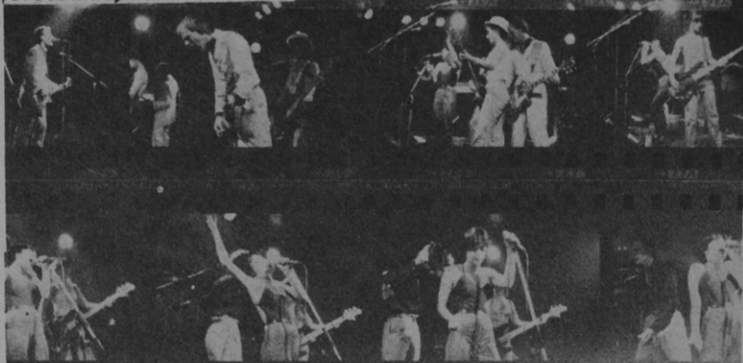


Crocodiles, Mainstreet.



J. Geils Band



TEARS THE CROCODILES RCA

There is something fundamentally different about a Wellington band (or an Auckland band, if you come from Wellington). Maybe it's just that their trousers don't fit as tight, or that they've spent too long practicing, but they never seem to strike quite the right note of nervous arrogance to convince as rock and roll desperados.

The Crocodiles are definitely a Wellington band.

What they do best is quite evident on their debut album, *Tears*. The pure pop of the title track, and "Whatcha Gonna Do" show off skills in making radio music unmatched by anybody in the country outside of Sharon O'Neill, all wide-screen harmonies and hooks fronted by the most winsome of female voices. What they don't seem able to do is to stick to their guns.

Instead they dip into the ragbag of their quite phenomenal past experience to come up with a disconcerting array of styles. In particular, Fane Flaws and Tony Backhouse, very much the on-stage mainmen, insist on singing lead on all but three of the ten songs, depriving most of them of maximum impact, and the album of the focus that lead singer Jenny Morris could have brought to it.

With the honourable exception of Flaws' crazy "In My Suit", most of the songs leave a slightly hollow feeling after they have passed from ear to ear. That is not to say that they are written, played or sung with any less than exemplary skill (don't forget all that practice we were talking about), just that they don't measure up to the standards the band sets itself with the high points.

This album was recorded, thanks to the QE II Arts Council, in the band's very early stages, and there must be every hope that they will shed the confusions about direction and concentrate on their strengths. So many things seem to point to bigger things for the Crocs, and they deserve it so much, that it would be a pity to see them continue to dissipate their potential.

Stephen McDonald

UK SQUEEZE ARGY BARGY A&M

Pretentious is the last word that springs to mind when considering UK Squeeze. Their first two albums were littered with Cockney working

Willie Nile



UK Squeeze



class romances-in-the-raw, the same source of inspiration tapped by people like Dury and Madness.

Cool For Cats, the second album, was a great improvement on the patchiness of their debut and now, *Argy Bargy* (slang for an argument) is a cautious, though definite consolidation on the band's unassuming recorded output thus far.

As expected, the songwriters, Glenn Tilbrook and Chris Difford, continue to work within their daily mundane experiences to produce authentic slice-of-life songs with characters and situations that are real and familiar:

*Her mother didn't like me she thought I was on drugs
My mother didn't like her she'd never peel the spuds.* ("Separate Beds")

Hardly about to be confused with the Yes/Genesis lot, are they?

Cool For Cats bore three hit singles (title track, "Goodbye Girl" and "Up the Junction") and *Argy Bargy* could easily do the same. "Pulling Mussells (From the Shell)", "Another Nail in My Heart" and the Lennonish "If I Didn't Love You" are matter-of-factly memorable, straight forward songs dominated by Chris Difford's domestic, dry vocals. On the other hand "Misadventure" and "Farfisa Beat" are jumpy immediately enjoyable shuffles that shouldn't be overlooked in the rush.

UK Squeeze unfortunately are being overlooked as an album band. They seem to have been pegged by a number of pundits as disposable impertinent cockneys capable of turning out the odd half-decent single but *Argy Bargy*, given a chance, should change a few minds.

George Kay

THE J. GEILS BAND LOVE STINKS EMI AMERICA

The problem of the Geils Band has always been how to transfer their live excitement to record. Their in-concert albums show that that is where they live. Their cutting edge is honed in a hot and sweaty atmosphere. The studio albums have captured this steamy dimension only occasionally. *Love Stinks* is the record they have been almost about to make for some time.

Love Stinks (great title and a terrific song) sees keyboardman Seth Justman taking over production. He manages to retain the band's

toughness and drive while getting them to work on songs with immediate impact. The pop hooks abound and several of the songs would make good singles. All songs are by Justman and Peter Wolf, except for the Strangeloves' 1966 "Night Time", which has also been done by Dr Feelgood.

The narrative-with-music "No Anchovies, Please", a sort of J. Geils play the Firesign Theatre and lose, wasn't such a smart idea. Peter Wolf has a good comedy voice, but the premise is too slim to make the track more than a oncer. At least it's at the end of the side and can be avoided without serious disruption.

Aside from this misjudged satirical foray, *Love Stinks* is fat-free, hard and lean, propulsive rock and roll in the best traditions.

