



Curses! Kristin Hersh feels the Muse trying to break out again

HEX MANIACS

THROWING MUSES

The Curse (4AD/CD only)

STOP ME if you've heard this one before, but I've always considered Throwing Muses to be the Pixies' most aloof siblings. First impressions lasting longest and all that, when 4AD's Boston Seethe Party first toured the UK in its full label package glory, while the Pixies were the kind of nutters you'd gladly go joyriding with, The Muses... well, the Muses were the kind of band you respected from afar and never really wanted to share a six-pack with underneath the baseball park grandstand. Let's face it, they're weird.

Hardly earth-shattering confessions, I admit. But that attitude has prevailed for over half a decade, and 'The Curse' doesn't know whether to clear up the situation or simply amplify the confusion. Herewith a 'special' cheap-ish limited edition CD-only jobbie featuring 18 tracks recorded at the Muses' two London Grand shows way back not so long ago. Which makes it the bargain of the week or a disposable donkey of a release, depending on your perspective.

Whatever, if your intestines get tied up in knots over bootlegs, 'The Curse' could cause terminal internal damage. The applause is comfortably distant, Kristin Hersh's vocals are reassuringly muffled – a sure sign this is an 'authentic' recording – and the three Muses rumble their way through their career from 'Hate My Way' to 'Fire Pile', sounding suitably tired and emotional come the close. Good.

Again, it's a fascinating mixture of maudlin moods and berserk outbursts. Again, it fails to hit the target every time. For sure, 'Hate My Way' is excellent, a whiplashed stab of emotions throughout which one can shiver along to the demons cartwheeling through Kristin's mind. But against that, a version of Hendrix's 'Manic Depression' is a cerebral card trick which warrants polite applause and scant gut reaction. Which isn't bad for a blinkin' instrumental...

The good thing about 'The Curse' is the way the music strains at the sociable leash; the lyrics are frequently impossible to fathom simply because Kristin's guitar is cranked up so high, creaking across 'Furious' and 'Snail Head' like a particularly malevolent bulldozer. There's a pleasing roughness to proceedings which one wouldn't instantly equate with the Muses' (supposedly) more careful instincts. And how apt a title is 'Mania'? Oh, very.

In the end one has to err on the plus side, if only because 'The Curse' has the ability to knock preconceptions into a cocked hat and it makes the gigs sound like they were bloody good fun. Some of my colleagues would gladly drive blindfold into a brick wall for this band, and while this collection hardly brings out the suicidal in me, I might be tempted to start coming along for the ride. Six-packs and all.

Shhh! Some ghosts are being laid to rest. (7)

Simon Williams