

"Get Close"
The Pretenders
Sire Records
 ★★ ★★

When the Pretenders released their first album, "The Pretenders" in 1979, it was a pleasant surprise. Here was a band being led by a woman who relied on talent instead of sex to sell albums.

The band, with its original line-up—Chrissie Hynde on vocals and guitar, James Honeyman-Scott on guitar, Pete Farndon on bass and Martin Chambers on drums—released two great albums and an EP of hard-driving rock 'n' roll and soft, soulful ballads.

After the drug-related deaths of Honeyman-Scott and Farndon, Hynde reformed the band with guitarist Robbie McIntosh and bassist Malcolm Foster for the 1983 "Learning to Crawl" album. Without the aid of her departed sidemen and collaborators, Hynde was still able to crank out some choice material.

Since 1983, the image of women in music has changed. With the rise of Madonna, Cyndi Lauper, Vanity, Stacy Q. and Regina, music has taken a backseat to fashion.

What makes "Get Close" so refreshing is that Hynde is still concentrating on making music and not on what

clothes she will or will not wear.

"Get Close" doesn't have any hard rockers of the caliber of "Precious," "Message of Love" or "Middle of the Road." The new album is a fine collection of well-crafted pop songs. Except for McIntosh, Hynde has dropped what was left of previous Pretenders line-ups. Bassist T.M. Stevens and drummer Blair Cunningham provide a more than ample rhythm section for Hynde, McIntosh and a variety of guest musicians including keyboardist Bernie Worrell and violinist Shankar.

The hardest pieces on the new album are the Bo Diddley-influenced "Dance!" and "How Much Did You Get for Your Soul?," an attack on Michael Jackson that fails because the music is too wimpy to support the scathing lyrics. The cover version of Jimi Hendrix's "Room Full of Mirrors," which features the return of Chambers on drums, fails because the guitar work is not as strong as Hynde's rough vocals.

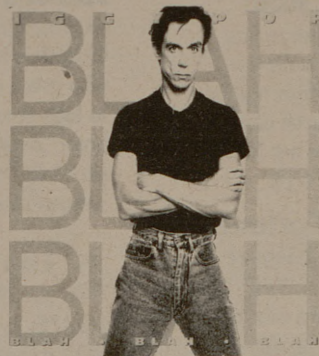
"My Baby" and "When I Change My Life" are tight, likeable tunes. Light acoustic guitars and synthesizers provide a gentle background for Hynde's sensuous voice. The interplay of Hynde's voice and Shankar's violin gives "Tradition of Love" a nice, supernatural feel. "Don't Get Me Wrong" is a bouncing little tune with soulful vocals from Hynde that recall early Motown.

The feminist sentiments of "Chill Factor" and Meg Keene's "Hymn to Her" support firmly what Hynde has been trying to do for women with her music. The songs may sound slow and gentle but

the lyrics show a woman who will not compromise her position.

Even though "Get Close" doesn't sound as rough as earlier Pretenders albums, it shows that Hynde is capable of making music that is both enjoyable and self-sufficient.

—Review by Karl Pallmeyer



"Blah-Blah-Blah"
Iggy Pop
A&M Records
 ★★ ★★

After listening to "Blah-Blah-Blah" you might think you had gotten the new David Bowie album hidden in a jacket plastered with Iggy Pop's name and picture. Since Bowie produced the album and co-wrote half of the songs with Pop, the Bowiesque sound is no mistake.

James Newell Osterberg, a.k.a. Iggy Pop, has the dubious title of "Godfather of Punk." Pop, then using the name Iggy Stooze, and his band, the Stooges, were the seminal punk band of the late '60s. The band would play loud, raucous rock 'n' roll while a shirtless Pop would sing, scream, rub his body with raw meat and peanut butter, cut his skin with broken bottles, and dive out into the audience. Pop's onstage antics made Jim Morrison look like an altar boy, and it

was rumored that Pop would replace the Lizard King as the Doors' lead singer after Morrison's death.

Pop and the Stooges recorded two albums, "The Stooges" (1969) and "Fun House" (1970). David Bowie, a big fan of the Stooges' music, joined forces with Pop and produced the "Raw Power" album in 1973. In 1976, Bowie produced Pop's solo albums, "The Idiot" and "Lust for Life." Pop returned the favor by contributing songs to Bowie's albums "Let's Dance" (1983) and "Tonight" (1984).

The new album has four tracks, "Baby, It Can't Fall," "Shades," "Hideaway" and "Blah-Blah-Blah" written by Pop and Bowie. The title track is a wonderful collection of freely associated phrases that attack current society. "Hideaway" is a good, if somewhat sedate, song about wanting to get away from it all. The other two Pop-Bowie collaborations are fair, and would not sound out of place on a Bowie album.

The stronger songs are those Pop wrote with ex-Sex Pistols guitarist Steve Jones. "Isolation" shows the loneliness of a rock

star. "Cry for Love," with its wonderful Jones guitar solo, is an appropriate title for that song, also about a rock star. "Winners & Losers" and "Fire Girl" aren't quite so strong.

Pop's band on "Blah-Blah-Blah" consists of only two players: Kevin Armstrong on guitar and Erdal Kizilcay on bass, drums and synthesizer. The duo are able to make a good but somewhat overpolished sound. "Real Wild Child (Wild One)," a song that dates back to 1958, would sound better if it were stripped down to just guitar, bass and drums.

If you're looking for tough punk music, "Blah-Blah-Blah" is not the album for you. If you're looking for strong, majestic, Bowiesque vocals and intelligent lyrics you won't be too disappointed. The only problem is that the vocals are too majestic for the lyrics. If Pop would scream like he used to, "Blah-Blah-Blah" would knock everyone dead.
 —Review by Karl Pallmeyer

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