



**A** hot air  
The French popsters pull out all the smooth moves and grooves on their latest disc

favourite among those who know their YSLs from their LVs, the French band known as Air is a musical duo who continually entice the stylish set without ever getting labelled *démodé*. According to the band's lead singer, Parisian Jean-Benoit Dunckel, the inspiration behind Air's sound successes (four albums and hits such as "Sexy Boy" and "Playground Love") comes directly from their love of—what else?—girls, girls, girls. "We constantly observe our female fans like [sexy '60s French pop icon] Serge Gainsbourg did," says Dunckel. "We worship the sophisticated, beautiful girls who aren't vulgar and don't turn up their nose

at people. We write so many songs about them and fantasize about their most intimate moments. Usually we prefer the ones who don't want to meet us backstage—the shy, pretty ones who are a mystery and want to keep us a mystery."

What is no mystery is Air's much-raved-about latest album, *Pocket Symphony*. Packed with the duo's sultry lounge-like verses, *Pocket Symphony* hosts a clutch of delicate pop songs that pair nicely with a good glass of Beaujolais (light, smoky and sweet). The album's lyrics—mainly driven by hypnotic phrases—touch on the topics of foreign erotic cinema ("Lost Message" is like

a modern *Emmanuelle* sound track," says Dunckel) and a bevy of unidentified beauties the duo have dreamed up: " 'Left Bank' is about a nonexistent girl, our ideal."

Another sensually charged track called "Redhead Girl" is about the scent of a fiery maned muse that Dunckel hazily admits "Air's never met." He does, however, cite Patrick Süskind's book *Perfume* as inspiration. "In the song, we were trying to investigate the cliché of what a redhead's aroma would be. Süskind writes about the same sort of addictions and obsessions to love that we cherish. Love and longing are things we never tire of."

And Sofia Coppola, for one, never tires of them. The renowned director collaborated with the twosome on the sound track to all three of her films: *The Virgin Suicides*, *Lost in Translation* and *Marie Antoinette*. Coppola took to the lads so much that she even had them appear in the latter film with full-on frills and wigs.

"When we were filmed in Versailles, it was as if she had brought the ghosts of Versailles to life," Dunckel says, laughing. "It was very strange for us, but we did because Sofia knows the importance of having artists interact with one another. She has built a little artist family around her—not an avant-garde clique but a family that we are happy to be a part of. We feed off each other." —*Elio Iannacci*

**LUCKY CHARMER** **FORMER CRANBERRIES SINGER DOLORES O'RIORDAN GETS HER GROOVE BACK** As one of the most successful acts to come out of Ireland since U2, The Cranberries were a soulful force to be reckoned with in the late '90s, creating a signature sound as distinct as the clover of the band's homeland. But the 'Berries demise in 2003 didn't signal an end for lead singer Dolores O'Riordan—she's been busy getting on with her own self-proclaimed journey. Looking back at the reasons for the group's breakup, she recalls, "The road wears you out, and also dealing with sudden fame." Thankfully, all things happen for a reason, and the results of her personal and musical plights are clear in her debut solo disc, *Are You Listening?* Songs such as "Loser" and "Ecstasy" delve into issues of child bullying, drug addiction and suicide, showing O'Riordan hasn't lost her edge. And her Sinéad-calibre vocal prowess is balanced with a scatter of melancholy throughout, proving that her hiatus from the studio certainly hasn't eroded any of the songstress's talent. "I've come a long way [since The Cranberries split up]," she says of her career, "but I feel a lot more comfortable now as a solo artist. I wouldn't have been ready for it before." —*Laura Lanktree*

