

Records

XTC
The Big Express
Virgin

Persistence certainly has its rewards. After a period of pastoral examination of the English predicament, *English Settlement* and *Mummer*, two albums which fell on deaf ears, the XTC approach, for all its sincerity, sounded like some hopelessly eccentric and antiquated voice from a post-punk past.

The Big Express takes its cue from their last great album, *Black Sea* in its return to a more urban depression/viewpoint. So much so that 'The Everyday Story Of Smalltown' is the album's 'Respectable Street', strident, yet catchy. Moulding's anti-war 'This World Over' recalls the message he delivered in 'Generals and Majors', while Partridge's churning industrial opus 'Train Running Low On Soul Coal' picks up the percussive panic he used in 'Travels In Nihilon'. And to end the comparisons, 'I Remember the Sun' shines with the same hope that lit 'Burning With Optimism's Flames'.

XTC may never recapture the legions of admirers and fans that drooled over *Drums and Wires* etc, but *The Big Express* proves that Partridge and co are still writing songs 10 times more pertinent and perceptive than most of 1984's precious little stars.

George Kay
Black Uhuru
Anthem
Island

This album gains a few marks for honest packaging: "A new mix of the previously-released *Anthem* album ... featuring an additional track, 'Solidarity'." On second thoughts, I take that back. What they've actually done is deleted a track, 'Party Next Door', which was the first single from the original album and substituted 'Solidarity'. What the sleeve also neglects to explain is the reason for messing

around with a perfectly good album in the first place.

There was nothing wrong with the original *Anthem*, which was released over a year ago. Why did we never see that one here? It's not Festival NZ's fault. What they release here is dictated by what is released in Australia. Festival Australia have gone off reggae, which is why some of Island's best releases in some time were only seen here on limited import (including LKJ's *Making History*, Gregory Isaacs' *Out Deh* and Aswad's *Live and Direct*).

I can only assume this remix was done for America. Steven Stanley and Groucho Smykle have knocked out the mid-range percussion and keyboards, giving the sound a leaden disco feel. Put bluntly, it doesn't work. There's no comparison when it's played alongside the original album, which has a fierce skanking edge to it.

The aim with the reissued *Anthem* seems to have been to make it sound as *unlike* reggae as possible. I repeat — what's the point? **Duncan Campbell**

Robert Gori
Night Full Of Tension
Mute

Formerly half of the teutonic smash DAF, Robert Gori has moved far from his Pere Ubu-ish beginnings. Even the later DAF recordings, a combination of brute sensuality and dancefloor sense, bear only residual similarities to Gori's recent bids for synth-pop fame. The cover of *Night Full Of Tension* presents him as a kind of Robert Redford/Richard Gere synthesis. The music (thankfully) doesn't retread the tarnished, predictable routines of the market-made star.

Lyrics burst like bubbles from Gori's lips, reluctant at first, but turning expansive then vanishing as if they'd never been. With tonal variations in Gori's voice, the mood varies from playful to dolefully serious. The music provides a relentless, consistent undercurrent, giving these eight songs a dream-like quality, not unlike the more impenetrable of German movies.

Annie Lennox makes a welcome appearance singing the pleasant 'Charlie Cat' and providing a counter to Gori's formality on 'Darling Don't Leave Me'.

Topp Twins, Jools and Linda.



Julian Lennon

Night Full Of Tension is above average fare. Its chief drawback is an anonymity of style and featureless soundscape. Gori needs a collaborator to provide the peaks and troughs that give music lasting appeal.

David Taylor

The Topp Twins
Twinset and Pearls
Dragons Egg

I have a friend who cries every time she hears 'Radiation'. Of course I don't, well, not really, but it sure as *hell* sends a shiver down my spine.

On *Twinset and Pearls* we're talking — naturally — honesty, anger, humour and something missing from the first record — polish. Using a variety of session musicians and Hot Cafe from Wellington, the Twins show a Marked progression.

Now the best bits — the songs. You'd have to be deaf or dead (or p'raps just male) to miss the message on 'Twinset and Pearls' and 'Friday Night Get Up'. 'Radiation' and 'Lotta Trouble' speak for themselves. 'Country Music' and 'White Line To Georgia' complete the six — and both will hit you right in the grin muscles. In fact, I sometimes get the impression that this record is gonna leap off the turntable, pin me to a chair and tell me to *shut up and listen*.

Yay for Kiwi wimmin on vinyl. *Twinset and Pearls* is a gem.

Fiona Rae

The Narcs
The Great Divide
CBS

The Narcs have a live reputation guaranteed to pack houses nationwide for a rollicking good night (nicely captured on last year's live album) so it came as something of a surprise to find the studio debut contains several less than memorable mid-tempo ballads. Their award-winning single, 'Heart and Soul' is here and none of the newer tracks (all members contribute a song or two) really top it.

Dave McCartney's production is possibly the best ever heard on a local album and the musicianship is of the highest standard throughout. Liam Ryan's keyboards in particular stand out. Yet at no stage does the band's pivot, guitarist Andy Dickson, really let loose.

