



KYLIE MINOGUE
Body Language
Capitol

83%

Everybody's doooooing the '80s re-vi-val. Including Kylie Minogue. Her new album has a slick slutty electroclash vibe to it, a change of pace from her typically cheerful party demeanor. On *Body Language*, Kylie's vocals get all breathy and sultry and the album's beats become heavy and sensual, making you feel as if you've just taken E and have the uncontrollable urge to hump the next object that comes your way. Eww. Uncoordinated white people with no rhythm (the running man enthusiasts of the world) will still love dancing to the new stuff, that's just as fun even though it's been sexed up a couple notches.

On the opening single "Slow," Kylie demands sincere and heartfelt bumping and grinding. She invites you to move with her "slow,"—a request that would thrill any dirty old European man dressed to kill in leather chaps. She gets right to the heart and soul of booty on "Red Blooded Woman." It has the R&B flavor (and by flavor, I mean Sexual Chocolate) of Destiny's Child or D'Angelo—which ain't easy when you come from a place whose most famous citizen is Paul Hogan.

Body Language might disappoint some fans accustomed to Kylie's carefree Bally's Total Fitness dance music. But the album is still so drenched in classic '80s pop, that it could easily be mistaken as both her first—leg-warmers, pink gloves and all. On songs like "Promises," Kylie moves away from mainstream pop and resurrects the hairsprayed ghosts of '80s girl groups like Exposé. "Still Standing" is heavy with Michael Jackson's dance grooves and Prince's sexual pop potency—a winning combination if there ever was one. I know, I can't believe she's almost 40 either.

CARMINA OCAMPO



FRANZ FERDINAND
Self-Titled
Domino

91%

Buzzworthy bands stagger like winos trying to piss into a can: connecting about half the time (Stripes, Soundtrack of Our Lives, Darkness), but missing the rest (Muse, Feeder, Rooney). Franz Ferdinand are of the former category, so let's not throw out the baby with the ink-water just yet.

High school graduates may recall the name's historical relevance: the assassination of Austro-Hungarian heir Ferdinand in 1914 was largely responsible for the start of World War I. Just as the Franz Ferdinand of yesteryear sparked a global revolution, so the buzz on this band expects us to believe that today's Franz Ferdinand—a sleek set of Glasgowian art-school drop-outs—will become another worldwide phenomenon. It's hard to start a trend when you're from Glasgow, though. Just look at the gloomy bands that city has exported in the last five years—Mogwai, Delgados, Belle & Sebastian...bands that are less likely to send people to the dance floor and more likely to send them into small padded rooms, chewing Lithium tablets out of a paper cup.

That's where the 'Nand comes in. Like a socially inept teen breaking out of his shell, Domino's latest bright light glows with a fresh luminosity, drawing people together—not deeper into the realms of personal torture. Shunning introspection of any sort, these unpremeditated songs urgently provoke to the maximum degree. Franz Ferdinand is relentlessly sultry, with lush arrangements framed by slamming dance beats. Indeed, a case could be made for each and every one of these 11 tracks being pressed onto a 7-inch and slipped into the stack of any veritable DJ.

Strokes comparisons are sure to abound, with FF's "This Fire" enduring titular similarities to Room on Fire and singer Alex Kapranos's nasalese coaxing images of Monsignor Julian. The band shares more than a passing resemblance to Interpol, too, as both relish in dark, Factory-manufactured bubbling beats. FF's inceptive effort is a distinctly fresh gust of warm air from a faraway place; just try to ignore the foul stench of media hype that's tagging along with it.

