



Chryssie and the boys

Devo
Live
Warner Bros
Pretenders
Extended Play
Real

Two half-album pot-boilers from WEA, the live Devo set originally being a four-track promotional item in America (the two added tracks are 'Planet Earth' and 'Girl U Want') and the Pretenders' five-track EP intended no doubt to remind the fickle ever-changing rock punter that the band is still in fact around, absence of follow-up album notwithstanding.

Devo don't spring any surprises live. 'Be Stiff' is the only track not off the most successful *Freedom Of Choice* album, though that record's title track appears here instrumentally as a concert-opener. A propulsive drum beat allows you to partially ignore the one-finger dynamics on Side One, and happily the guitar player is let loose more on the other side — 'Gates Of Steel' heading off the much loved 'Whip It' as the EP's peak. Recorded in San Francisco a year ago *Live* is a satisfactory if hardly revelatory reaffirmation of the band's current strength.

The Pretenders' most appetising recent vinyl 'Message Of Love' and 'Talk Of The Town' heads their mini-album. 'Message' somehow marries foxy two-chord raunch with much softer turnaround bridge



Bruce in a box!

Bruce Springsteen
Boxed Set: Greetings From
Asbury Park — The Wild,
the Innocent & the E Street
Shuffle — Born To Run
CBS

In the middle to late 1960s, most record companies seemed to have at least five Instant Dylans on their books — a David Blue here, an Eric Andersen there, a Tim something everywhere. The early 1970s saw the search change to New Dylans, and Bruce Springsteen was one of these on his debut *Greetings From Asbury Park*.

Was there a real rock'n'roller in there? It sure was hard to tell, and a wafer-thin production hardly helped either. 'Blinded By The Light' and 'Spirit In The Night' eventually became the name tracks off this album, but 'Growing Up' and 'For You' stand equally strong beside them in the breathless image-tumbling stakes, and perhaps understandably, the two restrained ballads 'Mary Queen Of Arkansas' and 'Angel' have weathered the test of time best.

Album Two, *The Wild, The Innocent & The E Street Shuffle* came within the year at the end of 1973, and it was a staggering improvement. Springsteen was a good deal more in control of his craft now, the production a vast improvement, and the songs, while often suggesting the man had seen *West Side Story* three too many times, were exceptional.

There was a wider sweep of writing styles on *The Wild, The Innocent* than on subsequent albums, and the bit in the middle of 'Sandy' where Springsteen quietens everything right down and talks about the waitress is one of the genuinely magic moments in the man's recorded career so far.

Darkness On The Edge Of Town may well be Springsteen's 'best' album by conventional

'best' standards, but *E Street* remains my favourite.

Born To Run took much longer to get out, and was finally served up with like-it-or-else media assistance — cover stories in *Time* and *Newsweek* and Jon Landau's albatross quote on the future of rock'n'roll. To the album's credit, it was good enough to survive that advance guard, but it still could have been a lot better. The fattened Spector-like backdrops glued much of the material to an elephantine standstill. It's a record Springsteen would probably like to record again, but, even at gunpoint, wouldn't.

For all the delivery problems, *Born To Run* still dominated a million turntables for many months — mine being dominated in particular by the first three tracks on Side Two and the opening 45 seconds of 'Thunder Road' on Side One.

For 50 cents less than \$20, you can trace the early career of the man now up there for the critics' grabs (and still doing it far too well for them to pull him down), from the seminal to the almost-mature.

Yes, he was still writing about cars on album one. Yes, these records are essential.
Roy Colbert

The Digits
Dog Wrestled to Ground
By Underarm Combat Flea
Sausage Records

The idea behind the Do It Yourself syndrome is admirable — especially if it's worth doing. The question is, why have the Digits bothered?

They are a makeshift, loosely-organised, occasional six piece combo from Wellington and for starters they've released a very limited edition album on Sausage Records.

The Digits have separated their schemes into two parts. The first part, being Side One, is devoted to ten poorly-conceived and recorded songs creaking under a variety of influences ranging from mid-west American ('Friend Who Sits Beside You') to Cure atmospherics ('A Throw Away') and muted punk ('Perfect Evolution'). Being derivative doesn't matter, but the Digits seem incapable of using their sources.

The second half of the album, Side Two, is a series of closely-packed jam sessions where repetition and aimlessness take control. The whole side has a time-wasting approach with vaguely amusing throwaway titles.

If enthusiasm and amateurism were all that was needed to make worthwhile rock'n'roll, then the Digits would be in with a shout. As it is, they've made an album from the best of intentions but have forgotten that other people have to listen to it.
George Kay

The Tubes
The Completion
Backwards Principle
Capitol

I first heard the Tubes in a room about as big as Meatloaf's dressing-gown, papered wall-to-wall by giant JBLs, powered in turn by enough watts to drive three smelters. Yes, I told my

wild-eyed and bulging-neck-veined host, I am impressed, it is indeed a big sound.

Since then, I've craved similar assistance to appreciate the expansive grandeur of this San Franciscan band — and I've noticed, too, how their most fervent followers are rarely people with \$95 stereos that pick up taxi talk every time the fridge is turned on.

Props. An integral part of the Tubes' master-plan, whether it be an overwhelming stage act or, merely, an absorbing album sleeve. The latest album includes one of the latter. The opener 'Talk To Ya Later' roars off with a stampeding beat, fine hook, and a guitar sound straight off Rundgren.

Thereafter, we strip away the covering and find the Tubes borrowing a few tricks from the REO Speedwagon school ('Don't Wanna Wait Anymore', 'America' and 'A Matter Of Pride').

