

Records

UB40
Live
DEP International

The UB40 sound, which is deceptively low-key in the studio, finally gets the airing it deserves. Coming only a couple of months on the heels of *UB44*, there is an embarrassment of riches here, a thank you gesture to fans.

On a good night, UB40 can reach out, stir up the corpuses, and elevate a crowd. This gig was recorded in Ireland a year ago; a fitting venue for a band that wears its politics in bold colours. The audience appreciates this and hangs on every word.

The 10 tracks represent a good cross-section from all the studio albums, and the engineering is some of the best you'll hear anywhere.

The essence of making a good live album is capturing the atmosphere, making people feel as though they've got the front row seat (not that anyone sits down at UB40 gigs). In that respect, this is an admirable album. Most pleasing are the dub sections of 'Sardonicus' and 'Tyler', no mean feat to produce on stage. Whoever was on the mixing desk that night deserves a medal.

UB40 Live works in its own right, complimenting the studio works, but also expanding on them, showing some songs to much better effect than the original recordings. It enhances the material and thus enhances the band's reputation. And that is what all live albums should do.

Duncan Campbell
Echo and the Bunnymen
Porcupine
WEA

Heaven Up Here was one of 1981's greatest triumphs. With it, Echo and the Bunnymen blew new life into the open-ended pessimism that is England's North. They moulded aggressions to produce rich, heartfelt anthems full of passion and promise. To follow up any masterpiece is a formidable task and it has taken the Bunnymen a fair while to complete this album.

A look at the cover, with its icy



Neil Young



John Cale



China Crisis

wastelands, seems to bear no relevance as *The Cutter* strikes its opening bars. A demon of a song, it pumps along with ferocity. In the background uncharacteristic brass swirls round McCulloch's vocal. It is no wonder it has become the band's first top five British single. As the album progresses, however, things slow

down. The studio comes into play as great landscapes of music are created. Acoustic guitar is used with an irregular, caustic effect as other strings burn behind it. In places, however, (particularly on the title track) a pointless, depressed cacophony takes over.

Porcupine is somewhat of a sad album, it doesn't welcome you

with open arms the way *Heaven Up Here* did. It takes time, patience and devoted listening to come to terms with. Sometimes, as on 'The Cutter', 'Heads Will Roll' or 'Higher Hell', the enigma that is the Bunnymen leaves you exhausted. It is an album that sees one of the most talented rock bands in the world struggling to find a niche in an industry of senselessness. This album is no better or worse than the previous one, just different.

"Just like my higher heaven, you know so well my higher hell."
Mark Phillips

John Cale
Music For a New Society
Ze

This is an infuriating record to review because people who like John Cale (because of the Velvet Underground connection, or because Little Feat played on *Paris 1919*, or because he's a mad genius, whatever) will buy it or at least listen to it. So to you people, it's out. It's a good one.

To the rest of you, reading this review because you've read everything else, or because you thought it was J.J., not John, if you like to be challenged as well as entertained you could do worse than this. A lot of this record has no rhythm section, a lot of it has a rhythm that takes two or three listens to begin to grasp. There is no upfront thump or dancing bass to tell you how to listen to the songs.

At times it verges on self-indulgent crap, but always stays on the exciting side of that particular edge. In the past he has done some extraordinary things, made some electrifying music of unique beauty and had an idelible impact on late 20th Century music (true!). This album sounds like it was made by such a person, something that cannot be said of all his work.

I realise that those of you to whom the above has been addressed probably want more specifics, more facts, but this is very elusive music by a man who takes risks. I know albums cost an unrealistically vast chunk of anyone's income, but if you have enough left over for a bit of a gamble, try this.

Chris Knox
Neil Young
Trans
Geffen

A change in record label for Young ushers in his most dramatic

change in style since *Rust Never Sleeps*. Where *Rust* juxtaposed an acoustic side with a side of frenzied guitar power, *Trans* integrates simple love songs with a foray into synthesiser electronics.

In the past I have found much of the music produced by synthesiser bands to be far too clinical. Young's success on *Trans* is that he overcomes this problem — the songs exude real warmth and emotion. On the album's highlight, 'Computer Age', the synthesised vocal is exquisite — it cries out to be heard. Backed by a Young guitar riff *par excellence* overlaid with electronics, it's great popular music.

