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## Records

**Smokey Robinson & the Miracles**  
**Greatest Hits Vol 2**  
*Motown*

This one originates in 1968, but it's been re-released a few times since then. For some people the album's current availability simply reconfirms its seminal greatness (and presents a chance to replace a worn-out copy with a new one). For others it's an opportunity to get acquainted with early performances by one of the greatest talents pop music has been lucky to embrace.

At the birth of the 60s, William 'Smokey' Robinson was the foremost creative talent in setting the new Tamla Motown record company apart from the mainstream of rhythm and blues. Producing and writing for his own group as well as Mary Wells, the Temptations and the Marvelettes, Smokey set the tone for Motown's love songs. He wrote songs for dancing but the greatest were usually for dancing real close. So it is with this Miracles collection. 'Going To A Go Go' or 'Whole Lot of Shakin' In My Heart' may initially sound dated to the uninitiated, but ballads such as 'I Second That Emotion' are as instantly, rapturously timeless as ever. The level of intelligence and wit in his lyric writing was also at its most masterful here. Try any of the abovementioned ballads for proof. (Bob Dylan is reputed to have dubbed Robinson as "America's greatest living poet.")

Smokey's singing was inspired by 50s groups like the Drifters and the Moonglows, and maybe also by Sam Cooke. It had a similar high, pure, swooping sound which, even at its most joyous could hint at experienced pain. Or conversely, even the songs of sorrow had a fresh breathiness that precluded self-pity.

It would be easy to continue extolling Smokey's virtues for pages but suffice to say that he is a genius of musical romance and one of pop's true masters. So many of his songs have been re-recorded by other artists, continuing through into the 80s by admirers as diverse as Luther Vandross, the Rolling Stones and jazz vocalist Bobby McFerrin. Here



*Smokey Robinson & Miracles*

however are just a few of the originals, sung by the man himself. (And you get the original sleeve design too.)

**Peter Thomson**

**The Builders**  
**Let's Play**  
*South Indies*

It's back to old tricks for Bill Direen's fourth album (the second this year): the old 'rough and ready product and package trick', the old 'give nothing away on the cover' trick and three old Vacuum tricks — 'Magazine', 'Kicks' and 'Inquest'. It all bears little resemblance to the user-friendly *CoNCH3*.

'Rubbish In the City' opens as a stuttering workout for Greig Bainbridge's bass and evolves into a Direen tale of cold street, empty windows and lost love. 'Opium and Gold' is a haunting song about Chinese coalminers' struggles in Otago last century. 'Newspaper Sleep' is a jaunty little jazz number, 'Metiko' sounds like first album Hunters and Collectors urban funk and both 'Resting Sleepwalker' and 'Johnny Devlin's Shoes' are simply wonderful.

Most of this was recorded at Progressive with Terry King engineering as usual. Carl Holdorf's trombone and Bainbridge's bass both stand out as being excellent.

'Magazine' is reworked at Night-shift assisted by Vacuum/Builder people Malcolm Grant and Allen Meek (I think — the cover is little help). Once docile, it now becomes an electric jolt of guitar feedback, as do the other songs here from *Beatin' Hearts*. 'Kicks' and 'Inquest' are both full-spiritedly messy and beautiful, especially 'Inquest' as the closing track.

There's a few old faces mixed in

with even older ones, and at times it sounds almost too jarringly like the two different bands that it effectively is. But then in its rough playfulness, melodies and lyrical images, *Let's Play* is Direen uniting elements into a whole. "Let's play," he said, and they did, having fun and displaying what marvellously talented people are those who go under the collective tag "Builders".

"All the back covers have been painted by kids: every one a gem," says Bill. He's right. And *Let's Play* is just a different, more shy, kind of friendliness.

**Paul McKessar**

**Artists United Against Apartheid**  
**Sun City**  
*Manhattan*

Records, unlike guns, make poor political tools. Much has been written over the USA For Africa/Feed the World protest genre; the desire to help is genuine, but the political effects are in many ways debatable. But as an aid in raising the consciousness of people, in making the issues more definable, records and events like this are important.

Musically speaking, the album's got some great tracks, with a plethora of interesting artists, from the more mainstream acts like Bono and Springsteen to others like Run DMC, Fat Boys, Linton Kwesi Johnson et al.

The title track appears twice (once in dub) and is superb, but the most interesting track is Keith Le Blanc's cut up and compilation of the sounds of struggle in 'Revolutionary Situation', which puts voices and speeches together in a similar way to his 'Malcolm X' and 'Strike'. Certainly the cut with the biggest political punch. The rappers have their say on 'Let Me See Your I.D.' with some interesting lines from Gil Scott Heron, who had years before commented on the South African situation in his 'Johannesburg'.

When compared to the previous protest efforts, this one comes on stronger in both political and musical terms, partly because of Arthur Baker's tough production and the hard-edge quality of most of the performers. Money from artists' royalties will go to aid American anti-apartheid groups, political prisoners and exiles. A worthy cause to support.

**Kerry Buchanan**

## Pop Mechanics



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