

COURTNEY PINE



EXPECT the UNEXPECTED

The Big Beat: Conversations with Rock's Great Drummers by Max Weinberg (Contemporary Books, 180 Nth Michigan Ave, Chicago, Illinois 60601; USD \$9.95)

"Drummers aren't really treated like human beings," says Ringo, "we're a bit like second-rate citizens." With *The Big Beat*, by Springsteen's stickman Max Weinberg, drummers finally get some respect. He interviews 15 of the most important drummers in rock, and the result is a fascinating, intelligent and accessible mix of history and musicianship. It's full of inside stories and anecdotes, enlightening info and tips; it makes one rush to the record player to hear for yourself what special moments they're discussing, the ultimate test of a music book.

D J Fontana relates how his years drumming for strip shows taught him to follow Elvis's arse, while Bernard Purdie (he drummed for Aretha, and on James Brown's 'Cold Sweat' and 'Papa's Got a Brand New Bag') claims to have drummed on 21 Beatles tracks. Roger Hawkins gives a lesson in the art of soulful drumming for Percy Sledge ('When a Man Loves a Woman') and the Staples ('Respect Yourself', 'I'll Take You There').

Purdie aside, they all pay tribute to Ringo, who can be both the best and worst of drummers, sometimes in the same song ('Can't Buy Me Love'), but there's no doubt he inspired a generation to take up the instrument. The man himself talks eloquently of his tom-tom madness on *Abbey Road* (he'd bought a second tom), his mini kit (to make him look tall), and his proudest moment: 'Rain'.

The discography of recommended tracks is an excellent primer. Listen for the hi-hat bark Purdie invented for Aretha's 'Rock Steady', or the hi-hat kicks Roger Hawkins gave her 'Since You've Been Gone'. Once, a personalised drum sound didn't mean a choice between Clearmountain or Lilywhite, but creativity like cigar-box snares ('Whole Lotta Shakin Goin On') or tampax-taped cymbals (an old Memphis trick).

Highly recommended for the musician and layperson alike, *The Big Beat* will sharpen anyone's listening skills — and how much rock journalism does that? Worth importing, or interloaning from



Marvin Gaye — the last tour.

Auckland Library ... it's got a back beat, you can't lose it.
Chris Bourke

Divided Soul: The Life of Marvin Gaye by David Ritz (Collins, \$23)

In popular music few can rival Marvin Gaye as a vocal stylist. He's up there with Frank Sinatra and Ray Charles. Though he mixed dollops of brooding X-rated introspection into his art, Marvin the man remained a perverse mystery.

To some Marvin Gaye was a soul deity, his every mumble and grunt deemed spiritual; to a cynic he was a chauvinist wally, Hefner's *Playboy* soulman who couldn't handle fortune, fame or cocaine.

It's fortuitous that author David Ritz was working on a Marvin Gaye book for several years prior to Gaye's tragic death, as I doubt that anyone else could profile the singer with such care and insight. Ritz did many interviews and was close to the singer, helping write the lyrics for 'Sexual Healing'.

Ritz explores the curious relationship between father and son, Gaye's relationship with his older first wife Anna Gordy and the paternal role of Motown boss Berry Gordy in Marvin's life and career. This biography is compelling reading and Ritz also achieves a detailed portrait of the reclusive Berry Gordy and his Detroit Disneyland empire. Gaye was not the only mad hatter at the Motown tea party.

For thrill seekers this book must be up there with John Belushi's definitive rendition of 'Life in the Fast Lane'. But seriously, comparison with Woodward's voyeurism is not valid. Ritz's portrait of a man who hath everything but not the love of his father is awesome — as the story unfolds the old adage comes to mind, "truth is stranger than fiction." That explains why *Divided Soul* is stranger than Woodward's *Wired*. For music fans the events here put Gaye's recordings in context and draws the reader close to the soul of the man.

Murray Cammick

Expensive Habits by Simon Garfield (Faber & Faber, \$22.80)

This book is subtitled "The Dark Side of the Music Industry." It could easily be called "Hits, Writs and Other Indemnities." It outlines the percentage piracy and contractual connivance against some of pop's biggest names.

