



STILLBORN

THE BREEDERS

**POD
4AD**

THE off-shoot or sideline project does not exactly have an illustrious history. But there were good reasons for having high hopes of The Breeders. There's always been the chance that Tanya Donelly could blossom away from the iron rule of Kristin Hersh and write a whole bunch of songs as good as "Green" and "Reel". Kim Deal, of course, has proven herself already by writing "Gigantic", the closest anyone's got to a female equivalent to the spirit of The Stooges. And Josephine Wiggs ... er, anyway, you catch my drift.

Yet somehow, the potential has gone awry. What's immediately striking is that, far from being a space where three hitherto subordinated musicians could nurture each other's creativity in a sisterly, democratic fashion, The Breeders are pretty much The Kim Deal Band. Almost all the songs are written and sung by her. Donelly gets a co-credit on "Only In 3's" — even less than the one or two songs she's allowed per Muses album. And, if Wiggs left Perfect Disaster because she was creatively marginalised, then she's out of the frying pan and into the fire: apart from the bass chores, her contribution to "Pod" would appear to be a smidgeon of "Spanish guitar" and some backing vocals (where she sounds like a chemistry teacher trying to rock out).

Clearly, the problem is that Donelly and Wiggs are completely over-awed by Kim Deal's super-cool. Fair enough: the woman is cool. But hanging out together, getting drunk, getting ripped, does not infallibly make for a vital or valid musical enterprise. Gang-leader Kim hasn't managed to sustain a whole album. The saddest thing about "Pod" is that the obvious put-down (just a collection of Pixies B-sides and fillers) is the correct one.

"Iris", the best song on the album (ie: the only one that could have made it on to "Doolittle") illustrates the point. It sounds like a Pixies' pastiche: the moronic/psychotic one chord, spasmic riff; the staccato, she-wolf howl of a chorus ("oh! oh! OH! OH! OH!"); the nice little gashes of gruelling, groiny feedback. Throughout the album, the guitar playing is an immaculate forgery

of Joey Santiago's signature: sudden squalls, geyser-gushing solos, surfadelic/Spaghetti Western twang, the lot. This wouldn't be so bad, except that the music sounds inhibited, moribund, stilted, never lets rip like The Pixies. Only "When I Was A Painter" and "Hellbound" sound remotely raucous.

"Hellbound" has already been described, accurately, by Kim as having "the worst lyric ever written by anybody in the world". It's about, "an abortion that lived". This pretty much typifies the pitch of gauche grotesquerie that The Breeders are striving for: somewhere between trash kultur and sub-Dali surrealism, George Romero and David Lynch.

Everything about The Breeders, from their name to the lyrics to the unappetising images on the record sleeve, suggests they want to mangle in the same twilight zone as The Pixies and play with the idea that man is a sick animal, that when instinct is suppressed it finds its release in the weirdest ways. But where Pixies music seems innately twisted, dirty, untamed, *f***ed*, The Breeders sound like they're trying too hard to be unhinged.

Whenever a song gathers momentum or thrust, they throw in a weird bit, a gear change or abrupt stop. They seem unhappy with the idea of simple rock exuberance. The result is difficult rather than uneasy listening: the ungainly "Lime House", the deadpan dirge of "Glorious", the violin-draped ballad "Oh!", as dank and lugubrious as a dying aspidistra. And "Metal Man", where Wiggs attempts a Kim Gordon-style *sotto voce*, spoken-word reverie, is plain embarrassing.

Kim Deal has one of the great American female voices; great because she sounds colloquial, seems to talk to you as much as sing. But, to be honest, there's more untamed insouciance and sheet *joie-de-vivre* in her backing vocals on Ultra Vivid Scene's "Special" than in the whole of "Pod" — an album as drab, dessicated and unloveable as its title.

The lesson of the whole Breeders escapade is that sometimes there's more glory (and, by the sound of it, more fun) in being trusty sidekicks than in being leading lights.

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