

FUNKY!

Chaka Khan and Friends
Echoes Of An Era (Electra)
Rufus with Chaka Khan
Camouflage (MCA)

In amongst the sophisto-funk of her last solo album, Chaka Khan included an electrified rendition of Dizzy Gillespie's classic 'A Night In Tunisia'. Now on *Echoes* she goes the whole way back for a complete session of bebop. Even the recording was done like the old Blue Note jam sessions — two days in and out. The songs are all standards and the musicians are Freddie Hubbard, Joe Henderson, Chick Corea, Stanley Clarke and Lenny White. Playing all acoustic (the best Clarke has sounded in years) this band's performances make terrific listening on their own.

Khan's vocals are a somewhat more mixed blessing. While it is a pleasant surprise how well she copes in such company, she is certainly no Sarah Vaughan or Ella Fitzgerald. Her tone, pitch, control and inventiveness all tend to suffer in comparison to previous great interpretations these songs have received in the idiom.

But then, in all fairness, Khan's music has previously lain within the confines of rock. And time was when Rufus was one of the punchiest bands on record with Khan its soulful knockout. (Check 1974's *Rufusized*). In recent years, however, they've become just another disco-funk outfit.

Unfortunately *Camouflage* maintains the pattern. There's nothing intrinsically bad about the album. On the contrary: the songs are varied, never overly repetitive, the arrangements intelligent, the musicianship impeccable (big fat bass lines, sharp brass work, etc) and Khan's vocals restrained enough to avoid her occasional shrillness. It's just that after half a dozen playings I can't recall one damn track.

In other words *Camouflage* is another super-competent, beautifully produced, American musical lathe-operation. The exact opposite of *Echoes Of An Era* in fact. Yet *Echoes*, whatever its shortcomings, is the album I'll keep out of the two.
Peter Thomson

Chic
Take It Off (Atlantic)
Spinners
Can't Shake This Feelin' (Atlantic)
Whispers
Love Is Where You Find It (Solar)
This Kind Of Lovin' (Solar)
Kool & the Gang
Something Special (De-Lite)
Shalamar
Friends (Solar)
Lakeside
Your Wish Is My Command (Solar)
Sister Sledge
The Sisters (Cotillion)

New York has been prime turf for black vocal groups since doo wop days when Drifters first recorded for Atlantic. On the same label, the Spinners keep that tradition lively and Chic shuffle



'Echoes Of An Era' artists: Chick Corea and Chaka Khan, seated. Freddie Hubbard, Stanley Clarke, Joe Henderson, Lenny White, standing.

about as only Chic do. In the same state, Kool and the Gang hang out cool like and Sister Sledge look sultry.

Meanwhile in Los Angeles, Dick Griffey — Mr Fast Food of Funk, founder of the Solar label — mixes modern funk, commercial soul and an unknown sticky substance then cooks it: micro-wave soul, man.

Since 'Le Freak' in 1977, Chic have been black music's prime movers, producing themselves. Sister Sledge and Diana Ross, creating commercial disco at its best. In 1980 they moved on with the album, *Real People*. Strident and stark in sound, 'Rebels We Are', '26' and the title track are delightfully tongue in cheek.

In 1981 after doodling with Debbie Harry on *Kookoo*, Chic recorded their new release *Take It Off*, an album with several gems: check 'Flashback' (their best cut since 'Good Times') and the instrumental 'Baby Doll' (beaut sax and organ). *Take It Off* is your best Chic buy after purchasing their essential hits album, *Les Plus Grands Succes De Chic*. (Cos as every pommie hairdresser knows — keeping up with the times means keeping up with Chic.)

The lyrical antithesis to Chic, must be the truly inane get-downs of Kool and the Gang. But Chic have no recent hit to compare with Kool's sublime 'Celebrate'. The new Kool platter has two fine singles, 'Steppin' Out' and 'Take My Heart'. But instant coffee is more stimulating than:

Let's have a good time
Let's have a real good time
Oh what a good time
Titled 'Good Time Tonight', that track's too cool for me mate, lovely melody though. Less get-down and let's get-on-with-it. Next stop: LA.

From the inane to the ridiculous, fly to Los Angeles, where the Whispers aided by Leone F. Sylvers on the "dancin'" of their *Love Is* album, consummately equate honesty with lack of clothes on 'In The Raw'.

