

NO COVER

Endless Mummer

**THE FOUR MEN IN THE JENNIFERS
RADIATE SUNNY POP ROCK**
BY VIOLET GLAZE

THE JENNIFERS' NEW ALBUM, *COLORS FROM THE FUTURE* (self-released), contains bright and citrusy pop as reminiscent of the flowery tang of oranges and lemons as it is of *Oranges and Lemons*. The similarity to that 1989 XTC album isn't a coincidence. "As a songwriter, I'm influenced by new-wave guitar-bass songwriters like Robyn Hitchcock, Elvis Costello, XTC, Television—that early-'80s sound," says guitarist John Irvine. *Colors From the Future* shares a melody-centric approach with those early not-quite-new-wave bands, as well as a palette of clean, bell-like instrumentation. But where Television might be a hard sell as background music for a summer barbecue, *Colors'* songs feel run-through-the-sprinkler cheerful while still retaining art-rock smarts.

**"Just try to keep it out
of mariachi territory."**

Irvine, bassist Joe Tropea, rhythm guitarist Joe Stone, and drummer Skizz Cyzyk are gathered in Irvine's Catonsville living room for a quick chat before practice. Irvine and Stone both work with children: Stone as an ESL teacher, Irvine as a planner for juvenile services. ("Every time something bad happens, we end up in the *Sun* papers," Irvine sighs.) Local film legend Cyzyk has his fingers in every festival from MicroCineFest to Slamdance (Q&A, Nov. 8, 2006), and Tropea is busy earning a master's degree in public history at UMBC. Despite their professional obligations, the four men commit regularly to jam sessions in Irvine's basement, where a spirit of inclusion reigns.

"Of all the bands I've been in, this has been the most democratic," Tropea says. "Even though [Irvine] writes all of the songs, he's not as compelled to be as controlling as a lot of other people are."

"This is probably the first band I've played drums in where I wasn't just coming up with a beat and playing it," Cyzyk says. "Usually when a drummer says, 'Want to hear my idea?' the band goes, 'No.'" They all laugh.

The Jennifers were formed in 1992 by an initial lineup of Irvine, college friends Chuck Rainville on bass and Jen Maser on drums, and guitarist Will Wall. They garnered local attention for their first release, *Nine Days Wonder—City Paper* described the music as "smart, pretty, tuneful pop rock that owes something to the Kinks"—and perplexingly won the 1995 MTV Beach House Band Search award for "Best All Male Band," an accolade awarded by nearsighted judges who didn't notice Maser (Her '70s-generic first name was the inspiration for the band's moniker. "I don't think she ever really liked the name," Irvine admits.)

The band members eventually drifted over to other projects, and the Jennifers went on amicable hiatus by the late '90s. In 2001, Cyzyk approached Irvine, who had since joined Cyzyk's surf-rock group Garage Sale, and Tropea to form a band to back up some film projects. "And we morphed into a Dukes of Stratosphere cover band," Irvine says, referencing the psychedelic side project formed by pseudonymous members of XTC. "And we had so much fun doing that just as a lark, it was like, *Why don't we see if the Jennifers can get back together?*"

This new incarnation of the Jennifers demonstrates con-

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THIS IS POP: THE JENNIFERS ARE DEDICATED TO A CLASSIC HUM-AND-STRUM SOUND.

siderable finesse in marrying multilayered, addictive melodies with clever lyrics, making the tunes running through your head as much fun as compulsively flip-flopping a Jacob's ladder toy. Check out the Oscar Wilde-cum-Botox wink in *Colors'* lead track "Mrs. Gray": "Mrs. Gray/ You're looking younger than you should/ You've got a husband with a practice/ He snips the skin fantastic/ But there's a painting in the attic/ And it don't look so good."

"We try not to keep it rhythm/lead [guitar]," Stone says. "We try to keep it interesting and switch off roles and have interesting textures, a melodic pattern, or something like that." The songs also contain the occasional oddball instrument, like theremin on the spacey "Starfleet Academy" and trumpet on "Great War."

