SMALL PACKAGES OF SWELLNESS IN THE MAIL

(Title courtesy Rob Christie)

Chocolate chip cookies from home, a forgotten check from the Internal Residue Service, a post card from your friend in Wales -- these things are mighty swell as far as swellness goes (which isn't, after all, all that far). But the swellest thing to get in the mail, as any indy music lover will tell you, is a package from that obscure record or tape distributor from Wisconsin or Washington or Georgia. If you're hip to it, the procedure is simple and pretty fool proof. You read in your favorite generic fanzine, or off the back of the your newest, wholesome waste of what should have been food money, and you spot a band that you've heard of or maybe that you just want to hear of. Send $5 (or $4, or $6) to P.O. Box so-and-so, and in a few weeks all you're thinking of is brushing your teeth or maybe finally getting your hair cut, and you open the mailbox, and you find this package just enough to fit inside, 4 inches by 3 inches without padding. And as simple as that, you've got something to put in your walkman when you leave your house. The alternate plans require the co-operation of a friend, and it involves getting the same sort of package without asking for it. The advantage is you get a longer letter accompanying it, the disadvantage is that your friend might be a Skinny Puppy fan.

Leaving the second alternative up to you and your friend's imagination, here's a brief and very personally selected glance at two of the swellest tape propagators I've run across. First is the Cassette King of the Pacific Northwest, Calvin K, who you can write at Box 7154, Olympia, WA 98507, and the second is Baby Sue Records, the dry dream of Steven Fievet of MNOP, featuring mainly Steven Fievet playing lots of electronic instruments, and reachable at his new address which is P.O. Box 1111 Decatur, GA 30031.

K Cassettes: various artists, "Let's Sea" ($5); The Cannanes, "Happy Swing" ($5); Beat Happening, "Three Tea Breakfast" ($4). Let's Sea is the third "Let's" compilation, following "Let's Kiss" and "Let's Together," and it's mainly northwest bands but also Half Japanese from Baltimore, and the Cannanes and Lighthouse Keepers from Australia. The Half Japanese cut is what "12XU" would have sounded like if Jad Fair had written it, and there's also cool stuff by Washington bands Beat Happening, Fastbacks & Screaming Trees, all of which have vinyl out as well. The Cannanes hail from outside Melbourne, but they sound mainly like one of the upper-echelon New Zealand crowd. Their singer's slightly tinny voice is offset by harshly funny lyrics and simply gut work. The tapes best moment is where they omplete a spoken word voice-over rhyme with "I don't think he meant it when he called you a mother-fucker.

Beat Happening, who also have two singles and an LP on K records, is Calvin's band, with him sharing vocal duties with one Heather. Although Heather has the weeter voice, both of them do a credible job matching Fievet's rhythm with liness in restoring youth innocence and simplicity to its rightful, unprocessed lace at the heart and soul of underground music.

Baby Sue: LMNOP ($5). This is the second of three tapes Fievet put out in preparation for his LP last year. It's not as noisy as the LP, which I think is actually a plus, at least in the several cases where the songs Fievet churns out are honestly worth paying attention to. Things like "Pop Idols" and "Mecchanical Machina," which don't appear on the LP, feature tunes won't go away, and lyrics that stay with you even longer. There is some masturbation here and there, but what do you expect from a guy playing with a bunch of instruments all day in an otherwise empty room?

