



Jar, man! It's the three demi-johns

BEYOND THE PALE

PALE SAINTS

The Comforts Of Madness (4AD LP/Cassette/CD)

"THE INDIE scene," announced a friend importantly just last week, "is dead. It is lifeless. It has ceased to be. The only decent records in the independent charts are the ones you can dance to."

Up to a point of course, he's right. The 'indie' scene has become a mockery of itself, a genre gutted by blinkered fanzines, useless flexis and a depressingly lengthy stream of piss-poor bedsit bands who couldn't see past their own bigotry and precious record collections. But dare to go past that (almost indefinable) Point and you'll find the likes of Pale Saints.

And here they are, one of our great hopes for the '90s, still reeling from the success of last year's 'Barging Into The Presence Of God' EP. 'The Comforts Of Madness' ably, if not admirably, justifies that optimism. It isn't an easy album. Nor – one hopes – is it intended to be. Far from the cuddlesome comforts of 'indieland', Pale Saints seek to unsettle, strive to challenge the listener. They leave no hope unplugged: between songs they'll meander or wig out, allowing no breathing space or relief. Even now, after eight or so plays, Side One still evades my grasp.

Their main asset is their ability to make simple things sound incredibly complicated, by taking the indie jigsaw pieces – fey vocals, jangling guitars and blurred sonic shapes – and inventing innovative, initially perplexing puzzles. While many are satisfied

with simply recreating, Pale Saints are *reconstructing*. Sure, frequently their experiments threaten to fall apart, yet their clumsiest, most chaotic moments act as catalysts for wondrous reactions: their cumbersome clatter always finds its way to pristine clarity, stumbling from the surging slams of 'True Coming Dream' to the sparse beauty of 'Little Hammer'.

Most important of all, somewhere amongst this unnervingly multi-dimensional collage of melody and friction exist at least eight Great Pop Tunes, all hooklines and absolutely no stinkers. 'You Tear The World In Two' jangles in beside Ian Masters' wispy larynx, darts through a smartly-observed stop-start sequence and is whipped to a frenetic finale by a cracking bassline. 'The Sea Of Sound' keeps its distance, the immaculately produced swathes of sensual sound juxtaposed with gently screaming guitars. And 'Insubstantial' finds murky distortion and elevatory harmonies steaming towards the same hauntingly volatile climax.

They have the grace of Galaxie 500, the splendour of Spacemen 3, the malevolence of the Mary Chain, the vacancy of the Valentines, all of which adds up to an individual, idiosyncratic and yes, godammit, *adventurous* journey through unpredictable sound. They've gone beyond that formula-stricken point. In the general scheme of things, they may not amount to much. But in generic terms, 'The Comforts Of Madness' is utterly perfect. (9)

Simon Williams