

RECORDS

The Blasters

Slash/Warner Bros

The Blasters, a bunch of bar rockers out of the working class zones of Los Angeles, make some of the best noise to arrive on the scene since the debut of Creedence Clearwater Revival. While they don't sound much like John Fogerty's not-forgotten band, they have a lot of the same good-time spirit. And like CCR and, say, the Band, the Blasters have a good feel for 'American music' — one of the songs on the album is titled thusly. Its best verse runs like this:

*It's a howl from the dessert
The screams from the slums
The Mississippi rolling
To the beat of the drums.*

Most of the album is written by lead guitarist Dave Alvin who knows how to tailor-make a song for his lead singer brother, Phil. The sound of the two guitar-bass-drums-piano line-up is fleshed out with the sax of Steve Berlin and the legendary Lee Allen, who honked wonderfully for Fats Domino, Little Richard and Dr John. The inclusion of Allen is not a trendy nod to the roots — he is an old friend of the band who offered encouragement in the early days. Allen does a nice, slippery sax walk on 'I'm Shakin'', a Little Willie John track.

The Blasters touch quite a few bases — from the Cajun feel of the opener, 'Marie Marie' (a European hit for Shakin' Stevens) to the full-tilt rush of Sunnyland Slim's classic Chicago blues, 'Highway 61', to the album's stand-out track, 'Border Radio', a rocking lament with undertones of Chuck Berry's 'Brown Eyed Handsome Man'. On the strength of 'Border Radio' alone, the Blasters deserve a place in the rock Hall of Fame. Good stuff.

Ken Williams

Various Artists More Hits and Myths XS

Whaddya know, a second instalment of *Hits and Myths* and one that takes us right up to the current state of NZ rock'n'roll.

As expected it's a mixture of competence and scant mediocrity with the occasional flash of inspiration. The Blam's 'No Depression' still ranks as our best item into topical irony and Graeme

Gash's overlooked 'Watching Television' cleans up the prizes for arrangement, production, intelligence and sheer presence. D.D. Smash impress with their subtle, atmospheric 'Arabia By Foot' and Split Enz re-live past greatness with 'No Exit', a previously unreleased nugget.

Changing down and we strike Toy Love's 'Don't Ask Me', good song but anaemic sound, the Mee-mees' 'Till I Die', Penknife Glides' 'Pleasure Through Tears', Spaces' 'Just Like Clockwork', Danse Macabre's 'Between the Lines', Hip Singles' 'Old Woman', the New-matics' 'Riot Squad', Rank and File's 'Brand New World' and Pop Mechanix' 'Too Cool For Words' — all honest, workmanlike but ultimately colourless attempts at coming to terms with the on-rush of British influences.

Last, and very probably least, we have the Swingers' silly 'One Track Mind', a piece of reggae candyfloss from Geoff Chunn, 'Like Elvis' and the forgiveably vacuous (because it's pop) catchiness of the Crocodiles' 'Hello Girl'.

More myths than hits and damn few legends.

George Kay
Paul McCartney
Tug Of War
EMI

For many of us McCartney's last listenable album was *Band On The Run* and that was 1973. Since then he's inflicted so much irredeemable pap upon the radio waves that now the mere sound of his voice gets you lunging for the tuning knob. His current hit, the nauseous 'Ebony and Ivory', seems sufficient grounds alone to condemn the album.

Surprise, surprise — *Tug of War* is not half bad! Well, yes it is actually but it's also half good. The single is easily the most offensive track and there's a couple of other close runners-up, but the best tracks are impressive. Two ballads on Side One ('Here Today' is his Lennon tribute) manage to be pretty, sweet and heartfelt without being sickly. 'Take It Away' and 'Ballroom Dancing' are good, medium-tempo rockers lifted by George Martin's punchy brass arrangements.

But best of all is McCartney's other collaboration with Stevie Wonder. 'What's That You're Doing' is six minutes of pounding funk that's the most soulfully sweaty either of them has sounded in ages.



John Hiatt

I still can't handle the title track but the rest of Side One and a track or two on the second side have made me revise my opinion of Paul. I'm not expecting real originality, but at least he's swiping and recombining old ideas with flair. And these days that passes for originality.

