

POEM ROCKET

abbreviated press kit

see also poemrocket.com

Includes reviews from *Pitchfork*, *Alternative Press (AP)*, *Magnet*, *Melody Maker*, *LA Weekly*, *CMJ*, *Chicago Reader*, *All Music Guide*, as well as "Bands Not In The Trouser Press Guide Guide" ... and more

Major Recordings/Releases by Poem Rocket

(not including singles and compilation appearances):

- *Into the Æther*, EP (Bear/Cat Crash, 1995)—“Single of the Week” in *Melody Maker*
- *Felix Culpa* (1996, PCP)
- *Infinite Retry on Parallel Time-Out* (1998, PCP)
- *The Universe Explained in Six Songs* EP (1999, Magic Eye)
- *Psychogeography* (2000, Atavistic)—#33 in AP's “The 50 Best Albums of 2000”
- *Invasion!* (2007, Atavistic)

Poem Rocket *Invasion!*

(Atavistic)

Jack Rabid's



Released in 2000, Poem Rocket's *psycho geography* was a revelation to those who heard it—an interior travelogue twisting the band's rich, dramatic vocal style with the musicality of *White Album*-era Beatles, the drone of Joy Division and a love for classic concept albums and Morricone soundtracks. Now, seven years later, the band—largely Michael Peters and Sandra Gardner—applies that DNA to a sprawling two-disc concept album showcasing their more acoustic, ambient side in shades-of-gray cinema of the mind. Throughout, Peters and Gardner make poetry of their ideals, challenging the numbing and dumbing down of the culture (and a certain “monosyllabic dipshit”) in “The Universal Flipdown,” and generally sounding the alarm, albeit a lulling meliferous one. The song titles alone give you a glimpse of where they're at: “Utopian Starter Kit,” “Try Love,” “Ileah (Don't Kill, US, Just Because You Can).” It's a timeless space well worth dwelling in.

— *Robert Cherry*

Music

CHRONOGRAM

CD Review (July) — Poem Rocket
Atavistic, 2007



Formed in New York City around the core, husband-and-wife duo of Michael Peters (vocals, guitar) and Sandra Gardner (bass, vocals, keyboards), Poem Rocket has been plying its highly individual brand of electroacoustic, post-punk art pop for nearly 15 years. The band has been less active recently, as the couple opted for starting a family over the punishing grind of small-club touring, and settled in Albany, New York in 2004, where Peters teaches college English. Quality-of-life improvements aside, the slowdown has done their outfit much good on the creative front; with the band's fourth album, the double-disc *invasion!*, Poem Rocket has made its definitive, most breathtaking work.

Crafted over five years and recorded in studios from Brooklyn to Baltimore, *invasion!* is a program of epic sweep, passing through myriad moods and textures but somehow never losing its confiding intimacy. On cuts like "Underwater" and "Cosmic Man," Peters's strummed acoustic guitar lays a gauzy mesh over Gardner's keyboard blips, the pair's voices arcing on opposite horizons and uniting for the occasional surreal couplet. Sonic reference points? Tough one, since this bunch doesn't really sound like much else. Suffice to say, however, those who dig Radiohead, early Pink Floyd, post-Soft Bulletin Flaming Lips, Jefferson Airplane, or Tim Buckley—and aren't adverse to a little experimental noise leavening—will feel right at home with Poem Rocket. And *invasion!* is an excellent place to start if you're new to the group. www.poemrocket.com.

—Peter Aaron

the

VOX

a publication of wtul 91.5 fm

FREE!

Poem Rocket

Invasion!

(Atavistic)

The new one from Poem Rocket is quite impressive. The double-disc set sounds to me like Sonic Youth meets Blonde Redhead meets Swell meets Galaxie 500 but played in a hazy dream state. This is the case for most of the cuts on both discs - it's only barely too long to fit on a single disc. There may not be any hott gimmicks here but damn is this nice.

the vox 10

Boomkat product review for:

Poem Rocket - *Invasion!*

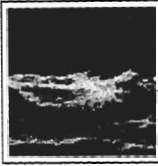
After years of silence, Poem Rocket (a band based around the nucleus of Michael Peters and Sandra Gardner) have returned with a CD double harbouring an album of monstrous proportions. This is the kind of apocalyptic folk you might expect to hear from David Tibet and his crew, and though a predominantly acoustic affair, the music on the first disc has a morphinated, doomy quality with tracks like "Into The Night Sea" and "Ileah" weaving a bleak, dramatic narrative. The second disc is slightly more raucous with distorted guitars and pummelling drumkits driving the music forward. Here the music takes on a quality you might associate with the early 4AD roster: everything's tinted by an '80s-style reverb and a textured guitar sound. Still the gloomy themes of the first disc persist, and the whole package comes across as an epic of 21st century malaise. Heavy.

KFJC 89.7 FM

Poem Rocket — *Invasion!* — Atavistic

Poem Rocket is a long-running NYC-based project led by the duo of Michael Peters and Sandra Gardner. "Invasion!" is their first release since 2000 and contains two discs, each of which focuses on a particular aspect of the group's sound.

Disc 1, which is subtitled "A Parade Of Vigilance", features 10 tracks of gorgeously recorded, acoustic guitar-based pop, often augmented with little lysergic touches such as droning synths, miscellaneous percussion, and various loops and samples. Personal favorites included "Underwater", "The Keeper", and the disc's one sonic outlier, the densely layered dronescape "The Ocean As Itself (Reprise)". Disc 2, which is subtitled "The Abdomen Of Memory", contains 9 tracks of pop-rock that I found to be very reminiscent of the kind of material that was quite popular within certain softer circles of the international underground in the early 1990's as represented by such diverse labels as Creation, Sub Pop, Too Pure, and so on – a pleasant blend of simple drums patterns, rumbling bass lines, distorted guitar chords and jagged, multi-effected electric leads, and tasteful keyboard treatments. Highlights from the second disc included "Sound Byte Hit" and "Pulse (I Hope You Dream Something)."



POEM ROCKET

Invasion!

[Atavistic, www.atavistic.com]

Principal elements of American trio Poem Rocket are presently Peter Gordon on drums, tape loops, harmonica, piano and parametrics, Sandra Gardner on bass guitar, vocals, piano and violin and Michael Peters and guitars, vocals, piano and some percussion. Back from their seven year hiatus, they've returned with a sprawling 2 CD opus entitled "Invasion!". Forget about human causes, social commentary and such, Poem Rocket sings about the real. This is music about the human struggle to keep your head above water and hold on to that wheel people throw at you. Case in point, on "Underwater" Michael Peters sings "I get deeper, deeper" as if all life was sucked out of him. The acoustic guitar parts do an intensely satisfying melody all around the chorus. "Put Your Hand in the Hand" is a lovely ballad which features duelling vocals of both Gardner and Peters. Midway through the album, I get the inkling the project is really about global warming. Water is referenced in just about every imaginable nook and cranny. Things start to pick up on "Utopian Starter Kit". As the electric guitars jangle, Peters starts to howl at the top of his lungs and the listener is finally rewarded with a climax of sorts. "Muse Thrower" could be taken for a reverential take on Throwing Muses earlier stuff, while "Sound Byte Hit" is a harsh knocking full-blast rock number. For my money, second disc is more revelatory in its honest way to rock out. Don't get me wrong the acoustic disc is fine, it's just that the harsher rock disc is where the band has a better opportunity to shine. A self-contained rock opera that is as good on the ears as it's harsh in its lyrical delivery.

- Tom Sekowski

<<< poprzednia recenzja

następna recenzja >>>

wybierz numer GAZ-ETY:



RECENZJE

- + Tatsuya Yoshida/ Piotr Zabrodzki - Karakany
- + Pharaoh Overload - Live in Suomi Finland
- + Andromelos - Andromelos
- + Fresh Maggots - Fresh Maggots
- + Unfolding - Freak Out Party: How to Blow Your Mind
- + Susan Christie - Paint a Lady
- + Jan Jelinek - Kosmischer Pitch
- + Carl Craig - The Album Formerly known As ...
- + Funkstörung - Appendix
- + Skinny Puppy - Mythmaker
- + Boogy Bytes Vol.3 - Mixer By Modeselektor
- + Adult. - Why Bother?
- + Stewart Walker - Concentricity
- + Sleep Well - Chapter III
- + Anthony Rother - Moderntronic
- + 5YR: Five Years Of Regularity - Mixed By Jaumetic
- + Dr. J present 1 Love - Neophilia
- + LCD Soundsystem - Sound Of Silver
- + International DeeJay Gigolos 10 - Presented By DJ Hell
- + The Field - From Here We Go Sublime
- + Electronicat - Chez Toi
- + Dirty Doering - Saubermann
- + Matthew Dear - Deserter
- + Computer Incarnations For World Peace



allmusic

Poem Rocket

Biography

by James Christopher Monger

New York City-based alternative noise-rock trio Poem Rocket formed in 1994 around the talents of multi-instrumentalist husband and wife Sandra Gardner and Michael Peters and drummer Peter Gordon. They released their first album, a disparate collection of EP tracks and 7"s called Felix Culpa in 1995. It was followed in 2000 by equally creative Psychogeography and by Invasion! in 2007.

