



Devo



Steve Gibbons

Devo-Future

Devo
Duty Now For The Future
Warner Bros

I can't really say that I've ever been much of a Devo fan, although it'd be more truthful to say I hadn't given them a great deal of thought. Wilfully arrogant though this may be, *Duty Now For The Future* isn't about to alter my consciousness either.

But, don't be deceived — I rather like this record, and not only out of perversity. Disregarding for the moment the theories of de-evolution and any attempts on my part to clarify such dogma, just take a listen to the album.

Second up on Side One is "Clockout" — a totally crazed but perfectly phrased parody of the Beach Boys' "Wipe Out". And — can you believe it? — it's a beauty! A real little rocker but as idiosyncratic as hell.

From the same side are two more set to catch attention. "Blockhead" bears the unmistakable marks of "Jocko Homo", Devo's war cry from album No 1. It's very spare, automated, repressed and even. It thuds. "S.I.B. (Swelling Itching Brain)" is similar, but even more so. It's dreadfully tedious, but most disturbingly infectious. It's also a very nasty concept if your brain dares to ponder upon it.

So it goes on. If that's what you want, Devo can terrify you. They can make you believe that sex is nothing but "a message from below...a need that must be filled". Make you mistrust your genes, believe that it's all the same as putting poles in holes anyway. That it's a wiggly world.

They're right too. Life is never straight up and down. But that's hardly the whole story. It seems to me there's a little more to this mortal coil than wiggles.

While I can appreciate their philosophy, I think it's halfbaked and I think they know it. When they're really good, they're more amusing than frightening. But, in terms of a world view, they're simplistic, facile even. And, yes, I

know they're meant to be, but that makes no difference.

Of course, all this is to ignore their peculiarly individual musical 'style'. That too is less merry than cynical. Bob Mothersbaugh thinks that guitars are passe; "they're getting tired, they won't make the noises we want."

They're into synthesizers then, in a big way. Too big. Too often they sound like rubber toys underfoot in a bath. I'm not joking. It gets boring too.

But that's the point. In the automatic age in which Devo purports to live, baths and music are equally boring. I mean, isn't that just awful?

Louise Chunn

Frank Zappa
Sheik Yerbouti
CBS

There was a time, I think it was about 1971-2 when it seemed that Frank Zappa represented the zenith of rock as a sophisticated art form (pant, pant). But some of the old Zappa formulae don't seem to work the same magic anymore.

Why is a man of Zappa's age and status bothering to satirise disco dancers still in "dancin' Fool"? Is "Bobby Brown" an insult to gays, or just a brilliant (?) piece of irony? Why is "Yo' Mama" allowed to clock in at over 12 minutes? These are some of the questions the new Zappa album raises.

Technically, apart from a feeble "Sheik Yerbouti Tango", it is brilliantly put together — real pyrotechnics stakes, but its main problem seems to lie in its being a double album when it probably only contains enough material for two sides. This is most notably evident in an instrumental like "Rubber Shirt" which is 3 minutes odd of nothing. Perhaps it is revealing that at the end of Side 1 a voice asks, rather incredulously "Did you just record that?". To which the answer is "Yes, and three more sides of it".

All in all then a disappointment, particularly as it marks what could have been a fresh start for Zappa on a new label.

William Dart

Culture
Cumbolo
Virgin

Even in Jamaica, Culture is a relative newcomer. In three years of existence, they have produced three albums (starting with the acclaimed *Two Sevens Clash*) and a string of Jamaican hits. Where it matters, they get respect.

If they haven't taken Babylon by storm (let alone bus) it's because their sound is so strongly African, harder than the rest. Unlike Toots, whose voice is always right up front, Culture keep the vocals further back, in with the band. The result is a smokey sound that takes just a little longer to grip.

Like Winston Rodney, lead singer Joseph Hill writes catchy brain hooks and lyrics that are very Rasta in outlook.

*Them never love them never love
Them love not a prophet in his time
How do you expect them to love
Jah Rastafari in his time?*

Apart from the unerringly excellent Hill songs, a Rasta version of "This Train" stand out, showing reggae's gospel roots, and Rasta's heavy leanings on the Old Testament.

This train carry no backbiters This train

Maybe one day someone will release some Mighty Diamonds, some Max Romeo, or Burning Spear's brilliant *Marcus Garvey*. I keep waiting. Meanwhile, Culture on your turntable is at least forty good minutes of rocker's time. And you don't have to be a Rasta to understand that.

John Malloy

Steve Gibbons Band
Down In The Bunker
Polydor

If the Steve Gibbons Band have a problem it's a lack of identity. They wear their eclecticism like a glove, making it hard sometimes to perceive substance beneath the mask.

At their best they play great, cruising rock and roll ("Any Road Up" and "Eddy Vortex" are rockabilly, the latter invoking the ghost of Eddie Cochran, real drape coat stuff) and in "No Spitting On the Bus" they have made a seventies answer to the Who's "Magic Bus". Bo Diddley goes Calypso in the form of a West Indian bus conductor.

The album's obvious single is the title song, which is heavy in martial handclaps and juxtaposes Gibbons' leer against bomb bursts of drums and air-raid guitars. "Down In the Bunker" could mark the direction the band may pursue.

Stacked against these (and other) superlative highpoints are a couple of grotesque Dylan copies, which could be either homage or parody. Perhaps they're both. Jarring they certainly are.

At their best, the Steve Gibbons band is extraordinarily good, but when they're ordinary they're very much so.

