

NME 11.8.90

PICTURE: KEVIN CUMMINS



WIGGY STARDUST

PIXIES

Bossanova (4AD LP/cassette/CD)

THE EVER-so-artistic lyric book that accompanies the new Pixies album contains the words to a song that you will not find on the record itself.

'Make Believe', sung by drummer David Lovering, can be found on the 'Velouria' single. It is Black Francis' paean to the Doris Day of the MTV generation, Debbie Gibson. "I don't want you to marry me/Make believe you're Debbie", sings Lovering, echoing the sentiments of a nation's adolescents.

Miss Gibson has now been immortalised in song twice in the last year (who could forget Mojo Nixon's boast 'Debbie Gibson Is Pregnant With My Two-Headed Love Child?'), which isn't bad going for a 19-year-old. She has become a national institution while still in her teens, and therefore is perfect subject matter for the Pixies' chronicles of American obsessions.

Cultural icons are one thing, be they real life legends like Debbie or fictitious sci-fi femme fatales like Velouria, but on 'Bossanova' Black Francis concentrates on another major obsession - weirdos from another planet.

Among these 14 songs you'll find more references to space travel, aliens, flying saucers and superior civilizations in strange faraway galaxies than in the entire '70s Bowie back catalogue. None of it makes much sense, of course, and those of you who read the NME cover story on the Pixies a few weeks back will be well aware of this. The truth of the matter is that Black Francis is totally barmy.

'Bossanova' is the Pixies in the Twilight Zone, Black Francis exploring the obscure and the unknown; Carl Sagan with a guitar cranked up to full volume. 'The Happening' is the eerie lynchpin of the album, a stream-of-consciousness tale of alien craft landing in Las Vegas ("They're gonna put it down right on the strip/... And step outside into the lights right outta that ship/Saying Hi!").

Black Francis is completely wiggled out, my friends, although he doesn't appear to see anything wrong with his worldview. 'Is She Weird' is a thundering lament to the most spaced-out of earth girls who is anything but easy: "Your mind is fancy/And your car is bitchin'/Your heart is ripshit/Your mouth is everywhere/I'm lyin' in it."

On 'Allison' it's clear that the Pixies have lost touch with Ground

Control for good, drifting away in the outer limits of a fertile but undisciplined imagination: "And when the planet hit the sun/I saw the face of Allison." If there is some kind of theme to 'Bossanova', it is the most obtuse thing in the world, a voyage into the unknown with a tour guide who is obviously missing a couple of buttons on his overcoat.

Gil Norton's production leans towards the harsh garage grunge of 'Surfer Rosa', although the songs retain the strong melodies of 'Doolittle'. In many ways, 'Bossanova' is the composite Pixies LP, the most positive elements of its two predecessors blended together to make one of the most intriguing and listenable albums of the year.

Two instrumentals set the ball rolling. A cover of The Surftones' 'Cecilia Ann' sounds like the theme to a post-Apocalyptic spaghetti western, as if Sergio Leone was shooting on Saturn. Next up is a wild guitar thrash anthem that encompasses all that is wonderful about rock music. Black Francis has called this song 'Rock Music'.

By now most of us have heard 'Velouria'. Not as immediate as 'Gigantic' or 'Monkey Gone To Heaven' as far as singles go, but still a delightfully wiggly window to the world of Black Francis and the maddest thing to have been seen on *Top Of The Pops* since The Wombles were Top Ten regulars.

'Ana' and 'All Over The World' would not be out of place on 'Aladdin Sane', with Black Francis doing his best Bowie impersonation. 'Ana' is a brief repetitive piece, just six lines long. The lyric book shows us the first letter of each line spells out S-U-R-F-E-R, while on 'All Over The World' Black Francis claims "I am a derangement." And we believe him.

'Stormy Weather' flirts with the kind of ominous doom The Jesus and Mary Chain used to excel at, peppered with the guitar psychedelia employed to such good effect by Lenny Kravitz in recent times. If the whole shebang sounds a touch derivative, it is, but 'Bossanova' still retains the indelible Pixies stamp, a collection of picture postcards from a different planet.

Black Francis may be the urbane spaceman of the 1990s but with the Pixies he has fashioned a flight path to untold fame and fortune on an extremely lovable album. You've really made the grade, and the papers want to know whose shirts you wear. (9)

Terry Staunton