

## PALE SAINTS

### **In Ribbons (4AD/All formats)**

IF, DISREGARDING common sense, you peer at the space around the tiny hole in the middle of this CD, you will see the legend 'scene but not herd'. Now I'm not sure what this means but somehow, when the subject under discussion is Pale Saints, it seems very appropriate.

Pale Saints, Leeds' strangest, are certainly part of no herd. Though there are superficial similarities with other breeds of wan, pale and interesting guitar groups, Pale Saints are one-offs, genetic aberrations. Where the bulk of their peers are recycling the same few half-formed notions, Graham, Ian, Meriel and Chris are positively drunk on ideas. 'In Ribbons' is a rock record for some of the time but it wants to be a whole lot more. It's ambitious, perverse, oblivious to fashion and desperately self-centred. It's marvellous.

Things begin straightforwardly enough: 'Throwing Back The Apple', surely a single at some point, is a typically attractive clash of plaintive folkish lilt and emphatically big riffs. The result is a great pop song of a sort. A favourite Pale Saints gambit is to begin a song in a vague stew of interesting atmospherics and then send a glorious pop vocal melody winging towards orbit, a trick used neatly on 'Thread Of Light', 'Babymaker' and 'Liquid' where acoustic pickings usher in a fably odd or oddly fab tune.

Pale Saints confound charmingly. 'Shell' is a brazenly lovely, ornamental string ballad in the midst of raging noise. Shamefacedly beautiful, it's more brogue-gazing than shoe-gazing. They aren't afraid to be alluring but neither are they averse to freezing your blood on occasion; like in the tiny, icy fragment of 'There Is No Day' or 'Hair Shoes'. I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to write like a nobbo here. 'Hair Shoes' is the sound of great, moaning winds passing across the frozen wastelands of the soul. Woolly mammoths are roaming about here. It is positively prehistoric. And ace.

They even have the chutzpah to lob in 'Never Ending Night', a dead-ringer for Fleetwood Mac's 'Albatross'. For the generation who think they don't like 'Albatross'. After such a feast, it's a pity that the coffee and mints are so flavourless. The last track, 'A Thousand Stars Burst Open' is frankly lame and as lazy as its title.

Still, 'In Ribbons' glitters with invention. It's moving, it's loud, it's crackpot. It's a modern rock record that bristles with quirk, strangeness and charm. History will look admiringly on it; let's hope that the dirty old present does too. (9)

**Stuart Maconie**