

## JAMES

Whiplash (Fontana/Mercury)

Rating: \*\*\*\*

By Craig Rosen

James are the Rodney Dangerfields of Britpop...er, make that *British pop*. They get no respect in America, even though they actually predate that catchy little term used to describe popular music hailing from Britain. In fact, when James's stunning debut EP, the *Village Fire*, was issued in 1985, certified *British pop* icon and Smiths' frontman Morrissey was among the first to sing its praises. But times have changed: The Smiths have gone their separate ways, and Pulp, Blur and Oasis have taken their place. Now the Chemical Brothers and Prodigy are all the rave and most Americans *still* don't know James from any other group of Limeys. That's too bad, because for more than a decade James has been one of the most consistent British bands around, no matter what the fashion of the day.

The band's latest effort, *Whiplash*, is no exception. The album began to take root while James were in America to play Woodstock II (Who knew? Who cared?). Following that triumph or tragedy, James frontman Tim Booth teamed with *Twin Peaks* composer Angelo Badalamenti on the album *Booth And The Bad Angel*. As a result of the influence of that project, and the band's continuing work with Brian Eno, *Whiplash* is filled with a stunning array of atmosphere and potential hits.

"She's A Star," for example, is a hit single in the making with its George Harrison-like guitar riffs and undeniably catchy chorus, which features Booth breaking into a falsetto. Yet on *Whiplash*, James aren't content to work within the traditional pop framework. With "Greenpeace," "Go To The Bank," "Avalanche" and the title track, the band has added electronic elements to the mix, effectively updating its sound without losing its human touch. In short, getting *Whiplash* has never sounded or felt so good.