

Above Street Level



Rufus with Chaka Khan
Street Player
ABC

As an album title it's rather misleading. The band has never sounded further away from the raw, rough energy we normally associate with street-life. The cover photo suggests the music's style more closely: some folks may be playing basketball but group leader Tony Maiden wears a smart white suit as he dances with an elegantly gowned Ms Khan. What, no more bare midriff and denims? Have they sold out, plumped for Las Vegas?

I don't think so. It's more that this album continues what seems to have become a carefully modulated change of focus. The funk'n' excitement is still there but it tends to be channelled into more sophisticated settings now. And, as the beat becomes

more complex and the arrangements more subtle, the band itself is playing with a greater restraint and cohesion. It's as if there's a reliance on power coming through instrumental interaction, rather than simply the sum of individual output. But does it work?

On the whole, yes, and largely because Rufus' most effective instrument is still the remarkable voice of Ms Khan. (It's no coincidence that two of the least successful tracks are the instrumental and the title song on which she provides only support vocals.) As a singer she's got it all: power, pitch, range, fine-phrasing, and the taste not to show off by indulging in gratuitous pyrotechnics. She, too, has modified her style however. On a number of tracks one is more likely to compare her to Dionne Warwick than Aretha Franklin. Nonetheless, her performances are a joy to hear.

Inevitably I suppose, because of the changing style, there will be some old Rufus/Khan fans who will feel disappointed with this album, bemoaning the 'weakening' of the band's earlier, more earthy sound. Yet Rufus has always been a very eclectic outfit, performing an assortment of styles and often with considerable success. On *Street Player* they continue to borrow and with no less achievement; it's just that they're drawing from different sources now. So, if you lament the use of strings — although I find they work well — then enjoy, say, the crisp and tasty horn work. If you think something's lost, something's also gained.

There are no bad tracks here and some are outstandingly good. The whole album is thoroughly professional. I'm pleased to own it.

Peter Thomson.

Parliament
Funkentelechy vs The Placebo
Syndrome
Casablanca

Strange things tend to happen when you play Parliament albums in the privacy of your own home.

First, the dust that has inevitably formed on your Led Zeppelin records starts to jump. Small objects start to rattle and vibrate, in time, of course.

As your temperature starts to rise, you feel your shoulders starting to drop and your arms push themselves away from your body, anthropoid-style. Your neck sinks

down into your body and your eyebrows start to wiggle and revolve rapidly in opposite directions around your face.

By now, the lower half of your body is moving totally independent of the upper half; hips, knees, ankles and booms-a-daisy shifting in directions you didn't know they could, and guaranteed to slip a disc

under normal conditions.

But these are far from normal conditions. Starchild, as you fall a helpless victim to the irresistible supergroovalistic pro-funkstacation of George Clinton, Bootsy Collins and their retinue of faithful funk-eteers.

Parliament make body music without parallel. It not only moves, it can remove. It spins all around you in an insidious fashion, urging you on to greater physical feats, and you just don't ever want it to stop.

Here, for your delight, brothers and sisters, six new tracks from one of the only three bands which know the true meaning of the word "funk" (the other two being Funkadelic and Bootsy's Rubber Band, of course).

Every track is chocolate-covered, freaky and habit-forming. If you ain't yet ridden on the Mothership, it's high time you took the trip. It makes you smile, keeps you fit, and probably cures warts as well.

Dig, baby, Dr Funkenstein is gonna getcha, stick a bolt through your neck and turn you into funk-crazed little clone. Is there funk after death? Is Seven Up?

You too can be a walking lobotomy. Get off your ass and jam. Saturday Night What?
Duncan Campbell

A Street Called Straight
Roy Buchanan
Polydor

The success of Buchanan's collaboration with Stanley Clarke, *Loading Zone*, has resulted in the belated release (in New Zealand) of this two year old album.

As with other Roy Buchanan efforts versatility is the keynote. The sounds range from the blues through gospel and country sounds a la Tony Joe White to a personalised version of Jimi Hendrix' "If Six was Nine" and the pyrotechnics of the foray with studio electronics, "Guitar Cadenza."

Buchanan is a guitarist of superlative technique, often blindingly beautiful, as in the haunting "The Messiah Will Come Again."

But his voice, while pleasant and down homey, is limited, and lacks the easy charm of a Tony Joe White. Consequently, interest must centre on his extraordinary guitar playing (Side Two is almost entirely instrumental), rather than the too-alike countrified vocals.

Ken Williams

Warren Zevon

Excitable Boy 