

MAGNET

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CHARLENE

Charlene

Charlene sounds like a lot of my favorite bands happening all at once. Which isn't surprising, since playing what we call "space rock" and/or "dream pop" and making it sound different than anyone else playing such music is fairly impossible. That said, this Boston trio does an OK job. The affectations the band has snagged from like-minded peers and predecessors (My Bloody Valentine) are clearly visible, but the way Charlene fucks 'em up a bit is right clever. Think a more sluggish New Order with a whiskey hangover ("Ripoff"), Love And Rockets in a much better mood ("Cathode"), Galaxie 500 but both intelligible and hummable ("Shoot Yr. Life") or Neil Halstead's as-yet-unformed 39th Slowdive spin-off band (entire album). Oh, and one song ("Shot Down") sounds eerily like Death Cab For Cutie with Kevin Shields on guitar. Weird. The point is, just because it's been done before doesn't mean it's being done badly. Black Rebel Motorcycle Club takes shit for sounding like the Jesus And Mary Chain and Interpol for sounding like Joy Division, but people still buy their records. [SharkAttack!, www.sharkattackmusic.com]

—Beth Wawerna

Fun Fact:

So far, Charlene's debut has been compared in print to: Spiritualized (8 times), Jesus & Mary Chain (8 times), New Order (3 times), Her Space Holiday (2 times), My Bloody Valentine (2 times), Notwist (2 times), Spacemen 3 (2 times), Yo La Tengo (2 times), Galaxie 500 (2 times), Velvet Underground (2 times), Versus, Belle and Sebastian, Mick Turner, Low, Love and Rockets, Neil Halstead, Mojave 3, Death Cab for Cutie, Bedhead, Kinks, Stephen Merritt, Placebo, Hopewell, The Poster Children, Ride, Catherine Wheel, Radiohead, Sara McLachlan, Flaming Lips, Nine Inch Nails, Mazzy Star, Interpol, Sigur Ros, & Monster Movie. While we feel comparisons bear little testament to the quality of Charlene's music, we also realize they are the bazooka in the Music Critic's formidable arsenal and thus likely to be used in times of dire need. Given that fact, may we suggest these as-yet-unused references: Sly and the Family Stone, Public Enemy, Mc Shan, Swirlies, 18th Dye (see bio), Red Red Meat, DEVO, Unrest, The Clash, King Tubby, Beatnik Filmstars, Ennio Morricone, East River Pipe, Kyuss, Wheat, Godheadsilo, and of course you can never go wrong with The Beatles.



CHARLENE
Album > Charlene
 (SHARKATTACK!;
www.sharkattackmusic.com)
Who? D.I.Y. trio who recorded, designed and released this full-length on their own label.
Sounds like? Lush and lulling indie rock that incorporates a wide range of timbres without sounding muddy.
How is it? Not the record to listen to when your getting ready to go out, but its minimalist meanderings are the perfect way to help nurse the morning-after hangover.
Kindred spirits: Belle And Sebastian, Mick Turner, Low

BLENDER

NOVEMBER 2002

CHARLENE

CHARLENE ★★★★★

SHARK ATTACK

Ambitious, Anglophilic shoegazers mold sonic overload into warm, affecting pop

Charlene call themselves a three-piece orchestra, and it's not hard to see why. The Boston group's self-titled debut piles guitars upon guitars upon keyboards upon drums upon electronic effects upon *even more* guitars, creating a lush tapestry of swirling dream-pop evoking classic British shoegazers Spiritualized and the Jesus and Mary Chain. *Charlene's* hypnotic centerpiece — an untitled seven-and-a-half-minute instrumental — features a lone guitar picking out a twangy melody as a wall of fuzz advances and recedes behind it. On "Stunner," their noisy feedback yields a cheery jingle tapped out on a xylophone. Such sonic weirdness abounds here, but somehow, Charlene turn brooding art-rock into pure pop candy.

DAVID PEISNER

THE SCORE

★★★★★

EXCELLENT. A MUST-HAVE

★★★★

GREAT. CHECK IT OUT

★★★

VERY GOOD IN ITS GENRE

★★

JUST OK

★

WEAK

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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 ambience 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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CMJ NEW MUSIC
MONTHLY



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 whirr 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

Link
www.sharkattackmusic.com

File Under
When you can't get out of bed
R.I.Y.L.

Yo La Tengo,
Spiritualized, Ride

MAGNET
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CHARLENE



The guys in Charlene like sounds: notes that last forever, tones that float and fly, simple beats and samples. The guys in Charlene also like melodies: ones that slither and stick to your tongue, bob like a clothesline and ripple like a curtain. What the guys in Charlene don't like, however, is getting lumped into a genre or scene. "I had this bet when we were recording (debut album) *Charlene*," says bassist Matt Miranda. "I said there's absolutely no way people are gonna call it

'shoegazer.' It's impossible. There's drum machines all over it, and it's blatantly a pop record. There's no way that's going to happen."

But it did; it has; and Miranda, singer/guitarist John Rex and drummer Ian Lawrence (the guys in Charlene, who also swap instruments at will) are a teensy bit miffed. "I cannot stand 'drone rock' and 'space rock' and overly indulgent music," says Miranda, who co-owns the Boston-based SharkAttack! label with Rex. "We like

interesting sounds and textures, but we try to combine those things with really dead-simple pop songs."

Sometimes Charlene's debut sounds like New Order fronted by Daniel Ash or a freak bastard child of Ride and Death Cab For Cutie, punctuated by Jesus And Mary Chain mood swings, the repeat choral maneuvers of Spiritualized and Ash-like tunefulness.

"I'm looking to make music that reflects the best music in my record collection," says Miranda. "That's why we're all in this music world. Because we, at some point, played a record that absolutely floored us."

But for Miranda, a lot of those albums weren't part of the early-'90s shoegazer camp from which Charlene's comparative lines are drawn. In fact, he cites Yo La Tengo's *Painful* as his favorite record of all-time, and it was while listening to the Swirlies, Flaming Lips and Mercury Rev that he and Rex decided to start Charlene in 1996.

So why all the space-rock pigeonholing? Must be those interesting sounds and textures. Charlene likes to write songs all in one key. The group likes chasing down a tone and oftentimes slaps velcro on the organ to hold a single note all the way through a song. Which sounds spacey, sure, but Charlene also knows how to juxtapose textured music and pretty noises with accessible melodies and tranquil hooks.

"There are a lot of bands that love to brag about how they went into the studio and came out with a 10-minute improvisational piece," says Miranda. "I'm not into that. Even if I'm on drugs."

—Beth Wawerna