

RECORDS

Laurie Anderson
Big Science
Warner Bros

The lady's an intellectual, a poet, an avant-garde musician and, in England at least, a pop star. Not a combination that bodes well for listening pleasure, but then maybe she's not really any of those things. She's famous for knowing William Burroughs and having the longest Top 10 hit ('O Superman', 8:21) in recent chart history.

That track's not the best thing on the album and the rest mostly sounds quite different. She can sing very well. In fact on the title track she sounds uncannily like Buffy St Marie (my second favourite female voice) and it's a rather lovely melody, reasonably straight really. But each track has something deviant going on, whether it be free form jazz bagpipes on 'Sweaters', a two minute song of extreme lyrical simplicity, or a farty-bass-brass-carhorn chorus-thingy on 'Example 22', a song mostly in German purporting to be based on messages transmitted through paranormals, I think.

She's either a pretentious, facile, arty, liberal or someone much more valuable. I'd bet my entire Kiss collection on the latter and I only wish I had more space to tell you why. Never mind.

Maybe women are going to save the world.
Chris Knox

The Cure
Pornography
Stunn

Promises were made and hopes were raised that this new Cure album, their fourth, was going to see Robert Smith emerge from the lover-hurts mental depression of 17 *Seconds* and *Faith* into a new and brighter world.

But this is not the case. *Pornography*, instead, is the third and (most) terminal, in a trilogy of anguish, of cryptic images and insights into Smith's private hell. Ian Curtis, by comparison, was a bundle of laughs.

It doesn't matter if we all die' is the sentiment that opens the album from 'One Hundred Years', a monotone, a plea above Smith's crying guitar sequence. The



Laurie Anderson



Joan Jett & Blackhearts



Steel Pulse

Hanging Garden' is dark uptempo relief before descending into the sickness of 'Siamese Twins', 'Cold' and the title track which concludes with the resolution: "I must fight this sickness, find a cure".

It is pornographic as Smith's been wearing his angst on his sleeve for too long and his catholic masochism, like all pornography, has become tedious and overdone.

George Kay

Rolling Stones
Still Life

Rolling Stones Records

The riffing of Duke Ellington's 'Take the A Train' (played on the PA; an unexpected but effective choice) slides into the guitar graunch of 'Under My Thumb' and ... yes, ladies and gents, it's the Rolling Stones, rocking harder than you could imagine.

This live album, culled from various venues on last year's American tour, sounds like the halcyon days of *Aftermath* and *Out of Our Heads*. Before Brian stopped coping. The Stones haven't sounded so good live - in concert, on bootlegs, on official recordings - maybe ever.

On warhorses like 'Let's Spend the Night Together' and 'Time Is on My Side' (colossal! Jagger and Richards trade vocal-guitar lines as if their lives depended on it) these ageing, former enfants terribles manage to beat themselves at their own game. Keith and Woody ride Charlie's drums like a guitar storm that actually lives up to their legend. Jagger is in top form. There is no posturing. He just sings - and damned hard.

Wisely, the Stones have

avoided those songs that have been a staple of the bootlegs for years, matching the vitality of their performance with the comparative freshness of Smokey Robinson's 'Going to a Go Go' (guest saxman Ernie Watts honks appropriately) and Eddie Cochran's raging boogie 'Twenty Flight Rock' (mildly surprising as Jagger has frequently rubbished Cochran in interviews).

The whole affair ends with a manic 'Satisfaction' with the guitar twins tearing up the track. I dare you to sit still. When by rights they should be slowing down, the Stones are sounding as exciting as when I first heard 'Route 66'.

Ken Williams

The Jim Carroll Band
Dry Dreams
Epic

Carroll's first album, *Catholic Boy*, combined for me the best of Lou Reed's decadent street smarts, Dylan's mid-sixties surrealist word spinning and a post-punk guitar thrash. Who cared that Carroll didn't really sing - with those lyrics and that relentless pace, anything more than a sneer was unnecessary.

