

# Records

## DD Smash The Optimist Mushroom

When Dave Dobbyn moved to Sydney last year he had no illusions about the challenge facing him. But he also had enormous faith in himself, a lot of guts, a lot of humour and a formidable musical talent. It's these attributes which have produced his best work to date. He said he was growing up and *The Optimist* is proof positive.

The biggest shift has been in Dobbyn's compositions, which have taken on a strong soul flavour. The only non-original here is a jaunty cover of Luther Vandross's 'She Loves Me Back', which fits in perfectly. The Vandross influence continues in the slick 'What A Day', where Rex Goh's guitar recalls Carlos Alomar on Bowie's *Young Americans*.

Even more soulful are the album's two ballads, the Memphis-sweet 'Surrender' and the climactic 'Guilty Through Neglect', a 3am

through-the-bottom-of-the-glass lament. This and the summery reggae song 'Don't Give Up' feature Dobbyn's two best vocal performances, one tortured, the other grinning all over its face. Lyrically, he can play delightful word games or bare his heart with equal aplomb.

Dobbyn the romantic sings an unashamedly sweet love song in 'Magic What She Do' and is equally sentimental on 'Whaling', an oh-so-memorable single. 'Open Up' and 'Tobacco Indian' are both destined for outstanding live performances, the former an up-tempo piece of funk a la Lowell George, the latter a heavily synthesized, dramatic powerhouse. The title song asserts the values which have seen Dobbyn through many lean spells and also displays the confidence he's attained in writing one of his most polished songs. Then, just to be different, he wraps the whole thing up with 'Head Start', a cheeky piece of Dixieland.

The only track which doesn't fit is 'The Actor', which sounds dated and heavy-handed in this company. Far better to have included 'I Met A Loser', which was consigned to the B Side of the 'Whaling' single. Still, it shows just how far he's progressed.

The long wait has produced a mature, self-assured album that can hold its head up in any company. Get behind a thriving optimistic.

**Duncan Campbell**



Bono, U2.

## U2 The Unforgettable Fire Island

In the space of three albums this band was in danger of becoming a self-parody. The bold sentiments and tranquil contrasts of *Boy* became exaggerated gestures on *October and War*. Satire seemed to be the band's only future, victims of formula; the Edge waterfalld guitar lines, Bono howled romantic protest songs, banners flew, hearts opened, wallets emptied and cynics yawned.

Time for a change, somebody said, it might've been a band member. And the change is *The Unforgettable Fire*, a blow for integrity, as it would've been easy to milk all of those *War* loving legions by sticking to the tried and true slogans. And with Eno as producer the development that has come over this band is like going from J.P. Donleavy to James Joyce.

Remnants of the past remain — and that means 'Pride', but even it sounds clean, reborn. The core of the album lies in 'A Sort Of Homecoming', the title track, 'Bad' and 'Indian Summer Sky' and these songs reveal lessons learned from Simple Minds as Bono's vocals are restrained by atmospheres, couched in instrumental



Billy Bragg

depth and not just in the Edge's lone guitar. Remember, this is a fourth album and any change is radical, but close your eyes, play 'Promenade' and the verbal improvisations of 'Elvis Presley In America', then distinguish them from Echo and the Bunnymen. Not possible, but fine songs and proof of Bono's willingness to adapt.

It's good being a fan of this band again, because, despite their past excesses, U2 have meant every note, believed in every gesture. And now, with *The Unforgettable Fire*, even the cynics can believe in them again.

**George Kay**

## Talking Heads Stop Making Sense EMI

Talking Heads' greatest hits, this — it's got 'Psycho Killer' and 'Swamp' and even 'Once In A Lifetime'. Neat! Sorry? What's that you say? Talking Heads sound-track to a Talking Heads movie? Wow! Weird old David Byrne on the big screen in his funny glasses and big suit? What'll they think of next?

But seriously punters, this is quite a good record. The live recording is excellent and the track listing will please fans and

the uninitiated; 'Swamp', 'Burning Down the House', 'Life During Wartime', 'Take Me To the River'. If you buy the limited edition cassette you'll get longer mixes of six of the album's tracks and there's a limited edition record with a booklet too.

But heck, what d'ya say about it? No tracks stand out, but none are bad. It gets your toes tapping and the crowd noise isn't too obtrusive — just enough to get that live feel, y'know?

Oh well, Talking Heads say: "People will pay to watch people make sounds."

**Fiona Rae**

## The Mighty Wah! A Word To the Wise Guy Beggars Banquet

Bold, soulful and committed, automatically recommending itself above the production-line emptiness of most pop. Pete Wyllie even turns rapmaster to deliver a four-lesson diatribe on the malice of capitalism — the Wise Guys he's yelling in the ears of are the "shyster priests of capitalism."

But ...

