

## RECORDS

Junior  
Ji  
Mercury

British acts have enjoyed remarkably little success over the years with their attempts to break into the American soul market. This makes it pretty remarkable when an erstwhile unknown like Junior Giscombe, from the South of London, comes out of the blue and has his debut single ('Mamma Used to Say', which opens the album) reach number two on the USA soul charts. Subsequently he became only the second British act to appear on *Soul Train* TV show.

The key to the success is that Giscombe and producer, keyboardist, co-writer Bob Carter have formulated a sound far more American than the general run of the current British 'funky-disco-pops' and yet is sufficiently dif-



Junior

ferent to stand out in the crowd.

The obvious points of reference are American. Junior's vocal style is at times very reminiscent of a younger Stevie Wonder, as are a couple of the songs. The overall sound of the album is not unlike Michael Jackson's *Off The Wall* but with a bit more sharpness about the sounds that are woven into the overall smooth mesh.

It is also distinguished by an emphasis on melody rather than the groove for the groove's sake, which probably results from



Russell Smith

Junior's not playing an instrument.

The eight tracks range from out and out dancing stuff like 'Mamma...' and 'Love Dies' through to the ballad 'Darling (Don't You Know)' which features the most impressive vocal performance on the album. An impressive debut.

Don Mackay  
Russell Smith  
Capitol

This is one for the converted, for people like me who regard the

Amazing Rhythm Aces as the greatest unsung band of the 1970s. If you saw them in the Auckland Town Hall, in the last concert they made before breaking up, then you'll remember Russell Smith as the tiny lead singer whose voice live proved as stunning as it had always been on record.

As a singer Smith has always reminded me of Al Green. There's the same soul, the same remarkable range, the same way of twisting or stretching words to rhythms only their minds hear, which makes both of them singers who can be recognised after only a couple of lines. Green has been a superstar in the United States, but Smith and the Aces, have struggled most of the way. The career battles — Smith said in Auckland that he cried when the record company decided to issue a straight country song, 'She Used to Sing Amazing Grace', as the follow-up to the Aces' debut single hit, 'Third Rate Romance' — have had their effect on Smith's music.

Early in his career Smith often displayed a keen sense of humour. By the time of this album, made in November last year, only one of 10 songs, 'Mississippi Gal', shows that side of his character, with the lines:

*I swear, you were born to please  
Freckles on your shoulders,  
Freckles on your knees.*

This first Smith solo album is largely serious stuff, with lots of love gone wrong ('That's What I Learned From Loving You') or maybe about to go wrong ('Some-day We Will').

The more you listen, the more it may dawn on you that this album has no bad songs, and several ('Our Lady Of The Blues', 'Your Eyes' and 'Southern Music') that rate with the best of the Aces. If that interests you it might pay to cherish this record.

Smith also said in Auckland that if this album was not commercially successful he would give up music and work full time on the farm he owns near Memphis. Russell Smith did not make the Top 200 albums in Billboard.

Phil Gifford  
Burning Spear  
Farover  
EMI

Another pleasant surprise. First, those dandy Trojan reissues from Music World, and now a major label retrieves JA's foremost artist (now you-know-who is gone).

After four albums for Island, Spear (Winston Rodney) formed his own record label and publishing company and produced his two most eloquent works, *Social Living* and 1980's stark and stunning *Hail H.I.M.* The latter LP was recorded with almost all of the Wailers and the association continues with *Farover*, recorded at Tuff Gong and with Aston Barrett among the musicians.

The album is more up than its predecessor but with the same haunting call-and-response backing vocals and Rodney's impassioned singing building on simple things to intense climaxes. Always that incessant, mesmerising rhythm and sweet brass punctuations.

What sets *Farover* apart is its feeling of optimism. As always, Rodney quotes extensively from the thoughts of black visionary Marcus Garvey, the father of the back-to-Africa movement. It's not all messages. 'Rock' is a reworking of an old track, an invitation to the skank, while 'She's Mine' is one of the very few straight love songs Spear has ever done. Mellow and tender, and something he should

try more often.

