

## License to Thrill

**Renee Geyer**  
**Blues License**  
**RCA**

1979 is fast becoming the year of the blues revival. There are excellent new albums by B.B. King and Muddy Waters and recent articles and recordings indicate that the blues scene in Chicago is, despite the passing of some of the older giants, as healthy as ever. And now from across the Tasman comes Renee Geyer's blues album. Damn good it is, too.

Quite simply, the woman is one of the best singers anywhere and she has an unerring taste for rhythm and blues, although in the past her skills have been directed more toward soul than the straight blues she offers here.

The music is a mixture of the obscure (half the songs were written by "Unknown") and the standard (songs associated with B.B. King, T-Bone Walker, Elmore James).

Renee Geyer handles them all with a born-to-it confidence. Her version of "The Thrill Is Gone" rivals that of B.B. King (and that's saying a lot). Kevin Borich is to be complimented on his sympathetic guitar part on "Thrill" and on his playing throughout the album. Borich also penned an original, "Bellhop Blues", which is among the album's highlights. Other ex-patriate New Zealanders Mal Logan (keyboards) and Tim Piper (slide guitar on "Dust My Blues") also make a major contribution.

The only weak song is "Stormy Monday", which, while well within Ms Geyer's scope vocally, is allowed to plod. The arrangement seems designed for an in-person situation to allow various soloists to show their stuff. A song that should develop inexorable tension just never gets going.

But it's a relative weakness only. *Blues License* is very, very good. Too long has Renee Geyer gone unnoticed outside Australia.  
**Ken Williams**

**Led Zeppelin**  
**In Through The Out Door**  
**Swan Song**

In the three years since Led Zeppelin's last album there have been major changes in music. There is little evidence of it here. No reggae, new wave or disco. What do we have — another Led Zeppelin album. To many, Led Zeppelin are atrophied rock relics, heavy metal dinosaurs. In *In Through The Out Door* should effectively disarm criticism.

To my mind, Led Zeppelin's greatest success has always lain in the meshing of their componentry, whether it be the musical contributions of the four members or the wide scope of the idioms they draw upon. In *In Through the Out Door* is their most diverse album since *Houses of the Holy*, but the various elements come together rather more successfully than in that patchy earlier work.

The album is strong in songs — from the heavy rock riffing of "In The Evening" and "Carouselambra" to the piano-pounding rockabilly of "Hot Dog" and the histrionic, on-my-knees pleading of "I'm Gonna Crawl" — but, most important, it's brimming over with energy. It's remarkable that on their ninth album, Zeppelin should sound more enthusiastic than on their first. There is a naive quality about Robert Plant's voice that has redeemed his more absurd Arthurian fancies and here, with no mythological excesses to weigh him down, he sounds like a kid having a good time.

Apart from the friendliness of the album — and that is not a quality one normally associates with Led Zeppelin — the other impression is of a shift of emphasis in instrumentation. While Jimmy Page is not short of an arresting riff or two, it's the keyboard sounds (piano, organ, synthesiser) of John Paul Jones which linger.

Music has seen much change in the three years since Led Zeppelin put out a record. Confident of their identity, they have chosen to make another, better Led Zeppelin record.  
**Ken Williams**

**J.J. Burnel**  
**Euroman Cometh**  
**United Artists**

**Bram Tchaikovsky**  
**Strange Man, Changed Man**  
**Radar**

Though I guess it's only stating the obvious, members of successful bands are rarely as successful with their solo projects. Viewing himself as the thinking man's punk Stranglers bassist J.J. Burnel hadn't much scope for his own ideas in the band's rather limited format. Thus we come to his rather difficult solo project.

**Bram Tchaikovsky and band.**



Apparently Burnel is preaching a united Europe theme on this album but as he uses three different languages I can't get much more specific than that. The sound is built around bass, drum machine and keyboards with vocal chants serving a limited function. Perhaps the nearest point of reference is Bowie's German disco-motor music.

Clearly this is an earnest, well intentioned piece of work but it is also very heavy going. As the finest moments develop from Burnel's pulsing bass lines he might have done better to stick to this role enlist the services of his fellow Stranglers and distill his ideas into a couple of adventurous tracks on their next album.

Then there is the exception which proves the rule. In this case it is Bram Tchaikovsky, formerly guitarist with The Motors. By pirating The Motors' guitar and vocal sound and adding his own melodic bent he has produced a catchy pop-rock album.

One of Tchaikovsky's two strengths is the sweet rock melody and the album boasts a couple of outright gems. The single, "Sarah Smiles" has taken a lot of playing on my copy and "The Girl Of My Dreams" looks a certainty to follow it up strongly.

