



A blighty shade of Pale



Lush-ess Miki

KINGS (AND QUEENS) 4AD

PALE SAINTS
LUSH
THE WOLFGANG PRESS
L'ESCAL NANTES FRANCE

VOICI LA nouvelle vague. It's about 35 feet high and it's bearing down on our fragile ferry like the Hammersmith Odeon gone surfing. And here comes another, and another, and another. You really haven't experienced the full surging excitement of Pale Saints' 'She Rides The Waves' until you've listened to it on a Walkman while plunging stomach-less through force ten-whipped monster waves on a boat with one engine out of commission.

This is the start of 4AD's package trip to Nantes where their bright hopes Lush and Pale Saints and a re-juvenated Wolfgang Press were to supply a night of Brit-pop abandon to accompany a French Ministry Of

Culture financed art exhibition by 23 Envelope/4AD sleeve designer Vaughn Oliver. Welcome to nausea, nouvelle cuisine, gnarly noise and no sleep 'till Frogsville.

After 24 hours of ferrying and coaching, the 4AD party stagger into L'Espace Graslin gallery in Nantes looking a distinctly greener shade of pale. It is, however, an impressive show from Cocteau's/Pixies/Throwing Muses sleeve designer Oliver, and town luminaries, elegant arty types and a herd of Euro-media pack the place out.

There is also a gaggle of teenage French Stone Roses fans thrusting self-made John Squire rip-off postcards into the hands of Lush, and paying rather too much attention to the girls in the band, Miki and Emma. Drummer Chris, the band diplomat for sure, replies by signing autographs with 'GET YOUR HANDS OFF OUR CRUMPET, love Chris'.

"OH MY God! What a f——in' idiot!" Miki, Lush's Ziggy-headed singer is screaming at the playback of herself on the *Snub* TV porta-screen. All three bunches of 4AD starlets have spent the day after the exhibition being *Rapido*-ed and *Snub*-ed and Euro Satellite TV-ed into the ground, and down at the thousand capacity venue they compete with each other over who managed the longest interview silences. Everyone treats the media overkill as a bit of a giggle.

Pale Saints are first up on stage and all the weird human zoo lens zooming suddenly starts to make sense. With their 'Barging Into The Presence Of God' EP last year they were touted as one of the few reasons to believe in non dance-kissing, sonic-bedsit pop, and subsequently given a drubbing by D Kelly of this parish, for having missed the Ecstasy boat and for suffering from a "collective charisma bypass" problem. The latter is their favourite review ever. Pale Saints 'Charisma By-Pass Victim' T-shirts will be available any day now.

In fact Pale Saints' lack of interest in being anybody's future of pop/wildman performers is probably one of their major saving graces. True, frontman-mophead Ian Masters (christened Dozey by Lush) has the stage presence of a pall-bearer, but that's actually quite refreshing. They scribble out their pretty poems about 'The Language Of Flowers' or 'Fell From The Sun' and then set them casually ablaze with hot-wired guitars.

Choirboys with chainsaws may not exactly be the shock of the new but Pale Saints are definitely a quality addition to the league of fragile psychopaths. Their 'Insubstantial' (see the just-released 'Comforts Of Madness' LP), which is like Paul Heaton singing for the Mary Chain, is quite enough to justify their existence.

Where Pale Saints are to be privately prized, Lush are clearly destined to be public property. Even a first time French boy crowd catches on to the wrong end of this stick, shouting for the girls to show their "nichons" as they make their nervy entrance. There is, however, a pop-up glamour potential about Lush, although at the moment they're under-playing it. Songs like 'Bitter' or 'Second Sight' are half

formed scratchy things dampened by the mildew of North London indie practice rooms. And Miki is currently too busy hitting notes to kick you in the eye.

But in the exploding snowdrop ebullience of 'Scarlet' and 'Thoughtforms' there is a creamy conventionality that tastes of chat shows. The chemistry is all so nicely set up—spite from Emma, stomping on her effects pedals like a fell walker in a sulk, and sunlight from Miki, trilling abstractly.

Plus they are sly enough, with their Abba cover versions and skipping Blondie songs called things like 'Downer', to keep you guessing. The next morning the French papers are describing Miki as "the adorable Miki", which causes her to laugh with a laugh about as pure as the driven slush. They will go far, and beyond.

Twenty four hours earlier, while lining their stomachs with large curries, The Wolfgang Press had confided that their main travel worry was getting back in time to see George Clinton and/or Jah Wobble play. This seemed like a hopeful sign, since their three 4AD LPs had been brutal, unwieldy, experimental things. Tonight they played for the first(ish) time with a proper drummer (the mad, bad Benny, fresh from beating time with Paul Rutherford), and with Simon of the Cocteau Twins on bass.

They were magnificent—a steaming, grungy, dirty funk machine, all deep heat bass lines, Loop-a-sonic wah-wah guitars and phlegm gurgle crooning from tank-head singer Mick. To crank an entire hall of Johnny Halliday weaned Euro guitar pop fans into sweaty dancing gear is no mean achievement. Their future plans for tenebrous body grooving should be watched carefully.

SO 4AD came and saw and chundered, and ultimately conquered. And it seems reasonable to assume that the 'misunderstandings' with Ministry Of Culture representatives were in some way linked to the 4AD coach being taken apart by French customs officials on the way back. But the sniffer dogs came up with nothing.

"Vous voyez, Monsieur, the music's that good, we don't need drugs."

Roger Morton



Spot the charisma-bypass scars



"Ere, let me do it," a Wolfgang Press, er presses