On the strength of about a third of the songs I'd like to have given an unqualified recommendation, but it's a case of the rough with the smooth.

Ken Williams

Robert Johnson
Close Personal Friend
Mercury

Unlike his namesake (the bluesman who died in the 1930s), this modern day Robert Johnson is no figure of despair. Instead he plays guitar-based rock'n'roll that draws its style from the Beatles, the Who and other 60's popsters.

Lacking a distinctive vocal style, Johnson's most impressive attribute is his guitar playing. For despite his years as a guitarist on soul music sessions in Memphis, his clear, ringing and forceful style owes much to Pete Townshend. This ability to play strong chord patterns and tough but melodic solos combines with the overwhelming enthusiasm of his approach to even the weakest of his self-penned songs to inject an edge that carries Johnson far beyond the run of the mill power pop practitioners.

Unfortunately Johnson, unlike at least some others drawing on the same era for inspiration, has yet to form a totally personal style out of these inputs or to find anything distinctive to say. But then Elvis Costellos are not born everyday.

Alastair Dougal

The Shirts
Harvest

Inevitably, rock music is a great stamping-ground for band-wagon jumpers. New York band the Shirts have suffered much chastisement from overseas rock press for trying to join the dregs of the New Wave movement, and missing the boat in the process.

The Shirts' background negates this criticism, however: their music is simply the sum of its influences — most prominently the Jefferson Airplane and Lou Reed, plus the genre that man helped spawn.

The crux of the biscuit, so to speak, is that the Shirts debut album combines incompatible mutations of New Wave cliches and hippie psychedelia, to awkward and sometimes patently neutered/diluted effect.

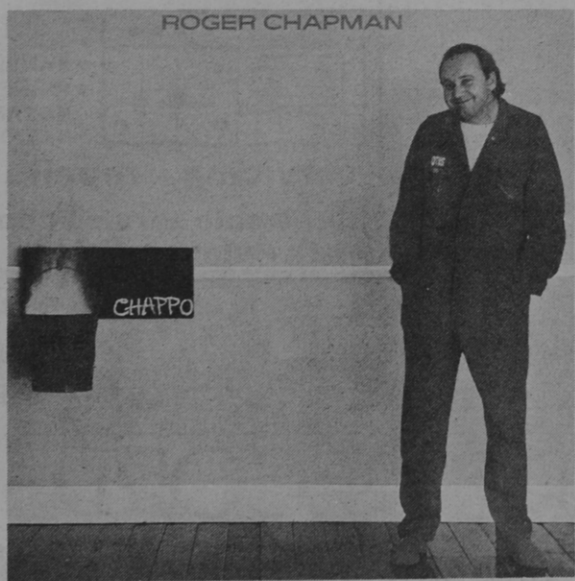
The opening three songs, "Reduced To A Whisper", "Tell Me Your Plans", and "Empty Ever After" are solid, memorable pop pieces, but elsewhere the album sinks in the muddy mire of Mike Thorne's production.

It's worth noting that this was recorded in April of '78, though, so the Shirts may well have resolved their problems.

If the real thing was too potent a mixture for you, the Shirts may just appeal. It's heartening to note that for once the token female vocalist, Annie Golden, certainly wasn't chosen for pin-up value!

Gary Steel

THE GANG OF 4



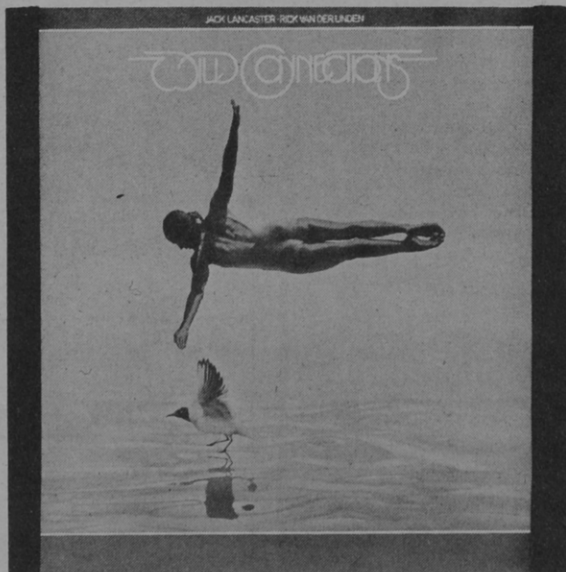
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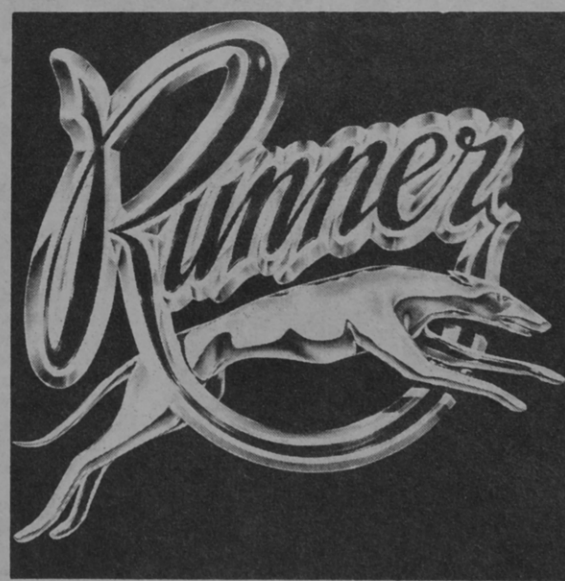
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