

NOW HEAR THIS

A weekly trip through the new-release aisle of your local music store

EQUATION

Hazy Daze (Putamayo Artists)

If music were a mere formula, British band Equation would be a big hit.

But there's more to it than that. The band's debut album sounds good in theory — a slick, well-tuned folk-rock quintet led by singer Kathryn Roberts, who has a silky, luxurious voice and an easy delivery.

Unfortunately, the talent is wasted on a series of nondescript, anonymous songs that could be from any well-turned folk-rock band any time in the past decade. There is nothing to distinguish one track from the next — no hooks, no catchy riffs, not even a cute line of poetry to elevate any of the 11 pieces beyond pleasant background music. — *Sean Scully*

WILLIAM TOPLEY

Spanish Wells (Mercury Records)

English singer-songwriter William Topley aims for profundity but lands somewhere closer to pomposity on his second solo album, "Spanish Wells."

From its overwrought packaging — which says the album is "b William Topley" and assures us "lyrics included" — to the swirling organ and Allman Brothers guitars, the album telegraphs its frantic attempt to be important.

In most respects, however, it proves itself to be a mere trifle.

Mr. Topley, leader of the English band the Blessing, is fascinated with the white-boy-blues sound, a road so well-traveled in rock music that it takes an altogether remarkable artist to avoid cliché. Although he has a considerable voice, solid musicians and some promising lyrical talent, Mr. Topley proves unable to break out of the trite formula. — *S.S.*

Jan. 1, 2000