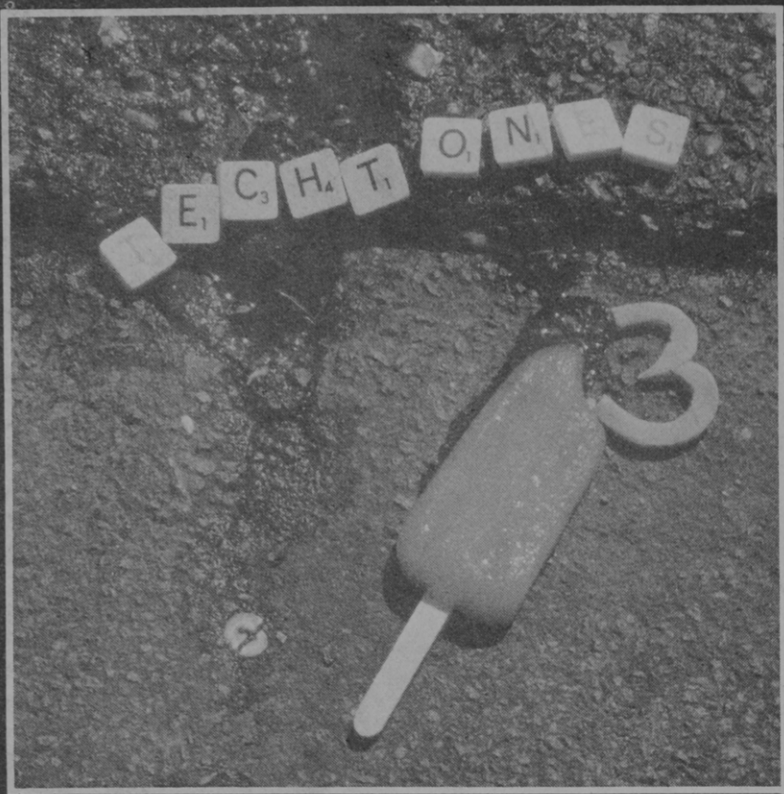


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RECORDS

Tom Verlaine
Dreamtime
Warner Bros

Visually, Verlaine is the archetypal artist-in-angst — sanguine features, tall and frail with an acute intelligence and intensity. His music clearly reflects this persona.

Two Television and now two solo albums within a five year span ain't exactly prolific, but it's still a hearty effort if you consider the delays caused by band dissensions following *Adventure*, Verlaine's own fussiness and his change of record companies. He's put nary a foot wrong in the past (I'll even defend *Adventure*) and so it's no surprise that *Dreamtime* continues to develop his meticulous schemes.

The title may suggest introspection and reflection, but the music is Verlaine's most boldly belligerent to date. The rush of 'There's A Reason' opens the album and sets an intricate and tightly knitted aggression that also pays off on 'Mr Blur' and 'A Future In Noise'.

Singling out is tough, especially from an album this consistent, but 'Penetration' oozes class, a delicate melody making way for a riff-tough chorus. Then 'Fragile', ('I've got to face what's never there') a contradiction, underpinned by precise chording, and 'Mary Marie', a love song of contrasts, yearning and demanding, the only way to end an album.

Verlaine, like not-so-distant-colleague David Byrne, is totally aware of his art and its relation to his audience. This produces the perfect balance between personal revelation and musical exhilaration. *Dreamtime* is first off an album of songs, then guitar prowess and refined pain. The sum total is as close to individual brilliance as anyone has the right to expect in 1981.

George Kay

Black Uhuru
Red
Island

One of the quotes of the year, which several people have recited to me lately, belongs to top JA drummer and producer Sly Dunbar. Asked what Bob Marley's death meant, he responded: 'Means no more records from Bob, mon.'

Not a callous, throwaway line, but an honest statement, affirming that Marley's passing was not 'the day the music died'. His spirit, and the music, live on. Sly can say that with true conviction, being a major contributor to *Red*, my album of the year by a long chalk.

This is the LP every fan of Uhuru has been hoping for, a masterwork that takes the group, and reggae, a giant step ahead. Sly and compatriot Robbie Shakespeare's sound comes to full fruition on *Red*, pulsating and hypnotic, mysterious and magical.

Not that Sly and Robbie can take all the credit. Michael Rose, Duckie Simpson and Puma Jones have matured as a vocal trio, the latter two playing a much stronger role than before. Their chorus lines stamp every song with a cogent identity, while Rose's dark, passionate voice smacks of the self-assurance of a wonderfully accomplished singer. Just listen to 'Sponji Reggae', where he asserts his ideals in the face of condemnation, and you'll see what I mean.

Red is a fighting album, in that sense, but abhors the politics of warfare. On 'Youth Of Eglington',



Tom Verlaine



New Age Steppers

Rose appeals to the youths to lay down their guns and talk sense instead. The message is carried on with 'Carbine', which talks of Rose's self-imposed exile in New York, for fear of being shot dead back home.

