

Blacks as video props dept: 'Only Eric Clapton's recent 'Motherless Child' video comes close to the racial fetishization level of Madonna's 'Secret'. Clapton, though, takes the coloureds out of their 'environment', and places them, like Avedon, on a seamless backdrop, out of their element(s), so that it's all about them, down to the creases in their knuckles, the black moles on their brown faces. It's too precious for fucking words.' Danyel Smith, *The Village Voice*.

VARIOUS ARTISTS Tulare Dust: a Songwriters' Tribute to Merle Haggard (Hightone)

A while back it was fashionable for punks to trash their elders. Now, musicians are falling over themselves to pay their respects. Among the rash of recent tribute albums, this is the very best — because those taking part are here for the right reasons, not as a career move. Merle Haggard is the musician's working class hero, his songs believable and unforgettable snapshots of smalltown blue collar life. Everyone here captures his magic, because they are his true descendants rather than just the first people in the marketing dept's address book. Thanks to Marshall Crenshaw, Dwight Yoakam, Billy Joe Shaver, Iris Dement, et al, Merle will be back on my playlist — once I've tired of this.

VARIOUS ARTISTS It's Now or Never: the Tribute to Elvis (Mercury)

This however, was put together by an accountant (at least Sting and Sinead weren't invited). Hiring Don Was to produce and NRBQ to provide backing was a good start. Then, out came the true fans: Bryan Adams, Michael Hutchence, Billy Ray Cyrus, Melissa Etheridge, Tanya Tucker... as motley a collection of overblown Elvis imitators ever assembled. Just surviving with dignity are Dwight Yoakam, Faith Hill and — for effete irony reminiscent of Bryan Ferry, Wet Wet Wet. The tragedy is that the best moments seen on the TV broadcast have been left out: Jerry Lee Lewis, Paul Rodgers, John Cale. At least they didn't invite the new son-in-law to 'Teddy Bear'.

GEORGE JONES
The Bradley Barn Sessions (MCA)

The duet album as pure product — but compared to Sinatra's recent efforts, at least they sound alive. A typically brief (under 35 minutes) album from the Rolls-Royce voice of country, running through his hits one more time, with an uninspired bunch of A-list guests. Highlights include an almost unrecognisable Keith Richards on 'Say It's Not You', and a sparklingly fresh 'Where Grass Won't Grow' with Dolly, Emmylou and Trisha Yearwood.

PHIL ALVIN
County Fair 2000 (Hightone)

Roots record of the month. Phil Alvin of the Blasters invites a varied crew — the Dirty dozen Brass Band, the Faultline Syncopators — to celebrate the history of American music. Blues, gospel, dixie, honky tonk, all sit comfortably together in a seamless concept album that recalls early Ry Cooder and Leon Redbone. Good fun.

BEBE AND CECE WINANS
Relationships (Capitol)

Slick studio soul from the leaders of contemporary gospel: this has more in common with Whitney than any of the other Houstons. Like the Womacks without the songs, the loopy lyrics or the endearing affection for each other, this has the bland sound of adult black radio. Stick with Gladys Knight's recent *Just For You* for the best in modern popgospel.

GARY FLOYD
World of Trouble
(Glitterhouse/Global Routes)

White blues with a punk attitude. Floyd brings a refreshing alternative feel to roots music—but he's done his homework as well. This strong set of originals is played with a sweaty one-take feel, and delivered in an eclectic array of styles (swampy rock, Delta slide, country ballad). The first in a series of underground American artists released on the German Glitterhouse label.

JAMES BOOKER

albums



Manic Street Preachers

MANIC STREET PREACHERS The Holy Bible (Epic)

I always thought their name had a great image, screaming atop a soapbox as passers-by watch, but don't listen. It's apt, to a degree. There's always been an element of punk pop heritage to this Welsh four piece. The simplicity of the Jam, the snarl of the Pistols, the melodies of the Buzzcocks, and yet, beneath their musical surface, are writhing maggots. *The Holy Bible* is their third album. It is, for the most part, created and driven by their Cobainesque icon, Richey '4 Real' James (who was recently hospitalised after his anorexia, alcoholism and self mutilation proved near fatal). The stench of his self-loathing permeates this CD. They're his songs — personal songs, dark revelations, with the lyrics here for all to see.