I've always been a sucker for simple-minded boogie and this is Tchaikovsky's second asset. In fact the more simple-minded boogie gets the better it is. The boogie cover of the Monkees' "I'm A Believer" is as simple-minded as they come and therefore a sure winner in my book. Though not an essential to anyone's record collection Bram Tchaikovsky looks certain to provide good listening now, and in the future.  
**Dominic Free**



**Ian Hunter**  
**You're Never Alone With A Schizophrenic**  
**Chrysalis**

Ian Hunter came to light with Mott the Hoople in the early 70's, and achieved a certain amount of fame before the band perished in the vast American rock wilderness. With Mick Ralphs (now in Bad Company) on guitar, they cut several classics of the time, notably "Ain't The Way From Memphis".

Times is changed. Hunter's first solo album, *All American Alien Boy*, was critically well-received but sold poorly, and his second, *Overnight Angels*, failed to make it on either account.

*You're Never Alone With A Schizophrenic* is a good, mid-paced rock record with an early 70's feel. Mick Ronson plays guitar, and he hasn't forgotten a lot. The real weight, however, is in the rhythm section, with drumming that would anchor a battleship in a big swell. This is in true Mott style, old wave without arthritis.

In fact, this is the best Mott album for ages. Hunter and Ronson share the production credits. The first side is the killer, rocking steadily through the first three tracks. "Ships" is the only ballad on Side One, and although Hunter's forte is rock'n'roll, the song stands up well. It's not until "Life After Death" on Side Two that he descends into the fatuous, with the kind of pretentious lyrics that sometimes marred his solo stuff.

Given that Mott deserved better, that this is 1979, and that it's dated, I still like this record. You can make up your own mind.  
**John Malloy**

**The Roches**  
**Warner Bros.**

Honestly, I never thought that Ricky Lee Jones would take off like she did. She seemed too off-beat for the sort of general consumption she actually achieved. That may only go to show how little foresight I can summon up, but this time I'm sure: The Roches will stay well below the Top Forty.

Three sisters from New Jersey, the Roches write, sing and play almost everything on this debut album of theirs. The production is by Robert Fripp, but, in spite of their giggles, this is an album very obviously well under the artists' control.

All three Roches write songs with a disarming honesty, mainly about themselves, their family and friends. They are like a conspiracy of three, sharing silly secrets with an audience but remaining quaintly detached.

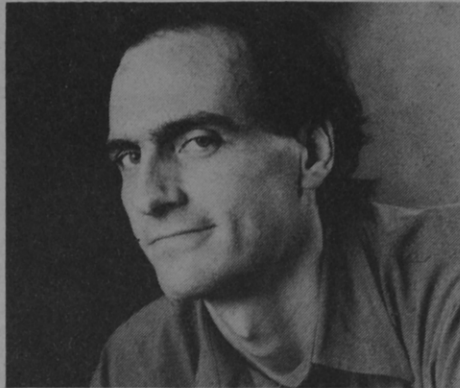
Every song on the album has a catch. "We" is the opener, introducing the sisters, poking a little fun: "We don't give out our ages/And we don't give out our phone numbers/Sometimes our voices give out/But not our ages and our phone numbers."

"The Troubles" is a lilting sweet song which works itself into a crazy round concerned with, of all things, going to Ireland. An example: "I

hope they have health food in Dublin/And strawberry apricot pie/If they don't have those things in Dublin/We'll probably die."

And all of this in three part harmony to minimal backing with a roughness of recording — called audio verite — which catches every breath.

I like the Roches a lot, though not everyone will. But, having suffered the radio stations' sponsorship of Ricky L.J., is that such a bad thing?  
**Louise Chunn**



**James Taylor**  
**Flag**  
**CBS**

The bleak simplicity of the cover design and the quite ascetic portrait of Taylor on the inside fold are no guide to what is really a rather lush and laid back album. Under the producing hand of Ronstadt's Svengali, Peter Asher, James Taylor works his familiar stylings, although with more success than on some of his more recent albums. True, his first CBS album a year showed some regaining of ground, but the two or three Warners releases were not designed to win fans and influence people.

The album has a built-in nostalgia with a new version of "Rainy Day Man", a rather elegaic "Up on the Roof" with stunning string work from Arif Mardin and a rather clumsy upbeat version of the Beatles' "Day Tripper". His "Chanson Francais" is a rather sly effort — and worth giving an ear to catch its nice humorous twists.

"Company Man" is quite cogent attack on the recording industry and all those faceless middle men of management land, whilst "Johnnie Comes Back" is really more a trip into Warren Zevon territory, highlighting however the greater edginess of Zevon's writing.

A new session musician has been discovered — Deputy Sheriff Larry Touquet who is responsible for the cell door on "Sleep Come Free Me", and it may be a relief to some to know that Carly Simon only lends her presence to one track on the album.  
**William Dart**

**Evelyn "Champagne" King**  
**Smooth Talk**  
**Music Box**  
**RCA**

Evelyn "Champagne" King is an eighteen year old whose first single, "Shame", has become a disco classic. Built around a basic two chord structure and a beautifully pulsating bass line, "Shame" utilises all the disco conventions — the hand claps, the percussion break — yet manages to produce a single that transcends the limitations of the dance floor. The album from which the single was lifted (or is it the album which was constructed around the single?), *Smooth Talk*, is mostly a smooth pop-soul effort that veers occasionally into disco. Philly producer T.Life links Evelyn King's mature and gritty vocal power to a bunch of pleasant, but mostly undistinguished songs.

