



# BLOOD LUST

## THIS MORTAL COIL

**BLOOD**  
(4AD)

AT last, a double LP of dreams from a label that doesn't want to launch the next Eddie Cochran. 4AD are blessed with immaculate taste and a terrific record collection. The last couple of times all-round impresario, theoretician and musical coordinator, Ivo Watts-Russell assembled his favourite singers and players – on 1984's "It'll End In Tears" and '87's "Filigree & Shadow" – This Mortal Coil tackled Roy Harper, Alex Chilton, Tim Buckley, Van Morrison, David Byrne and Wire's Colin Newman like never before. The best moments ("Song To The Siren", "Holocaust") were revelations.

For "Blood", the careers of Randy California (Spirit), Chris Bell (Big Star), Gene Clark (Byrds), Syd Barrett (Pink Floyd) and Mary Margaret O'Hara are given the posthumous reappraisal treatment, sometimes treacherously, more often with a perfectly balanced mixture of respect, awe and commitment to radical reinterpretation. Very rarely does "Blood" suck. When it works, you realise only sex, battling tops and the new Electronic album will be as great all year. It's the kind of disappointment worth living with.

Not everything here demands we reach for the adjectives and italics. There's a distinct air of oh-it's-4AD-so-it-must-be-good around the project, the kind of mood you feel virtually press-ganged into revering so as not to reveal your poor upbringing and lack of social grace. It's that sensation of dumbstruck bemusement one might get in an art gallery when confronted by four square feet of squiggles, dashes and splatters of paint on canvas (actually, I'm kidding, I love De Chirico).

It's like, I want to suggest that "Baby Ray Baby" just sounds like two minutes and 13 seconds of puking and mewling noises from an infant spewing incomprehensible gobbledegook over a backing track of odd industrial clatter, but I daren't in case I'm caught out and someone appears from behind my

desk to squeal, "H-ha! Gotcha! You didn't like that track, eh? And that was the one where Ivo was commenting on the finite nature of existence. Dummy!" Such is the dilemma occasionally presented by "Blood".

Many of these 21 songs are more beautiful than breathing, though. Shelleyan Orphan's Caroline Crawley lends what must surely be the country's most undervalued syrupy warble to Syd Barrett's "Late Night 5" and Mary Margaret's "Help Me Life You Up", and achieves a sweet but terrifying intimacy to rival Karen Carpenter in each instance. My dying wish would have been for Caroline to sing Spirit's "Nature's Way", the one true lament for a decaying earth in pop's sorry pantheon of concern; instead of Alison Limerick, who seems to think it's an audition for an Andrew Lloyd-Webber musical.

The divine Ms Crawley would also have been more suited to "Several Times" and "Carolyn's Song", rather than the huskily-toned Deirdre Rutkowski. The former is a glorious programmed string-drenched elegy, the latter as wretchedly poignant as Laura Nyro at her most harrowing, yet it's a testament to 4AD's pursuit of excellence that they could have been even *better*. Album of the century accolades were *that* close.

Chris Bell provides the two heart-stopping moments of torrid beauty on "Blood". The handsome genius whose fierce artistic clashes with Alex Chilton resulted in Big Star's utterly essential "No One Record" LP, and who drove his car off a cliff in the late Seventies just when his creative muse was returning to peak condition, has his plaintive acoustic tale of deceit and desire, "You and Your Sister" (harmonised by Kim Deal and Tanya Donnelly), and the colossally self-absorbed monument to despair, "I Am The Cosmos", unearthed and brought to brilliant life by This Mortal Coil. The world turns on such prodigious acts of tender care. Jesus loves you, Ivo.

PAUL LESTER