

# RECORDS

## Billy Bragg Back to Basics Chrysalis

With raw electric guitar and flat London voice, Billy Bragg has become the bard of the 80s with his "urbane folk music" that ranges from touching love songs to biting satire and political comment. *Back to Basics* collects together the first 21 songs Bragg committed to vinyl, it's *Life's a Riot ...*, *Brewing Up ...* and *Between the Wars* all in one double album package.

Despite his musical limitations, Bragg is capable of great depth (such as the tenderness of his vocal on 'The Milkman of Human Kindness') and wit (lines like "our titanic love affair sails on the morning tide" would ensure, if his politics were otherwise, a career in advertising.) 'Busy Girls Buy Beauty' looks sarcastically at the banality of the popular mags, while 'A New England' is a primitive matter-of-fact love song. Bragg's no guitarist, although the subdued 'Man in the Iron Mask' hints at 'Stairway to Heaven,' but his charm and sincerity carry his

live show, and helped the demo quality *Life's a Riot* quickly sell 110,000 copies.

For *Brewing Up ...* Bragg sharpened his pen and added additional instruments — the merest hint of organ and trumpet. 'It Says Here' starts out like a rock anthem, underneath it's Who rock epic. 'Love Gets Dangerous' also recalls the Who; Billy sounds like every boy in his bedroom who is breaking out. The *Between the Wars* EP is perhaps Bragg's finest record, with such contemporary folk as the title track, and Woody Guthrie's 'Which Side are You On.'

While this double album package offers good value, without Bragg's endearing stage manner, an EP-sized dose is about the limit at a sitting. A companion book with a Billy history, the melody lines, chords and lyrics to the songs, also called *Back to Basics*, is being published by Express Music, Box 153, London WC2H 0LD.

Chris Bourke

## Jesus & Mary Chain Darklands WEA

Over-produced as it was, there's no denying the fact that *Psychocandy* was a landmark record of '85. Listening to it now, much of it sounds

somewhat dated, but at the time, to wallow in sculptured layers of feedback and distortion seemed like bliss

... Come '87 and once again reviewers get to talk about "production" and the Jesus & Mary Chain, cos to me, this sounds like two records — one with Bill Price joining William Reid at the controls, and one with John Loder co-producing with Reid.

It sounds best when Price is producing; the record really doesn't kick off till song three, 'Happy When it Rains.' And even though the guitars never get rill dirty, at least they find their edge in that song (until, of course, the lyrics go twee: "And we tried so hard / And we look so good / And we lived our lives in black ...").

Loder ups the gloss a notch or two, and that's what I really don't like, you need a much better song than 'Nine Million Rainy Days' to sustain that approach. Plus, the 'Sympathy for the Devil' backing vocals are awful. They should leave it to the Cult.

'April Skies' is the good song, but it's left alone to carry the weight of side two, which no song, however clever, could do — the likes of 'Cherry Comes Too' beg the question, "are they making perfect pop like they think they are?" The answer's a patent no; wearing other people's songs on your

sleeve is not a clever trick — 'Never Understand' was a good, subtle Beach Boys pastiche, 'Cherry Comes Too' is crass.

The new drummer is about as inspiring as a metronome, and though one can appreciate the simplistic ethic at work in the J&MC, four chords do not an album make, unless you make them with a magic spark (Velvets, Ramones ...). Did the J&MC leave their spark in San Francisco, or did they just swallow their lollipop?

Paul McKessar

## Poison Look What the Cat Dragged In Liberation

Imagine you're 14 years old and choosing between Curiosity Killed the Cat and Poison. One sings about 'Ordinary Days' and the weather in Barbados, wear style-by-numbers designer labels and "nice" haircuts. The other looks like the Bangles and sings about girls, cars, running wild and rock 'n' roll. *Young stuff*. No contest, right?

The Top 10 is clogged with social consciences and upwardly mobile fashion victims. Enough! In a world of chart whores, at least Poison play the game with flash. They steal all the



Poison

right riffs and wear Sex Pistols and James Dean T-shirts. Right from the opening Glitter-beat drums to the closing voice that yells, "You heard your mother, turn that shit off!", Poison present you 10 perfect pop anthems. The titles say it all: 'No 1 Bad Boy,' 'Play Dirty,' 'I Want Action' ("I want action tonight, satisfaction alright!"). The ballad even has a vocal that goes, "I won't forget you-ooo."

