

Julian Cope Saint Julian Island

It's a crime that a band like the Teardrop Explodes is being ignored in favour of punk retrospectives and heavy metal revivals. A lot of musicians in 1987 are willing to tolerate rock's clichés in order to rediscover some of its power, and they'd do well to recall that such calculated revivalism was the Teardrops' forte. With songs like 'Poison Gas', 'Poppies in the Fields' and 'Great Dominions', they raised the public's expectations of British pop to an unfair high. No one has replaced the Teardrops, Echo and the Bunnymen or Wah! They were better than unique — they were reliable, funny and clever. When the Teardrops disbanded, Julian Cope was left with the task of filling his own shoes.

The shoes were a bad fit on his first solo attempt *World Shut Your Mouth*, and most were prepared to write Cope off as they'd done with Howard Devoto. But just when you thought it was safe to dance to the Pet Shop Boys — all hail the return of the Tantrum King.

The singles, 'Trampolaine' and the reissued 'World Shut Your Mouth' give a good foretaste of the album: thumping, bellicose rock with songbird vocals. Julian is at his height of caveman cleverness ('Well I push you kicking into my airtight machine / Fuel my love — I'm a big gas turbine') and tight-fisted funk ('Planet Ride' and 'Evel's Volcano'). The determined idiocy of a song like 'Spacehopper' ('I've got a spacehopper baby / But it's strictly one-seater / You've gotta hold on baby / To my special feature') is quite breathtaking. It's juvenile, yet the product of much experience. It's loose and stupid but beautifully crafted — like the rest of the album.

Saint Julian is an apt title: its songs are 10 little miracles. While his contemporaries are floundering in 48-track surroundings, Cope has produced a music that takes nothing for granted. It's lean and purposeful, wasting no time. The beat is clean and gives the tunes room to move. Warne Livesey's production is neat and nasty. Cope is still young and foolish enough to pen songs like 'Pulsar' ('I've been away too long and I'm wondering why / I had to sell my world for a piece of pie') but he delivers it with an old hand's confidence.

Tight, funny and strong, *Saint Julian* is one hell of a comeback. It proves that English pop is still worthwhile and that a record can still be worth its price tag. While *RWP* and *The Tube* are cataloguing mangy punk rockers you'd do well to consider Julian Cope as the patron saint of here and now. Few have resurfaced from NME-land with such energy.

Chad Taylor
Simple Minds
In the City of Light
Virgin

Oh dear, they haven't made this easy. Right from the gold-embossed lettering on the perfect black cover to the inner colour photo album of Jim Kerr and Charlie Burchill silhouetted against purple skies surrounded by sunflowers, Simple Minds have laid themselves bare to further accusations of that whole gauche stadium mentality that's plagued them since *Waterfront*.

Between *New Gold Dream* and *Sparkle in the Rain* the band had created a following that meant their two-night Mainstreet intimacy had to expend to 1984's Sweet-

waters proportions. That same devolution can be heard on Springsteen's live epic. But whereas he's never strayed from rock and roll, Simple Minds have recently fallen prey to putting dynamics before songs.

Maybe that's a trait that has always lurked in their music, a flaw arising from the belief that the size of the sound can somehow capture the intensity of the feeling. The road sense of *Sons and Fascination* (here represented by a hasty 'Love Song'), the optimism of *New Gold Dream* and the more reflective moments of *Sparkle in the Rain* and *Once Upon a Time*, represent the best of their music but on *In the City of Light* the selection veers more to mass communication.

'Ghost Dancing', 'Waterfront', 'Alive and Kicking', 'Once Upon a Time' and 'Sanctify Yourself' would encompass any stadium with their immaculate delivery but the emotions remain unmoved. And 'Promised You a Miracle' suffers from a performance that alters the balance of the melody, and curios like 'Sun City' and Sly's 'Dance to the Music' are only courtesy nods to black music lifted a touch by vocalist Robin Clark's outlay.

Gallery stuff for sure, leaving the best to the quietest moments; 'Big Sleep' is still handled with care, 'Someone, Somewhere in Summertime' remains intact and 'At Easter' has a pathos that should have concluded the night.

In balance the album shows how Simple Minds have evolved too far in creating an exaggerated sound as a means of communication; the problem is it's too big too often to remain credible.

George Kay

Ladysmith Black Mambazo
Shaka Zulu
Warners

Whatever one may think of the political "correctness" of Paul Simon recording in South Africa, one undeniable benefit is that *Graceland* has opened a lot of western ears to the sounds of Soweto. The sudden local availability of compilation LPs featuring exciting examples of township jive is testimony enough. Now, in *Shaka Zulu* we have the first major international release from one of black South Africa's favourite musical acts. Paul Simon produced.

Ladysmith Black Mambazo are, of course, the 10-piece vocal group who featured on *Graceland* and subsequently joined Simon's worldwide (except NZ) tour. From the few television sequences shown here — the Grammy awards, two Simon videoclips and *RWP* doco — it's apparent that Ladysmith's performance centres on the personality of leader and writer Joseph Shabalala. Shabalala's smile may be absent on record — as is the group choreography, although it can be heard on one track — but the a cappella warmth of this music maintains its glow.

Whether the lyrics are in English or an indigenous tongue is irrelevant as one responds to pure vocalese, including paralinguistics that range from laughs to gentle wails, from tongue trills to kissing sounds. For this reviewer to start commenting on such features as the group's harmonic range, or whatever, would be as ethnocentrically dangerous as a Siberian criticising *Te Maori*. Suffice to say that if you are taken by Ladysmith's contribution to *Graceland*, then you won't be disappointed by *Shaka Zulu*.

Peter Thomson



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