Preview the new **allmusic**

The design is updated, but the song remains the same.

allmusic

Felix Culpa Poem Rocket

Review by Charlie Wilmoth

This collection of early singles from New York's Poem Rocket shows that the stellar indie rock on their later LPs, *Infinite Retry* on *Parallel Time Out* and *Psychogeography*, didn't come from nowhere. On *Felix Culpa*, Poem Rocket splits the difference between the plodding post-punk of the Comsat Angels and the white noise of *Flying Saucer Attack* and *Sonic Youth*, though *Poem Rocket* isn't as obviously melodic as any of those groups. The band's goals are achieved through repetition and texture, not melody, and *Felix Culpa* is a captivating record mostly because of the druggy, insistent bass and drum patterns and keyboardist/guitarist Denney's wild noise explosions. Intelligent, sloganeering lyrics from guitarist Michael Peters and bassist Sandra Gardner drive the point home. William Weber recorded much of *Felix Culpa* on a four-track, but this has nothing to do with the lo-fi sound that was popular when the album was recorded: *Poem Rocket* favors chunky, angular guitar lines and creepy feedback over shambling pop and dry, confessional songwriting. Some of the drum-free tracks near the end of *Felix Culpa* deaden its impact a little, but this is a powerful debut record nonetheless.

Infinite Retry on Parallel Time-Out Poem Rocket

Review by Tom Schulte

Poem Rocket's latest is an exquisite meeting of art and technology in an edgy, song-driven setting. Poem Rocket is firm in the truth that memorable and properly delivered vocals are key to a song's success, even when the main musical content is distorted guitars and driving drums. Witness the interwoven vocals of bassist Sandra Gardner (*Future Neighbors*) and guitarist Michael Peters (*Day for Night*, *Lid*) on "Box: Tallow, Felt and Ice" and other tracks. Both of these players also contribute piano and most percussion comes from Andrew Nelson (*Azalia Snail*) rounding out the trio. This album is a dense art rock creation often deeper than *Sonic Youth* and more encompassing than the *Velvet Underground*. Roughly half of the material is made up of studio productions recorded by musician William Gilmore Weber (*Chrome Cranks*) and mixed by Wharton Tiers (*the Fall*, *Sonic Youth*, *Dinosaur Jr.*) The remaining material is made up of home four-track recordings mixed by Weber.

psychogeography Poem Rocket

Review by François Couture

New York City trio Poem Rocket released *Psychogeography*, its third album and debut for the Atavistic label in October 2000. More straightforward but as uncompromising as ever, this CD contains 15 songs ranging from acoustic pseudo-ballad ("Intermission") to full-fledged noise rock anthem ("Reurbanization of the Space"). The band's best feature is still the complementary male/female lead vocals featured throughout the album. A reference to the more organized side of *Sonic Youth* is in order, but Poem Rocket also takes elements from the post-rock book, namely on the slow-paced opener "Dirigible." The basic guitar/bass/drums trio's sound is enhanced by a wide array of effects, studio montage, and tape loops that can turn what could have been a bland song into something like the haunting "Budapest." Vocals could have been more forward in the mix, as they get drowned in guitars at times, like on "Karel Appel." *Psychogeography* is packed with intelligent, energized, danceable, not-taken-for-granted alternative pop/rock tunes.

A.P.

ALTERNATIVE PRESS
MAGAZINE, INC.

VOLUME 15 • NUMBER 15

FEBRUARY 2001



POEM ROCKET 4

Psychogeography

This sophisticated yet raw New York trio are one of the best art bands to rock garage-style since the Velvet Underground. Not only that, but they do so without the safety of ironic distance—when guitarist Michael Peters lets two sour notes resonate like a migraine in the opener, “Dirigible,” or hammers a stirring, dissonant arpeggio in “Zen Hum,” you know he’s feeling the pain. But that doesn’t make the band a one-trick noise pony, either: Singer/bassist Sandra Gardner trades vocals with Peters throughout, upstaging the monotony of standard drone bands with surprisingly sweet melodies and unexpected voice arrangements. Peter Gordon anchors the ethereal angst with insistent, tribal drumming and strange tape loops, like the harmonically clashing church bells clanging almost inaudibly throughout “Explosion Ex Cathedra (Cimabue).”

Hints of the Pixies, Sonic Youth and early Blonde Redhead crop up here and there, but it’s more due to the male/female vocal interplay coupled with dissonant, memorable guitar rock than any overt stylistic reference. The real differentiating factor is Poem Rocket’s ability to coddle you with hypnotic rhythms before exploding. Or not—they just as often keep the tension hovering around, build it, and never consummate. You won’t always get the catharsis you need, and there’s an acute lesson in that. Who says art rock can’t be brutal? (Atavistic, POB 578266, Chicago IL 60657) *John Pecorelli*

KINDRED SPIRITS:

Sonic Youth's *Daydream Nation* • Pixies' *Surfer Rosa*
Band Of Susans' *The Word And The Flesh*

Pitchfork Media

Poem Rocket

Psychogeography

[Atavistic]

Rating: 7.1

It doesn't take much time with Psychogeography to figure out that it's clearly a Work of Art. Song titles in German, references to European history, sleazily distorted electric guitar, experiments with noise-- stick the thing in a black turtleneck, and you've got the hippest record of the year.

Of course, capital-A art has always made an uneasy bedfellow for capital-P pop music. If the bane of really great rock music is pretentiousness, and pretentiousness is Art's best friend, then how are the two things ever going to get along well at all? Psychogeography's tension does, from time to time, produce fascinating masterworks. But, more often, it sounds like what it is: a bunch of people too hip to kick out the jams but unwilling to put in the effort to make something legitimately challenging.

Though Poem Rocket don't entirely escape rock's trappings, they don't make the album equivalent of Ph.D theses, either. Instead, they manage to split the difference between visceral pleasure and analytical enjoyment, letting the two things grow around one another organically. And surprise of all surprises, they've even got a pretty good sense of humor.

Consider, for example, "Crappy Payphone Song," a bizarrely literal little folk ballad, in which singer Sandra Gardner mournfully intones the set of numbers one should call if they're ever forced to use-- you guessed it-- a crappy pay phone. Smack in the middle of so much post-Sonic Youth feedback and deliberately paced experimentation, the song is a funny little breather. Though it certainly fits into the album's theme of urban living, it's a quirky moment, full of the pleasure that music of this variety usually forgoes.

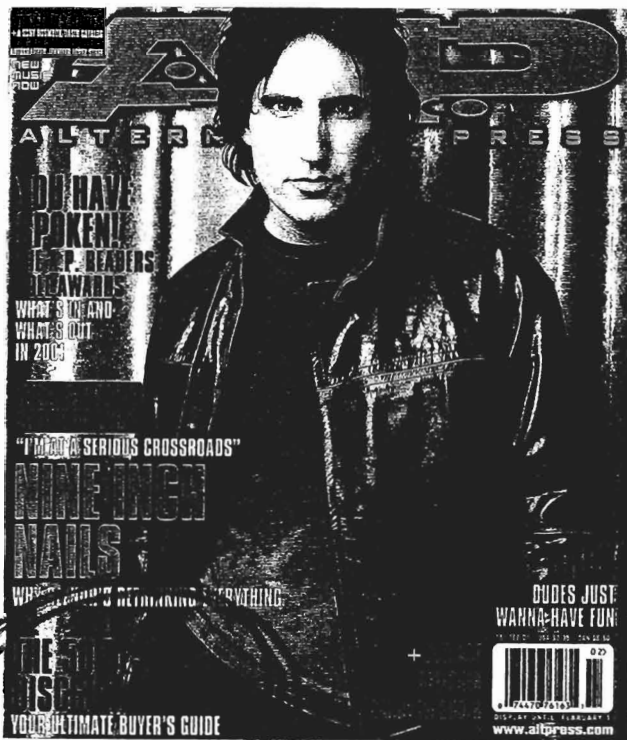
At the same time, Poem Rocket very much want to be taken seriously. They borrow from all over the art-rock map. From the Youthiness of their guitar playing to their occasional instrumental wig-outs, the Rockets resolutely stick to their intellectual guns, preferring to explore the unusual rather than exploit the expected. Like all albums of this variety, Psychogeography doesn't have the best hit-and-miss ratio in the world, but even its unusually misguided moments have their charms. The simple fact that not every album you own sounds exactly like this is enough to make it worth checking out.

And when Poem Rocket hit, they hit big. "Hip Emergency" attaches a breakbeaty rhythm to an impression of Mark E. Smith as an advertising pitchman. "Explosion Ex Cathedra (Cimabue)" is, despite its crushingly arty title, a nicely ominous little wonder. Throughout, the band's fusion of terse, No Wave ranting and freeform noise makes Psychogeography an intense trip through gritty territory, just as any album about living in an urban environment should.

In the end, Poem Rocket succeed for rather surprising reasons. Though their project reeks of earnest artistic seeking and a genuine aspiration to artistic merit, the album never becomes dry or esoteric. Powered by their honest appreciation for their influences and their genuine wish to communicate what they enjoy, the band come off sounding surprisingly unpretentious. They may never manage to achieve Art, but they've created a work of the small-a variety, which, as any rock fan knows, is where the real fun is, anyway.

— Sam Eccleston

The 50 Best Albums of 2000
 ALTERNATIVE PRESS / February 2001
 Poem Rocket's "psycho geography" #33



IF EVERY WORD IN THIS ISSUE MEANS SOMETHING TO YOU, YOU'VE GOT TO BE A COMPLAINER PUTTING OUT THE FIRE. BECAUSE THE GIFT OF HEARING ISN'T EVERYBODY'S. BUT IT IS OURS. AND WE'VE GOT TO TAKE CARE OF IT.

01 FRODO BAGGINS
 Executive Editor
 Frodo's story is a triumph of the underdog. It's a story of a young hobbit who saves the world. It's a story of a young hobbit who saves the world. It's a story of a young hobbit who saves the world.

02 DEPTONES
 Music Party
 In the wake of their cover, the Deftones are one of the most exciting bands in rock. They're a band of five, and they're all doing it. They're a band of five, and they're all doing it.

03 OUTCAST
 Music Party
 Outcast's new album is a masterpiece. It's a masterpiece of rock music. It's a masterpiece of rock music. It's a masterpiece of rock music.

