

RECORDS



XTC
BLACK SEA
VIRGIN

Last year I named *Drums And Wires* as one of the albums of the year not because it was rock'n'roll's most adventurous step, though it did have more than its share of risk taking, but more because of the balance it struck between Moulding's orthodox tunefulness and Partridge's fidgety inventiveness.

Black Sea, a metaphor for life's darker moments and future, is the fourth and best of XTC's albums to date. It doesn't contain the Partridge/Moulding balance of *Drums And Wires*, since the quota falls nine to two respectively. But that isn't a criticism as Partridge has often managed to combine elements of his rhythmic/dub idiosyncracies with white pop music, producing songs that pack basic two-the-for bass/drum impact (Chambers and Moulding take a bow), tantalising tunes and some of Partridge's best lyrics.

A simulated 78 rpm opening, then "Respectable Street" and the combined edge of guitarist Dave Gregory and Partridge himself are immediately feet in the rail against outward respectability, "decency jigsaw". "Living Through Another Cuba" takes the missile crisis of 1961 as a warning that these things happen in 20 year cycles. Who needs to wait until 1984? "Rocket From A Bottle" is a glorious optimistic love song, but this leads into the morbid deliberations of "Language In Our Lungs". Both of Moulding's songs are on Side One. The single "Generals And Majors" and another commercial morsel, the reggae-ish "Love At First Sight".

Side Two, all Partridge, follows the same cyclical pattern of pessimism-hope-pessimism to similar effect. "Towers Of London" painstakingly melodic and "Paper And Iron", a rhythmically weighty dig at working for money, are the downer songs. "Burning With Optimism's Flames" and the exquisite three tiered structure of "Sgt. Rock (Is Going To Help Me)" are flashes of optimism but they make way as the "dance goes full circle" for the dub-heavy, steamrolling, yet hypnotic, climax of the album, "Travels In Nihilon". Climb into the song.



B52s

*There's no youth culture
Only masks they let you rent*

Black Sea is XTC's *Setting Sons*; an album that is the end product of three increasingly bold and mature steps. This is XTC's zenith and don't let anybody tell you different.

George Kay

B52s
WILD PLANET
WARNER BROS

English writers weren't too sure about the B52s when the Georgia band first toured there. One of *NME*'s weightiest saw them first and mentioned Beefheart (lyrically). The next one *NME* sent along decided they were more Walt Disney (everythingly). But everyone seemed to agree on one thing — the B52s were a real neat dance band. The New Zealand concerts confirmed that, but those concerts also suggested the band were going to need some pretty strong songs to keep their ball rolling through the 1980s. Cos once the effect of the visuals wilted, this essentially primitive band didn't really have a whole lot to fall back on.

Perhaps album three will find them out, but as at album two, that ball is still rolling confidently forward. Without changing the formula very markedly, at all, the B52s have still put together a strong second album. Familiarity leads me to instantly liking "Give Me Back My Man", "Private Idaho", "Quiche Lorraine" and the longtime concert favourite "Devil In My Car", and the record's opener "Party Out Of Bounds" is a winner as well.

The B52s probably aren't going to frighten any of the guys who write columns for *Guitar Player* magazine or *International Musician*, but they've honed their primitivism pretty effectively. Keith Strickland anchors a rock-steady rhythm section (cynics may wish to know he has a rhythm unit coming through his headphones on stage) (or at least he did at the Dunedin concert) and guitarist Ric Wilson, whose right hand is a lot more important than his left, drives home the rhythm — and gets a great guitar sound as well. Sorta dwang-dwangy. He plays a (4-string) Mosrite, and of his most famous American Mosrite predecessors, he resembles the Ventures a good deal more than



Jah Wobble

Johnny Ramone.

The top bits of a B52s' song can be ultimately irritating, and the band haven't totally got away from that on *Wild Planet*. But the hooks are still there, the best relentlessly fine.

One presumes the inner sleeve was done by one of Kate's two pet goats.

Roy Colbert

JAH WOBBLE
THE LEGEND LIVES ON ... JAH WOBBLE
IN "BETRAYAL"
VIRGIN

Jah Wobble, armchair bassist, is one-quarter of PIL, and like new drummer Martin Atkins, he has decided to dabble in solo albums.

It's not the third PIL effort, as Wobble himself has said that he wanted to put out a "sunshine record", comparatively speaking, and this shows on his affable if mechanical treatment of Fats Domino's "Blueberry Hill" and the bustling original "Today Is the First Day of the Rest of My Life".

But all is not sunshine. Assisted by producer/guitarist Mark Lusardi and PIL drummer Martin Atkins, Wobble has picked up on synthesisers (and saxophones) to convey his own dub peculiarities. Because of his bass preferences and personal reggae overtones there is a dub slant to the music particularly on "Beat the Drum" and "Pineapple". PIL pops up in the form of a stark synthesiser instrumental, "Not Another" but the album's best moments belong with "Betrayal", his fourth single, and it's an active, biting piece of reggae.

Wobble's solo when placed beside the PIL output is certainly more optimistic in tone and content and infinitely more accessible: this adds to its individuality and occasional excellence.

Keep the legend alive.

George Kay



Daryl Hall

CARS
PANORAMA
ELEKTRA

EMI in this country once released a Tangerine Dream album with that group on one side and Faust on the other. At the rate Cars and Devo are currently progressing, WEA are going to have to be damn careful by album five not to get the masters of these two bands mixed up. Or maybe album six — but the two are growing in towards each other faster than anyone would have envisioned back there in 1978.