This time out Carroll and producer Earl McGrath have gone for a broader approach. There's a slightly glossier sound and more variety in dynamics, instrumentation and tempo. There have been changes in the band too: the two guitarists have gone. Their vicious dual attack has been replaced by one guitar and keyboards. While this affords a more rounded musical base it also lowers the overall intensity. Consequently we become more

aware of Carroll's own delivery. When he has to hold notes rather than just spit words, Carroll's singing either degenerates or else just gives out. On 'Rooms', for instance, he simply can't carry the melody.

Not that the tunes themselves are that strong. There's not the number of hooks that make *Catholic Boy* so strong. Nor are the lyrics as immediately arresting. Maybe it's that Carroll's voice seems to be mixed slightly further back this time but no lines leap out and grab you by the throat the way his best poetry can.

Perhaps Carroll and McGrath were aware of the weaknesses anyway. Surely it's no coincidence that the only track on *Dry Dreams* that fully recalls the adrenalin rush of its predecessor is the title track.

Peter Thomson

The Go-Betweens
Send Me A Lullaby
Missing Link

In the late seventies, the Go-Betweens, Australians Grant McLennan and Robert Forster, went to Britain. While there they recorded a single, 'Sometimes I Think I Need Two Heads', for Edinburgh's Postcard records.

Although the single did quite well on the independent charts, they returned to Australia. Since then they have recruited Lindy Morrison on drums, recorded another single 'Your Turn My Turn', and completed this album, late last year.

Musically the Go-Betweens are well matched with their former label mates, Orange Juice and Josef K. Tight modern Velvet-pop with early Talking Heads influences and slightly off-key singing. Sometimes it works, occasionally it doesn't, but it is at least, always interesting. They use the three-piece line-up to their advantage building things up then stripping them back down, sometimes augmented by James Freud on saxophone.

In its brighter moments *Send Me A Lullaby* is a record of pure honesty and should not be treated lightly. With 'One Things Can Hold Me' being a minor modern Australian pop classic.

Mark Phillips

Joan Jett
I Love Rock 'n' Roll
Liberation

She's just 23 and she's been on the road since 1975. Outwardly her image is similar to Suzi Quatro though you can bet there is no way Joan Jett would've been invited onto *Happy Days*. Or *Minder*. Not with her eyes and reputation.

All the stuff on the album is pretty much what you'd expect from the single: crass, thrash and trash. Basic may be, slower than the Ramones for sure, but this music's not without its sizz. How about the Dave Clarke Five's 'Bits and Pieces' with antmusic drumming!

In fact the album seems characterised by its borrowings; even the hit single is someone else's old B-side. Covering the Shondell's schlock classic 'Crimson and Clover' looks a shrewd choice too but, unfortunately, the guitars come down too hard. Two originals shape up well enough. In 'Victim of Circumstance' she defends her past and in 'You're Too Possessive' she shows she can kick ass with the best.

Aggressive, primal rock 'n' stomp. A freak hit or the beginning of a return to basics? Whatever, Joan Jett's been doing it this way since Chrissie Hynde was still a record reviewer.

Peter Thomson

REGGAE REGGAE

Bob Marley & Wailers
Soul Rebel (Charly)

After the dreadful *Chances Are*, I held little hope for this similar package of old Marley material. There's not a posthumous overdub in sight this time. But then, these are old singles, not studio demos that were never intended to see the light of day.

The one drawback to this set is the lack of any sort of information on the dates of the recordings, or the personnel. They probably come from the mid-sixties' period, when the Wailers were recording for Clement Dodd's Coxson studios.

These were trying times for the group, but they recorded some brilliant singles. The harmonies were never sweeter, and Marley was already a vocal tour de force. Try the impassioned gospel style of the original 'Chances Are'. You also get 'Soul Rebel' and 'Put It On', two standards, and seven other never-less-than-excellent tracks.