TOTA LLY LIVE REVIEWS=

CHRISTMAS-BIG DIPPER-YO LA TENGO The RAT June Six

Yo la Tengo is another one of those New Jersey guitar bands, and they'll probably hate me for saying that but it's true. Fortunately the guitar parts were sincere, interesting, and all that necessary jazz, and their drummer kept me awake by using these really huge sticks and looking like she was writing this important letter home all the while she used 'em. Big Dipper valiantly kept up the myth that Boston bands have to be awkward, unprofessional, and only brilliar in three-minute bursts. The brilliance tonight came in the form of Steve Michener acting like Kevin Seconds (now and then) and their encore performance of "Pasty," their new Homestead thing. Seeing Christmas for the first time since before their junket with those fat brothers of Warner reminded me more than anything else of the Bugs Bunny special I had seen on TV the night before. In both cases, the animation wasn't quite as good as I'd recalled, and although Mel Blanc (Mike Cudahy's evil twin when Cosloy's busy jocking off) still did all the voices, it was just a little too pat. But above all, the 1987 version of Christmas and Bugs made me realize that what had counted as fun, entertaining, and ingenious after school in the third grade (or before Nikki Sudden two years ago, which amounts to the same thing) just DOESN'T WORK ANYMORE. Even with the miraculous bouncing Wolf from New Jersey on bass, Christmas only barely avoided coming off as cardboard cutouts with a bag full of wind-up wacky antics. Just pull the string for yet another version of "Fish Eye Sandwich." No, not again!

REDD KROSS-DAG NASTY-CAVE DOGS The RAT May 29

This WMBR shindig featured five bands, so I did more than half-okay by catching three of 'em. The Cave Dogs were unpolished but promising, passing the songwriting baton back and forth between their bass player, who wanted to be Glenn Tilbrook, and their guitar player, who just wanted to be a Cave Dog. Dag Nasty came on for a fifteen minute warmup for their show the next afternoon at TTs, and the combination of Brian Baker's guitar blizzard with a performance so tight you could here it squeak in Natick, all this was enough to hide the fact that Dave Smalley is the most pretentious asshole this side of Mark Stewart. Redd Kross just plain did it up, California-style. They really don't have a care in the world, even at the Rat the day after two of their guitars had gotten stolen at the airport. Why some people think these guys suck live is totally beyond me, unless they don't know what it means to have fun. Total seventies and hair and smiles, teasing the whole audience but mainly teasing themselves, and loving every minute of it. Only Redd Kross would think it was cool to sandwich an entire Creedence song inside the French bread that's "Linda Blair," and only Redd Kross could get away with it. If I had any Meat Puppets records I'd sell 'em to see these guys again.

MORE LIVE REVIEWS (WELL, ONE MORE AT LEAST)
RECORD REVIEWS UP PATRICK'S BUTT

ETON CROP--A Bundle of Bucks (for a dead dog is a bargain) (Ediesta EP) Or more to the point, a stuffed animal in a toaster oven. This particular stuffed animal learned all its English from British public school dropouts who sold their Gramsci paperbacks and moved to Amsterdam because the heroin's cheaper there. I think I'd rather hang out with the Beastie Boys. Well, on the B-Side "Banana Battle" hums along a la "Yes Please Bob," and they do spring the most plausible sounding utterance of "bourgeoisie" I've ever heard along side a drum machine.

WORLD WAR XXIV (Aberrant LP) Way up there on lots of scales, including oud guitars, political incorrectness, and sloppy production. Fortunately, the loud guitars are so loud that you tend to forget that any of those other scales ever mattered (and besides, how much worse is an anti-lesbian song than the Housemartins or Billy Bragg, really?) Proving once again that the electric guitar is one of the most truly subversive instruments ever invented, right up there with alcohol and pornography, and other designs intended to help you forget what a creep you really are. Some of the best music ever invented if you want to (faq)bash on blue afternoons.

ASTBACKS And his Orchestra (Popluma LP) If I say this is one of my favorite records of the year, I shouldn't have to preface that with "I'll stick my scrummy neck out..." Why do, I can only half-figure out. The fact that this Seattle outfit has come up with one of the stupidest record covers I've ever seen, and that they do lay an occasional classical pteradactyl egg in strange middles of pop songs, sure, these things make it a little difficult to groove to the BEST HARD-EDGED AMERICAN UGLY GUM POP RECORD of the year. Yeah, that hard-edged bubble gum is n-da hard to swallow, especially if you didn't have the experience of buying baseball cards when you were a kid and figuring out which one was the gum only because it didn't have a picture on it...or if you just didn't get around to listening to the Soup rags, Shop Assistants, Hard Ons, Pastels, or any of the other best bands of 86.

