

Shake Summation

Peking Man Good Luck to You (CBS 12")

This has been on high rotate for several weeks, and it sticks out — which is more of a comment on commercial radio than the song. Although it lacks the catchiness of 'Room that Echoes' and 'Lift Your Head Up High', it could be more typical of Peking Man: studied funk, extremely well-crafted, but over-worked so that it's squeaky clean and antiseptic. Apart from the cocktail jazz sax, only Margaret Ulrich's harmonies provide much character. That's the 7" — over 12" the song is stretched to its limits, with a few more instruments thrown in by producer Bruce Lynch. Once again, so careful — why do I keep getting distracted? 'Get the Feeling' indeed; Peking Man might be falling into the "tasty licks" trap.

Pop Mechanix Celebration of the Skin (Hit Singles)

Arresting opening from the drummer Kevin Emmett, then it's

U2 for the guitar lines and verses; Pop Mechanix emerge on the chorus — male duos seem to be essential currently — but it works on you finally. Heavy pop that's retained its grittiness. 'Land of Broken Dreams', "mastered from a cassette dub", is very refreshing with its ringing acoustic guitars. Quirky vocals (Paul Scott) to a lovely sad melody. A cut-rate baroque production from Eddie Rayner; love the witty use of timpanis.

Ardijah Give Me Your Number (Pagan)

Full of life, it leaps out from this batch with its energetic synth hook. Lightweight, but that's what's good about it. The breathy-voiced Betty Monga is a smooth, assured pop singer, and while the plucked bass might be a cliché, it's essential for the funk sound. The HM guitar solo is the perfect touch and even the cut-off ending works. The instrumental version on the B-side shows how backing music can stand up on its own. The guitar solo is even more over-the-top, but its tongue is firmly in cheek. Excellent.

Beat Soldiers Conversation (Ode)

Bottom heavy from the start, surprising for producer/engineer Phil Yule. When the vocalist stops singing to the floor and gets out

of the lower register he proves to be the best feature. Started out as early Simple Minds, with the Doors' 'Love Me Two Times' riff thrown in, but neither influence is developed. On 'Comfortable Living', the pastiche is perfected; ringing guitar lines, and anthemic stadium sound which falls away for a meaningful chorus, then back to the guitar lines ... there's no question who these guys want to be, but they haven't got the edge.

Chris Bourke

Sneaky Feelings Better Than Before (Flying Nun 12")

Firstly, 'Better Than Before' is not the work of melancholic beauty that 'Husband House' was, and I must admit to being very disappointed when I first heard and saw it on TV. Happily, having heard the record, I can say that 'Better Than Before' is another very good song from the Sneakys, but less impressed am I with the song's production. In the end it manages to lead the song nowhere, as despite being full of sounds, the production falters just when it needs to punch.

On the flip, things get enjoyably country-Byrdsy with pedal steel geetar from Red McKelvie on

David Pine's 'Wouldn't Cry', and there's also John Kelcher's sad another-day-at-the-pub 'Here's to the Other Six', recorded at Strawberry Fields.

Paul McKessart

Live

NZ Artists for NZ Music

Gluepot, May 23

It's hard to criticise a gig for such a good cause — New Zealand music on the radio. Some artists — like Marc Hunter and Mike Caen — had come over from Australia to support the NZ music quota and petition. Karyn Hay and Annabel Carr took signatures at the door, and Neville Purvis reminded us at every single opportunity what we were here for. However the two best bands came at the beginning and end of the night — Ardijah, up first, and Herbs, last.

Ardijah were particularly wonderful, all three songs that I saw. Very clean and very close to funk and soul bliss. I caught 'Give Me Your Number', their single — Betty Monga has a fine voice indeed,

and she phrases well, so the words are clear. If the band are missing a live drummer it doesn't show, in fact the drum machine fitted in with their hi-tech outlook. Surely with Ardijah springing up from South Auckland there must be unlimited talent out there.

Soul On Ice were more full-on soul, with a brass section and back-up singers. They looked good, if a little crowded (11 members) and sounded reasonable. Good singing, but with so many people making noise on stage it was a bit heavy-handed at times — a little more space is needed. There were sound problems too, with the bass no doubt being felt by the drinkers downstairs, let alone shaking my fingernails loose.

Next along was a group of musicians who stayed on stage for a large part of the night: Tony Waine (Narcs) played bass, Grant Ryan on gat, Stewart Pearce on keyboards, and Steven Clarkson on drums. What followed was a rather mediocre time, Trudi Green on vocals and amazing dress, Harry Lyon played a kind of electrified blues skiffle, including a country version of 'Fugitive for Love' — and it sounded good countryfied, too.

Mike Caen, the 'ex-pat', is in an Aussie band called Pink Slips. He at last started to show some form, but it was too much macho bull-shit for me; he did a dull version of 'Satellite Song'. Women were reasonably well represented, with all the singers being women until Mike Caen took the stage. Josie Rika did a respectable version of 'Nutbush City Limits', and then smilin' Tommy Fergusson was raucous with 'Gimme Some Lovin'.

If people hadn't come to see any other band, they had come to see Marc Hunter, and things certainly woke up when he got up. Dragon's greatest hits followed, including 'Rain' and 'April Sun in Cuba'. Hunter's beginning to look like the David Thomas of Aussie rock. Herbs were late starting, but it's hard not to succumb to the rhythms of 'Nuclear Waste', 'On My Mind' and 'Azania'. They sounded good, as usual.

Two thoughts: the number of covers done was just enough to make me think it was a pity all the songs weren't New Zealand too. Also, someone shoot Neville Purvis — his humour/persona does not work on any level at all. I believe funds raised will go towards

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