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## England, Ireland still churning out the pop

## POP ALBUMS

Lloyd Cole.

"Lloyd Cole." Capitol.

The House of Love.

"The House of Love." Polygram.

Something Happens.

"Stuck Together With God's Glue."

Charisma.

The Wedding Present.

"Bizarro." BMG.

The Wild Swans.

"Space Flower." Sire.

The British Empire may have taken on the distinct hue and smell of post-industrial rust but, in terms of popular music, the residents of England and Ireland are still mighty giants.

The residents of the British Isles have a skill for weaving together ephemeral styles, from Bauhaus to acid house, celebrating them as full-fledged tribal youth movements and selling them back to the rest of the world. But there's one gray area at which the Brits especially excel: pofaced pop played by skinny guys who spent too much time reading while it rained outside their crumbling tower blocks.

The current success of the Sundays and the Stone Roses underscores the British flair for literate charm and art school sighs, and a rash of new releases shows there's no shortage of sensitive young things whiling away pensive evenings in dreary cold-water flats. While none of these bands is obviously original in the way that, say, the Smiths were, most have their merits.

Lloyd Cole only attracted a cult following here with his previous band, the Commotions, and chances are that won't change with his first self-titled solo project. But the slick and dreamy "Lloyd Cole" is his most concise work, highlighting his picturesque song stories and razor-sharp production. Less precious and more focused than some of his past work, this album illustrates the maturation of a talented songwriter.

The House of Love's shimmering neo-psychedelics sound so much like the Church at first that it's a wonder there isn't a lawsuit. But this quartet has such a way with a riff, a hook and a languid vocal on its self-titled debut that tracks such as "Shine On" and the sublime "I Don't Know Why I

Love You" overcome their influences. The album is uneven but certainly noteworthy.

Ireland's Something Happens is the most commercial of the crop. Produced by Ed Stasium (Smithereens, Living Colour), "Stuck Together With God's Glue" sometimes has a beefy American sound that veers toward the ordinary. But there's a welcome eclecticism on songs such as the Byrds-like "What Now" and the engagingly country-flavored "Esmeralda," which gives Something Happens a deeper dimension.

Completely opposite is "Bizarro," the US debut from the critically acclaimed Wedding Present. Thrashing and pummelling guitar over ferocious post-punk rhythms and little attention to melody gives the band a wiry, jagged intensity. Yet, clocking in at about an hour, "Bizarro" wears out its welcome.

The Wild Swans had one of the best albums of '88 with "Bringing Home the Ashes," and that's what makes the mediocrity of their new "Space Flower" all the more painful. What once was deliciously downcast pop about a dying England has transformed into misguided mutant psychedelia.

— Cary Darling/The Register