04 AT THE DRIVE-IN
 Music Party
 At the Drive-In's new album is a masterpiece. It's a masterpiece of rock music. It's a masterpiece of rock music. It's a masterpiece of rock music.

2000

05 PJ HERRLEY
 Music Party
 PJ's new album is a masterpiece. It's a masterpiece of rock music. It's a masterpiece of rock music. It's a masterpiece of rock music.

06 THE DEFTONES
 Music Party
 The Deftones' new album is a masterpiece. It's a masterpiece of rock music. It's a masterpiece of rock music. It's a masterpiece of rock music.

07 RYAN ADAMS
 Music Party
 Ryan Adams' new album is a masterpiece. It's a masterpiece of rock music. It's a masterpiece of rock music. It's a masterpiece of rock music.

08 THE DEFTONES
 Music Party
 The Deftones' new album is a masterpiece. It's a masterpiece of rock music. It's a masterpiece of rock music. It's a masterpiece of rock music.

09 THE DEFTONES
 Music Party
 The Deftones' new album is a masterpiece. It's a masterpiece of rock music. It's a masterpiece of rock music. It's a masterpiece of rock music.

10 THE DEFTONES
 Music Party
 The Deftones' new album is a masterpiece. It's a masterpiece of rock music. It's a masterpiece of rock music. It's a masterpiece of rock music.

POEM ROCKET
Psycho geography
A raw, otherworldly yet highly accessible concept album. (Atavistic) [RC]





POEM ROCKET
PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY



Cette étrange pop acoustique aux rythmes répétitifs ponctués de riffs de guitares claustrophobes et hallucinants déclenche un ouragan en Amérique. Et la France ?

JAN./FEB. 2001

MAGNET

VOLUME 9

NUMBER 48

laweekly.com

POEM ROCKET
Psychogeography (Atavistic)

With one foot in mantralike repetition, the other in straight-from-the-gut rock, artcore trio Poem Rocket make skronk that soars, and despite the scary-looking architecture themes and surreal song titles, *Psychogeography* is the sort of headphone experiment you can jump up and down to.

Opener "Dirigible" sets the tone for the band's signature trope: chimy drone that unpredictably erupts into amp-taxing frenzy. "Appeal to the Imagination" and "Coronation of Ellipses" carry on in the same vein, but then along comes the memorable three-part harmonic wallop of "Reurbanization of Space," its brainy title belying raw pop thrills, and before you know it, it's back to feedbacky sustains and spiraling guitar atmospheres with "Explosion Ex Cathedra (Cimabue)." The things that keep *Psychogeography*'s bipolar tendencies on a more or less even keel, however, are guitarist-singer Michael Peters' clean, needly voice jabbing against the fey lilt of bassist Sandra Gardner; simple melodies atop a subtle background of Rhodes piano and tape loops; Peter Gordon's crashy-bashy cymbal-washes; and riffs that suspensefully mount for, like, ever. And just as the thumping toms and jangle-whine motifs start to get claustrophobic ("Zen Hum"), the band suddenly ready to party with winky whiteboy blues like "Hip Pharmacy," "Magazine Man" and "Subway Relocation Memo."

Yes, they're New York-based, they have a female four-stringer and indulge in the occasional avant styling, but Poem Rocket, contrary to the opinions of lazy journalists, are nothing like highbrow punks Sonic Youth. Basically, Poem Rocket inject the tired-and-true emo formula with a greater sense of space and earthy sensuality and there's nothing too artsy about that. (Andrew Lentz)

POEM ROCKET
Psychogeography

Though it sounds like a made-up word, "psychogeography" is actually the study of the way different parts of a city make a person feel. It's a good metaphor for Poem Rocket's songs because it isn't an exact science; it relies on mood, individual interpretation and vibe. Wandering around the third album from the New York City trio—with an abundance of dissonant drones, male/female interplay and, particularly, the tense chugging and clicking drums on the intro of "Karel Appel"—feels a lot like residing in Sonic Youth City. But what makes Poem Rocket engaging in the face of such an easy comparison is the combination of guitarist/vocalist Michael Peters' discordant, bluesy meanderings and his fluid vocalization, particularly when paired with the floating, gauzy quality of Sandra Gardner's singing. "Appel" mutates into a hand-clapping, garage-rock blast with Gardner and Peters cooing back and forth at each other, sounding more like Exene and John than Kim and Thurston. Though *Psychogeography* occasionally falters under the weight of pretension—the noisy, Fall-like "Hip Pharmacy" just lies there—the acoustic, album-closing "Intermission," with Peters sounding frail, more than balances it out. The Rocket rises because it knows that sometimes it takes both noise and solitude to make a city beautiful. [Atavistic, POB 578266, Chicago IL 60657]

—David Simutis



CHICAGO READER
NOVEMBER 3, 2000

CRITIC'S CHOICE



POEM ROCKET

Almost all the great bands to emerge from New York—from the Velvet Underground to Television to Sonic Youth to Public Enemy—seem to have in some way incorporated the drone and pulse of that city's perpetual motion into their music. In that tradition, the underrated trio Poem Rocket (bassist, keyboardist, and vocalist Sandra Gardner, drummer, tape looper, and keyboardist Peter Gordon, and guitarist and vocalist Michael Peters), who've always sounded something like the clanging of steel cellar doors and steam hissing from manholes, make the connection explicit on their new *Psychogeography* (Atavistic), an urban love song more detailed than even Sonic Youth's *NYC Ghosts & Flowers*. Despite the geographic specificity, Chicagoans should be able to relate: as the lyrics say at one point, "the space around the buildings is the soul of the city," and we certainly have plenty of that. And "Crappy Payphone Song" is bound to elicit an amen or two. They open for two top-notch local bands: the rousing Sweep the Leg Johnny and the completely arresting Bride of No No. Saturday, November 4, 10 PM, Empty Bottle, 1035 N. Western; 773-276-3600.

MONICA KENDRICK

Review: Poem Rocket's Psychogeography

by Jordan Hoffman

Much of the talk about Radiohead's latest CD *Kid A* labors on the ambient elements being cleverly incorporated into a rock paradigm. The hidden story here, folks, is an unknown band from New York called Poem Rocket that is wildly and proudly using the formal elements of rock—namely, guitar, bass, drums and voice—and shredding them of their arena implications. Presented freshly like this, we have the non-rock paradigm, bereft of AABA, bereft of recognizable chorus and verse, yet replete with fierce rises, boundaries pushed, cliffs leapt up from.



Oh, it's so very retro. Television did it in 1977; Sonic Youth did it in 1988; Built to Spill did it in 1999. But *no one* is doing it with as much wit and precision as Poem Rocket right now.

"Psychogeography," a record that really just showed up on my doorstep along with the dozens of other unsolicited CDs I get regularly, is the manna from heaven, diamond in the rough, needle in the haystack so many cynical reviewers dream about. Poem Rocket so very much *get it* that I am stunned that they aren't really a newly monikered collection of alt music veterans.

Lyricaly, the album sticks with its Alphavill-ean thesis of urban decay equaling evolutionary movement (or something.) With the opening buzz of guitar, echoing, siren-like riff and shoegazer-with-a-rat-tat-tat drum beat, "Dirigible" lets female vocalist and bassist (natch) Sandra Gardner float northward declaring her strength and acceptance of machines. Guitarist and male vocalist Michael Peters calls her back from below, and the response is a hard rock song built stealthily from swirly low-fi effects. No tempo change, just attitude. A revelation.

"Reurbanization of the Space," continues where this leaves off, with some Lee Renaldo liquid guitar riffs. "Here is the future" Gardner and Gordon wail in quasi harmony. "In the space around the buildings is the soul of the buildings" goes the chant. If it weren't already a defined genre, I'd say *this* was "industrial rock."

One or two songs, like "The Coronation of Ellipses" may be a hair *too* similar to the classic Sonic Youth of "Sister" or "Daydream Nation," but, come on, is that really something to complain about? Exactly.

"HIP Pharamcy," (a gag on HMOs?) breaks a little with this (lack of) paradigm. A spoken word piece, really, to the backing soundtrack of exploding urban development—the kind that involves this stink of the Gowanus Canal, not the freshly brewed coffee of Soul Coughing's Park Slope.

"Subway Relocation Memo" is the eight and a half minute opus. It lacks the symphonic edge that makes Television's "Marquee Moon" such a masterpiece, but its bassline and continually evolving guitar effects make it anything but overblown.

The CD ends, snarkily enough, with a tune called "Intermission," where the only acoustic guitar is heard. It is light years from the rest of the album on every formal level, but exudes much of the same weary, metropolitan angst. "I wanna spend this moment with you, in the dark vertical corridors. . . ."

It's good shit.

Cold Comfort

LATE 2000 ALBUM REVIEWS

Poem Rocket - *Psychogeography* -8-

This is a very interesting, ambitious and overlooked group of sonic sculptors from NYC. They remind me of Band of Susans, Slint, odd krautrock and even Sonic Youth. "Reurbanization of the Space" and "Subway Relocation Memo" are pretty much astonishing, using melodically clanging guitars and a confident lyrical flow to sound like prime S.Y. "Explosion Ex Cathedra (Cimabue)" is like Verbenas meets Can. There's a nice shoegazer type influence on a lot of the songs, as far as their atmosphere and how they flow through space. Poem Rocket even has dual male/female lead vocals, making the S.Y. and B.O.S. comparisons even more accurate. Sandra Gardner's are pretty, sultry female vox, not grimy, intense ones like those of Kim Gordon or Susan Stenger. The quality control isn't perfect throughout, but this is a hell of a band. The lyrics are consistently oblique, memorable and interestingly sung, and it's almost disturbing how effortlessly they can write memorable hooks. Poem Rocket's previous two records came out on lowbrow PCP Records, so their change in labels should bring them a lot more critical attention. Speaking of that, a similar band (Radiohead) released a far inferior album on this same day, which got about a thousand times more attention and analysis. Go figure.
(Atavistic; www.poemrocket.com)

POEM ROCKET
The Universe Explained In Six Songs

A doctoral-level study in controlled-chaos rock.