Take the politicising according to your own lights, embrace the music without prejudice. Spear may be a preacher and a teacher, but he's also a loving man and a dancing man. A magic man.

Duncan Campbell  
Romeo Void  
It's A Condition  
Epic

Romeo Void's *Never Say Never* EP was a much sought-after import this year, especially in Auckland, where it was thrashed by Radio B to the enlightened masses. Few who listened will forget the rush of adrenalin from the boisterous drums, manic sax and superbly judged vocals, with that brilliant chorus:

*I might like you better if we  
slept together...*

Romeo Void are one girl and four guys from San Francisco. The lady with the voice and a big share of the songs is Debora Iyall, a physically large but incredibly graceful figure, whose singing is always beautifully judged and controlled.

*It's A Condition* dates from early last year, and suffers in comparison with the later EP, recorded last October and produced by Ric Ocasek of the Cars. The songs are just as good, a mixture of 60s surf and psychedelia and the post-punk rhythms of Britain, especially the Cure and (dare we say it?) Joy Division. The songs are assertive and lyrically mature, but the band is too tentative. A few months of gigging and a better producer made all the difference, especially for Debora, whose vocal presence on *Never Say Never* was right upfront.

Still, *It's A Condition* is important for its best songs, 'Talk Dirty (To Me)', 'White Sweater', 'Drop Your Eyes' (very close to 'People Are Strange') and the slow burning 'I Mean It'.

The LP shows a band finding its feet, confirmed by the later recording, which should now be given general release here. But both still prove that America does have life beyond AT 40.

Duncan Campbell  
The Yardbirds  
The Single Hits  
Charly

As the informative liner notes so rightly point out, the Yardbirds' influence on music and musicians was quite out of proportion to their brief period of fame.

This compilation album contains the A and B-sides of the group's second through fifth singles (1963-66). After that the hits stopped coming. Unlike many other groups of the time, the Yardbirds are not really served especially well by a "hits" collection, for while their singles were among the most exciting music of the mid-60s they also were unusually experimental on albums. (Notably the so-called "Roger the Engineer" album, where Jeff Beck trots out some of his best guitar licks and Keith Relf plays with nursery rhymes as a basis for pop — all very trendy in '66.)

That said, this collection can't be faulted. Here is 'For Your Love', 'Heartful of Soul', 'Evil Hearted You', 'Still I'm Sad' (one of those rare, double-sided hits), and 'Shapes of Things'/'You're a Better Man Than I' (and another double-sided), as well as such B-side gems as 'I Ain't Got You' in which Eric Clapton delivers one of his best solos and Jeff Beck's slinky slide outing 'Steeled Blues'.

If Charly has missed anything, it is the Yardbirds' last single of

any worth, 'Happenings Ten Years Time Ago' backed with the manic 'Psycho Daisies' — not a hit, but a beaut. Oh well, next time maybe.

Ken Williams  
George Thorogood  
and the Destroyers  
Bad To The Bone  
EMI America

Lonesome George crashes back on to the scene with what is arguably his best album yet.

Thorogood himself is in the same manic form he has displayed in the past, but the Destroyers as a whole seem to be getting a better response out of the recording studio. Production credit goes to the Delaware Destroyers themselves — and it's hot and punchy. The band sounds tighter, an improvement from earlier days when Thorogood seemed to be carrying the others. New member Hank Carter has settled into the group and blows some gutsy sax. He's a primitive, but that suits the Thorogood philosophy perfectly.

Thorogood contributes three songs himself, all in the style of the R&B killers he loves. Best is the title track, a menacing variation on Bo Diddley's 'I'm a Man'. Very few can worry a riff until it screams in agony the way Thorogood can.

Also included are songs by John Lee Hooker (a raving 'New Boogie Chillun'), the Isley Brothers (a 'Shout' variation), Bob Dylan (an acoustic 'Wanted Man'; don't know the song myself), and Chuck Berry ('No Particular Place To Go', too frantic), as well as the lovely blues ballad 'As The Years Go Passing By', perhaps definitively done by Albert King and on his new Masterworks collection.

