STARTING LINE

A Direction Less Traveled

BY BRIEN OVERLY

“IF SAY IT LIKE YOU MEAN IT and *Based on a True Story* had a baby that was super good looking and really talented, could slam dunk and run really fast, it would be this record,” says Starting Line guitarist Matt Watts of his band's latest effort, *Direction*.

While the album may or may not actually be the musical equivalent of Brad and Angelina's kid, Watts is confident it will find a comfortable home in the album collections of fans both old and new.

“I think it shows our musical growth but also retains those hooks that kids loved on the first record,” he says.

More importantly with this album, Watts, fellow guitarist Mike Golla, drummer Tom Gryskiewicz, keyboardist Brian Schmutz and singer and bassist Kenny Vasoli, are just stoked on their music and the making of it, something Watts admits wasn't always the case not so long ago.

“On the last record, the mood wasn't as positive as we are as people,” he says. “We were going through a tough time with Geffen Records, it was an uphill battle to make the record, and I think we were just at a low point in our career. This time, the album came out on Virgin, and after we got let go from Geffen, we realized

we were kind of like a brand new band, and we could do whatever we want. We really chose our team carefully, and I think this is the most optimistic we've been since we first started the band, and it definitely reflected on the record.”

Though many bands don't have the luxury of continued success after parting ways with a major label on not entirely amicable terms, much less having a blank slate to start from, Watts hopes to make the most of their opportunity for both.

“We're always trying to improve ourselves, improve musically and challenge ourselves in the writing process and not put out the same record twice,” he says. “We've always looked up to bands like Saves the Day who have challenged themselves like that, and I respect bands like that so much. Hopefully, people will value that.”

Recalling his band's stay on this year's Vans Warped Tour he says, “I finally feel like we're that band that other musicians kind of like. Ben from Throwdown was watching us from stage, and I remember last Warped Tour we did, Tim Armstrong was watching us from stage. Our musical peers that we really look up to and value their opinions are fans of it and that's really cool. It makes me feel like I can sit at the cool kids' table now.”

Much as he may joke about being



(l to r) Matt Watts, Tom Gryskiewicz, Mike Golla and Kenny Vasoli of the Starting Line

wide-eyed at the prospect of other musicians liking his band, Watts remains humbled by the level of support and dedication shown by Starting Line fans.

“There have been a few people who have come up and said a certain song saved their life, which is crazy but that's the biggest compliment you could ever give somebody. It's crazy to think about the magnitude of that,” he says.

Citing influences ranging from Nirvana to NOFX to Mineral to Jimmy Eat World, Watts can understand where they come from, however.

“Those bands I get stoked on and still listen to, to this day,” he says. “I want our records to capture that. I want kids to put on our record 10 years from now and have the same

feeling that they felt the first day they picked it up. I think that's a really hard thing to capture, but I think it's possible.”

Looking at where these Philadelphia kids started out, from being “barely able to play their instruments in VFW halls,” it has undoubtedly been a long path to the chart-topping, respected rock act they are now. And though they've faced their share of detours, setbacks and wrong turns, if things continue as they're going now, the members of the Starting Line shouldn't have any difficulty finding their way. ■

Direction is currently available. The band will perform Nov. 9 at the Grove and Nov. 14 at the Wiltern. For more information, visit www.startinglinerock.com.

music dvd review

THE BYRDS

Under Review
(Chrome Dreams)

There are about 30 titles in the *Under Review* documentary series; some of them dissect one particular album by an influential group while others, like this two-DVD set, take a look at a band's entire career. And a good thorough look it is, too, starting with how the three core members of the original Byrds – Jim “Roger” McGuinn, David Crosby and Gene Clark – came together out of their folk backgrounds with the Chad Mitchell Trio, the Les Baxter Balladeers and the

New Christy Minstrels, respectively.

The film chronicles the trio's mutual desire to “answer back” to the Beatles, something they did in 1965 with their first single and first hit, the Bob Dylan-penned “Mr. Tambourine Man.” The band would often turn to Dylan for songs throughout their career, but Gene Clark would develop into a strong songwriter (“I'll Feel a Whole Lot Better”), as would Crosby.

John Coltrane and Ravi Shankar were two of Crosby's main influences and he incorporated their sounds into “Eight Miles High,” a tune often given credit for being the first hit to soar into

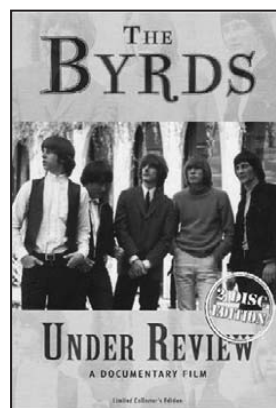
psychedelia. Crosby would soon get kicked out of the band for getting a big head, and the Byrds suffered many lineup changes in a career that ended in 1971 with the release of *Farther Along*.

This film is not sanctioned by the Byrds, and the only alumni who appear in the interview sections are John York and Gene Parsons (and Crosby extremely briefly). Lots of performance clips are included along with insightful comments from the likes of producer Van Dyke Parks and bluegrass musician Byron Berline.

Grade: B

—Kevin Wierzbicki

Under Review is currently available.



BUILT BY SNOW

Noise

Built By Snow is a band that's not quite ready for its close-up. The group is based in Austin, Texas – a city that runs deep with talent. The college town is known for being liberal with unknown artists; if you can't find any ears here

you probably won't find them anywhere.

That being said, it's hard to imagine Built By Snow garnering much of an audience beyond a few drunken frat boys, at least based on the material that appears on this EP. *Noise* contains seven songs that rehash ideas explored long ago by

groups like Devo and the Cars, but the mimicry lacks the quirkiness or charm that those two bands displayed.

There are brief moments of creative cohesiveness. If these guys are happy just to play keggers for a few years they're doing a great job. If they want careers in the business

or the respect of their fellow musicians they really need to get to work.

Grade: C

—Kevin Wierzbicki

Noise is currently available.