

Records

The Builders CoNCH3

South Indies

Can we deal with the periphery first? Stu Page's neat monochrome cover seems to come out at you; Bill Direen "up front". Turn it over, more pictures of those involved; where *Split Seconds* left you to guess, *CoNCH3* tells you exactly who played on what track, where each song was recorded. In the sober press release that arrived with the record: "Due to interest in other fields such as the theatre and writing, (Direen) has often been regarded as someone who prefers obscurity to publicity. He is now attempting to redress the balance. Current projects — investigating the possibilities of brass and percussion."

CoNCH3 is a record of songs recorded recently and all written

within the last couple of years. It's interesting that the only track that pales with repeated listening is the only non-Builders one, 'Lovers', recorded at the 32M studios with local band Vague Secrets. Indeed, despite its pop elements, *CoNCH3* is a record that takes a few listenings to settle into.

The pop — whether lightfooted and evasive, like 'Clifford Flats', or looney like 'Alligator' (reminiscent of Lou Reed's ol' 'Do the Ostrich' — but how do ya dance like an alligator?) — is intelligent and immensely likeable (of course, whether pop should be that intelligent is another matter). Alongside those songs are three written for Blue Ladder productions; that Direen, using mainly voice and guitar, can evoke so much ... 'Holydays', written for the theatre's production of James K. Baxter's *Mimes* is perhaps the best.

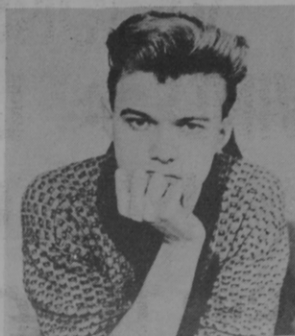
There are some good people along to help here — Greg Bainbridge's bass playing is dextrous but thoughtfully funky and Stu Page's percussion remains steadfastly non-standard. They come through more strongly in the wilder works, like 'Black Doors' (present on the Above Ground tape as a blast of glorious gibberish, here a weirdo funk workout), 'Coalman' (also on the



Mick Jagger
Orange Juice's Edwyn Collins

AG tape, longer and a little less intense here) and the boisterous jam 'Alligator'. Elsewhere, Maryrose Wilkinson sings a lovely, lost vocal on 'Holydays' and Jay Clarkson gradually takes up the lead vocal in 'Look East', balancing out some great, whining guitar.

The stated emphasis on rhythm is clear here and while, especially in the use of the congas, it's a little gratuitous in a couple of places, the timings and beats throughout set this record apart. You can en-



joy 'Clifford Flat' once as a pop song, and again for its arrangement, see?

Direen and co. records have always been good friends — *CoNCH3* is positively gregarious. Enjoy!

Russell Brown

Orange Juice The Orange Juice (The Third Album)

Polydor

Talking about singers, it was the Chills' Martin Phillipps who said that trying for the note, not hitting it, was the important thing. Orange Juice's Edwyn Collins was born to fit that comment. Way back as early as the band's first album he tried to tackle Al Green's 'L.O.V.E.'; let's just say that sincerity just wasn't enough to save it.

Since then, *Rip It Up* and *Texas Fever* have continued to air his flights of fancy, sometimes charming, sometimes droll and forced and sometimes too indicative of his narcissistic tendency to worry too much about how people see him.

At first glance *The Orange Juice (The Third Album)* seems to be merely a showcase for Collins' indulgence and the degeneration of Orange Juice as a functional entity (three producers are used and only two permanent band members, Collins and Zeke Manyika), as there's Edwyn decked out in mournful shades and black vinyl, hardly signs that the album's about to wrestle with the world's problems.

And sure enough, the dreariness and resignation of 'Lean Period', 'Out for the Count', 'Get While the Getting's Good' and 'All That Ever Mattered' confirm the cover's impression that he's often too self-absorbed in his own predicament to reach for outside vitality.

But there's another, more positive, side to the album and to Collins' music, as is portrayed by the reverse sleeve's smiling faces and the delightful subtleties of 'I Guess I'm Just A Little Too Sensitive' and 'Burning Desire', songs reminiscent of Roddy Frame's technique. And leaving the best until last means 'What Presence?' and the almost-blues 'The Artisan', songs of menace and bite where Collins lets his guitar speak for itself.

Since *The Orange Juice*, Collins has, quite predictably, squashed the band. Whatever way he falters or reaches next, there's just enough substance on this album to keep me watching him trying to hit that note.

George Kay

Mick Jagger She's The Boss

CBS

Mick Jagger apart from his Rolling Stones is not an unappealing idea. 'Memo From Turner' from the soundtrack of the elusive film *Performance* was released as a Jagger solo single and allowed him to extend the Stones' dark satanic myth in one of his finest performances (what other word?). Then why, oh why, is *She's The Boss* such a bore.

No, I wasn't expecting a Rolling Stones album, although that, I think, is not easy to define. Nor Papa Rolling Stone digging back into the Dartford Delta with his best impersonations of Robert Johnson, Slim Harpo, et al. An interesting record might have been nice, though.