Unlike *Rust*, this album downgrades the guitar but within the total sound there is some superb playing. 'Like An Inca' features Nils Lofgren and Young in some fine guitar interplay and the rework of the old Buffalo Springfield number 'Mr Soul' is tougher than the original — Young's most committed playing on the album. Lyrically, Young breaks no new ground on this album. Songs about technology taking over are plentiful but the difference here is in their presentation. The music soothes and savages when required, giving the lyrics added potency.

On any assessment, *Trans* is a major album. The pity is that in his dedication to doing something different with each album Young may have lost a large section of his audience.

David Perkins

China Crisis
Difficult Shapes and Passive Rhythms
Virgin

Newsflash. Simple Mind Jim Kerr said China Crisis are his favourite band.

No surprises there. Imitation is a fine form of flattery and China Crisis are the Simple Minds you listen to when you're not listening to Simple Minds.

For all its polish and melody in that smooth, glossy form perfected on *New Gold Dream*, *Difficult Shapes and Passive Rhythms* is bland. Straight takes of facile, play-by numbers songs are easy on the ear but hardly memorable as they lack a gripping undercurrent. Similarly the lyrics are clever — flirting with life, love and conflict — but lacking in real substance.

The eleven songs packaged here

are satisfyingly consistent, with only 'African and White' edging to the fore because of superior crafting and a more spirited vocal delivery. Performance-wise the vocals tend to be the weakest element, being world-weary, wan and wispy. The harmonies (witness Temptations Big Blue Eyes' and 'Seven Sports For All') jar when they should contrast or slide by. A more expressive, concentrated effort could have dispelled the unadventurous air of *Difficult Shapes*.

This is a safe, pleasant debut album, the musical equivalent of urbane Alan Whicker. Polished in stylised ways but ultimately as substantial as fairground candy-floss.

David Taylor

The J. Geils Band
Showtime
EMI America

This third Geils' live album lays down in-performance versions of the band's biggest sellers since the switch from Atlantic. The Geils group has always appeared to me to be at its most exciting in a live context and this album, recorded in Detroit, confirms that.

Despite the band's enduring tendency to attack virtually every song in the same, full-ahead fashion, it can have few equals in the business of whipping up a crowd. The album is mixed in an almost old-fashioned way — crowd noise sometimes overwhelming, instruments swamp each other in a murk of hard-driving noise. Hi-fi it's not, exciting it is.

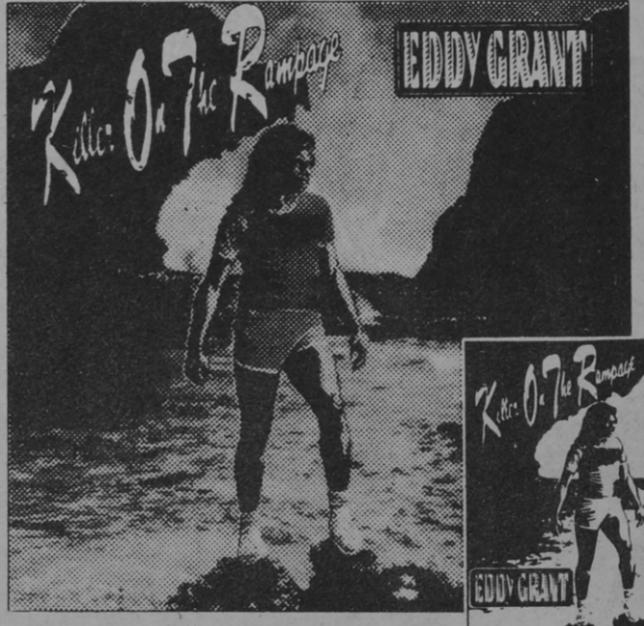
Peter Wolf and cohorts work through such crowd-pleasers as 'Jus' Can't Stop Me', 'Walls Come Tumblin' Down', 'Sanctuary', 'Love Stinks' and, of course, 'Centrefold'. But the real killer is the show closer, a punching version of the oft-recorded 'Land of a Thousand Dances', done in a manner that recalls Toots and the Maytals' live version of 'That's My Number'.

