



ATLANTIC RECORDS

Tracey Thorn and Ben Watt of
Everything But the Girl.



Everything But The Girl
The Language of Life

Ben Watt and Tracey Thorn have staked out a distinctively mature jazz-pop terrain. A major commercial success in Europe, they're finally breaking through in America with their latest release, *The Language of Life*, and its percolating first single, "Driving."

Since their classic debut in 1985, the style has changed little. Each album features the duo's pithy lyrics and Tracey's confident, self-assured vocals backed by Ben's

more limited but engaging back-up singing.

Certainly their jazz credentials never have been stronger than here. Producer Tommy Lipuma recruited stellar session musicians like saxophonists Michael Brecker and Stan Getz and drummer Omar Hakim. The result is a musically rich look at a world of sophisticates who drolly reflect on their emotional entanglements.

On "Meet Me In The Morning," a woman urges her married lover to run away with her. "I haven't come to be a stranger," she sings. "I haven't come to break your home/ I haven't come to harm your children/ I've come to be your love."

On "My Baby Don't Love Me," another woman regrets having cheated. "That's how I let my fate begin/ Threw back the sheets, let someone in/ And thought that love would understand/ But nothing ever goes as planned."

As on all their albums, the songs seem merely charming at first. But after repeated listenings, the complicated feelings and musical passages dig in: the grown man who can't talk to his wife in the title track, the gorgeous sax solo on

"Driving" and the woman in "Letting Love Go" who won't shake off an old romance.

Still, this effort isn't quite as good as 1987's languid gem, *Idlewild*. Ironically, its two weakest moments are also its two most ambitious. "Me and Bobby D" is an obtuse jab at Bob Dylan and Jack Kerouac, rescued from indifference by some witty lines. "Imagining America" tells of lovers separated at the turn of the century when one emigrates to America. It never connects emotionally, but a clever vocal arrangement keeps it interesting.

After five years and some 50 songs, *Everything But The Girl* has created a catalog of music that is sure to prove irresistible to other vocalists for years to come.

But it's hard to imagine anyone doing a better job than Ben Watt on the beautiful closing number, "The Road." In it, yet another jaded soul says casually, "I'll keep a good thought for you," only to let down his guard and add plaintively, "If you're lonely, think of me." It's an affecting moment, typical of the insight *Everything But The Girl* brings to all its music.

BY MICHAEL GILTZ