"There's a little soul-ska going on," says Irvine, who plays trumpet with the Hopkins Symphony Orchestra and the Homewood Brass Consort. "I was thinking of the Jam."

"Just try to keep it out of mariachi territory," Tropea teases.

"That's the trouble with trumpet," Irvine says. "You get the parallel thirds, and all of a sudden it sounds like a wedding band from Mexico."

The band is pleased with the final result on *Colors*, and rightly so. "I think it's more of a finished product," Irvine says. "Of all of our projects, we had the most time and the most resources to do it right. We didn't have a record company telling us the way to do it. We had complete control." And that control extends to marketing, as the Jennifers

released their album through CD Baby, an online record store that buys independently produced CDs from artists and provides services like making tracks available on iTunes for much less than a standard record company would.

"I personally think in the future you won't need a record company if you have a web site and you do some touring, and you've got a good product," Irvine says. Touring in support of this album might be a little tight, as everyone's got day jobs, though the group hasn't ruled out doing a few live dates, including a CD-release party Feb. 23 at Seidel's Bowling Center.

But the internet revolution side of self-promotion has been good to the Jennifers. "We sold a lot of digital downloads of our last record [2003's *Book of Bad Advice*], even though we never promoted it," Irvine says. "It'll be interesting to see what happens just on [*Colors from the Future*]'s own merits."

If the Jennifers are banking everything on the album's inherent worth, they've got nothing to worry about. And other bands better understand this group's ability to outlast the competition. "We've been around," Cyzyk says. "There's a lot of kids in their early 20s that seem to form [bands] two months ago, [and] tonight is their third show and their CD-release party. We're not one of them."

"Right," Irvine says. "This is the long haul."

The Jennifers play Roots Café's Duck-n-Roll Night at Seidel's Bowling Center on Feb. 23 with the Pale Stars.


MUSIC

By Robert C. Knott

"It's hard for Baltimore bands to break out," says John Irvine, the singer/songwriter and guitarist of local music veterans **The Jennifers**. "The clubs are always dodgy. As soon as a good one gets going, it closes. And since most national bands play in Washington, D.C., not Baltimore, a local band often needs to go outside of Baltimore to make a name for itself."

Irvine knows of what he speaks. The Jennifers, whose members also include Skizz Cyzyk (drums), Joe Stone (guitar, vocals), and Joe Tropea (bass), have been one of Charm City's best pop outfits for a decade and a half without ever making a splash outside of their hometown. The band did experience a fleeting whiff of glory when, in 1995, they won "Best All Male Band" in an MTV contest. Alas, their video was never broadcast on the cable channel.

A thinking-person's garage band, The Jennifers marry the songwriting influences of Robyn Hitchcock and XTC's Andy Partridge with the interlocking guitar work of Television and My Bloody Valentine. Throw in the occasional twang of surf-guitar legend Dick Dale and you have a strange, which is to say intoxicating, brew that sounds like few other bands, local or otherwise.

Colors from the Future, The Jennifers' latest release, marks the band's artistic highpoint. "Mrs. Gray," the uptempo opening salvo, waxes humorously about a modern-day Mrs. Robinson in this, the age of cosmetic surgery: "Mrs. Gray, you look so surprised. With all that work done to your eyes I'd think you could see the light. Mrs. Gray, you're looking younger than you should. You've got a husband with a practice, he snips the skin fantastic ..."

Other highlights include "Great War," an infectious romp that sticks with you hours after you last hear it, and a spirited reading of Robyn Hitchcock's



The Jennifers: Joe Stone, Skizz Cyzyk, John Irvine, and Joe Tropea

"Queen of Eyes." No less compelling is the album's coda, "Saturday," in which Irvine and Stone, true to their influences, weave a melody that no one guitarist possibly could. For their part, Cyzyk's and Tropea's driving backbeat infuses the album with a live, kinetic energy.

