

**SHARON O'NEILL**  
CBS  
**JON STEVENS**  
**JEZEBEL**  
CBS

It is not inappropriate to consider these artists together. They share producers (Jay Lewis and Steve Robinson), session musicians, and give vocal support to one another. Their record company has given both much encouragement, and they have reciprocated, Stevens especially, with hit records.

It is quite a while since New Zealand has had its own family-fate, safe-enough-for-TV singers — certainly any worth a damn. Now we have Sharon and Jon. That is not a criticism in itself, but an indication of the broad base of their audience.

While he has had phenomenal success (two records, two number ones), Stevens is the epitome of the singer of songs, as strong only as his best material ("Jezebel" would have been a hit anywhere), not matured enough to interpret convincingly ("Ain't No Sunshine" is disastrous, mechanical funk without conviction).

Jon Stevens' potential hasn't been realised, but few singers can support the burden of weak material, and his album is short on strong songs.

Sharon O'Neill is the country's most visible singer-songwriter. Her accomplishments put her in danger of being overrated; equally, she should not be underrated. This album puts her on a footing with the leading exponents of country-accented rock, the likes of Christine McVie, Bonnie Raitt, and the less satisfying Linda Ronstadt.

O'Neill's best material, and there are riches aplenty, inspires her collaborators. The sympathetic guitar lines of Jay Lewis and Dennis Mason's wistful sax linger in the memory.

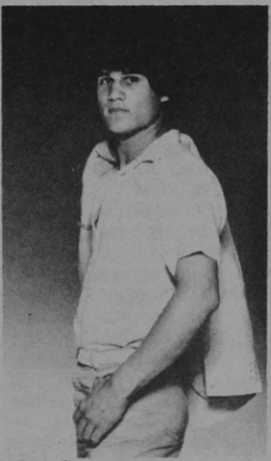
Sharon O'Neill's more rocking approach is to be welcomed. Few New Zealand artists will produce such a satisfying album. Outside the new wave, our brightest hope.

**Ken Williams**

#### **THE RAMONES** **END OF THE CENTURY** SIRE

When Phil Spector met Dee Dee Ramone three years ago it was reportedly love at first sight. Spector just couldn't believe the guy. Perfect, he kept saying, perfect.

Now Spector's admiration for the unique Ramone persona has come to fruition with his producing their latest album, and what he's done is largely what you'd expect — right through to making sure they record one of his songs. The backings have been fattened out, the vocals sunk a little deeper into the mix, and the songs are even stretched beyond three minutes. Four times. Usually the new extra text



**Jon Stevens**



**Jefferson Starship**



**Slits**



**The Mekons**

ture works, although the saxophone players struggle to play as fast as the band on the anthemic opener "Do You Remember Rock'n'Roll Radio". Or is it that the band struggle to play as slow? And we must inevitably blame Spector for "Baby I Love You". It's a mistake — obvious from the jaunty yelping string riff at the beginning, and laboriously confirmed after that.

But then we have such vintage chord-slashing Ramones as "Chinese Rock", which Johnny Thunders claimed he wrote when He did it (extremely well) and which gets a Thunders-free Ramones writing credit here. Superb. And right before that there's a tinkling pretty "Danny Says", which builds powerfully — a structural tactic not used before and one which should be used again. It's nowhere near the most obvious radio song, but it would make a great single.

The whole first side is good really. "The Return Of Jackie And Judy" is the only palpable re-write (hear the little nick from "Pretty Vacant"?) and the side bows out with real power on "Let's Go".

The uh-huh bits are on the second side, but they hit the straight with energy to burn, and finish strongly with "All The Way" and "High Risk Insurance". Another fine Ramones album then. The necessary shift has been made, cautiously yet, but all the old weapons are still being used. And no-one in the band is even close to marrying Britt Ekland OR Faye Dunaway.

**Roy Colbert**

#### **JEFFERSON STARSHIP** **FREEDOM AT POINT ZERO** GRUNT

For my sins, they gave me a mission. Record and analyse the latest movements of Jefferson Starship, once the Jefferson Airplane, guiding light of innumerable once-young hippies. 'Does anyone care?' I protested. Was I to be 'terminated with extreme prejudice'?

The Starship is pushing the concept of "a

brand new band" and to a point this is true. Never a stable congregation, the most recent fracture saw the loss of former linchpins Grace Slick and Marty Balin. The regrouping brought in Mickey Thomas (ex-Elvin Bishop), who probably sings higher than Grace, and Aynsley Dunbar, one of the few rock drummers who lives up to the hype and who may be the album's greatest asset.

"We wanted to make a record that kicked ass like we did live," says Craig Chaquico, he of the excessive hair and the excessive guitar.

Indeed, this is a more rocking Starship, rocking in the sense of Led Zeppelin, Foreigner, Journey, thunder drums, endlessly riffing guitars. Heavy metal, with an injection of Paul Kantner's relentlessly optimistic anthems to a better world. And let us not forget the numbing banality of Craig Chaquico's "Rock'n'roll is good time music" song. We could collect the paeans to the joys of rock music, put 'em in a boxed set, leave it unopened.

Only marginally more than a song about rock and roll does the world need a new heavy metal band.

**Ken Williams**

#### **THE MEKONS** **THE QUALITY OF MERCY IS NOT STARNEN** VIRGIN

The Mekons are part of the experimental wing of English rock bands, which is currently such a force on the club circuit. Anyone who has heard others from this group such as The Human League wouldn't be expecting easy listening. So its a surprise to discover that the Mekons have immediate appeal as a pop band.

The band do take a few liberties with traditional ideas about arrangements. But the secret of their appeal is that they have such strong tunes to work on from the start. Their repertoire ranges from pacy trash pop like "Dan Dare" to atmospheric ballads like "Lonely And Wet".

Along with many other young English musi-

cians, the Mekons have learnt from reggae music. So on this album the guitars, bass and drums play together but often not at once. The technique is used to good effect, one good example being the choppy guitar rocker "Like Spoons No More".

Another point in regard to their playing is the clever interplay of the lead and rhythm guitars. It's probably best heard on the fine love song "Roseanne" where an understated melodic lead runs over the chord strum.

Bands can be clever and still be fun. XTC are one example, the Mekons are another.

**Dominic Free**

#### **THE SLITS** **CUT** ISLAND

*Don't create, don't rebel*  
*Typical girls don't think too clearly*  
*Typical girls try to be typical girls very well*  
(Typical Girls")

The Slits are not typical girls, they are Ari Upp (vocals), Viv Albertine (guitar) and Tessa (bass) and they've been chipping away at rock's foundations since 1977 but to no avail until now. Drummer Palm Olive left a year after the band's formation to launch another all-female enterprise, the Raincoats. She was replaced by Budgie, a man. He doesn't pose on the cover.

The songs on *Cut* actually date back to their beginnings when Palm Olive was around so you get "Adventures Close To Home", ingratiatingly droll, which appeared last year on the Raincoats EP.

The Slits are chintzy Pere Ubu, vulnerable females who lash out at what they don't like — "FM", "Love and Romance" and "So Tough". The songs lurch gently, cynically, infiltrated by vague reggae overtones and convoluted introspective viewpoints. Can you dig it, man?

I like the album. It's honest, musically unorthodox, existentially rewarding and I like the cover.

**George Kay**

# THE JAM

# SETTING SONS

**1979 NME Readers' Poll**  
**BEST GROUP**  
**No.1 THE JAM**  
**BEST ALBUM**  
**No.1 'SETTING SONS'**  
**— THE JAM**  
**BEST SONGWRITER**  
**No.1 PAUL WELLER**

**THE JAM** **SETTING SONS**



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