ME SPIDERS My Favourite Room (Virgln 45) The cover art is a new reception for the 'Spiders, a droll Dr. Sues/Fritz the Cat hybrid, but what's inside sure it. Just one more time down that well-worn (out) road, the one with decibel signs at every turn. What's the Southern Hemisphere coming to when loud is the norm, when you get to that third chord and still want something more than a prolonged wah pedal propellled by the drum sound of two fat aborigines slapping their mud flaps together? Is there something more than this, or is it just time to go back to the womb and kick around with Shane Carter and Nikki Sudden? Sure, I'm exhilarated, Mr. God, if it's possible to be exhilarated and bored at the same time.

INTACT INCITE! C/O TIM ALBORN AT MY EDITORIAL OFFICES, CHESTER ROAD, BELMONT, MASS. 02178.

I WILL ALWAYS LOVE YOU XXXXX

MY DAD IS DEAD Peace, Love & Murder (This is Cleveland not Uganda LP) This record features at least one of the class songs of 1987, "Babe the Woods," with a wormy left hook that calls to mind the spooky cringe of Yo's vocalist and the sweet poison of Death of Samantha. Too bad the rest of the album is two or three Joy Divisions below that one moment of truth.

ROSEHIPS Room in my Heart (Subway Org. EP) Shop Assistants by the numbers, with a real drum set snuck in through the stage door. I'm sure it's just the malignant soft spot which is threatening to overrun my record collection, but this "unoriginal" Nico meets the Ramones stuff counts for a lot more in my book than that "creative" trash by Wisebool and their ilk.

VARIOUS SEEDS Vol. 1: Pop (Cherry Red LP) Up till now I generally have chosen to pass on Cherry Red chow, but what we have here is a real winner. If the rest of the "Seeds" series is as good as its leadoff, it should be mighty successful a uncovering bands and records that actually deserve and need to be uncovered. Volume One includes the Pastel's first single "Heavens Above" (on the TV Personalities' old label), plus warm memories from the June Brides, Distractions, and Vital Disorders.

MICHELLE SHOCKED Texas Campfire Tapes/If Love was a Train (Cookin' Vinyl LP,EP) I almost hate to report that this was recorded on a Sony in the middle of a field in Texas (you actually can hear the crickets), because the sound quality and the style of music on the record defies your usual tape-box/studio distinctions. I also almost hate to bring up Suzanne Vega's name in this context, but the similarities between her and Ms. Shocked force me too. They also force me to wonder (I know the answer, Joe Promotion Agency) why Suzanne Vega is a bona fide Folk Heroin who cops twenty bucks a ticket and Michelle Shocked is still squatting in NYC. Her songs are absolutely sincere and true, even though she doesn't always tell the truth. Actually they're more like tall tales than songs, more like hearing stories by the fireside than listening to a record. The EP features two tracks worth of Michelle in the studio, one okay and the other a beautiful song all but ruined by distressing strings. I guess that's what she meant when she told me at the Mekons show that her stint in the studio "didn't work out."
HATING MY FRIENDS
LEMONHEADS RECORD RELEASE PARTY
JUNE 4 TT THE BEAR'S PLACE w/Moving Targets, What Now

"I'd like to thank my mom for buying me a drink..."
  --Jesse, between songs

They tell me that Brookline has one of the best Little League teams in the
country.
They tell me the Lemonheads are one of the best new punk rock bands
around these days.
To be a good Little League team, you need an ace pitcher (preferably with a
curve ball), a couple of power hitters, and good coaching. Of course, it doesn't
hurt if the little leaguers' parents are well-off enough and concerned enough
about the welfare of their kids to spring for good equipment, summer baseball
camps, and trips to the Little League Playoffs in Pennsylvania.
To be a good punk rock band...

What comes after the dots and what happened at TT's on June 4 should have
been one and the same thing. Instead, I think I learned a lot more about Little
League baseball than punk rock, or maybe about what happens when the two
are mixed together in a stiff Beacon Hill cocktail.