As is his custom, Wolf includes one of his over-the-top preaching raps, this time on the subject of love (it serves to introduce 'Love Stinks' on Side Two). While this no doubt can be spellbinding in concert, it becomes wearisome on record. Not unwisely, it has been programmed at the end of Side One. Otherwise, a fine album which falls short of greatness.

Ken Williams

EDDY GRANT

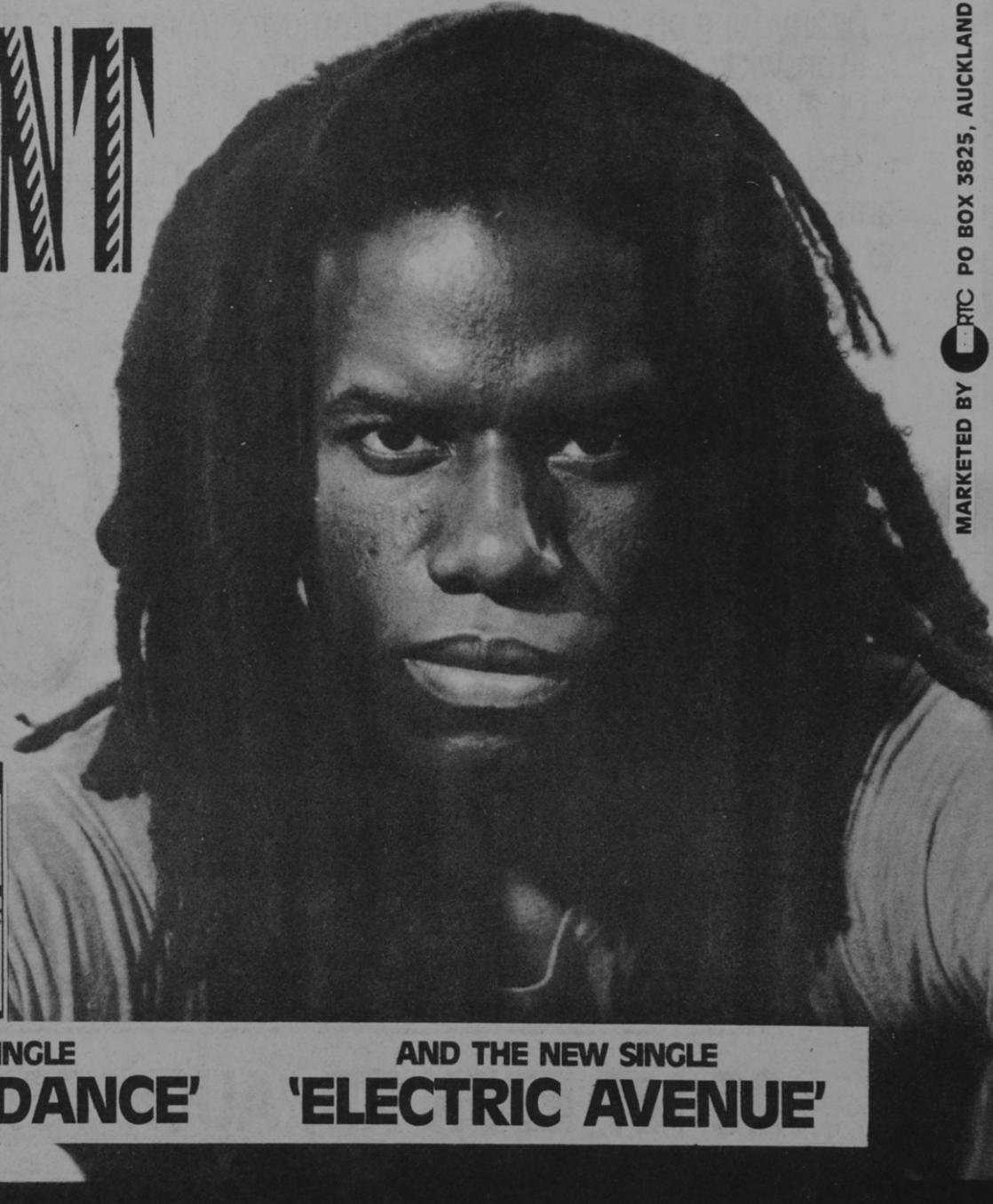
Killer On The Rampage



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