It's big guitars, pounding drums and chugging bass, but it's a million miles from pot-gut and truncheon-trousers "rock" and ugly, heads-down, ears-bleeding speed metal. Poison come on looking like a clean New York Dolls and sounding like a dirty Bay City Rollers for the 80s. Like fab.

Ian Plowman

## Buckwheat Zydeco On a Night Like This Island

Zydeco is the dancehall music of French-speaking Louisianan blacks, a funky ethnic combination of French, Cajun and rhythm and blues elements. It's a music full of energy, designed to get people out of their sets and onto the dancefloor. The lead instrument of zydeco is the piano accordion, which pumps and slides along with the verve and idiosyncratic rhythms of the legendary pianist Professor Longhair.

The master of the form is Clifton Chenier, and Buckwheat Zydeco (aka Stanley "Buckwheat" Dural) is considered his heir. *On a Night Like This* reflects the continuing evolution of zydeco; it's a music that takes on

contemporary influences without losing its essence. So don't be surprised when you see a synthesiser in the band along with the horns and whip-crack New Orleans rhythm section, or covers like the Blasters' 'Marie Marie,' 'Time is Tight,' and the Dylan title track. All sit well alongside such originals as the frolicking, whooping 'Ma 'Tit Fille' or 'Zydeco Honky Tonk.'

Buckwheat Zydeco's profile has been lifted with a major label deal and music in a hit film *The Big Easy*. While the constant accordion may be too much for some, that's because they're not dancing hard enough. *On a Night Like This* is an accessible crossover introduction to zydeco that can be recommended to anyone who loves the sound of New Orleans, the taste of gumbo, or sweaty dancefloors.

Chris Bourke

## TNT Tell No Tales (Polygram)

A hard rock four-piece that hailed from Norway and then recruited San Diego singer Tony Harnell for a more successful international sound. His high-pitched vocals are well-suited and raises the album to a climax for the 'Tell No Tales' track with some soprano screaming. As far as guitarists go, Ronnie Le Tekro is hot and his classical influence shines through on 'Sapphire,' along with real ripper lead breaks in 'Desperate Heart' and others. 'Northern Lights' and 'Child's Play' are the quieter ones to soften things out a bit. A running time of 29 minutes means this album is both short and sweet.

GD

# the record exchange

the left side:

## interesting records

Frank Zappa — complete collection  
Fats Domino — Rock and Rollin'  
Wayne Fontana — The Game Of Love  
Blue Cheer — 4 LPs  
Phil Lynott — Solo In Soho — Pic disc  
McCartney/Wings — Band On The Run — Pic Disc  
Stones — Goat's Head Soup — Jap pressing  
Peter Green — In The Skies — Green Vinyl  
Tom Tom Club — Blue vinyl  
Dead Kennedys — Pic disc  
Pink Floyd — Piper (orig. pressing)  
Sex Pistols — Bollocks pic disc  
Rolling Stones — 20th anniv. collector's kit  
Little Richard — The Fabulous  
Little Richard — Is Back  
Big Joe Williams — Walking Blues  
Little Walter — Chess Master  
John Mayall — Live At Klooks Kleck  
Wire — Chairs Missing  
Cliff Richard — Me & My Shadows  
Yardbirds — Five Live (original)  
Blues Project — Lazarus  
Blues Magoos — Psychedelic Lollipop  
Waves  
George Harrison — Wonderwall Music  
The Casuals — Hour World  
Isle Of Wight — Atlantic Pop Fest  
Mitch Ryder & The Detroit Wheels — Greatest Hits  
Peanut Butter Conspiracy — For Children of all Ages  
Dr Feelgood — Stupidity  
Sonny Boy Williams — One Way Out  
Lightning Hopkins — Lightning Blues  
Lowell Fulson — Chess Blues Masters  
Kinks — Lola Versus Power Man  
Pretty Things — Emotions  
Boxtops — 5 LPs  
Love — False Start  
Pretty Things — Parachute  
Tommy James — I Think We're Alone Now  
Chess Blues LPs — 6 x double Lps  
Seeds — 4 LPs  
Cryan Shames — 3 LPs  
Suburban Reptiles — Megaton  
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