

RECORDS

Nick Lowe Nick the Knife F Beat

After a lengthy absence Nick Lowe has returned with, uh, another Nick Lowe album.

He's long since left his greasy, legendary Brinsley Schwarz days behind, what with being photographed talking to Andy Williams and marrying Carlene Carter. As punk emerged he showed that he still had a few picture cards up his sleeve, namely 'So It Goes', 'Heart of the City' and 'I Knew the Bride' even though his solo albums, *Jesus of Cool* and *Labour of Lust*, didn't exactly change the course of rock 'n'roll.

Anyway Lowe is the dab hand at stealing other peoples' ideas and incorporating them into his own unpretentious schemes. *Nick the Knife* continues this habit in its predictable and stolid balance of Lowe ballads and rote rock'n'roll. 'Stick It Where The Sun Don't Shine' is Nick trying to be witty and at the same time steals a Creedence Clearwater riff. 'My Heart Hurts' is 'Sweet Jane' under Lowe surgery and reggae and calypso make ineffectual appearances in the form of 'Heart' and 'One's Too Many'. Using styles to write songs.

Nick the Knife is, at best, Nick the Average. Lowe is trying to survive on past cheek and present craftsmanship, and that ain't enough.
George Kay

The Legendary Taj Mahal CBS

Like his onetime guitar player Ry Cooder, Taj Mahal is a living repository of the musical heritage

of the Americas. This latest compilation album reflects the breadth of his interests — from the buck dancing swing of Mississippi John Hurt's 'Candy Man' through Elmore James' 'Dust My Broom' and the Stax soul of 'You Don't Miss Your Water' to a Caribbean update of Chuck Berry's 'Brown Eyed Handsome Man', the latter reflecting Mahal's growing fascination with his own West Indian heritage.

All the music (15 songs) derives from Mahal's time with CBS — he went to Warner Bros a few years ago — probably his most creative time. Oddly, the album ignores his debut album (where Ryland P. Cooder played both guitar and mandolin), but perhaps the high-octane raunch of that record would have jarred with the more insinuating sounds of this collection.

CBS must be congratulated on the choice of material, which does great credit to Taj Mahal. The only quibble is the lack of information on recording dates and sidemen. While such information does veer towards the academic, one feels the tone of the 'legendary artists' series would have justified its inclusion.
Ken Williams

The Secret Policeman's Other Ball The Comedy/The Music Island

Two live recordings taken from the Amnesty International fund-raiser held in London last year.

The comedy album features the current who's who of British humour so the uneven standard of performance is disappointing. Some skits admittedly suffer from lack of visuals yet many are simply flabby reruns of stuff we've heard before (eg 'Python', 'Not the

News', Jasper Carrott's gags from local insurance salesmen.) Worse still, some of the funnies simply aren't: John Wells, Neil Innes and Chris Langham barely raise a smile. Billy Connolly feebly imitates farting.

Still, I'll probably keep it for Cleese's amazing introduction, Rowan Atkinson's beautifully delivered xenophobia and probably the Alan Bennett and Alexei Sayle bits.

The music album is also a mixed bag but with more pleasant surprises. Sting's solo spot, if not as stunning as Pete Townshend's at the previous *Ball*, presents interesting versions of his first two Police singles. (And he later leads a massed band through a reggae-matic rendition of Dylan's 'I Shall Be Released'.) Phil Collins also sounds strong solo but Bob Geldof suffers without his Rats. Donovan remains timewarped.

The real standouts come from Jeff Beck and Eric Clapton. Old farts they may be but certainly not boring when pushed along by a very fine pickup band. Beck delivers a beautiful Stevie Wonder instrumental then Clapton leads on two blues warhorses that haven't kicked so strongly in years.

So there you are, two albums for Amnesty; neither essential but with the music giving better returns. Then again, you could always send a donation.
Peter Thomson

Durutti Column The Return of the Durutti Column Factory

Factory has made its name from bands who've communicated bleakness and confrontation, but on their books ever since their out-set has been the Durutti Column, a band of one, guitarist Vini Reilly.

The Return of the Durutti Column, despite its title, is the first

DC album, released originally in Britain in October 1979, and in some ways it can be regarded as an escape route from the views of Joy Division, A Certain Ratio and New Order.