For the musician, the songwriter, the band manager, to anyone who studies the charts, it's a book that makes irresistible reading from prologue to put-down. Songwriting is big business and anyone who poo-poo's that truism is as much a potential victim as those described in this book.

A case in point is Wham!. In the beginning, their demos were consistently rejected. Andrew, motivated by a dream, and George, threatened with the family restaurant if music didn't work out, both signed contracts with a friend's newly-formed independent company (started on a paid up capital of £100). Eight months later 'Wham Rap' was Top Five, the boys were on *Top of the Pops*, the whole "star" syndrome, and they didn't have a busfare home. In a period where Alison Moyet reputedly got £250,000 advance for her first album, Andrew and George got £500 each.

Other stories include Allen Klein's relationship with the Stones and the Beatles; the Sex Pistols, Sting, Elton John, the Who, and the tribulations of Hazel O'Connor, which would endear her to even the most ardent cynic. A truly fascinating book, even if you don't know what a packaging deduction based on 90 percent of sales means ... while my lawyer gently weeps.

Trevor Reekie

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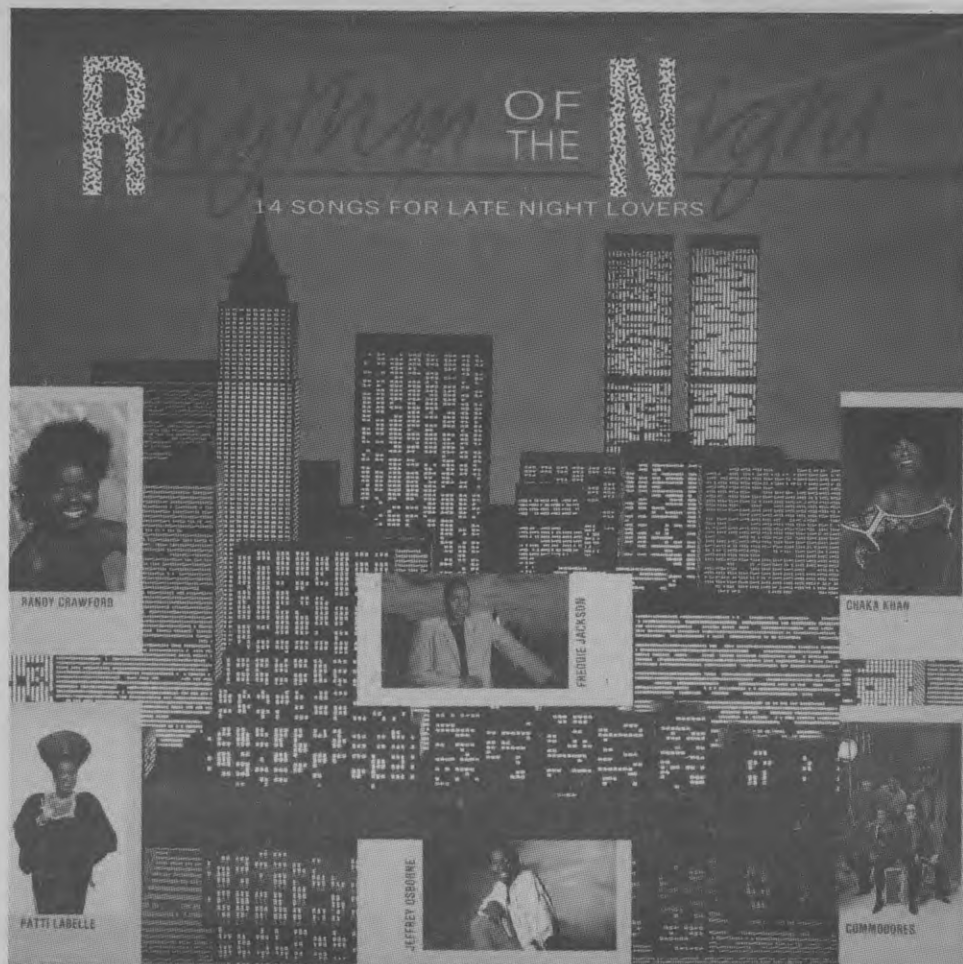
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