

Golden Age of Pop Returns

RECORDS



Blondie Plastic Letters Chrysalis

Blondie have shattered another myth that surrounds so-called New Wave bands ... that they can't lay aside their punk chic and break through into a wider, more lucrative market.

This platter, quite simply, is one piece of gorgeous, sensual, invigorating rock 'n' roll. The British, exhibiting their usual good taste, have taken Blondie to their hearts. Us colonials would be well advised to do the same.

Their influences, as stated by themselves, are too diverse to list, ranging from the Fab Four to the Rascals, to the Vanilla Fudge, to the Doors, to Dave Brubeck, and more.

But the overriding one, their *raison d'être*, has to be Phil Spector. The main reason here is that he produced singles which sounded great on radio. "We all remember when you'd switch on the radio and hear at least 20 great singles in a row, but all that's finished," says a wistful Debbie Harry.

Blondie have set out to at least try and recapture some of that feeling, and if they don't get a healthy slice of airplay here, then there's no justice left in the world.

But then, this band has to succeed, with the two terrific assets it has. One: the ability to write first-class songs, with the emphasis on mel-o-dee and tight, no-nonsense arrangements. Two: Debbie Harry, rock's very own Marilyn Monroe.

Debbie just has to be one of the best things that happened to rock since Grace Slick appeared topless on stage. A deceptively-fragile creature of exquisite grace, she combines the pinup appeal to drive men wild with the mental toughness and self-assurance that makes her more than just a divine face and come-hither eyes and magnificent legs and ... oh, sorry, that won't happen again. Promise.

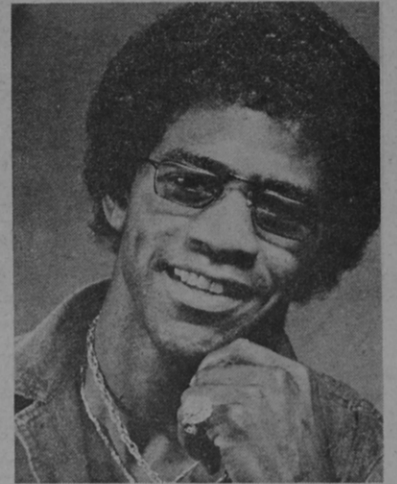
What's more, the lady can sing. No whispery, breathy, Donna Summer fantasy trips here. Debbie switches effortlessly from belting boogie on "Kidnapper" to the charming innocence of "I Didn't Have The Nerve To Say No" without having to resort to cheap, singing hooker tricks. This girl ain't owned by nobody.

The rest of the band, Chris Stein, Clement Burke and James Destri, visually take their places beside Willy De Ville as super-hip street boys. They play with a consummate skill epitomised on the breakneck "Detroit 442" and the psycho scream of "Cautious Lip." It demands attention and cannot be confined to the background.

The track that screams out "single" is "I'm Always Touched By Your Presence, Dear." Small wonder Spector is itching to produce Debbie. Too late, Phil. Richard Gottschler has got there first, and done the job just as well, with Debbie sounding just perfect over a wall of strumming guitars and clashing tambourines.

Following close behind are "Denis" and "I'm On E", where Debbie brings back all those dumb, teenage crush vocal inflections that the Ronettes, the Shangri-Las

Sanctified Soul



Al Green The Belle Album Hi Records

Not since Percy Sledge's heyday, and before him Sam Cooke, had a soul singer taken as firm a hold of me heartstrings as when I discovered Al Green. I have a compulsion to acquire new Al Green albums as they arise, can't wait to get my scone-grabbers onto them. Of his last half-dozen or so I guess I've liked them all ... some better than others but I've liked them all.

Al Green has one of the best voices in popular music, and I'd bring that down to a company of about seven or eight. His backings are at best, simple and direct, as is his songwriting, and his choice and treatment of cover versions is consistently interesting. Most importantly he has amassed a body of work that radiates personality and vision. He's a soul singer who embodies all that the label might hope to suggest. A major artist in an idiom overburdened with mediocrity.

You guessed it ... I kinda like this record.

To my mind *The Belle Album* is Green's best since the superb *Al Green Explores Your Mind* (a bad title for a great album). On this one he forsakes the Hi studios session band for a new rhythm section and sounds all the fresher for it. The songs are all self-penned — it's an album of love songs with religious overtones or religious songs with sex undertones — and either way it's one of the best so far this year. (And there've been some goodies.)

There's nothin' like having a good rave about a favourite!

Terence Hogan

and a dozen other '60's girlie groups made famous. Totally charming and lovable.

"Plastic Letters" has something for everyone. It sounds every bit as good on a stereo as I know it'll sound on radio. Do your ears a big favour and start listening.

Debbie, yer luvley.
Duncan Campbell



The Ramones Rocket to Russia Philips

"Hello children. Today's Tuesday ... T-U-E-S-D-A-Y. Now what day is it? That's right. And Crumpy the Clown and I have got a little suprise for you today. We're going to have a little test, just a fun test, nothing to do with school all right? Have you got your pencil and paper ready? Well I'll wait here while you go get your pencil and a piece of paper. A crayon will do. And just a small piece of paper; this isn't going to be hard. Now off you go ... hum de dum, da dum, um ... ready? Ah huh ... um, I can't wait much longer ... good. All right, now take your paper and write down the first thing that comes into your head when I say these words. Just write down what you first think of, remember. Ready? 'CAT' ... 'HOUSE' ... 'DADDY' ... heh, heh ... 'LOBOTOMY' ..."

