



The Cocteau Twins: "the overblown sepulchral majesty," or a CD cash-in?

SINGLES GOING STEADY

COCTEAU TWINS

The Singles Collection (4AD/CD only)

ROBIN, LIZ and Simon had the sonic cathedral off pat by 1984, when the Valentines were still piss-poor. Shame that they should only surface by dint of a farewell-4AD testimonial; it's almost as if they've died and gone to Calligraphy And Reverb Heaven.

This boxed set (not strictly an album, but very much a think-about-it purchase) is basically all the Cocteau's 12-inch singles on CD, not a single one of them lacking in shrill, stand-offish brilliance or magical good looks. Natch. From the opening squall of 'Feathers Oar Blades' (1982) and those first flashes of vocal impedimenta over dustbin-lid rhythm, through the eggshell untouchability of 'Pearly Dewdrops' ('84) and kill-everything monstrosity of 'Rococo' ('85), to last year's menopausal 'Iceblink Luck', this is a box that will have you on the edge of your *chaise longue* for the duration.

You can trace the Cocteau through three distinct phases. 1) Post-Banshees amateurism, where the deep-throated basslines of old boy Will Heggie rumbled beneath Guthrie's ear-piercing guitar shards. 'Peppermint Pig'—your theme song

here. 2) Hello-Simon-Raymonde overblown sepulchral majesty, circa the 'Treasure' LP—amazingly the period the band are keenest to forget, best accounted for here by the 'Aikea Guinea' EP. And 3) Let's Have A Baby, where Liz and Robin really get to grips with what they can do in their own studio. And have a baby. (Hey! It affects people!) The cynics will cry "Cocooned, introspective indulgence" here, but what do they know?

To damn the Cocteau Twins as precious, insulated, arty or farty would be to knock Turner's sea paintings for having no plot. The textured surfaces, the evocation of moods too complex to put into words, the sheer turbulence next to therapeutic calm, the bloody mental drum machine!—it's all there for the taking. Only a Level 42 fan would be troubled by these sorts of pretensions.

No rambling sleeve notes, no Vaughan Oliver fold-out art shrine (boy, 4AD *must* be pissed off at losing them!)—just ten shiny circles, 38 tracks (two unreleased: 'Dials', and an instrumental 'Oomingmak'), and one upmarket fag-packet of delights for an increasingly undelightful age. (9)

Andrew Collins