

RECORDS

Little Feat Down on the Farm Warner Bros

This album had much to live up to. It is the final offering from a group which only in its crumbling latter days developed more than cult status, but which made some of the best, perhaps the best, rock and roll of the 70s.

Those who liked Little Feat liked them very much. The band inspired a rare warmth of feeling and its followers felt genuine grief at the untimely death of the band's original guiding light, Lowell George. It is by no means overstating the case to suggest George deserved the accolade of 'genius'.

Down on the Farm does Lowell proud. His presence within Little Feat had diminished in recent times and without his tough caress of a voice and his quirky songs the band seemed unfocused. For all their merits, *Time Loves a Hero* and the live *Waiting for Columbus* are the least essential Feat albums since the exploratory first effort.

Down on the Farm — the last last record album — redressed the balance. It is as fine a piece in its way as any of the earlier albums, not directly comparable to any one, but resonant of all.

Once again, Lowell is represented by fine singing and fine songs (he has authorship of five of nine), and there is more than a touch of slide guitar. The songs by the others are strong. There is even one from the pen of Sam "Congas" Clayton — "Feel the Groove", a medium dance groove that allows the band to dig in and smoke.

Lowell is reported to have been working on the album until weeks before his death, but we have no other information on the recording, although "Front Page News" made the cover of *Feats Don't Fail Me Now* but not the record.

Lowell George's memorial will remain the misunderstood, brilliant solo *Thanks I'll Eat It Here*, but *Down on the Farm* is a proud epitaph for Little Feat, who in the end didn't let us

down.

The Neon Park cover is in the best Feat tradition, too.

Ken Williams

The Kinks Low Budget Arista

For some people it was the Stones, the Who, the Beatles or even Bob Dylan who seemed to sum up and capture the richness of the sixties, but for me it was always the Kinks. Ray Davies stuck to his guns and wrote some of the best and most influential singles of the age and a number of great albums only now being appreciated. Into the seventies, and sure, his songwriting slipped a little but he still managed to turn in appropriate classics, "Lola" and "Celluloid Heroes", to name a couple.

Low Budget ends the series of mediocre Kinks' albums that began with *Preservation Act 1*. Ray Davies not only presents his best ballad since "Celluloid Heroes" in "Little Bit of Emotion", but he's also writing better fuller blooded rock songs even though he does borrow the "Jumping Jack Flash" riff for "Catch Me Now I'm Falling" and the "Superstar" melody for "In A Space". Brother Dave on guitar has seldom been in better form, striding out full of confidence backing Ray's songs to the hilt. Jeez it's good to hear them sounding so hot.

In the last ten years these guys have been inconsistent but they've never been bad, and *Low Budget* is certainly their best album since the seminal domestic charm of *Muswell Hillbillies*. So it's with more than a slight sigh of satisfaction that at last I can point to a sixties band who haven't blown it. Boys take a bow.

George Kay

Neil Young & Crazy Horse Live Rust Reprise

Ever the enigma, Neil Young is becoming

downright confusing with his recent output. *Live Rust* would appear to be not a follow-up to *Rust Never Sleeps* but a contemporaneous companion piece. In minute lettering on the cover of *Live Rust* is the legend "Record 2" which corresponds to the hitherto mysterious notation "Record" as the axis of the earlier album's cover title.

Without corroborating evidence, it appears that *Live Rust* is from the Rust Never Sleeps tour of early 1979, from which some tracks on the *Rust Never Sleeps* album were taken. In fact, the two albums appear to have some tracks in common, so similar are the recordings. Then again, Young, despite the apparent fragility of his voice and the "accidental" nature of his guitar playing, has been uncommonly adept at reproducing his recorded sound in a live situation.

Unravelling the mesh of mystery is just a little bit of peripheral fun. What *Live Rust* is about is music, and extraordinarily fine music.

On the face of it, a double album of Neil Young performing not a single new song doesn't hold much promise. Don't be misled by the familiarity of the titles. Virtually from go (the childlike-childish "Sugar Mountain") to whoa (the pained and painful "Tonight's the Night") Young tops himself at every turn.

As it would be in concert, the album starts with Young playing solo acoustic guitar (and, on "After the Gold Rush", piano) before being joined by Crazy Horse (Frank Sampedro, Billy Talbot, Ralph Molina) for some furious electric rock and roll. The crystal sparkle of the acoustic material is in stark contrast to the savage slash of the electric set.

Crazy Horse have always had an enviable reputation as a live band; the substantiation is here.

Neil Young never looked like a survivor — his death was shaky, his temperament unpredictable, each album seemed to arrive only after considerable personal struggle — but as we turn into the eighties Young sounds in bet-

ter shape than most of his contemporaries. Appropriately, his guitar strap displays a portrait of Jimi Hendrix, one who didn't make it, but whose spirit is evoked in the workout of "Cor-tez the Killer".

For those who enjoy a puzzle, *Live Rust* isn't the soundtrack of the *Rust Never Sleeps* film, which is due here early in the New Year, although the film is liable to contain some material from the record. Confused? Just play the record.

Ken Williams

Gary Numan The Pleasure Principle Atlantic

The Gary Numan story is a lesson in opportunism.

