

Records

The Art Of Noise Who's Afraid of the Art Of Noise

ZTT

Whether they like it or not, as the post-holocaust follow-up to Frankie, the Art Of Noise are Zang Tumb Tuum's confirm-or-deny. Musically, they fall from the deluxe-dancefloor approach of their

predecessors, but they land on their feet.

The music is mostly rhythm, which Trevor Horn has magnified to (surprise, surprise) quite HUGE sounds, dashing between tight compartments and verse structures. There are no lyrics but for the traditionalists, Mr Morley has written some that you can sing anyway (ha ha). Songs are cropped and edited with a brazen disregard for the listener; many a spare hour can be spent working out what title is what song (the printed cover has five titles for the record's Side One, which only has four songs, so someone's made a mistake). What is left really is junk funk, a cross between Herbie Hancock, 73 Eno and Test Department. The seriousness is left on the cover and

the attitude is throwaway; many of the shorter songs and interludes are reminiscent of 23 Skidoo's *Hawaii Five-O* cover. The biggest relief is the lack of any big-art-statement which has plagued all the bands with metal in their percussive vocabulary until now.

So, much banging and carry-on from the lads, some witty voice-overs from Anne (ex-ACR?) Dudley, big noises from Trevor, big words from Paul and a shaky "confirm" for ZTT (such a little idea, such a lot of mileage). Containing the ever-popular 'Beat Box' as well as two other songs at least as good (and as long), *Who's Afraid Of...* is an unlikely winner. No Pleasure Domes, but my, what an exciting kitchen.

Chad Taylor

Last Man Down State House Kid Ode

Listen here a moment. Last Man Down, aka singer-songwriter Ross Mullins, features the sharpest, wit-tiest and most compassionate lyric writing you've probably ever heard from a local recording artist. And what's more, the remarkably articulate versifying is concerned with the ordinary scenes and characters of urban New Zealand life. Uncles reminiscing in the RSA, a state house kid in town on a Friday night, a lonely housewife sitting awake in the early morning hours, a laid-off car worker who wants to go to Oz, a lecher watching the Baradene girls play netball: all these characters and more



The Art of Noise



Ross Mullins, Last Man Down.

come alive in Mullins' songs with a vibrancy that makes you share in their smiles and sorrows.

Not only that, but the music is good too. Perhaps once or twice it's only functional, but the best tunes (and there's enough of them) are guaranteed to carry the words around in your head for days. Mullins' musical style is generally a laid-back, piano-based blend of easy-going pop and cool blues. The resultant combination of words and music is as individual as the subjects are indigenous. (If comparisons are required, Last Man Down suggests something like a consistently on form Tom Paxton, if he had grown up in Auckland and listened to Mose Allison records in stead of folk music.)

Mullins is supported in Last Man Down by a brace of Auckland's best session players and it is their contribution which often lifts the performances above the typically NZ production sound. The arrangements and soloing add many distinguishing touches, from the Caribbean lilt of 'Casey and the Pearly Gates' to the pastoral textures on Mullins' setting of James K. Baxter's poem 'The Bay'. 'Featherston', a haunted reflection on NZ's shooting of Japanese POWs (also recently the subject of a play by Vincent O'Sullivan) is considerably enhanced by the tenor sax of Greg Heath.

If Last Man Down has a weakness, it lies in Mullins' merely adequate singing. The times when his vocals are enriched by the beauty of Anne Crummer or Kim Wilmoughby only highlight Mullins' own shortcomings. But what the heck. We don't complain about the singing of Randy Newman, Leonard Cohen or Tom Waits.

Look, *State House Kid* is an ex-

citing event in the NZ music scene. Get smart; be the first among your friends to get a copy, then you can convert the others. Shit, even the sleeve photo is funny.

Peter Thomson

The Spines The Moon Jayrem

The Moon is a collection of songs written by Jon McLeary between 1981 and 1984, all recorded recently at Gisborne's Capture Studios by the latest (re)incarnation of the Spines. It contains typical Spines material, tending to the sad and melodic but containing an air of accessibility.

McLeary's personal, often despairing lyrics and vocal delivery that comes on like a theatrical performance are the definitive element of the Spines' sound. But it's Wendy Calder's bass that actually leads the way, winding in and out, leading Ross Burge's hard drumming and slashes of McLeary's guitar through the songs.

The sax supplied to most of the tracks by Neill Duncan adds much, particularly on 'Go To New York' — giving the song an almost free-form jazz feel. The album varies from that jazz feel to the almost-standard-rock-riff of 'You Should See My House', with much in between.

'Lily and I' closes the album on a mournful, beautiful note. Written in 1981, it reflects McLeary's confusion at the Springbok Tour of that year and its motives; "Lily and I went down to the riot...", so relevant... "And the winds of change are taking their time..."

Paul McKessar

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