

# RECORDS

Madness

**The Passions**  
**Michael and Miranda**  
**Stunn**

Hailing from London, the Passions — two girls, two boys — tread carefully over ground recently covered by label-mates the Cure. Fortunately, the Passion's all-female vocal line keeps the distance between the acts great enough for comfort.

Side One of the album opens at top pace with 'Pedal Fury'. Short and to the point, it makes way for 'Oh No It's You', the flip of the band's first New Zealand single 'Hunted'. The same melodic guitar riff the Cure used on 'The Forest' crops up on 'Love Song', unimpaired by the re-run.

Following in succession on Side Two are possibly the album's strongest compositions, 'Suspicion', 'Palava' and 'Absentee'. The closer, 'Why Me?' makes it evident that the girls write the lyrics.

*You call us the weaker sex  
When it's you that made us weak  
You fool us with sexual delight  
Then you threaten us with physical might.*

Chris Parry's Fiction Records (released here on Stunn) set a high standard with the Cure. The Passions in no way lower that standard. Now, how long before the Associates get a local release?

**Mark Phillips**

**Neil Young**  
**Hawks and Doves**  
**Reprise**

Neil Young opens his new album with a blast on harmonica that pins your ears back to your head. Whatever else he may be aiming for, the easy listening market isn't on the list.

*Hawks and Doves* fits neatly into two musical areas. Side One, mainly acoustic, has a weathered ancient feel to it, the kind of music Ry Cooder created for The Long Riders' soundtrack — almost, but not quite, from another age. The most effective song, 'The Old Homestead', features a saw player, and the strange sound of the bending saw, like wind whistling through a deserted house at midnight, is perfect for the dark atmosphere Young conjures up.

Side Two, all electric, is driven mostly by Young's piano which sometimes, as in the opening track, 'Stayin' Power' evokes memories of Lloyd Price's 'New Orleans', circa 1955.

Young draws all his themes together in the title track, which can be read as a warning that would please Ronald Reagan with its sentiments.

Sings Young: "The big wind blows, so the tall grass bends/ But for you don't push too hard my friend." When Young, a Canadian, sings that he's "proud to be livin' in the USA" there doesn't appear to be the edge of sarcasm that Chuck Berry applied to a similar line.

Young as super patriot is not a role many of us would have seen for him, but it's another turn in a career with so many turns you can never lose interest.

**Phil Gifford**

**The Plasmatics**  
**New Hope For the Wretched**  
**Jona Lewie**  
**On the Other Hand There's A Fist**  
**Madness**  
**Absolutely**  
**Stiff**

Stiff seems to operate on Andy Warhol's principle that everyone is due about fifteen minutes of fame. A long line of weird and wonderful acts have recorded for the label, including Humphrey Lyttleton, Wreckless Eric, Lene Lovich, Magic Michael and many others. The latest in this tradition, the Plasmatics, are perhaps the least talented of the lot.

They have a lot in common with the Damned, one of Stiff's first signings. Both have a guitarist who wears a tutu, a singer who can't sing, a peculiar sense of humour, and both have produced a debut of loud, brash, chaotic punk. There is a difference, though. The Damned album was a classic of messy, post-Dolls punk, while the Plasmatics record has no redeeming features, and despite the sensation surrounding the band, is just plain rubbish.

On the other hand, I'm glad to see a re-issue of Jona Lewie's fine 1978 album, which was unfairly ignored at the time, aside from huge suc-



**Plasmatics**

Dance', 'I Hear You Knocking', 'Down, Down, Down', and their release dates, catalogue numbers and so on. In fact, you only need me to tell you that his first recorded work, a version of 'Morning Dew', with the Human Beans, appears here, and that this is a great record to introduce you to his beginnings. It makes a fine supplement to the slightly more comprehensive *Early Works* — 67-72 or *Dave Edmunds* — *Rocker* compilations.

**Dave McLean**

**Chic**  
**Real People**  
**Atlantic**

*chic (sh-eeek); skill, effectiveness, style, stamp of authority, stylish, in the fashion.*

Chic certainly fit the bill. In the last few years they have made the most stylish and effective dance floor music available. The Bernard Edwards and Nile Rodgers song partnership has constructed a series of classics from the simplest musical and lyrical ideas. They build songs storey upon storey until you have the complete entity, a soul/disco skyscraper.

The new album follows their traditional, fail-safe and superior methods but with less immediate impact and success than *Risque*. As an opener, 'Open Up', an instrumental, is brisk but forgettable, however, amends are made by the title track and to a lesser extent by 'I Got Protection', standard crisp Rodgers-Edwards' fare.