The closing lines of '4st 7lb' (the weight at which anorexics face death) give you the gut wrenching idea: 'Self worth scatters / Self esteem's a bore... such beautiful dignity in self abuse'. And the titles '(I wanna die) In the Summertime', 'The Intense Humming Of Evil' and 'Archives Of Pain' deliver exactly what they promise.

Bible isn't hung up on image and ambition like *Generation Terrorists* — there's too much anger and pain. Nor does it drown in polish like *Gold Against the Soul*, as its scowls were captured in some shithole stuio in Cardiff's red light district. It is a gritty, seething mess, with plenty of pop among the decomposing pigeons.

JOHN TAITE

SLAYER Divine Intervention (American)

Us jelly-back humans only use about 10 per cent of our brain's potential. Pretty sad news, isn't it... so where does that leave us? Hopelessly inadequate at best and absolutely hopeless at worst. There's very little hope. Ever heard of Social Darwinism? It's about survival of the fittest — weeding out the gene pool, if you will. It's a very metal concept when you think about it. If you can't handle the power and the subtle lyrical twists that the music of bands like Slayer offer, then maybe you should... well, fuck off and die.

So what about those that decide to start wandering around killing people, those who actually try and carry out these social 'experiments'. Have they tapped into the rest of their brain, or are they just unable to put value on human life? And who protects us from these killers anyway? The cops and their ticket books? The armies and their chemical weapons? The priest who kneels alone in poverty and prays for us? We are all alone — to be weeded out — Slayer know it and create the soundscape to accomodate it.

How beautiful this album should come out just before Jeffrey Dahmer had his brains splashed around the walls of a toilet cubicle.

There's a great song on this album about Jeffrey Dahmer. It's loaded with some very evocative lines about dead men. Jeffrey drilled holes in mens skulls, poured acid into those holes and waited for a zombie to arise. His victims went into comas and died. Then he had sex with them. Have you passed a serial killer on the street today? Are Slayer sick because they sing about death constantly, or are they just facing up to a reality that is so very real it makes you shit your pants?

You're very drunk. You wake up. You don't know where you are. You look around. You are tied to something. You can't move. Jeffrey Dahmer is lying next to you, naked. You're going to die. Feel the hideous blasts. Hold back a cackling laugh as Tom Araya shouts about more killings. Then burst through a new plane of understanding beyond your wildest dreams and bow down before the mighty love of Jesus Christ our saviour. Let us rock, amen.

JEREMY CHUNN

METHOD MAN Tical (Def Jam)

GALLIANO A Thicker Plot (Talkin' Loud)

Method Man was always the star of the infamous Wu-Tang Clan rap collective. Out on his own, this Staten (Shaolin) Island, steel vampire fanged (check out the photos!), psychotic rap assassin is no less lethal. There ain't a spot of G-funk to be heard. The two styles going down here are old school poundings and splashes of horrorcore — aided by producer RZA (Prince Rakeem) of the Gravediggaz. The beats are blunted, the rap is gruff, the style meanders in and out of time. Of course, there are the staple kung-fu movie samples.

'I Get My Thang In Action', 'Tical', 'Meth Vs Chef' all ooze some Knievel sounds. But when swarming bees and screams of terror open 'Mr Sandman', then chilling soprano vocals mix with an old horror movie organ and RZA gets involved in some rap warfare — phew — hell with the lid off, ya know. Then 'Stimulation' brings it back to spliff time with the aid of some strings from some 1940s Hollywood love scene. This ain't nothin' ta fuck with. The Wu-Tang saga continues.

As for Galliano, well, *A Thicker Plot* is about being fucked with. It's a re-mix album. Although this is better than the disappointing *The Plot Thickens*, all of the mixes here have stripped away the ethnic core to Galliano's sound. Instead, the various remixers (DJ Krush, Machine, the Roots, Palm Skin et al) have used Galliano's music as a sample mine. Weatherall's does the usual spacious sounds of surround on 'Skunk Funk', Machine creates some dance floor fodder supreme with 'Long Time Gone' and X Project give them a jungle juicing. *A Thicker Plot* is a whore of an album. That's the full appeal.

JOHN TAITE

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