Although most often compared to New York's more famous exponents of avant-rock (Sonic Youth, Shudder To Think and Blonde Redhead), Poem Rocket offer a raw intensity that's perhaps more akin to the controlled chaos of the early Factory Records bands, such as Joy Division, A Certain Ratio and Durutti Column. In more contemporary terms, imagine Radiohead on a shoestring budget. Both Radiohead and Poem Rocket are consumed, musically as well as lyrically, with the struggle between art and technology. With Poem Rocket, however, the tongue is planted much more firmly in the cheek.

The Universe Explained In Six Songs picks up where 1998's *Infinite Retry On Parallel Time-Out* left off. The band's fascination with atmospheric effects and all things outer-space continues in songs such as "New White Spaceship," which features a Bongwateresque spoken vocal by bassist Sandra Gardner, and in "God Damn Alien Sundial," where guitarist and main vocalist Michael Peters pokes fun at Manhattan's World Trade Center. The tongue-twistingly titled "Araloolaleelay" is a modern twist on the Velvet Underground's "The Murder Mystery," while the final cut, "Levy 9 R.S.V.P.," offers a nearly 12-minute odyssey into the world of experimental noise. Listen and learn; this is college rock in its truest sense, dissertation and all. (Magic Eye Singles, POB 6165, Baltimore MD 21231) *Darren Johnson*

Poem Rocket
SPACE-STATION ROCK



Rock band names are famously meaningless.

What, after all, does Better Than Ezra mean, except that Ezra ain't very good? But New York's Poem Rocket actually *sound* like a missile shooting pretty words from flame-orange engines.

The band's new, satirically titled EP, *The Universe Explained In Six Songs* (Magic Eye), offers shorter, more delicately crafted songs in comparison to those on their 1997 full-length, *Infinite Retry On Parallel Time-Out* (PCP), which was like a creepy and moving prayer book of avant-noise, with some pop passages. Because the members possess New York mailing addresses and arty sensibilities, some critics have drawn comparisons of the band to Sonic Youth; but *The Universe* shows Poem Rocket still moving steadily toward something all their own.

"It is even tighter, and the songs are much shorter; and yet it contains our longest song ever," says guitarist/singer Mike Peters. "It plays with the whole space-rock genre—and spoofs it."

The record's strange mix of moving, acoustic pop elements, mechanistic electro-rock and at times hilarious social satire makes

songs such as "God Damn Alien Sundial" (about Manhattan's World Trade Center) especially distinctive. Nonetheless, Poem Rocket's wit doesn't curb tons of rocking out.

"I feel like we're more controlled in our writing, in that we don't allow ourselves as much self-indulgence of a riff as we might have been tempted to do when we were a younger band," says bassist/singer Sandra Gardner.

So where do the band see themselves on the alt-rock map?

"I would situate [us] probably as a difficult water passage," quips drummer Peter Gordon. "Like the Strait of Magellan at Cape Horn, or the Panama Canal when the locks aren't working right."

When asked if Poem Rocket are a "New York" band, Gordon, an NYC-born-and-raised native, replies: "Absolutely. Have you ever tried to load your van at rush hour on 8th Avenue?" —*Bill Brown*

FEBRUARY 10, 1999 Athens, GA
FLAGPOLE

Monday, Feb. 15
Poem Rocket,
Dynamite High
High Hat Music Club

Brooklyn, N.Y.-based trio Poem Rocket — guitarist-singer Mike Peters, bassist-singer Sandra Gardner and drummer Peter Gordon — are currently touring in support of their brand new six-song EP titled *The Universe Explained In Six Songs*, a spaced-out roar of pop and noise released on the Providence, R.I. Magic Eye Single Label. The EP is a concise follow-up to last year's full-length album *Infinite Retry On Parallel Time-Out* (PCP Records).

The band's minor-key guitar clang and in-and-out drone sessions seem to remind music critics of Sonic Youth (the Poem Rocket press kit is full of references to Kim Gordon and Thurston Moore), but a lot of it seems in line with bands like Joy Division, The Birthday Party and The Gordons.

Local rock band Dynamite High open the show with their solid new line-up and a handful of new material. (BL)



Poem Rocket

Let's Do Launch

Poem Rocket Explains the Universe

BY MITCHELL FOY

Make a listen to just about any popular artist and try to come up with some descriptive terms. Try not to repeat yourself. You're likely to come up with no more than a few that are substantial. Now plow through the Poem Rocket catalog. You're likely to spend hours trying to cover all of the angles. New York's Poem Rocket takes multi-dimensionality to new levels. At any given point they can be described as pop, post-punk, indie-rock, psychedelic, discordant, organic, experimental, noisy, acoustic, hard rock, harmonic, or any combination thereof — the list goes on until the brain is exhausted. Yet despite the diversity there is an undeniable cohesion that ties it all together. Ultimately Poem Rocket is best described as Poem Rocket. They take a place next to all of the great artists throughout history that have defied categorization.

The band began life around 1993 with the core of husband and wife team Michael Peters (guitar, vocals) and Sandra Gardner (bass, vocals) with the addition of a revolving door of drummers that has currently settled with Peter Gordon. After releasing a string of singles and EP's, PCP Entertainment released the whole batch as a CD called *Felix Culpa*, and, as far as Atlanta is concerned, that's when the storm hit. Chills are still felt when the opening strains of "Small White Animal" pierce the air, as

they did in '96 across the local college waves. The sound conjures images of children playing in front of a monstrous wall of flames that reaches the clouds, oblivious in their bliss to the looming threat. The record firmly justified the group's moniker, providing that immaculate launching rush that can only come from a unit that charges not only the groin but the gray matter as well. Meanwhile ringmaster Peters established early on that, yes, the lyrics are interesting and if you listen close you'll find many facets within them like irony, theory, absurdity, metaphor, etc.

Next came 1998's near-masterpiece *Infinite Retry On Parallel Time-Out* — their first official full-length, also on PCP. This record cemented their position as a band willing to delve into any uncharted territory and brought cohesion of their varying elements to new heights, all the while never forgetting to rock. Always the rock. Here is proof of a band that stands outside all musical trends, enticing the listening public to come to them instead.

Their new release is an EP titled *The Universe Explained in Six Songs on Magic Eye Singles*. Musically it is a fluid continuation of *Infinite Retry...*, while adding a few new pieces to the puzzle. I contacted Peters via e-mail about this new release, which not only works with the many elements that make Poem Rocket what they are, but also contains



a theme involving aliens and space. 'Levy 9 R.S.V.P.', Peters explained, "is about the comet that hit Jupiter in the form of a wedding invitation. 'God Damn Alien Sundial' is based loosely about the World Trade Center. Using the sundial metaphor, it not only plugs into the alien theme, but also serves as vague commentary upon the space and the activities occurring around the building. 'Monolith' fits thematically because of the sundial connection to architecture and the monolith-like qualities of the skyscraper, not to mention the space/alien thematic connection to the monolith in Kubrick's *2001*."

This theme was not part of a master plan, but instead a "happencence" occurrence that was taken advantage of as the songs were being assembled. "[There's] a makeshift theory that with-

in a natural come-what-may process of writing, irony can become obvious at the conclusion of the creative process. Personal philosophies are always shaped after events in art occur, and this also applies to life. We pushed the EP's theme in certain directions after it was recorded. 'The Real Periphery' was probably the last of the six songs to come together. By this time I was aware of the thematic similarities of the other five songs. With this nestled in my subconscious, I happened across lyrics that could work on different levels for me or a listener. I played upon the human imagination's idea of this vast expanse of space, wherein we ask if we are alone."

Well aware of the fact that these themes in modern music are less than novel, and exposing a certain weariness of the music industry's constant attempts to pigeonhole the group, Peters adds, "By drawing attention to the space-rock theme and accentuating it, we're also trying to dispose of it as well. Poem Rocket has been mis-labeled frequently, and space-rock is among the many genres that we feel doesn't quite fit what we're doing creatively. Given the opportunity to exploit this mis-labeling, we hoped to discount, disassociate, and destroy it by participating in it."

So if they're not "space-rock," what exactly are they? "Poem Rocket are quite simply songwriters experimenting," Peters offers, "to varying degrees within individual songs, with the general form of the Western pop song itself." Fitting, yes, but given the multifarious nature of this group, an understatement of colossal proportions.

Poem Rocket performs live at the Echo Lounge on Feb. 13th

poem rocket



The Daily Athenaeum
Monday, February 22, 1999

A Poem everyone should hear

The New York band Poem Rocket brought their monstrous show to 123 Pleasant St.

By JAMES WALLIS
A/E WRITER

A backdrop of distorted television images graced the wall behind the New York-based rock trio, Poem Rocket, during their visit to 123 Pleasant Street on Friday night. The pairing of the mangled television images with the dark yet hauntingly psychedelic band was quite appropriate. Spanning the back of the stage, the screen took familiar television pictures and twisted them into an indiscernible mess that was still mesmerizing to watch. Similarly, the band mangled any of the audience's preconceived notions of what a rock show should be like until a new image was formed that was as colorful as it was chaotic.

