

**Gang Of Four
Songs Of The Free
EMI**

It's hard to believe this is the same band that put out the brash and basic *Entertainment* only two years ago. That was an album of physical music, if often harsh, with a raw sensuality that both repelled and fascinated.

Solid Gold was more ambitious, though some found it mannered and self-indulgent. It gave pointers to what has been achieved here, a new and vital chapter in new age Funk, written in songs like 'Outside The Trains Don't Run On Time'.

Last year, Dave Allen quit during a problem-filled US tour, but the remaining members were determined to carry on.

Side One of *Songs Of The Free* is hard, sharp dancing material. Choppy, metallic funk, combining Andy Gill's rhythm guitar with a thunderous backbeat of drums, percussion and handclaps. Instant, urgent and demanding. The opener, 'Call Me Up', takes a swipe at Adam Ant, stealing some chorus vocals from his signature tune. 'I Love A Man In Uniform' speaks for itself.

Politicians who think they know what is best for us get theirs on 'Muscle For Brains'. 'It Is Not Enough' is about drudgery, boredom and that sense of déjà vu, while 'Life, It's A Shame' is a dour vision of Cold War USA.

The second side is more subdued and inward-looking. Pleasure seekers dance to forget in 'I Will Be A Good Boy'. People try and shut themselves off from the loneliness of urban living ('We Live As We Dream, Alone'), or else they lose themselves, if only briefly, in love or fantasy ('Of The Instant'). Sometimes they're all you have left.

Jon King surpasses himself vocally, ably backed by new recruit Sara Lee on bass and vocals, and the backup voices of Stevie Langie and Joy Yates (kiwi, Pacific Eardrum).

This album is a shout of anger against callous indifference. A

Phil, Bryan, Andy, Sweetwaters



Pete Townshend



Theatre of Hate



bleak, uncomfortable and very important picture of life in the 1980s. (The cover features a picture of Venice, a city which is slowly sinking.)

Duncan Campbell

**Van Morrison
Beautiful Vision
Mercury**

Van Morrison is back — and in glorious form. His last album,

Common One, didn't seem to catch the public fancy. A pity. I enjoyed it immensely, despite its occasional excesses. *Beautiful Vision* will redress the balance. There isn't an ounce of flab. This is Van the Man singing with the ferocity of his Them days, with the mystery *Astral Weeks*, with the pumping rhythms of *Moon-dance*.

Over the years, Morrison has

developed a unique blend of rhythm-and-blues and the Celtic skirl of his native Ireland. Here, the marriage of these seemingly disparate musics and cultures is honed to perfection. The arrangements are superb, no one uses horns better, and the drums snap the way rock and roll drums should.

Anyone who has followed Morrison's musical journey will find huge rewards in *Beautiful Vision*, including a lovely instrumental, 'Scandinavia', with Van playing piano against a cushion of synthesiser.

'Celtic Ray' rocks gently with Uilleann pipes contributing a touch of the timeless. Again, it's that mix of soul, gospel and Irish folk themes. If you ever doubted Morrison could sing gospel (in the broadest sense), listen to the title track.

But the song that sums up the record is 'Cleaning Windows', an autobiographical memory lane trip pushed by a won't-let-go rhythm (reminiscent of Ry Cooder's 'Down in Hollywood'). Perhaps only Morrison could get away with a song ostensibly composed of fragments of memory about the Belfast days, bits of conversation and a recitation of musical and philosophical influences (Jimmie Rodgers, Muddy Waters, Kerouac et al). In his hands, it becomes a summation of all Van Morrison has been and is. The song is so joyous it must be heard. The same applies to the album.

Ken Williams

**Theatre of Hate
The Westworld
Stiff**

Kirk Brandon, self-styled leader of Theatre of Hate, Britain's latest sociological altruists, sees the band as a catalyst or focus for this current era of disaffection.