Opening their gatefold cover reveals band members engrossed in their hobbies — a book, two race horses, a fast boat and seven

women, respectively. But in Walter's spare time he "finds relaxation in running the business of Whispers Music Inc." Why has he released two Whispers albums at once?

This Kind Of Love is produced by the band, it's smooth with an ace title track. *Love Is Where You Find It* is more contemporary funk. Dancers will dig Side One. Good stuff, but when will Solar do a Whispers Best Of?

Also on Solar are the more youthful. Lakeside. Their 'Fantastic Voyage' boogie returns, barely disguised, as 'Your Wish Is



Shalamar

My Command'. Rather good actually, but the rest of the album is indifferent and 'I Want To Hold Your Hand' is awful.

Best Solar release is Shalamar's *Friends*. (Remember their big hit, 'The Second Time Around'?) Best tracks are 'Don't Try To Change Me' (Jody's vocal is superb and Solar producer Leon F. Sylvers plays a mean bass) 'Friends', 'I Can Make You Feel Good' and 'There It Is'. As vocalists, Shalamar are maturing, they feature in the songwriting credits and they work effectively with their producer.

While Shalamar move to higher ground in funky town, Sister Sledge falter. The girls produce and largely write their new album, *The Sisters*. It's Broadway meets disco, without the bottom end of last year's *All American Girls*.

Smokey Robinson's 'My Guy' is understandably the single — it's an oasis on Side One. *The Sisters* has its moments (rap on 'Super Bad Sisters'), but their D.I.Y. proves too bold a move. Next time maybe?

We're in New York, where Spinners recorded *Can't Shake This Feeling*, their best album since John Edwards replaced Phil Wynne. Edwards, a fine vocalist, is in top form on the smooth soul music written by producers Mtume & Lucas and the Delfonic's classic 'Didn't I Blow Your Mind'. The title track and 'Love Connection' are more modern funk. Big budget soul ballads, step this way.

But why is a five man vocal group augmented by female vocalists, and do I still want to be a Sister Sledge roadie?
Murray Cammick

Smokey Robinson
Yes It's You Lady (Motown)
Rick James
Street Songs (Motown)
Teena Marie

It Must Be Magic (Motown)
Smokey Robinson and Rick James encompass two decades of Motown, from its first great talent to its latest great success.

There were a lot of us under Smokey's spell back in the 60s, people who somehow found themselves with a strong emotional commitment to his words and music, whether via Robinson's own group or the others in Motown's stable. And while that commitment may have lain dormant for much of the 70s it was fully revived with his 1980 single 'Cruisin'' and album *Warm Thoughts*. Consequently we bewitched-ones regard last year's *Being With You* somewhat dewy-eyed. But at least on *Being With You* his own songs completely outshone the others. This time it's difficult to pick out his originals. With *Yes It's You Lady* we're going to have to realise that Smokey seems content with a career sweetening into MOR.

A world apart from the self-professed punk-funk of Rick James, Motown's first superstar of the 80s. *Street Songs*, his fifth — and best — album was the label's top seller last year, but in NZ James' garish persona tended to put off all but the very brave. James' songs are about what interests him — which means himself, lots of sex, smoking dope and police harassment. But his music has immense verve, a good sprinkling of hooks and a refreshing touch of humour. He's also got a super-charged band and, in Teena Marie, an excellent backing and co-vocalist.

So it is logical that James should feature on Marie's album. (She lauds him in the title song). At nineteen, Marie already sounds in possession of a prodigious talent. Although white, she has the vocal strength and range of a black. She wrote all the tracks, arranged much of them and plays keyboards throughout. Even some of her lyrics are pretty smart — witness 'Revolution', a reflection on Lennon's murder.

The album's weaknesses are a result of her youth. Often her



Newmatics & friends, Mainstreet.

writing, arranging and singing lack identity. It's as if she isn't content with funk but hankers to try out as the new Minnie Riperton or, worse, Barbra Streisand. Give her another couple of albums to absorb her influences, find her own voice and maybe Motown will have another superstar.
Peter Thomson

Sky
Skyline (Salsoul)
Rafael Cameron
Cameron's In Love (Salsoul)

Sky and Rafael Cameron are both produced by Brass Construction member Randy Muller. What characterises Muller's work on these two albums is a willingness to try anything: no groove is too repetitive, no rip-off too blatant. This eclecticism almost sinks Cameron's album with so much diversity there's no style and Cameron's clear, enthusiastic voice can't stamp a personality on Muller's poppy songs.

