

video

UNSUNG HEROES VOL.1

Various

Electric Productions, 82 Bartholomew St., Newbury

AT LONG last the provinces have grasped the video Photo Booth Principle – round up a lot of unsigned bands, stage 'em, shoot 'em, edit 'em, package 'em and proliferate 'em. Like the traditional demo tape, in fact, except that here you can make judgements about posture and footwear and septuagies (look it up).

This seven-band Thames Valley compilation is – in the (adjusted) words of film critic Pauline Kael – like sleeve designs for albums you don't want to buy. Take, for example, The Magic Mushroom Band. The stage is – dim. The prevailing colour is – brown.

Eventually, a mage-like being sporting uncanny hair growth steps up to the microphone. Then – as the band tunes up, an exploding cloud of rice and sandals – he lets us in on a secret: "This song is about alternative substances, as it were". The song begins. Meanwhile, a girl in a creased disco dress gaffers keenly

behind the speakers, a living testament to what 'alternative substances' can do for your stage presence.

There are some good spots here, but first – more unkindnesses. It's troubling to discover that a few musicians regard independent video not as opportunities for convention-throttling but as chances to behave like TV-AM personalities. Like the first band on view, The Boys From Brazil, who might as well be called Thirty-Five and Related To Scott Crolla. 'Dartline', a homemade promo, makes you believe that gigantic Wine Bar Gods sit smirking over the Thames countryside, dropping bits of trend on other wise sincere people. Here are the modestly pricey designer gumboots, the anglopoise lamps, the vodka-ad friends over for dinner, the girlfriend who is a cheat and a lie but knows her pasta, and – most of all – that short, expensive walk in the rain, bearing a wistful, crinkly facial expression, a wistful, crinkly wardrobe, and an even more wistful, crinkly enormous white poodle. No, this was never

SEES THE PRESIDENT CUT UP ROUGH

alternative video.

The Anthill Mob are more like it – classy and skilled, with a brass section that cleaves the mustard somewhere between A Certain Ratio and The Lounge Lizards.

But the crown of crowns just has to go to The Geisha Girls' self-made 'Cyborg Men'. Shot entirely on condemned farmland, the heroines turn out to be four full-figure ladies in lime-green bondage gear. At one point they pretend to be fledglings in a bale of hay; later, they kick a cooker down the road. In a world of telly justice 'Cyborg Men' would get on *Whistle Test* sooner than tomorrow.

SF: SKELETAL FALLY THE THREE JOHNS LIVE

Whiteline Video, 83 Great George St., Leeds LS1 3BB

TWO CONCERT tapes from cassette newcomers Whiteline. About the Johns: regrets – I have a few, from the poor sound quality to the not very imaginative cutaways (band members walking down the street) to the short-person-in-the-audience



the best of this year's independent video. These tapes are scratch-edited; they're the lie that tells the truth.

Death Valley Days is a four-piece suite centring around the Thatcher-Reagan Economic Summit of June '84. As the Gorilla fact sheet explains, "We began to collect TV coverage of the events along with our own footage – our experience of police on the streets, nuclear terror, the miners' struggle – edited together with their versions. The production evolved into 'scratch video' – talking back to television with the means at our disposal".

On your television, the results look like this: it's a sunny day, and

Ronald Reagan is making a speech. Flags flutter, beefy executives stand at attention, and the scratch squad are rescuing truth from the jaws of deceit.

Close-up on Reagan – the hinges move, the voice comes out, but if you remove just one or two pivotal nouns you get: "Today, our armies are here uninvited and unwanted. Believe me, we in the US/ want war. We/ are the focus of evil in the modern world. We/ reserve the right to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat. The US is/ evil and contemptible to the core. You keep that in mind!"

Later, as views of international carnage flash by: "We must terrify Central America/the Soviets/Ireland/Poland/Japan, or (heartily) anyone in the free world for that matter!"

Buy this tape for its wit, its maliciousness, and its brilliant, elegant editing.

Announcer's voice: "Mr President, the countdown please..."

Ronald Reagan: "1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, ... uh ... 8..."

Dessa Fox