There's no shortage of talent. Jagger has the assistance of two other producers, Bill Laswell (Nona Hendryx, Herbie Hancock) and rhythm master Nile Rodgers (Chic, Diana Ross). Musicians include Jeff Beck, Pete Townshend and Nile Rodgers on guitars, Robbie Shakespeare and Sly Dunbar in the engine room, Herbie Hancock on keyboards. Lots of others. A heavenly lineup. But mostly the blend of funk, reggae and rock elements fails to catch fire.

Mick Jagger once was a symbol of things attractively dangerous (or demonic, whichever you preferred). Today he is of that society he once appeared to threaten. There is no danger.

Ken Williams

The Smiths Meat Is Murder

Rough Trade

What presence! The Smiths' second album opens with the effervescent yelp of 'The Headmaster Ritual' and finishes with only one ineffectual song, ironically the title track. Morrissey has always possessed a magnificently tarnished vision, a New Brass Dream, and the first three songs on this album are the best examples of it to date. The music is criminally charming, the crispest, most sparkling pop, and the wit and irony are in clever-dick abundance, a precocious display ("Her skirt ascends for a watching eye /

It's a hideous trait on her mother's side") of charm steadily weighted with a discerning cynicism ("And if you ever need self-validation / Just meet me in the alley by the railway station").

Both Morrissey's thoughts and his vocals remain icing on the musical cake of Johnny Marr; the newest stylistic development is the increasing separation between the two, to paradoxical advantage. Two individuals who work smoothly together in the perfect marriage.

And that, for sure, is the only relationship of which Morrissey could ever approve. "Although I walk home alone, my faith in love is still devout," he sings in 'Rusholme Ruffians', yet precedes it with the sarcastic backlash of "Scratch my name with a fountain pen (this means you really love me)." The boy is too clever for his own good; his love is a precious faberge egg described by a ham-fisted draughtsman, and best left unrequited. His lyrics keep Zang Tumb Tumm executives awake at night and his band have produced two intelligent, witty and feeling albums that stand as well on their attitude as they do on their technique.

Chalk one more up to the Smiths; *Meat Is Murder* is a gold nugget amidst 1985's compost heap of recycled pop.

Chad Taylor

The Fall The Wonderful and Frightening World Of ... Beggars Banquet

Is it a case of Lennonitis? Domestic bliss with Brix blitzes hick priest Smith? Are the Fall drying up and burning out? Mark E. Cha-charred? Well, to be honest, no, no, no and no. I must admit the Altered Image strain staining 'C.R.E.E.P.' had me worrying that music had turned another full cycle and what we had here was the new Wings. But the pop sensibility simmering under the surface of the new Fall album shouldn't come as too much of a surprise. Ironic as it seems, the Fall do, after all, rank as one of Britain's best singles bands in recent years.

As we enter *The Wonderful and Frightening World Of ...* it's obvious there's been some sandpapering here, evidence of the arrival of Brix Smith, who, as well as providing healthy chunks of guitar, co-wrote seven of the album's 10 songs. What passes as rough edges to one person can be the gloss to another, but here the Fall generally rub off well and in the right places. Apart from the ponderous 'Bug Day', side two is the stronger, with goodies like 'Slang King', 'Stephen Song' and 'Disney's Dream Debased'. Diehard fans will be soothed by the comfortingly out of tune guitars in 'Graigness'. 'Elves' is a direct rip off from 'I Wanna Be Your Dog', but still runs the nuclear-themed 'Lay of the Land' close as side one's best.

Much has been made of this record's production and while it unquestionably rates as the cleanest and least frantic Fall effort to date, there are times when the whole sound descends into a wonderful, grimy grind of *Grotesque* proportions. It appears those holding their breaths for the Fall sellout may have to turn a shade bluer and sit tight a little longer.

Shayne Carter

Van Morrison A Sense Of Wonder

Mercury

Van Morrison continues to explore the spiritual, with mixed, and often marvellous, results.

As with recent albums, Morrison favours a "wide", spacious, even reverential tone that drifts like Celtic mist, and then is punctuated by some sinuous echo of his rhythm 'n' blues past or a breath of the Irish traditional music which colors recent work. There are two instrumentals, and Van Morrison is a voice above all, but they're just right, so one shouldn't quibble. His singing is often superlative. The Ray Charles song 'What Would I Do' took a while to register — it's fragile, a breeze in a tree — but now I rate it highly.

However, disaster hovers over the album's most ambitious (a worrying word) piece, 'Let Thy Slave', a plunge into William Blake land. Against some excessively portentous music by Mike Westbrook, Morrison intones Blake's 'The Price Of Experience'. For one so gifted with words, his recitation is hopelessly insensitive. Better forgotten.

But Morrison's fans have always forgiven his failures. His chances have been chances of the heart. He is startlingly good when he hits a pitch that jolts that particular anatomical region. He still does.

Ken Williams

Get the
Ultimate contraception
for the very intimate
times in your life.

Ultimate Condoms are a safe and convenient form of contraception and have no side-effects.

They're available in three ultra-sensitive styles: Ultimate Lubricated, Ultimate Dot-Ribbed Lubricated and Ultimate Contoured Lubricated.

Ultimate Condoms are priced below most brands and are available in packs of 3's and 12's at your chemist.

ULTIMATE



Stevens Distributors Ltd Auckland

■ The New Zealand Department of Health recommends the use of condoms to protect against sexually transmitted diseases.