Sky fare a little better. This is their fourth album and on 'Let's Celebrate' they hit the perfect groove. There are other highspots here but much of the rest is enjoyable but unexceptional — funk or attractive but forgettable ballads. And of course Muller's not too proud to slip in a deft Chic imitation at the end.

Alastair Dougal

Bobby Bland
Try Me, I'm Real (MCA)

Bland's a smooth blues singer who has always derived much of his vocal style from cool pop singers like Nat King Cole. But as the years go on, Bland has been moving his musical approach ever closer to the Cole style as well. In fact *Try Me, I'm Real* is MOR-blues. It's an approach not without its possibilities. Bland sings with characteristic warmth and control but few of the arrangements are interesting enough to provide a proper setting for his voice.
AD

Carl Carlton
20th Century Fox

Carl Carlton's a Detroit singer by origin, who achieved some success in the sixties in the wake of the rise of Little Stevie Wonder. Today Wonder's style is still present in Carlton's singing but, without anyone to write material of the calibre of Wonder's for him, Carlton can't provide much beyond a decent groove. The result is that apart from the novelty 'She's A Bad Mama Jama', there's little of interest on offer here.
AD

Evelyn King
I'm In Love (RCA)

It's five years now since 17 year old Evelyn King shot to prominence with her disco hit 'Shame'. *I'm In Love* finds her skills still intact: she's singing more strongly than ever and happily one of the two sets of producers/songwriters used here provide her with effective backdrop. Their synthesiser-intense robotic dance tracks make for propulsive backing. Unhappily the alternate producer used, contributes only sappy ballads and derivative disco. There's a decent EP lurking here.
AD

APOLOGIES
In the March issue, *Rip It Up* incorrectly stated that the D.D. Smash album *Cool Bananas* was recorded at Mandrill Studios. In fact the entire album was recorded and mixed at HARLEQUIN STUDIOS.

LIVE

Newmatics, Prime Movers
Mainstreet, April 27

Prime Movers played prior to the headliners. Nick is a very able and energetic singer/guitarist but is a mite indulgent. Their good songs were often lost, due to their fast paced delivery and lengthy sets. Tighten up.

The Newmatics hit stage at 1am, thirteen players in all. For those who fancy a twin guitar band, Mark Blam Bell was there. Also present were: original sax man Simon Clark, Don Blam, Yoh Meeme, Jacquie Freud, John Bongo and others.

First up were 'Five Miseries' and 'Judas'. Fortunately the mix favoured the basic band, Syd's 'Judas' rhythm clearly audible, his sparkling reggae solo being as usual, the song's highlight. Same with 'Broadcast O.R.', though Mark Clare overcame an apparent indifference to deliver a fine vocal.

Song six was Sam and Dave's 'Soul Man', a tasty arrangement with a very full chorus. Looking back: 'East of the UK', and 'Playing the Champion'. 'Riot Squad' follows with its laborious, birth of a bull horn intro — a great song but, horns, if it has to be white, try trading your Dexys for an early Average White Band album.

Next up: 'Crosswires' (Clare excelled), 'Five Minutes To Zero' (a neat single), 'Doobie Do Boy', 'Square One' (new single), '1000 Dances' (Pickett'd love it), 'Health' (a pro-weedy diatribe effectively depicting health workshops as militaristic and anti-tobacco) and finally their finest number, 'Silent Type'.

Whatever they started off looking like, whether sax looks like *ska* or not, despite the influences encountered, the Newmatics stumbled on their own sound and a dozen great songs.

On their final night 17 songs were their own. Record the best 12 well, mix and master them nicely and you'd get a better album than any debut I've heard in the last 12 months.

Murray Cammick

RECORD AUCTION

ORIGINAL SINGLES, EPs & LPs
from the 50s & 60s
and other COLLECTIBLES
from the 70s & 80s
send I.R.C. for list to:

THE RECORD PLANT
SHOP G39 IMPERIAL ARCADE
SYDNEY N.S.W. 2000

BLIND DATE

are available to play
at your College or University
lunchtime or night time
if interested, phone Mike 764-485
or write c/- 6 Lawrence St,
Herne Bay, Auckland.

Radio 1404

ON AIR UNTIL MAY 9

WEEKDAYS 4PM — 1AM
WEEKENDS 9AM — 1AM

SMOKE MILITIA

APRIL
15, 16, 17
REVERB ROOM