Musically, Wyllie continues to show a heavy leaning towards the epic. His voice, coming out of a full, swirling aural backdrop, comes on too much like a choir. Adds up to an overdose.

The stronger songs here — 'Comeback' (the single), 'Weekends' and 'The Lost Generation' — are unfortunately overblown, an ailment that also weakened the better tracks ('Sleep', 'Seven Minutes To Midnight') on the first album. He was eight months in the studio cooking this up (release was then further delayed by record company hassles and an eventual label change) and the cover promises the inner sleeve notes read "like an Eagles album" — but who knows, we haven't been given inner sleeve notes ...

Wah! have never made rock albums in the sense that other Liverpool bands like Echo and the Bunnymen have. Where they brim with guitar, today's Wah! use it sparingly — the album owes more to soul than anything else.

But Wyllie does share the egocentricity and garrulousness of fellow Liverpoolians like Julian Cope and the Bunnymen's Ian McCulloch. Even now, five years after these crucial three gave Liverpool its second coming, they

still make some of the best reading in the music press (not everybody in Liverpool is funny, but they are all TRYING to be).

There has always been, however, a chasm between what these characters have talked about, said about themselves and what they have delivered (McCulloch to a lesser degree). You'd think Cope would be making some of the greatest stuff around with his psychedelic infatuations, but he isn't.

As for this album — laudable sentiments but overall I still prefer his interviews.

**Richard Langston**

## Billy Bragg Life's A Riot With Spy Vs Spy Chrysalis

*Life's A Riot* is huge in its native England. Released late last year, it has sat obstinately in the upper reaches of the independent charts ever since and received the Peel/Jensen seal of approval, not to mention much printed praise. The accolades are truly deserved.

In his hoarse barking brogue and with only guitar for accompaniment, Bragg pours out his soul in the best busking traditions, setting in stark relief all that's glossed over in the cheery confines of the Rover's Return. 'A New England' sets the perspectives. Bragg's got no desire to change the world or the country, he just wants a new girl. In 'To Have and Have Not' he rails against the qualifications-equals-mealtickets fallacy and 'The Busy Girl Buys Beauty' is about the daily drill of a consumer clone. Where's it get her?

But Bragg's not all politics. 'The Milkman Of Human Kindness' and 'The Man in the Iron Mask' are love songs. Pure but never simple.

In Bragg's hands the guitar is worked and worried. Chunks of rhythm are split by shard-like pickings, distorted chords and the occasional gentle strum.

*Life's A Riot* is a minor classic and a major triumph for Bragg. But be warned that these songs are even better live, that Bragg plays till he runs out of material and clowns with the audience between songs. After a gig in London last January he told me he would quite like to play in New Zealand. Here's hoping.

**David Taylor**

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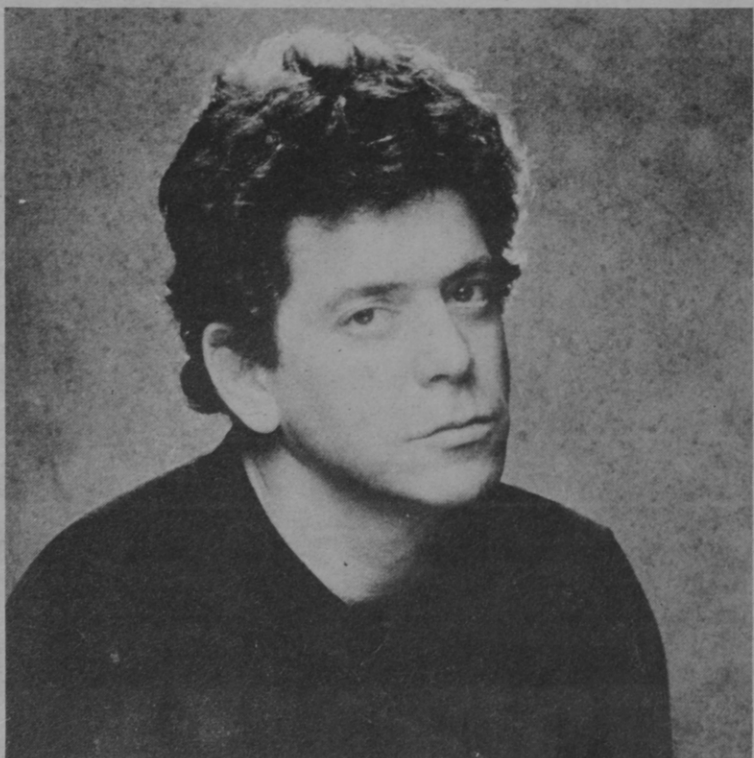
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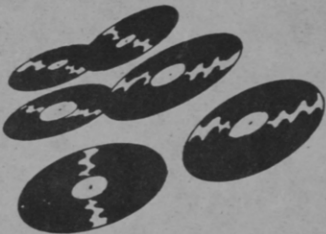


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