

# Records

## R.E.M. Reckoning

Like its predecessor, *Murmur*, *Reckoning* is a record that appreciates in value every time it is played. R.E.M. work with such understated and human strokes that the record might at first seem unexceptional, even bland. But here, even more so than *Murmur*, there is constant activity — Peter Buck's guitar runs through a spectrum of sounds and styles, even within a single song.

The album might sound like more of the same initially but it's not until you go back to *Murmur* that the differences become clear. *Murmur* held the same mood throughout, its songs tended to blend into each other as different parts of the same piece of theatre, but on *Reckoning* each song works as a separate unit.

Because of *Murmur*'s production the band was able to get away with some very simple songs that somehow sounded mysterious — here, with the songs exposed, they've produced music both more exploratory and more complex. They also sound a lot more like the music fans they've professed themselves to be from the start, with bits of borrowing from the Asian/Venus In Furs' guitar on 'Time After Time' to the direct country steal of the delightful 'Don't Go Back To Rockville'.

There's a rural element here that goes beyond 'Rockville' however, something down to earth. What makes R.E.M. different from others is that they've found the passage between the music that has gone before them and the modern world. Here we have drums that sound like drums, guitars that sound like guitars and Michael Stipe's Southern drawl, a voice that combines bluster with tenderness. All quite traditional yet more "progressive" than nearly anything else these days.

Progressive in the sense that they're moving and discovering as well. R.E.M. know what they want and don't seem afraid to try for it. A great album.

**Russell Brown**

## Tina Turner Private Dancer

This album has its genesis in BEF using Turner for their 1982 project *Music Of Quality And Distinction*. There she performed the Temptations' oldie 'Ball Of Confusion', a title that comes to mind when perusing the credits for *Private Dancer*. This album features five different producers and a variety of instrumental support groups, spread over a wide range of styles. No confusion in the results however. The tracks not only sequence OK but virtually all succeed in their own right.

Old soul purists who approved of 'Let's Stay Together' will also give the nod to her rendition of Ann Peebles' 'I Can't Stand The Rain'. (There's also a couple more interesting covers: Bowie's '1984' and Crusaders-produced 'Help'.) Those who prefer Turner as a rock'n'roll belter will be happy with 'Steel Claw' and 'Show Some Respect' (the latter complete with 'gotta, gotta' vocalizing). And the large sophisti-pop audiences who've been drawn by 'What's Love Got To Do With It?' can wallow in the title track especially written by Mark Knopfler. Bracketing the album is a pair of songs consciously referential to Turner's long career. Tom Snow's ironic 'Rock'n'Roll Widow' is his usual smooth AOR while Rupert Hine's 'I Might Have Been Queen' is the most exciting thing he's written or produced outside his own albums.

Throughout these tracks Turner displays a vocal maturity and control she's rarely shown in the past. There's more singing, less hollering. All of which goes to make *Private Dancer* one very fine comeback album. In the post-40 credibility stakes Tina Turner's currently outranking everyone from Joe Cocker to Joan Collins.

**Peter Thomson**

## Elvis Costello Goodbye Cruel World

The question here is, just what does keep this guy on his apparently endless run of con-



Elvis

sistency? Greater and lesser talents like Lennon, Weller, Springsteen, Reed, Parker, et al, had their ups and downs and their inspired moments gradually dwindled to mere craftsmanship.

But not Costello, well not yet, as you'd be hard pushed to point to any one of his albums and accuse it of being the result of a tired tradesman low on ideas and inspiration. Predictably enough, *Goodbye Cruel World* sustains his reputation.

It has the unenviable task of following the brassy up-market tempo of *Punch the Clock* and rather than follow in its footsteps, Costello has wisely decided to opt for a durability in song/style content similar in character to *Imperial Bedroom*. So patience is needed to unravel some of its deeper moods and secrets.

And that means 'Home Truth', a ballad with typical Costello wordplay bite; 'Joe Porterhouse', a song of compassion that emerges as the best on the album; 'The Only Flame In Town', a real, glistening Philly soul glide that would have made a better single than 'I Wanna Be Loved', which although it insinuates its point isn't going to crack too many top tens; 'The Comedians' is worth your time with its acidic bite at big business and finally 'Room With No Number' mixes a mystery lyric with a Steve Nieve keyboard flourish.

Sure there's disappointments. 'Peace In Our Time', the album's conscience song, is no 'Shipbuilding' or 'Pills And Soap' but it's not bad for all that and 'Sour Milk Blues' is a boogie that is just

too routine in the context of the album.

But *Goodbye Cruel World* is as sharp as anything he's done. Emotionally and intellectually he's just too fussy and free of flabby sentiments to allow his music to fall below standard. Maybe that's his secret.

**George Kay**

## Nick Cave From Her To Eternity

When *Mutiny!* signalled the end of the line for the Birthday Party it was also a new beginning for Nick Cave. Themes he initiated then are carried through and developed on this, his first solo album.

Cave is in his singer-as-novelist stance and the fat slave novel of 'Jennifer's Veil' has turned into Mark Twain with 'Saint Huck', where he has cast himself in the third person, as with the aching 'Box For Black Paul'. His metaphor of the ship for life/the band/whatever is continued too — 'Cabin Fever' is after the mutiny, Cave gets along "Notch by notch, winter by winter."

