

**Procul Harum
Something Magic
Chrysalis**

I imagine the British press gave this album a rough time considering the current teenage movement there and let's face it, Procul Harum have been around for ten years or more. However, this is NZ\$ and anything with more gusto than a metronome tapping is worth mentioning in the hopes that the insipid strains of the banal disco-fad will be drowned out.

Something Magic is an overstatement as a title, although the side one chooses to listen to first does have a bearing on this conclusion. I strongly recommend you listen to side one first and if it appeals to you, stick to it. It consists of five songs, intelligently structured, with some nifty though stylistically dated orchestration. The band never really takes off but with keyboard-based music like this, any raving usually results in loss of detail and murky production.

Within the limitations imposed, drummer, Bernie Wilson, introduces some interesting counterpoint work, complemented neatly by Chris Coppings' bass.

Side two is a contrast, consisting of a work entitled, 'The Worm and the Tree', a philosophical treatise that will be widely interpreted, I'm sure. I will avoid pointless derision of the lyrics; let me just say that I read them to my one-year-old son and he was not impressed. I will have to say that 'The Worm and the Tree' is conceptual corn but then 'Michael and the Slipper Tree' is corny and I love it. I feel this album, due to its quirky characteristics, is strong enough for most people's taste to make it worthy of consumption. Eat up.

Mike Chunn

**Gong
Gazeuse!
Virgin**

Gazeuse! follows much the same pattern set by Gong's previous album *Shamal* which, in turn, was a radical departure from the group's previous style. Gong now plays a Soft Machine-type avant-garde jazz-rock with an emphasis on the percussion talents of Mireille Bauer, Mino Cinelou and Pierre Moerlen.

But Gong has had an awkward past and, although none of the original members remain in the present group, the past has left its mark. Gong was founded by David Allen, then a refugee from Soft Machine, who created the idea of the planet Gong, inhabited by psychedelic dwarfs. The idea evolved into a whole Gong mythology, a mythology which the group naively adopted on stage and record. When Allen left, Steve Hillage (then Gong's guitarist) carried on the tales of Allen's weird imaginary world. It wasn't until he left in late 1975 after his solo album *Fish Rising* that Gong dropped all reference to Allen's fantasy.

For all the excellence of *Gazeuse!* and the band's dogged persistence, the scars of that fantasy still remain. Many people must still feel, as Pink Floyd's Nick Mason confessed prior to producing *Shamal*, that Gong is "woolly hats with maybe equally woolly heads".

Jeremy Templer

**Disco Magic
Phonogram**

Disco Magic, is a well-packaged and thoroughly marketed collection of disco cuts. Its the sort of record that keeps record companies where they belong — in business. But its not likely to score with your average music freak, no matter what kind of stuff he may be into. The problem is that collections encourage indiscriminate listening. They are designed for the undiscerning. If you can tell the difference between one song and the other, then you needn't buy the record.

However, this one does have its good points. It includes several funk classics such as Hot Chocolate's "You Sexy Thing" and Natalie Cole's "Sophisticated Lady". There are a couple of good tracks from the Bar-Kays, a band that dates back to the days of Memphis Soul and Stax Records, and a quality Ohil Players number. There are two good percussive tracks (Osibisa and Kalyan), both unfortunately marred by fairly trite lyrics. And then there's a bunch of instantly recognisable Top 40 songs by the likes of Shirley, Gloria Gaynor, and Wild Cherry.

There's some really gross stuff on it too, studio disco of the assembly-line variety. Its this uninspired and mindless stuff which gives disco a bad name. But it sells. The four or five examples (Silver Convention, Symphonic 2000, Billy Ocean etc) of this commercial-shit detract from an otherwise reasonably palatable album.

RECORDS

But even with Process Soul, there are no absolutes. For instance, the Bee Gees are placed with a solid, danceable cut on side one, and a track on side two that could be a parody of the genre. So much for initiators.

From my point of view, the main fault of *Disco Magic* is its sameness. There are no highs or lows. Good soul music (or any good music for that matter) can take you from one end of the emotional spectrum to the other, and back again. Unlike records by people like Al Jarreau and Rufus, *Disco Magic* has no dynamics.

