



13 Irish Gems

The Undertones *Sire*

One noted member of the British rock press has said that the Undertones are even better than the Ramones. Of course he's wrong but it just goes to show that the Undertones have got everyone hauling out the superlatives in a big way. After one listen to this album the reason is obvious. Potentially they have the calibre of the Ramones, Costello and the rest of the class of '76.

The Ramones' influence is clearly an important one. Most of the songs on this album are built around the powerful blocks of chords which are Johnny Ramone's trade mark. Plenty of bands have adopted the approach but the Undertones are clever enough to realise that only The Ramones can get away with that kind of simplicity. So they have added a second guitar dashing out quick melodic lines. On to this solid base they lay their clever vocals complete with backing harmonies.

Thus far I'm completely won over but I've got my doubts about the lead vocals of Fergal Sharkey. His voice has a trebly almost bleating tone which works well on some numbers but takes some getting used to as a long term proposition. In the end he will be a matter of individual taste but for what it's worth I'm still persevering.

Maybe it's the hoariest old cliché in the book to say so, but with an album like this it's hard to leave much out of the list of highlights. Most of Side One is Ramones' style powerchord racing. Perhaps the best picks would be "Family Entertainment" and "Male Model". Having established their dance band credentials the Undertones then bring out their catchy pop music. "Here Comes The Summer" is a great pop song featuring keyboards that Elvis Costello would like to call his own (and he'd have every right to do so as the Undertones obviously pinched the whole idea off him).

Side Two continues the emphasis on pop with the band's immaculate new single "Jimmy, Jimmy" and a reworking of "True Confessions" a number previously released on EP. After making the point that there is more to

them than headbanging they rock out with a vengeance on "Runaround" and "I Know A Girl."

Thirteen tracks here and everyone a gem. Maybe it's time to wheel out that old favourite "the future of rock'n'roll" again. Personally I'm more cautious as I never got over the shock when The Ramones didn't immediately conquer the world. Still, plenty of people who should know say The Undertones are going to be huge.

Dominic Free

Beach Boys *LA (Light Album)* *CBS*

In a world of shoddy production and musicians of minimal competence, the sheer professionalism of the Beach Boys is a pleasure in itself. From the very first track of the album, "Good Timin'" you can sink back into their rich confident harmony work, and spot on chord progressions. Everywhere there is balance, order, precision — an almost classical approach in the literal 18th century sense of the word.

However with the next track, "Lady Lynda" the worst aspects of the group show up with the tasteless and quite unnecessary use of a Bach theme as an intro and outro to the song. So, reservations start to express themselves. But then song after song the group can really take fairly trite material and package it imaginatively and colourfully, "Angel Come Home" being a prime example.

This is not an album without its novelties. Side two opens with a 10 minute disco revamping of "Here Comes the Night" — Donna Summer on a surfboard, so to speak. And this is not taking into account a little kitsch piece of cherry-blossom-land-romance in "Sumahama" or the vocal pyrotechnics of Brian Wilson's version of "Shortenin' Bread". Sadly, this last track and the opening "Good Timin'" are the only new material that Brian Wilson seems to have had a hand in.

A nicely packaged album which inexplicably seems to have slipped into the market without as much as a murmur. It really does deserve chasing up, even if you feel the group's credibility rating is a little strained these days.

William Dart



Into the Music

Van Morrison *Into the Music* *Mercury*

As the decade draws to a close interest is naturally directed towards those old wavers who have been with us since the sixties. Critical acclaim has greeted the recent efforts of Neil Young and Joni Mitchell, ensuring them of at least a hearing in the eighties. Now Van Morrison, the short chunky fellow with the fading hair, stakes his claim.

*I'm gonna lay my cards right down on the table
And spin the wheel and roll the dice
Whatever way it turns out
Whatever way it comes out
Baby, you know, well that's the price
But I'm home again
There's no need to explain
I just need someone to dump on my naked sympathy...*

One is almost tempted to say *Into the Music* is Van Morrison's best outing since *Astral Weeks* but it's a bit early — too few listenings — to make such a major remark. It is, however, by far his best album since *Veedon Fleece*.

Like *Too Late to Stop Now*, *Into the Music* appears to be an attempt to place his career in perspective, but without revamping his classics as on the live set, he's merely incorporated the various influences and styles he has utilised during his 15 year career, from R&B to country to Celtic folk music.

The album kicks off with "Bright Side of the Road", the forthcoming single. This bouncy

piece sets the mood for Side One — with the exception of "Troubadours" with its Elizabethan flavour and the Irish jig "Rolling Hills", the songs are all uppers, celebrating life. To be honest lyrically Side One leaves a little to be desired, but as a poet eighty percent of Morrison's recorded works tend to fall short; his images are still those of a man-child's awe at life's natural wonders — "whispering shaded trees" and such. But with Morrison the actual words have never been all important, his delivery can transcend even the most banal line. I can think of only one other vocalist who has the same power — Billie Holiday, who sung almost nothing but Tin Pan Alley unrequited-love songs, managed to move even the most insensitive listener.

At the end of "Angeliou", Side Two's opener, Morrison says to the subject, "I've got a story too but my story it ain't got no words. It goes something like this ..." What follows is an example of Van the Man's wordless intonation, with the lyrics, such as they are, meaningless yet with the power of the finest Celtic poetry.

If Side One is a joyous celebration, Side Two is pure melancholy, sensual ballads that will haunt the listener long after the stylus has lifted. Morrison's last two albums aside, there has always been that one track, that one masterpiece that rises above the rest, no matter how good the album; even on the masterpiece *Astral Weeks*, "Madam George" dominated, just as "Listen to the Lion", "Moonshine Whiskey" and "Lindenarden" did likewise on following recordings.

On *Into the Music* the gem of gems is "And the Healing Has Begun", the song that probably sums up Morrison's present optimism:

*Well we a walked down the avenue again
And we'll all sing all the songs from way back when.
Yes we'll walk down the Avenue again
And the healing has begun.*

Those astute Morrison fans will know that 'the Avenue' is, of course, "Cypress Avenue". The music confirms it — Toni Marcus' violin, reminiscent of the cello that dominated *Astral Weeks*, weaves in and out of the melody, which has the same chord sequence as "Cypress Avenue".

The album closes with "It's All in the Game", (the only non-original) which seizes into "You Know What They're Writing About". Again *Astral Weeks* springs to mind, the track is multi-layered — the rhythm section, unlike *Astral Weeks*, is right out front, and Marcus' viola is prominent throughout, with tasteful horn work from Pee Wee Ellis and Mark Isham.


The album isn't without its faults, particularly with the horn arrangements on Side One which are almost always predictable, never more than effective and, as mentioned, Side One's lyrics tend to be clichéd. But, as a whole *Into the Music* is one of 79's best albums and must place Van Morrison in the vanguard of the old wavers as 1980 approaches.

John Dix

ROCK & ROLL

DAVE EDMUNDS

REPEAT WHEN NECESSARY



INCLUDES
QUEEN OF HEARTS
BAD IS BAD


LOWE



NICKY LOWE
LABOUR OF LOVE


RY COODER

Includes Little Sister
The Very Thing That Makes You Rich (Makes Me Poor)
Down In Hollywood / Look at Granny Run Run



Bop Till You Drop

LIVE RAMONES



COODER

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