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Editor's Note: This review has been revised since its initial publication to properly credit Lorraine Lelis for her vocal contributions. She was clearly mentioned in the liner notes and press materials, but I forgot all about her when it came time to write. Sorry, Ms. Lelis.

Evacuation is another one of those tasty little CDs that doesn't pretend to be more than it is; it simply aims straight for the pleasure centers and doesn't waver 'til the last track ends. I guess that's why I can recommend it so readily, but spent three weeks deciding whether or not I liked The Beta Band's *Heroes to Zeros*.

This Brooklyn-based duo has been lumped in with the waning electroclash movement, which doesn't make a whole lot of sense -- there's hardly any "clash" in their sound, and even the "electro" descriptor seems more circumstantial than fundamental to their existence (but hey, if it helps them sell a few more records and open some ears, that's fine). Members Joseph White and Channing Sargent focus on writing solid songs rather than pandering to trend-driven tastes, and as a result, *Evacuation* is mercifully free of bleak, joyless, aimless synth-punk slogfests. In place of all that keyboard-hammering angst, we're treated to percolating machine-drums, slippery New Order-approved basslines ("Evacuation" borders on copyright infringement, albeit enjoyably so) and burbling keyboard melodies that wouldn't sound out of place on a twenty year-old Anne Clark record. It all goes down without resistance, a thick, flavorful milk shake for the ears.

Both Sargent and White tackle vocals, but *Evacuation's* striking female vocals were provided by Mahogany's Lorraine Lelis. (The slim, stylish and sweet-voiced Sargent is the sort of focal point that most synth bands dream of; her Jean Seberg looks and soft, breathy vocals mark her as serious indie-rock crush fodder, and we look forward to hearing more of her work on future Somnambulants releases). On "In Transit", Lelis soars to the level of Opus III's Kirsty Hawkshaw, while "Countdown" allows her to channel Martha and the Muffins by way of Ladytron. White, in addition to dishing up those wonderful basslines, is actually responsible for the disc's most interesting vocal performances. On killer single "Evacuation", he's a sort of new wave Bryan Ferry, camping his way through the casually doom-laden lyrics. He goes even further on the gabber-fied "Monument" (check out those overmodulated beats!), pushing the vocal histrionics to **Robert Hazard** (or at least Ric Ocasek) levels while Lelis goes all robot-like in the background. "Bleeding Hearts" is pure chaotic new wave kitsch -- somewhere between Devo and Falco -- and the blurry, beautiful "Traveling Companion" gives us White as OMD's Andy McCluskey, warm and intimate but subtly eccentric.

Obvious new wave touchstones notwithstanding, *Evacuation* isn't an exercise in "let's name the eighties reference points" -- except for those New Order bass bits, and I'm certainly not complaining about those. The synth melodies are rich, bubbly and satisfying; they've been engineered for your pleasure, and fine-tuned to tickle your brain and get your adrenaline pumping. Given twenty-odd years of hindsight, tunes like "Bleeding Hearts" and "Evacuation" are *complete* in a way that few songs can claim to be -- compact, definitive summations of an established sound. They're unlikely to break any of your boundaries, or cause any clashes in your personal taste continuum, but as a high-level tribute to the form, they are sublime.



The Somnambulants
Evacuation
 Clairaudience Collective

Format Reviewed: CD

Soundclip: "Evacuation"



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