



Liz Frazer: enfant terrible or cold-eyed midwife?

TERRIBLE TWINS

THE COCTEAU TWINS

Heaven Or Las Vegas (4AD LP/Cassette/CD)

LET'S GET one thing straight. I am not a 'fan' Of The Cocteau Twins. Music can be a passionate, terrifying, mysterious thing and still feel cold to the touch but The Cocteau Twins have always struck me as being the very antithesis of musical truehearts. Like vinyl Marie Antoinettes, they have spent their entire career believing – rather stupidly – that your sweet tooth houses your entire digestive system and that the fat, squashy cakes they bake, flavoured with rich, dark chocolate to hide the taste of bromide, are enough to keep you going.

Furthermore, after crystallizing and consequently trivialising life's absolutes – pain, fear, the death of love – into sprays of Frazer's hieroglyphic warble-baubles, The Twins' next step is always to stand back from the pretty wreckage, refusing to clear up or explain the mess they've made. Our minds are supposed to do all the talking, and while it is right and good that music should be left open to interpretation – everybody knows that any pop analysed to the nth degree is prone to fall apart like Carnaby St jewellery – let's not fool ourselves that anything other than our own sense of melodramatic self-importance is connecting with the self-important melodrama in them.

Worse, it's all quite intentional. Exactly the opposite of their affectedly queer, ethereal media 'image', The Cocteau Twins are actually experimentally-minded pop scientists who make white mice of their listeners, forcing them into The Subjective Corner when communication not inscrutability has always been the axis for true genius to grind around.

I cannot be so presumptuous as to tell you what 'Heaven Or Las Vegas' is like (open to your

own interpretation, darlings!) but I can tell you what I think. Definitely their best since 'Treasure', this album is still not accessible in the true sense of the word. Occasionally a hairy (outsider's?) fist does try to thump long-overdue clarity into the lyrics but these moments are few and far between. For the rest read standard Cocteau fare. Giant steps forward, fairy steps back, cruelty and passion homogenised for consumption inside plastic-bubble psyches (The Cocteau Twins are fine cocoon-artists) and, of course, Frazer dribbling party streamers, fog and razor-blades out of her ever-versatile facial orifice. The title track, 'Cherry Coloured Funk', 'Frou Frou Foxes In The Midsummer Fires' and the single 'Iceblink Luck' benefit hugely from having rock hearts with pop arteries and 'Heaven Or Las Vegas' is – at the end of the day – a beautiful *sounding* album. However, it's spoilt for ME by what I interpret as a stench of pomp and dishonesty pouring from every groove.

So, listen and enjoy by all means, but play the naughty twins at their own game. Remain detached, do not be duped into believing their music *means* anything. Having your mind 'blown' by The Cocteau Twins is like admitting that said organ – the most valuable thing you possess – is as flimsy and foundationless as a house of cards. At the end of the day The Cocteau Twins are little more than cold-eyed midwives who make music for people who wish they'd never been born. This mortal coil is *not* a cosmic contraceptive device. It is life itself. When The Cocteau Twins realise this, they will scream their first honest breath. Then the birthrate – which some already hold them partly responsible for – really will soar. **(8 for content, 0 for attitude)**

Barbara Ellen