Shades of the Clash and you'd be right especially with Mick Jones producing *The Westworld*, TOH's first album. Last year they warranted attention with a live cassette only release of *He Who Dares Wins* and three singles on their own label, Burning Rome.

With integrity and concern as their passwords, Mick Jones seemed like the ideal producer but he's come under a lot of flak for his work on *Westworld*. Theatre of Hate are direct, but much more

intelligent, descendants of the 1977 punk spirit of idealism and, with that in mind, Jones and the band should have opted for a rougher more garage-built sound. As it is Brandon's guitar takes a backseat, well behind the predominance of Luke Rendle's and Stan Stammer's often pedestrian bass-drum combination.

The songs are good: 'Westworld', 'Conquistador' and 'Judgement Hymn' are haunting tunes using spaghetti western and tribal overtones and 'Freaks' is a neat little piece of punk. But Brandon's over-produced strident pleas and the lack of thrust/grit in the production and arrangements thwart the band's desire for grass-roots integrity.

The sound is inappropriate to the sentiments expressed and TOH must realise that current commerciality won't win them the credibility they need for their particular crusade.

George Kay

**Pete Townshend
All The Best Cowboys
have Chinese Eyes)
Atco**

Pete Townshend's always taken his work intensely seriously, and over the past decade it has virtually evolved into a spiritual medium for him. The more personal his writing became the less it suited the traditional Who format. Consequently 1980's solo *Empty Glass* was far more rewarding than the subsequent group album.

Chinese Eyes is probably his most personal set so far. It is also, of all his four solo efforts, the most removed from the sounds and styles of his band. There's nothing here remotely resembling the classic Who structure of, say, 'Rough Boys'. Instead we get songs of such varying styles, textures and rhythms that any general classification proves inadequate. At times the fluidity of this music evokes comparisons with jazz rather than rock.

The overall standard of musicianship is superb and Townshend's singing is stronger, clearer, less adenoidal than ever before. Lyrically his songs continue his familiar preoccupations: fascination with adolescent tribalism, fears of aging, failings, faith, ambivalence towards stardom. Indeed, this self-obsessive candour

often threatens to render his writing insufferable but, at least on this album, it's always saved by the music. For example, the cloying spoken tract in 'Stop Hurting People' fortunately rides on a joyous rhythm.

The album is a success. Given the disparate styles involved, it coheres so well as to almost appear, (dare one say it) conceptual. Near 40 and after almost two decades as one of the most creative figures in rock, Pete Townshend continues to grow creatively. With *Chinese Eyes* he may finally have left the Who behind.

Peter Thomson

**Roxy Music
Avalon
Polydor**

Considering the somnambolism of the performance I saw on their Australian tour, Roxy Music's new album is pure pleasure. *Avalon* follows the excellent *Flesh and Blood*, and is more than a match for its predecessor. No longer "fashionable" or "innovative" — suspect words at best — Roxy have become even better musicians, Bryan Ferry especially. They are now a "rock" (another suspect word) band, and here they rock well, albeit languidly.

Despite line-up changes — Andy Newmark drums, Alan Spenner and Neil Jason share bass duties — Roxy sound more confident than ever. Key men Ferry, Manzanera and Mackay are at the top of their game and the songs are good. Ferry at times sounds overwhelmed by his own ennui, but it works against the insistent funk bottom (dance rhythms for those too bored to dance?).

Ferry handles all the keyboards himself. He has grown into a musician of stature, and contributes much to the album's two instrumentals, 'India' and 'Tara' (a delightful 1½-minute fragment). Manzanera's guitar is as economic as ever and Andy Mackay wails or whispers as necessary.

I seem to have written much about how good *Avalon* is without quite pinpointing why. It's all to do with atmosphere, and perhaps the strength of the music is its rather elusive quality. Allow the ears more time, but suffice to say Roxy's new entry works wonderfully well. If that cops out, so be it.

Ken Williams

from
London



Chinese
style
funk

CLASSIX
NOUVEAUX



La Verite

