

# Records

David Bowie  
Let's Dance  
EMI

With the avowed intention of returning to the spirit of fifties R&B, David Bowie has released his first album since 1980's *Scary Monsters*.

Since, in rock'n'roll terms, he has been out of circulation for some time, *Let's Dance* can be seen both as a desire to return to unpretentious beginnings and as an attempt to plug into the dance music that is the current pulse. And just maybe that's the reason Chic's Nile Rodgers is along as co-producer and guitarist.

Whatever, *Let's Dance* is intentionally Bowie's most straight-forward physical (as opposed to intellectual) album since the sleek Philly soul of *Young Americans*. Entertainment is the message and the opening classic swagger of 'Modern Love', which screams to be a single, proves that point. Then 'China Girl', the Pop-Bowie collaboration that initially appeared on *The Idiot* but this time has been stripped of its darkness and claustrophobia and instead injected with an up-tempo optimism that makes it a completely different success. 'Let's Dance' (long version) is the pivot of the first side and its thrust and plaintive choral bridge make way for 'Without You', a beautifully understated love song that closes the first side.

'Ricochet', a mixture of Cabaret Voltaire mania, Bowie determination and social comment opens the second side and is probably the album's best move. 'Criminal World', a non-original, is delightful and guitarist Steven Vaughn adds some real deft touches. This leads into a completely rethought 'Cat People' and what was once a sluggish embarrassment is now made into a crucial song, taut and more dangerous. The seduction of 'Shake It', a satin glove is the last blow.

In its basic aims of the virtue of simplicity and the feel of enjoyment, *Let's Dance* has few flaws. Two or three more new originals wouldn't have gone amiss, especially considering his long

absence, but this complaint can't alter the fact that the new Bowie album is bound to be one of the invitations of the year.  
George Kay

Fun Boy Three  
Waiting  
Chrysalis

One instant classic single, one good single, two more good songs and several dinky twee ditties. That was the Fun Boy Three's debut album a year or so ago. A classic case of "great single lads, now do an album real quick to follow it." Since then, one single, a slightly misguided cover of a Gershwin standard and the Fun Boy Three didn't look a very good bet.

But voila, a second album at last, worthy of 'Stereotype', 'Ghosttown' and 'Lunatics'. It seems that the FB3 have finally got their act together and given us a listenable, coherent and directional album that highlights the strong points that were obvious in the Specials (rather than masking them, as the first album did). Terry, Lynval and Neville seemed to have forgotten that they were vocalists and masters of melodic understatement *par excellence*.

But no more. Apart from the dragging 'Well Fancy That' every track is a gem with incisive lyrics, just like the classics mentioned above. David Byrne's production is suitably sharp and clean.

If the last album had you convinced that the real inspiration behind the Specials was Jerry Dammers, this album heralds the return of the prodigal sons and demands your attention.

Simon Grigg

Herbs  
Light of the Pacific  
Warrior

This is a fine album.

Right from the opening 'French Letter' it's clear that this is Herbs at their smoothest and sharpest — it's their studio sound. The playing is precise, the production is clear.

'Crazy Mon' suffers in the studio, lacking its usual bite, but on the other hand the medley of traditional polynesian songs makes a lot more sense than it does through a rock PA.

The studio triumph, however, is the seven and a half minute title track, which features no fewer than seven guest musicians and singers. The song passes through



Big Sideways, Gluepot.



Herbs

several moods and is really a statement of what Herbs are about.

This album's political content is not nearly as overt or as widespread as that on the group's first mini-album *What's Be Happen?*, but it's still there. It's most obvious in the anti-nuclear sentiments of 'French Letter', but Them's the Breaks' and 'Crazy Mon' are also saying things worth thinking about.

Three of the six original songs, the most lyrically incisive ones, were written by former singer Tony Fonoti. Herbs have coped well with the loss of a lead vocalist, it will be interesting to see if they can fill the gap left by his songwriting.

It's puzzling that Herbs haven't drawn better crowds during their first national tour, a lot of people don't seem to want to listen. It would be a pity if it took international success for Herbs to gain the recognition in this country they deserve.

Russell Brown

3 Voices      Big Sideways  
Unsung      Unsung

Two debut albums from one of the country's newest independent labels, one by a very important new band, the other more of a novelty.

Big Sideways already have a solid reputation in Auckland, went down a treat at Sweetwaters and have recently made a tour of North Island provincial centres. Kingpin is guitarist Ivan Zagni and 11 others play on this album, notably ex Blam Mark Bell, Robbie Sinclair and Miltown Stowaways Syd Pasley and Kelly Rogers.

The sound is horn-driven, with the four-piece brass section punching the colour into a largely funky base. The jazz leanings are strongly reminiscent of the more

adventurous efforts made by Quincy Conserve in the late 1960s.

The horns flex their harmonies and dynamics effectively in the instrumentals which open each side. Zagni contributes two contrasting pieces, the party-down sound of 'Guava' and the turbulent 'Riding Out The Storm'. Sinclair's two efforts are also sharp contradictions, 'Dance It' being highly aggressive funk, while 'Not Bad' is just plain loopy. Drummer Phil Steel's 'One Planet' is a sparse ecological song and John Quigley's 'Run From Home' is similarly stripped down and almost desperate in its tone.