Which is why it's good business. Its probably going to get played at parties till its coming out of your eyeballs. At least half the tracks are downright funky — the rest you'll probably tolerate just because they're there. And in twenty years time, when your kids ask you what you used to dance to, drag out your copy of *Disco Magic*. That'll show 'em.

John Malloy

**Bee Gees
Children of the World
RSO**

Other points of merit aside, you have to admire the shrewdness with which the Bee Gees have relaunched themselves at the public. From the appearance of singles "Nights on Broadway" and "Jive Talking" the boys have assailed the market with a new and cunning blend: enough funk to appeal to disco devotees, enough vibrato to rouse old fans and even enough tune to take in a more demanding soul audience.

But not till I listened to *Children of the World* did I realise how prolific they've been over recent months. A good proportion of the songs I recognise from the radio, and of course there are others off the previous album that've had chart success. Well, good luck to them; such new found energy is enviable, especially when the product is good.

Taking It All In Stride

**Mark Williams
Taking It All In Stride
EMI**

Mark Williams is undoubtedly the finest solo singer working in New Zealand today and *Taking It All In Stride* proves that more than adequately. He's always been a good singer but he's no a lot better and the range of material tackled here affirms that. From the Marvin Gaye styled funk of "A House For Sale" to the slower songs like "Rock and Roll Widow" and "Taking It All In Stride", he handles the lyrics with taste and power and proves the breadth of his talent.

The basic backing unit of Redeye play with muscle and overall the production is very fine. I find the synthesised strings a little overbearing at times but that's only a minor grumble.

Particularly notable are the two new Zealand penned songs. Malcolm McCallum's "True Love" (Is Never Easy) is treated as a funky ballad and the long-time Blerta show stopper "This Is The Life" is finally given the exposure it deserves.

I'm happy to say that the product is good. The Brothers Gibb are writing good songs — better songs than they used to write. "Nights on Broadway" was a real goodie, and on *Children of the World* are a few more. "Love So Right" is a pleasant soul ballad, as is "Love Me"; "You Should be Dancing" pushes along, and the rest more than bear up. Unlike certain other disco bands, the Bee Gees are not tune hoarders. The average song runs to such extravagances as verses and choruses, or at least to 3 riffs in place of the standard one. With tolerable variety and tasteful arrangements this is a pretty fair collection of material.

BUT ... to tell you the truth, I'm not at all sure the songs are done justice. I never could get used to that distinctive Bee Gee's sound, and there are moments here when the vocals cease being merely reedy and take to a sheep-like bleating. Oh well — a matter of taste.

Mind you, almost as if adopting the

same attitude, the Gibbs have placed the voices right down into the mix which gives things an unfortunate flat quality. Never, as in your true soul classic does the vocal line punch its way forward. A pity. What's more this principle applies to everything; not even excellent guest sax man Gary Brown gets to be heard. It's a bit paradoxical that the uniform, made-for-disco sound should at the same time re-establish this band and hold them back. It's a good record, but it could have been better.

Bruce Belsham

**Emerson, Lake and Palmer
Works
Atlantic**

When rock first met the classics it was with an embarrassed smile; rock had come to steal or to borrow. Keith Emerson was still at school, just a normal kid whose mother had him taking regular piano lessons from the age of seven and entering piano competitions (which he mostly won). You can bet he was also good at science, general knowledge and maths and never cheated. When he began to compose his own piano concertos and to write his own arrangements of the classics, rock was able to meet the classics with respect and an air of near-forbidding seriousness.

After he left the Nice, Keith Emerson teamed up with Greg Lake and Carl Palmer to form the most serious, grandiose and technically accomplished group working the terrain of "classical rock". After a three year spell away from studio and stage, ELP has re-emerged with its most mature album yet. But, like most truly experimental albums, it is only partially successful — and the experiment is not always interesting.

Works is a double album set which gives a side to each member and a fourth side with Emerson, Lake and Palmer together. Emerson's self-composed con-



Murray Cammick

What can I say? It's the finest New Zealand recorded album in God knows how long and it's doubly significant in that it marks the emergence of Mark Williams as more than just a good singer. It's released June 1st, so check it out, you might be surprised.

