

RECORDS

TOY LOVE DE LUXE

When Todd Hunter last passed through Dunedin, heaving the rotting Dragon carcass behind him, he mentioned he'd really like to do something with Toy Love. They've got the songs, said Todd, and they're GOOD songs. Todd got his wish, and nothing on this debut album, produced by him in Sydney, villifies that belief. Above all this record is crushing confirmation that Toy Love have songs to burn. There are fifteen here, and even allowing for the fact that some date back to the 1977 Enemy embryo (and that band's bass player Mick Dawson) the writing range is still astonishing. Imagine a *Billboard* reviewer with his box of labels grappling with this one — post-punk power, pure pop, macabre melodrama, whoop an' holler bizarro bop, sublime ice-cold beauty, three-chord thunder, chaotic psychedelia ... the bard could go on forever. And realise too there are a number of fine Toy Love songs not even ON this album. Whew.

So much for Toy Love (and Mick) as writers. As a record mirroring that ability, this is not quite in the same league — not that anyone, fervent followers and doubting dissenters both, really expected the full sweep of the band to make it onto vinyl at this stage. That full sweep, after all, covers a lot of ground. There are times on this album when, technically, things do come together, usually on the slower, more dramatic and instrumentally spare material, but when the band are raging, all five, limitations are laid bare. During such moments we listen in vain for Dooley's drum anarchy, the bass drum especially, we strain to hear the keyboards, and we wish Johnny Ramone had been brought in just to produce Alex. It sounds almost as though someone panicked every



time the VU needles went into the red, not realising that the best rock'n'roll only starts there.

Back to the songs. Track placement must have furrowed a few brows, but a daunting task has been handled pretty well, though the album should really end with "Frogs", leaving the frantic "Fast Ostrich" in the studio can for bootleggers to creep in and steal at night. As mentioned, the slower more skin-crawly stuff has come up solidly, and it's amazing that Chris Knox, who, incidentally, writes some damn fine lyrics, can still wring life out of such thousand-times-played chestnuts as "Cold Meat" and "Green Walls". The same big plus goes to Knox — and band — for somehow getting a good cut down of "Shades". Not definitive, coz it's too late for that, but at white noise volume, this is at least magnificent. This song could still bring the NZ singles chart to its knees. Which leads me on to the album's actual single "Bride Of Frankenstein". More evidence of that off-the-wall writing ability, sure, but querulous stuff for the 45 market nevertheless.

The glorious pop visions of "Swimming Pool" and "Ain't It Nice" have battled with the sobriety of the studio and the still-developing instrumental skills of the band — the result is a draw — and "The Crunch", a song to open ANYTHING (a record side, a set, a day) is one of those ones Johnny Ramone should have been in on. "Don't Catch Fire" has a great atmospheric opening, but when everyone climbs aboard to drive this anthemic rocker home, the amplifier has to be driven into clipping to get the required climax.

"Bedroom" I leave till last coz it's so good. One of Knox' best vocals, the keyboards swirl beautifully, and the drums reveal subtlety and taste hitherto untried for. Melodically, it's the album's supreme achievement.

I like the first Toy Love album a whole lot. Strengths and weaknesses have both been underlined, but if your criteria is songs, as mine ultimately always is, then you'll find them here. Any overseas big-name big-dollar record producer who heard this one couldn't fail to realise Toy Love have the machinery to move mountains. Someone's just gotta turn on the power.

Roy Colbert



GANG OF FOUR ENTERTAINMENT EMI

When Bob Last launched the Fast label in Edinburgh a few years ago he had three main bands in the throes of forming their own highly specialised view — the Mekons, Human League and potential world-beaters, the Gang of Four.

From Leeds University, the Gang consisting of Andy Gill (guitar), Jon King (vocals), Hugo Burnham (drums) and Dave Allen (bass) recorded one record on Fast, the oft-cited "Damaged Goods" EP which thrust forward three tracks lethal enough to pare flesh from bone. The title track was a counter-revolution against the cliched and sentimental notions of love ("Your kiss so sweet, your sweat so sour."), and the ground-breaking "Love Like Anthrax" opened with malevolent guitar feedback and slid into a double vocal with Jon King knocking love on one channel and Andy Gill (?) describing the recording process on the other. Both songs appear in a slightly re-mixed toned-down form on *Entertainment*. "Armalite Rifle" concluded the EP with similar concerned venom.

A record deal with EMI followed last year and a single "At Home He's A Tourist", also on the album, proved that they were determined to continue their fight against complacency as the song tore at the foundations of ambition and pleasure and Andy Gill lacerated anything that moved with his famous guitar irregularities.

Entertainment, the title itself being an ironic put-down and questioning of the methods we use or accept as "entertainment", was therefore eagerly anticipated, and although it's not the killer blow I hoped for, it still dictates its own terms and position in rock'n'roll.

