# **PECORDS**

## **Brutal Youth Super Sonic**

Sonic Youth Flying Nun

There's a few people around who've had "Sonic Youth" on their lips for a while now. They're rich. It's either that, or they read the NME, and we wouldn't want to accuse anyone of doing that these days, would we? They scour the import bins, and on their \$20-a-pop travels, they've picked up the two previous Sonic Youth albums, Bad Moon Rising and Evol. "Blah blah blah, Sonic Youth,"

Well Flying Nun (NZ's own) gets the last laugh, cos for all of us that ain't got those other goodies (tho' I'm saving up for 'em...) they've gone and got the rights to release Sister, the SY newie, and it's the best. Better than the snatches I've heard of the other two. Better than anything else you'll hear this year. Awesome.

You can't help but bandy vorce like "brutal" around when you talk of the New York four-piece; as members of that city's avant garde post-punk "no wave" movement of the late 70s, their approach to rock music has always been an oblique one. They're just as prepared to attack their guitars with screwdrivers as they are with picks, but their development, culminating in Evol's stark contrast between beauty

and malevolent white noise, has been steadily towards a re-definition of the territory of rock's outer limits.

Their disciplined sense of melody and a good tune enables them, with and a good time enables them, with Sister, to achieve a synthesis be-tween those disparate elements of cold beauty and ugly noise. This is ex-emplified in the track 'Cotton Crown,' where over a sculptured barrage of where over a sculptured barrage of fierce guitars and primal drumming, Thurston Moore sings lines like "angels are dreaming of you" ... the effect of the words is enhanced by the odd interplay of the guitars and seething rhythmic undercurrent, making it was all um's tour de force.

Sonic Youth's lyricism is deliberately understated ("come on get n the car / let's go for a ride somewhere." — 'Pacific Coast Highway ), their realism is dirty. No sur-prise then, that there is a mention of Raymond Carver on the inner sleeve credits — his claustrophobic vignettes of the darker side of American life work over similar territory to Sonic Youth's soundscapes: tales of schizophrenia, claustrophobic Catholicism and squalor, "keeping commission to faith's transmission."

Art and artifice go out the window however when it comes to songs like 'Catholic Block' and a cover of Crime's 1976 punk nugget 'Hotwire My Heart. They're *urgent* songs, draped in an angry snarl of feedback — you even hear the band plug into their over-driven amps before the songs begin!

Sister's 10 chilling tracks may be an acquired taste — I picked it up at the first hearing though, and they ain't that far removed from fellow New Yorker Madonna; and in their own way, the Sonic Youth seem determined to be-



Give them a chance: buy their record. Sister is intelligent in its simple approach; not flawless, but challenging, more so than anything else you're likely to hear this year. Awesome again. Paul McKessar

# Dancing With Myself

Michael Jackson

"This is like Beethoven coming to town!" enthused the record exec, announcing Michael Jackson's local concert. But that's just dumb. Who said Beethoven could dance?

It's difficult to think of a cultural event so anticipated as this album.

Colin Hogg compared it to Halley's Comet, and remember what a disappointment that was? Bad has not just been hyped, but created a buzz that money can't buy. For five years it's been Michael in the sequinned suit and sunglasses, Michael the eunuch Jehovah's Witness, Michael talks to the animals, Michael gets a cut and tuck, Michael in the bubble ...

But with all the Wacko Jacko talk it's easy to forget that Off the Wall and Thriller are two of the most important records of the 80s, breaking down barriers and leading the way with highest common denominator musical innovations. So influential were those albums that now their lesser moments sound cliched, with only the dancefloor hits standing up: 'Don't Stop Till You Get Enough,' 'Billie the irresistable grooveshakers

But five years for the follow-up? Five years to write eight songs and re-cord two more? Let's remember what the only other comparable pop icons achieved in their two peak years, '64 and '65: four hit albums, six hit singles (some not LP tracks), two hit films all critically acclaimed - plus seven

Then there's the video, 20 minutes which must make CBS wonder, Where did all the money go, and how come he looks so ugly? Eighteen million dollars, it takes your breath away. Nelson George, rock's pre-eminent black critic, asks how many films young black directors could have made with that budget. Okay, it's not as offensive as America's military spending, but how many starving Africans could that have saved? Is questioning such gross extravagance from the guy who wrote 'We are the World' irrelevant?

All that aside, how good is Bad? Very good. One would think that no music could stand up to such expectations, but with five great songs Bad offers a higher return than both Off the Wall and Thriller. Michael Jackson is a modern song and dance man, and it's always his dance tracks that stand up best. When he gets romantic, he wimps out, but what can you expect from someone whose best friend is a chimpanzee? 'Bad' is more than 'Beat It, Part Two' — it leaps out, with whip-cracking rhythms and stunning production. No one's allowed to leave the dancefloor as it segues seamlessly into 'The Way You Make Me Feel,' dance heaven. It's pure industrial funk with a bass riff like driving pistons that, with the sub-lime synthetic chorus, brings Motown and the Tempts' 'The Way You Do the Things You Do' into the 90s. The other great dancer opens side two, 'An-other Part of Me,' which glides as light-footed as Fred Astaire.

