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BLACK

There's a maxim about theater which dates back at least to the days of vaudeville: "When *you* fall in a ditch and break a leg, that's comedy. When *I* fall in a ditch and break a leg, that's tragedy." Colin Vearncombe would disagree. His second A&M album is full of steep emotional ditches, yet he called the record *Comedy*. "I looked at (the songs that) finished up on it," he said in a recent interview with *Q* magazine, "and realized that if all that had happened to somebody else, I'd probably find it really funny."

It's not the first evidence that the 26-year-old Vearncombe has a contrary nature. He grew up in Liverpool, interested in music, but dismissed the city's storied musical heritage once he realized that "The Beatles were being played at wedding receptions." An aspiring sculptor, he was influenced in his mid-teens by the more textured, personally anguished division of new wave — the Cure, the Associates, Magazine — and formed a band. Liverpool itself was a new wave center, but in a city known for extravagant band names like Echo and the Bunnymen, the Teardrop Explodes, and Wah! Heat, Vearncombe named his band, Black.

It was, as any photograph will show, his favorite — modern, stylish, but coyly undetailed, "a name that wouldn't offer a clue as to what the music itself was like." A three-piece band, Black debuted on New Year's Day, 1981, performing in Liverpool's dingiest clubs. After a year and a half wading in bogs, he exchanged two band members for Dave Dickie; the second Black lineup toured with the Thompson Twins, and recorded two singles for WEA, "Hey Presto!" and "More Than The Sun." When his partner left in 1985 for a production career, Vearncombe was left as a solo act — in more ways than one.

A marriage to a girl he'd known for seven years lasted just nine months, and ended slowly, unhappily. Record labels dismissed his demo tapes, his publishing company dropped him, and he was in two car accidents.

"I was sinking into self-pity and enjoying it," Vearncombe says. Working with Dickie (now known as Dave Dix), he gave voice to his self-pity in new songs like "Wonderful Life" and "Everything's Coming Up Roses," grim tales of excessive, lingering depression. "I was really just transcribing what I was feeling," he says. The former song was picked up by Ugly Man, a British independent label, and its modest chart success led to a deal with A&M. Once it was re-released, "Wonderful Life" became "the song of summer '87," according to a writer for England's *Sunday Express Magazine*. Named for the single, the *Wonderful Life* album spawned two more gloomy pop hits, "Roses" and "Sweetest Smile." Solitude and misery proved to be Colin's fortune.

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