

Searching for the Perfect Beat

For years overseas acquaintances would ask, who and what is hot down under? When is there going to be something I can play next to Luther Vandross and say "That's a New Zealand band"? Well, the wait is over and all hopes and expectations have been fulfilled.

Ardijah have made one of New Zealand's most important records, not only because it holds its own internationally, but because it's a work of great creativity. Sound has been crafted and structured into fine pieces of music and song.

Credit must go to Ryan Monga, writer of eight of the nine tracks, and head producer and arranger. Ryan's a perfectionist who knows that the search for the perfect beat is a hard task, but he succeeds on each track. The influences are the severe soul of M'tume and the almost architectural patterns of Jam and Lewis, things that rely on the technology of samplers and sync boxes, machine precision, and cool. The heat and the soul comes from the vocals of Betty-Anne Monga, who establishes herself as a true stylist, and proves you don't have to scream to sing soul. Her vocals are faultless, and things like 'Do to You' and 'Give Me Time' give Anita Baker a run for her money. My favourite track is the lush ballad 'When the Feeling is Gone' written by keyboardist Simon Lynch. Both he and Ryan show great maturity in their songwriting abilities.

I've heard rumours of re-mixing, and perhaps certain parts would benefit from another look. Things like 'Jammin' need a more upfront sound, but these are small problems. It is clear that Ardijah have made the best soul album that New Zealand will see for a while.

The hb of this band, song-writers Cathal Coughlan and Sean O'Hagan, escaped from Cork four years ago and developed their highly intelligent and subtly subversive Microdisney in London. Their second album on Rough Trade, the gently wafting discontent of *The Clock Comes Down the Stairs*, was released locally last year and despite containing some of the most incisive commentaries and lingering melodies available, it was duly ignored or dismissed (in these very pages) as "boring."

Crooked Mile follows a similar tack except that Lenny Kaye's production is a tad more glossy, a little more upmarket — like the tuxedos. But the songs still bristle with beautifully veiled hooks and lyrics so cryptic yet precise that the whole deal is a vault of goodies that needs more patience than usual to crack.

One of the lynchpins of *The Clock Comes Down the Stairs* was "Past" — Coughlan's well aimed blow at the English weakness for living off past "greatness" to compensate for present third world status — "Who won the war / Who ruled the world / Who showed them all / Who CARES!?!?" On *Crooked Mile* "Hey Hey Sam" takes up a similar refrain with a tune every bit as charming and hard wearing, and the question "and did those feet in ancient time walk a crooked mile?" casts doubt on Anglo Saxon morality. Can you dig it?

And just when you thought it was safe to vote fascist 'And He Descended into Hell' advises otherwise, while 'Armadillo Man' gets slanderous about Reagan over a suitable upbeat country treatment and 'Our Children' is a bitter song truly at odds with the band's deliberately maudlin C&W dressing. But hold it, there's also the moral hopelessness of 'Town to Town,' a song the band felt was catchy enough to be a single, and 'Angels,' a single fare to the land of the blest.

This album has been available on import these last few months and I threatened to buy it if there wasn't a review copy. That's how good it is.

George Kay

Pity poor Dwight. The darling of the new country traditionalists, now required to produce a follow-up to last year's acclaimed debut album. But though the songs that Dwight wrote for *Guitars, Cadillacs, Etc* were virtual instant classics, nearly half the LP was written by other people — which makes his task even more difficult. This time, Dwight has written all but three, and the result is an album which, though less immediately appealing, is easily the equal of that debut.

It's a more reflective album, with the concentration less on upbeat honky tonking. Dwight's tales are of lost love, and there's nary a happy one among them. From the opening bars of 'Little Ways', the characteristic sound of Yoakam's sharp sob of a voice and the simple guitar riffing returns, and it's one of the best. 'Johnson's Love' is a Gram Parsons-like tale of a

smalltown eccentric who's never gotten over an affair, superbly sung to a stark, delicate acoustic guitar and pedal steel backing. '1000 Miles' is another favourite among Dwight's originals, a ballad worthy of George or Merle, in which a disappointed lover flies away, watching a honeymoon couple across the plane aisle: "They're holding hands / Revealing brand new wedding bands / But our sweet gold, it's gone to rust / Now my life has turned to dust"

Yoakam's trump card is his guitarist/producer, Pete Anderson, who gives the traditional band a pure, clear sound — and provides the crisp guitar licks. It's an 80s country album that's proud to show its roots, be it Scotty Moore rockabilly ('Smoke Along the Track'), or Hawaiian slide and Bob Wills' backing vocals ('Always Late'), which is one of the reasons Dwight Yoakam is so important to modern country music. There are less knee-slappers than before, though the version of Elvis' 'Little

Various Artists
Something Wild Soundtrack
MCA

As the American market for yuppie-love films is ever broadening, so is the filmmakers' willingness to experiment with the formula. Jonathan Demme pushed his film *Something Wild* into Martin Scorsese territory so it's not surprising that he's travelled a little further than usual in choosing music for the soundtrack album.

