

THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

Hits (4AD/All formats)

SOME CORPSES are best left un-interred.

The fetid wave of nostalgia that washes over '92 like effluent has finally offered up The Birthday Party for reappraisal and the results are not pretty. More than any other group, the noises made by Tracey Pew, Rowland S Howard, Mick Harvey and Nick Cave in their formative years, were of *their time*, taking the temperature of the early '80s filled with disgust and loathing at the complacency of the England they uprooted themselves from Australia to come to.

In the face of 'Henry's Dream' by The Bad Seeds being one of the most effective and corrosive LPs of this year, the exhumation of 'past classics' is just a shower of relics, useful only to the archivist or the sad person.

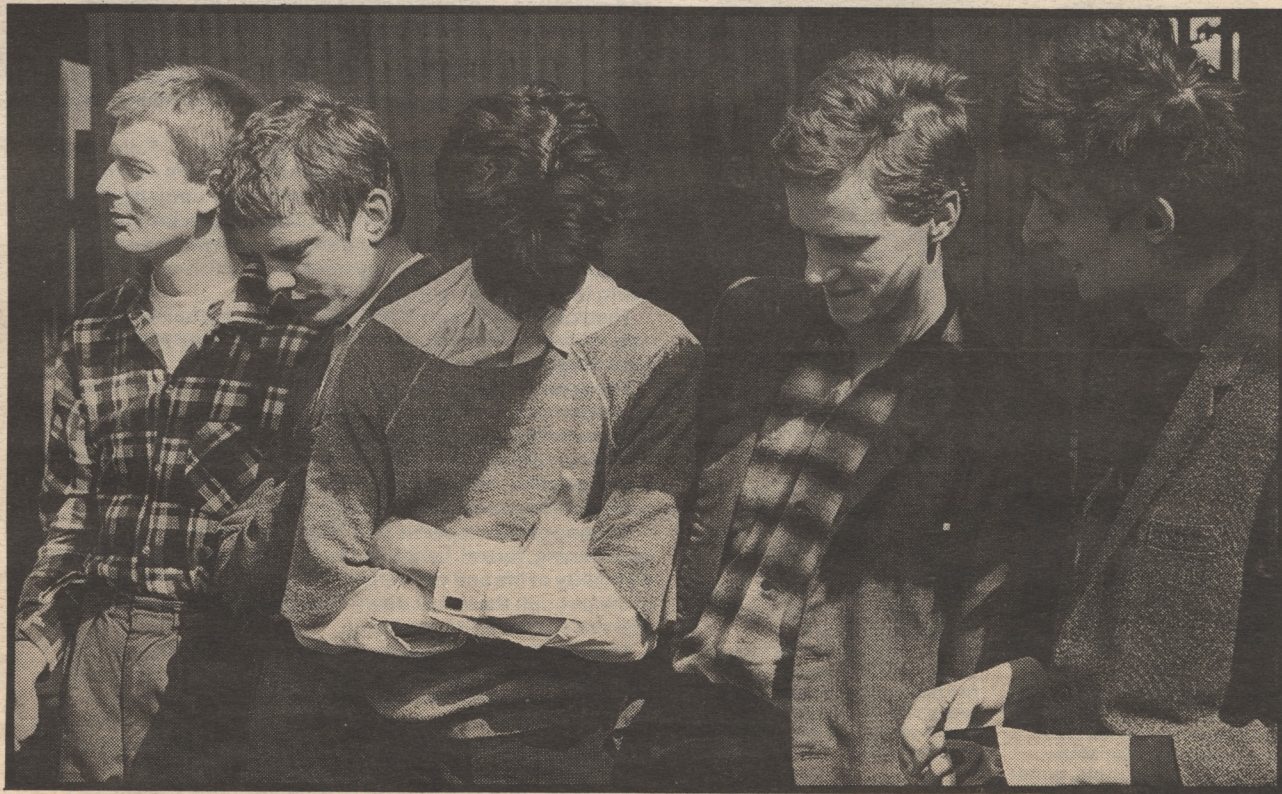
Anyway, the selections from 'Prayers On Fire' included here are just sketches, the caterwauling of big, bad boys with minuscule problems trying to be punky and fresh and shocking. The real Birthday Party story starts with 'Junkyard's' freeze-dried blues, where you finally hear an individual group struggling to build an identity.

Initially, the desolate crawling spectre of 'She's Hit', the rush of 'Six Inch Gold Blade' and the junkier prayer of 'Junkyard' itself are electrifying and amazingly wired, until you hear the words (irony included)...

A strain of virulent misogyny seems to afflict these songs, from Cave relishing a car-crash in which a woman is killed, to him sticking a knife into the head of a girl ('Dead Joe' is included for male 'balance'). And the hatred continues through the selections from 'The Bad Seed EP', with the sinister lovesong of 'Wild World' being contrasted with 'Deep In The Woods', where the murder victim is again female.

It's only with the final three tracks, ironically the group's dying throes, with Blixa Bargeld on second guitar, that the true transcendent qualities of these refuseniks become apparent. They might have missed off the elegaic 'Say A Spell' (because it was written by Rowland S Howard) but the heartbreaking 'Jennifer's Veil', the rabble-rousing 'Swampland' (where Cave is the soon-dead body for once) and the Catholic-baiting 'Mutiny In Heaven' open up endless vistas of possibilities only fulfilled after the split. (6)

Dele Fadele



The birth of The Birthday Party (l to r): Phil Calvert, Tracey Pew, Young Nick, Mick Harvey and Rowland S Howard