

**BOB SEGER
AND THE SILVER BULLET BAND
AGAINST THE WIND
CAPITOL**

The long overdue recognition accorded Bob Seger with the 1976 release of *Night Moves* smacked of rock and roll romance. After years of struggle, Detroit's hard-gigging rocker was finally received into the hall of heavyweights. Success. But what to do now?

Seger has met the challenge of *Night Moves*' platinum peak by offering more of the same. He has done it twice now, and it is time to cry enough.

Night Moves captured the essence of Seger's style, storming hard rock juxtaposed with ballads of adolescent memories. The tough and the tender. The elements fused powerfully on *Night Moves*; by the time of the next album, *Stranger in Town*, they had become formula. *Against the Wind* is a re-run.

As usual, Seger divides playing chores between the Silver Bullet Band and the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section, with the addition of a few name guests (Frey, Henley and Schmit of the Eagles, Little Featers Payne and Clayton). Seger himself takes a few guitar solos, and there is the usual balance of rockers and ballads. There is nothing unusual.

Once, Bob Seger's refusal to give lip service to rock music trends spelled brave defiance. Now it seems reactionary, as lifeless as the hotel-room painting chosen for the album cover.

Ken Williams

**LENE LOVICH
FLEX
STIFF
RACHEL SWEET
PROTECT THE INNOCENT
STIFF**

Dave Robinson, the head of Stiff Records, is the original scruffy Pom, with slept-in hair, and a T-shirt that once saw him through a week-long New Zealand tour without a change.

He's also a highly original thinker, reflected in the variety of artists signed to his label. Two years ago, when the brilliant *Live Stiffs* acted as a sampler for Lowe, Costello, Dury, Wreckless Eric and Larry Wallis, there was a certain style summed up in the finale of the album "Sex, Drugs, Rock and Roll and Chaos."

But the Sweet and Lovich albums, the 18th and 19th LPs in the Stiff catalogue, tread very different ground.

Lovich is the hot item, with "Lucky Number", an out-of-nowhere hit that reminded some of us a little uncomfortably of Kate Bush, and an image and sound that balances Dr Zhivago against rock and roll. *Flex* is her second album, and again she writes the bulk of the material in a way that will surprise no-one.

There are lots of vocal tricks, some strange lyrics (try "You Can't Kill Me" on the end of side one), and a nagging feeling that she may



Lene Lovich

just have had her 15 minutes of Warholian glory.

Sweet, a 17-year-old from Akron, Ohio, is, by the sound of her vibrato-laden voice, a natural born country singer whose first love is rock. She writes some of her own songs, but on *Protect The Innocent* they're not as convincing as her covers, in particular a country version of Graham Parker's "Fools Gold".

Sweet needs the freak hit to break her, but in the meantime anybody who doted on Carlene Carter's first album, the one produced by Nick Lowe, should find time to investigate Rachel Sweet.

Phil Gifford

**ROGER CHAPMAN AND THE SHORTLIST
LIVE IN HAMBURG
ACROBAT**

Roger Chapman's excellent solo debut of last year, *Chappo*, saw a return to his soul-R&B roots and showed there are a few finer exponents of the genre.

He's now ploughing similar fields to Joe Cocker, the essential difference being that Chapman is well capable of writing material worthy of his voice.

A live album was inevitable, if not essential, on the strength of the rave reviews of his performances. Soaked in booze and sweat, *Chappo* personifies a good time.

The Shortlist, as its name implies, is a shifting nucleus of backing musicians, including Tim Hinkley, Geoff Whitehorn and Mel Collins, who deserves special mention for his sizzling sax work.

The first side is largely taken up with titles from *Chappo*, which the band blows to hell and back again, retaining that essential looseness without being sloppy. Side Two includes workouts of "Hoochie Coochie Man" and "Can't Get In" and finishes with a dodgy but

entertaining version of "Let's Spend The Night Together".

