

Records

China Crisis Flaunt the Imperfection Virgin

Barely audible above the soothing hiss of consumer-orientated pop ruled by drum machines and radioland's aural image of 24 hour sound perfection lurk the likes of China Crisis, bands with a touch more integrity, but lacking the essential grit to really distance them from the commercial masses.

Their two previous albums established them as fussy songsmiths too polite to bite and too soporific for their own good. And although *Flaunt the Imperfection* won't win them them laceration-of-the-year award, the songs are blessed with more character than before, even though some of it is implanted by producer Walter Becker.

Becker, of course, was one half of Steely Dan and apparently he was lured out of retirement in Hawaii to work with China Crisis af-

ter hearing their past albums. Becker's presence overflows into the Steely Dan-ish harmonies that glide through 'You Did Cut Me' and 'The World Spins I Am Part Of It' and through the sharp delivery of 'Wall Of God'. The best of the rest has to lie with 'King In A Catholic Style', 'Strength Of Character' and the single 'Black Man Ray', songs with a hint of personal class.

Flaunt the Imperfection is an ironic title for an album that skims perfectly across the surface of pop without getting wet. Flawless execution but where are the ripples?

George Kay

John Hiatt Warming Up to the Ice Age Geffen

From cult status to cult states, now that's what you call progression. In an era when commercial success is the kiss of death for credibility, John Hiatt has the safest reputation around. He's so popular that last year's *Riding With the King* never made it here, a disappointment to those who warmed to his first high-profile album, *All Of A Sudden*.

Anyway, here's *Warming Up to the Ice Age*, an album that leans on R&B for its main crutch but

baby that's no handicap. "I'm 31 years old and I still don't mind dyin'," Hiatt snarls in his best Howlin' Wolf on 'I'm A Real Man'. And that sets the scene for the little acrid R&B explosions of 'Zero House' and 'The Crush'. Smoother rhythms are explored on 'Number One Honest Game', the delicious George Benson parqu岸 slide of 'She Said the Same Things to Me' and on 'Living A Little, Laughing A Little', the duet with Costello, a song that doesn't quite fly, a leaden chorus clipping the verses' wings. Tough means 'The Usual' and 'I Got A Gun', first and last tracks respectively, and first and lasting expressions that Hiatt can still use the hard core of American R&R to sketch his little stories.

There's hard-liners out there who'll argue that *Slugline* was Hiatt's hiatus. Maybe so partners, but that's surely no grounds for neglecting an album as dependable and fine as *Warming Up to the Ice Age*.

George Kay

Wilson Pickett The Exciting ... Atlantic

This 1966 LP contains the best track from Pickett's first two years on the Atlantic label, including track from *In the Midnight Hour*

(1965). Pickett was the hitmaker amongst the Atlantic soul singers — and though the record spans only a couple of years of a remarkably consistent 26-year career, most of his famous hits are here; 'Land Of 1000 Dances', 'In the Midnight Hour', '99 and A Half Won't Do', '63-45789', 'Barefootin' All the tracks were recorded at Southern studios (Muscle Shoals and Stax), an innovative move at the time and in line with that which launched Aretha Franklin's career.

While other soul performers (Otis Redding, Solomon Burke, Aretha) were treated with almost spiritual reverence, Pickett was regarded as a rabble-rouser — gritty, fiery, wicked — a screaming, uncompromising, crazed soul man who had the hits but didn't play the game.

Despite having recorded two excellent albums as recently as 1979 and 1981 for EMI America, Pickett remains a living legend appreciated by few. Maybe the fiery temperament that makes this (and 15 or so other Pickett albums) so great is the very reason why Pickett is without a recording contract.

To appreciate Pickett, start here, enjoy *The Exciting Wilson Pickett*. Then look for his other albums.
Murray Cammick



Loose Ends

Expendables Inbetween Gears Flying Nun

The latest offering from Flying Nunderground's Expendables is not, as some malingerers have stated, a trivial pursuit. True, Jay Clarkson's introspective lyrics verge on self-indulgence, but one can accept or reject the pictures they paint without any detriment to the music. Self-examination more often than not reveals aspects of character difficult to embrace. In other words, the Expendables deal in distress and the fact that they have produced a record that is both musically satisfying and (upon perseverance) lyrically rewarding is to their credit.

