

BREEDING GREAT!

THE BREEDERS

Pod (4AD LP/Cassette/CD)

I CAN'T remember the last time the Independents produced some kind of Supergroup. We've had Revenge solo projects, fragments of bands like Spacemen 3 going off to get their heads together, but not your genuine mainstream rockism – the full-blown Notting Hillbillies-style supergroup.

But in the absence of new material from the Pixies and Throwing Muses we come as close as we're going to get with The Breeders: the fortunate aspect of 'Pod' being that it doesn't sound like an indulgent excuse for getting stoned with your dumb friends. The foursome – Throwing Muses' Tanya Donnelly, Kim Deal of Pixies, Jo Wiggs ex of The Perfect Disaster and Shannon Doughton – have produced a tight-ish piece of tantalising rock.

If anything, with Deal writing all the songs (save for a cover of The Beatles' 'Happiness Is A Warm Gun') it leans towards the Pixies. But essentially 'Pod' is the intuitive gelling of ideas from all sides. An improvising mix of menacing and melancholic music set against Deal's personalised lyrical themes and breathy, low-down vocals.

Following on from their appearance on *Snub TV* and the John Peel session this (one-off?) record does all it can to justify the attention it'll receive because of the people involved with it – right down to engineer Steve Albini. It has the unpredictability and tense atmosphere of 'Surfer Rosa' and 'Doolittle', along with flashes of ferocity and pure, gracefully glowing catchiness.

The initial thought, particularly on Side Two, is that they'd overdone the sparseness (that it was the sort of LP best appreciated if you'd just painted your bedroom completely black). But it grows on you like hell. 'Pod' is a lasting, enduring album, not simply some stop-gap, and anyone who tells you different probably has their head too full of Rock Theories to hear properly.

'When I Was A Painter' is a classic Deal song, with the opining, husky voice and the stop-start guitar surges, while their version of 'Happiness Is A Warm Gun' stretches out the original into a new, taut, drum-kicked sound. Throughout 'Pod' The Breeders show what you can achieve by leaving some space in the songs: by leaving instruments *out* rather than the current trend of filling them *in* ('Doe' being a good example, stripped down but punchy).

'Fortunately Gone' is a good, deceptively poppy start to Side Two followed by 'Iris', a hectic, screeching number (which is where the Black Bedroom came in). That said, 'Pod' isn't weighed down by Art – there is some reason behind the sleeve's madness – and they try just hard enough on it without sounding like they're trying too hard.

Finishing off with 'Lime House' and the perfectly harmonised 'Mettle Man' with Wiggs playing spanish guitar, 'Pod' is a welcome collection of emotive challenges. And from an almost-Supergroup, it's a good Deal better than expected. (9)

Steve Lamacq



The real Deal? (Left to right) Tanya, Kim and Jo