

RECORDS

Various Artists Who's That Girl? Soundtrack Warners

Almost a brand new Madonna album — the lady contributes four out of nine tracks — with extras. The title track, 'Who's That Girl,' has, of course, been getting a lot of airplay and deservedly so; it's a cruisy and clever little song, twisting just when you expect the melody to take a rest. 'Causing a Commotion' is an average-sounding dancefloor re-hash but 'The Look of Love' (not the ABC song) would make a champion second single. A lazy samba with a wistful refrain, it's Madonna's best ballad to date.

Scritti Politti are sounding likewise cruisy and sweet and it's good to see them doing the smart thing and getting on to a movie soundtrack. 'Best Thing Ever' is heavy on the melody

and lifts on the drums, drummer Fred Maher is not credited and has been spending his time since *Cupid & Psyche* producing I'm Talking and doing data transfer for Kraftwerk. But heck, it's a brand new song from a group who take almost as much time between albums as Michael Jackson, so be grateful.

'Step by Step' is the return of the dreaded Club Nouveau, using an old Kurtis Blow drum pattern again. It's squeaky clean, painless, and if it gets as much airplay as their previous 'Lean on Me' I will get a nosebleed. The same goes for Duncan Faure's '24 Hours' which sounds like George Harrison.

Much better is Kid Creole's ex-muse Coati Mundi whose 'So So Bad' exceeds all expectations with a party-like mix of hollering and stomping. The worst track on the album, by contrast, belongs to old pros Stock, Aitken and Waterman's act Michael Davidson, but in scolding them one must remember S, A & W's 'Roadblock,' which has covered up a multitude of sins.

Chad Taylor

The Long Ryders Two Fisted Tales Island

X See How We Are Elektra

Two bands currently resident in LA, both of whom are struggling to be felt above the real pulse that courses through the likes of Husker Du, REM and the Replacements and the brilliantly embryonic Let's Active and Tim Lee's Windbreakers.

The Long Ryders are expatriate Southerners who've taken to cashing in Confederate sentiments for hard West Coast currency. *Two Fisted Tales* is their third album and like their commendable first and the inferior western exploitations of *State of Our Union*, it homes in on a Byrds-Beatles-Prairie past that's too convenient to be true. Man of Misery' and 'A Stitch in Time' read like old stately Virginia mansions — full of class but empty of real sentiment. 'Gunslinger Man' just can't out-draw the riff and the single 'I Want You Bad' owes too much to McGuinn and McCartney to let it pass.

Despite better intentions 'Harriet Tubman's Gonna Carry Me Home' will sucker you with McCarthy's mandolin, and 'Long Story Short' moves some derriere, but they're slim pickens from a band riding a formula.

On the other side of the track X have been hangin' in there since their first two albums, *Los Angeles* and *Wild Gift*, caused a splash on Slash at the turn of the decade when the post-punk clean-out hit America. They may have been fuelled by some cross-Atlantic energy and Exene Cenerenka's colourless female wailing, but John Doe's heart never strayed far from the badland of mid-American rock'n'roll. *See How We Are* is probably their best effort since *Wild Gift*; it finds and explores a middle ground between the likes of Dream Syndicate and the Go Go's, in a first side that doesn't stop for refreshments through high points like 'Anyone Can Fill Your Shoes' and Doe's title ballad. The second side eases up but 'Left and Right' is real catchy and 'Cyrano de Berger's Back' is another way of doing a love song.

X's chance has long since past but they're still scoring points for their wit, cynicism and rock'n'roll heart — don't count them out just yet.

George Kay

Ben E King Stand By Me Atlantic

Percy Sledge When a Man Loves a Woman Atlantic

Thanks to some sassy adman in England two of soul music's greatest stars are enjoying second careers; as a spinoff definitive compilations have been locally released. Although both Ben E King and Percy Sledge are soul legends, their music is poles apart, reflecting the diversity achieved through Atlantic's distribution deals with regional independent labels.

The sound of the city is the domain of Ben E King. As lead vocalist of the Drifters in the late 50s and as a solo act, King gave a sophisticated elegance to soul with hits such as 'Save the Last Dance for Me' and 'Spanish Harlem.' 'Stand By Me' has been covered by everyone from Muhammad Ali and John Lennon to jock-strapped All Blacks, but no one comes close to the original, with its raw vocal stating commitment against the simple bassline and gut-wrenching strings.