Peter Thomson
Duran Duran
Rio
EMI

Well, here we are, the second album from Duran Duran, hot off the New Romantic production line.

What it really amounts to is a glossy repeat of their debut, complete with some nifty toons and lots of super-safe production, once again courtesy of Colin Thurston.

The trouble is that where their debut was content with lively, if somewhat shallow pop, on *Rio* they've felt the need to 'progress' a little. This means the cute irony of 'Girls On Film' makes way for such meaningless questions as 'Are You Lonely In Your Nightmare' or the silly 'New Religion'. A Dialogue Between The Ego and the Alter Ego (their sub-title, not mine).

Not surprisingly, the best moments on the LP come from the pure pop of the title track, the single 'My Own Way' and the powerful 'Hungry Like The Wolf'.

Their initial impetus seems to have disappeared, which is perhaps indicative of the movement itself. These guys will really have to pull one out of the bag to sus-

tain the initial interest. If they continue to play it this safe, their careers are going to be sweet, but short.

Barry Morris

Bill Wyman
A&M

'(Si Si) Je Suis Un Rock Star' was one of those surprise hits, a piece of good-humoured trivia from a good-humoured, well-known bass player. Should those people who made 'Je Suis' a hit and supported Wyman on the less memorable follow-up, 'Come Back Suzanne', bend an ear to his third solo album they will be pleasantly entertained, although certainly not overwhelmed.

The record is somewhat more successful than his two earlier, more rock-oriented albums, but Bill is still only a fair songwriter. At his best, as on 'Je Suis', he has a nicely unpretentious, dry delivery that more than compensates for his nearly non-existent singing ability. And when he rocks (albeit politely), he can put together a solid rhythm section — notably on 'Ride On Baby' (not the old Jagger-Richard number) where the Stray Cats' Brian Setzer goes lickety split.

But these two songs are the album highs. Too much of the other material is synthesiser-laden fragments which while well arranged and played (musicians include Dave Mattacks, Mel Collins, Chris Rea) remain musical doodles.

But then Bill Wyman clearly didn't expect to set the world on fire. He's too old a hand not to realise that when he has got his latest batch of songs out of his system and had a bit of fun doing it then it's back to the real job — laying down the bottom for the Rolling Stones.

Ken Williams

Robert Palmer
Maybe It's Live
Island

I have to own up to being a big Robert Palmer fan, ever since I first saw Vinegar Joe many moons ago, then working for Island Records through the *Sneaking Sally Through The Alley-Pressure Drop* era. I always thought the guy had heaps of class, and would one day make it real big. The former, he exudes, the latter still eludes him internationally, for reasons I'll never understand.

All that aside, on this album, his seventh, Palmer has come up with

a gem, albeit in an unusual packet, half live and half new studio cuts.

From the opening 'Sneaking Sally', he and the band soar majestically through a 'very best of' set, including 'What's It Take', 'Best Of Both Worlds', 'Every Kinda People' and 'Bad Case Of Loving You'.

Opening Side Two with 'Some Guys Have All The Luck', showcasing Palmer's amazing vocal contortions, the band slinks into a moody 'Style Kills', featuring Gary Numan's robotic keyboards. Then it's the trance-like 'Si Chatouillieux', which owes a lot to his incredible sense of funk rhythm and some amazing elephant guitar courtesy of Adrian Belew (Zappa, Bowie, Talking Heads, King Crimson).

'Maybe It's You' fires along at a frenetic pace, yet again highlighting Palmer's unique vocals and the superb tightness of the band, and we finish with another live cut, 'What Do You Care', leaving this humble reviewer disappointed that there ain't two more sides to listen to.

Greg Cobb

The Hall and Oates Collection
RCA

Hall and Oates' output runs to about a dozen albums. This is a RCA 'Best of' which stops short of the recent *Private Eyes* album. Despite a rather tatty sleeve, which makes no attempt to provide the information expected from a serious retrospective, the selection of tracks doesn't leave much room for argument. The big hits, 'Kiss on my List', 'Rich Girl', 'Sara Smile' and their masterpiece 'She's Gone' are all included.