The bottom line: *Colors from the Future* is a very good album. If they hailed from Greenwich Village, many in Baltimore would nevertheless be hip to The

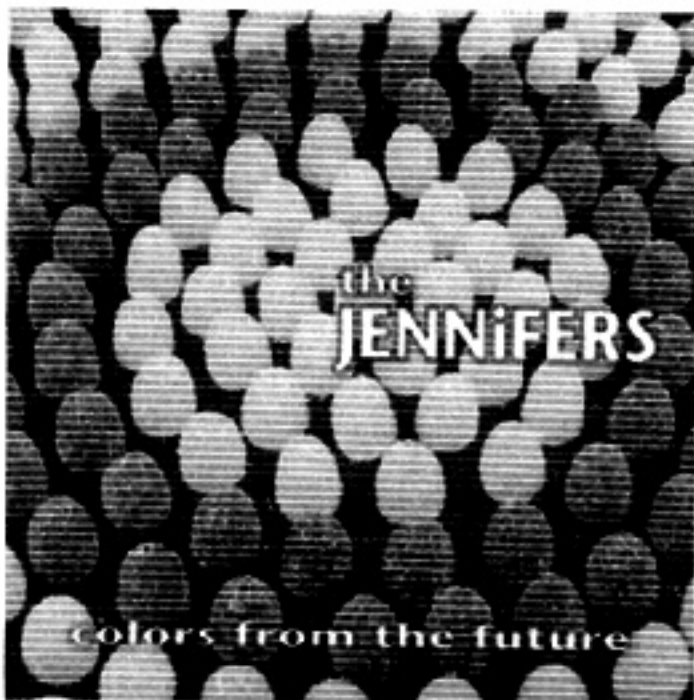
Jennifers. Conversely, because the band makes its home in Baltimore, precious few audiophiles in the Big Apple are likely aware of them.

Meanwhile, Irvine is realistic about the future of The Jennifers. "We have no delusions we're going to be rock stars. But we also believe a lot of people will like our music if we get it to them. We don't want to make a huge career of the band, but it's our job to get the music out there." **7**

play it

BY JOHN LEWIS

itlist



The Jennifers

Colors from the Future
(Beef Platter)

This disc's cover art, a photo of a carefully constructed landscape of gumdrops, hints at the sugar-rush exuberance that infuses the Jennifers' well-crafted pop tunes. This sort of stuff ruled college radio in the 1980's, and, when done well, its simplicity—guitar, drums, bass, and garage-y attitude—can be sublime. Combining the propulsiveness of The Feelies, with XTC's stratospheric sparkle and Young Fresh Fellows' absurd wit, the Baltimore-based quartet hits that mark more often than not. Although "Lion In Winter" and "Saturday" meander a bit at disc's end, the balance of the material cozies up to pop perfection. "Mrs. Gray" and "Starfleet Academy" might even bring an envious smile to Andy Partridge's face. The biting funny "Fell In a Hole" and a cover of Robyn Hitchcock's "Queen of Eyes" add to the fun.

Philip Glass

Heroes Symphony/The Light (Naxos)
Glass, a native Baltimorean, seems to be

CMJ New Music Report

FUTURES

3.20.95

JENNIFERS *Nine Days Wonder*

You Say When, P.O. Box 4751, Baltimore, MD 21094
410.366.8402

This self-released disc from Baltimore's Jennifers is an ambitious full-length effort, showcasing the band's agile playing and neatnick songwriting on every track, without a weak link in its chain of crafty pop tunes. The Jennifers' backbone is their snappy drum parts coordinated meticulously with jumpy bass lines that push each song through highly structured, yet eagerly and naturally delivered, song structures. The Jennifers know how to design verses and choruses to complement one another, and frequently use bridges and other fragments in sharp contrast with their otherwise-harmonious collected song parts, proving an ability to write intelligent songs that are filled with ear-pleasing hooks. On a handful of tunes, the band plays a key or two above the range of the vocalist, but his occasionally cracking voice casts a sympathetic light on the woe-is-me romantic themes of tunes like "Love Song For Valerie" and "It Won't Be Long." *Nine Days Wonder* is an excellent first outing from a band that relies on its brains over its brawn. CHERYL BOTCHICK

