



APE-OCALYPSE NOW!

PIXIES

Doolittle (4AD LP/Cassette/CD)

THAT LITTLE monkey with the halo hot-wired to its tiny skull – the central image for both the Pixies' latest single and this, their second LP – could almost be a cryptic clue to what exactly makes this band tick.

Cute and mischievous for sure, angelic . . . perhaps, but there's certainly something darker and stranger at play within the Pixies' magical, musical circle. Peel back that little monkey's scalp and you'll probably be both appalled and fascinated at the tumour of evil genius that's squirming there.

Mishear one these lyrics and, while you're optimistically humming along, something altogether different is in the mind of these little devils. While you're Pixie-led into thinking about "jubilation" they're really mouthing "mutilation" . . . spot the difference? Nothing is quite, thankfully, what it at first seems on 'Doolittle' and that's exactly what gives it a razor edge.

These Pixies from Boston have laid open their secrets with 'Doolittle' by including a beautifully produced lyric booklet with the initial 30,000 copies (quick kids before they fly away!), a slick and artistic *grimoire* which mates the words of 'Doolittle' together with Simon Larbalestier's portraits of demented decay.

The images herein are bloated with *Blue Velvet* surrealistic dreamscape. Larbalestier's rot-riddled images in their sepia tones echo the effects of such surrealist photographers as Man Ray or Hans Bellmer, two artists who were more than aware of the monster that lie submerged beneath the dark depths of the human subconscious.

As a mere give-away however, it's a bonus, and great fun can be had turning the pages to try and relate which image goes with which song. More valid and worthwhile than some other dumb consolation prize as it opens up another door in the Pixies' psyche.

So just what does give on 'Doolittle'? The surrealistic show of sepia splendour that floods the lyric booklet overflows with a vengeance to seep into the very songs themselves. There are 15 of them, each neatly numbered and labelled like the exhibits of some eccentric travelling museum.

'Debaser', which kicks off, is blessed with the kind of beefy bass hook that originally brought 'Gigantic' to life. Black Francis leaps into action and plunges into a lyric that transforms Dali/Bunuel's film script of *Un Chien Andalou* into a three minute pop song. Complete with razored eyeball reference, it is an astonishing

achievement.

Equally thrilling, positively unnerving, is 'Tame', where the rabid pant of a serial killer is superimposed over Kim Deal's breathlessly passionate backing vocal to create a highly potent mix of emotions. More amusing is the fact that Black Francis manages to make his voice sound the spit of veteran Hollywood bad guy Peter Lorre! On purpose? I'd dearly love to know.

Personally I find Black Francis's lyrics, together with the various ways he chooses to translate them, a delight. He manages to push a kind of Beefheartian naivety into his work that suggests a love affair with the very language he is dabbling in. So who cares if all the words don't appear to fit together properly, or that the picture they eventually show is slightly blurred and chaotic? It all adds to the originality and charm of the band who bring such visions to life.

'Black Francis' songs here seem to have an almost 'speaking in tongues' quality to them, as though an invisible presence has gently guided his hand in an attempt to get through from some phantom zone. How else can the crackling static bones of such spectres as 'Crackity Jones' or 'Mr Grieves' be explained as they whoop and roar out of this record to shake their raggedy fists in your face? The songs on 'Doolittle' have the power to make you literally jump out of your skin with excitement.

From seemingly nowhere the Pixies manage to concoct something that ultimately builds into an epic on a miniature scale. The wonderful 'Monkey Gone To Heaven' is laced with lush but unobtrusive strings which nibble round the edge of the song and push it into a new realm of arrangement for the band. The opportunity to give 'Monkey' the full Philharmonic treatment, complete with heavenly harp, must have been a temptation to them. Wisely such a folly has been resisted.

'Monkey' is the most immediate song to ring out as a single on 'Doolittle' and (if indeed it is their intention) it will be interesting to see which song they decide to push individually next time round. My bet is on 'There Goes My Gun' which sounds like a sure shot to me with its Duane Eddy meets Ennio Morricone guitar twang.

Whatever they decide, the Pixies' popularity shows no sign of waning just yet and, as 'Doolittle' positively underlines, there is no shortage of ideas. Good news not only for Pixies fans but for the state of independent music as a whole. I can think of no finer role models than these Bostonian imps of the perverse. (10)

Edwin Pouncey