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RECORDS

K D Lang and the Reclines Angel With a Lariat Sire

Having Dave Edmunds produce your debut album turns out to be something of a two-edged sword. As Dave's number one fan, I love the characteristic chunky, exuberant sound, but his indelible stamp does tend to overshadow the band somewhat. (You'd swear Dave taught lead guitarist Gordie Matthews his licks note-for-note.)

However it would take an awful lot to drown out K D's bull-skipping voice, though Dave tries with lots of echo and a vocal-light mix. The louder K D sings, the better she sounds, which means the remake of Patsy Cline's 'Three Cigarettes in an Ashtray' falls a little flat, while their stomping version of the truly awful 'Rose Garden' is a little beauty — I never thought I'd like that song.

Other tracks, from the tricky 'Watch Your Step Polka' to the more conventional 'Diet of Strange Places' and the raucous opener 'Turn Me Round', burn with a fire all too rare on record, but there's more than a hint of your King's Road Cowboy here, an underlying feeling of youngsters experimenting with a genre. Is this a bad thing?

A powerful debut, a great party record and a take-it-or-leave-it introduction to the voice of K D Lang. It's just a bit hard to know where the band stops and the production takes over. I'd go see them live just to find out.

Ian Morris

Various Artists When the Wind Blows Skank Skank Attack EP Skank

Skank Records encouraged the *Wind* compilation because of what they saw as the "lack of recognition" Wellington bands receive. The immediate reflection is that it is a buzz to hear this record sounding so familiar, due to the fact that Radio Active plays it lots. The stone has hit the water, ripples will hit you.

The Glass kick off with 'When the Wind Blows', which uses the classic story's title line to re-affirm the horror of the blast. It's a pity this band is no longer with us, for they sound exciting. (I hear they're available on cassette.) The Jonahs follow with their essentially more optimistic rhythms and a fine song. The Primates are given plenty of room with their wonderfully urgent sound of madcap release, verging on the aSyd Barrett. This band is having fun creating this music as two songs merge into one.

Skank Attack offer a remixed version of 'Harvest of Shame', proving the more time in the studio, the better chance you have of getting the sound you want. I look forward to these guys' next offering. Wild Poppies use inventive sounds to get the effect of a 'Walkabout'. People are thinking of their sound, the way they want to create an aural illusion. The album closes with the Chosen Ones' atmospheric 'Tender Three', a song which is worth a trip into the studio — you can get those ethereal tones and keep the song's

presence alive.

When the Wind Blows proves without a doubt that Wellington music is alive and kicking and that it doesn't sound the same.

There ain't no mucking around on Skank Attack's debut EP. 'In Time Out of Time' is an intelligently crafted song, the standout cut, summarising the 60s sound without getting lost in the dirge. 'Attrition' is a powerful rock song, showing the band's tightness and political coherence. The "other side" continues the themes: power and corruption, themes appropriate to music so close to the state/police/tax capital. 'She Came Down Alone' harks back to the late 70s with its edge of purpose. The power and beat pick up and 'She Came Down Alone' leads us over the edge and into overdrive. This band is well worth checking out.

Two worthy inaugural releases from Skank Records!

Tim Byrne

Patsy Cline Sweet Dreams Soundtrack MCA

Musically, *Sweet Dreams* is one of the best film-bios I've seen; shame about the soap opera script. I'd like to know how many people left the theatre and bought the soundtrack though. You'd have to be deaf not to be moved by the voice of Patsy Cline: heart-wrenching "torch country" without schmaltz, exquisite phrasing and vocal-inflection ("I ... fall ... to pieces ..."). She's the greatest influence on women country vocalists, though few come close; unlike many, she can stretch a word without ever breaking her voice. Her gutsy personality comes across, and the backing is the Nashville sound at its best: tasteful, sympathetic, and always saying something.

The gems on this brief overview are the Cline standards, 'I Fall to Pieces', 'She's Got You', 'Sweet Dreams', and 'Walking After Midnight' with its big band backing. Absolutely sublime is Willie Nelson's 'Crazy' with gorgeous tinkling piano and male backing chorus, so delicate you could blow it away if it wasn't for the power of Patsy's passion, especially on the final descent: "Crazy for tryin', crazy for dyin' ...". Included are versions of 'San Antonio Rose', 'Your Cheatin' Heart' (with less vengeance than ole Hank) and 'Blue Moon', which some people think cuts Elvis's version.

A great introduction to Patsy Cline, country's Dusty. The film is out on video soon.

Chris Bourke

George Strait Ocean Front Property MCA

George Strait's warm baritone and smooth brand of country have been around long enough for him to garner a sizeable fan club in New Zealand. His albums, one a year, regular as Thanksgiving, have been above all tasteful; perfectly played, recorded and produced, they have nonetheless managed to avoid the dullness such polishing can bring. However with *Ocean Front Property* George has moved away from his usual jazzy western swing feel, and to these ears it's a move in the wrong direction.

There are some fine moments, particularly the western swing numbers like 'All My Ex's Live in Texas' and 'You Can't Buy Your Way Out of the Blues', and the Ace in

the Hole Band really cooks on a couple more. The overall impression though is of a bunch of Nashville songwriters just filling their publishing contract quotas; there's not enough great songs, and does the world really need another lacklustre version of 'Am I Blue'?

A patchy one this time round for George Strait, but let's wait till next Thanksgiving ...

Ian Morris

The Men They Couldn't Hang Night of a Thousand Dances Demon/Jayrem

The beat is uptempo, a country swing through songs of love and life. This Irish band's eyes are smiling as they temper this fine album with sweet harmonies and tough, driving rhythms. The gentle sway of the Irish lyric voice is heard aplenty too and it's never amiss. The influences are there, namely the Clash, and people will liken them to the Pogues. But either this band has no neck or the rope was bad hemp, these guys won't hang. You know what that means; they'll be around for a while.

The whip cracks as 'Rawhide' hits the groove. This band is having fun. 'Walkin', Talkin' (Singing to Myself)' carries the day as surely as the heavenly chorus that starts 'Kingdom Come' evokes the winds that curl around the dark rocks of the cliffs of Moher. Listen to the intensely beautiful 'Scarlet Ribbons', with its aching plea of blood in love, in history ... this band has no trouble in being on either side of the Atlantic. This, to me, is one of the album's strong points — the ability to re-create two different types of traditional music, American C&W and the Irish ballad, and point to the similarities between the two. We all know the influence that Ireland has had on the greening of America, and also, the latterday "land of opportunity" ethic which offers the Irish the chance to escape the bog.

And 'Greenback Dollar' ('We spend 'em as fast as we can, with a winning song and a good guitar. It's the only thing we understand — oh boy') points to this band's wonderful sense of humour. A must for anyone who likes to kick up their heels and party up!

Tim Byrne

Ramsey Najm Language of the Heart Ode

Waiheke Island is definitely hosting a talent in the form of Ramsey Najm. His music is an innovative blend of jazz, classical and folk, drawing on many musicians and varying instruments. It is very warm and gentle, full of peace, and reminiscent of a dominant style of a decade or so ago, although it fosters its own originality.

This album shines out of local releases. It includes fine engineering from Mascot's Victor Grbic, and highly competent musicianship. After several listenings I've warmed to the sound of acoustic guitar, piano, cello and sax, coupled with a very poetic narrative.

Najm describes himself as a "cultural refugee", clear of the vast wasteland that is America today. The island in the gulf has certainly soothed his soul. His collection of material is very warm, very probing: "As we sit inside our cells, free men pretending, still asking questions that have no answers."

Barry Caitcheon

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