Poem Rocket has a sound on recording that is heavy and distorted. Any one of the band's many releases, such as the six-track EP *The Universe Explained in Six Songs* or their full-length album *Infinite Retry on a Parallel Time-Out*, provides the listener with only a glimpse of the full Poem Rocket experience. When played live, the sound is monstrous and twisted beyond any recognizable form of sanity. The band uses guitar distortion like a surgeon uses a knife, but this is only one of the tools they use to operate on the crowd. At one point during the show, bassist Sandra Gardner used one of drummer Peter Gordon's sticks on her bass like a bow on a violin. The result was an intense drone that turned the listener's stomach as it blasted their eardrums.

Poem Rocket's strength comes from the balance between the stage presences of Gardner, who also sings, and guitarist and vocalist Mike Peters. On stage, the two are polar opposites who manage to draw the crowd in with irresistible strength in-

stead of pulling it in different directions. The result of Gardner and Peters' synthesis is a force greater than the sum of its parts.

Peters is a frightening character when he is performing. Well over six feet tall and sporting bulging, mad scientist eyes, Peters often delivered a glare to the crowd that would make the most hard-nosed onlooker reconsider any jeers he might have in mind. If by some bizarre chance an audience member's attention strays from



Poem Rocket's performance, Peters will be sure to go out of his way to get it back. On Friday, this endeavor included Peters' departure from the stage itself. As he wandered through the crowd, the lanky and ominous singer shook some sort of tiny, round noisemaker directly in the ears of unsuspecting members of the crowd. This daring, in-your-face act did away with any short attention spans that might have been lingering in the crowd.

To Peters' left, a much different event took place. The singer's female counterpart kept his wildness in check with her detached, spaced-out presence. Gardner emotes with her eyes closed in what ap-

pears to be a perpetual state of slow motion. Her gentle, trance-like movements were in stark contrast to those of Peters, a man who seemed to be enduring physical torture while on stage. The delicacy with which Gardner approached the microphone was a perfect complement to her soft, haunting vocals.

When asked the difficult question of how to describe his band's style of music Peters, acknowledged that "there is a very literary approach to what Poem Rocket does." He went on to characterize the band as, "songwriters experimenting in the pop music form." Peters wants the listener to recognize the changes that the band's attitude goes through with each different song. According to the singer, one Poem Rocket song only captures one brief moment of their ever-changing attitude toward their music.

More than any other aspect of the band, Poem Rocket's live performance is what sets them apart from their peers. While most bands will sit idly by when a crowd is unresponsive, Poem Rocket transcends the stage and incites the crowd at any cost. Peters' confrontational journeys into the crowd are a metaphor for this phenomenon, but it is Poem Rocket's powerful music, honesty and overall intensity that really jumps off the stage into the audience's minds.

There is an invisible line that separates good bands from great bands. This line between mediocrity and greatness is the point where garage bands stop and true performers march on. Poem Rocket doesn't just cross this line, they dive over it with utter disregard for where they might land afterward.

Peter Gordon.

I'll tell you what happened to me when I was 12. Um, it's kind of disgusting. Peter Gordon from White Plains, NY this small town north of NYC. When I was 12 I went to Costa Rica with my family and we were there for a month, it was like a summer thing, my parents were both teachers, blah blah blah...I was not a particularly skinny or fat kid but I started losing a lot of weight and I was hungry all the time and I was eating, eating, eating. They discovered I had a tapeworm, which was growing. But unfortunately we couldn't leave and I couldn't be treated in the states because it's like quarantine or something. So, they had to treat me there.

Unfortunately they didn't have proper medicine. I think they do stuff now where you take pills and it's like the strongest Ex-Lax you could ever take and everything in you comes out. But I didn't have that option, so the way they treated me, was the way they used to treat a lot of people for this problem which was they starved me for like 4 or 5 days (it was like from the Middle Ages?). Yeah, so for 4 or 5 days I didn't eat anything and I was just absolutely ravenous and I'm 12 years old and I'm crying. On the fifth day, they put me in this chair, I'm strapped down in this chair and they brought in this big plate of steaming hot pasta with all this like rich sauce on it and it smelled great. They put it down in front of me and I just fuckin' sat there and I just had to breathe in the smell and —this is actually true — the tapeworm comes up to get at the food. The doctor had 2 assistants, they were on either side of me, they waited until the tapeworm came up to get the food and as it came out of my mouth, they GRABBED it and pulled it out. It was like probably 6 or 7 feet long. And that's how I was cured of the tapeworm, it's a very old method that they used. (Did you throw up?) Yeah, it was disgusting, this whole thing came out of me. But it was basically coming out for the food. Fascinating, story, it's not a joke.

MAGNET

VOLUME 6

NUMBER 35

POEM ROCKET

Infinite Retry On Parallel Time-Out

Finally, something challenging to listen to that isn't difficult to understand. Delicate yet fully formed and not without a totally savage edge, this New York trio approximates guitar/studio psych-rock in all its exultant glory. Shadowy vocals hover over slabs of distortion and bursts of man-made sound. Pounding chords of tribal inference and dronological innuendo flirt urgently with simple, almost conventional song structure. Go on, bang your head, pass out drunk, sacrifice a small animal or just scare your little sister—Poem Rocket has the sound for it all. With stark, lurid imagery and fierce intellectual underpinnings, *Infinite Retry* contains both obvious and subliminal sounds that reach far and wide. Haunting interludes of perfectly constructed aural atmospheres supply huge, dramatic force and an otherworldly disposition. Occasionally plaintive, oddly subversive and even downright pretty, this recording seems to gestate like some kind of living entity. Half of the tracks were mixed by Wharton Tiers (an endorsement in itself), but the whole thing holds together like a big hunk of protoplasmic goo. Straddling the line between nightmarish and dreamy, the psychic coloring of this fanciful endeavor is both somnambulist and hallucinatory. [PCP, POB 1689, NYC 10009]

—Mitch Myers

DAZED & CONFUSED MAGAZINE

1997 MAY ISSUE

POEM ROCKET

Experimenting with white noise washout sounds and moving rock melodies, their new album, *Infinite Retry* on *Parallel Time Out* is due out in the spring.

Name: Michael (vocals, guitar) and Sandra (vocals, bass)
Age: 31 and 32
Where are you from? Brooklyn, NY
Describe the place in three words: Cloudy, more sky
Where are you going? Back to the studio to finish the new album, ironically titled "Retry on Parallel Time-Out" (it's taking forever)
What's your role in the band? Harmonic and gatherer, but an agrarian system would be ideal. Horticulture!
Describe your sound to the utterance: Cloudy, more sky... more high... more low. More stars

New York swings more than London. True or False? True and False
Greatest musical moment: Awarded honorary membership to the Village Green Preservation Society
What song would you most like to cover? "The Crystal Test" by Clark Coolidge
Which people would make up your ideal family? There is no ideal family. Atticus Finch would be a good start, however
What's the worst job you've ever had and why? Michael: Washing oil truck semis with chemicals and water, puddles of which expanded the rubber soles of my shoes from 13

to 35-inch flying pan size
Favorite word: Ausfahrt
What's the greatest lie you've ever told? Sandra: I'm a sagittarius, we're pretty honest people. Michael only lies to himself
Which song do you lose your virginity to? If I miss one up, that would be a great lie
Cultural references (book, band, movie): I think we've already dropped a few
How will you change the way we think? ...With subliminal messages based on William Burroughs' theory of three tape recorders



“Cloudy, more sky. More high, more low. More stars”

Badaboom Gramophone

The Bands Not In The Trouser Press Guide Guide

POEM ROCKET

Blue Chevy Impala EP10 (Bear/Car Crashh) 1995

Felix Culpa (PCP) 1995

Infinite Retry On Parallel Time-Out (PCP) 1998

Music, like narrative, exists at its most intriguing moments out of tension. Poem Rocket's songs are best seen as narratives, so draw your own conclusion. Led by dramatic personae Michael Peters (who also writes essays, a couple of which have appeared in this publication) and Sandra Gardner, the group draws its greatest strength out of its contrasts. Compositions go long, basing themselves in repetition while unveiling like fragmented stories. Peters and Gardner often sing their own vocal phrasings right over each other. Mostly, it's Peters' performance presence - a lumbering, wild-eyed, howling madman - that sticks most in mind.

Felix Culpa collects seven-inch songs, as well as three songs from Blue Chevy Impala. The edgy guitar intensity on "Eject" is a highlight, while "Small White Animal"'s background effects haze and invigorated dual-singing remains a high point for the band. "Deus Absconditus" rotates around a repeating drum pattern, leaving wide open spaces, so the intensity of a full-band is properly felt at the right moments. Although Felix Culpa

is essentially a compilation, it has all the markings of an inspirational first album. Guitarist Dennis left before the next album.

Infinite Retry On Parallel Time-Out is somewhat cryptic as a concept album, but intelligent strands wash the songs in provocative gestures of drama. "Box: Tallow, Felt and Ice" is the closest the group has come to a pop song, with a catchy guitar riff following each line of verse. At times, *Retry* has a sense of being *At Play In The Fields Of The Academics*, but Poem Rocket never loses sight of being essentially a rock band, and the group continually provides proper payoffs as such. [bg]

EXCLAIM Toronto, Canada



POEM ROCKET *INFINITE RETRY ON PARALLEL TIME-OUT*
(PCP, BOX 1689, NY, NY 10009)

Like their hometown of New York, Poem Rocket find many ways of rising above squalor (or squalling) and being beautiful. Woody Allen's *Manhattan* was a subdued, but rapturous valentine to New York, with its infinite variety of greys in black and white photography. Conversely, there is the lurid vibrancy of Times Square in pre-Giuliani New York celebrated by David Holmes in last year's excellent *Let's Get Killed* and the garish life and energy graffiti brings to the economically devastated South Bronx. Poem Rocket find their splendour amid a chaos and confusion of noise and atonal sound. They invite the endless comparisons to Sonic Youth not only with their jarring guitar tunings, but also with their intuitive knowledge that a strange beauty, that the proverbial ugly-beautiful child, is more compelling and fascinating than outright loveliness. So while *Infinite Retry* is quite beautiful, indeed, it sure ain't pretty. They share with Sonic Youth and My Bloody Valentine an air of seductive menace — even while they coo and soothe with whispered vocals and liquid, dreamy chords, you get the feeling that they'd just as soon use their guitar strings to strangle you. As it is, this is bruising pop booby-trapped with lacerating edges, an extended siren song that finds pleasure in their pain.