NO COVER

BY JIM MAHER

CITY PAPER • FEBRUARY 15, 1995

Forget Me Not

These Are a Few of My Favorite Bands

I'm always forgetting about the Jennifers. In a recent *City Paper* review of the new film *Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle*, Max Weiss said that when people ask her to name her favorite actresses, she always forgets about Jennifer Jason Leigh. Well, I'm always forgetting about the Jennifers when people ask me to name my favorite local bands. To help me remember them in the future, the Jennifers have released a wonderful new 13-song CD called *Nine Days Wonder* (You Say When).

Around this time last year I had not heard or even heard of the Jennifers. Then they sent me a nine-song tape called *Pretty Things*, and I was smitten. The Jennifers make smart, pretty, tuneful pop-rock that owes something to the Kinks and other great bands of the late 60s, but it also sounds fresh and new. Last year the Jennifers made a video directed by Eric Dyer for their song "You're My Star" and were runners-up in the MTV Beach House Band Search, winning \$2,000 worth of equipment for each member (Annapolis' Bovox Clown grabbed first prize). And last fall, You Say When Records released a split vinyl single with the Jennifers (doing a song called "The Television") and San Francisco's Mommyheads.

The Jennifers include drummer Jen Maser, singer/guitarists John Irvine and Will Wall, and singer/bassist Chuck Rainville. Irvine, Rainville, and Maser met at St. Mary's College in Southern Maryland, where they played in a band called Love Planet. After they graduated and moved to Baltimore they met Wall, and formed a band called the Bigbys; before long they changed the name to the Jennifers.

Nine Days Wonder was recorded by Tony French at Baltimore's Hound Sound, and mixed and mastered at Blue House Productions (two songs were recorded at Social Services Studios). Of course, I had to wonder about the title—did it take nine

days to record the album? According to Irvine, "Nine Days Wonder" is a song Chuck Rainville has been working on, and even though the tune didn't work out for this album, the band liked the title (perhaps we'll see the song on their next record).

With the new CD the Jennifers have grown up and added a bit of variety to their sound; some of the songs are getting a bit rootsy, folksy, and even slightly countryish. Irvine plays some organ and uses a guitar gizmo called an e-bow to achieve a violin-like effect on a few tunes, and Wall plays mandolin and slide guitar. The 13 tracks were mostly written by Irvine, with four by Rainville, one by Wall, and one by all three. Six of the songs appeared (in earlier versions) on the *Pretty Things* tape. The Jennifers' side of the split single with the Mommyheads is not included.

Almost every song on *Nine Days Wonder* has done some playing time in my head, and that's a big compliment to their songwriting ability. I've found myself humming "You're My Star" while walking my dog, and mouthing the very Kinks-like "People Looking Up" while doing the laundry. "Little Brick City" is going through my head even as I write this. The Jennifers' CD release party will be February 18 at Chambers. (You Say When, P.O. Box 4751, Baltimore, MD 21094)

Optional Art Newsletter

SUPPORT INDEPENDENT MUSIC

March 1995
No. 4

The Jennifers are a band primed for the big time, and if you don't believe me, give a listen to their marvelous new CD! Mixing melodious guitar rock with vibrant power pop moves, "Nine Days Wonder" ripples with expert songwriting and plenty of memorable hooks. Ten dollars will get you a copy of this disc, and checks and money orders are to be mailed to You Say When Records at PO Box 4751, Baltimore, Md 21094.