A Bowie clone, Numan formed the Tubeway Army two years back and hit on the idea that a monotonous simplification of the *Low/Heroes* albums would pay off. Two *Replicas* resulted, the first a limited pressing the second very much unlimited, a gold record in fact, with the hypnotically calculated "Are 'Friends' Electric" taking care of business in the singles' stakes.

For many Numan had become the new messiah, a prophet of alienation full of profundity and social relevance, he was heavy man, the rock'n'roll of the future. Surely not. Like his major influence, Bowie, he is an exploiter of styles, a photogenic manipulator, who (unlike the lodger) has yet to write a song of some import.

The Pleasure Principle is merely another well-controlled stage in Numan's stairway to stardom and like his previous efforts it's back and computerised just like the society it's supposed to reflect, no doubt. His music is monochromatic, it's empty and it pretends but ultimately it's harmless and so serious it's hilarious.

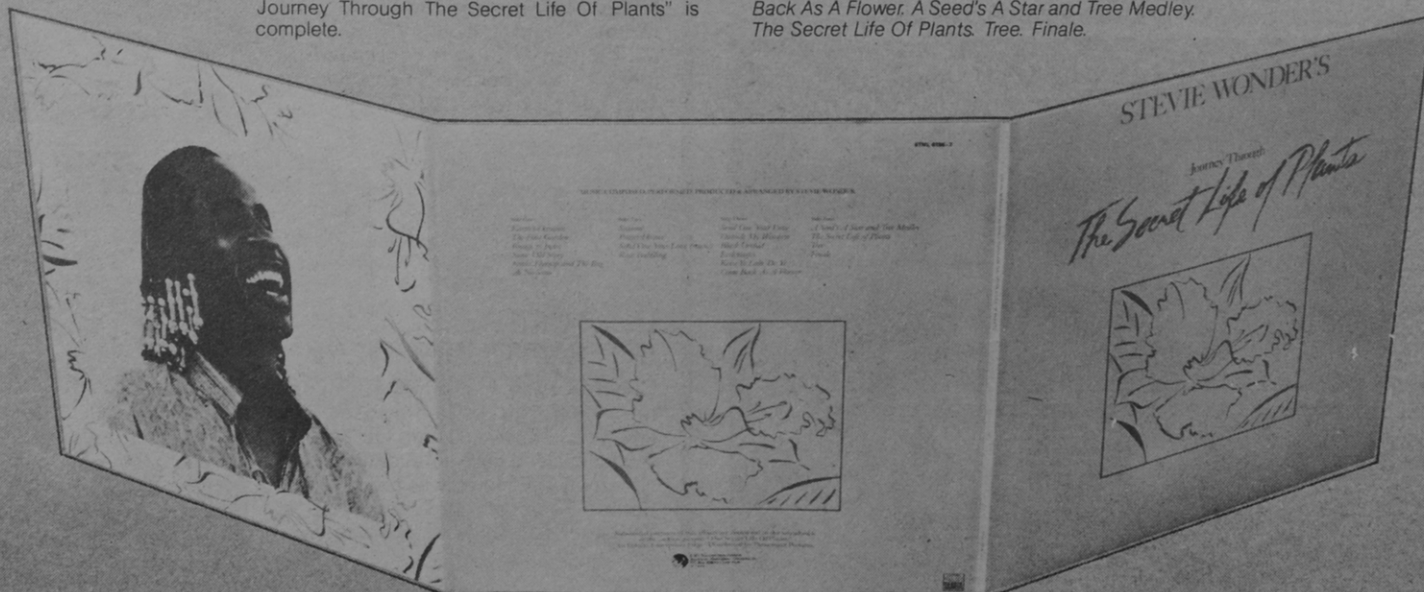
George Kay

3 YEARS IN THE MAKING STEVIE WONDER'S Journey through THE SECRET LIFE OF PLANTS

When Michael Braun asked Stevie Wonder to compose a piece of music for his film "The Secret Life Of Plants" it is certain that neither of them had any idea of the proportions to which that project would eventually grow. One musical segment from Stevie unbalanced the musical content of the rest of the picture, so he was asked to compose a theme song, and from this it grew to Stevie being invited to write the entire musical score for the picture. Thus, the "Secret Life Of Plants" grew to become Stevie Wonder's next major project after his universally successful "Songs In The Key Of Life" album. Now a little over three years later, and after the characteristic Stevie Wonder honing to perfection, *Journey Through The Secret Life Of Plants* is complete.

After only one listen to the album it will not be difficult for even those relatively uninitiated in the complexities of song writing and recording to realize why the album took this length of time to perfect.

This is a major musical work which can expect to enjoy a longevity which will dwarf the length of time that the album took in the making. The *Journey* explores the entire musical and hence emotional spectrum via 20 brilliant tracks: *Earth's Creation. The First Garden. Voyage to India. Same Old Story. Venus' Flytrap and The Bug. Ai No Sono. Seasons. Power Flower. Send One Your Love (music). Race Babbling. Send One Your Love. Outside My Window. Black Orchid. Ecclesiastes. Kesse Ye Lolo De Ye. Come Back As A Flower. A Seed's A Star and Tree Medley. The Secret Life Of Plants. Tree. Finale.*



Double Album. Deluxe Double-Fold Cover