Although their key point of reference has always been the soul style of hometown Philadelphia they've never been afraid to put it into the blender with whatever else seemed interesting. What we get is straight soul. 'Do What You Want', and 'I Don't Want To Lose You', fizzy soul-pop, 'Rich Girl', 'Sara Smile' and the Rundgrenesque 'Wait For Me', guitar rock 'Be Bo Drop', disco-metal 'Portable Radio' and even a rendition of the monumental ballad 'You've Lost That Loving Feeling'.

It takes a collection like this to demonstrate just how much quality stuff these guys have produced. Warmly recommended. Sixteen tracks of the very best of American radio music.

Don Mackay

Chas Jankel
Questionnaire
A&M

Jankel left Dury and the Blockheads in 1979, two years after he had helped in establishing them as the only successful purveyors of black Cockney street music in rock'n'roll.

Questionnaire is Jankel's second solo attempt at asserting his own identity, and from that point of view it's a mixed success. The trouble is much of the material has been written with Dury and his lyrical rhythms and personality all too often ('Johnny Funk' and the title track in particular) overpower Jankel's formative character and reticent vocals.

But that's the bad news, the good is real good. Jankel's R&B upbringing has made him a deft hand at fusing various styles of black music into a feel loaded with panache and authenticity. 'Glad To Know You' rises way above the Dury lyric and (dig that Booker T. riff); '109', 'Now You're Dancing' and 'Boy' are mainstream funk, smooth and palatable while '3,000,000 Synths' proves that he

is capable of taking funk into the abstract, successfully.

As it stands/dances, *Questionnaire* moves with real musical assurance but Jankel, if he wants to become a true solo performer, would do well to sever the Dury connection.

George Kay

John Hiatt
All of a Sudden
Geffen

John Hiatt's first two albums attracted a devoted cult following. A brash, tough young American, writing streetwise R&B songs, and singing them better than many of his ilk. A voice somewhere between Graham Parker and Willy DeVille, and with a similar romantic streak.

All of a Sudden is Hiatt's bid for commercial acceptance. Tony Visconti has been roped in to produce, and stamps the album with the weighty Transatlantic feel, also beloved of Roy Thomas Baker. Hiatt's vocals are less harsh, more refined, but still retaining the strength of before. His lyrics are also maturing, in places echoing the cynicism of Elvis Costello, when talking about people and their relationships.

A hit single will be essential for Hiatt to make his break, and he has the choice of at least two here. 'Overnight Story' uses a very old-fashioned, very commercial riff, and 'Some Fun Now' is equally catchy.

For best vocal performances, I plug for the dramatic 'I Could Use An Angel' or the closing 'My Edge Of The Razor', a strong ballad that allows Hiatt to extend himself.

Those who liked *Slug Line* may miss its gritty edge and simpler approach, but *All of a Sudden* could be John Hiatt's big break.

Duncan Campbell
Ry Cooder
The Slide Area
Warner Bros

From where I'm standing, Cooder's *Bop Till You Drop* is one of the very best albums of the last decade. I also treasure his 1980 show in London as among the most exhilarating gigs I've ever attended.

The Slide Area maintains the syncopated R&B approach Cooder adopted with *Bop* and continued on *Borderline*. That latter album was somewhat disappointing however. Like *Bop*, its material was ninety percent covers but a few, instead of emerging as refurbished classics, sounded merely cute. A rather flat production didn't help either.

The Slide Area rectifies these faults. Firstly, the sound has a sharp, gritty punch as if the backing tracks were recorded live in the studio. And the playing is wonderful. Secondly, over half the songs are originals written by Cooder alone or in partnership. On the whole they're very strong. Only 'UFO Has Landed In The Ghetto' gives me doubts and, oddly, it's the opening track.

The three non-originals, all on Side One, are a brand new Dylan, a 60s Curtis Mayfield and a re-worked 'Blue Suede Shoes'. Unbelievers may point to the inclusion of this chestnut, along with the fact that the album contains just four tracks a side, as evidence that Cooder's spark is dimming. Hardly. The writing and performances here show a musician who, after 10 albums, still finds — and communicates — great joy in his work. *The Slide Area* is not a masterpiece like *Bop*; it is simply a damn fine album.

Peter Thomson

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