

RECORDS

Various Artists Rock Against Racism Virgin

Rock Against Racism was formed as a foil to the insidious bigotry which has surfaced in Britain in recent years, through such obscenities as the National Front and the British Movement.

During 1977, 1978 and 1979, RAR organised a series of nationwide concerts, featuring artists who've never been afraid to take an overtly political stance, and whose sympathies conformed with those of the organisers.

RAR's banner has not flown as strongly in 1980, so this album serves as a reminder of what they were fighting for. The stars of all the shows are featured, and the royalties go to RAR. A noble gesture on Virgin's part, and not a bad slab of plastic either.

On one album, you get several slices of heavy reggae, courtesy of Steel Pulse, The Cimarons, the Barry Ford Band, Matumbi and Aswad. Elvis Costello contributes the appropriate 'Goon Squad', X-Ray Spex recall '77 with 'Oh Bondage Up Yours', and Stiff Little Fingers get abrasively militant on 'Law And Order'.

The Members spit on the 'G.L.C.' (Greater London Council, ace legislators against rock), the Mekons and the Gang Of Four challenge established boundaries, Carol Grimes gets very soulful, and Tom Robinson's 'Winter Of '79' wraps up the package with a big left hook. Rock against racism, smash it ...

Duncan Campbell

Rockpile Seconds of Pleasure F-Beat

Take four guys who love playing together, a brace of Nick Lowe songs, selected tasteful covers (Joe Tex, Chuck Berry — is there actually a Chuck Berry song that hasn't been covered?) — add an excellent production, not too fat, not too thin, and what have you got? Rockpile's *Seconds Of Pleasure*, their "first solo album".

This is an excellent record, loaded with good humour and great playing and potential hit singles.

'Teacher, Teacher', the american single, is this album's 'Girls Talk'. 'Heart', a Nick Lowe/Rockpile credit, has been written a thousand times before, but in the hands of Dave Edmunds, Nick Lowe, Billy Bremner, and Terry Williams it sounds just as fresh and vital as ever. 'Knife and Fork' sounds like Edmunds did it in '71/'72.

'Wrong Way' appears to be the English single, a strange choice, as this Dillford/Tilbrook (of Squeeze fame) song is the album's weakest moment. It's strong enough to grace and complement anyone else's album, but it's got stiff competition here. 'When I Write The Book' sees an Attractions' organ sound



Athletico Spizz 80

(played by Edmunds), under Nick Lowe's vocal, on a great little pop song that really shows up the faults on 'Wrong Way'.

The album finishes strongly with 'You Ain't Nothing But Fine, Fine, Fine' — pure Edmunds' guitar, rock'n'roll for the fun of it. Makes you want to go straight back to the start.

So Rockpile finally record together under their own name — it could have easily been a mishmash of disjointed songs under the guise of democracy, but it ain't — it's a great record. Buy it, play it loud, stare at the great gatefold sleeve, marvel at the production, but most important of all, dance!

Dave McLean

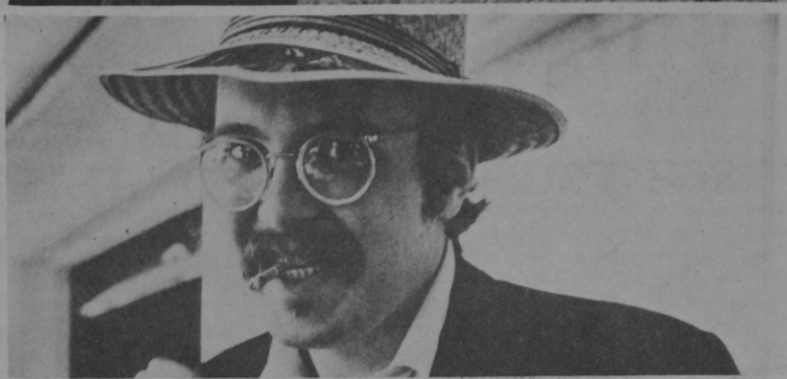
Athletico Spizz 80 Do A Runner A&M

It's just a matter of where you are really.

If you happen to be a good English band, and you are signed to a major label, chances are that someone 12,000 miles away will end up reviewing you.

It's not that I don't like this record — I do. It's just that there are local bands who are equally talented, and even if they do get a record out, they are lucky to have it played on the radio.

Gripes aside, *Do A Runner* is a fine, if flawed album. It contains some great rhythmic guitar, especially on Side Two, although, on 'Airships' a little economy would have helped. It's a



Walter Becker and Donald Fagen, Steely Dan Bun E. Carlos, Cheap Trick.

logical follow-up to their Rough Trade singles, but it is a pity that some of the humour has been lost in the transition to A&M.

For the record to live up to its full potential, it has to be played loud. Loud enough for the bass to thud through you, to make your ears ring, and the neighbours sell up and move to Australia.

The only weakspot is the variable quality of the lyrics. The impotent anger of 'European Heroes' and the Numan imagery of 'New Species' don't work at all.

But fortunately, the overall sound does. And give it more than a few plays. Like decent wines, it takes time, but it's worth it.

Simon Grigg

Steely Dan Gaucho MCA

Donald Fagen and Walter Becker certainly look like guys who have made a pact with the Devil, or somebody not a lot different.

Their records, as Steely Dan, are so slinky and seductive the barbs in the lyrics sink in painlessly until one day all the bland on bland radio stations are playing a song 'Babylon Sisters' about going to bed with two underage girls, when the Barlett crowd thinks the real dirt is "if it don't fit, don't force it."

Musically *Gaucho* is as seamless as anything released by Steely Dan. In many ways the brilliance of Fagen and Becker is best appreciated in the performances they get from session musicians, who with other rock stars resort to the same old rent-a-riff. Not much chance of that here. Fagen and Becker apparently write charts for most instruments, and their approach to music is possibly the reason the only non-original they've ever done was a Duke Ellington song. Ellington, too, was an exciting arranger.