The band's unwavering honesty remains intact but the savagery of their sound has been levelled out somewhat especially on the aforementioned classics "Damaged Goods" and "Anthrax", and songs such as the marital undercut of "Contract" and the mail-order blues analogy of "Return the Gift" pull their punches a little. But as bad news that's as far as it goes and the rest produces smiles (hardly of humour) all round. "Ether" digs at the "dirt behind the daydream" until you're no longer under the anaesthetic; "Natural's Not In It" hacks at the exploitation of pleasure and "I Found That Essence Rare" and "Glass" strip away the "polarised glasses" view of things. But it's the concluding trilogy of "Tourist", "5.45" and "Anthrax" that conclude the album with the most passionate frenzy, especially on the TV images of "5.45".

For complete perfection the Gang of Four should have released this debut album on Fast where the small label enthusiasm could have matched the band's idealism. But as it stands, *Entertainment* is a fierce and fanciful indictment of things we take for granted, and the flaws of occasional compromise are lost in the harsh new standards set by the band.

That's *Entertainment*?

George Kay

BOB DYLAN SAVED CBS

Veteran R&B producer Jerry Wexler compares Bob Dylan's new, and 23rd, album, *Saved*, which he and Barry Beckett produced at Muscle Shoals, with the great soul records he cut in the '50s and '60s. "This one was like when Ray Charles used to call me up and say, 'Hey, pardner, I'm coming in in three weeks, let's do a record.'" High praise.

Of Dylan's new-found Christianity (which some more ardent admirers see as tantamount to betrayal), Wexler says, "Whether you're an agnostic or a leftist or whatever you can view him as a seminal artist who has reached a turning point in his life, as he has before."

On the first count, Wexler's comparison is not the absurdity it might at first appear. At best, the gospel music of *Saved* is rousing, uplifting, and not far removed from the secular church of Ray Charles or Aretha Franklin.

This is the music of self discovery and self affirmation. Which pretty well takes care of the second point. The album opens with a gospel church reading of the old country song "A Satisfied Mind". In other hands it often sounds merely smug. Dylan, sounding possessed in



LIP SERVICE CBS

I can remember seeing Lip Service at the Cook a couple of years ago and my impressions then were that they were a band with everything but a plentiful supply of memorable songs. Now, even after numerous personnel changes, they still face the same problem.

Their first album is an asset from many angles — Graeme Mhyre's full-bodied production, the unflagging punch of the band, the intelligent construction of the songs and the occasional perceptive lyric ensure that as a debut *Lip Service* has plenty going for it. But the lack of consistently strong material still plagues the band and this can't be disguised by their instrumental prowess or animated song structures.

The opening two tracks, "Eating Out" and "Mr. Right" establish the feel, brisk and dynamic, that characterizes most of the songs. "Playschool", with its Members' influenced social pressure/futility theme, veers too close to Mi-Sex mannerisms, as does the first track on the second side "Ventriloquist". The appropriate bustle of "Rush Hour" makes amends, and "Situations" which has an effective menacing guitar line and "Elim N 8" which sports a neat recurring guitar piece that leads the band into their best tune, would be the album's best moments.

Lip Service are groomed, stylish, full of contemporary slickness and compete favourably in the Mi-Sex race for streamlined form-over-content. Strip away these trappings and you're left with a band and an album that are on the favourable edge of mediocrity, but as the man said maybe it's early days yet and if they can improve their writing abilities they will be a force to be reckoned with on the local scene.

George Kay

ROXY MUSIC FLESH + BLOOD POLYDOR

Rather bravely, Roxy kick off their new album with a re-run of Wilson Pickett's classic "In the Midnight Hour" that substitutes for Pickett's impassioned soul shriek the languor of Bryan Ferry, and succeeds brilliantly. Ferry's detached manner and limited voice ought to work against him, but I find Ferry's occasional foray into soul music (for example, "Take Me to the River" on *The Bride Stripped Bare*) enormously, and unexpectedly, satisfying. The spacey sax of Andy MacKay deserves special mention on "Midnight Hour" (and throughout). As the innovations/image games of Ferry and Roxy Music have been overtaken, they have met the challenge by turning into one strong rock band. For proof, try "Oh Yeah", a song about the pleasures, pain and loneliness of the rock and roll radio. Phil Manzanera consolidates his guitar rep. on this one, and on "Same Old Scene", "My Only Love" and the Byrds' old "Eight Miles High", which winds up to a closing so "psychedelic" in its echo effects it surely is tongue-in-cheek. As an example of that rare thing, genuine British funk, "Rain Rain Rain" rivals "Ain't That So" from *Manifesto*.

Ferry, MacKay and Manzanera remain the nucleus of Roxy Music. Drummer Paul Thompson has gone, but his place is more than adequately filled by session drummers (mainly Allan Schwartzberg, who did overdubs on some of the posthumous Jimi Hendrix releases). Ex-Grease Banders Neil Hubbard and Alan Spenser handle guitar and bass duties on most tracks, while Gary Tibbs (bass) and Paul Carrack (keyboards) are back from *Manifesto*.

