

RECORDS

Bruce Springsteen
The River
CBS

The conventional view that Bruce Springsteen's megastardom began with *Born To Run* naively underestimates the role his second album *The Wild The Innocent & The E Street Shuffle* played in putting Springsteen where he is today. A magnificent record, it was not only superior to the Caesarean-delivered *Born To Run*, but it made acceptance and eventual worship of that third album a relatively natural process.

Production troubles, legal troubles and, one presumes, fame troubles have all conspired to slash Springsteen's recorded output since *The Wild & The Innocent* set, all of which is a little strange since Springsteen has appealed right from the start as the archetypal instant music-maker, prolific, and totally besotted in the spirit of rock'n'roll. For sure there have been some pretty grandiose moves pulled on the last two albums, and Jon Landau, once a weighty critic, has often proved the weightiest of producers. But through all the boom-laden drums and cavernous backdrops, Springsteen has still shone through as someone who would prefer to do it fast — and in front of a (dancing, drunken) audience.

His peerless reputation as a live performer, and his where-possible desire to play the smaller hall, both confirm that belief. *The River* has not been without its delays and murky rumours, but the double album 20-song end result, amazingly, is music that sounds as immediate and studiously unpolished — and rock'n'roll exciting — as anything Springsteen has yet got down on vinyl. Bootlegs included.

There are big ballads here, and they admittedly have been done with care and a light coating of grandeur, but the meat and overriding impression of this double set comes from the raging, stomping, R&B rock'n'roll that takes up close to half of the four sides. If it's not a return to the growing-up craziness of Asbury Park, it's at the very least a return to what us punters think the Asbury Park days must have been like.

Having The E Street Band sure helps. The contributions of Clarence Clemons and Roy Bitan have long been obvious and vital, and they are both that again here, while closer to the engine room, the Springsteen-Van Zandt guitar axis is clearly crucial. But the man who really leaps out at you on the rock side of *The River* is Max Weinberg. Relishing a vividly live drum sound, Weinberg is all-out attack all the way. Listening to him battering his kit to pieces I was reminded of Tom Scott's witty jibe at (the unbelievable) Norman Jones during a television debate where Scott said he had enjoyed Norman's speech until the injections had started to wear off. Weinberg's injections, be they even only from life itself, never wear off.



Bruce Springsteen, Clarence Clemons in 'No Nukes' movie.

'You Can Look', with the guitars driving the band to a numbing finale, is possibly the pick of the up tempo stuff, though it only just shades 'I, A Rocker' (more finale thunder) 'Two Hearts' and the ringing opener 'Ties That Bind'. There are classical rock'n'roll R&B riffs and echoes aplenty here, and Springsteen's taste and feel for such music is never in question as he joyously re-runs them all.

The rockers are tastefully inserted through the record until Side Four, where the intensity is finally allowed to wilt, while the slow ballads are kept one to a side — all strong and atmospheric, but at the same time springing few melodic surprises relative to the standard-setting efforts that have gone before. In-between we get the songs that ultimately showcase Springsteen the writer.

'Point Blank', already known and loved by concert audiences, is arguably the record's classiest composition, 'I Wanna Marry You' reincarnates the delicious 'Little Girl So fine' given to the Asbury Dukes, and 'Fade Away' would have highlighted the last Elvis Costello album (just as 'Crush On You' would help the Stones and all four sides would help Graham Parker).

Gems as all these are, the most palatable radio fare is probably 'Hungry Heart' in view of what has worked for Springsteen there before.

As regards lyrics, familiarity with Springsteen's themes are making his songs increasingly less evocative. It's James Dean and *The Last Picture Show* revisited just a little too often, and if the knives are pulled on this album, then this seems the likely point of entry. But then again, when you've written 'Sandy',



UB40

where else can you go?

The River hangs on to recent Springsteen trademarks, but essentially redefines the man in his original guise as the unpretentious street rocker. Vulnerable — and smiling. In this respect, the back cover photo on *The Wild The Innocent & the E Street Shuffle* is a lot more applicable than the more serious shot from the *Darkness On The Edge Of Town* sessions used here. This is a superbly reassuring pair of albums from an artist who has been repeatedly imitated in recent years — to the point where one wondered whether even the real thing could possibly stand apart when it came. *The River*, undeniably, is the real thing.

Roy Colbert

UB40

Signing Off
Graduate

'Food For Thought' was the first ever New Zealand hit single on an English independent label, the second ever reggae number one (the first was Marley's 'Is This Love'), and unusual in the breadth of its appeal until the radio stations played it to death. The appeal of UB40's debut album is also undeniable, although there are no hooks as such, just jazzy bass and a very silky, almost MOR sax.

Recorded in producer Bob Lamb's home 8-Track studio, the album has an easy swing about it, especially on the exquisite 'King', here much dubbed and improved on the version on the flip of 'Food'. 'Madam Medusa', included on a bonus 12-inch single also shines, a damning ode to Margaret Thatcher.

Apart from a couple of limp instrumentals, the rest of the material is incredibly strong, and all original, aside from Randy Newman's 'I Think It's Gonna Rain Today'.

Signing Off is the first true post 2-Tone reggae album to appear, and that is important. More important still is the fact that UB40 have left themselves plenty of room to move for the future.

One more thing, any temptation to relegate this album to late-night listening should be avoided. It sounds just as good, if not better, at maximum volume.

A perfect album for the summer.
Simon Grigg

The Police
Zenyatta Mondatta
A&M

Zenyatta continues the trend started on *Regatta de Blanc*. Sting's loose, open-ended songs are allowed to develop naturally in the studio, and then carefully edited. This endows *Zenyatta* with all the merits, and faults of its predecessor.

The defects come from a possible lack of discipline that tighter song structures would give. This is especially true of the album's two instrumentals, 'Behind My Camel', written by Andy Summers, and Copeland's 'The Other Way Of Stopping'. Both are aimless pieces, ob-

viously designed to showcase the guitarist's and the drummer's talents respectively. Maybe they work better as onstage jams, or in the context of a film score. Neither is given much breathing space, and they just constitute filler on an otherwise very satisfying record.

Onto the positive side. *Zenyatta* opens with 'Don't Stand So Close To Me', a classic Police song with a chorus I've been singing nonstop for the last fortnight. Recalling that Sting was once a teacher, I wonder just how personal this one is.

The Police are one of the very few rock bands to play in India. The impact of the place was not lost on Sting. His 'Driven To Tears' is a sweeping, pulse-racing glimpse of a world going mad:

*How can you say you're not responsible,
What does it have to do with me.
What's my reaction, what should it be,
Confronted by this latest atrocity.*

Summers plays ringing chords, a la 'Walking On The Moon'. His solos are becoming freer in form, and closer to jazz than ever before. This dovetails into 'When The World Is Running Down', continuing the theme, but on a more personal level. Copeland's 'Bombs Away (In Old Bombay)' displays his rather sardonic wit, depicting lust and corruption in a country where civil unrest is rife.

'Canary In A Coalmine' is brisk and funky, the subject an incorrigible neurotic, whose sensibilities are shaken by the slightest defect, and gets dizzy even walking in a straight line. The title refers to the poor birds once kept caged in the mines to detect gas leakages. If the bird pegs out, get the boys above the ground, quick.

'Voices Inside My Head' again shows how the Police can take a simple basic idea and build on it. A single riff or melody line is all

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