Veering substantially from the Flying Nun party line that rough is roughage, meter is murder, the Expendables, to these ears (all three of them) play superbly, fully exploring the limitations of a three-piece without sounding like a big strain. Messrs Kime and Key, on bass and drums respectively, provide the perfect platform over which Jay Clarkson's vocals and guitar soar (just like a happy birdie).

The virtue of their music is that Jay Clarkson's voice communicates the intent of the piece perfectly when the lyrics may seem vague, a quality she shares with Alison Statton (Weekend, Y.M.G.). Summary of review: buy record ... but don't drop it on the grass — it may disappear.

Hamish Coney

Loose Ends Virgin

An album with a considerable amount of work behind it that emerges as user-friendly funk, ranging from the hypnotic ('Hangin' On A String') to the merely hip ('Silent Talking'). 'You Can't Stop the Rain' is genuinely sensual and the cover of 'Golden Years' improves on Bowie's original. (As usual. Check out the Au Pairs' version of 'Repetition'.) But many tracks come close to my ever-increasing list of after-dinner bands whose names I can never recall in conversation; bands like Level 42, Floy Joy and Working Week. Superb musicians all, purposeful and without flab, but in the face of this (so-called) new jazz idiom I am forever Oliver Twist;

"Please, may I have something more?"

Media saturation does have a lot to do with it; bands that want to be quiet bands suddenly pushed into the light as the Next Big Thing, but the general feel of this album is accompaniment rather than appetite. Standing them against Everything But The Girl (twice the soul) and the new Certain Ratio ('Life's A Scream', the creamiest, most joyful 12" yet) makes Loose Ends look pretty thin and pale, however much the press-release patronisingly flaunts their racial origins.

You might try compensating with a volume knob, since on a nightclub-sized system they sound damn good — muted tones once enlarged become very pleasurable. But there is the same lacking that Level 42 suffer from, however you describe that in words. Loose Ends are a good band and this is a good album. What is there is fine but what isn't makes me restless.

Chad Taylor

Various Artists Say Something Jayrem

This 13-track compilation from Wellington's very enterprising Jayrem Records represents as wide a selection of contemporary New Zealand talent as you'll see anywhere. For that reason alone it should have that silly symbol slapped on it and be exported, post haste. None of these people are getting richer.

The better-known contributions, from Herbs, the Pelicans, Peking Man and Car Crash Set, need no further extolling here. In each case the tracks are showcases for some of New Zealand's most talented musicians, and more power to them.

Plunge deeper into this surprisingly varied package and things really get interesting. Wellington's Circus Block 4 intrigued me the most, having seen the enigmatic video for their track 'Take Another Look'. An air of suspense pervades, with layers of keyboards, guitar and finely-meshed percussion. A lot of precision and a dash of inspiration. Auckland's National Anthem managed to cop some airplay for 'Please Say Something', even if the song relies too heavily on its horn riffs. Tony Johns' Welleresque vocals promise much for the future.

Wellington's Violet Summer should delight fans of early Marc Bolan with the slightly eccentric Flower Power imagery of 'Morning Before', while Vietnam wander a mite too seriously down the Doors/Joy Division path for my taste.

The now-defunct Freudian Slips always picked their targets well and showed little mercy, especially to the male sex. Their honesty and inventiveness will be missed. The package also includes a bonus four-track 45, with contributions from Luke Hurley, Wayne Gillespie, Naked Spots Dance and Sonya Waters.

Duncan Campbell

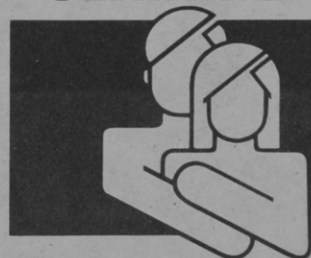
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