-Chris Wodskou



PREMATURE EVALUATIONS

A QUICK ROUND-UP OF ALBUMS DUE SOON.
BY DAVE SEGAL, AARON BURGESS AND ROBERT CHERRY.

POEM ROCKET

Infinite Retry On Parallel Time-Out

If this underexposed NYC avant-pop trio weren't so extraordinary, they'd be beating Radiohead and Sonic Youth at their own games. The Rocket's second LP offers great songs, distinctive vocals and innovation without a sampler or phat beat in evidence. (PCP) —rc



ALTERNATIVE PRESS MAGAZINE, INC.

VOLUME 12 NUMBER 117

[APRIL 1998]



POEM ROCKET

Infinite Retry On Parallel Time-out

Sure, NYC's Poem Rocket deserve their frequent comparisons to Sonic Youth and Gang Of Four, but they also have a lot in common with David Foster Wallace's novel *Infinite Jest*. Poem Rocket are like the musical equivalent of Wallace's book: Their songwriting is so loaded with musical history, so rife with theoretical concepts, so full of interesting ideas, they need footnotes. Forget math rock—this is thesis material. With fierce rhythms, insistent bass and Sandra Gardner's often clipped vocals, Poem Rocket's jagged art-rock could be part of New York's old-school no-wave scene, or even part of early '80s post-punk Leeds. But Poem Rocket are more unpredictable than Bush Tetras or the Au Pairs; their songs are more likely to change time cleverly, to lurch in unexpected directions or to invite strange new sounds into the mix.

That said, Poem Rocket also find many dead ends and follow unrewarding instrumental paths, perhaps suffering from the "debut disease" that often afflicts bands who are finally afforded album-length freedom after being limited to EPs. (*Infinite Retry* is considerably less melodic than 1996's highly recommended singles compilation *Felix Culpa*.) But as with *Infinite Jest*, or the Dada artists from whom Poem Rocket surely draw inspiration, the band can occasionally be frustrating; but these quibbles seem inconsequential for a band with such thoughtfully considered songs and such a distinctive and expansive vision. (PCP, POB 1689, New York NY 10009) David Daley

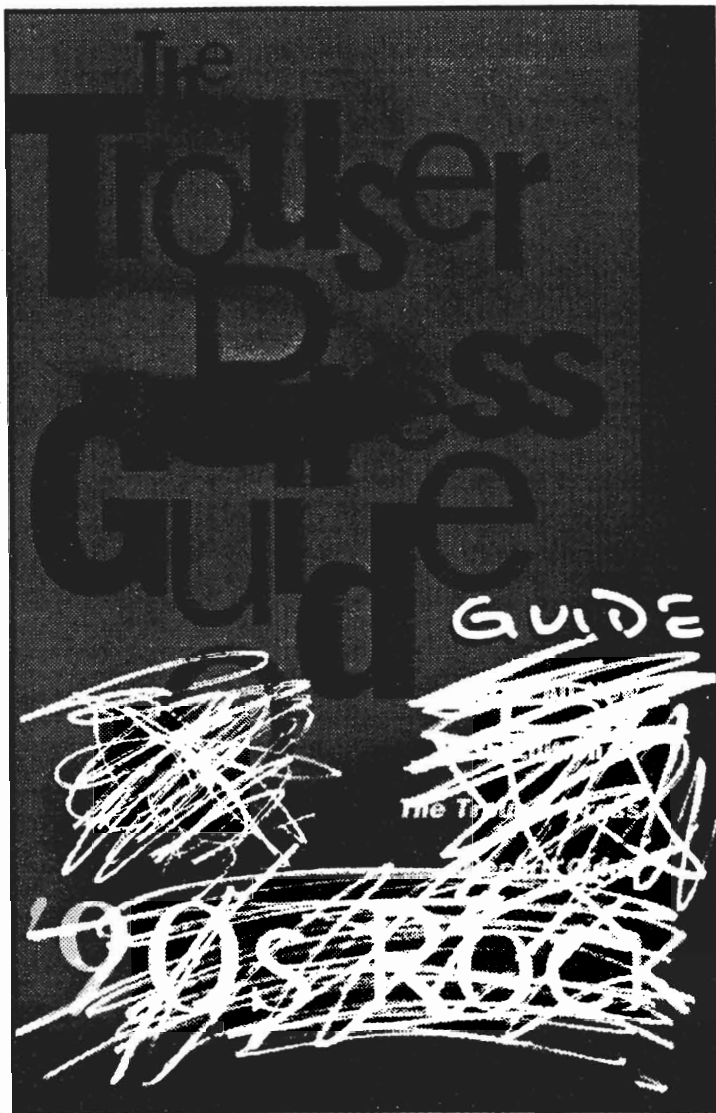
YOUR FLESH

POEM ROCKET *Infinite Retry On Parallel Time-Out CD*

Finally the NYC based Poem Rocket has hammered out a full length record, but it didn't come easily. It was a process that took over eighteen months to create plagued by one disaster after another including the midway departure of guitarist Dennis Bass. The recording/mixing process was bandied about between Chrome Cranks' William Weber, Wharton Tiers, and the band itself. Surprisingly *Infinite Retry...* doesn't come off as fragmented as one might think. The record flows with jagged guitar riffs and punch drunk rhythms amidst a whirlpool of sonic striation which evokes the feeling of riding the edge, accompanied by sweaty palms and a knot in your stomach. Guitarist Michael Peters and bassist Sandra Gardner continue to share vocal duties, harmonizing in ethereal sing/speak tones that are as haunting and moody as their music. [PCP] Troy Brookins

Badaboom Gramophone's

THE BANDS NOT IN



POEM ROCKET

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1995

Felix Culpa (PCP) 1995

Infinite Retry On Parallel Time-Out (PCP) 1998

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7" reviews

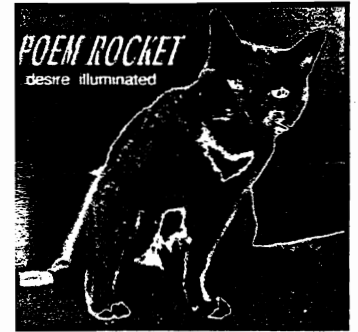
Poem Rocket
"Desire Illuminated"/
"Electronimo"
Magic Eye Singles

Poem Rocket's latest release features two vastly different, but equally rewarding tunes full of droning, swirling rock. "Desire Illuminated" is built on a wall of guitars with a gnawing riff on top of them. If Bowery Electric wrote real songs, they might sound as catchy as this. "Electronimo" is a trippy thing with whispery female vocals and drums (drum machine? metal file cabinet?) that are so overdriven that they sound like a murky piano. It makes a pretty warped groove.

MIKE SHANLEY



POEM ROCKET are
weird, abrasive, beautiful.
MARK LUFFMAN plays the
culture vulture



POEM ROCKET

"Desire Illuminated" (7")

Magic Eye, P.O. Box 6165, Baltimore, MD 21231
410.342.6046

Known for its spacey rock, Poem Rocket makes quite a statement with this single. The A-side is built on a dark guitar base that is decorated with somewhat slurred lyrics, but as it progresses, the music builds speed and the lead vocals switch back and forth from singing to speaking while female harmonies are introduced. It is a cunningly constructed song that lingers and haunts. On the B-side, raspy female vocals and tribal percussion are marked by static to make "Electronimo" an interesting, if not playful, commentary on the electronica phenomenon. *KELSO JACKS*

MELODY MAKER, December 9 1995

powerful verse

"I HEARD Michael Stipe singing 'It's A Man Ray Kinda Sky' and it was: 'Who's Man Ray?' So rock 'n' roll introduced me to art, literature - it led me in directions I would never have taken otherwise." It led Michael Peters from "pretty straightforward" bands to the unashamedly experimental Poem Rocket, and from Ohio to New York, where the band released a half-dozen tracks on as many labels in as many months. Tracks as oblique as early

Gang Of Four, as impenetrable as Delicatessen, with a harsh beauty all their own. Tracks featured on the surprisingly cohesive "Felix Culpa". "It's weird hearing everything at once. We worked hard on the running order, but it doesn't sound like a real album. I can't wait to start recording specifically for our first one - but then, I'm always most excited about the next project."

