

SPACE

Spiders (Universal)

Rating: ***1/2

By Ken Barnes

Now that the Great Worm Of Rock has--for all intents and purposes--devoured its own tail, and the mass of popular music comprises recycled forms from the past, two kinds of pillagers have emerged. There are the faithful devotees of a specific style or act (Rancid=Clash, Oasis=Beatles, No Doubt=a sickly cross between Berlin and Missing Persons) and then there are the magpie eclectics who plunder musical riffs, styles and curiosities across artists, eras and genres almost at random (Beck, Kula Shaker).

Anyone who values stylistic coherence (at least within the scope of a single song) is bound to find this second sort of musical grab bag irksome. Others will find it exhilarating. Space falls somewhere in the middle. *Spiders*, the band's debut album, traps a truly bewildering variety of styles within its web of sound (props to the Seeds). Sometimes they mesh, sometimes they rub up against each other and cause irritation.

The calling card single, "Female Of The Species," is more unified than most of the band's material, mixing a Martin Denny topical/tropical vibe and some loungy crooning in the verse. Then there's the Burt Bacharach-style bridge that suddenly illuminates the song like a sun-break in Seattle--a hook so good you can put up with the rest of the tune just to hear it again. Earlier UK single "Neighbourhood" combines a pseudo-reggae sound with filigrees of surf guitar and an Arabic drone in fairly effective fashion. "Major Pager" is an ominous, edgy pop tune with menacing Johnny Rottenesque trilled "r"'s, while "Me & You Vs The World" (silly spoken passages aside) could almost pass for a Kinks song, right down to the affected Caribbean/Liverpudlian vocal style.

Of course, there are combinations that just don't work: "Mister Psycho"'s sinister, psychotic sing-song vocal, plus whistling; "Money"'s filtered vocal, dreary hip-hop/industrial crunch, florid strings and treated crooning; "Dark Clouds"'s mannered, "swinging" vocal (not unlike Bowie in his most cloying "Life On Mars" phase) married to rock guitars and a mildly funky beat; and "Charlie M"'s dancehall talk-overs, muted '40s-style horns and Blue Swede ooga-chucka background chant. Other songs are drowned in ponderous Sabbath riffs or synth-funk.

While all this messy style-mongering mars *Spiders*, the bizarre, funny and often borderline libelous lyrics are a plus; they're definitely worth a listen and a read-through. All in

all, the album is fascinating and repellent at the same time--
just like the title.