Her second album, *Music Box*, shows a development in her vocal strength and moves even deeper into disco territory, but the material here is even weaker. It all washes by pleasantly but too little of this stuff sticks to the ribs.

In my book, disco definitely does not suck but these albums are unlikely to convert your neighbourhood punk to the cause.  
**Alastair Dougal**

**Robert Palmer**  
**Secrets**  
**Island**

In emulation of the album cover, the record company included a razor in the package, so

first a few words about that. It was a Schick Super II, one of those modern, lightweight devices. Cartridge, twin blades. It did a nice job, it cut close, didn't tear you up too much. Not bad, but not so good as to make you change your brand.

Robert Palmer's a bit that way, too. He's a smooth purveyor of blue-eyed soul. He sings well and looks good and when he finds a good song he can be brilliant ("Sneaking Sally Through the Alley", for example), but he's soft at the centre. I can't imagine him being on anyone's list of Desert Island Discs.

Having said that, let me add that *Secrets* is not at all bad. In fact, there are some very fine moments. The uncharacteristic (for Palmer) rocker, "Bad Case of Lovin' You", I like a lot, as I do Todd Rundgren's "Can We Still Be Friends?"

Like Michael Franks (whom he is not at all like), Palmer has developed a personal, even idiosyncratic style in which one album is pretty much like another. For the uncommitted, one album is probably enough. To the committed and the disinterested, I can recommend *Secrets* as pleasant if not startling listening.  
**Ken Williams**

**Frankie Miller**  
**Falling In Love**  
**Chrysalis**

Frankie Miller is in love, or else he has discovered that it's commercially more profitable to sing love songs, something he must have realised with "Darlin'". Whatever the reason his new album is a far cry from the terrier front he put forward on *Double Trouble*. On *Falling In Love*, Miller, the barroom brawler, has been floored, or maybe just tamed, by the wiles of the gentler sex. You don't believe it, huh?

Well, lemme see, I suppose it was inevitable that Miller, who always had a leaning towards whiskey soaked sentiments, should make an album of fully-fledged romantic proportions. Sure *Falling Love* has its tougher moments embodied entirely in the rolling boogie of "A Woman To Love" and "Papa Don't Know", and a very enthusiastic rendition of Marley's "Is This Love", but the dancing stops here. From here Miller develops the title of his album with a number of forlorn love songs, one or two (the gently swinging "When I'm Away From You") succeeding, but most of them falling into a rough-guy goes-soft tone.

Frankie Miller's albums until now have been balanced affairs of rock'n'ballad, *Falling in Love* is his commitment to the latter. For me it was the wrong choice.  
**George Kay**

**Pacific Steel Co.**  
**Stetson**

Who among us has never winced at the sugary whine of the steel guitar on some piece of cornball Nashville C&W? Have those pedal footers ever been guilty of some atrocities. But bury your prejudices and bend an ear to this album, where five of the best pedal steel players join forces to make some superb music.

Those involved are Tom Brumley (whose credentials range from Buck Owens to Rod Stewart), Sneaky Pete Kleinow (Flying Burrito Brothers, Little Feat), Jay Dee Maness (Byrds, Ray Stevens), Junior (Red) Rhodes (Michael Nesmith, James Taylor), and Al Perkins (Stephen Stills, Rolling Stones), who also produced the record.

The sound is high and clear and lovely (the sort of thing Gram Parsons did with his voice) and given the differing styles of the five steelers there is a remarkable musical continuity. Each man contributes two tracks and there's not a note wasted, whether it's the hotlick breakdowns of Jay Dee Maness or the soaring ballads of Tom Brumley.

Rock fans will probably find most immediate impact in Al Perkins' "Salty Saltery", a rocker featuring Perkins' searing slide guitar (actually played on a pedal steel without using the pedals). This track may cause a re-evaluation of who played what on *Exile On Main Street*, to name just one album.

The playing throughout is so good that one would like to know who else was involved. Sadly, sidemen aren't identified, but that may be because an inner sleeve isn't included in the local packaging. But that's a minor quibble. More power to Stetson for releasing this gem. No cornpone in sight, y'all.  
**Ken Williams**

# Rate Record

## GOOD QUALITY SECONDHAND RECORDS AND TAPES

### DOWNSTAIRS: THE CORNER VILLAGE CNR QUEEN & VICTORIA STs, AUCKLAND.

### OPEN MON-SAT LATE NIGHT FRIDAY BRING IN THOSE UNWANTED RECORD & TAPES AND EXCHANGE THEM FOR CASH.

### PO BOX 5556 AUCK. 1 PH 370-820