

Records

The Stranglers Aural Sculpture CBS

This album leaves me with a somewhat mixed response. I thoroughly enjoyed the first side, but side two, with the exception of the humorous 'Uptown', was depressingly dull. Perhaps it was just a matter of expecting too much after the power of side one.

But the album's opening track goes a long way towards excusing side two's doubtfulness. It's all about a man who "knew the Ice Queen" and played cards with her — typical of the seductive vocal thrills the Stranglers really are capable of. 'Let Me Down Easy' is another fine track. The harmonies and almost Doors-like keyboards bring back memories of classics like 'Golden Brown' off the *La Folie* album. The single 'Skin Deep' is not quite as stirring but it definitely possesses a certain catchiness — hence its heavy plugging on commercial radio.

The problem with side two of *Aural Sculpture* is perhaps not one that couldn't be overcome with a bit more listening (and a lot more patience) ... but that doesn't mean that the Stranglers are not welcome back in my record collection, 'cause they are.

Vicky Bogle



Mike Scott, the Waterboys.

The Waterboys A Pagan Place Island

If, like me, you've regarded the bulk of recent UK releases with disdain, the Waterboys' first local release may go some way towards restoring confidence.

The Waterboys slot into the epic run of bands like U2, Big Country, Echo and Simple Minds. This is heroic music, big, but lacking the bluster of U2 or *Boy's Own* sentiments of Big Country. Y'know, sweeping stuff that makes you want to punch air at the peaks.

Research reveals the mind behind the music is Mike Scott, a Scot with a passion for sound. The Waterboys are not his first

band and *A Pagan Place* is not their first album. The 1983 debut *The Waterboys* was the testing ground for the celebration available now.

Scott has a fine dynamic sense. His songs build and soar, awash with sound. Waves of horns, keyboards and strings crash across grand, resonant rhythms and brittle guitar melodies. His vocals stop just short of histrionics, sweeping from a murmur to a full-throated roar.

There's the familiar 'The Big Music', the Waterboys' signature tune. 'Church Not Made With Hands' is goddess worship, about flawless inaccessible modern Mona Lisas. Across time and space is 'Red Army Blues', a saga chronicling Stalin's dishonesty, a cause gone wrong. And it was all because of fraternising with a boy from Hazzard, Tennessee (wry humour). But the title track is the standout, majestic and sweeping.

A Pagan Place is the clearing house for two years' creation. It marks the arrival of a new talent. We'll hear more of Scott but for now this is a winning introduction.

David Taylor

T-Bone Walker T-Bone Blues Atlantic

Aaron Thibaux "T-Bone" Walker was born in Linden, Texas, on May 28, 1910. He died in Los Angeles in March 1975. In between times he made some marvellous music.

One of the very first electric guitarists, his innovative style influenced innumerable blues, rock and jazz performers, principally the school of post-war guitar playing most associated with B.B. King but including Lowell Fulson, Johnny "Guitar" Watson, Albert Collins, Eric Clapton, Michael

Bloomfield ... you get the picture.

This album is one of T-Bone's most influential. It was recorded in the late 1950s for the Erteguns' Atlantic label and features T-Bone in fine form, both vocally and instrumentally. His loping rhythms, succinct picking and dry vocals are among the most charming sounds in blues (or jazz; in T-Bone's hands the differences are academic).

Sidemen include tenor saxophonist Plas Johnson, ace New Orleans drummer Earl Palmer and, especially, the brilliant Texas pianist Lloyd Glenn, whose tasteful accompaniments have enhanced the performances of, among others, Lowell Fulson and B.B. King, but who himself has been rather overlooked.

Why Walker never achieved the "star" status his influence and abilities might have accorded him remains a matter of conjecture. Perhaps it was his age, more probably a matter of temperament. Regardless, whenever somebody plays a bluesy electric guitar lick there's bound to be a breath of T-Bone there. If you don't know his stuff already, start right here.

Ken Williams

Big Country Steeltown Mercury

Big Country's excellent debut album, *The Crossing*, blended incisive guitar and strong lyrics, with traditional music as the launching pad. On 'Fields Of Fire' they made traditional music seem contemporary and 'Chance' illustrated that Stuart Adamson was no slug in the songwriting department.

Steelton continues the same approach, but the sombre nature of the lyrics makes it less accessible than *Crossing*. Added to this is

the extremely murky production from Steve Lillywhite. Or is it the production? On first hearing I was driven to purchase a new stylus but no improvement was discernable. Further examples of the pressing have made revealed no difference — this is the most muffled sound quality since Graham Parker's *Squeezing Out Sparks*. Whatever the cause, the result is to severely detract from music of a very high quality — with the title track, 'Come Back To Me' and 'Flame Of the West' being the highlights.

Highly recommended but no points for clarity.

David Perkins

Southside Johnny and the Jukes In The Heat Polydor

Southside Johnny emerged from the Asbury Park scene in 1976 with *I Don't Want To Go Home*, an R&B celebration. Since then he's released a string of consistent albums but has never caught the public imagination. That's too bad because *Hearts Of Stone* (1978) was classic horn-based rock 'n' roll and *Reach Up and Touch the Sky* (1981) documented the Jukes' high-energy live show. *Trash It Up* (1983) saw the South — with Nile Rodgers' assistance — successfully tackle funk.

The songs on *In The Heat*, love songs, deal with hard times. Titles like 'Love Goes To War' and 'Tell Me Lies' tell the story. Horns, guitars and synthesisers add the feeling. It's pure American pop on the question-and-echo 'New Romeo' and funk for 'I Can't Live Without Love'. Smokey Robinson's 'Don't Look Back' (covered in recent years by Peter Tosh) gets soulful

treatment with horns rumbling and tooting. And Tom Waits' 'New Coat Of Paint' is finest bar-room blues. The link is the South's voice, raw and emotive.

Although Southside Johnny could benefit from a more inspired songwriting collaborator than Billy Rush, *In The Heat* is a solid, successful release. It's rock 'n' roll for the wee smalls, avoiding prairie-scale canvasses in favour of more intimate moments. That scale and a working man's approach lend Southside status beyond sales.

Hey my man, stay on the job.

David Taylor

Linda Ronstadt Lush Life Asylum

It's pretty much in the nature of sequels to be inferior. The pleasant news here is that *Lush Life* generally improves upon last year's surprisingly popular *What's New*. The songs are similar vintage — 1920s through to the 50s — and the orchestrations are again by period maestro Nelson Riddle. Yet this time the singer herself seems more at ease.

On *What's New* Ronstadt's reverence for the material came closer to embalming than interpreting. This time out, while obviously still in awe, she is willing to relax with the tempos, even swing a little. For sure, none of the versions here is likely to be deemed definitive, not considering their classic heritage (Ella, Sarah, et al). Also, Ronstadt can still get strident when she pushes her volume. Nonetheless these remain very beautiful songs and all are lovingly performed. And the fact that there are very few other versions currently available makes *Lush Life* a welcome release.

Peter Thomson

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