I'll run out of space before I finish praising this record. There's more, much more. 'Utterance' and 'Puff She Puff' are hard, militant shots of Rastafari, filled with the joy of following, and the danger of challenging. 'Rockstone' is a work song, people dulling the pain and boredom of repetitive physical labour with liberal doses of herb.

Red is a monster. Bob did not die in vain, as long as there are groups like Black Uhuru to carry on.

Duncan Campbell

The Cramps
Psychedelic Jungle
IRS

Album two for the Cramps, and a different producer, different studio, and different lead guitarist. You'll be thinking they've lost the sound, but you'll be wrong — *Psychedelic Jungle* is soddan with all the raw reverberated aural dirt that made *Songs The Lord Taught Us* the guitar trash tour de force it undoubtedly was. Maybe a smidgin of craziness and sonic distortion has been lost, but there are improvements as well — and absolutely nothing you loved them for on the first album is missing.

At this point then, the Cramps are definitely a two-off, not the one-off everyone pegged them for after the debut. But what could hold them back from being a, gulp, three-off, are the very limitations of rockabilly itself. No matter that the Cramps are attending to the wildest extremities of that form, there is still a limit on how much of this stuff the public will eat. The answer seems to be some very positive sidesteps, and there are two of these here where the next album may well need four or five. 'Fever' was the coat-hook in the padded cell on the first album, and 'The Green Door' is the one

this time. A superb Lux Interior vocal, and a surprisingly tasteful arrangement.

But the killer is the opening track 'Green Fuzz'. An utterly inspired performance from all four Cramps on a magnificent song. The original, incidentally, was annotated thus on the 60s punk compilation *Pebbles Vol. 2* — 'Green Fuzz' is gotta be the rottenest recording I ever heard, but with more energy than anything the wimpy Sex Pistols ever dreamed of puking up. Ignore the comparison — but believe the evaluation.

Of the rest, check out the guitar in the middle of 'Caveman Rock'. Remember how the 13th Floor Elevators once had a motorcyclist thunder right through the studio in the middle of a song? This is the sound that band were after.

Roy Colbert

New Age Steppers
Action Battlefield
Statik

One of my favourite albums of 1980 was Jah Wobble's gloriously trashy and irreverent *Betrayal*. It took reggae rhythms and dub effects, fifties' pop and almost anything you care to name and mixed them together to produce some sort of eighties' post-punk bubblegum. This album does similar sorts of things with similar success.

The New Age Steppers could not, even loosely, be described as a band. They are the creation of producer Adrian Sherwood using people like Slit Ari-Up, two members of UK reggae outfit Creation Rebel, one Aswad and a lady called Neneh who also happens to be saxophonist Don Cherry's daughter.

They take reggae standards and a few originals and turn them inside out. This music has no pretensions to social or political relevance. It is just totally mesmerising.

Those amongst us who take their modern music oh-so-very seriously may not be amused, but I find it hard to imagine how anyone but the most passionless could fail to fall victim to the joyous elastic sounds of 'My Love' and 'Guiding Star'.

Simon Grigg

Tom Waits
Bounced Checks
Asylum

A compilation album described by Waits as "a collection of songs put together from six albums that never went anywhere — now they're back." Waits' many faces are all here — biting R'n'B, beat-style free verse, wry humour and in 'Tom Traubert's Blues', bleeding alienation. Only his debut, *Closing Time* is not represented.

Two alternative studio versions are included. 'Jersey Girl' is an exquisite love song which doesn't quite match the original *Heart Attack and Vine* version with its string arrangement. A slowed-down 'Whistling Past the Graveyard' improves on the hectic rendition on *Blue Valentine*.

The live 'Piano Has Been Drinking' shows Waits is no sluggard on the humorous rap. More like a routine than a song, it has improved with age. The unreleased out-take, 'Mr Henry' tells a familiar tale of booze and hypocrisy.

Waits sings and narrates his slices of life in a voice rooted in the bowels of the earth, tempered by gentle piano and bluesy sax. This is essential listening for the uninitiated, with enough carrots to tempt the believers who have the previous seven albums.

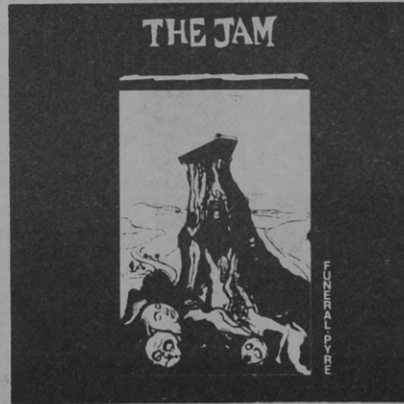
Dave Perkins



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