

U2 Boy Island

U2 are from Dublin, breeding ground of the Boomtown Rats. Although they have existed since the primeval days of punk, it took them until last year to secure release of their debut, *Boy*.

Produced by Steve Lillywhite (of XTC fame), *Boy* is above all intense. It combines melody and harmony with the semi-metal fervour favoured by the Skids. On the opener, 'I Will Follow', the voice of Bono. Vox twists up to a full-paced chant over reverberating guitars and crashing drums. Through the whole of Side One, they don't let up. 'An Cat Dubh', 'Twilight' and especially 'Out of Control' all ooze the excitement lacking in many of Britain's elite.

As the cover and title suggest, *Boy* is concerned with the problems of growing up. 'Stories for Boys' deals with the same area touched on by 'Twilight' and 'I Will Follow'.

A boy tries hard to be a man,
His mother takes him by his hand,
If he stops to think he starts to cry,
Oh, Why?

Only on 'The Ocean' does the music reflect the lyrical depression. Short and sombre, it's mood parallels Joy Division.

U2, with their mixture of old wave skills and new wave ideals, have made a record for the masses. A stunning debut.
Mark Phillips

Garland Jeffreys Escape Artist Epic

Those who retrieved Jeffreys' 1972 Atlantic debut from the sale bins, where it immediately landed on its release in this country, were agreeably surprised as to just how good the record was. However we had to wait until 1977 before Jeffreys delivered the real goods, via the justifiably much-praised *Ghost Writer*. Two more albums on A&M followed, bought in vast quantities by Europeans only, and then it was on to label three. And here with *Escape Artist*, we find Jef-



Garland Jeffreys, the Rumour etc.



Skafish



U-2

freys right back at the very top of his craft.

Songs are always important, and Jeffreys' writing on *Escape Artist* would rank with his finest to date. But what really makes this one work is the backdrop — a sprinkling of top reggae names plus two each from the Rumour (who have ditched Parker in favour of the dread-locked New York mulatto) and the E Street Band. It's a mighty unit, and flavoured by guest appearances from the wunnerful Adrian Belew and longtime buddy Lou Reed, to name but two, you have the

perfect vehicle for Jeffreys' superior vocal skills to cruise on. So good in fact, that the overkill on vocals that occasionally marred previous works, is never allowed room to destroy the balance of the record.

Escape Artist comes with a bonus 4-track EP, and it is there that Jeffreys plays his main reggae cards. The album itself is a lot more rocky, no ballads, nothing slow. The killer cuts are arguably the last two on the second side (a great place for killer cuts), the cover of Question Mark & The

Mysterians' '96 Tears' is superb, and 'Christine' is a natural single. The man never misses once over the entire 14 tracks.

Play this between *The River* and *Trust*. You might just find it's better than both of them.
Roy Colbert

Dennis O'Brien Still In The Same Dream EMI

This is Wellingtonian Dennis O'Brien's second album. His first was recorded in London in '75 with Gerry Rafferty's producer. This one is self-produced (with James Hall) in Wellington. It's very good indeed.

O'Brien sings, plays piano and co-wrote nine of the eleven numbers. His voice is strong with just that commercially-right touch of throttled melodrama. But it's his songwriting that's his real ace in the hole. An astute craftsman, O'Brien proves thoroughly capable of adopting various popular styles at will. Four of the first tracks range through Steely Dan, flat-out rock'n'roll, a jazzy shuffle (à la Amazing Rhythm Aces) and a Jay and the American's type ballad.

Side Two is the stylistically more uniform — solid, mainstream pop-rock of consistently high standard. The impeccable musicianship, from some of NZ's finest session workers, is enhanced by a powerful, punchy production. In fact everything about this album is classy.

Given the right promotion, *Still In The Same Dream* has the necessary attributes to hit big in that market currently dominated by the fading talent of Billy Joel. If EMI don't push this album for all they're worth they're crazy.
Peter Thomson

Mink DeVille Le Chat Bleu Capitol

The delays and problems surrounding the third Mink DeVille album have given it a sort of mythical status — Willie versus the Capitol bankers, Art v Finance with Art finally winning. On listening, one's first — and lasting — reaction is:

what's all the fuss about?

The album was recorded in Paris and New York with Steve Douglas producing. It was reputed to be laden with strings. The record company said uncommercial. Willie was sacked. Why?

Essentially, *Le Chat Bleu* follows closely the lines of the two previous albums — occasionally, a mite too closely. The rocker 'Savoir Faire' car-bons 'Gunslinger' from the first album and 'Soul Twist' from the second, the lilting ballad 'That World Outside' (co-written with veteran songsmith Doc Pomus) has the melodramatic rises and falls of 'Just Your Friends' from *Return To Magenta*.

But perhaps that is carping. There are some sublime moments. Willie DeVille has a marvellously evocative voice. He can sound hurt, crushed by emotion, but still avoid self-pity. His leer on uptempo number is so broad as to be ludicrous but funny.

If you want some funny, silly, moving singing, check out 'Bad Boy', with its cocktail-lounge piano and shoo-by-doo vocal chorus. For stick-it-up-there raunch, try 'Lipstick Traces' and the dirty, propulsive guitar of Louis X. Erlanger.

An excellent album — regardless of the wait.
Ken Williams

The Residents Commercial Album RTC

If you have any preconceptions about the Residents, this album will destroy them.

While the band's previous material (available here on the *Nibbles* compilation) has been obscure and inaccessible to most, this album seems to live up to its title. It contains forty one-minute tracks, each with its own melody — self-contained but fitting into an overall mosaic. They cover everything from rock and roll to ethnic ditties, each song sounding satisfying when heard in context, despite its lack of length.

The Residents could never be classed as easy listening, but this album is almost ambient music — a record you can put

on and just float away, as with much mid-period Eno.

But, things aren't quite right. It's still a Residents' album and it sounds like it. No hard core devotees will be disappointed, but it should have a wider appeal than things like 'Satisfaction', and 'Smelly Tongues'. Then again, perhaps I'm just taking them too seriously.

The Residents sell out? No, the Residents sell in.
Simon Grigg

The Joe Jackson Band Beat Crazy A&M

Joe Jackson's debut certainly looked one of the sharpest of '79: catchy tunes, danceable rhythms and smart lyrics. Possible reservations over any Costello influence were cleared away by the follow-up album; Jackson was definitely his own man. Now, over two years later, comes his third, though this time it's the J.J. Band.

And there's a lot more than just a few moniker involved here. Remember those witty, ironic lyrics of sexual bewilderment? No more. The new Jackson is a solemn auteur pronouncing on racism, political ideology, voodoo, fashion, social alienation even. Serious stuff. Unfortunately however, his once trenchant observations are becoming laboured.

Moreover, in writing what seem primarily statements rather than songs, he has dissipated his old musical strengths of melody and structure. 'Someone Up There' is virtually the only example of those tight, poppy numbers that made his fame. Most of this music is darker, moodier, considerably less accessible than before, often involving long, even overlong, instrumental passages.

I've really been trying to like this album. After all, Jackson has made a bold departure from the safety of his successful formula. I respect his concerns and admire his passion. And certainly there are some successes here: 'One to One', 'Battleground', 'Someone Up There'. Ultimately, however, too much of *Beat Crazy* simply fails to satisfy.
Peter Thomson

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