MAGNET

THE JENNIFERS

Nine Days Wonder

[You Say When]

N*ine Days Wonder* is an out-of-left-field treasure. Bouncy, uptempo pop ("Television Girl," "You're My Star," "People Looking Up") mixes with slower, introspective stuff ("New Light," "Someone," "Love Song For Valerie") in a truly wonderful way, sounding sort of like the Feelies might've had they not been so miserable. "Love Song For Valerie" is simply that, a heartfelt ode that's both catchy and downcast and a great way to end a great record. Thirteen songs, every one a winner. Bring me more.

—Matt Hickey

THE JENNIFERS AND MONSTER ZERO, WITH 30 AMP FUSE

I've gotta admit I didn't put much faith in any band that would enter, let alone *win*, the MTV Beach House Band Search... but that's exactly why the Jennifers turn out to be such a welcome surprise. Never mind the noise—this Baltimore band keeps their hook-riddled, laidback pop clean as a whistle. Sort of like the Smiths with a sense of humor (wait—that's XTC). Best said, their infectious record, *Nine Days Wonder* (You Say When Records) rings out like the *Pretty In Pink* soundtrack redux. If you're looking for infectious pop with a mean bite, the sound of Columbus, Ohio's Monster Zero is sure to leave your ears buzzing. Check out their various super-hookysingles, most especially the terrific "The Unkindest Cut of All," with the giddy punch that is "Come Down." Call it punk pop if you must, but there's some leftover "shoegazer" in there, too. (If you're looking for yet another soundbite on 30 Amp Fuse, just scan your kitty cat eyes on over to the calendar right now.)

30 Amp Fuse w/ The Jennifers and Monster Zero
Mercury Theatre • Sat., July 27 • 9:30 p.m. • \$5

—Shelly Ridenour

FOSTER CHILD

THE JENNIFERS

Nine Days Wonder

(You Say When)

The Jennifers are one of the best new bands on the Baltimore music scene. They are old-fashioned popsters, bringing to mind the Kinks, the Beatles, and others, while still sounding fresh and new. *Nine Days Wonder* is their new CD, it is their first full-length release, following a tape and a split single. The best thing about the Jennifers is their songwriting ability (something of a lost art in this age of noise bands). Almost every song on this CD has done some playing time in my head. (P.O. Box 4751, Baltimore, MD 21094) -- Jim

IF IT DONT ROCK IT AINT IN STOCK

FOSTER CHILD

THE JENNIFERS

Nine Days Wonder

(You Say When)

It took me a few spins to really appreciate these 13 slabs of homegrown pop rock but now that I do, what I once perceived as weaknesses are now among their strengths. At first I found the production somewhat flat and the singers voice kinda hoarse and a bit off key and while they both may take a bit of getting used to, at this point I think that they just add to the charm. In the end, what's important are the songs and it's songs like "I Hear Angels," "You're My Star," "People Looking Up" and "Ritomello" that keeps me coming back. So, while this might not be for everyone, if you like good pop that's not afraid to deviate from what's expected, you might wanna give this a shot. (PO Box 4751, Baltimore MD 21094) - The Platterpuss

METRO PULSE JULY 25 - AUGUST 1, 1996

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pop NARCOTIC

☼ The Mommyheads / The Jennifers (You Say When) (\$2.50)

On this single, upstart Baltimore pop label You Say When pairs San Francisco's Mommyheads with Baltimore's The Jennifers. The Mommyheads contribute a fine track, "Day Job." It has a quirky pop feel that blends XTC style pop leanings with a touch of Bay Area psychedelia. The Jennifers follows this up with a classic pop track that sounds like it could have come from an early 80's skinny tie band. Both songs on this split single are pure and unpretentious pop.



