



Ry Cooder
Jazz
Warner Brothers

Another fine release from WEA is Ry Cooder's latest. Cooder, like David Bowie and Randy Newman, always keeps his audience guessing. A small audience, but a faithful one I should imagine. And a growing one, judging by his reception in the Auckland Town Hall last month.

Leaving the Tex-Mex style of his previous two albums behind him, Ry Cooder has espoused the causes of various genres of American popular music ranging from the late 19th century to the present day.

The most contemporary offerings here are three traditional Caribbean numbers adapted by the great Bahamian guitarist, Joseph Spence. In these numbers Cooder uses an instrumental group incorporating such diverse colours as cymbalum and pump organ, and mandolin and tuba, to create a sound somewhere between his earlier "Denomination Blues" and the music Taj Mahal was making in the early 70s.

The oldest number is "The Dream" which dates from around 1880. However the bulk is what the title of the album suggests: Jazz. There is "Flashes", a stunning Bix Beiderbecke solo played by Cooder on solo guitar, and two songs are quaintly touching as pieces

of nostalgia — these are "Big Bad Bill is Sweet Willian Now" and "Shine". In "Shine" and "Nobody" Cooder uses a vocal quartet with some smooth harmonies underlying Cooder's vocals.

It is really impossible to praise Jazz too highly. And, in closing, it is pleasing to note that Joseph Byrd is still around and arranging. If the name doesn't ring a bell try to find a copy of the United States of America's first and only album, or Phil Ochs' *Pleasures of the Harbour*.

William Dart

Johnny Guitar Watson
Funk Beyond the Call of Duty
DJM

Johnny Guitar Watson, a veteran of more than 20 years of funky music, is still a virtual unknown in New Zealand even though for a time he used to come into our living rooms every week. That was when *A Week of It* used one of his tunes as its outro. Very good it sounded, too, but sadly it was uncredited and to most people Watson remains an odd-ball whose album jackets are so outrageously tasteless as to be almost quaint.

Too bad. He's one of the best R&B artists around. He's been around since the mid fifties, an influence on a whole generation of guitar players, most especially Frank Zappa, who used Watson for hot vocal duties on "One Size Fits All". He was the original "Gangster of Love" and notes wryly that while Steve Miller's version of the song went gold, his stayed plastic.

A couple of years ago Watson moved to DJM and made *Ain't That A Bitch*, a classic workout in space age funk. Watson was one

of the first to explore the electronic aspects of the electric guitar and he hasn't stood still. He played virtually all the instruments on the album and multi-tracked the vocals. The album was a smash in the States. He followed it with *A Real Mother For You*, which was again very good, but a little too close to *Bitch* for comfort.

Now he delivers his third DJM album. It's the same old groove . . . but it's wonderful. It's what is by now formula Watson, dense moog backgrounds, sly vocals, stinging guitar lines and rhythms that won't quit.

Johnny Guitar Watson may be working what has turned out to be a golden groove, but his saving grace, like that of Chuck Berry, is his wit. He writes some of the funniest lyrics and punctuates them with some of the most blowing music around. The gangster is back.

Ken Williams

Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson
Waylon and Willie
R.C.A.

The prospect of a new Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson collaboration is a thing to approach with mixed expectations. As *Rolling Stone* magazine writer, Chet Flippo, puts it on the back of the sleeve, these two men are the godfathers of modern country music. Consequently one expects either a record of real excellence, or the disappointment of hasty product hustled together to raise fast dollars.

To tell the truth, as an occasional admirer of the genre, I have been lately disheartened by the relentless parade of mediocre country performers and downright bad country

songs on the likes of T.V. One's *The Entertainers*. Country music and I were becoming estranged.

I am offering then a small prayer of thanks to *Waylon and Willie* for restoring my faith. It turned out to be as good as I had wanted, to bolster my waning appetite.

Waylon and Willie is an album on which that essential ingredient, care, seems to have been spent. First indications were not good. The cover was tacky, there was no useful information anywhere to be seen. So how relieved I was to hear an excellent, clean production, to hear arrangements, not intruding, but heightening songs. And most welcome of all was the first rate vocal presentation.

Waylon and Willie's harmonies, where used, have the quality of naturally complementary voices, a quality enhanced by years of experience. Jennings' throaty toughness and Nelson's nasality give the intensity that distinguishes the "outlaws" from pulp C&W rivals.

The atmosphere the two create, part macho-strength, part plaintiveness emerges from an obvious attention to the songs. Practice, or at least honest sentiment has been pumped into the material all of which has been lifted by performance. My favourite is Nelson's "It's Not Supposed to Be That Way" and I'll also put in a word for "Looking for a Feeling" and "I Can Get Off On You". Not to forget a nice treatment of a Shel Silverstein, Dennis Locorriere number "A Couple More Years".

This is a fine little record, one that, if I were Mr Westmoreland, producer of *The Entertainers*, would make my stomach sink.

Bruce Belsham

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