Those tracks are all Jackson's achievement, despite the average of 15 musicians credited on each song and the 250-odd people he thanks elsewhere. The two other peaks are 'Just Good Friends' (by Terry Britten, who composed Tina's 'What's Love ...') and Jackson's 'The Man in the Mirror.' The 'Friend' is Stevie Wonder, and it's a sublime duet between

the two ex-child stars of soul The Man in the Mirror' reflects on Michael's self-obsession, he talks to himself with a nervous breathiness scared to go outside. A beautiful ballad, it could be from an old musical, where the hero recognises the error of his ways, assisted by the Andrae Crouch choir. 'I Just Can't Stop Loving You' also recalls *The Sound of Music*: the chorus soars, though the lyrics

But that eclecticism, and his voice, are Jackson's strongest points; he's a magpie whose talent and influences turn him into a swan. From the BB King "Ain't nobody's business!" on 'Bad' to the way he worries a line like a pre-pubescent Otis on 'Dirty Diana,' Jackson's a black music grab-bag, but with his own voice, and it's one of the finest: versatile, soulful and gritty, with skittish, nervous phrasing.

Jackson treads a fine line between delicacy and heavy-handedness. Occasionally that anxious breathiness blows away a ballad such as the soporific 'Liberian Girl,' while Steve Stevens' guitar attack hammers 'Dirty Diana' (now that's worth an Oedipal psychology thesis) into the ground. 'Speed Demon,' too, is killed by its metallic insistance, with sequencers going crazy. Luther Vandross knows you can fill a dancefloor without using rhythmic artillery, but subtle funk.

With Luther and Prince, Jackson is one of the innovative leaders of modern music, though no one could call him prolific (or a lyricist). What have we got to look forward to? Spinoff hits for months, and CBS again threatening the world's vinyl reserves this Christmas—though with a much worthier item than Bruce's five live. Get past the colossal myth, and you'll boogie till you get enough.

Chris Bourke

Pet Shop Boys Actually Parlophone Boy George Sold

inere's something lacking beneath Neil Tennant's foppish vocals and vague lyrics; the Pet Shop Boys are, I suspect, the Village People in dinner jackets. If so, Frankie Goes to

Hollywood must be green wit envy Envious because the Pet Shop Boys are getting away with something they couldn't and envious because the Pet Shop Boys will, in the long term, sell more records. This is odd because Tennant and Lowe rate alongside Mel and Kim as one of the world's great ready-made duos and many of their songs sound nine months late. 'West End Girls' arrived with a rap long after anyone else and could have been an Al Stewart song It's a Sin. from Actually. flat Why dance to the Euro-beat of 'Heart' and 'One More Chance' when you can dance to Prince. ABC or Janet Jackson? Why put these men on your wall when you can

Trent Darby? More interestingly, Actually avoids any distinct style of its own. The Pet Shop Boy's idea of pop moderne is to borrow a bit of Suicide here, someone else's lyrics there and stitch it all up with a topical vinec ('It's a Sin' was a three minute version of *Name of the Rose*) and bang! Instant top tenner.

have Corinne Drewery or Terence

Anyone else with such obvious affrontery has been shot down in flames. Like Duran Duran, the Pet Shop Boys are the band the critics couldn't kill.

Actually is all these things and less and it will be a big success. The lads have even managed to get people talking about Dusty Springfield again by bringing her in to sing on 'What Have I Done to Deserve This.' Fortunately for all, it's a good song, as are 'I Want to Wake Up' and 'It Couldn't Happen Here.' Still, their success leaves my jaw scraping the ground. Why? How? What for?

Boy George, by contrast, is looking almost conventional. He's done the big hit, the big tour, the big good-album-which-nobody-bought (From Luxury to Heartache), the big drug bust, and now he's lined up for the big comeback, looking like a back issue of *i-D* and sounding, well sounding not all that bad. *Sold* s title track is sullen and his cover of 'Little Ghost' is almost threatening - no mean feat for an artist who looks alarmingly like Jon Gadsby. 'Keep Me in Mind' could be a Michael McDonald track and side two's opener, 'Just Ain't Enough' is an up-tempo version of Millie Scott's 'Prisoner of Love.' Most of the other tracks are going for a very black feel, in both sound and voice (I wonder if black musicians like it or laugh at it?) and George himself has advanced way beyond the Malcolm Garret' artwork and image game. Maybe if he got a nice hairduct and suit like Neil Tennant, and Neil Tennant dressed like a back issue of *i-D*, things would be more in their proper place. Boy George is the one with the good album and the Pet Shop Boys are the

ones playing the pop game.

Not that difficult to grasp, actually

### Yo Bum Rush the Show Def Jam

Def Jam's Public Enemy makes music that's like the original punk, almost deliberately inaccessible and parochial. It's for B-boys, but and parochial. It's for B-boys, but the message is dedicated to the proliferation of social nerds, glamour Gidgets and angry young Public Enemies everywhere: "Many have forgotten what they came here for / never knew or even had a clue — so you're on the floor / just growin' not known' about your past / now you're lookin' pretty stupid while you're shakin' your ass."