To one who far prefers today's Roxy Music to the early work, *Flesh + Blood* is a very entertaining, very musical album.

Ken Williams

GRAHAM PARKER AND THE RUMOUR THE UP ESCALATOR MERCURY

It's difficult, if you've followed GP and the Rumour from their early instinctive beginnings, to be less than moved by their unerring and total investment in rock'n'roll. With four mandatory albums behind them it's not too surprising or disappointing that *The Up Escalator* is an understandable exercise in marking time.

Not that it's a bad album, in fact by most standards it is excellent, but there's a little of the deja vu creeping into Parker's music as many of the songs merely mimic their superior counterparts on earlier albums. Familiar Schwarz guitar lines ("No Holding Back", "Stupefaction" and "Endless Night" especially), those taut Parker sentiments ("Devil's Sidewalk") and the tight, maybe too controlled, arrangements have made a more indelible impression on *Heat Treatment*, *Stick To Me* and *Squeezing Out Sparks*.

Parker is in danger of becoming too distinctive, a quality which can lead to straight-jacketed music and eventually self-parody. Costello has tried to side-step it and Springsteen isn't prolific enough as yet to worry about it but on *The Up Escalator* GP, although still pouring his heart out ("Love Without Greed" and "Empty Lives") is too close to being hamstrung by the characteristics that have made his music so essential in the past.

George Kay

the sense that the best bluesmen and the best rockers can be possessed, injects the banal lyric with a quality to make it live. "I'll leave this world with a satisfied mind." This Dylan reminds of the guileless face of *Self Portrait*.

That Dylan is "satisfied" does not, mean he has lost any of his skill with a song. *Saved* contains some of his finer ballads, and certainly several of his best rockers ("Saved", "Solid Rock" "Are You Ready") since "From a Buick 6".

Dylan's band this time contains some of the leading musicians in the areas of rock and soul — Tim Drummond (bass), Jim Keltner (drums), Spooner Oldham (keyboards) and Fred Tackett (guitar) — and, throughout, the playing is stunning. Listening to the exquisite textures of "Covenant Woman", a love song of the order of "Just Like a Woman", it is, very easy to disregard the unsettling picture of Bob Dylan as Christian.

What is intriguing is that as with earlier Dylan — once the writing became denser, anyway — one can still read into the songs as one likes. To expect Dylan to become uncharacteristically explicit is clearly a mistake. Draw from the songs as you will. To dismiss *Saved* unheard because of a man's (even Bob Dylan's) personal belief is as misguided as those who won't see *Life of Brian*. To this infidel, it sounds like some ace rock and roll.

Ken Williams

BOB MARLEY & THE WAILERS UPRISING ISLAND

Coming so hard on the heels of the angry, prophetic *Survival*, *Uprising* will inevitably be judged alongside it, and may be found wanting. It's not a weak album, but its best moments are offset by some undistinguished tunes and cliched lyrics.

Chief culprits are "Work" and "Zion Train", neither of which is worthy of Marley. "Real Situation", meanwhile, wallows in depression and lacks focus:

*Well it seems like total destruction
The only solution
And there ain't no use,
No one can stop them now...*

"Pimper's Paradise" is uncharacteristically vicious, attacking women who, in Marley's view, are immoral:

*She love to party, have a good time,
She looks so hearty, feeling fine,
She loves to smoke, sometime shifting
coke,
She'll be laughing when there ain't no joke.
A pimper's paradise, that's all she was
now...*

On the positive side, there's "Coming In From The Cold", a song reminiscent of the *Bur-nin'* period. The men in the band get to sing harmony, and again on "We And Them". Those nostalgic for the days of Tosh and Livingston will lap these up.

"Could You Be Loved" is Marley's most up-tempo song since those of *Natty Dread* and he seems to regain his optimism:

*Love would never leave us alone,
In the darkness there must come out light...*

"Forever Loving Jah" is held together by the I-Threes' chorus, and Marley is at his most poetic:

*Only a fool lean upon his own misunderstanding
And what has been hidden from the wise
and the prudent
Been revealed to the babe and the suckling.*

But it's "Redemption Song" which makes *Uprising* more than just another Bob Marley album. Accompanying himself on acoustic guitar, he sings a song that could become a hymn for the black movement:

*Old pirates, yes they rob I,
Sold I to the merchant ships,
Minutes after they took I from the bot-tomless pit.*

*But my hand was made strong by the hand of the Almighty,
We forward in this generation triumphantly.
All I ever had is songs of freedom...*

Its strength lies in its simplicity, and you can forgive the album's shortcomings. *Uprising* doesn't equal the heights of *Survival*, but its good parts are still proofs of Marley's pre-eminence.

Duncan Campbell



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