

12" SINGLES

RUBY TURNER

'If You're Ready'

Smooth soul smoocher.
Produced by Billy Ocean



PAUL HARDCASTLE

'Don't Waste My Time'

Bent for the floor!



TAMARA & THE SEEN

'Everybody Dance'

Ouch! Minneapolis never
sounded so goo-o-od.



SPECIAL AKA

'Free Nelson Mandela'

New Elvis Costello remix.
Essential to own.



Records

**Lloyd Cole
and the Commotions**
Easy Pieces
Polydor

Look around, just what the hell is there for the discerning teenager to get into at the moment, man? For us over-30s we can afford (?) to import and name drop obscure current goodies via an NME shopping list. And you couldn't ask a kid to like the Pogues, so the teenager without a commercial lobotomy is left with the Flying Nun catalogue, REM, the Fall, New Order, etc. And did someone mention Lloyd Cole?

Rattlesnakes did brisk trade in the late-teens market, probably because Cole ties his tunes to a forlorn digestible angst, and the album did offer a few classy songs in 'Down on Mission Street' and 'Are You Ready to Be Heartbroken?'. Since then he's kept things going with two very tidy singles in 'Brand New Friend' and 'Lost Weekend', both on *Easy Pieces*.

Like most sequels, *Easy Pieces* fails to match the variety or achievement of its predecessor but that doesn't mean it's a bad album, in fact, it's a perfect example of intelligent undemanding pop without the vulgarity of the commercial push.

The best must be the gentle guitar resonance of 'Pretty Gone', a sad little song with plenty of dignity; the beefy opener 'Rich', no doubt a role-play from one of the many books Cole reads; the two singles 'Brand New Friend' and especially 'Lost Weekend' ('It took a lost weekend in a hotel in Amsterdam and double pneumonia in a single room and the sickest joke was the price of the medicine,' sounds like a real experience) and the insinuating lovesickness of 'Perfect Blue'.

Sure Cole's music won't tear down too many buildings but neither is he into the vulgar commercialism of the Go Wests et al. And although his lyrics are still reflections of the self-conscious cognoscente and are therefore a substitute for living the real thing, he does at least hint at the depth and danger of life. So he's in the

middle between the Mary Chains and the Whams and he's doing alright. Teens-with-taste could do worse than start here.

George Kay

Chuck Berry
The Great 28
RCA

In the pantheon of rock and roll saints, Chuck Berry stands by Elvis's right hand.

Chuck the poet of neon and hot dog stands, Chuck the liberator of teenage dreams, Chuck the smirk behind the sexual glance, Chuck with his ringing guitar and duckwalk.

One of the originators of the big beat via the jump blues rhythm of Amos Milburn, the loud guitar of Chicago, and the cool country pickers of the Sun sound.

Chuck's first gem was the rockably ramble of 'Maybelline', a purity that only Carl Perkins could match. 'Maybelline' replaced 'Rock Around the Clock' as the No. 1 R&B song of 1955; Chuck became the cool ruler of the beat. *The Great Twenty-Eight* charts the history of his rule, all the essential tracks from 1955 to 1965, with only 'The Promised Land' missing. These songs are like old friends, instant stabs of pleasure and recognition. Innocent pleasures perhaps, but with just a hint of forbidden knowledge. Nick Tosches writes of Jerry Lee Lewis that "Mothers smelled his awful presence in the laundry of their daughters." Chuck was never that blatant but remains that mythical 'Brown-Eyed Handsome Man'.

An album that confirms the words of Chuck's 'School Days':

Hail, hail, rock and roll
Deliver me from the days of woe
Long live rock and roll
The feeling is there, body and soul

Kerry Buchanan

Jackson Browne
Lives in the Balance
Asylum

I'd written off Jackson Browne. As the archetypal 70s song-poet he helped define the "me decade" and then became confined by it. His once beautifully-evoked concern with eschatology gradually turned into positive resignation (on *The Pretender*, 1976) and then to self-trivialising (with 'Disco Apocalypse', 1980). By 1983 Browne could only present the musical aridity and facile verbal

smugness of 'Lawyers in Love'.

So what's happened? *Lives in the Balance* is not just a stunning creative resurgence, it's quite possibly his strongest set since that remarkable debut, eight albums and 14 years ago.

The new impetus seems to stem directly from Browne's social and political concerns. (Though, curiously, his leading role in the Musicians For Safe Energy project showed no carry-over onto *Lawyers in Love*). With titles like 'Soldier of Plenty' and 'Lawless Avenues', six of Browne's seven originals pose hard questions about current American attitudes, both domestic and international. With his considerable verbal gifts rejuvenated, he is able to be fiercely committed without once becoming hectoring or strident. Most of these lyrics are so good they beg for quotation, yet any brief selection here would only render them a disservice. And besides, they'd lack the music.

Because not only has Browne written some of his most eloquent words ever, he's made them resound to a bunch of his very strongest tunes. Admittedly all the music retains the traditional format of mid-70s West Coast rock. Nonetheless it's well arranged, powerfully performed and always naggingly memorable.

'In the Shape of a Heart' is the only non-political (well, overtly so anyway) song he has here. A tender lyric on a failed affair and a haunting melody make it one of the most beautiful love songs I've heard in a long time. Surprisingly, the album's one non-original — by Browne's friend Greg Copeland — is the only dull track.

Within his overall theme of pointed political criticism, Browne is equally severe on himself. In both the first track's opening verse and the album closer's coda he dismisses his own early outlook on life. The 16-year-old musician who began his career as Nico's guitarist/songwriter/love; and then went on to win fame as an introspective idealist, has toughened up. He's been through a lot since those days, from personal tragedy to the development of a committed political consciousness. Now, with *Lives in the Balance*, he's given us one of the year's most powerful albums. Suddenly the 70s Pretender is an 80s Contender.

Peter Thomson

SOUL ON ICE

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