

Elvis Costello
and the Attractions
Imperial Bedroom
WEA

Costello's been carrying the white man's song burden since 1977 and during that time he's been the yardstick against which new songwriters are measured. Never a man to mark time himself, he has, since *Armed Forces*, played musical hop-scotch — don't step twice on that square — and this fear of repetition has led him to tap the rich soul vein of *Get Happy* and the less impressive country balladeering of *Almost Blue*. Between the two was *Trust*, an album of great songs, intense and honest the real predecessor to *Imperial Bedroom*, a slightly different story, again.

Geoff Emerick handles the production and he's created some new textures by relegating the Thomas rhythm section to a less dominant role and this has made the songs less dense and more orthodox in tone. Plus there's been a pressure drop in the material, a slight relaxation of the tension that made *Trust* such an event, but that's OK. The lyrical bite is as uncompromising as ever, Costello tears sheets through recriminations ('Tears Before Bedtime', 'Almost Blue'), accusations ('Shabby Doll', 'The Loved Ones') and deceit ('... and In Every Home'). Peeks into Costello's mental bedroom, bed-bugs and all.

Dividing the album into sides and the first is the slighter of the two, the standouts ranging from the breathless 'Beyond Belief' to the standard Costello melodic twists of 'Shabby Doll', 'The Long Honeymoon' and the big ballad resonance of 'Man Out of Time'.

The second side boasts the better tunes — 'The Loved Ones', the delightful 'Kid About It', 'Little Savage', 'Pidgin English' and the orchestrated 'Town Cryer' — all tip the scales in the side's favour.

It's too early to say where *Imperial Bedroom* lies in the Costello pecking order but it goes without saying that it's an excellent album. He's too much of an old hand and genuine craftsman to produce shoddy merchandise.



Tom Verlaine

Like Hiatt he pays attention to the fine detail and the rest seems to take care of itself.
George Kay

Blondie
The Hunter
Chrysalis

Smart title this. Provides a handy catch-all for some otherwise dissimilar bits and pieces. Debs gets to wear her fright-wig on the cover and the boys can churn out a few vaguely junglish rhythms (one even recalling 'Heart of Glass' — a good marketing move, especially as it opens Side One.)

Even smarter is that the concept lets the band go 'tribal'. In other words it allows Debbie to chant (or worse, rap) rather than sing. Which in turn lets the boys out of writing so many melodies. Oh sure, there are some tunes here, just not as many as you'd hoped for. And not a real killer single among them. I mean 'Island of Lost Souls' is pretty safe and cosy stuff compared to some of its great predecessors.

But smartest of all is that the concept enables the band to cover Smokey's 'The Hunter Gets Captured By The Game'. Wonderful song, reverently rendered, the classiest track on the album.

As for the other numbers: 'English Boys' catches the old knowing coyness with a pretty performance and a couple of neat lyric lines. 'For Your Eyes Only'

(no, not that one) also has an identifiable tune and a style that suits the lady's vocals. Both Destri and Harrison wrote a couple of numbers each but, as expected, the catchier ones are still Stein's.

At least they've stayed with Mike Chapman producing. Hit-maker perfection as usual. You're willing to believe Debs can really sing again, despite *Koo Koo* and all those TV shows proving she couldn't. But really, how often can even a master beautician disguise the fact that Blondie is getting decidedly thin at the roots.
Peter Thomson

The Associates
Sulk
WEA

A change is as good as a cliché, or a holiday. The change being the McKenzie-Rankine move back to Scotland after last year's London based singles' blitz, with five of the seven little gems plus flips finding local release on the German instigated *Fourth Drawer Down* album.

Billy McKenzie and Alan Rankine are the stable nucleus of a band that was originally fostered by Chris Parry, and their debut on his Fiction label revealed a duo that wasn't about to sell their souls for a three minute spot on *Top of the Pops*.

That was two years ago and now we have their second album proper, *Sulk*, a lush and sophisticated extension of their music-as-

images philosophy. Behind most Associates' songs there's a white space, a void that evokes what they call filmatic elements. They play the rock'n'roll game in that they work within the structural rules but within that they create their own means of communication. On *Sulk* No', 'Nude Spoons', 'Skipping' and 'It's Better This Way' clearly fall into this category, an area previously mapped out by 'Tell Me Easter's On Friday', 'Property Girl' and 'Transport To Central'.

'Party Fears Two' and 'Country Club' are their two recent singles, appropriately tuneful, accessible and evocative. Themes for imaginary films appear in the form of two instrumentals, 'Arrogance Gave Him Up' and 'Nothing In Something Particular', the introduction and the conclusion respectively.

The Associates are saying more within the framework of a forty minute album than most bands can express in entire careers. A hit record, and their best.
George Kay

Robert Plant
Pictures At Eleven
Swansong

Robert Plant, who is gifted with one of the truly memorable voices in rock, has produced a stunning album with the help of one Robbie Blunt on guitar (I wonder who he could be?). With Collins and Powell sharing drums, Martinez on bass and Woodroffe on keyboards, this is a band that makes the demise of Led Zeppelin seem less final.

Nostalgia is amply catered for on 'Like I've never Been Gone'. 'Stairway To Heaven' fans will drool with delight as this number builds and builds to the climax. A highlight, as is 'Slow Dancer', featuring squealing blues notes merging into majestic guitar, with Plant's voice screaming over a tough rhythm section. Raunchy rock features on 'Mystery Title' and 'Worse Than Detroit' — if Blunt is not Page I'll eat my hat! 'Fat Lip' is soft rock with sting.

