

down for years / Jesus come closer / I think my time is near...

This is a fine summation of Polly Jean Harvey. You'd have to be goddamn strong to be an ice queen living in the desert. Polly is that. She sings her time is near just three songs into this album's first and title track, then hauls herself through a whole album of gut twisters that spit in the face of any Saint Peter type, before being perfectly closed by the redemption of 'The Dancer'. Flood and John Parrish join Polly as producers this time round. The band name still sticks, but Flood, for one, is calling this very much Polly's project, despite any thing one may read into 'Working For The Man'. This track puts the heaviest pressure on your bass monitor it will have felt in a while (and will brace it well for the muted thud of 'I Think I'm A Mother'), before beating its way to one of those squealing burts you hear just before your hearing goes. 'C'Mon Billy' trades the bass for violin, teamed with acoustic guitar, augmenting one of the album's finest tracks. While PJ's left holding the baby here, she's looking for a lost one on the eerily hissed 'Down By The Water'. The best vocals are delivered on 'Tecto' and 'Send His Love To Me', which remind you just how essential this talent is, while unearthing a couple of dozen more of those often hauled out Patti Smith comparisons. 'Long Snake Moan' is a slow driven rocker which I'd kill to see live. Until that day comes, I suggest you lock your-

self in a disheveled room (mental or physical) and tear the hair out of a couple of voodoo dolls. Yes Polly — your voodoo is working, and how!

BRONWYN TRUDGEON

**LITTLE AXE** The House That Wolf Built (On U Sound)

Former Sugarhill and Tackhead guitarist Skip McDonald meets the blues, but I bet it's not what Leadbelly had in mind.

The House That Wolf Built is a musical melting pot, filtered through the awesome On U Sound machine. It's like Tackhead without the crunching rhythms and heavy metal guitars. It's like Eric Clapton discovered the rhythm in blues and the 90s all at the same time. It's like... it's like... it's really hard to describe Little Axe. 'Another Sinful Day' is about the closest they get to traditional blues, yet dem blues haunt the album. 'Wolf's Story' pretty much sums up the feeling conjured up by McDonald, who has been co-producing and remixing for On U for the past few years.

Little Axe is the kind of music you can put on at the start of a car journey in the middle of the night. Three hours later, you arrive and don't even realise the time has gone.

Listen to the compelling rhythm of 'Ride On', the first single, and let Little Axe's haunting hard rhythms and atmospheric samples subvert your mind.

'Wake the town and tell the people about the king of sound and blues / Each sound around you carries you deeper, and deeper and sounder.'

MARK REVINGTON

**ALT** Altitude (EMI)

Alt is German for 'old' which is a fairly accurate depiction of ALT's members — Tim Finni, Hothouse Flower Liam O'Maonlai and unknown Dublin victim Andy White. This is one of those part-time, hopefully one-off, band relationships that stars occasionally indulge in through chance encounters or fiscal incentives.

In keeping with the rather informal nature of the band *Altitude* is an album of relaxed bonhomie and half-realised songs and ideas. There's the kernel of substantial songs in 'The Refuge Tree' and 'What You've Done'. Even the throwaway, loose party feel of 'We're All Men' and 'Penelope Tree' can't totally disguise there's some charm lurking in there. The rest is either pretty tardy, like 'When the Winter

Comes' and 'I Decided To Fly', or just plain maudlin and lacking in the commitment and conviction needed to justify making this record. The only good news is it could have been worse.

GEORGE KAY

**VAN HALEN** Balance (Warner)

Another No. 1 album in the States for Van Halen, and it's a bunch of new songs that continue their trademark big rock sound with a few surprises thrown in. Different offerings like 'Strung Out', which is Eddie getting some crazy sounds out of his piano, plus two other instrumentals, add a different touch to the expected formula. Another change is Eddie's short hair and beard, giving him a true Dutchman look. Mainly though, it's the guys rocking out and having a good time in 'Amsterdam' ('Stone you like nothing else can / Don't have to worry about the man') and 'Big Fat Money' which is basically a 90s version of the old Bradford/Gordy rock 'n' roll number. The stand-out tracks are definitely 'The Seventh Seal', 'Don't Tell Me' and 'Feelin'', which all contain brilliant playing from the Van Halen brothers, and the band as a whole demonstrate how powerful and tight-knit they are as a unit. Hagar is more prominent this time too, with two tunes ('Deja Vu' and the cheesy 'Can't Stop Loving You') sounding straight out of the Sammy songbook. He's now been in Van Halen for longer than David Lee Roth was, so we can probably rule out any return to the diamond days when their albums rated 10 out of 10. *Balance* would get somewhere around six and a half, which is still high enough to buy.

GEOFF DUNN

**VARIOUS ARTISTS** Collision 3 (Mushroom)

**VARIOUS ARTISTS** Red, Hot and Cool (BMG)

**VARIOUS ARTISTS** Red, Hot on Impulse (BMG)

Well, another *Collision* compilation. Exactly the same as the last two, only different songs. What else do you need to know?

Errm, 20 tracks. Spot of Brit rock (Primal Scream), spot of hip-hop (Coolio), spot of Mozz, Grant Lee Buffalo. Weezer's one wonderful hit. Even the 3Ds and Head Like A Hole (yay!). Being an Australian comp, there are lots of

Ozzy bands pretending to be important like Barker and Ash(!?). It's your very own Australian, alternative radio playlist.

The next two chapters in the AIDS awareness compilations are also among us. First up, picking up on the jazzy hip-hop flavour, is *Red Hot and Cool*.

It opens with its worst song, 'Time Is Moving On (live)', which has Guru doing all this live toss like "Come on y'all turn it up". Yeah, yeah, yeah. It gets a bit better as MC Solaar does his thing, then Michael Franti sneaks in 'Positive' off the latest Spearhead album (not all that jazzy, but it's a great song). Some of the rapper meets jazzster team ups are amazing: MeShelle's bad Gurrl blues and Herbie Hancock's piano mastery (phew); the Roots with the floating vibes of Roy Ayers (wow). There's UFO, Dignable Planets, Pharcyde, US3. This is the jazzy hip hop album of the moment. Knievil listening.

*Red Hot and Cool* even gives you a bonus CD of Branford Marsalis doing Coltrane's 'A Love Supreme' and Alice Coltrane's trippy hippy version. Both of which are a taster of the companion jazz album, *Red Hot On Impulse*. Basically, Impulse records have capitalised on all the sampling on *Red Hot and Cool*, just as Blue Note did with US3's album — they've re-released the original songs that were sampled. There's lots of Pharoah "don't call me the Colonel" Sanders' solo spiritual (well, hippy) jazz. There are the highlights of Alice Coltrane's career (as well as John's 'Love Supreme'). There's the bass brilliance of Charles Mingus, the rolling be-bop drumming of Max Roach, all sorts.

I wouldn't recommend grabbing it just 'cause you're into *Red Hot and Cool*, but it's certainly got all the magic of the Impulse label for the enthusiasts.

JOHN TAITE

**HELLO SAILOR** The Album (EMI)

The ignoramus really come out of the woodwork when you mention the new Hello Sailor album. Two out of three people feel they have the right to creatively dismiss a musician or a band just 'cause they're over 40. The bottom line though, is the necessity for good songs and great vocals, and *The Album* has both.

Graham Brazier has a superb rock voice — it's strong and powerful, and he carries a melody brilliantly. Song wise, *The Album* is notable for the lack of Brazier/McArtney com-



Little Axe

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