'Felix Culpa' is out now on PCP. An album and tour follow in the new year

Mod magazine

San Diego, CA

MAGNET

Volume 6 Number 34

POEM ROCKET "DESIRE ILLUMINATED"

Giving atmosphere a rock edge, New York's Poem Rocket continues to make some of the prettiest noise around. The title track is the more chaotic number of the two, weaving Mike Peters' droney vocals and Sandra Gardner's ethereal singing through a dense, fuzz-guitar atmosphere shaped by a repetitive melody. But it's the b-side, "Electronimo," which shows this group at its best: Gardner's ghostly vocals float atop a tribal-mechanical noise background, which gets a groove with the injection of some funky guitar bursts. It's ambient with a bite. [Magic Eye, POB 6165 Baltimore MD 21231]

-Laura DeMarco

MUCCHIO

POEM ROCKET DESIRE ILLUMINATED Magic Eye

Trio di New York, i Poem Rocket si possono considerare come una versione noise dei Pavement. Sia la title track che *Electronimo* sono brani piuttosto grezzi e ci vuole poco ad intuire l'utilizzo di una strumentazione lo-fi (quattro piste?). Non se la cavano affatto male e soprattutto il secondo brano - che lascia da parte il rumore per concentrarsi su riu-scite sperimentazioni - è ricco di spunti originali e convincenti. Da seguire. (gp)

Poem Rocket *Infinite Retry* on *Parallel Time-Out* CD
Whilst you sit in your armchair pondering what to watch on television tonight, there are stark, sinister anti-culture plots afoot. Conspiracies in favor of consumerism. Many of those that report such 'guises' are themselves trapped within a societally-induced downward spiral equating their criticisms to the same cultural-currency value as individuals striking one another on Jerry Springer's programs. Huxley warned us of rapid consumption pushing us far away from serious contextual thought and practice and arguably, even love. Poem Rocket are reporters hardly constrained by the norms of rock culture: Yes, they harbor angst; Yes, they wield the instruments that propel a sonic force at your cortex. Yes, they rock. Each song within *Infinite Retry* on *Parallel Time-Out* requires thoughtful discussion and debate. The album as a whole needs a semester's worth of lectures, exams and research papers to get at its composite pieces. It only takes one listen to regard it as valid.



POEM ROCKET

Felix Culpa

Felix Culpa collects tracks from seven-inches, 10-inches and compilations that Poem Rocket recorded between '94 and '95. Living in (and lurking through) the Big Apple, it's not very surprising Poem Rocket would inherit the tweaked guitars and dissonance of Sonic Youth and the twisting/crashing moments of the Velvet Underground. But the band manages to plow through uncharted territory by adding to its NYC mix some dreamy Mazzy Star ("Pretty Baby") and the sonic intensity of Big Black ("Eject")—and walking that impulsive edge like the mad Birthday Party. "Milky White Entropy" borders on Galaxie 500 emulation, but somehow through all of this Poem Rocket never bites the hand of its predecessors. To best enjoy *Felix Culpa*, you should program the cuts in chronological order to save yourself from jumping off the track during the trip. Otherwise, your brain will be attacked by a migraine head fuck. [PCP, PO Box 1689 Grand Central Stn, New York NY 10009]

—Greg Barbera



Felix Culpa

Poem Rocket, in splitting their attentions between little details and enormous designs, practice a kind of musical botany. Imagine songs tall as trees, with even the tiniest green pores—upon the smallest leaf which dangles from the most remote branch—elaborately, graphically planned. As any great artists, they are trying to do the work of the gods.

Felix Culpa promises to be one of the most interesting debuts of the year. It is a new type of organism, filled with engrossing electronic effects and savage brushstrokes of tone painting, all stitched down underneath with simple guitar threads. If you liked the last releases of Magnetic Fields or Lisa Germano, you should love Poem Rocket. Their debut LP's inside jacket cover, filled with minutiae about each song's recording and release history (most of these songs originally appeared on singles or compilations), is just one clue to the New York quartet's sense of how much thoughtfulness and perhaps anxiety a good song really merits. Poem Rocket's work is the sort whose influences are so numerous and varied one can only tack on, feebly, a few faraway dots on the map. And what are they, you ask? You may hear traces of the brutal, Romanesque death marches of Cranes and Joy Division; the choring scrapes and hisses of Sonic Youth and My Bloody Valentine; the utter pandemonium and psychosis of Bardo Pond and Throwing Muses.

But on Poem Rocket, all of these encapsulations ricochet off like darts on an iron bull's-eye. They don't tell nearly enough of the story. The songwriting is just too inventive to bog down in matchmaking. S. Gardner's eerie, dead-woman vocals throughout *Culpa* come off like the inverted reflections of the more traditional, sorrowful mysteries of Michael Peters. On songs such as "Blue Chevy Impala," Peters achieves a kind of starkness and quietude that accentuates the meditative value of everyday objects. As the title suggests, Peters can essentially elevate a banal piece of Detroit detritus into a sacrosanct *objet d'art*.

That many of *Felix Culpa*'s songs were aged to perfection on 10- and 7-inch vinyl, is probably the most concrete indicator of the band's devotion to the wholeness of the song. "The Animal Planter" is just one of many real showpieces, a bizarre ode of piano and cello in 2/4 time with all the delicious alienation of Dada. On that song, and throughout the album, Poem Rocket use noise as a stony form of artificial beauty, rather than a grating distraction or gesture of rebellion. Remarkably, there is enough organic warmth elsewhere, even in Poem Rocket's coldest, most satanic clamors, to steady each song. PCP —Bill Brown

CMJ

JACKPOT!

POEM ROCKET Felix Culpa

PCP, P.O. Box 1689, New York, NY 10009 212.982.4018

A combo of poly-artistic transplants, Poem Rocket has maintained a low-key presence on the New York slum-gig circuit for some time now, thoughtfully freeing its sonic confusion on a mystified group of pricked up ears. But its self-described 'unconventional guitar rock' is deserving of a more colorful definition — call it a case of musical schizophrenia — where hints of noise school chaos belligerently dishevel a downy bed of post-punk-influenced rock.

Commandant Mike Peters (vocals/guitar) and his cohorts deliver this drama through pleading, emotive singing (male and female), infinite guitar and sleepy drum strokes, with an additional plane provided by hypnotic tape loops. An assemblage of tracks released since 1994 on fine indie wax, *Felix Culpa* is a crash course in Rocket history, yet doesn't smack of the eclecticism of your average compilation. Chalk this up to Poem Rocket's broad musical vocabulary, which neatly coincides with the musical ground covered over the course of the '80s: from muted production (à la Gang of Four) to British-influenced melodic vocals and My Bloody Valentine-esque 'walls of sound.' With traditional verse-chorus arrangements jettisoned, the band's germ ideas are circled as if they are raging, sacrificial fires, and a fever-pitch builds until each track burns out smoldering. Liftoff: "The Animal Planter," "Conrail De L'Avion," "Flaw" and "Milky White Entropy," which by itself makes *Felix Culpa* well worth your milk money. STEVE SAVOCA

POEM ROCKET
felix culpa

THE WIRE
adventures in modern music

Issue 146 April 1996

Poem Rocket Felix Culpa PCP

ENTERTAINMENT PCP 029 CD New Yorkers Poem Rocket peg their swirling guitar noises to fierce rhythms and fairly punchy songs. Their often frantic outpourings — rolling drums, lurching bass and jagged guitar riffs — evoke something of a post-punk feel. There are occasional studio effects — tape dropout, for example — but generally Poem Rocket stick to a gloomy guitar rock format. There's the obligatory Velvet Underground homage in "Pretty Baby", but elsewhere there are echoes of The Birthday Party and even Siouxsie And The Banshees: very 80s.

Westzeit / Köln

POEM ROCKET

Felix Culpa

(PCP Entertainment/RTD)

Poem Rocket kommen zwar aus NYC, spielen aber keinen Jazz. Felix Culpa kompiliert frühere Vinyl-Veröffentlichungen und Raritäten nun erstmals auf CD. Zu lärmigem Gitarrengeschrammel oder psychedelischem Klaviergeklimper erheben sich die Stimmen von Bandleader Michael Peters (ex-Lid und Day ForNight) und Bassistin Sandra Gardner, was sich zu einer spannenden White-Noise-Platte fügt. Mein Favorit der insgesamt 10 Songs ist dabei "The Animal Planter". HB

YOUR FLESH

POEM ROCKET *Felix Culpa* CD



This CD, which includes previously released vinyl and compilation tracks along with a pair of exclusives, effectively prepares the listener for the upcoming full-length release of new material by this vastly underrated NYC band.

Poem Rocket skillfully combine the wide open repetitive, rhythmic nature of Echo and the Bunnymen with the claustrophobic guitar squall of *Sister-era* Sonic Youth. The result is both terse and swirly. Somehow they always seem to sound like they are playing along with a thunderstorm, even when they shift gears into some dreamy, fluttery, Bowie-like acoustic glam which amazingly feels just right next to the cool churn of the more "signature" songs. The best cut on *Felix Culpa* is still the a-side of their 1995 PCP single, the harrowing "Small White Animal" which may very well be about being a typical New York punk guy walking home from a late CBGB gig. [PCP] *Craig Finn*

Straight Edge

1997. No. 8.

Győr, Hungary

Poem Rocket: *Felix Culpa* CD

Mióta kiábrándultam a Sonic Youthból messzire kerültem az ún. noise-rock zenéket, zenekárokat. És akkor a kezembe került a Poem Rocket CD-je, mely 1994 és '95 között öt kis független kiadó (köztük a CD-t megjelentető PCP Entertainment) által világra szabadított kislemezek, EP-k és válogatásokon szereplő dalok gyűjteménye, és nekem újra bizodalom van ebben a zenében, a Poem Rocketben legalábbis biztosan. Ha csiped a New York-i hangzást szerintem szeretni fogod a Poem Rocketet.



