

RECORDS

Jessie Johnson Shockedelica A&M

Ah, yes, there was a time when any black male singer worth his stretch limo looked like a pimp. Lots of wild suits and the all important hat. Check out Sly Stone, Isaac Hayes and even James Brown. Now it's good to see Jessie Johnson continue in the grand tradition, by wearing a leopard skin pillbox hat on the cover and having Sly Stone cut loose on 'Crazy.' The video was out of this world, Jessie and Sly in royal attire and the 10-piece band looking sharp as a flick-knife.

Just like this album, seven real pumpers and three ballads, locked up tight in this percolating rhythm, like Prince circa *Controversy* period. But this ain't no old styled jam. Stuff like 'She (I Can't Resist)' mixes that "ring my bell" guitar with a bulldozer rhythm, and 'Crazy' has to be one of the best hard funk outings ever.

Nice sparse beats with hot horn lines underline Jessie's vocals, emphatic fun funk, which is just class all the way.

Kerry Buchanan

Swing Out Sister It's Better to Travel Mercury

This album is being pushed hard, as are most jazzy-sounding pop groups these days, but for once the powers that be are pushing a band that could go further than No 1. Comprising of A Certain Ration keyboardist Andy Connell, drummer Martin Jackson and St Martin's School of Art graduate Corinne Drewery, SOS play as smart as they dress. *It's Better to Travel* is their debut and far from perfect; likewise, it's far ahead of their competition.

Production is level-headed but rushed; like Heaven 17's *Penthouse & Pavement*, the band see to be getting the tunes down quick and saving the lush production and arrangements for the 12" single versions. Thus 'Breakout' appears as the least fussy of pop songs and 'Surrender' as a rough-cut gem — you'll have to listen more than once to realise how good these songs are.

That's a rare quality: a whole pop album that doesn't wet itself trying to get your attention. Top 10 riffs poke out from beneath busy, almost drab songs ('It's Not Enough', 'Fooled By a Smile') to catch you just before boredom sets in.

Also enjoyable is Andy Connell's habit of not quite hitting the sweet note. His tunes are always one not to

the side of perfect, which means they're going to avoid being labelled old hat in a month. Corinne's vocals are straightforward, she can't sing as well as Sade but she can sing much faster, rapping quickly between verses. The songs often mean she has to sing slow, which puts her at a disadvantage. Hopefully by album number two the lads will realise that Corinne's an up girl and not interested in all that moody late-night stuff.

There's even a generous Bond quote in the album's closing instrumental "theme," a direct lift from the countdown sequence in *You Only Live Twice*. And Corinne's got a bob and Andy's got a polo neck and there are lyrics like "Don't say you're sorry / Don't even try / Too late to worry / Too late to cry!" Weeee! Pop music!

Chad Taylor

Let's Get Naked Funky Dnedin Rational

In the heatwave of fresh Dunedin music, Rational Records have squeezed tequila from a four-track. Local programmers will need to isopropyl their heads when they spout quality and production arguments for not playing this local music. What's the bet they *don't* play this album from Let's Get Naked. More pity them.

Jonathan Richman rolls into yer

average Kiwi joker and back: "No tiff over what riff / No hysterics over anybody's lyrics." Maybe from the industry's point of view the wording is "unfortunately honest," but these tracks jam through some wonderful variations on funk, and with the exception of a couple of tracks there's a strong sense of purpose. 'Chimps' (rivetting beat), 'Babies,' 'Joe's a Fiend,' and the pre-released 'Funky Dnedin,' show that for each face there is a reflection — and resultant humour. Not unlike Auckland theatre duo The Front Lawn, where everyday roles and situations are satirised to the bone.

There are shades of the Clash's *Sandinista*, but without the climaxing grit. It is especially in the bass, sax and vocals that the songs are all held in suspension ... a sort of one-ness. Good groove poems to be read in their own right. Elephunkadelic stuff.

Barry Caitcheon

Ozzy Osbourne/Randy Rhoads Tribute CBS

"Goodbye to friends, goodbye to all the past, I guess that we'll meet in the end."

Randy Rhoads' life tragically ended in a plane crash on March 19, 1982 at the age of 25, and the world lost one of the finest and most talented musicians ever. Now Ozzy has

finally released the only quality live recording of Randy playing guitar with him in concert, and it really is an amazing tribute of total respect for his best friend. When Ozzy left Black Sabbath to form his own Blizzard of Ozz, he discovered the incredible ability of Randy and quickly recruited him for two albums and tours of the most exciting rock music imaginable. His speedy fills and diminished scales in the songs 'I Don't Know' and 'Crazy Train' were like nothing ever heard before, and his solos on 'Mr Crowley' and 'Suicide Solution' peak into dizzying heights of fiery fretwork. Randy's years of classical training are obvious on 'Revelation (Mother Earth),' and 'Dee' is an acoustic masterpiece he wrote for his mother DeLores, who owns the music school where Randy was both student and teacher. *Tribute* is not only an excellent documentation of Randy with Ozzy at his best, but the greatest live album for 1981, 1987, or any year!

Geoff Dunn

Whispers Just Gets Better With Time WEA

Lakeside Power WEA

So it's time to chill out, get mellow, time to count how many cashmere sweaters you own and sip Pepper

Absolut over ice. What better ambience than these two fine acts from Solar Records in laidback Los Angeles.

Lakeside hit the groove with that "bass in your face" 'Fantastic Voyage' years ago, and continue to show class on *Power*. Tracks like 'Just a Touch Away' and 'Bullseye' are real nice smoochers, delicate like beaujolais. But if romance is not your thing, there are two great dances in 'Still Feeling Good' and 'Relationship.' Production by Babyface and Stephen Shockley follow the traditional Solar pattern — hot tunes at a cool tempo.

Solar have this rich upwardly mobile sound, apartment soul for consenting adults. The Whispers are the champs of this genre. Lots of "let's go to bed and crinkle the satin sheets" grooves and drum machines that pop like champagne corks. One side crucial mid-tempo dance like 'Rock Steady' and 'I Want You,' side two the big ballads like the title track and soulful 'Give it to Me,' each handled by lead vocalist Scotty Scott.

Two examples of smooth city soul that help heat up the night.

Kerry Buchanan

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