'Rebels Are We' is a good a second side entree as you'd get, but 'Chip Off the Old Block' sags under a barely serviceable tune. So, soul brothers, you gotta wait until '26' for the real goods, staccato and incisive, it stands with their finest, a comment that can't be aimed at the innocuous love funk of the closer, 'You Can't Do It Alone'.

The stamp of superiority tag would, perhaps, fit three of the songs present — the title track, 'Rebels Are We' and '26'. The rest could be filed under F, for Fashionable and Functional.

**George Kay**

**Nina Hagen Band**  
**Unbehagen**  
**CBS**  
**Herman Brood, Nina Hagen & Lene Lovich**  
**Cha Cha Soundtrack**  
**Ariola**

Nina Hagen is a 25-year-old former East German who left for the West due to some obscure political wrangle. She'd already made something of a reputation as a singer-actress when she left East Berlin in 1976. Dividing her time between West Berlin, Amsterdam and London, she soon became fascinated with the punks and determined to emulate them.

Her idol is undoubtedly Lene Lovich, whom she tries to resemble vocally, and fails. Hagen has a formidable coloratura voice, but without Lovich's charm and wit. She yelps, wails and snarls pointlessly, as if believing she'll carve her own niche by sounding as bizarre as possible. Couple this with her own interpretation of punk hairstyles and makeup, and you have a most unattractive picture.

*Unbehagen* (translates to *Ill At Ease*) features a German version of Lovich's 'Lucky Number' which does nothing for the song, some loopy reggae and a lot of ponderous Germanic heavy metal. It helps that you can barely understand a word Hagen is singing, and the warning about offensive lyrics is superfluous. Nina Hagen is self-obsessed and ostentatious.

*Cha Cha* is a movie featuring Lovich, Hagen



**Passions**



**Richard Jobson, Skids.**

cess in Finland. It is a fine example of blue-eyed Euro-soul, and Polygram have added the recent hit, 'Kitchen at Parties'. Although this is far more Dury-like, and not representative of the rest of the album, it doesn't detract from it.

The first Madness album, *One Step Beyond*, was one of last year's finest debuts, and along with the Beat's album, the best of the first crop of 2-Toners. The "nutty" sound is still evident on *Absolutely*, but it is now much tighter, thanks largely to a superb production by Clive Langer and Alan Winstanley. The only real failure is Chas Smash's skabillly, 'Solid Gone', which is rather wooden, but it is more than outweighed by songs like 'E.R.N.I.E.', a song about the perils of betting, 'Baggy Trousers', an ode to schooldays, and the instrumental, 'Los Palmas 7', which sounds like a Viv Stanshall-inspired out-take from a Bonzo's album.

While not as immediate as its predecessor, *Absolutely* is a fine album, and mostly surpasses the standard set by *One Step Beyond*.

**Simon Grigg**

**Skids**  
**The Absolute Game**  
**Virgin**

The Skids have received more than their fair share of flak over their first two albums. Accusations of pomposity have been directed at Richard Jobson, vocalist and the man held responsible for their lyrical pretensions, and a man who feels the need to adopt a rationalised persona via his dress sense and personal philosophies.

Skids' music has never been kissed by the lip of divine perception but they've always managed to be above average in their word sense as well as incorporating a few unusual aspects (slipstream wall of sound, Jobson's and Adamson's meshing guitars and Jobson's highly produced vocals) into your day-to-day rock'n'roll.

*The Absolute Game*, their third album, differs a little from their other two in that it is their most refined to date. Carefully crafted mini-dramas like the African vocal platform of 'A Woman in Winter' and the immaculately tailored musicianship of 'The Devil's Decree' and 'Arena' are the signs of a band who care for their music and are eager to please.

Jobson can be bombastic ('Circus Games' and 'One Decree') and a touch melodramatic but these are well-intentioned attempts at communication from a lyricist also trying to reach precision.

The Skids had shaken off their Dunfermline dowdiness long ago but there are those who perpetually feel the need to remind the band of their origins. But three thoughtful albums out of three speaks for itself.

**George Kay**

**Dave Edmunds/Love Sculpture**  
**Singles A's & B's, 1967-72**  
**Harvest**

I wonder why I'm reviewing this album. Anyone else would simply take David Brown's excellent sleeve notes, edit them some and bung them out — "Unlike many artists, the early recordings of Edmunds' are not embarrassing skeletons from the cupboard, but a useful pointer to a great rock musician's future." That says it all.

If you know Dave Edmunds' work at all, or if you have one eighth of the love and respect that he has for rock and roll, you don't need me to tell you that words like dated and nostalgia sure don't apply to this album, baby.

You don't need me to tell you that this album contains all those great singles like 'Sabre

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