

Records

Luther Vandross Give Me The Reason Epic

Yep, more of the same from the giant of today's soul music, the self-confessed "emotional eater" is slightly diminished in size for this LP, having lost 126 pounds. Will the rash of fat soul singer signings continue now Luther has trimmed his once 54 inch waist? What will Luther impersonators do (Freddie, Alexander) now the boss can see his shoes?

It's ironic that the leading 80s soul man should hail from New York, having lead a decidedly yuppie existence since being discovered by Bowie during the *Young American* sessions. From there Luther was the fourth harlette for Bette Midler's stage show — he sat behind a curtain "with monitor, mike and about six sandwiches, singing fourth harmony". From there Vandross fronted his own band Luther, guested with disco act Change and did lucrative session work. Recently he bought Rona Barrett's house in Beverley Hills — surely the stuff soul legends are made of?

Now he's back with Bette for this album's title track from her hit film *Ruthless People*. A ditty groomed for crossover success, yet platinum (one million copies) selling Luther is still relatively unknown in the white USA market.

Best on this low-cal outing are the movers 'Stop to Love' (stop what?), 'I Gave It Up' (gave what up?) and 'I Really Didn't Mean It' (repent from what?). Best ballads are a duet with Gregory Hines 'There's Nothing Better Than Love' (food?) and remake of Dionne War-

wick's inspirational fat-free ode 'Anyone Who Has a Heart'.

What Luther has over pretenders to the soul throne is his self-sufficiency creatively in the studio. Although his lyrics are more predictable this time out, and he steps aside to co-produce the LP with collaborator Marcus Miller, Luther once again proves that he's in a class of his own. I guess the king of soul is only competing with himself.

Murray Cammick

Aretha Franklin 30 Greatest Hits Atlantic

At last an Aretha compilation with a significant number (30!) of her exquisite Atlantic recordings. Those who have suffered on a diet of 10-track Aretha "best of" LPs and scratchy old pressings can now envelope themselves in this digitally transferred feast. Aretha played a unique role in the late-60s pop music. While "girl" groups and "girl" singers were common place, Aretha stormed onto the pop charts with her assertive, impassioned delivery — the voice of a woman.

Most musical criticism has focussed on the southern R&B "setting" for Aretha's Atlantic recordings, and specifically the role of producer Jerry Wexler in selecting studios and musicians. But the scope of Aretha's vocal achievement over her 19 Atlantic albums puts the importance of the setting in its proper perspective; Wexler's earthy 60s soul style was only a starting point.

During her peak years, critics rarely praised Aretha's own quiet, introspective writing and were aghast at her tacky choice in cover versions, yet the strength of this set is that compiler Kim Cooke realises that with these songs Aretha achieved some of her

greatest performances. Seven of the 30 tracks are Aretha's songs — try the lesser-known 'Day Dreaming', 'Rock Steady', or sister Carolyn's 'Ain't No Way' or 'Angel'. Among her lesser-known covers that steam are the Beatles' 'Eleanor Rigby', the Band's 'The Weight' and Paul Simon's 'Bridge Over Troubled Water'.

Though Aretha is an inarticulate interview subject — "yes" and "no" are her most clearly stated comments — with her voice, her phrasing, her piano playing, her arranging and her songwriting (one or two tracks per album) Aretha achieves a rare, unique eloquence. I suspect that Annie Lennox wrote 'Sisters' for Aretha knowing that the theme was never stated but always implicit in Aretha's delivery — always "felt" if never heard.

It's a pity that so few "women" soul singers get heard beyond the black market and dance clubs. — What about Betty Lavette, Denise Lasalle, Shirley Brown, Betty Wright.

A superb collection, with excellent sleeve notes and packaging, that should whet people's appetites for further reissues, maybe an Aretha sings Aretha collection of her own songs or reissues of entire albums — Aretha Now, Lady Soul, Spirit in the Dark or Young, Gifted and Black.

Murray Cammick

Ziggy Marley and the Melody Makers Hey World! EMI

Bob Marley's eldest child stunned everyone last year. *Play the Game Right*, the Melody Makers' debut, showed Ziggy's pedigree. He was truly his father's son, and his maturity of lyrical vision, coupled with his depth of

musical ability, provided a major surprise. He's still only in his late teens and a year on, his second LP charts his growth.