"You've got the same ears as Mozart"
  -- Some guy pretending to be the
  conductor of the Boston Philharmonic, during "So I Fucked Up"

What's worse, he actually was the conductor of the Philharmonic. So-- what does
this Mozart fag have to do with "So I Fucked Up"? I'm afraid I don't know the
answer-- you'll have to ask your father that one. I should have been amused, I
guess, instead of disturbed, caught as I was in the doorway between a living
room full of prep school seniors wholesomey enjoying the night before graduation
and a kitchen full of half-drunk, half-erect chaperones talking about musicology
and the new editorial in Forbes. Honking their horns whenever one of the
kids hit a punk rock home run, listening intently as Evan sang his ever-lovin' guts
out about the big one that got away, about what it's like to hate your friends -- is
that supposed to be amusing, Ev?

"Hey, it's punk rock. Who cares?"
  -- Ben, between songs

Yeah, who cares about writing songs that work at more than one level? Who
cares about covering songs that work at less than five? Yeah Ben, I love you, I
love punk rock... but what the fuck is this? Look, the Ep was great, a few things
off the album are still with me three weeks later, and they'll probably remain
there. I just wish these guys didn't always seem so under the influence whenever
I see 'em play. If it's necessary to consult Bob Mould or Pete Shelley or
Paul Westerberg whenever you make a chord change, just what the fuck is the
point anyway?
SONS OF ISHMAEL INTERVIEW
TIM ALBORN TALKS TO TIM FREEBORN, AND LIVES.

Sons of Ishmael are a hardcore band (remember those?) from Meaford, Ontario, which is somewhere north of Toronto. A couple years back they put out an EP called "Hayseed Hardcore," and nowadays you can find them on a compilation called "Apathy Never" (Over the Top records). Coming soon from them will be a split LP on the same label & hopefully a U.S. tour. The band feature Tim Freeborn on vocals, drummer Chris Black, bassist Mike Canzi, lead guitarist Ditch Dog Poirier, and guitarist Paul Morris. So... first question, please?

Incite!: How old are you and what do you do besides playing in a band?
SOI: Paul is 21, and he goes to college and plays in another band called M.S.I. (More Stupid Initials). Mike is 20, he goes to university [Toronto] and does a radio show there, Ditch Dog is 20, and goes to college and plays in another band called B.S.L., Chris is 21, he works in the Eaton Center and also on his car, and Tim is 20 and he recently returned to Grade 13 for a semester; he also does a fanzine called KILL POSEURS.

Incite!: How long have you been together? Where have you done shows and who with?
SOI: We've been together (in various line ups) since the spring of '84. This line up has been together since the fall of '85. We've played in Toronto, Ottawa, London, Meaford, Guelph, Kent (Ohio), and Newport (Kentucky). We've played with 76% Uncertain, A.D.O., Active Ingredients, Straw Dogs, Hype, Sudden Impact, and Problem Children, among others.

Incite!: What's Meaford Ontario like? Is it a "Small Town Mentality" sort of place?
SOI: It's a pretty boring place, and there's nothing to do if you're not into sports (except play in a punk rock band). It really is a smalltown mentality sort of place, but I've yet to see a town or city that wasn't, no matter how many people live there.

Incite!: Could you say something about Canadian politics for ignorant Americans in our audience?
SOI: Canadian politics is pretty similar to American politics in that only rich people can afford to run for office. Of course, rich people represent the views of their class, and only pro-big business parties have a chance of getting elected because of their extensive financial backing (i.e. media support counts a lot and only those with money can afford to advertise). Social benefits seem to be better in Canada (i.e. O.H.I.P., Medicare, welfare, etc.). In short, people are still oppressed in the U.S. and Canada by the capitalist class [correct -- ed.]
THE NME 1979-83: POLITICALLY CONCERNED SCENESTERS OR HYPOCRITICAL WASTES OF TIME?

What a typical NME headline, only thinly hiding its hypocrisy behind "cute" ambiguity. For those of you who don't have enough experience posing to know, NME stands for New Musical Express, the official artiste's guide to "our" kind of music across the Atlantic. For those of you who don't care, it also stands for one of the best instances of hairspray hypocrisy in an England where, in the past at least, pretending to know what's best for the working class has been a national pastime among Labour Party types. Still, I suppose, although a decade of Thatcherism has dilluted Kinock's high brow and taken the wind out of the political sails of NME's student audience.