Alastair Dougal

certo is in three movements, performed with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Emerson playing a Steinway Grand piano. Greg Lake's five songs are in direct contrast to Emerson's classical opus. The ballads work; "C'est La Vie" is strangely like "From the Beginning" on *Trilogy* but employs a choir, an orchestra and piano accordions with Lake's acoustic guitar. Lake's vocals often seem too wooden and even operatic, as in "Pirates" on the final side, but are not out of place here. "Hallowed Be Thy Name" and "Nobody Loves You Like I Do" are unfortunately marred by Peter Sinfield's lyrics (*You can change the world/But if you lose control/They will take away your T-shirt*) and orchestral arrangements which sound awkward.

On the third side Carl Palmer plays percussion to orchestral and big band arrangements, including an orchestrated arrangement of "Tank" which originally appeared in unorchestrated form in *Tarkus*. "LA Nights" features Joe Walsh's

lead guitar and scat vocals in one of the few exciting moments on the album.

But it is Emerson's arrangement of Aaron Copland's "Fanfare For the Common Man" on the final side which is the most dramatic and impressive track. Ironically it was the result of a studio jam during a soundcheck.

Works is sub-titled "Volume One". That's not just hesitant optimism for ELP has indeed regained confidence — but in moving further to the classics the group has left its original rock audience for an audience it has yet to find. *Works* may well finish what three years' isolation had only started.

Jeremy Templer

**Cliff Richard
Every Face Tells A Story
EMI**

When I first listened to this album I thought 'Hey, this guy sounds like Elton John!' Then I thought, 'well, maybe Elton John sounds like Cliff Richard?'. I was confused, and I'm not sure who sounds like who now. Nevertheless, beyond vocal similarities the arrangements here do tend to suggest the Captain Fantastic himself, in that they range from imitations of his good time rock style to his string laden and anguished style. But I still like it.

After all, Cliff's a good singer whose considerable talents have too often been buried in Eurovision boom-a-bang songs. Here, he gets some neat little tunes that sit comfortably in the pop-rock vein, and the punchy arrangements courtesy of producer Bruce Welch push everything along with generally just the right amount of uh ... oomph.

However, at times, Cliff does seem to play it just a little bit too safe. The formula becomes a little too restrictive and things tend to veer towards an overdose of blandness, with smooth vocals and snappy commercial backing all the way.

But over a few weeks of consistent listening, it has stood up. There's not a disposable song on the album and some are outstanding. The rocker, "Every Face Tells A Story" proves Cliff can still move it with the best, while "Try A Little Smile" shows the way to handle a ballad with just the right balance of anguish to pop sensibility and the soul influenced "It'll Be My Babe" showcases a song the Average White Band wouldn't be ashamed to be seen with.

There's not too many artists in rock 'n' roll still prepared to take chances after 18 years and, while it would be nice to see him rock out a little more bravely on his next album, it's good to have him back. And I, for one, hope he lasts another 18 years.

Alastair Dougal

**Ohio Players
Angel
Mercury 6338 787**

This is the first Ohio Players album I've heard, and it wasn't instantly accessible to me. At first listening it appears slick, polished to a sheen, and just a mite too clean to be true. But it ain't necessarily so. It improves with listening. The Ohio Players are an 8-man band with a lineup that includes three horns, a keyboard ace (of course), and guitars, bass and drums. Their songs are polished to the point of being seamless, and they specialise in falsetto harmonies (even smoother than the Pips.). It's a dangerous game though, being that good. It's like the feeling you get watching the Doobie Brothers live. Initially, their technique can dazzle, but after a while they can seem like a machine — well oiled, faultless, and impersonal.

But behind the O.P.'s surface polish lies at least some discernable feeling. Lyrics that appear trite at first can get imprinted on your brain, largely through the rhythmic and melodic emphasis on them. In fact, their simplest phrases are their best, such as the backup voices on the title track singing "Send Me Down An Angel". It's all in the way they sing it. Likewise, the song "Ohio" consists of one word sung repeatedly as part of a solid instrumental, and its very simplicity works.

Their songs with more complex lyrics are a different bag altogether. For starters they are all about love (the storybook kind). It's been said better, and worse yet, said before. "Can You Still Love Me" (Now That We've Made Love) is a trifle teenage for my taste. The spoken rap on "Faith" is downright corny.

However, the cats that buy it may not be listening to the lyrics. The playing is consistently good. The rhythm section is solid, but never as punchy as that of the Commodores for example. The horns add in some crisp fills, and the guitarists have those percussive licks down pat. I could stand a lot less of the ARP string ensem-