"Lobotomy? Gee, this is getting hard ..."

"Turna TV off, Tommy! I'm tryna do an interview here ... Hey, is that ya taperecorder, is it? Hey, this t'ing working? Where d'ya speak into? Hey!"

"Just press that button there."

"Ah ... you do it."

"Sure. There you are ... you can go ahead now."

"Er ... ah hem. I'm Dee Dee. I'm the brains in dis band THE RAMONES, see, and this is our manager, Danny ..."

"Please to meet you ..."

"He's gonna explain the words we dunno. Ah ... this is Joey. Ah ... Joey! He don't talk too much. An' this is Johnny ..."

"Hiya."

"... An' that's Tommy over there. Turn it off, Tommy! He don't listen too good."

"What I wanna say is dat this here is our

third album, we called it ah ... lessee, where's de cover? Uh ... yeah. We called it *Rocket to Russia*. That was Danny's idea. I was gonna call it *The Return of the Pinheads* cos I wasn't allowed to call the last one dat ... uh ... hey, Danny, you say somethin' ..."

"Tell 'em about the songs."

"Uh ... okay. Dere's "Sheena is a Punk Rocker" which ya shoulda heard ... "Teenage Lobotomy" ... "I Can't Give You Anthing" ... "I Don't Care". The words are someplace ..."

"Hey, this working? Yeah? Ah ... this is Johnny. The words don't mean nuthin'. We put 'em in because they rhyme. It's total nonsense ..."

"This is me back again. We wrote all the songs 'cept for ah ... lemme see ... "Surfin' Bird", which the Trashmen done ... it's real good an' uh ... "Do Ya Wanna Dance" which was uh ... Bobby Freeman. Ah ... er ... oh, yeah ... people say we're punk rock an' they say we 'ave a real '60s sound an' that. *Cream* thinks we're the new Beach Boys h'yuk! Hey, ah ... Johnny wants to say somethin'."

"We're Influenced by old hit singles: Freddy Cannon, Buddy Holly, Presley, Roy Orbison, Peter Lemonjello. Joey ilkes Peter Noone. There's more recent things ... heavier rock, MC5, the Stooges ... Danny used ta manage Iggy. An' the Doors an' the Dolls ... an' Lou Reed ... the Dolls were already breaking up when we started ..."

"Uh ... this is me again. That was Johnny an' ah ... what else can I say, Danny? Danny?"

"Huh? Oh ... ah, tell them this is the best album you've done."

"Yeah, this is de best album we done. Honest ... ah ... hey, how you stop dis ting?"

Jeremy Templar

Hoarse Foreman of the Apocalypse

Death of a Ladies' Man Leonard Cohen CBS

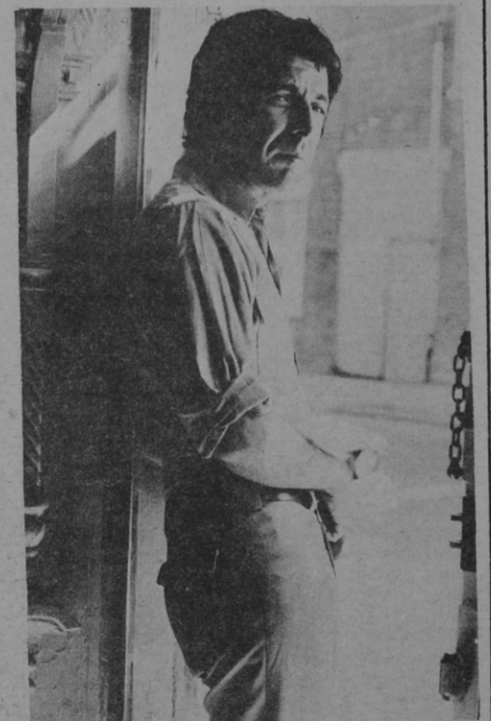
I am sure that one of the principal attractions of Leonard Cohen's first three albums was their perverse accessibility. Despite the determined obliqueness of the words, the songs were performed in such a way that a whole generation of girls with long, shiny hair could take up their Yamaha classic guitars and plunk out a fair rendition. Ideal for bed-sit identification points.

Cohen's fourth studio album, the notably less successful, *New Skin for the Old Ceremony*, stretched this premise somewhat by the inclusion of a fuller band, and then there was a long period of silence.

On *Death of a Ladies' Man*, we are confronted with a paradox. At last Cohen has bowed to some of the dictates of the popular song. Without losing his rather overbearing sense of irony, he has shed the more impenetrable lyrical mannerisms of his older songs. At the same time, he has given up on the readily-identifiable sound of these songs.

By teaming with Phil Spector (even to the extent of sharing all the song-writing credits) and a whole army of New York session men, he produces a huge, leaden sound, which far outstrips even the Spector-John Lennon albums. The voice is still there, but now it rides on an extraordinary backing of Spector's teen-dream melodies played by no fewer than fifty-nine musicians (often it seems that they are all playing at once).

I'm not altogether sure who is going to buy this album. After all, all those girls with



the shiny locks are long gone, and their Yamaha guitars bequeathed to their little brothers to pose with in front of the bedroom mirror. I hope somebody out there can temper a taste for the melancholic with an affection for the Shangri Las.

Francis Stark