

Simply Red Picture Book Elektra

From the six-piece British ensemble whose radio hit 'Money's Too Tight (To Mention)' brought to our attention the soul-soaked voice of Mick Huckhall, we have a five-a-side debut album. The band, which took its name from Huckhall's shock of red hair, brought in Stuart Levine (whose credits include Randy Crawford, the Crusaders and BB King) to produce. They gave the songs and he gave them a hit single with the Valentine Brothers song 'Money's Too Tight'. If you enjoyed that track, sample this mixture of white soul and jazz. There's the bouncy funk of 'Come To My Aid' and 'Look At You Now', the swing jazz feel of 'Sad Old Red' and the cruises 'Holding Back the Years'. There's even a great version of David Byrne's 'Heaven', slowed down to suit.

This band has a reputation in the UK and Europe as an exciting live act and this was verified to me by a friend who saw them live in Paris — but to be awarded the opening spot for James Brown's London season (at the Hammer-smith Odeon) you would have to be good.

Hot live and hot on vinyl, so don't let this album slip into ob-

scure. Discover it now. It's great music. Simply Red ... Simply Marvellous.

Simon Elton

Louie & the Hotsticks Stickability Radar Vague Secrets Radar

Two mini-albums released through the new Christchurch label Radar. First up is a 12" 45rpm offering from the long-running Christchurch sextet Louie and the Hotsticks. It comprises five songs — four written by vocalist/guitarist Alan Park, plus a re-arrangement of the old standard 'Hit the Road Jack'. The competent musicianship shines through, with the standout track being the ska-flavoured 'Living On My Heart'. The "live in the studio" sound gives this an air of honesty which should be welcomed by the band's fans.

The second album is an eight song presentation from fellow Christchurch band Vague Secrets, who are equally as at home playing to a pub audience or with underground theatre. This four piece play thinking man's music with the emphasis on rhythmic feels. Some songs do sound like studio jams and consequently tend to ramble, but the lyrics are above

average. Best tracks: 'Headlines' and 'People Fly Away'. Good effort for the first time around.

Simon Elton

Wynton Marsalis Black Codes (From The Underground) CBS

Want to hear an opinion? Try this one: the quest for intellectual stimulation in jazz is threatening to destroy the music. The fact that Wynton Marsalis is so revered is proof positive.

Jazz has walked a long road since Louis Armstrong played in a band at an orphan's home in New Orleans. Shunned as low-class and tainted by racism, it only climbed out of the mire through sheer virtuosity after the Second World War, when nothing else was ever the same again and some of its finest practitioners had been consumed by the vices which plague the music industry more than ever (the anti-heroin campaign came three decades too late for Charlie Parker and Billie Holiday, to name just two).

The refinement of the 1950s and 60s which spawned Hard Bop and the Free movement brought with it a wave of pseudo-intellectual claptrap and a split between the Miller/Ellington nostalgia freaks, the Parker/Davis bop-

pers and the potpourri of music fans who listen with interest to the new sounds coming out of both America and Europe.

What all this boils down to is that the word 'Jazz' has come to encompass a huge range of musical styles under a very broad (and vague) collective term, and that too many people are now forgetting what the masters of music were doing, ie: following their instincts, speaking from the heart, seeking new directions.

Wynton Marsalis is a musical scholar. Look at the cover of his new LP. Read (if you can stay awake) the ostentatious sleeve notes of Stanley Crouch. Then listen to a record which simply tries, probably with excellent intentions and with state-of-the-art equipment, all lovingly detailed, to recreate the feeling of music already played better by others, many of them long dead.

Marsalis is classically trained, and if there's one thing his music reflects, it's discipline. Emotion doesn't come into it, no matter what Crouch's gushy sleeve notes say. Marsalis is simply imitating, in very academic tones, music which was progressive in the early 1960s but which has been surpassed.

As an example, try Archie Shepp's *Down Home New York*, a

performance by a man who was a contemporary of Coltrane and whose current music breaks new boundaries and takes the breath away. Shepp is a professor of music, Marsalis is a talented pupil.

Duncan Campbell

Philip Glass Mishima Nonesuch

New Yorker Philip Glass is the sort of contemporary composer who's considered hip even when *Time* does devote four-page articles to him. Glass is the best known of the so-called American "minimalists" (though from the little I've heard I prefer the work of John Adams or Steve Reich). Minimalism is readily accessible to pop listeners through its repetitive, hypnotic rhythms and often melodic use of electronics. (Glass in fact has had considerable influence on both Brian Eno and David Byrne — eg Byrne's *Catherine Wheel* album.)

Glass's greatest reputation currently rests with his composing for opera and it is therefore not surprising that he should have also recently begun writing for film. *Mishima* is the soundtrack to an as-yet unreleased American-made drama on the life of Japanese novelist Yukio Mishima who committed hara kiri in 1970.

Firstly dismiss any thought that Glass would be remotely drawn to approximating those crude sounds that are often presented as westernised "orientalism". He also almost totally eschews electronics, relying instead on various string sections, including the traditionally European quartet. (Interestingly, Glass's previous soundtrack, 1983's *Koyaanisqatsi*, was dominated by electronics.)

The nearest we get to anything vaguely "rockist" is the use of electric guitar against strings on two of the 14 tracks. And it is precisely these two tracks I find the least satisfying, but then maybe it's got something to do with the way the guitarist sounds as if he's been recruited from a second-rate reception lounge.

What does the rest sound like then? Well the strings can create both vigorous rhythms and sweet, soothing sounds. In fact while this stuff is enjoyable to listen to you can also safely use it as fairly unobtrusive background music and still retain your credibility. So next time you're out to dinner and some bozo puts on something from, say, that griffawful Wyndham Hill label, introduce your friends to *Mishima*. Philip Glass as avant-garde MOR — and why not?

Peter Thomson

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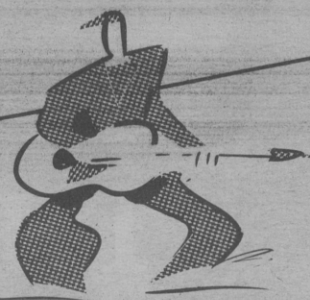
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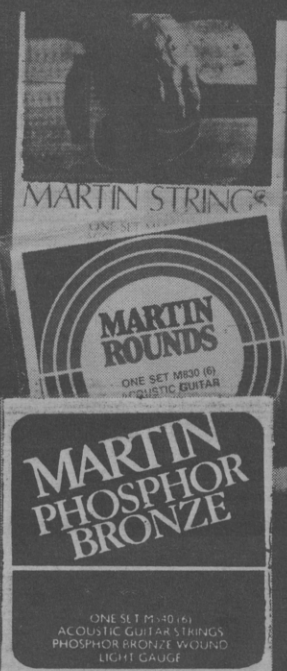
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