The film featured an incidental score by John Cage and Laurie Anderson which is, sadly, unavailable. What we do get is a refreshing dose of reggae and pop curiosities.

David Byrne returns the favour Demme did him with *Stop Making Sense* and contributes a brilliantly stupid title track, 'Loco de Amor' ('Sheee's like a pizza in the rain / No one wants to take her home / But they love her just the same / Oh-ho-ho-hoooo.') It's Byrne at his best, a mad whine travelling from Egypt to Mexico and back to New York in less than four minutes. Jerry Harrison also contributes 'Man With a Gun', a striking song with shades of Talking Heads' 'The Overload' and Lou Reed.

Fine Young Cannibals make a takeaway meal of Pete Shelley's 'Ever Fallen in Love' but UB40 put things right with their fuzzy dub of 'Zero Zero Seven Charlie.' Jimmy Cliff's rousing 'You Don't Have to Cry' is the best track on the album, a reggae ballad written by Arthur Baker and Steve van Zandt.

Sonny Okussun's 'Highlife' sounds like Sunny Ade, a great, happy tune with rich instrumentation. New Order begrudge three-and-a-half minutes of 'Temptation' (a depressing economy, as usual) and Sister Carol closes with a loose 'n' sassy toasting of 'Wild Thing,' a cover which tops the Creatures' 1981 version as the weirdest yet.

AOP (Adult Orientated Punk) tracks from Oingo Boingo and Steve Jones add to the confusion. The film promo says "different, daring and dangerous"; the soundtrack varies between Smart, Weird and Wonderful. The film — which is a goodie — is released through this school term, so the record should keep you more than happy in the meantime.

Chad Taylor

Dionne Warwick
Twenty Greatest Hits
Harmony

I always used to watch *Solid Gold* when Dionne was hosting because each week she'd take someone else's current hit and, more often than not, improve on the original. Not because she necessarily had the stronger voice — it has its limitations — but because she phrased with more class. As the tracks on this superb compilation attest, her early recordings taught her to develop a distinctive sound while simultaneously adapting to a variety of styles. (Pop styles of course — soul never was her bag.)

That variety came from the extraordinarily talented pens of Bert Bacharach and Hal David. To their belongs equal billing on this album as all bar one of the songs are theirs. It was a partnership during the 60s that launched the stellar careers of all three members. Yet even today these early recordings remain peaks against which subsequent work is measured. Similarly, most remain as the songs' definitive versions.

Subsequent interpretations, from Aretha Franklin ("I Say a Little Prayer") to Jo Jo Zep ("Walk On By"), only really succeed by consciously departing from these originals. And apart from Dionne Warwick, only a handful of other singers have made *any* of the classic Bacharach/David songs their own. But the likes of Jackie De Shannon, Cilla Black, the Walker Brothers, even Dusty Springfield, only managed one or two apiece. Here we get virtually *all* the goodies from one of a great era's superior songwriting partnerships.

But then this album must rank among the best collections of pure pop from any era.

Peter Thomson



Microdisney

-20=20%

YOUNG PEOPLE UNDER 20 RECEIVE A 20% DISCOUNT

The inspiration for this collection was feminine, fashion and most of all, hair that moves. I would like to see hair styled so that you can achieve so many looks from the one cut. Versatility is the new fashion key.

Rodney Wayne

rodneynwayne
hairdressing

YOUR PERSONALISED I.D. MEMBERSHIP CARD

-20=20%

Rodney Wayne

CITY PH. 32-373 • GREAT NORTHERN ARC
PH. 389-942 • MT EDEN PH. 687-611
• TAKAPUNA PH. 534-5719 • HENDERSON
PH. 836-3210 • HAMILTON PH. 390-6521
• HUNTERS CORNER PH. 278-1980 •

"Finally, someone has taken note of young male and female wants and needs by offering us a personalised 20% off everything discount card. Because of our tight budgets, we can now have a great new style at prices we can afford."

Thanks Rodney.

INTRO1541