Panorama is another very good Cars album. You'd have to have a brother in the band to say it was their finest so far, but within the stylistic restrictions self-imposed on albums one and two, Ric Ocasek has done a reputable job in quality sustenance. Cars' debut updated bubblegum with insinuatory little synthesiser riffs as wrapping. It was a record with quite a few nifty tunes. On this third album we find the wrapping is beginning to take over, the fascination with sounds stronger — and the nifty tune content just a little lower.

"Down Boys" suggests Ocasek has been checking out Iggy Pop, but like "Gimme Some Slack" and "Up and Down", it stands as a refreshing guitar raunch in amongst the synthesisers and David Robinson's utterly unyielding drums. One feels Joey Ramone would let only these three through (Joey, you see, thinks synthesisers have nought to do with rock'n'roll).

"Touch and Go" and "Don't Say No" on the first side both attack you successfully with archetypal Cars mini-hypnotism — this band can really do a lot with a little — but the one that really interests me is "You Wear Those Eyes". A haunting melody rises out of a backdrop not unlike Ocasek's New York favourite *Suicide*, and then it's into a really memorable chorus. Hidden away in the middle of Side Two, this could either be a furtive experiment or a pointer for album four. Whichever, it works.

Cars pass the third album test with a B plus.

Roy Colbert

ALBERTA HUNTER
AMTRAK BLUES
CBS

That a woman singer of some 85 years should be recording at all is extraordinary. That she should make one of this year's most exciting albums approaches the miraculous.



Alberta Hunter

Alberta Hunter made her first recordings in 1921 and had a long career, on records and on the stage, before abandoning show business to become a nurse in the 1950s. Apart from an isolated recording session in the '60s she has remained distant from performing until very recently. Her return to recording is to be welcomed.

Her one-time producer Chris Albertson believes she is singing better than ever. Incredible, but probably true. Bluesologist Paul Oliver notes that the young Alberta Hunter "had the thin, melodic but rather featureless voice characteristic of many lesser singers who came within the 'Classic blues'." Today Alberta Hunter's voice is rich, insinuating, knowing, sly and funny. Few singers of any age could get away with a song as suggestive as "My Handy Man Ain't Handy No More". Hunter offers a lesson in being obscene-and-not-heard (by those too innocent).

Although she came from the so-called Classic blues period of the 1920s which produced Bessie Smith (and whom Hunter preceded on record), Alberta Hunter is more than a singer of blues songs. In fact, she is only a moderate blues singer. Her greatest strength lies in her freewheeling reinterpretation of songs of the American near-past. Listen to the joyful life she wrings out of such chestnuts as "Darktown Strutters' Ball" and "Sweet Georgia Brown." Jazz of a high order.

Of course, the album would not be the resounding success it is without the superb instrumental support of, among others, pianist Gerald Cook, guitarist Billy Butler and Vic Dickenson on trombone. The album is produced by John Hammond, who has been around long enough to have also produced Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday (as well as Dylan and Springsteen).

The best summation of the album might be a comment of Alberta Hunter's — "This old jalopy's got a lot of mileage on her yet." It's great.

Ken Williams

DARYL HALL
SACRED SONGS
RCA

Occasionally there are chilling reminders that record companies do in fact rule. *Sacred Songs* was done in 1977 as an integral part of Robert Fripp's advance on 1981, but RCA thwarted Fripp and Daryl Hall both by freezing it in their vaults until now. Obviously someone important at RCA felt the album wasn't the best thing for the career of Hall & Oates, and yet *Sacred Songs* sounds no more risky and stylistically experimental than the second side of Hall & Oates' last outing.

It's a record in fact that Hall and Oates' fans should like a lot, as it features Hall singing lyrics of real substance above melodies often as appealing as anything the man has come up with since *Abandoned Luncheonette*. "Why Was It So Easy" is especially nice.

Fripp, who presumably relishes working with real singers like Hall and the Roches after what he had to put up with during Crimson's halcyon period (*Larks Tongue — Starless*), is more an over-riding presence on *Sacred Songs* than an all-over-everywhere collaborator.

He pops up noticeably in the middle of "Something In 4/4 Time", elongates the schizophrenic "Babs And Babs" with a slice of pertronicking, pushes "NYCNY" hard with some suitably frantic guitar, and eases the listener attractively into Side Two on "The Farther Away I Am". But overall there isn't an enormous amount here for Frippfans, though it won't do those people any harm at all to check out this thoroughly worthwhile album.

Roy Colbert

PURPLE HEARTS
BEAT THAT!
STUNN

With things the way they are in Britain, I suppose the Mod revival was inevitable. Punk died the death, the cost of living went sky high and unemployment is rampant, so the hedonistic outlook of the Mods, spurred on by *Quadrophonia*, was the release for jaded youth.

With it came a new crop of backward-looking bands, drawing their inspiration from old records and magazines, and the memories of older siblings. Names like Secret Affair, the Chords, the Merton Parkas and Purple Hearts.

Named after a favourite Mod pep pill, the Hearts are four young Londoners, the oldest being 19. They started out in 1978 as a "teenage pop group", having previously been a punk band called the Sockets. They knew only three chords then, and though they've definitely advanced on that, they're still hardly the stuff legends are made of.

They borrow heavily from early Who and Kinks, especially in the guitar of Robert Stebbing and vocals of Robert Manton. Both are also responsible for much of the material. It has all the vigour of youth, but precious little originality. Manton can't seem to shake off his punk beginnings, often sounding like an immature Joe Strummer, and sounds faintly ridiculous attempting Wilson Pickett's "If You Need Me".

I'll stick with the ska men, who have more humour and panache.

Duncan Campbell

GANG OF FOUR

entertainment!



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