KURT ORZECK



SONDRE LERCHE
Two Way Monologue
Astralwerks

86%

Sometime between my first interview with Lerche a year ago and this-very-moment-as-I-type, he became the international heartthrob for "thinking" girls. That's not to say that when I recently saw him

perform at Chicago's world-famous Schuba's nightclub wearing a pair of classic, relaxed fit chinos with rugged double-needle stitching, a comfortable full-elastic waistband and gusseted crotch, that there wasn't an abundance of "Grown Women" and one "Human Being with Testicles." No...no indeed, in accordance with his maturation from teenage prodigy to legitimate acoustic troubadour, his audience has become more homogenous. TWM, Lerche's second proper LP lacks the robust, full-bodied sound of its predecessor and instead exercises a studied, stripped-down clinic on how to brood and remain upbeat. The now 21-year-old continues to hint at McCartney, Bacharach and Brian Wilson—but does so with the sincere, shyly romantic Holden Caulfield-esque charm of one who might spend a bit too much time indoors reading the Metaphysical Poets, listening to A-Ha! and daydreaming of fjords. Ex: "I saw you, you saw me. You were naked...which was weird." Subject matter aside, Lerche sets out to create what he terms, "tidy songs," and he does just that. Bon Appetite!—12 crisp, acoustically driven ballads that avoid the dreaded punji pit of folksiness and continue to reveal, by degrees, a young chap who has more potential than Richard Simmons has sweat glands.

MARK VON PFEIFFER



FELIX DA HOUSECAT
Devin Dazzle And The Neon Fever
Emperor Norton

83%

What irks me about this whole electro revival thing is how limited in scope it is. And I'm not just talking about how the music will never change (ever—except on a nine to eleven scale of kitsch). I'm referring to the rest of the '80s. What about the shit that decade was really about? Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Ronald Reagan and blow. Mad blow. Yeah, Cali's got Arnie, and sure, cocaine's around, but cowabunga dude, someone hand me a fuckin' samurai sword already.

Given the movement's shortcomings, there's not much one can say about the "instrumental" component of Devin Dazzle And The Neon Fever. The compositions are predictably repetitive (blips, bleeps, bass, "unst-unst" beats and layer upon layer of synthesizer love), and that's the way it should be. They vary enough from track to track (a dub breakdown here, a Knight Rider paean there), but da Housecat ain't exactly reinventing the wheel; he's dusting it off and spray painting it electric blue.

The Michelangelo's Numchucks Award for Best Performance goes to James Murphy on "What She Wants." The DFA producer drops by for a positively weird display of vocal histrionics, stuffily slurring his way through the track and grunting like Kylie Minogue in heat. Tyrone "Visionary" Palmer wins the Wonder Years Best All Around prize for "Ready to Wear." The vocals are instantly familiar (a la D'Mode), and Felix breaks out the top-shelf synth bass bounce and reverbed snare hits. Neon Fever gets to take home the Leg Warmer Prize For Breakout Performance Ultimately Doomed to be Cast Aside. These totally sweet babes contribute to three of Devin's strongest songs, including the über-camp "Everyone Is Someone In L.A." (which somehow manages to sound like a mash-up of OutKast and the Faint being played through a Nintendo).

Though Devin may not be the record to put on while enjoying the creature comforts of the 21st century (TiVo, Guacamole! Doritos, PlayStation 2), when it comes to the ancient art of getting really, really high and partying like 1999 is still the future...well, Felix has got ya covered. In a word: Radical.

JACK McGRUE



ANI DIFRANCO
Educated Guess
Righteous Babe

82%

Not many artists have shown the amount of resolve that Ani Difrancu. Since 1989, she's done an average of an album a year and released them all herself on her own Righteous Babe records. And if that's not enough—people actually bought them.

Granted, many people may assume that Ani's catalog is just being consumed by the endless supply of sexually confused sophomores that file into liberal universities by the truckload. But Ani has continuously proven that her heart lies not in providing solidarity to the dreadlock, shorts and comfortable footwear—it lies in making the music that moves her.

In the case of her latest, *Educated Guess*, she dives into a murkier, less-definable world that is part acoustic neo-soul, part spoken word and dreamier than you might imagine. The spoken word moments are almost obligatory for her and