Having said that, *Hey World!* also shows that there's still some growing up to do. Above all else, Ziggy needs the freedom to develop his own directions.

The hand of Mama Rita is obvious in this LP. Her company, rather than the woman herself, is listed as the executive producer. Those who have done business with her say she is one tough cookie. Sure, she's had to be. As a woman in the very corrupt Caribbean music industry, she's had few favours. But the desire to be "commercial" spoils *Hey World!*, and the executive producer must carry the can. The musicians are of the highest calibre, but the mix too often spoils the impact of a fine song. Come the time Ziggy feels confident enough to produce without so many guiding hands, I'm certain the results will be vastly better.

On the positive side, Ziggy continues to construct songs in the Marley tradition, even if he's not as consistent as on *Play the Game Right*. 'Hey World', a song addressed to the planet, is co-written with one Otis O Solomon and mourns environmental destruction. 'Police Brutality' doesn't mince its words, nor does '666', an explicit shot at the Vatican (the numbers form the symbol worn on the vestments of the reigning Pontiff. Rastas say the Bible warns of this as a false prophecy). 'Say People' and 'Freedom Road' are strong enough melodies, but lyrically they characterise the reggae dilemma — how to state familiar messages in new ways.

Reggae is as vulnerable as any other musical form to the cliché. If you're not singing about love, you'll generally sing (these days)

about war, poverty, racism and inequality. Too often, *Hey World!* sinks into glib phrases, making serious subjects sound trivial. Ziggy Marley is worth more than that. He's still young, with enormous potential. But channelled the wrong way, he'll find it hard to fulfil the huge promise of his debut album.

Duncan Campbell

Various Artists Love Kills: Music from Sid and Nancy MCA

It's a risky move making a movie about someone who's so recently passed into punk folklore as Sid Vicious has. Getting a perspective on that wasted life would be hard enough without the added danger of glorifying Sid and Nancy's heroin addiction and eventual murder and suicide. Add to those near crippling drawbacks the fact that very few music lovers or lovers-of-life have mourned the passing of the archetypal punk whose contribution to rock and roll was negligible to say the least.

As far as the music's concerned, the soundtrack isn't without some value. For the Pogues, Cait O'Riordan makes a good job of another fine McGowan song, 'Haunted', and Jem Finer chips in with one of his instrumentals, 'Junk'. Joe Strummer polishes his waning star with the title track and 'Dum Dum Club' and John Cale is suitably droll and dejected on 'She Never Took No For an Answer'.

The rest of the songs are best forgotten. Actor Gary Oldman who plays Sid, growls through Iggy's 'I Wanna Be Your Dog' and Sid's own pathetic 'My Way', and Steve Jones is too dull on 'Pleasure and Pain'. Pray for Rain, whoever they are, pad out the rest of the album with soundtrack backdrops.

Five acceptable songs from a movie soundtrack is probably not a bad head count but I get the feeling that this whole idea of Alex Cox's is a waste of his precocious talents.

George Kay

David Sylvian Gone To Earth Virgin

Sting is probably the most recent musician to point out that there's no such thing as a solo album and it's a thought one should bear in mind with this double-album from Japan's ex-lead vocalist and songwriter. With musicians such as Robert Fripp, Bill Nelson and Jon Hassell wandering around the studio it's no surprise that their influence is so strong. And nor is it a bad thing; Robert Fripp turns in some of his prettiest guitar-playing since Eno's *Another Green World*, for instance. He does ruin the album's short title-track, too, but that's the bad side to such heady collaboration.

By sides three and four, Sylvian dips out altogether and the only credits which appear are those of the performers. The extremely beautiful songs and instrumentals do however share enough qualities to prove that he must be in there somewhere — if not writing, then at least laying down guidelines for the musicians. Sylvian also makes the very impressive 'Taking The Veil' as well as 'Silver Moon'; he may be a poser, but he's no prima donna.

If you liked *Brilliant Trees*, you'll adore this, and if you didn't then you're just not listening anyway. This lad's solo work is some of the loveliest stuff around.

Come to think of it, I still like *Gentlemen Take Polaroids*. Right, lets get back to being cynical ...

Chad Taylor

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