Ken Williams

WILLIE NILE ARISTA

Willie Nile is a New York philosophy graduate whose debut album, produced by Yardbird's and Lovin's Spoonful engineer Roy Haller, looks like being the yardstick by which all similar newcomer solo efforts will be measured this year.

With a vocal style sifted through Arlo Guthrie-Bob Dylan folk nuances and a songwriting slant not a million miles away from Tom Petty's attempts at immortality, Nile's album delivers an endearing solo wallop of rare force.

Unlike fellow-Arista signing, David L. Byron, who has allied himself much too closely to his influences, Nile has jostled enough artistic breathing space for himself on the human realism undertones of his first album. With two guitarists, himself excluded, and Patti Smith's itinerant drummer, Jay Dee Dougherty, Nile creates at least two bona fide classics in "Vagabond Moon" and "Sing Me a Song", both key pieces of rock'n'roll potency. Pop fans are catered for on the jangling immediacy of "That's the Reason" and he pulls yet another ace with "Across the River", a love song of latent power.

Look, Nile is actually one of the few artists around who actually surpasses the customary record company hype and promo spiel. There's scarcely a bad song on his album and as such he knocks most of his contemporary solo artists into a cocked hat.

Forget the hat, buy the album.

George Kay

BLUES II

Reviews by Ken Williams



The Blues Band

THE BLUES BAND OFFICIAL BOOTLEG ALBUM ARISTA

The blues may go in and out of fashion, but it doesn't go away. The ska revival in Britain seems to be accompanied by renewed interest in R&B. In the vanguard is the Blues Band, a new band of old hands.

Bassist Gary Fletcher is a youngster. The others are Paul Jones, Tom McGuinness, Highie Flint and Dave Kelly, all veterans of various 60s British R&B units, including Manfred Mann and John Mayall's Bluesbreakers.

It could have been absolutely horrid. A bunch of old musos churning out the 12-bars for drinks money. Far from being a travesty, this album is a lot of fun, in the way that George Thorogood is a lot of fun. Things are taken at a fast clip, the band is right on time, no room for introspection and, perhaps most importantly, there is much humour in the music.

Paul Jones always had a good comic delivery and this lightness contrasts nicely with the rougher vocal approach of slide guitarist Kelly.

The "bootleg" quality of the album (title and blank cover) results from the initial apathy of record companies to the group and its decision to finance its own recording. Don't be put off. There's nothing homemade about the recording quality.

The Blues Band is reported to have developed a strong following in Britain. I would prefer to think it's because of the band's "rocking for fun" approach and not because of some unrequited hunger for the past.

KW

THE FABULOUS THUNDERBIRDS CHRYSLIS

JOHN LEE HOOKER THAT'S WHERE IT'S AT! STAX

The Fabulous Thunderbirds are a new American four-piece who look like and play like the mid-fifties. The sound is barroom blues, vigorous, solidly swinging, suggesting a rawer version of Paul Butterfield's first band.

Singer-harmonica player Kim Wilson, a pudgy greaser, sings and plays with conviction. Best of all, he writes original songs which sound fresh while working within the blues tradition and framework. The album is more or less equally divided between originals and covers (notably Slim Harpo's "Scratch My Back") and one is grateful the Thunderbirds have looked beyond material by the half dozen or so Chicago stalwarts whose names appear again and again on records by white blues bands.

You may feel you've heard the Thunderbirds before. To an extent that's true. It's old-fashioned, but when bands rock as the Thunderbirds do, as if they mean it, it isn't out of date.

The earthy music of John Lee Hooker was an early favourite with British blues bands. The Animals recorded several of his songs and he was a strong influence on Van Morrison. His influence faded as the followers of B.B. King put more emphasis on instrumental technique, but he never went away. In fact, Hooker has been recorded more often than just about any other blues singer, with inevitably variable results. This recording (apparently from 1953, origins obscure) has an intensity often absent in later work and shows to good advantage the Hook's hypnotic, idiosyncratic guitar style and brooding voice.

KW

ELMORE JAMES / EDDIE TAYLOR STREET TALKIN' MUSE

MUDDY WATERS BAND MUD IN YOUR EAR CHICKEN SHACK MUSE

While we are talking blues, Terence O'Neill-Joyce, who has done such a fine job of keeping the catalogues of Vanguard (Buddy Guy, John Hammond, Skip James etc) and other specialist labels alive in New Zealand, has released on the Muse label three blues albums of more than passing interest.

Street Talkin' features mid-50s recordings by the guitarists Elmore James and Eddie Taylor. James is the better-known. His "Dust My Broom" riff is as unmistakable a signature as any Chuck Berry intro. As bluesologist Pete Welding says in his excellent notes, "Elmore James' music was like homecooking — nothing fancy but damned good."

The comment applies equally to Eddie Taylor who has spent most of a long career backing most of the Chicago stars. As a front man Taylor isn't spectacular, but is consistently satisfying. His "Big Town Playboy" which is included is rightly regarded as a classic of Chicago blues.

Mud In Your Ear and *Chicken Shack* derive from 1967 recordings of the Muddy Waters Band. Despite the deceptive packaging of *Mud*, they are not Muddy Waters albums. Rather they feature the work of Waters sidemen Luther "Snake" Johnson, a whiskey-voiced

SQUEEZE



THEIR NEW ALBUM ARGYBARGY