It's astounding to think that King recorded four of his greatest hits on just

one day, October 27, 1960: 'Stand By Me,' 'Spanish Harlem,' 'Young Boy Blues' and 'First Taste of Love.' The last two were co-written by apprentice producer Phil Spector, and like most of King's work, must have reached young Willy de Ville across the airwaves. While King gives superlative renditions of Bobby Darin's 'Dream Lover' and 'It's All in the Game,' hoary standards like 'I Could Have Danced All Night,' 'Moon River' and 'Amor' reflect the one-nighters for the gold-medallion set he's been doing for the past 25 years. (Solomon Burke called him the "black Andy Williams.")

But in 1975 King bounced back with the sublime soft-funk hit 'Supernatural Thing (Part 1)' — let's hope the renewed interest created by Levis 501's inspires another comeback gem.

It is rare in music that you come across something as perfect as Percy Sledge's 'When a Man Loves a Woman.' Everything is held back — the exquisitely subtle drums, guitar, backing vocals and horns — letting Sledge give the vocal performance of a lifetime. Sledge could never top it — no one could have.

But in trying, he produced many more soul classics in the same slow, grave, country vein: 'Take Time to Know Her,' 'Warm and Tender Love,' 'Out of Left Field,' 'What Am I Living For.' As Motown proved, "if it ain't broke, why fix it?" Most were written, and all were recorded, within the primitive egg carton walls of Fame Studios in Muscle Shoals, Alabama (now a parking lot) — this compilation finally removes the ghostly hiss from 'When a Man.'

Whereas the urban symphonies of Ben E King brought soul to Broadway, Percy Sledge's ballads provide the link between gospel and country, with churchified organ rather than great string sections as a trademark. Twenty-one years after 'When a Man' gave Sledge his worldwide No 1, he is touring Britain. As his mother warns in 'Take Time to Know Her,' "it's not an overnight thing."

Chris Bourke

Guns 'n' Roses Appetite for Destruction WEA

Guns 'n' Roses ain't speed, thrash, death or any other kind of metal really, even if the skulls on the cover may suggest at something like that. (The original cover is actually the robot rapist painting on the inner sleeve which seems to have been regarded

unsuitable and banned in some countries.) Guns 'n' Roses are a bunch of hard livin' and drinkin' degenerates with a bad-mouthed singer, who play sleazy kick-ass rock 'n' roll.

But there is a lot more to their style than just fast stuff with cussing. 'Sweet Child o' Mine' and 'Mr Brownstone' are fine examples of group effort along the lines of Aerosmith, and such outbursts as 'It's So Easy' and 'Paradise City' have choruses that repeat over in the mind long after playing. *Appetite for Destruction* is ideal party music for the 80s, but when put into practice it's likely to upset the whole neighbourhood.

Geoff Dunn

Emmylou Harris Angel Band WEA

This is a nice record. The pure, controlled voice, the traditional approach, the high standard of musicianship, and the fact that she used to sing with Gram, man! means you gotta have a certain respect for Emmylou Harris, despite your having to reach for the insulin every 15 minutes or so.

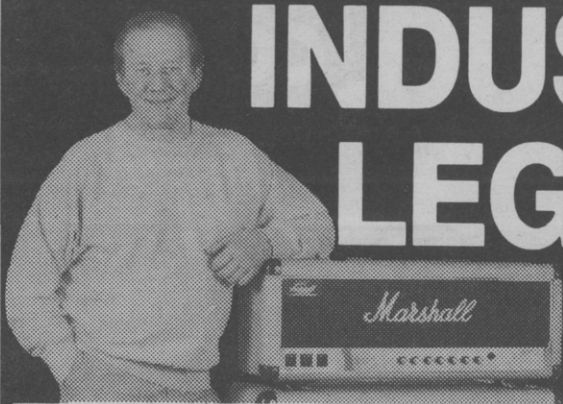
This is a real Sunday morning after a Saturday night record, its mood gentle and calm, and if you're feeling really guilty then you can do penance with this collection of cowboy spirituals. On the other hand if you're not feeling guilty enough then the soothing rhythms of this set could make it the bonking album of the year, but safe sex only, y'unnerstand.

In any recording session there always seems to be a trade-off between technical perfection and "feel" — do you go for the take that was perfect but pedestrian, or do you keep the one with the bum note because the band was really rocking out? The music on this album, largely acoustic with smooth vocal harmony work from Vince Gill, Carl Jackson and Emory Gordy, was all recorded "live" to digital master apart from one or two dobro and fiddle overdubs. Consequently there's the odd moment where Emmylou's voice (maybe she had this bloody flu) sounds a little strained, something that would normally have been overdubbed out of existence, but here it adds spark and spontaneity.

Overall, as with any record of this kind, there's a certain sameness from track to track, and Emmylou has a slightly cold vocal style which doesn't help. But for lovers of gently music and country fans alike, this album is a must. What a nice record.

Ian Morris

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