Fortunately, the mag -- now an apathetic shell of its former smarmy self-- has left a legacy of print from the age of the Falkland Islands, the Brixton riots, and "Bingo Masters Breakout." An age where the hope of Britain lay, strangely enough, not in the working classes, but instead in a curiously breed of Cure fans, public school devotees of Mark E. and Robert Smith who were apparently the only ones well-educated enough to articulate the plight of the poor, to appreciate the proper nature of the conflict, and -- coincidentally -- the only ones who bought NME every week. The rest were simply drop -- enlightened '77 retreats, ignored by the music journal in The Know unless they made the mistake of expressing a glint of the reality of British working-class violence, racial tension and nationalism in all its misguided glory. Much better to listen to the Fall, headed by someone who probably reads poetry, or Billy Bragg, who actually writes poetry for those poor culture-starved workers on the dole.

The real enemy -- October 81

The quacking Oil mirage was a tacitly accepted as a pet, and it's screams will be comfortably harvested by the consorium. Ultimately it's a demented shriek into oblivion, a queer collision of unsound and depressive popular culture that will inspire nothing but the perpetration amongst some of the hysterical reasoning that such comments and mythically minor instances is an encouragement or contribution to new values.

Discharge's 'Never Again' (Clay) is the kind of single screwy rock criticism we can accept, it has a certain degree of deflection, of so few possibilities can ever lead to anything profoundly informative or exhilarating. I can, of course, see the difference, there are many more possibilities, the force of oppression.

The fall are still the most important band in the land, and still taking part in our queen's and stupid myths. Mark Smith knows what to blacken: "We are going to have to die just a little, and a certain depression of life never did thought anything will happen. When we have discovered ourselves in this vision, we will wake out of our social slumber, out of our dying mass culture. And we will each of us have the right to dream our myths all over again.

I still believe Mark Smith is the only really important writer and singer in the vast, mythic-structured culture that is the NME. So here in this NME I want to write that could make the possibility of a new game of fame, and imagination.

Adrian Thrills interviews the new rock partnership of Neil Kinock's and Billy Bragg who explain Labour's and new young people run.

The real question, which the NME somehow managed to avoid asking itself or its readers on a weekly basis, was how to combine an abiding interest in politics and a critical attitude to music without constantly finding the two in conflict. It's a problem which probably doesn't have much of a solution apart from recognizing that it exists, but instead the NME want to complacently about its business of applying a critical double-standard to bands that either didn't fit into their student Labour agenda. The unlucky ones -- like The Business, Co Sparrer, Blitz and The Adicts -- were immediately disregarded as purveyors of "pulp music" and punks. Benny Hill parodies of bands who gave the public what they asked for instead of being pillared spoonfuls of Socialist coffee syrup which the NME thought was tastier than Oil punk rock, and certainly better for them. The idea was that Blitz could Screem and Shout they wanted without changing anything, while (so it went) Madness could turn a ska rev into a socialist revolution. In kinder moments, the self-appointed quality controllers at the NME excused bands like the Defects or the Four Skins for appealing to the common denator, since their only alternative to making money was standing in dole lines. As report-carrying Working Class Sympathizers, the NME had to at least appear to appreciate evil economic forces which might lead to unfortunate uses of the music medium, but their sympathy stopped there. Even bands like Discharge or the Subhumans, who read all the books, counted for naught in NME's book, because they preached to the converted -- apparently meaning that they sold their records for 90p and covered their sleeves with Sex propaganda instead of thanking John Peel.