A loving Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. DC

Steel Pulse
True Democracy (Elektra)

True Democracy is this British band's first album since their split from Island. Their last effort, *Caught You*, never made it to this country. It sounded tired and uninterested. *True Democracy* revives some of the old spark, without making any radical departures.

Steel Pulse are another reggae band trying to crack the American market. They have an advantage, with their more sophisticated upbringing and polished sound, though their politics may prove a stumbling block.

True Democracy works best at its simplest, when the rhythms are trimmed down and allowed to function without too much fussy percussion (the best reggae drummers are the most basic - ask Sly). In this vein, try 'Blues Dance Raid', a song about police harassment, the simple tenderness of 'Your House', or the boozier lament of 'Man No Sober'. In each case, the song shines through and Hinds sings beautifully. 'A Who Responsible?', dedicated to the victims of the Atlanta child killer, would have benefitted from a sparser treatment.

Still, Steel Pulse continue to function well within their prescribed limitations, though these days they seem to surrender to them more than they did in the heady days of *Tribute To The Martyrs*. DC

Various Artists
Reggae Sunsplash '81 (Elektra)

In the middle of last year, several thousand people gathered

in Jarrett Park, in Jamaica's Montego Bay, to pay tribute to Bob Marley. For four days, some of the best and second-best reggae artists performed.

The aura surrounding Bob Marley has not diminished since his death, and the presence of the Wailers and the I-Threes ensured an almost-religious atmosphere. The event was recorded and filmed. This is the double sound-track.

If I sound unenthusiastic, forgive me, but the music is really very ordinary. During the I-Threes/Wailers version of Marley's 'Them Belly Full', Junior Marvin says nobody can replace Bob. Do we have to listen to embarrassing cover versions to prove it?

Marley's children, the Melody Makers, will have to show something more than just cuteness to make it as adults. Black Uhuru do 'Plastic Smile' and 'Guess Who's Coming To Dinner', better mixed than on their own live LP, while Carlene Davis and Sheila Hylton should never have been there in the first place.

Steel Pulse steal the show in terms of sheer sound quality, and they're not even natives. Gregory Isaacs and Dennis Brown also turn in good performances, and toaster Eek-A-Mouse raises some smiles with his hilarious 'Wa Do Dem'.

But it's the artists who are missing that should have been up front. Marcia Griffiths performed solo, Culture were there, as was toaster Lone Ranger, Judy Mowatt (another I-Three) also did a solo spot, Jimmy Cliff and Tapper Zukie put in appearances, as did Leroy Sibbles, ex-Heptones.

Marley never lost touch with his roots, despite his popular appeal. I can't believe he would have been pleased by the mostly sanitised reggae presented here. DC

Third World
You've Got the Power (CBS)

Third World's second album for CBS, and another bid to crack the American market. A considerable improvement on the dire *Rock The World*, but that's not saying a helluva lot, especially recalling the strength of their earlier Island output.

The band's crossover disco-reggae sound would seem to have everything going for it. As a bonus, it's recorded at Stevie Wonder's studios, and the man himself is credited as producer-arranger on two tracks. Artists like Wonder have given reggae some respectability in the super-straight American music industry, which was never quite happy with Marley's rebel image. Third World retain just enough JA to look exotic, without being threatening.

'You're Playing Us Too Close' raises a fist, but not high enough, and 'Jah Jah Children Moving Up' has some nice toasting from Rugs. Only those two raise the interest level at all.

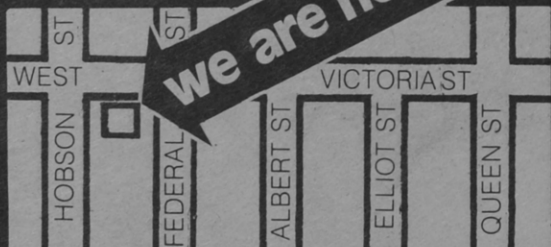
Third World pay tribute to Marley, but they would better serve his memory by crying tough. Duncan Campbell

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