Perhaps the most interesting is Bell's 'Conversation With A Machine', a swipe at the computer age, giving a strong indication of where the Blams might have headed, had they managed to stay together.

3 Voices is described as 'an obscure sampler', all Robbie Sinclair compositions. Backing singers and musicians include several members of Big Sideways. The impression gathered is that these titles cover a lengthy period

of writing, some of them stemming from Sinclair's old Ray A. Band. Each piece is a miniature sketch, standing alone. Some are exercises in sound technology, others are collages and abstracts. The title track is an eerie, almost formless piece, with the voices wailing wordlessly and being almost mistaken for other instruments. 'Plastic Things' and 'The Bells' are equally harrowing. The album is not without its light and humorous moments. 'Listen Don't Cry' and 'Delighted Tonight' are both jaunty, appealing songs, the former being semi-ska, the latter south-of-the-border fiesta stuff.

This is very much an album for the individual to judge. It is maddeningly fragmentary. It will be misunderstood by many. I'm not sure that I understand it. Whatever your view, you couldn't call it dull.

If you can't find these albums in the shop, they can be ordered from Unsung Music, 54 High St, Auckland 1.

Duncan Campbell

The Chris Knox Ego  
Gratification Album  
Songs for Cleaning Guppies  
Flying Nun

This has been a very difficult album to review. There is a lot going on here, it can't just be absorbed, assigned a label and marked out of ten like some records.

Bits of it I like, bits of it I don't. Of the 20 tracks here some have an irritating unfinished feeling, while others are complete, gems at 80 seconds. Some are particularly complex in nature and Knox has stretched his four-track tape recorder further than most engineers can stretch a big studio.

Knox seems very conscious of his position as a hip priest in this country's alternative music scene. He doesn't like the fact that people will buy this album simply because he is Chris Knox, or because it's on Flying Nun. There seems to have been a deliberate attempt to shake that sort of thing by grouping the album's worst songs at the beginning. Or perhaps he conceived the whole thing purely as a piece of shit so people like me could make fools of themselves praising it. Surely not.

If you buy this album because you used to like Toy Love you may be disappointed because it's further away from Toy Love than

ever. It's sort of Beefheart meets Joan Baez meets Cale meets the Picnic Boys. It's odd, like some mirror-image Dylan, as Knox moves further away from rock towards a kind of folk the cries of "Judas!" grow louder. If this record is aimed to finally exorcise the lingering spirit of Toy Love I don't think it will.

It's not until the final 'Justification Song' that Knox comes clean and puts the questions clear. But "Do you want honesty/Or do you want a song?" Surely it's possible to have both? But Knox challenges, rather than abuses, the listener.

Ego? Certainly. Chris Knox wouldn't be making records and I wouldn't be reviewing them were it not for ego. At least Knox is honest enough to think about it.

This is a hard record to make decisions about because it is surrounded with questions (see 'Jesus Loves You' for an example) and you can't evaluate questions, only think about them. So maybe there's no point in me even writing this, because you'll all just have to buy it and decide for yourselves anyway. If that's true, it's a damn good way to sell records.

Russell Brown

Various Artists  
Burning Ambitions  
(A History of Punk)  
Cherry Red

Sooner or later someone had to have a go at putting together the definitive punk retrospective — thank God it's been done by people with some understanding. This compilation's greatest value lies in the fact that it contains much material never released in this country and some (like the Adverts' classic 'Gary Gilmore's Eyes') that is now hard to obtain anywhere.

The four sides run in loosely chronological order from 1976 through to the present day. Things begin well with the Buzzcocks' 'Boredom', The Fall's first, twisted single 'Bingo Master's Breakout', Wire's '12XU', ATV's 'Life' and the Adverts all on Side One.

Sides Two and Three are a mixed bag of old and not so old. The highlights include Swell Maps' 'Read About Seymour', Stranglers' 'Grip', Damned's 'Love Song' and 'Identity' by X-Ray Spex, but it's almost all great listening. The only turkeys are 'Stranglehold' by the

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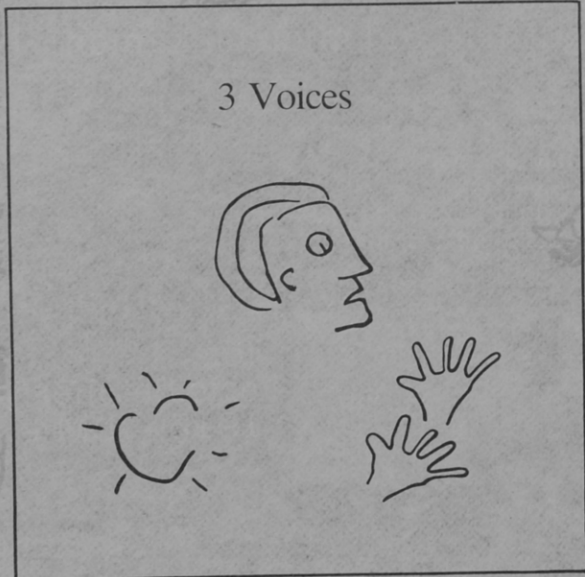
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