

MORRISSEY'S REVENGE AND OTHER DELIGHTS

Homo Hymns for Misfits and Outcasts

The picture arrived before the LP, even before the single: Morrissey shirtless, his arm raised languorously, filling a page of the *New Musical Express* opposite a story on the upcoming solo LP by the former lead singer of The Smiths.

Boy critic Bobo Baird squinted at the photo and then drew a sudden, astonished breath. Giggling ominously, he chirped a Church Lady query: "Well. We have a shaved armpit, Mr. Morrissey. Isn't that special? I wonder: When did we last do drag? Could it have been months and months ago? Or—I don't know—last Thursday?"

"Un-be-liev-able," Bobo marveled, posting the image by his bed, praying that the LP would come soon.

Viva Hate (Sire) is that disc, and it answers Bobo's hopes and fears. Within two hours of the moment it first hit his turntable, the tough was hugging himself through his studded leather jacket and cooing, "It is fabulous! The best. The best." I didn't—I don't—disagree. *Viva Hate* is the vinyl equivalent of that shaved armpit flashed at the pop public: nervy, outrageous, and wickedly blasé.

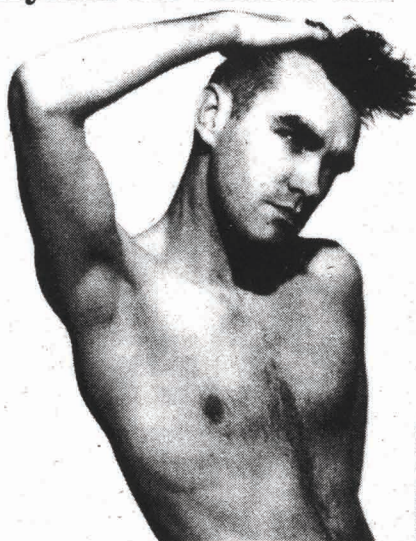
In the wake of guitarist-collaborator Johnny Marr's departure, many feared for Morrissey's future. But he began writing with Steven Street (The Smiths' engineer since 1985) and brought in Durutti Column guitarist Vini Reiley, a drummer, and a string section. Within six months the team had completed a Morrissey solo LP that outshines nearly all his work with The Smiths.

"Pity Me Because I Am Too Sensitive for This World, and Everyone Is Wrong Except Me." When Morrissey penned that chapter title for his brief fan bio *James Dean Is Not Dead*—published before the heyday of The Smiths—he could have been reciting his own mantra. Morrissey's dry extravagance, devotion to misfits and outcasts, homo lyrics, and vicious wit are all deliciously queer and shimmer against lush, ragged, and playful melodies on *Viva Hate*.

Look forward to those reverberations on

- Tributes: to a faded and forgotten boy star remembered from ancient afternoon TV in "Little Man—What Now?" and to a lad who is "different" and stubborn enough not to conform in "Ordinary Boys."

- Love songs: to a fallen street slut (a modern echo of *Brideshead*'s Sebastian but now suicidal on Marc Almond's torrid turf) in "Angel, Angel—Down We Go Together" and to a troubled boy hauled off to jail in the standout "Late Night, Maudlin Street," in which Morrissey pleads with the arresting officer, "Dear Inspector, don't you know? Don't you care about love?"



EAMONN J. MCCABE

Morrissey: British pop's beguiling brat

But there is so much energy in the baser motives, and so little in the grander that I need hate's heat to warm my art. I must have my malice to keep me going.

—William H. Gass
*Goodness Knows
Nothing of Beauty*

- Brush-offs: by the sexy thug in "Suedehead" who stole into our hero's rooms just to read illustrated diary entries about himself, and by the former partner (Johnny Marr?) kissed off in "I Don't Mind If You Forget Me."

Morrissey saves his coldest barbs for those who pursue and preach normalcy, such as the culturally colonized fashion victim in "Bengali in Platforms"; the "friend" in "Dial a Cliché" who counsels, "Do as I do and quit your fey ways. The safe way is the only way"; and finally the paramount proselytizer of bloodless good manners—Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, target of the insidious, hilariously dreamy, and seductive ballad "Margaret on a Guillotine"—a chilling dollop of Ortonesque deadpan that makes The Sex Pistols' "God Save the Queen" sound like an infantile temper tantrum.

Be warned: Morrissey's vain and vicious plea for a make-over, "Hairdresser on Fire," is available only on the cassette and CD packages and on the B side of the British single. I smell an ugly conspiracy against LPs!

Even without that gem, this LP by Morrissey—the self-proclaimed gay, celibate, militant vegetarian and British pop's most beguiling brat—is a masterpiece. The Smiths are dead. Viva Morrissey!

QUICK PICKS

1) **Sinead O'Connor, *Lion & the Cobra*** (Chrysalis). Half the cuts on this debut from the Irish mystic lady "suede head" (cf. "Mandinka" and "Troy") outclass most of Siouxsie and the complete Kate Bush catalog. The other half are reassuringly wretched—reminders that she is only 20.

2) **Sister Double Happiness, *Sister Double Happiness*** (SST). Hard core now boasts a homo hero in singer Gary Floyd (Janis Joplin meets John Lennon) in front of a blistering band (Z. Z. Top stomps Sonic Youth). Two songs tackle AIDS: the PWA-inspired "Freight Train" and the haunting "On the Beach," but the team is equally kickin' on the salacious blues chestnut "Play with My Poodle." Hüsker Dü is history; SDH threatens to make some.

3) **Godfathers, *Birth, School, Work, Death*** (Epic). The United Kingdom's great white hope for techno-free rebel rock offers a palatable primer in politically aggressive, traditional thunder—Midnight Oil "wannabees."

4) **Pop Will Eat Itself, *Box Frenzy*** (Rough Trade). Sick of "Pump Up the Volume"? These Buzzcock boys have a synth sampler, but they don't abuse it: Here's a witty, crisp antidote to the smug-thug Beasties.

—Adam Block