This hip-hop is a jerky, rhythmical drone, with a garage band guitar and wild, cryptic, brethless rapping. It's monotonous, and yet it's on the verge of dementia, a "toilet bowl" recording that's alive with the old recording that's alive with the old sounds of hip-hop; the block parties of DJ Cool Herc and Flash, parties of DJ Cool Herc and Flash, and their muffled, unsophisticated amplification. The rock drumbeat, the feedback and the furry, indistinct vocals. Hip-hop has never needed state-of-the-art equipment, and while this is only an imitation of bad, it's good, and it's original and it's the best hip-hop

album this year.

Public Enemy are here to knock Public Enemy are here to knock some sense into the B-boy bumph of guns and gold and fly girls. They we aire ady de-capped the Beasties into acknowledging their role as the new American heroes. The Beasties with egg on their face because they're intelligent, but the idols of the idiot classes. The Beasties are the new Rolling Stones, bad and spotty and craving for some intellectual conversation. Instead, Public Enemy will conquer the Village Voice and left, white America. Public Enemy are the semi-consciousness of black

the semi-consciousness of black New York, a halfway-read Malcolm X, a riot going on in a dance. And while it's idealist prosetylising, X, a not going or white it's idealist prosetylising, Public Enemy are not, never an Enemy, they're campus communicators and media controllers, Long Island cousins of the Say Pistols. It's rock anarchy. It should be the best dance record you've heard. Yo! Burn rush the Public Enemies.! MiUzi weighs a tone, Public Enemy are number

#### Alexander O'Neal Hearsay Tabu

Somebody somewhere decided that this album would benefit from snippets of party conversation be-tween the tracks — a bad idea. They sound like outtakes from *The Cosby* Show and like that show, they're amusing the first few times but cloyingly cutsie from then on. Fortunately they're the only negative aspect to this record, probably the finest soul

album to see local release this year. Alexander O'Neal's 1985 self-titled debut album came out locally last year and sales were that of the proverbial dog, which was a shame, for those who chanced to hear it were as often as not addicted. Hopefully this disc will improve those sales figures: it's even better. Alexander is supposedly prod-ucers' Jam and Lewis's pet prodigy and it shows, they've held back all their strongest songs for this set, and the future of their own Secret project apparently rests with how well CBS do with this album.

I love the uptempo tracks like the first single 'Fake,' already a local club hit over the past few months, the powerful 'What Can I Say (to Make You Love Me)' and the new single 'Criticise.' But it's the slow stuff that really chills me, when that voice really crunches home. Tracks like 'The Lover's Sunshine' and, most especially, 'Crying Home' are enough to tear me apart everytime. It's the way the man can turn around an everyday phrase and give it added meaning with just an inflection on his voice. I

One of the albums of the year, no question. Simon Grigg

#### Marianne Faithfull Strange Weather Island

This album, her first in four years, is unlike anything Marianne Faithfull has ever done before. Consider the material. Whereas her previous three Island albums all contained a significant number of self-penned songs, here they're all covers. And what covers. Four are from the 30s, others from the 50s and 60s. Only two are brand new, courtesy of Tom Waits and a Mac Rebennack (Dr John) collaboration with Doc Pomus. Other songwriters range from Huddie Ledbetter to Jerome Kern to Bob

The album's musicians constitute an equally remarkable cross-section. Normally the idea of combining a serene ECM guitarist, an avant garde pianist, Lou Reed's bass player and a classically oriented violinist would seem ridiculous. Here it works brilliantly, and that's just the grouping on the first track. To discuss the various attributes of individual tracks is beyond the space available in this review. But just sample Faithfull in a duo with Rebennack's rolling New Orleans piano.

Obviously the song choice and arranging (all slow to mid-tempo) continue to foster Ms Faithfull's image of decadent vulnerability and ennui. Even the re-recording of 'As Tears Go By' — her first single is now 23 years old — gains new resonance from the life lived in between. That once high, breathy vocal has long since become a familiar tattered rasp. What is surprising on Strange Weather is that it somehow manages to create valid interpretations.

The inner sleeve carries an inter-esting note on how the album was conceived, by Hal Willmer, the man behind last year's Kurt Weill tribute. The outer cover has a blurb by Kentucky-fried novelist Terry Southern in which he compares Faithfull to Lotte Lenya, Marlene Dietrich, even Billie Holiday. After one listen I dismissed those comparisons as inflated hype. Now, after many more hearings, I'll concede Southern has a point. Marianne Faithfull has developed into a genuine torch singer.
Peter Thomson

come rock icons (probably so they can self-destruct in the limelight, though). Maxell. Tapes that last as long as a legend. E-180 maxell.UDI 90 Superb quality Audio and Video . . even after 500 plays Manufactured up to 60% above industry standards.

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