Top-notch, Mr Thorogood.

Ken Williams  
The dB's  
Repercussion  
Liberation

Many new bands try to avoid comparisons with established acts. The dB's slyly suggest them. *Repercussion's* pop-art cover has affinities with Elvis Costello's debut. Their song title 'From A Window To A Screen' is a play upon one from Costello's *Trust*. The vocal harmonies on the very first track recall Squeeze. All of which means that the dB's are after some pretty prestigious company. Happily, however, this New York-based quartet have talent to equal their nerve.

And like Squeeze and Costello, the dB's are revitalising pop songwriting. Chris Stamey and Peter Holsapple, in each of their six songs apiece, show an originality that explores and tests the structural limitations of pop while at the same time maintaining its heritage. But while, say, the horns on 'Living A Lie' are redolent of 60s Rascals, or the bongos and backwards guitar on 'I Feel Good (Today)' recall (the original) psychedelia, there is nothing remotely nostalgic going on here. These witty songs and assured performances are thoroughly modern in their sharp, angular lurch and sway. There's nothing dumb here and there's plenty that's smart.

The dB's debut album, *Stands For Decibels*, was released here late last year and sank without trace. It seems they appear too pop for the cultists and too cult for the pop-pickers. A bit like Squeeze in fact. Another victim of rigidified New Zealand music tastes.

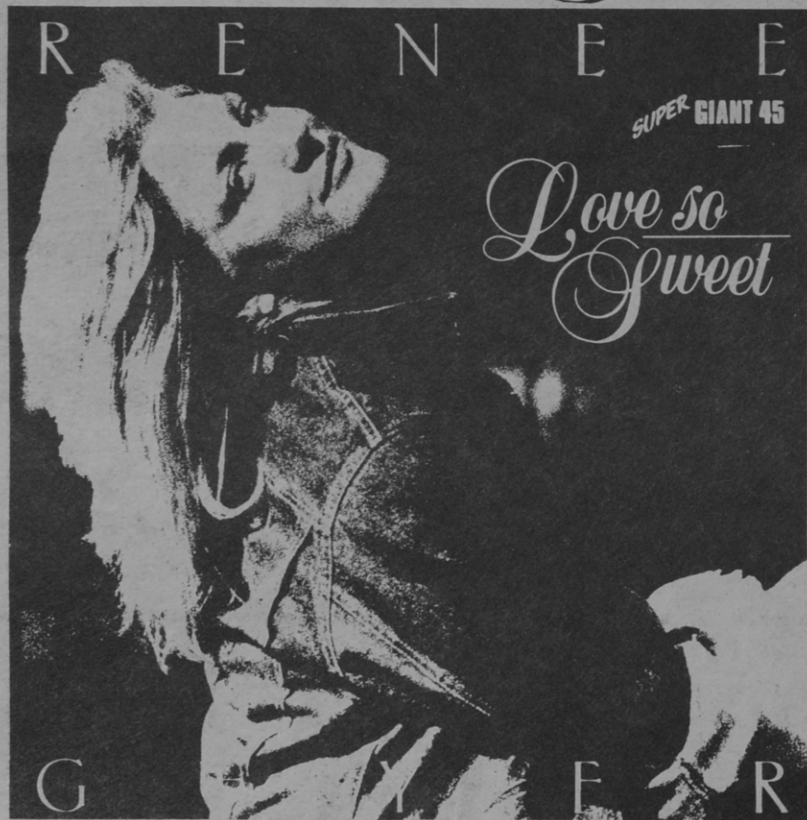
Here's our chance to get smart. The dB's are a band to love as much as to admire.

Peter Thomson

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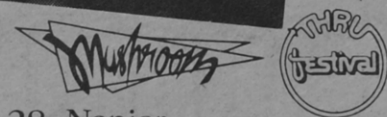
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