

Records

The Robert Cray Band Strong Persuader Mercury

This is Cray's fifth album, though only the second to be released locally. The band is an orthodox four-piece: Cray on vocals and guitar, plus bass, drums and keyboards. On a few tracks they are supplemented by the Memphis Horns or an extra percussionist.

Cray originally hails from the state of Georgia, and while his music is deeply rooted in the blues it also owes much to southern soul and R&B. The fact that it also bristles with as many melodic hooks as the best mainstream pop doesn't go amiss either. A group of writers contribute to the repertoire, Cray and his producer Dennis Walker being the most prominent.

Lyrically, nearly all the material centres on scenes of love gone wrong. Powerfully evoked feelings of pride, suspicion, guilt, revenge and despair torment the narrators of these songs. The last LP was called *False Accusations* and contained tracks with names like 'I've Slipped Her Mind' and 'Payin' for it Now'. On the title track Cray plays a man who's listening to a fight next door, knowing he's destroyed a love affair when he calculatedly seduced the woman, just so he could add "another notch to my guitar".

Strong Persuader is overall a more uptempo album than *False Accusations*, though many of its tracks do share the earlier record's cruisy tempo. Otherwise the

sound is very similar, that of a band sounding accurately recorded rather than flashily produced. The arrangements are typically restrained, with keyboards usually subdued and the instrumental focus on Cray's Fender Stratocaster.

The Robert Cray Band plays music that resolutely adheres to black musical traditions established in the 50s and 60s. As such it stands outside present trends but it does so with such craft and quality that old forms are rendered current again. For those with the ears to hear, the Robert Cray Band is indeed a *Strong Persuader*.

Peter Thomson

XTC Skylarking Virgin

After posing as the flower-infested acid heads "The Dukes of Stratosphere", XTC have come out from behind their beads to construct what has to be their best album since the heavy days of *Drums and Wires* and *Black Sea*.

Their recent records have been lovingly crafted doilies celebrating Englishness when quaintness was hardly appropriate. *Skylarking* is still typical XTC, but this time they're revelling in the pop period of *Magical Mystery Tour* and *Sgt Pepper's* and using that psychedelia to carry their own rustic pop.

As usual the writing is divided between Partridge and Moulding and their individual styles are beautifully contrasted in the first two songs when Partridge's lazy, hazy 'Summer's Cauldron' snoozes into Moulding's hayseed 'Grass'. 'Earn Enough For Us', with its stuttering chorus and kaleidoscopic guitar line, is vintage Partridge and his 'Another Satellite' floats gently down-

stream, leaving Moulding to have the last say with 'Sacrificial Bonfire'.

Producer Todd Rundgren, whose appreciation of the finer points of 60s pop art wouldn't have escaped Partridge and co, must also take credit for what is XTC's best album since the advent of paisley.

George Kay

Ini Kamoze Pirate Island Taxi Connection Live in London Island

If there was any justice, both of these LPs would have been released to coincide with a sellout tour by the Taxi Gang with Kamoze, Yellowman and Marcia Griffiths. What went wrong, after five postponements, remains a mystery. It seems to boil down to bad communication and maybe a case of cold feet. Funny, seeing how well the Wailers did, with a 12-date tour.

Having spent two nights working on the preview of the Tour That Never Was (see January *RIU*), I've said all I can about Ini Kamoze. He's a tall, good-looking Libran Rasta, sings dancehall style and is dynamite on stage. He loves his bredren and sistren and tries to say something in his songs.

On *Pirate* his topics range from a bizarre touch of incest ('Betty Brown's Mother'), to street violence ('Gunshot'), technological pressure ('Dream'), righteousness ('Pirate', 'R.O.U.G.H.', 'Pull the Cork') and romance ('Queen of My House', 'Burnin').

The S&R riddim machine provides a sound that has mutated from a top-edged skank to a blurry rumble. Frankly, I'm unim-

pressed by it. Paul Smykle, who decided to mess up Black Uhuru's *Anthem*, does another ham-fisted production job here. The aim seems to be to make reggae palatable to American disco audiences.

Live in London is a stronger hint at what we missed, Kamoze raging through 'Trouble You a Trouble Me' and 'Call the Police' to evoke fond memories of JA Sunsplash. Half Pint, an even bigger star, gets four of his best tracks and Yellowman camps it up with 'Reggae Calypso', although it must be conceded that his illness has left him a pale shadow of his former self. Behind it all, the Taxi Gang cooks a red hot dinner. We may still see them, according to rumours, but it may be a while ...

Duncan Campbell

Brian Smith Ode

Because his talents are constantly in demand, Brian Smith's saxes are rarely absent from local recordings or live performance. Nonetheless it's been two and a half years since an album was released under his own name. (In the meantime there have been sessions with Space Case, Jacqui Fitzgerald, and a couple of film soundtracks.) Smith's *Southern Excursion* was one of the standout releases of 1984, local or otherwise. But whereas that LP featured him leading a dynamic quartet throughout, on this new release he performs in a range of settings.

The most remarkable finds Smith playing bamboo flute in a chattering, South Pacific flavoured improvisation that also showcases the superb acoustic guitar of Martin Winch and the popping electric bass of Billy Kristian. All three musicians also supply the bubbling percussion

background.