But the sense of humour is still there. They sure write a neat company prospectus.
Roy Colbert

Phoebe Snow
Rock Away
Mirage

The Best of Phoebe Snow
CBS

A few years ago, American writer Stephen Holden seemed to have Phoebe Snow's career neatly summed up. "Though the stylistic collisions in her singing sometimes result in confused mannerism, Snow is a true original. Unfortunately since the debut LP, the confusions have dominated."

Mind you, that first album certainly was a stunner. Not only did this young white girl sing with a mature black voice, she penned strong songs with shrewd lyrics. From semi-jazz to introspective folk, her writing could range as widely as her vocals.

Yet, except very fitfully, Snow's work never reached such a standard again. As if in acknowledgement, she increasingly turned to interpreting the work of other writers, though still with only limited success.

In attempting a representative survey, this *Best of* selection has drawn from all Snow's recordings through to '78. Consequently, only two tracks from the first LP are included — which simply isn't enough. Furthermore, the clashes which arise from juxtaposing tracks from her various recording approaches render this album a very mixed bag. It doesn't really sound like a 'best of' at all. That title probably still belongs to her 1973 debut.

Rock Away, her new set for a new label, does have the virtues of coherence and consistency. Recorded with the powerful band Billy Joel recently brought to New Zealand, this is the straight-forward, punchy album its title suggests.

Snow is still primarily working as an interpreter and has chosen her covers well. If occasionally her voice may veer towards stridency in belting out the Allen Toussaint or Don Covay classics, the strengths of the song and the band carry everything through. Purists of course will always quibble over reworkings — Rod Stewart's 'Gasoline Alley' seems the most

likely candidate here — but by and large, Snow's versions are a success.

Perhaps the best performances are the slower ones, particularly her own wistful title track, and Dylan's lovely 'I Believe In You'.

One hopes, as this album tentatively suggests, that with her change of label, Phoebe Snow's talent may become fully re-established.
Peter Thomson

Change
Miracles
Sister Sledge
All American Girls
Atlantic

Change are yet another of the curious concepts thrown up by disco. No, it's not a gay cop this time, but a bunch of funky Italians. All the rhythm tracks on *Miracles*, their second album and their first, *Glow of Love*, were recorded in Bologna, and vocals overdubbed by session singers in New York. Unlikely, maybe, but their debut was an overblown delight.

The singers were sacrificed to the giant-sized production, but the liveliness of the project erased all doubts about the lack of soul.

The second album, *Miracles*, marks a clear change of pace. Here, they steer closer to the Chic style of cool restraint. The drums no longer crack like whips, but shuffle politely. It's smaller scale and less dramatic, but the material is seamless enough to support the chamber approach.

The new album by Sister Sledge — *All American Girls* — finds them out from under the control of Chic masterminds Edwards and Rogers, and produced by one-time Mahavishnu drummer, Michael Walden. He's clearly unsure what to do with them.

He convincingly recaptures the Chic sound on the title cut and manages one urgent piece of Euro-disco on 'He's Just A Runaway'. But the rest of the album is an uninspired blur of contemporary black music stylings. Disco at its dreariest.
Alastair Dougal

Santana
Zebop
CBS

The Devadip's devotees tend to be a breed apart. They're invariably guitar-solo freaks, and often regard other rock with distaste. Such an attitude is the source both of Santana's extraordinary longevity and of his increased rigidity. Carlos' mid-70s freedom for successful experimentation seems over. His recent sortie with some contemporary jazzmen encountered significant buyer resistance (not to mention critical flak).

Zebop sees him return to orthodox formation and formula: the slow-tempo sustained guitar lines; up tempo pyrotechnics; el latino percussion and vocal chants; plus two or three pop-rock updates with an eye on the singles charts. It's all here, as proficient and safe as ever.

Unless you nurse a particular desire to hear a Cat Stevens or J.J. Cale number, sung by a Steve Winwood sound-alike over a latinized rhythm section, you can safely leave this for the fan club.
Peter Thomson



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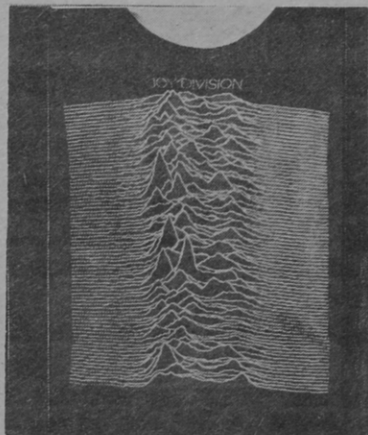
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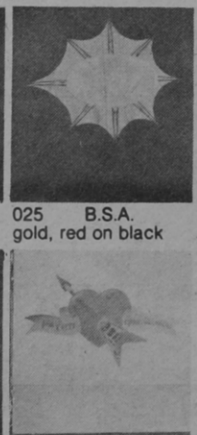
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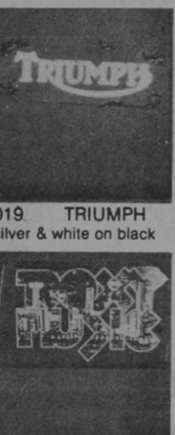
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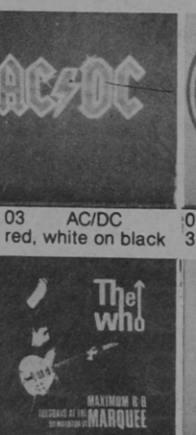
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