☼ The Jennifers *Nine Days Wonder* (You Say When) (\$9.00)

You Say When has been busy mining the Baltimore pop scene and The Jennifers CD is their first full length release. Although this band has a timeless pop sound, they don't fit neatly into any of the categories that exist in today's pop world. Their sound is crisp and clean and owes as much to people like Nick Lowe and Elvis Costello as it does to today's pop music. Instead of the muddy, lo-fi road taken so often in the indie world, these recordings are crisp and clean and the vocals are right out front. The two main songwriters, John Irvine and Chuck Rainville have distinctly different styles. John's songs tend to be more somber love songs while Chuck's are more upbeat rock and roll. This variety ensures that this debut album never gets boring. It's good to see a band with such a heartfelt and honest take on music they obviously love.



This Year's Mods

In their first 10 years together (1964-74), the Kinks were one of the best bands on the rock landscape; they were smart, tuneful, incisive, groundbreaking, and quite influential (the Jam, for example, would have been impossible without them). Even, apparently, to this day—two new Baltimore bands, the Jennifers and Jag, have just released tapes that reveal the touch of the Kinks and other great bands of that era.

The Jennifers include singer/guitarists John Irvine and Will Wall, singer/bassist Chuck Rainville, and drummer Jen Maser. Irvine, Rainville, and Maser met at St. Mary's College, where they played in a band called Love Planet (and also, presumably, took some classes). They started playing around Baltimore last summer. At first they were called the Bigslys but a few months ago became the Jennifers.

The Jennifers have just unleashed the nine-song *Pretty Things* tape ("Pretty Things" is the name of a song on the tape, and is apparently not a reference to the 1960s British r&cb-to-pop-to-psych band the Pretty Things, who took their name from the Bo Diddley song "Pretty Thing"). In a few months, Baltimore's fledgling You Say When label will be releasing a vinyl split single with one song each by the Jennifers and San Francisco's Mommyheads.

I haven't seen the Jennifers play live yet, but on tape they make a sprightly strum-pop that is charming, whimsical, tuneful, and smart—a few songs on the tape have done some humming time in my head in recent weeks. According to Irvine, the band often gets compared to XTC, but I hear more of the Kinks in them. Their "People Looking Up" could almost be an outtake from the Kinks' 1966 album *Face to Face*. (Jennifers, 13 E. Read St. #3A, Baltimore 21202)

JIM MAHER

Baltimore CityPaper

When the Kicksouls throw their gala rerelease party at Chambers this Thursday, they will be sharing a bill with the Jennifers, who are out working behind their own You Say When release, "The Television," a split single with San Francisco's Mommyheads. The band also released a nine-song tape, *Pretty Things*, a few months back (CP, April 13). This time around you get "two fine pop songs about modern living," according to You Say When, and right they are. The Mommyheads' "Day Job" might actually be the groovier of the two, but the Jennifers acquit themselves well with the slightly edgier, janglier "The Television." Again, neither tune is likely to remind you of anything on *Physical Graffiti*—think more of a low-budget, non-English XTC—but try to be open-minded about these things.



THE MOMMYHEADS
THE JENNIFERS / *Making Music*
Your Own split 7" / You Say
When Records, P.O. Box
4751, Baltimore, MD 21094

The B-side, "The Television," the television has a line: "From another zone" which is a reference to a song by the Kinks from 1966. Both songs are great sounding, but the Jennifers played your parents

The Mommyheads, with their Beatles meets the Monkees bluesy, yet light rock, and The Jennifers, with their smooth slide guitar and nonsensical Duran Duranesque lyrics, give this record a nostalgic '70s/'80s charm. A little risqué for one of Baltimore's premier labels, but a winning gamble. (JM)

ALIVE! MAGAZINE

THE MOMMYHEADS

"Day Job"

THE JENNIFERS

"The Television"

You Say When Records

"Day Job" is a well-written, well-produced pop rock song made interesting by a sometimes twisted, sometimes hazy and lazy guitar sound. "The Television" is a quirky song, dominated by fast, sometimes offbeat rhythm guitar. The vocals have that New-Wave kitsch, not unlike the Cars or early Talking Heads.