The most obvious manifestation of the NME's double standard in musical criticism, an their unwillingness to admit it, would appear whenever one of their working class saviours WHETHER BILLY BRAGG, THE REDSKINS, OR THE CLASH -- sold themselves so far down the road ev the blindest Oxford bag lady couldn't miss it. When this happened the student weekly has face two embarrassing facts. First, it shot holes through their whole ideology that smart young socialists could use the medium to their advantage without being effected by such patently human pitfalls as ego clashes, drug addiction, bad songwriting, and plain old greed. Seco the NME had to realize -- and competing journals like Sounds didn't let them forget it -- that their wishfully thought-out superhuman socialist rock star ideal was not only an illusion, it was an illusion for which they themselves were largely responsible. The best case of this happening involved a bona-fide skinhead named X. Moore, who the NME rescued from the dole by hiring as a reviewer and correspondent, and who later went on to fame and ignore a Redskin. As a reviewer, X was allowed by the mag to find a couple harmless Oil bands (I Rook was his favorite), pretend that they were somehow different from the rest, then write glowing pieces about them which were homely yet sufficiently well-versed in Marx. As a correspondent, X got sent along on one of the Right to Work marches in '81, providing the NME with a snapshot of Wiggins Pier, and at the same time a fistful of working class cred amongst their oh-so concerned readers. Of course, all the skins marching with X were probe reading Sounds, if anything, and listening to the Angelic Upstarts on their box.

Once Moore joined the Redskins this concentrated lunge at reality started wearing a little thin -- soapbox interviews nearly every month, and live reviews prating on and on about how the Redskins playing in Wembley should have Thatcher trembling in her combat boots. Why? The Redskins' star made its swift descent after only a year or so in the lime light, the NME welcomed it with clipped news reports and hardly any critical attempt to find out what went wrong. X. Moore's annoying ego, which was given full reign as long as he was holding an NH camera up some editor's ass, was suddenly not a news item once it got in the way of the musicians' revolt.

It's actually unfortunate that the Love to Hate syndrome doesn't really apply to the NME anymore. Their cover persona now is more likely to be We've Got a Fuzzbox than Billy Bragg, and their stream lined sycochancy has to stand by itself now that the greater political good has lost its appeal. In the end, probably hypocrisy beats apathy, merely because hypocrites annoy you into thinking, taking sides, and important things like that, and another...
got the feeling I'd been cheated, and I was sure that was the half-cocked plan. The Ex-Lion Tamers layed down one of the best shaggy dog stories I'd heard, an excessively stupid joke (a Wire cover band concentrating almost exclusively on "Pink Flag") played so straight it was a riot. Sharing the vocals were a guitarist who had severe Albini pretenses, and a drummer who could probably beat David Thomas in a pie-eating contest. They managed to replicate the song sequence on "Flag," and didn't say anything between songs apart "second side" when they flipped it over and "Here It Is Again..." before their cover of Minor Threat's 12XU. A near-ideal copy.

Wire toyed with the sell-out audience all night, treating us to glimpses of both ridiculous and sublime, and sometimes both at once. Worthy of ridicule were most of assist Lewis's pranks, as well as his unsettling tendency to look and act like a cross between Phil Oakley and Phil in Phlash, and Colin Newman prancing about with his open smile in "Ambitious" asking "Are You HOT?" as if I was actually his type. Sublime flashes came at the end of "Drill," where all of a sudden the world was at its end (and I'd thought we were all just here to see Wire sell out), extremely loud guitars and louder bass, and a smattering of songs that were so well-crafted it let you forget how ultimately crafty these middle-aged Lydon-impersonators were trying to be. Well, at least Colin didn't put toothpaste in his hair. Ridiculous and sublime (I suppose) was their encore of "Ahead," which they evidently did just in case we didn't "remembered" that they hadn't already done it once that night. And of course we got nothing from Pink Flag, Chairs Missing, etc., (which was too predictable to be anything other than amusing), apart from a few cracks directed toward "mutant flies" in the audience. Of course we must be aware by now that the road from the Roxy to the Paradise was a long one, and the fact that Bruce Gilbert just might be suffering from Alzheimer's Disease surely had nothing to do with their "artistic" decision to numb their noses at the history which Wire -- and no one else -- had the gall to create. Y'ee, these guys are just too on top of things to let history repeat itself.

NOT JUST ANOTHER NICE PIECE OF ASS....

SATAN IS KNOWLEDGE

BULLET LA VOLTA GOD IS LIFE

REQUEST 'BAGGAGE' AND 'AUTOPILOT' ON
WHRB, WMBR, WZBC, WFNX, AND V-66.
TELL 'EM LOOG TOLD YOU TO.