

ADVANCE

Edited by JIM ARUNDEL

EACH WEEK: THE CREAM OF THE NEW BANDS, NEWS FROM ELSEWHERE, MEDIA WAVES AND STUFF TO WIN

Lovers of today

PICK
OF THE WEEK

Melbourne's UNDERGROUND LOVERS have just released an album called 'Leaves Me Blind'. It's the kind of record that scatters superlatives in its wake as critics attempt to identify just what it is that makes it so f***ing great. Is it its cinematic sweep, its startling poignancy or its sense of seductive loss? SHARON O'CONNELL reports



"UNDERNEATH every beautiful moment there's always something that will taint it", says Underground Lovers' vocalist Vince Giarrusso, entirely without regret. It's that sane if sombre world view that informs much of "Leaves Me Blind", the Australian band's second album but their first for Guernica, 4AD's new label. And it's a swoonworthy, accomplished airing of the collective doubts and desires of their quietly spooked soul, a lush beauty with menace stirring gently beneath the seductive surface. It comes as no surprise that Vince is a fan of Julee Cruise, David Lynch and Angelo Badalamenti, because "Leave Me Blind" has an epic sweep that has more to do with cinema than most pop music. The opening track, "Eastside Stories", introduces the movie obsession. It's a dark blue, guitar-churning drama that updates "West Side Story" to the multi-cultural, present-day Australia, and has Vince, a second-generation Italian, muttering something about "talking to the f***ing dago", with suitably nasty scorn.

"Over here there's a definite undercurrent of racism," he explains. "It's veiled but it's always there. I got that at high school even though it wasn't as bad for me as it was for some other kids, but it was still there."

Like the other Lovers, Vince is a self-confessed movie junkie hooked on the peculiarly passive nature of the thing. His favourite film this year is "My Own Private Idaho" and he's currently working on his own script, "about a young boy who stays overnight in a shopping mall, and these strange things happen." Exactly what's the big deal with film, then?

"It's just the actual form of cinema", he explains, "the way you can get totally enveloped in a mood and transported somewhere else. You're not part of it; you just watch and then walk out. Actually the original idea for the album was that it would be called 'The Long Long Trailer'

and be all about holidays and getting away from everything. We do live lives outside the cinema, though. But only just," he jokes.

Despite the general broodiness and melodrama, though, there's plenty of intensely ferocious guitar-pop, too. "Promenade" builds to a thunderous crash-endo reminiscent of Ed Kuepper or Straitjacket Fits. Apart from this sub-Valentines power drive there are a couple of wild cards on the album. Like "Ladies Choice", a piece of deliberately cold electro-funk "about a stripper and sex that's paid for". But "Holiday" is maybe the real shy star, where Philippa Nihill murmurs "is this your idea of a holiday?" with the heavy regret that comes from realising something will never live up to your expectations.

"We have a lot of Japanese tourists out here and I see that on the faces of a lot of them," Vince laughs. "They have no choice; they can't get out of it. That's pretty funny, but it's really sad, too."

Is he happy with this effort then?

"I like the way it goes from male to female and heavy to light, and back, and mixes the two all the time. Whenever we're doing something, if we see it going in one particular direction, like sounding really 'nice', then we'll always consciously draw back a bit the other way. We try to keep that tension. That's what makes for atmosphere. That's exciting."

'Leaves Me Blind' is out now on Guernica. The band plan to tour here in the new year

UNDERGROUND LOVERS are: Vince Giarrusso, vocals; Glenn Bennie, guitars; Richard Andrew, drums; Philippa Nihill, keyboards/vocals/guitars and Maurice Argiro, bass