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RECORDS

The Fold *Flying Nun*

What made the Fold's 'Women in Red' a better than average single was the fact that it seemed so well thought out — the Fold not merely overcoming the limitation of a drums-bass-vocals lineup, but turning it severely to their own advantage. But on this, their third record, the effect is more strained than on that 12" single. They have attempted to overcome it by using a "live" recording technique in the basement of Auckland's Lab Studios. This works best on the likes of 'Crowd,' where the drums fill out the sound, coming from what sounds like a very echoey space. It's a similar effect, I guess, to what the Triffids were aiming for on their *In the Pines* woolshed recording, but the comparisons end where production and digital mastering step into the Triffids' recording.

A more brooding version of 'Need of Want' (off *Outnumbered by Sheep*) is one of the highlights of the album, but unless you can actually derive some perverse enjoyment from the Fold's harrowing visions on this record, it is best avoided. Some of you more adventurous souls will no doubt ignore me. All I can say to you is good luck in the labyrinth. Enjoy the unenjoyable.

Paul McKessar

Johnny Winter *Third Degree*

Alligator

Albert Collins *Cold Snap*

Alligator

Lil' Ed and the Blues Imperials *Rough-housin'*

Alligator

This batch of three new releases from the Chicago-based Alligator label continues the company's good work in the recording of modern electric blues.

Johnny Winter's album is his third, and best, for Alligator, and possibly his best since he first burst out of the Texas bar scene in the late 60s. He works again with the crack rhythm section of Albert Collins's Ice-breakers, bassist Johnny B. Gayden and drummer Casey Jones, who has

since left Collins. Winter also reunites with his original bassman Tommy Shannon, and drummer Uncle John "Red" Turner.

Together they stormed out of Texas and Johnny became the newest guitar star, but the band broke up in 1970. If anything, they play better together now than ever, working out fiercely on Elmore James's 'Shake Your Money Maker,' Freddie King's 'See You Baby,' and Johnny Guitar Watson's 'Broke and Lonely.'

Dr John helps out on piano, and as an extra bonus Winter plays National steel guitar on record for the first time in years.

The Master of the Telecaster, Albert Collins, turns in another fine, funky performance on *Cold Snap*. The band includes his long-time cohort Gayden, as well as veteran jazzers Mel Brown (guitar) and Jimmy McGriff (organ).

It is more of the Collins mixture — lightning flashes of shrieking upper-register guitar and dryly laconic vocals ('I Ain't Drunk'), funky grooves or high energy shuffle instrumentals ('Fake ID'). A minor criticism, but Collins does not seem quite as involved as he does on *Showdown*, the Grammy-winning collaboration with Robert Cray and Johnny Copeland.

Lil' Ed and the Blues Imperials are from the junior end of the Chicago blues scale. The album title tells the story. This young quartet plays upbeat music in the intense partying mood of the late, great slide guitarist J.B. Hutto, uncle and mentor to Lil' Ed Williams. Williams writes most of the material, but also covers Rufus Thomas's 'Walkin' the Dog,' Arthur Crudup's 'Mean Old Frisco,' and Percy Mayfield's 'You Don't Exist Anymore.'

Ken Williams

Randy Travis *Always and Forever*

Warner Bros

Steve Earle and the Dukes *Exit O*

MCA

Now Randy Travis is a man with a golden voice. Hot on the heels of his million selling debut *Storms of Life* comes this follow-up. If, like me, you fell for his easy, relaxed, and oh-so-mature singing the first time around, this album will not disappoint. Unlike

his close rivals Dwight Yoakam and Steve Earle, Travis steers away from making waves and putting political bite into his songs. So he's been rewarded with membership to the Grand Ole Opry, the youngest ever member at 28.

No, Randy's meal ticket is his weary baritone, which carries all the resignation of his esteemed forebears. 'Too Gone Too Long,' 'My House,' and 'Good Intentions' are all fine showcases of his ability. 'What'll You Do About Me?' — my personal favourite — has the humour I found missing on his first effort.

Recommended for fans of great country singing and tacky jewellery.

Steve Earle also weighs in with his second outing, but the story he's telling ain't no picnic. Comparisons with one B. Springsteen are so obvious I'll ignore them except to say he has a similar sympathy for the small man and the victim of circumstance. Images of Steinbeck's dirt road characters abound, especially on 'The Rain Came Down,' a particularly effective story of dustbowl struggling, and the best song about farming since the Band's 'King Harvest (Has Surely Come)'. In fact the superb 'It's All Up to You' reminds me of Robbie Robertson's legendary group.

Anyone remotely interested in country-flavoured rock will be delighted with this record, as it's quite the most consistent collection of new songs so far this year.

Mark Kennedy

Judas Priest *Priest... Live (CBS)*

As the crowd chants "Priest, Priest, Priest!" it's the sound of synths that indicate the band have arrived on stage for the evening. Up till a couple of years ago that was unheard of at a Judas Priest concert, but times change and it makes a chilling start for 'Out in the Cold' and the Whole Turbo tour. With material taken from the last five albums, the set includes the mighty 'Metal Gods' and 'Electric Eye,' later getting into some 'Free-wheel Burning' and 'Living After Midnight.' There is of course the powerful dual guitar from Glenn and KK throughout and Rob Halford still proving he has one of the best rock voices in the business. This band deliver the goods live and anyone unfamiliar with these songs is in for a treat.

GD

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