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CHARLENE
(SHARKATTACK!)

8

QUALITY AUDIO AND SERVICE WITH A SMILE:

Charlene is the ultimate self-contained unit. The band—Matt Miranda, Ian Lawrence, and John Rex—runs SharkAttack!, the label on which their records are released. They own the recording studio and handle all the packaging, production, and promotion. As a co-founder of Sugar Free Records, Miranda knows a thing or two about indie labels, so therefore Charlene are able to craft their music to their own tastes and specifications. "How wonderful," you say, "but what do they sound like?" Atmospheric to a fault and boasting an innocuously non-descriptive band moniker, the Massachusetts based trio melds narcoleptic drone rock to the stark ambiance of slowcore with a smattering of primitive synthesizers and drum machines for added spice. Many of the songs on their self-titled debut album open with subdued, gentle intros that build into thick, feedback drenched noise pop. Many of the songs wind down with extended outros that sound as if they forgot to start the fade-outs. For example, the album's unnamed fifth track commences with chirping birds, single piano notes, and ominous feedback swells undercut with barely audible studio chatter. A twangy guitar enters, playing melodies and countermelodies with another guitar before the feedback swallows everything up. It's all very languid and evocative. Of what, I'm unsure. Like the rest of the album, it's hard to describe, but easy to enjoy. —*Jay Ditzer*

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CHARLENE, S/T

SharkAttack!

After releasing three singles on SharkAttack! and providing very little information about themselves, Charlene release their eponymous debut full-length. While the singles were simple, sparse, and often brief, these recordings feature a denser sound, with more instruments and a clear evolution in production. These songs also feature a burbling energy, kept just beneath the surface, that often breaks through and shows itself off. On the first track, "Ripoff," Charlene seem to be on a crusade to change perceptions and preconceptions about their previous output, as they groove their way through a fairly uptempo shuffle with competence. Here is a Charlene that is neither spacey nor droney. The vocals are still a bit drowned in the mix, but Charlene seem more confident this time around, and the harmonies on several tracks are gorgeous, as always. Electronic instruments flourish throughout the entire album, which add a sincerity and depth that was hinted at before but never quite achieved. Charlene have come a long way from their early recordings to this fine display. There are longer tracks here, as well, that blister and crack as well as introduce a playful side to the band with xylophones and coquettish lyrics that name check Mazzy Star. The untitled fifth track is noise rock beauty, charming throughout until it buzzes away. Ultimately, Charlene prove all over this release that they are making brave, vital, original music that few can touch or even approach. Their grasp of melody is uncanny, their growth to this point apparent, and their success imminent. —**Rob Devlin**

Brainwashed.com - October 2002

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CHARLENE

Charlene SharkAttack!

Heavy-hearted, molasses-slow indie pop has been done to death, but when it's artfully executed it can still elicit a good hour of gloomy introspection on the sofa, and that's exactly what Boston band Charlene accomplishes on its striking self-titled debut. Combining the guitar whir of the Jesus and Mary Chain with the near-whispered vocals of Yo La Tengo, the trio evokes the sad, pretty buzz of Spiritualized minus the gospel groove. Informed by shoegazer droning (their Pumas are so firmly planted in 1993 they even toss out a reference to Mazzy

Star on "Stunner"), '80s synth-pop and snip-and-paste orchestrations, the band embroiders the usual instrumentation—guitar, bass, drums—with various electronic samples and other found sounds, resulting in hypnotic, wide-open compositions that only give the illusion of being minimalist. Songs are about lazy hours spent waiting, and knowing that relationships fall apart ("Ripoff"), that the future is uncertain ("Still"), that valuable time has been wasted ("Shoot Yr. Life"). There's enough remorseful examination here to provide a life-in-turnaround soundtrack. Sometimes the songs drag on and sound too similar, but overall this lethargic collection has a raspy sincerity that will resonate with the down and the dumped for heartbreaks to come. >>>MICHELLE KLEINSAK