'Burning Down on One Side' is a solid rocker, leading into 'Moonlight In Samosa', an exquisite combination of Plant's voice, mellower than Zeppelin days, soaring over acoustic guitar. 'Pledge Pin' adds sax to beef up a standard Zep rocker.

Lyrical, the album won't win any awards, but there is nothing here as silly lyrically as The Immigrant Song, and did we really worry about the lyrics anyway. There is an excitement about this record, and we could sure use some excitement in NZ 1982.
David Perkins



Debbie Harry



Colin Newman

Tom Verlaine
Words From the Front
Virgin

Angles: an approach to a new Tom Verlaine album, a guitarist and songwriter whose breakthroughs have stimulated the likes of Echo and the Bunnymen and their copyists.

Advice: play 'Venus' from *Marquee Moon* and you'll see he hasn't surpassed this although his two solo albums *Tom Verlaine* and *Dreamtime* still stand as true balances of delicacy and drive. Since last year's *Dreamtime* he has changed from Warner Bros to Virgin and *Words From the Front* is a switch in sound — back to the cool cascading spaces of the Television albums.

Dissection: 'Present Arrived' is tight, no flaws, a straight riffing Verlaine song. 'Postcard From Waterloo', the single is an uneasy combination of corn and charm so it doesn't quite come off, leaving Side One's best moments to True Story', a sound recalling the disciplined majesty of Verlaine's best.

Side Two and the title track is a triumph, a brooding climatic war yarn that could have been a maudlin hollow sentiment but Verlaine pulls out all of his Roger McGuinn guitar licks and turns it into a searing slice of pathos. Finally, 'Days on the Mountain', the most ambitious arrangement he's attempted is an insistent three part tone poem punctuated by a synthesizer reverb and layered with acoustic guitar icing. Initially pedestrian it eventually insinuates.

Words from the Front is not an unqualified success ('Coming Apart' and 'Clear It Away' are plain ordinary and on a seven track album you notice them) but there's more than enough here to revive interest in Verlaine's faltering career. Recommended.
George Kay

Gary U.S. Bonds
On The Line
EMI

Last year, Bonds' triumphant return from the twilight zone was masterminded by Bruce Springsteen and sidekick Steve Van Zandt. They produced, contributed songs and the E Street Band supplied the backing. These duties are all repeated for *On The Line*.

This time, though, Springsteen's doubled his quota of new songs from three to six. (Well five actually — 'Rendezvous' was originally intended for *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*.) All are as solid and sturdy as you'd expect and most have touches of the 'where've-I-heard-that' classicism which often characterizes his

writing. 'Out Of Work' must be Springsteen's most overtly political song to date.

On *The Line* is not only a Springsteen album. Out front it has Bonds' magnificent voice, the voice that Springsteen modelled his own style on. Its husky, soulful tone finds perfect complement in Clarence Clemons' tenor sax.

There are, of course, a bunch of non-Springsteen songs here: two co-written by Bonds, two great ones by Wayne Carson (including his marvellous Box Tops oldie 'Soul Deep') and one by Miami Steve (the only disappointment). Van Zandt's ballad on *Dedication* had considerable dramatic intensity. This time it's overblown.

But overall that's a small criticism. Look at it this way. What we have here is a very good Bruce Springsteen album — only more so.
Peter Thomson

Colin Newman
Not To
4AD

In only three studio albums, *Wire* won the sort of respect and avant garde awe usually reserved for rock'n'roll's highbrows. From the cold white hot punk of *Pink Flag* to the updated tightly structured *Piper At the Gates of Dawn* tones of *Chairs Missing* and *154*, they indulged and innovated.

Colin Newman, at last, has decided to pick up again on this vein of quality. His previous two solo albums, *A-Z* and *Provisionally Entitled the Singing Fish*, were unsatisfactory affairs alternating between glacial landscapes and aimless forays. But on *Not To* he has certainly re-captured the fine balance of experimentation and accessibility that characterised *Wire*'s best work.

'Lorries', 'Remove For Improvement' and the title track are the best songs, firm in direction and expertly crafted. '5/10', 'Truculent Yet' and 'We Meet Under Tables' in particular, revive memories of Syd Barrett innocence and belief in simplicity. Further afield and '1, 2, 3 Beep Beep' could almost be construed as an answer to all those people who still holler for '1, 2, XU', and George Harrison's piece of ethereal fluff, 'Blue Jay Way', closes the album as a past reference point as to the origins of one facet of Newman's music.

In *Not To* we have one of the surprise packages of the year, an album that combines imaginative risk-taking within a highly personalised pop format. Quality plus.
George Kay

PAUL AGAR & THE SET



DEBUT SINGLE on REACTION records

YOUR EYES

polyGram

FLYING NUW

SEVENS AT 45 FOR \$2.99

THE CLEAN - TALLY HO!
25¢ - DON'T DECEIVE ME
MAINLY SPANIARDS ... FRIENDS..

TWELVES AT 45 FOR \$4.99

THE CLEAN - BOODLE
NAKED SPOTS DANCE -
- CERTAIN WAYS

TWO TWELVES AT 45
FOR \$10.99

THE CHILLS, SNEAKY FEELINGS,
THE STONES, THE VERLAINES.

SEVEN AT 33 FOR \$2.99

THE BUILDERS - DER SEE....

TWELVE AT 33 FOR \$8.99

THE GORDONS - L.P.

TWELVES AT 45 FOR \$5.99

BALLON D'ESSAI - E.P.
PINGROUP - GO TO TOWN
THE CLEAN - GREAT SOUNDS.....

WHAT NEXT?
SEE ELSEWHERE
IN THIS ISSUE....

Box 3000, CH...CH.