When music appears in danger of disappearing up its own fundamental orifice through self-indulgence and pretension, thank heaven there are artists like Roger Chapman to pull it back to earth.

Duncan Campbell

**UTOPIA
ADVENTURES IN UTOPIA
BEARSVILLE**

Utopia has always been Rundgren's blind spot. Throwing taste and self-control to the wind, gale force, he picks up his guitar, looks up to the endless cosmos and proceeds to unleash fickle anthems all in the name of Utopia. With the band he is satisfied to become just one of the boys, it's a democracy after all, but this time out democracy doesn't take a beating.

Yeh, there are songs here, credited to the band, that wouldn't disgrace Rundgren the soloist. "Second Nature" and "The Very Last Time" can stand with his past love songs and even the focal tracks, "Caravan" and "Rock Love", are more down-to-earth and melodic than usual. In fact at last with Utopia he's found an album's worth of toons that strikes that precarious balance between the band's flashy instrumental predilections and his own more palatable solo ambitions.

At the moment Rundgren is unfashionable but this cannot detract from the sturdiness of much of *Adventures in Utopia*.

George Kay

IN BRIEF

The Buzzcocks, Singles Going Steady (United Artists)

This collection of eight early Buzzcocks' singles (both A & B sides) turns out to be a delightful lesson in allying pop melodies to terse chord crashers, all overlaid with Pete Shelley's romantic disillusion. Side One with its assembly of great A sides (from "What Do I Get?" to "Everybody's Happy Nowadays") is predictably the better side, but Side Two provides several unexpected goodies including a clue to the origin of Magazine's "Shot By Both Sides".

AD

The Damned, Machine Gun Etiquette, (EMI)

The Damned at the end of 1976 beat the Sex Pistols to the punch with punk classics like "New Rose" and "Neat Neat Neat". They were just what the doctor ordered back then, but from those white hot beginnings the Damned cooled off fast.

MGE is their third album and with the exception of the buzz of "Love Song" and the rarefied rock of "Smash It Up" the band come on like punk who have sold their lot to heavy metal. Shame

GK

George Jones, My Very Special Guests (Epic)

Designed to introduce honky-tonk, country singer George Jones to a wider audience, this collection of ten duets with famous people is an uneven bunch. It ranges from the predictably good (Willie Nelson; Tammy Wynette) to the unpredictably bad (Linda Ronstadt; Emmy-Lou Harris) plus a couple of real left-field successes — and all the more intriguing for that in the tracks with Elvis Costello and the Staples Singers.

AD

Live Wire, Pick It Up (A&M)

From London, Live Wire, on this their debut album produced by Glyn Johns, are hot on the trail left by overnite successes, Dire Straits.

Vocalist/songwriter/rhythm guitarist Michael Edwards is nothing if not a Mark Knopfler clone boasting the same lazy drawl and loping reggae songs with the worldly lyrical slant.

Live Wire are implied power and authentic style but Dire Straits hero worship seems like a one way ticket. Wanted: one new identity. **GK**

The Knack, ... but the little girls understand (Capitol)

The kings of leer weigh in with their second album which rates largely as a disappointment. Their flat-tack pop songs are as successful as before, but attempts at retreading "My Sharona" ("Baby Talks Dirty"), rewriting the Stones' "Beast of Burden" ("Price On Love") and performing 1961 style wimp-ballads are failures. Their limitations as writers, musicians and singers are becoming clear.

AD

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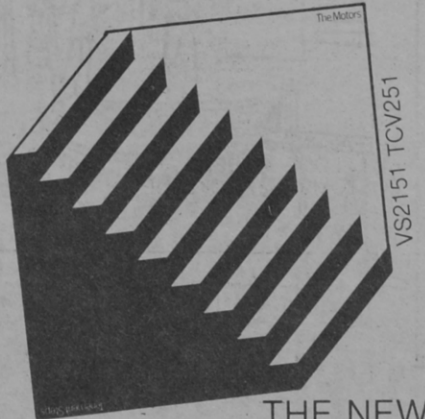
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