The other two numbers as a trio are more orthodox, both featuring pianist Phil Broadhurst in beautiful complement to Smith and firmly underpinned by Kristian. 'Grace' has a medium-paced swing while 'Little Shop' is slow and ruminative.

Smith and Broadhurst further demonstrate their considerable empathy dueting on the album's one non-original, Raye De Paul's ballad 'You Don't Know What Love Is'. Smith even takes one track alone. 'For Derek,' the album closer, is a slow but passionate tribute to a musician friend that at one stage involves Smith commenting on his own statements via use of echo delay.

The other three tracks bring Frank Gibson in to make up a quartet. 'Yvette' is a gently wistful piece with Gibson using brushes, which leaves 'Greenlane' and the sprightly samba of 'Kiwifruit' as the album's only two really uptempo numbers.

Finally, more than the variety of instrumental groupings or even Smith's own range of sax playing, it is the selection of material that determines the overall impact of this album. Smith has written seven of the eight pieces and the predominant mood is one of measured reflection. This is understandable given that they stem from incidents in his personal experience. So where his last album was characterised by its energetic vigour, *Brian Smith* more often expresses the quieter side of New Zealand's best saxophonist.

Peter Thomson

Part 1 Pictures of Pain Pusmort Septic Death Now That I Have Your Attention Pusmort

Listen to this, gore freaks — the lead singer of Septic Death is a guy called Pushead. He shouts unintelligibly on the record, is a pretty gruesome freelance artist, and (judging from the inside pix) enjoys maiming himself with screwdrivers and things. Neat, eh? Septic Death are an American "speedcore" band and Part 1 are a British "gloom rock" band. Ain't labels great? Now that we have them in their little boxes ...

Part 1's 'Pictures of Pain' (the song) is a good offering after the two songs that precede it on side one — it wakes you up. 'The Corpse' sounds like Killing Joke used to, before they became A Flock of Seagulls. But 'Incest', 'Ghost' and 'Hymn'? "In the shadow of the cross / we stand defiant" ... "pages written in blood" ... hmmm alright.

Septic Death provide 18 stark visions which fly by very, very fast. That is why they are in the box called "speedcore". But they're all so sad — 'Burial', 'Poison Mask', 'Sweat of a Nightmare'. I thought at least Pushead might have some funny stories to tell. Like where he got his name — chronic acne or what?

Available for \$13 plus \$2 postage each from Hella Distributing, 29 Hyperion Drive, Manurewa. Records for the Howick Goths and Remuera Punks, I suppose ...

Paul McKessar

Dolly Parton, Linda Ronstadt, Emmylou Harris Trio Warner Bros

I don't know about anyone else, but personally I thought these three had done their artist dash, so to speak. The long promised

get-together album has finally materialised, and to my amazement the damn thing gets up and walks.

The choice of songs at first glance is a very encouraging sign, from Phil Spector through Jimmie Rodgers to Linda Thompson, plus a couple of Dolly originals — and that's only side one! Also, the musicians used read like a who's who of tasty session cats, Ry Cooder, Bill Payne, David Lindley, etc, etc, but to producer George Massenburg's credit they never get in the way of some of the prettiest vocalising you'll hear this year, or any other year for that matter. 'The Pain of Loving You,' written by Dolly and Porter Wagoner, starts side one and it's immediately apparent what a classy outing we have here, a great acoustic guitar solo by Albert Lee and with Emmylou taking lead vocal. Terrific.

It's about time Linda Ronstadt realised she's best suited to a country setting and not singing on Broadway or against Nelson Riddle strings. Here she turns in some good performances, especially on 'Telling Me Lies,' the most convincing she has sounded for some time. As usual Dolly demonstrates the sweetest voice in country music, and really, no one does it better. I just love it when they're all singing together in harmony; at times it's quite breathtaking.

Favourites, favourites ... at this stage they seem to change each time I play it, and although it's hardly a challenging record, if you like one song, say the single 'To Know Him is to Love Him,' you'll probably like the whole lot.

Mark Kennedy

Southside Johnny and the Jukes At Least We Got Shoes RCA

In the second half of the 70s Graham Parker and the Rumour and Southside Johnny and the then Asbury Jukes kept the flame of white R&B alive. Parker came via a British soul pedigree funnelled through Dylan, while Southside Johnny Lyon (the nickname arising from his passion for Chicago blues) made his name from New Jersey on three classic albums with Springsteen and Steve Van Zandt. With the severing of that connection the songwriting chores fell to guitarist Billy Rush and although he was no Springsteen, songs like 'I'm So Anxious', 'Long Distance' and 'Captured' proved that he had enough substance to carry the band over a period when their album sound was just plain tame.

Now Rush has gone, replaced by Bobby Bandiera, and together with a new label, RCA, these changes have lead to a revitalised band just when it looked like they had packed up. Lyon and Bandiera have a hand in most of the songs and belters like 'Hard to Find', 'Till the End of the Night' and 'I Can't Wait' close the gap that had been growing between the band's live and studio performances. 'Under the Sun' is a nicely weighted ballad, and what they can't write they cover, as in Southside's devoted cover of 'Walk Away Renee', a marked contrast to their frenzied treatment of 'I Only Want to be With You'.

Like Van Morrison, Springsteen and even Bob Seger, Southside has got one of the great lived-in voices; it's been places, seen things and that's why it's so good the Jukes have moved up a gear to keep that voice on the road.

George Kay

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