

Records

Sting
The Dream of the Blue Turtles
 A&M

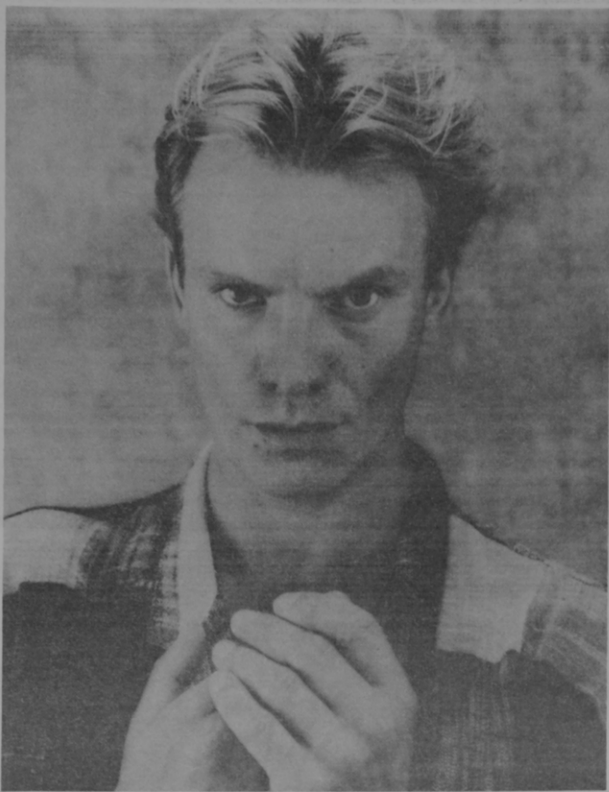
It is difficult to approach this record without preconceptions. For a start there's our attitude to the whole Police file. Fans of the group will want more of the same. Detractors will of course expect confirmation of their criticisms.

Well, *Blue Turtles* is not a Police album, even though it does include a couple of numbers that recall the old format. 'Fortress Around Your Heart' has a bright, poppy hook while 'Love Is the Seventh Wave' re-employs that familiar white-reggae schtick. There's also a revamp of an early Police song. And then critics of Sting's past work will be able to remake their point about verbal pretentiousness, particularly with reference to 'Russians' (the album title is also an example).

But finally all assessments based on Police-oriented criteria are inadequate. The music is simply too varied. Besides, it distinctly lacks that identifiable Police sound.

Another expectation is that Sting has "gone jazz". Understandable when you consider his choice of stellar back-up band: Weather Report's drummer, Miles Davis' bassist and the sax and keyboards players from Wynton Marsalis' group. (A line-up, as they say, "young, gifted and black.") Yet less than half the tracks are jazz-oriented, and in those it's mainly a matter of pulse rather than improvisation. The exception is the short, instrumental title piece — and that seems largely a concession to allow the band to flex.

Often in fact, the music works best when a tension is established between jazz expectations and the restrained structure of Sting's songwriting. 'Consider Me Gone' swings beautifully but is kept under tight, brooding control. Likewise, 'Moon Over Bourbon Street', an eerie love song for a vampire. (Which also includes some deft arranging by highly reputed British composer Dominic Muldowney.



Sting



The Bangles

Sting certainly is moving in classy company these days.)

But the band's enormous potential firepower isn't wasted. They provide a marvellous dynamic to the final two tracks on side one. 'Children's Crusade' builds to a superb instrumental climax and 'Shadows In the Rain' boogies with a vengeance.

If one has any reservation about *The Dream of the Blue Turtles* it's probably that the album hasn't developed beyond that extraordinary second side of *Synchronicity*, the last Police set. But then, I guess, that's another preconception.

Peter Thomson

The Pogues
Red Roses For Me
 Stiff

Ten years ago and the Pogues would've been safely shelved as Folk-Rock, that meaningless but convenient category that covered anything from the Incredible String Band to the Eagles and the Byrds.

These days it isn't so simple. For a start the English press are desperately scratching for something REAL in a soap-opera domestic scene, and the Pogues, with dirt under their fingernails and real Guinness in their veins, make a dirty, bawdy, credible music that's long been missed.

Anglo-Irish by extraction, not by choice, the Pogues released this album in Britain last year. Booted by rockabilly rhythms and laced with Celtic folk instrumentation (accordion, tin whistle), their songs spring from vocalist Shane MacGowan's alcoholic energy and from the odd trip into ethnic pasts.

MacGowan's songs veer between drinking reels, 'Streams of Whiskey' and 'Boys From County Hell'; stolen jigs, 'Battle of Brisbane' and 'Down In the Ground Where the Dead Men Go'; and metropolitan blues, 'Dark Streets of London'. But his masterpiece is 'A Pair of Brown Eyes', a drunken, yearning song about longing that rolls, laments and finally accepts "a-rovin' a-rovin' I'll go for a pair of brown eyes." *Repo Man*'s Alex Cox directed the video that was recently on *RWP*.

The heart of their traditional attack lies with the reels/jigs of 'Poor Daddy', 'Dingle Regatta' and 'Greenland Whale Fisheries'; and for Celtic soul Brendan Behan's

'The Auld Triangle' and the timeless melancholy of 'Kitty' reach those sentiments too true to be maudlin.

Confronted by *Red Roses For Me*, purists will point to the likes of Planxty, Boys of the Lough, Alan Stivell, Horslips and even the Chieftains as better examples of the wonders of Celtic folk music. But that isn't the point. The Pogues, like The Men They Couldn't Hang (grab their import album *Night of A Thousand Candles*), are now, their style is only a means of conveying their hunger in the present. The important thing is that there's life, passion and great music on this record.

George Kay

The Bangles
All Over the Place
 Liberation

The Bangles grew up alongside the California hardcore scene and they've since been variously considered as feisty casual feminist and sellable girlpop; of course they're both and neither.

Side One, with the exception of 'The Hero Takes A Fall', is the duller side. It's crisp, pleasant but somewhat predictable guitar-vocal pop. But flip over and there's a bag of multitextured riches. The six songs are linked by a continuum of melody and sheer tastiness. It encompasses the quick shuffle of 'Tell Me' and the gorgeously slow and languidly precise vocal harmonies and string backing of 'More Than Meets the Eye'. 'Going Down To Liverpool' was written by the lead guitarist of Katrina and the Waves but it fits in fine. And

let's hear it for *smart* love songs.

There are two main sides to great pop music — on one hand, the manner in which it relates to and evokes its time and on the other its absolute grace, verve and economy. The Bangles may not have a lot to do with the pop world of 1985, but they're pretty heavyweight on the other scoresheet.

Russell Brown

Aztec Camera
Backwards and Forwards
 WEA

"I like Roddy Frame but I still think he's stupid, all dressed up for stardom. He looks a bit of a twit," said Man of the Month Terry Hall earlier this year.

Frame has been picked for stardom and named, on more than one occasion, as the heir to Costello's bag of tricks. Two albums of carefully-wrought craftsmanship bear out his potential and this five-track live EP gives some indication as to the care the man takes to present his wares.

'Backwards and Forwards' and 'The Birth of the True' from *Knife* and 'The Bugle Sounds Again' from *High Land Hard Rain* are reeled off pretty faithfully and benefit from the keener edge of live performance. The justification for the price of admission lies in the unknown 'Mattress of Wire', a Frame acoustic exorcism of some presence, and in the masterfully understated version of Van Halen's 'Jump', this time bowing out on a two-minute guitar blitz.

Tasty.
George Kay



The Pogues



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