Overall I'd have to say *The Great Divide* is a slight disappointment, with the band's greatest strengths, their ability to really rock and their knack for writing memorable songs, scarcely in evidence. The best from this band is yet to come.

Chris Caddick

Al Jarreau
High Crime
WEA

Although he was once considered a jazz singer, Jarreau's forte has long since settled into a groove of slick soul moves and swinging funk. But he has also largely curbed his old urge to flash that extraordinary technique in every song. The result is that, while he may seem to have stifled his potential, his albums have actually become more consistent. And if that may not provide many more standout tracks, it's largely cut out the need for track-hopping.

Last year's *Jarreau* was generally tolerable, hardly distinguished, but it did contain the excellent 'Blackie and Blues' and a couple of near also-rans. For *High Crime* Jarreau has kept on Jay Graydon as producer and as one of his co-writers. The results are largely comparable although the material is slightly less varied than last time.

However a problem with

smooth riding on this upmarket soul train is that the lines are pretty crowded. The result can be that a performer ends up sounding like any number of his contemporaries. At least three tracks here evoke the styles of Earth Wind and Fire, Michael McDonald and Johnny Mathis. The most distinctive number is probably 'Raging Waters', which has been given a very hi-tech production, undoubtedly aimed at radio play.

Peter Thomson

Jimmy Barnes
Bodyswerve
Mushroom

The photograph of Jimmy Barnes on the inside cover is the clue to this album. Sweat dripping off the face and the mouth wide open — you can hear the scream before the needle hits the vinyl.

Backed by a band that builds up a full head of steam, Barnes launches himself into song after song with a commitment verging on suicide of the larynx.

'Vision', 'Boys Cry Out For War' and 'Promise Me You'll Call' are the pick of the self-penned items. The frantic 'Paradise' evokes memories of Cold Chisel's 'Goodbye ...' and there are two excellent covers — Sam Cooke's 'A Change Is Gonna Come' and Ragavoy-Berns' 'Piece Of My Heart'. The latter rivals Janis Joplin's version on the historic *Cheap Thrills*.

Tired of namby-pamby rock? If so, slip down to your local record store and pick up a copy of *Bodyswerve*. A superb celebration of what rock 'n' roll is all about.

David Perkins

Julian Lennon
Valotte
Charisma

Oh shit I don't know what to say about this haunted, weird record. He's got a great voice with elements of Boy George, Paul Young, Elton John, Gary Brooker as well as his dear, dead Dad. He's a pretty good songwriter, with 'On the Phone' being as good as anything on 'Milk and Honey' and nothing being embarrassingly bad. But it's so locked in some sort of mid-70s neo-schmalz which is excusable for someone in their 30s but for a 21-year-old, it's a little bizarre.

It's all been arranged by American sessioners and produced by Phil Ramone as if it's *John* Lennon's new album. I mean, his voice

and songs are bound to be leaning in that direction but I'd like to think that as an absolute beginner in some of the USA's most prestigious studios and with heavies like the Legendary Muscleshoals-rhythmsection all over the place, that he let himself be moulded into something that wasn't in his original plan.

I'd like to think that he could shrug off all that stuff and make his own album. I doubt it though, he's got the chart success already and he deserves it, but I'd love to hear Cynthia's boy before he climbs on the monorail to fame. The last track, 'Let Me Be', is the least adorned and, to my ears, the most satisfying. It's also, however, the shortest by far and probably intended as a throwaway, but the last track on *Side Two* is often a sign of things to come so I'll keep my fingers crossed. There's too much talent here to be wasted on a career keeping John's musical spirit alive. There's countless albums and stuff by his father on his own without adding seance sessions like *Valotte* to the pile.

"Hue Jude, don't be afraid."

Chris Knox

Deep Purple
Perfect Strangers
Polydor

It's hard to believe it's 10 years since this, the classic Deep Purple lineup, last recorded together. The musicians' obvious empathy with each other has ensured a musically successful reunion album.

While it lacks the fresh bite of, say Yes's comeback *90125*, *Perfect Strangers* recaptures the sound of *Fireball* and *Machine-head*. Purple. Gillan's voice is suitably in control, following the excesses of his flirtation with Black Sabbath; the interplay of Jon Lord's keyboards, Blackmore's guitar and Ian Paice's magnificent drumming is a real joy.

Lyrical, there's a tendency towards the male chauvinism normally associated with Whitesnake and 'Hungry Daze' is an autobiographical sequel to 'Smoke On the Water'.

They've played it safe here — there are no real standout tracks, no complete turkeys. A little more time together and a tad more adventurousness could reap yet another metal classic. Welcome back.

Chris Caddick

this mortal coil



this mortal coil



On Album & Tape Thru RCA

IT'LL END IN TEARS

Michael CONROY	BASS modern english
Elizabeth FRAZER	VOICE cocteau twins
Robin GUTHRIE	GUITAR cocteau twins
Gary McDOWELL	GUITAR modern english
Gordon SHARP	VOICE cindy talk
Martyn YOUNG	KEYBOARDS colour box

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