

THROWING UP IN PUBLIC

THROWING MUSES

The Real Ramona (4AD/All formats)

WRITTEN AND recorded in the shadow of lawsuits, custody battles and band upheavals, the fourth Muses album effortlessly surpasses its ancestors and brazenly kicks ass. Where once there stood a confused, moody and often apologetic child now stands a quietly confident she-devil, fully grown with all the scars to prove it.

"That last one messed me up/Things look bad, things look tragic," wails the wonderful Kristin Hersh at one point, but her forked tongue is in her cheek and she is surveying past damage, not battenning down hatches for the coming storm.

Whereas previous albums have sometimes been dominated by one prevailing mood, the tracks huddled together for mutual support, almost every song here explodes out of its shell with guns blazing.

We already know that current single 'Counting Backwards' is bold and brash, all criss-crossing drones and clattering military percussion. But witness the smouldering menace of 'Red Shoes', its smooth surface gradually breaking up into choppy turbulence and violent mood swings, or 'Ellen West' with its crescendos of guitars and twisted rhythms.

Look for the old, angry Muses and you won't be disappointed. Spiralling snake pits like 'Hook In Her Head' recall the times when every band member seemed to be pulling against the rest, Hydra-headed banshee beasts heading for the nearest asylum. But far more gratifying are the moments when Kristin, Tanya and their two boy-slaves work together on classically catchy tunes; mangled mutant pop, perhaps, but pop nevertheless. 'Graffiti' is just such an

Kristin: 'Real' good

animal, alongside 'Honey Chain' and 'Two Step', nursery rhyme harmonies teased into cool but sad-hearted surroundings. Topping both of these is Tanya's breathless Blondie impression on the voluptuous 'Not Too Soon', knowingly nostalgic girly-pop

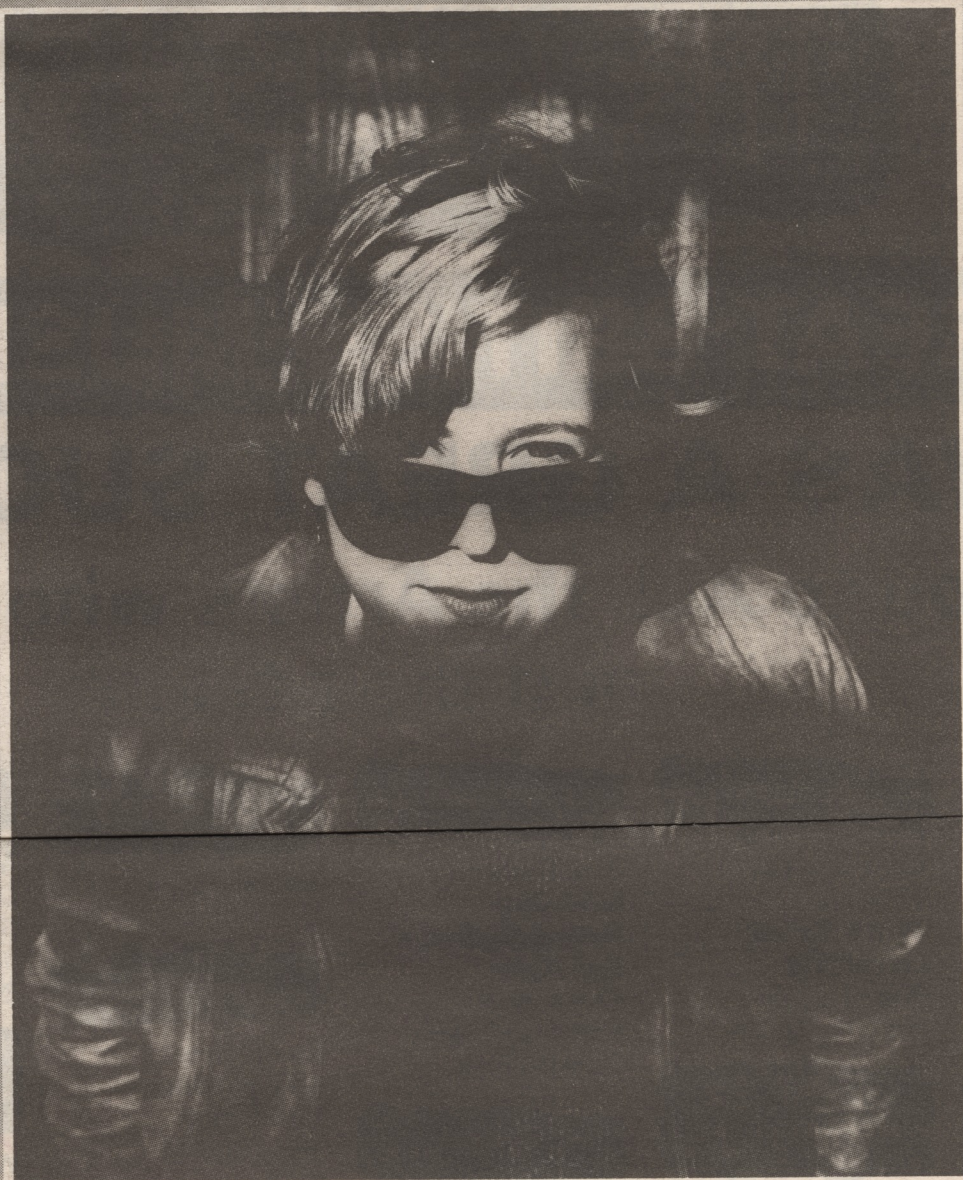
which steals its brother's leather jacket and stays out all night. Like former teenage rebels trying on their old Sunday school dresses and discovering they still fit.

From the tribal barbed-wire tangle of 'Golden Thing' to the fragile beauty of 'Dylan',

Boston's finest have delivered a solid set of dense, diverse tunes which absorb Tanya's Breeders-inspired sweetness without erasing Kristin's studied savagery.

It seems Ramona has come of age. (8)

Stephen Dalton



PICTURE: HARRY BORDEN