

Records

Phil Collins No Jacket Required Warners

I don't know why, but calling this a good album seems like an insult to Phil Collins. From a position of love and respect, I want to be able to write that the new LP is the best ever; better than his two previous solo efforts or anything (post Gabriel) Genesis has done. But it isn't ... and I can't. No big deal. What is only good for this man far surpasses most other musicians' brilliance.

The opening cut, 'Sussido', sets the mood of the album; rhythmic, upfront vocals and the horns splashing phrases throughout. A change of pace arrives with 'long Long Way to Go', a gem in the tradition of 'In the Air Tonight'. I've found myself coming back again

and again to absorb its haunting power, bathe in its sparse arrangement and feel a spinal tingle when Sting joins Collins for the tasteful harmonic chorus. The next track, 'I Don't Wanna Know', drags us back to reality with its driving drums, as rock solid as Blackpool, and ringing guitar outro. Side one concludes with 'One More Night' and it's a beautiful ballad that builds slowly to a sax solo supreme that glides in and out of the melody. El primo Phil Collins.

Side two is where the album starts to fall down as an air of similarity starts to creep in. Might well be rock for middle aged critics but I'll take this LP with its one hot side in exchange for most of your art rock experiments that don't come off.

Simon Elton David Johansen Sweet Revenge Virgin

Enough has been written about and accredited to the New York Dolls' brief lifespan in the 70s. Johansen was lead singer, a kid (well, he was in his mid-20s at the time) from Staten Island with lips as rubbery as Jagger's and an R&B

background to match.

Advancing the cause of rhythm and blues was probably low on the priority list for the Dolls as their shock tactics were aimed primarily at blitzing the pomp and complacency of a rock scene that had slowed to a standstill. In Johansen they just happened to have a singer who wanted to sing like Levi Stubbs.



In his solo career of five albums (this is five) Johansen may have kicked off the platform shoes, dropped the glitter pants and

substituted professional polish for the glam trash of the Dolls, but essentially he's retained the no-shit belief in energy and fun. And Levi Stubbs.

On the slick, chunky and irresistible *Sweet Revenge* this is borne out in songs like 'Heard the News', 'Big Trouble' and the heavy partyin' 'Too Many Midnights'. On 'I Ain't Workin' Anymore' he gets serious and on the moving ballad 'In My Own Time', real serious. 'The Stinkin' Rich' decries the chasm between rich and poor using a 'Ghostbuster' type chorus to point the finger and for a finale 'N.Y. Doll' gets all dramatic.

Nuthin' flash here, just a guy who's stayed in touch with his roots, and a bunch of songs that are as honest as they are enjoyable.

George Kay Japan Exorcising Ghosts Virgin

Like a polaroid, Japan's music now seems to hang in time and space. Divorced from the style that added affectation, David Sylvian's retrospective compilation of his band's "best" work can be

assessed on its merits.

To be sure Japan had something. Songs like 'A Foreign Place' and 'Night Porter' breathe atmosphere. They are will o' the wisps framed by fragile melodies and a sense of quiet adventure. The oriental fixation captured on 'Visions of China' also holds appeal. But when Japan try to experiment with percussion and rhythm, as on 'Talking Drum' or the 'Art Of Parties', they fall flat on their pretty painted noses. Their efforts are too stiff, contrivances without lilt, swing or punch.

As was to be expected, *Exorcising Ghosts* draws heavily on *Gentlemen Take Polaroids* and *Tin Drum*. Only 'Quiet Life' is repeated from the *Assemblage* compilation and regrettably Japan's chilling rendition of Smokey Robinson's 'I Second That Emotion' is omitted.

Sumptuously packaged with lyric sheet (covering four albums' songs) and impressionistic artwork, *Exorcising Ghosts* sums up Japan's contribution to popular music. "Everything's neat and compact, there's not much to shout about."

David Taylor

Fenton Robinson Nightflight Son Seals Bad Axe James Cotton High Compression Alligator

Alligator Records of Chicago can take credit for reviving the moribund blues recording scene in the 1970s. I for one am eternally grateful. The label's sympathetic approach to its artists has been rewarded with some exceptional recordings.

Best of its latest releases is *Nightflight*, an album by guitarist

Fenton Robinson, best known for 'Somebody Loan Me A Dime'. Robinson had two previous albums on Alligator, but his mellow singing and jazzy guitar improvisations have yet to be accorded their due. Robinson's stunningly inventive guitar floats in and out and over the persistently prodding accompaniment.

Where Robinson insinuates, Son Seals' guitar style is darkly brutal, although he has refined his attack since he first burst on the scene, ready to hit first and talk later. The right-between-the-eyes menace and no let-up rhythm reflect his time as a drummer (Albert King, *Live At the Fillmore*, *Live Wire/Blues Power*, Stax). It's not all bone crushing on *Bad Axe*, however. 'I Can Count On My Blues' is an unexpected ballad, with touches of Otis Rush's version of 'Rainy Night in Georgia'.

James Cotton, who was playing with Howlin' Wolf around West Memphis when barely out of short pants, was a mainstay of the Muddy Waters band for a decade, then a popular, post-psychedelic rock-blues act. His best is very good — most notably 'Cotton Crop Blues' for Sam Phillips at Sun in 1953 — but he has often been showy and the music anonymously funky. *High Compression* reflects Cotton's problem (or personality, depends on your perspective). Not unexpectedly, the best sees Cotton blowing harp in the company of the Chicago Blues All-Stars, especially Magic Slim on guitar and Pinetop Perkins on piano. But the album is divided equally with Cotton's touring band. The performances are not in the same class.

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Ken Williams

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