MARCH 1996

POEM ROCKET *Felix Culpa* PCP

With their songs running the gamut from dirge to lament, Poem Rocket is the apotheosis of all shoe-, navel- and floor-gazing bands. *Felix Culpa*, a collection of vinyl releases and compilation tracks, is billed as a "Starter Kit" rather than a debut album, but it has a deathly unity that signals a total stylistic certitude: barely qualifiable as a "guitar band," Poem Rocket buries its swirling guitar figures under a muffled cacophony of bass, piano and (say the liner notes) "et al randomness." Poem Rocket works with noise the way a sculptor works with clay—keep chipping away at it until there's a slab left that resembles art. A metallic echo leads off the album and crops up between songs, tying them together as a *leitmotif*. That blast of distant feedback is about the only thing that Poem Rocket allows you to cozy up to; the songs themselves emerge like they're rising from a tar pit. The piano on "The Animal Planter" thumps like a dark approximation of a tribal chant, while "Blue Chevy Impala" starts with dissonant squalls over thumping beats and leavens the gloom with a fluttery, Cranes-like voice promising to "drive like the weather." The Cure's Robert Smith may have once reveled in this kind of malaise (one song here even sounds like a way-slowed-down version of "Charlotte Sometimes," if that's possible), but the members of Poem Rocket have no interest in leading an alien nation of like-minded depressives; they are the alien nation. If *Felix Culpa* is wickedly enjoyable and cathartic, it's because the band had the wherewithal to keep it dark. —Chris Molanphy

DATALOG: Released Dec. 10.

FILE UNDER: Love lies bleeding.

R.I.Y.L.: Cure, Cranes, Joy Division, My Bloody Valentine.

SINGLE OF THE WEEK

MELODY MAKER, November 18 1995

MELODY-MAKER

REVIEWED BY MARK LUFFMAN

POEM ROCKET

INTO THE AETHER EP (Bear/Carcrashh)
THIS five-track EP starts with the epic "Blue Chevy Impala", a song about flying saucers and ficke girlfriends that sounds like a very grumpy Luna, and then gets very strange and very beautiful very quickly.

In an ideal world, Cypress Hill would sample "The Furry Evil Bird" and we'd have the real-deal avant-

garde head-f*** pile-up we all want. Sandra Gardner, a sexier, sedated Sarah Cracknell singing in front of a slow motion Pop Group, makes "Contrail de l'Avion" this week's most beautiful pop record. The sadness floods out. The unexpected elegance of all the songs makes "Into the Aether" easily P R's best record so far. And I was told America was dead...?

Mod

magazine
SAN DIEGO, CA

Poem Rocket *Felix Culpa* CD

Poem Rocket is in my Top 5 favorite bands from NYC (2 of the top 5 are on Silver Girl!) making it hard to objectively critique their music, as its "awwwwww! goooooood" from my tainted perspective. "Felix Culpa" culls songs from a Silver Girl comp., a Ba Da Bing comp., a PCP single, a Bear single, and the Bear/Carcrashh co-released 10" - much of the latter taken from the demo cassette I heard many moons ago courtesy of Jeff Toste of Laurels (who at the time was saying Silver Girl should snap these young upstarts up). For starters, Michael Peters (ex-member of Lid, and Day for Night) is a true gentleman and scholar. Poem Rocket puts to music the heart of what New York is about: noisy, dirty, beautiful, exciting, scary, overextended, tightly closed in, and always challenging. While Poem Rocket's guitars may screech, and Michael's voice cry for help and damning the evil in humankind, Sandi's (as in Sandra Gardner who added her beautiful voice to a song on the Gapeseed album "Project 64") voice calms the listener in a manner I can't recall since first experiencing the Cocteau Twins in 10th grade. Palm Rocket as we affectionately call them on occasion, borrow from Sonic Youth, My Bloody Valentine, Joy Division, and Wire to make something so unique that words sometimes are more a barrier than a tool to communicate how my organs react to their sounds. Take the time, the money, the energy and invest it in hearing what they are producing and it may actually move you to action, to make the rest of your life worth living. As an aside, Poem Rocket and Gapeseed share a practice space in the heart of NYC. (PCP Entertainment Inc. PO Box 1689 NYC, NY 10009)

POEM ROCKET

INTO THE AETHER 10" EP

A quick scan of Poem Rocket's bio turns up mentions of their various intersections and path-crossings with Jad Fair, Pavement, Seam, Azalia Snail and New York avant-garde outfit SEM Ensemble, which give nearly an adequate inkling of what kind of space they hover about, but, as every song transpires on *Into The Aether*, a recent five-track EP, and *Felix Culpa*, an eye-opening compilation of singles and B-sides, more names and points of comparison suggest themselves, without quite fitting snugly. The guitars that tear apart melodies with the rough, lacerating insistence of a dull saw blade remind me of Live Skull and, inevitably, Sonic Youth, but the undeniable elegance tempering the brutest noise directs me more toward the territory of Shudder To Think's pop contortions. "Milky White" is a tortured ballad of introspection and self-incrimination of the sort that Afghan Whigs perfected on *Gentleman*, but "Pretty Baby" has that hazy, mescalized stardust of Mazzy Star. Like so much New York noise/art rock, Poem Rocket have found the shortest distance from pained existence to expression in music, whether it be a cauterizing sear of white heat or something lushly brooding. And far from being monochromatic or merely droning as so many of their precursors and peers have been, their songs are subject to tangents and detours that, as slow and winding as the music gets, ensure that they're never static.

-Chris Wodskou

NO. 18 JUNE/JULY 95

MAGNET

POEM ROCKET
 "Small White Animal"
 [PCP]
 "Period"
 [Bear]

Borderline Kraut rock, mixed with downtown-N.Y.C., mid-'80s neo-noise, chased with a pop sensibility. Sound revolting? Try again. "Small White Animal" loops a shrieking guitar around a gloomy, goth bass progression—and guess what—I can't get the fucking thing out of my head. "Period" nicely incorporates acid-tinged, effects-heavy guitar meanderings with a keenly melodic bass underpinning; the flip, "Flaw," builds from a shrill frailness laced around the vocals of Michael Peters and Sandra Garder until it explodes over the top. Both singles are unexpectedly great.

—J.D.

CMJ JACKPOT!

POEM ROCKET Poem Rocket (10" EP)

Bear Records, JAF Box 444 New York, NY 10116-0444

New York's Poem Rocket may or may not be the biggest thing since Opal, but they're definitely onto something, and doing it without copying other people or mimicking



trends, which in itself is a victory. "Blue Chevy Impala" (the A-side spins at 45, the B-side at 33) builds on thunderous rhythms and all-out space jams to create an atmospheric, slightly unnerving impression of a dragged-out Opal jam, while on the flip, it's "Pretty

Baby" that arouses interest, an almost Syd Barrett-ish romp full of plinking toylike xylophones and breathy vocals. **JAMES LIEN**

CMJ 4-24-95

POEM ROCKET "Small White Animal" (7")

PCP, P.O. Box 1689, Grand Central Sta.,

New York, NY 10009 212.982.4018

Poem Rocket's signature sound is of passionate rockers and spaced-out noise experimentalists playing the same song at the same time. "Small White Animal" is almost straightforward, except for the huge descending, echoing guitar-scream that overwhelms the entire song, curling around everything else in it like smoke and teasing the lead guitar part into more and more tone-bending mayhem. "Milky White Entropy," on the other side, wraps a *musique concrete* intro and outro around crackling ambient noise, then slips an acoustic lament into the middle, where it's subtly changed by the surrounding noise-juices seeping into it. **DOUGLAS WOLK**

7' of fun

POEM ROCKET
 "Small White Animal" b/w "Milky White Entropy"
 PCP Entertainment

Although Poem Rocket has risked a perception of pretentiousness, I would be amiss if I did not offer the complete titles listed on this 7". Here goes: "Small White Animal" b/w "Milky White Fade in," "Milky White Entropy," "Carbon Black fade out" with slight "Animal Planter Reprise." What this NYC combo has done, however, is soared above most bands who would be content to slap together two unrelated songs for release. The group has created a work that can stand on its own, regardless of whether or not it is included on a future full-length project.

On "Small White Animal," Poem Rocket's second "single," the band continues to explore musical fabrics and guitar atmospherics, but the band is not rehashing "Silver Rocket." The agents that comprise this unique musical chemistry are Dennis Bass (guitar), Andrew Nelson (drums), Sandra Gardner (voice, guitar and vibraphone!) and Michael Peters (voice, guitar). Peters, a Northeast Ohio native who was eventually drawn to NYC, could very well be the best performer/vocalist around that nobody knows about (A handful of *MOO* readers may remember his band Day For Night kicking around Ohio in the late 80s before heading off to Richmond, Virginia.)

The "Milky White" side begins with what sounds like a mutated music box before giving way to punctuating acoustic guitar strums and Peters' striking voice, which can be likened to the chap from Moonshake. It's a moment of splendor when he gets to the line "I'm coming apart at the seams, and it seems that I'm dissolving." The song itself seems to be doing just that, but you are soon thrown a lifeline by those acoustic strums and, eventually, Sandra's complementing voice. The whole shebang could have been written by Angelo Badalamenti after a *Galaxie 500* show.

Poem Rocket doesn't so much create songs as paint sonic pictures, loosely frame them, then hang them slightly crooked. Start collecting for your walls now.

—Mike Sumser

A.P. ALTERNATIVE PRESS

POEM ROCKET March 1995
 "Period"/"Flaw"

Long-anticipated debut from this NYC quartet proves worth the wait. Thurston and Kim should play the fuzzy dream-pop lullaby "Period" for their baby at bedtime, except three-quarters in, it gets all clenched and the guitars jump a few notches in intensity. "Flaw," though, is the real killer. The rhythm moves at a slow, noble gait while two guitars ascend in double helixes of rotary-saw buzzing and Sandra and Michael's dazed and blissed voices get blown hither and yon. Well d(r)one. (Bear, JAF Box 444, New York NY 10116) —Dave Segal

MELODY-MAKER

POEM ROCKET
 SMALL WHITE ANIMAL (PCP)

GORGEOUS. A pale shimmer, a powerful glimmer, an anguished drawl and we're away. It's one of those records where you can't quite hear what he's saying — "Everything I see looks like nothing"? Or "nutmeg"? — but it matters not because the sound the words make is so perfect for the sounds the guitars make. A record you can trust.