Cave opens with a version of Leonard Cohen's 'Avalanche', which is okay if you don't know the original but makes a better fist of good ol' existentialism on the title song, an extraordinarily tense tale of a man who falls in love with the girl who lives above him, even though his only knowledge of her are her footsteps and the tears that fall through cracks in the floor ("ah catchem in ma mouth..."). That song is distinguished by a heavenly bassline from Barry Adamson, who along with guitarist Blixa Bargeld, makes a substantial contribution to the album's character if not its direction. Bargeld doesn't really play guitar in the conventional sense but his bent stabblings of noise indicate a real intuitive ability to make music.

The mood of the album is dark, maybe hard to take at first listen but listen carefully and you'll hear a massive amount of humour. Nick Cave as Nick Cave as Nick Cave may one day collapse on itself but then again Cave might have sufficient perspective on himself to change the direction and halt the process, as he did with the Birthday Party, when it ceases to work. For now what we have here is an extraordinarily aware rock album that's stretch-

ing beyond rock. In short, magnificent.

**Russell Brown**

## Miles Davis Decoy

Every Davis fan has a perspective on the man's work. Mine is fairly orthodox: that throughout the 50s and 60s his work was consistently excellent and that a number of albums from those decades figure among my all-time favourite records. But since 71's *Jack Johnson* I've not heard a whole album that stands alongside those earlier classics and I've also heard a couple I never want on my turntable again. So what? So maybe I come to *Decoy* too ready to find fault and too reluctant to acknowledge merit. So I'll deal with the negative stuff first, okay?

Now obviously we don't expect a guy who's now 58 and has spent much of the past decade seriously ill to be peaking the way he once used to. I mean it's enough that he's back and blowing right? But Davis also seems to be surrendering leadership now. Side One of *Decoy* is dominated by the writing, arranging and synth work of Robert Irving. The man's good but he doesn't knock me out the way, say, Zawinul can. (The title track, in fact, has a somewhat Weather Report-ish feel, though without that band's forward dynamic.)

Davis has only one writing credit to himself on the album and that's for the track where he forsakes the horn for some fairly ordinary — if pleasant enough — synthesizer.

On Side Two, as well as a long, slow blues (seemingly an extension of 'It Get's Better' from last year's *Star People*) we get two edited extracts from a live performance. These are more of the fast, electronic funk that characterized *We Want Miles* (and the TV Grammy gig). It's definitely dextrous but, for all the busyness, I still find the rhythm section overbearing static if someone isn't really sparkling on top.

The good stuff then. Guitarist John Scofield and soprano saxists Branford Marsalis and Bill Evans play terrifically throughout the album. All three are equal stars, up there with the trumpeter who is still playing damned well. Soloing of this standard is always worth listening to. (And on 'What

It Is' Miles even gets to duet with himself, courtesy of — I think — one of those octave-divider things.) As one who couldn't stand Davis's previous guitarist I find the consistently high standards of these four 'front' men an added pleasure. Yep, this is a good album alright — not great, but it's the only one of Davis's four this decade that I'm likely to continue playing right through.

**Peter Thomson**

## Eurythmics Touch Dance

Call it what you like — club mix, dance mix, extended version — what you still end up with is a repeat of something already done once. It usually has an instrumental passage tacked on somewhere, a tricky mix by courtesy of some studio hotshot, and takes up a great deal of vinyl. Forgive my cynicism, but I've never really been convinced of the value of these things, except maybe in discos, where they originated, and where people have the room and the atmosphere to appreciate them. A whole collection of 12 inch singles won't turn your lounge into Studio 54, or wherever the chic types are going this week.

In 90 per cent of the cases the remix adds nothing to the original, and sometimes the stretching of a track can detract from its original appeal (see Springsteen's 'Dancing In The Dark').

It's up to you, I suppose, whether you think this album represents value for money. Side One gives you remixes of four tracks: 'The First Cut', 'Cool Blue', 'Paint A Rumour' and 'Regrets'. Side Two contains instrumental versions of the first three. Four of the mixes are courtesy of John 'Jellybean' Benitez, New York's studio whizzkid, and three by Francois Kevorkian. The vocal tracks still work best, because Annie Lennox's singing is at least 60 per cent of the Eurythmics' success story. For the rest, you can admire the technical proficiency, but that's about all.

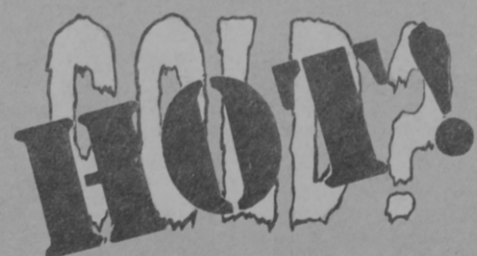
The true masters of this are the reggae dub engineers, who put more dexterity and wit into their mixes, have been doing it a lot longer and with far less sophisticated equipment. By comparison, people like Jellybean are just pallid imitators.

**Duncan Campbell**

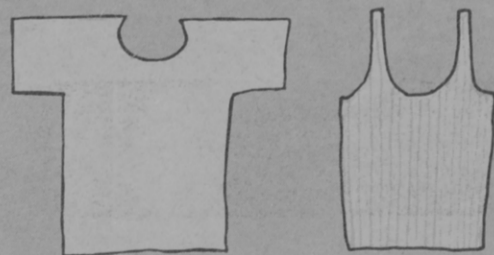
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