

U2 stretches with 'Pop,' but recalls basics too

"POP"
U2 (Island)

The always-adventurous U2 wriggles onto the dance floor with "Pop," its 11th album, adding electronic dance beats to its patented panoramic rock and roll. The new mix adds propulsion to the Irish supergroup's distinctive sound without altering it.

Experimental tracks such as "Discotheque" and "Miami," with their layered, European dance grooves, strut along blandly until The Edge sharpens them up with his buzzing, cutting guitar riffs.

Ironically, "Pop" shines brightest when U2 gets back to basics. The combination of Bono's impassioned vocal delivery and The Edge's sweeping guitars, powered by the sturdy rhythms of bassist Adam Clayton and drummer Larry Mullen, brought U2 to fame and still generates transcendent musical moments.

Album highlights include "The Playboy Mansion," a wry look at shallow social icons; "Staring at the Sun," a psychedelic guitar rocker; and "Wake Up Dead Man," a slow-motion, soul-searching ballad, all of which are taken from U2's traditional sound. —DAVID YONKE.

"PRIVATE PARTS SOUNDTRACK." Howard Stern and Various Artists (Warner Bros.). The shock jock's soundtrack is as rough and raunchy as his radio shtick can be, but considering the source it's hard to get too worked up about the lewd, crude, and rude behavior. Between each Howardism there is basic Top 40 rock, from '70s retro hits such as Deep Purple's "Smoke on the Water" and Ted Nugent's "Cat Scratch Fever" to '90s contributions from Green Day, Marilyn Manson, and Porno for Pyros. —TOM HENRY.

"OCEANIC." Vangelis (Atlantic). Multi-instrumentalist Vangelis paints nine distinct portraits of the world's waters using lush, contemporary arrangements interspersed with shimmering strings, erotic vocals, and live sounds of oceanfront surf. The surreal re-

SOUNDS

REVIEWS BY BLADE STAFF WRITERS

sults are relaxing and, in many cases, more than a little interesting. If you've never sampled New Age music, get your feet wet with this one. —KEN ROSENBAUM.

"SPIDERS." Space (Universal). Tommy Scott, the singer/bassist for Space, calls Burt Bacharach an influence. Space's music does have that freshly creased feel, but it's mixed with techno and a Black Grape-like groove to produce a hip-hop effect with surprising appeal. —DOUG IVERSON.

"TEST OF TIME." Gypsy Soul (Cabana Boy). Despite the band's name, this is not a disc of flamenco, but a shimmering pop/rock blend led by the enticing voice of singer Cilette Swann. Soft, melodic ballads and atmospheric dance beats co-exist, with blasts of guitar, layers of harmony vocals, and soulful grooves added to the musical mix. —RICHARD PATON.

"RICHARD D. JAMES." Aphex Twin (Elektra). Fans of dance-beat electro and house might find the ambient babble of Aphex Twin a bit daunting — but perseverance brings rewards. From the martial rhythm of the opening cut to "Fingerbib" with its orchestral echoes and skip-hop beat, these instrumental/synthesizer creations are futuristic electronic soundscapes powered by staccato drum patterns. —PATON.

"LOS HOMBRES CALIENTES." Eddy Herrera (Milan Latino). Merengue joins with Caribbean and Cuban rhythms as Herrera and his orchestra give the horns and percussion a real workout. Herrera learned well as he honed his craft for six years with the king of merengue, Wilfredo Vargas. The vocals are more than adequate, but it's the spicy instrumental work that'll get your feet moving. —ROSENBAUM.

CROSSWORD ANSWERS

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