Musical progression is not really a point to be made with Steely Dan. The jazzy Latin feel to so many Dan songs has always created its own space and time, and *Gaucho* has that same atmosphere of timelessness. No tricks, no gimmicks, just endlessly interesting and intelligent composition.

Lyrical they have always been clever, sneaky little punks. They got sacked from Jay and the Americans for offering a song with the catchy chorus, "throw out your gold teeth and see how they roll", and how much they enjoy seeing critics trying to read the signs in the entrails of their writing was shown when their last album, *Aja*, arrived, like Dylan's *Blood On The Tracks*, with a review as liner notes.

If there is a theme in *Gaucho* it's a glide through the world of drugs and drug deals. "It's a glamour profession/The L.A. concession" croons Fagen, "illegal fun/Under the sun." It's a world of "Cuervo Gold" and "fine Columbian" where love is a "spasm, like a Sunday in T.J." Life is "cheap, but it's not free." Violence is near the surface. "I loved you more than I can tell/But now it's stomping time." On the last track on the album, 'Third World Man', the violence spills over.

I saw the fireworks I believed that I was dreaming

Till the neighbours came out screaming
He's a third world man.

Belong exciting as well as intelligent is one of the hardest balancing acts in rock. Fagen and Becker have pulled it off again.

Phil Gifford

Stevie Wonder Hotter Than July Motown

A female Shakespeare of your time
With looks to blow Picasso's mind
Your body moved with grace and song
Like symphonies by Bach or Brahms ...

Hello, Stevie. Or is it Michael Franks? It's getting hard to tell the two of them apart now.

Wonder's saving grace is that he can still turn out a good dance number. In fact, *Hotter Than July* contains some of the sharpest foot music he's put down in a long time (witness 'Master Blaster').

But the lyrics! A random sample is quoted above, and the rest aren't much better. Wonder these days seems unable to avoid either gooey sentimentality ('Do Like You') or drippy politicising ('Master Blaster' and 'Happy Birthday').

The melodies are all you come to expect from Wonder (pick any album), and his ear for a tune certainly hasn't deserted him. His backing musicians are of the highest calibre, including

David Bowie's drummer, Dennis Davis, to my mind one of the best stickmen alive today. The credit list is yards long and the whole shebang is, of course, digitally recorded.

There's even the address to write if you want to join 'Stevie Wonder's Universal Family.' I have been trying very hard to avoid using the word 'pretentious', as it's one I've abused a bit lately. But Stevie Wonder just begs for it. At least he doesn't go on about plants this time.

Duncan Campbell

Cheap Trick All Shook Up Epic

Rick Nielson worked Cheap Trick so hard through the late 1970's it was a surprise only one band member (Tom Petersson) finally cried enough. It was that determined relentless work schedule that enabled the Trick to claw their way into America's first division. The body of *Dream Police* was purportedly done before Trick hit the big time, but the record nevertheless sounded like a band desperately trying to make music concomitant with their new-found status: music for football stadiums.

All Shook Up faces similar problems, and the opener 'Stop This Game' is a particularly bad example of Trick at their most desperate and overblown. Things fortunately get back to the jukebox fire and re-rum Move moves of yore through the rest of the first side — until the laboured 'World's Greatest Lover' — and occasionally again on the second side — but the creative spark is definitely on the wane. There is definitely no 'Surrender' here.

The last track here even clones 'Tusk'. As one of the most accomplished plagiarists of all time, Nielson should really be mining finer sources than this.

Phil Spector used to talk of the importance of contributing to rock, as opposed to just riding alongside it. Cheap Trick have rarely threatened to contribute, but they do entertain. The less weighty moments of *All Shook Up* definitely deliver in that area — and 'I Love You Baby But I Hate Your Friends' is a title worth smiling at.

Roy Colbert

Rod Stewart Foolish Behaviour Warner Bros

After the creative low point of his career, the *Blondes Have More Fun* album, Rod Stewart redeems himself with *Foolish Behaviour*.

After a brief quote from an old, old British radio comedy (*Hancock's Half Hour? The Glums? God, it's driving me crazy*) theme, the album jump starts with 'Better Off Dead', a lurching rocker that has more than a hint of the Rolling Stones' 'Rip This Joint'. But that's only a prelude to the album's big production, 'Passion', perfect for the dance halls and already getting plenty of radio play. Carmine Appice's bass drums are so up-front that the unwary listener can be pured.

But while this is the pivot of the album it is not the sole distinguishing feature that 'Do Ya Think I'm Sexy' was on *Blondes*. Stewart seems to have rediscovered his sense of humour and, more importantly, his sense of melody. There are songs here to rank with his best earlier work. For those with long memories, listen to 'Oh God, I Wish I was Home Tonight' and hear the shade of *Gasoline Alley*, with Jim Cregan doing a guitar part that could almost be an ode to Woody (Ron, not Guthrie). Much as I like 'Passion', the simple emotion of Stewart's delivery (reminiscent of the great 'Mandolin Wind') makes this song a personal favourite.

Stewart's regular group is on most tracks. Guesting here and there are Valerie Carter (vocals), Colin Allen (drums) and Tim Bogart (bass).

It's not a *Gasoline Alley* or an *Every Picture Tells a Story* — and Stewart has yet to match those early peaks — but *Foolish Behaviour* is more than enough reason not to write the old rocker off.

Ken Williams

Tom Waits Heartattack And Vine Asylum

This album is a desperate mixture of triumph and tragedy. Triumph in its heartfelt brilliance, tragedy in marking another chapter in the personal downhill slide of Tom Waits.

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