



# back beat

**BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN** Greatest Hits  
(Columbia)

'Born to Run' roars from the speakers, glistening like a Phil Spector gold record, the visions are all epic, the dreams glorious. Definitely a 'greatest hits' – there is nothing from the wordy first two albums – the 14 famous tracks give a rapid overview of the Boss. We see the dreams explode in 1984 when the critics' favourite (he delivered on

Elvis's promise) became a worldwide superstar. My ears are still weary from the radio overkill of 'Born in the USA' and 'Dancing in the Dark', but the moving minimalism of 'My Hometown' points to Springsteen's darker, less bombastic future. These days I see *Tunnel of Love* as his greatest album, its maturity hinted at by 'Atlantic City' five years earlier. This album (the first volume?) is most useful to inspire reconsideration, to see the big picture, as well as for the joy of rediscovering *Born to*

*Run and Darkness*; the four extra tracks are to entice the fans, rather than essential.

**JOHN LEE HOOKER** Chill Out  
(Virgin)

The man who taught Van Morrison how to growl cruises with dignity to superannuation. Now 78, the Hook follows his recent guest-heavy successes of *The Healer* and *Mr Lucky* with a complete work of creativity that is satisfying without too much celebrity help. Van, Carlos Santana and R&B piano legend Charles Brown make distinguished appearances, but it is the Hook who dominates. His inimitable chooglin' boogie and one-chord vamping remains fresh on remakes of 'One Bourbon, One Scotch, One Beer' and 'Serves Me Right to Suffer', plus there are exquisite examples of pure Delta blues played by Hook alone. One of the last in a long line of blues geniuses from Clarksdale, Mississippi, Hook shows how to age with class.

**DAVID MUNYON** Code Name: Jumper  
(Glitterhouse/Global Routes)

The dark side of the Springsteen dream, part one. This wordsmith/fingerpicker comes across like a more serious John Prine, though occasional flashes of humour emerge. He delivers snapshots of real characters in the underbelly of US blue-collar life: Vietnam vets, panhandlers, drifters and dreaming dads. The very simple arrangements are held together by David Pomeroy's fretless bass.

**RICHARD BUCKNER** Bloomed  
(Glitterhouse/Global Routes)

The dark side of the Springsteen dream, part two. San Francisco based, Buckner is another Midwest songsmith who eschews mainstream aspirations. Recorded in Austin, this has strong (if bleak) songs, with the only drawback being Buckner's reedy voice, which recalls James Taylor.

**JOHN MARTYN** Sweet Little Mysteries  
(Island)

A two-pack career anthology from the eclectic singer-guitarist who was rivetting at Sweetwaters in 1983. Coming from the British folk scene of the late 60s, Martyn's early material leans a little towards Donovan rather than Fairport Convention for my tastes, but his subtle folk-blues voice is strongly supported by leg-

endary acoustic bassist Danny Thompson. Later, Island stalwarts such as Steve Winwood contribute as Martyn gets into jazzy-acoustic meanderings and the occasional tilt at world music. Recommended for Paul Ubana Jones fans – and to those who remember the days of Buddha and Joni Mitchell's *Hejira*.

**PAT McLAUGHLIN** Get Out and Stay Out  
(dos)

The 1989 album for Capitol, produced by Mitchell Froom and never released until now. Probably they thought the sound – power pop rather than the roots rock of last year's *Unglued* – was nothing special, not hearing the strength of the songs. But Bonnie Raitt did, particularly the swampy feel of 'Don't Tell Me'. I can also hear echoes of David Lindley, Marshall Crenshaw, Boz Scaggs's recent album – and John Hiatt without the vocal mannerisms.

**SONNY LANDRETH** South of I-10  
(Zoo/BMG)

Landreth is a Cajun guitar hero, an electric bottleneck specialist who dazzled as part of John Hiatt's *Slow Turning* band. On his own, Landreth's guitar work has character and variety; he pisses on Chris Whitley with authenticity and originality. But Landreth is held back by his ordinary songs and weak voice. Plenty of friends help out – Allen Toussaint, Mark Knopfler, Stephen Bruton – but this needs someone like Daniel Lanois (missing in action?) to bring out the meat. Recommended, however, to bottleneck stalwarts.

**VARIOUS ARTISTS** Skynyrd Friends  
(MCA)

With friends like these, who needs enemies? The tributes get more absurd. Lynyrd Skynyrd died in a plane crash in 1977, the same year as Elvis and Bing Crosby. Those two were giants of 20th century pop music; Skynyrd weren't, but at the time it was their star in the ascendant. More than a mere Southern boogie band, they were *smart* good ole boys. Unfortunately these C-grade new country acts (Travis Tritt, Wynonna, Confederate Railroad ... Steve Earle, what are you doing here?) show none of Skynyrd's sass. But even Alabama can't kill a great song like 'Sweet Home Alabama'.

JAMES BOOKER



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
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