Assisted only occasionally by bass and drums, Reilly's forte is simplicity; this is no Steve Howe-meets-John McLaughlin-at-Fred Frith's-place outing. The music is a soothing, tuneful, purely instrumental anaesthetic; discordancy seldom gets a look in.

The tracks on Side One, 'Sketch For Summer', 'Requiem For A Father' and 'Katharine' tend to be too amorphous, waterfalls of notes, pleasant and refreshing but lacking direction. 'Conduct', which closes the first side, 'Beginning', 'Sketch For Winter' and 'In D' are more successful. The cadences remain reflective and gentle but the melodic structures are stronger and more defined giving the songs a firmer purpose.

Don't dismiss DC as mere wallpaper music. It may be easy listening but it's never bland and it's the ideal antidote for these troubled times.
George Kay

BRIEFS

Tenpole Tudor Let The Four Winds Blow (Stiff)

Eddie Tudor's Mum asked me to say something nice about her little boy's second LP, so I said that it makes most comedy records look like World War II. "But it's not a comedy album," she said. "Oh, no?" says I. "Well what about the 'Rup De Doh, Diddle EE Day's on the title track? And the Punky-n'Western feel on the single 'Throw-in' My Baby Out With The Bathwater?' Honest, this album is a must for your next Medieval Fancy Dress, or similar

exotic gathering, but play it really loud. And Eddie's Mum? Well, she conceded the point ...
D.McL Nils Lofgren

The Best (A&M)

The acceptable face of mid-70s American rock. This is a collection of the best of Lofgren's material from 1973-79. It wisely devotes itself largely to the earlier part of this period, when Lofgren was every critic's fave rave and his music was known as punk rock! This is a good collection, and the quality contained herein perhaps explains why Lofgren has never made it in the States.
SG

Black Uhuru

Tear It Up — Live (Island)

Recorded during last year's European tour, which also yielded a mighty video clip I recall seeing on *RWP*. The band is much the same as on the last two studio LPs, the material all pre-*Red*. Worth having just for 'Abortion' and 'Guess Who's Coming To Dinner', though it sounds like it was mixed from inside a drain pipe.
DC

Blam Blam Blam

Mini LP (Propeller)

This may look the same as your *Maid To Order* EP, but it's actually the Blams' first release in Australia. The difference is that this is cut and pressed in Aussie, and it includes both 'No Depression' and 'Got To Be Guilty'. You don't need me to tell you how good it is.
MP

Rowan Atkinson

Live In Belfast (Arista)

It is stating the obvious to point out that Rowan Atkinson is an ex-

ceptionally visual comedian. His bug eyes, bee-stung lips, rubber face and elongated, spastic limbs are an integral part of his humour. Therefore this album should be a video cassette. I saw Atkinson perform essentially this same show in Edinburgh and howled with laughter till I was begging for mercy. It does not transfer well to vinyl.
PT

Sugar Minott

Good Thing Going (RCA)

Lincoln 'Sugar' Minott was one of Jamaica's bright young boys, formerly billed as 'The Ghetto Singer', a youth with a strong message and a sweet voice. His *Black Roots* LP, from the days he was signed to Island, showed so much promise. Pity. *Good Thing Going* is unsubstantial lovers' rock with a strong disco leaning, one single and a lot of candy floss.
DC

Johnny Guitar Watson

The Very Best Of... (DJM)

Johnny Guitar Watson has long been an exponent of wry funk. His 'Gangster of Love' (remade here) is one of the funniest of rock standards. And he plays a very mean guitar. Frank Zappa a disciple of the Watson style, calls it the 'icepick in the forehead' sound. But while Watson has been rocking for more than 25 years it is only with his disco-y DJM albums that he has hit paydirt. He has since changed labels, but his collection accurately sums up the recent work of a sadly underrated artist. For early material, consult the excellent *The Gangster Is Back* album on Red Lightnin'.
KW

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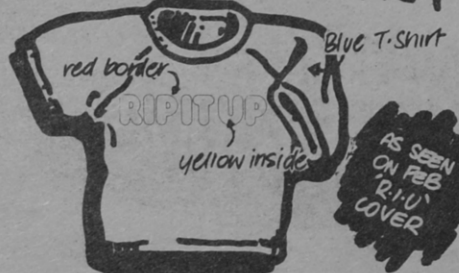
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