

Dance

OC Word Life
(Wild Pitch)

Word Life is a very strong, very well produced LP. Production credits go to Organised Konfusion, and it has an overall intelligence that is seldom seen. On songs like 'Time's Up', where OC states: 'Non-conceptual, non-exceptional, everyone's either crime related or sexual,' he speaks honestly and uses effective language. A great story teller, on 'Go Ahead Wit Yourself', 'Story' and 'Cops', he tells stories about his girlfriend leaving him for another woman, police deviancy, and a gruesome tale of a thief whose family gets tortured by drug dealers. His style is straight up and basic — effective positivity without sound preachy or like a woosi.

This is a great release, well worth buying if you like good beats and better lyrics. Small body count, however, for you gangsta rap freaks. *Word Life*.

OLI GREEN

GOATS No Goats, No Glory
(Ruff House)

The Goats' second effort is once again produced by Joe 'the Butcher' Nicolo, and once again about weed and pseudo revolution. There are additions of live drums and guitars, and I'm not sure if I'd really consider it hip-hop. The rappers share styles and don't really impress.

'Wake 'n' Bake' is the first song about getting stoned. The second song, 'Philly Blunts', is about... getting stoned. Maybe they forgot the first song or something.

The Goats miss the target, and the best thing about this is the great cover art. Really pretty average. No Goats, there is no glory.

OLI GREEN

MASTA ACE INC. Sittin' On Chrome
(Delicious Vinyl)

NONCE World Ultimate
(American)

You just know it's going to be a good summer when you get not one, but two rap albums this fine. First up, Masta Ace has expanded out a little to become an Inc., and I have no problems with that, as *Sittin' On Chrome* is probably his finest output yet. The whole album seems to be progression from last year's hit 'Jeep Ass Niguh' (a rap concept album?) — same kicked back vibe anchored by solid beats and some very cool raps. *Sittin' On Chrome* flows along nicely. All the Inc. members get a moment or two in the spotlight, and they all acquit themselves very well, with some of the best rap lyrics I've heard in a long while.

The Nonce work in a similar vein — the same laconic but tough sound is all over *World Ultimate*. The raps are of a more smart ass, boasting style, but the smooth and funky vibe is definitely still there, along with a more hook orientated approach. It's a cool mix. There's definitely a strong old school feel in the raps and the pacing of the record, but the beats and loops have a heavy and slightly nasty element. With rap music as stylistically delineated as it is nowadays, both these albums are a good deal — rap that's just plain good.

KIRK GEE



The Goats

Bobby Charles



back beat

BOBBY CHARLES

Wish You Were Here Right Now
(Stony Plain/Global Routes)

After 40 years in the biz, legendary reclusive Cajun pop songwriter returns with only his third proper album, and he's full of beans. The writer of 'See You Later Alligator', 'Walking to New Orleans' and other classics re-visited here, Charles sings like a relaxed Rick Danko. He puts the 'easy' into The Big Easy, with casual help from friends such as Willie Nelson, Neil Young and Sonny Landreth. Charles's invention of Gulf Coast blues is absolutely charming: a mix of New Orleans pop and Tex-Mex soul.

DAN PENN Do Right Man
(Sire)

Dan Penn grew up in the deep South, a white boy who listened to black radio stations, wanting to be Ray Charles or Bobby Bland. Instead, he wrote some of the great soul classics for Aretha Franklin, Joe Tex, Percy Sledge and others. Here, 35 years after he started selling songs, 22 years after his debut album, Penn returns as performer. You can hear the R&B giants taking all their cues from his aching blue-eyed soul delivery as he re-captures some of his most famous songs: 'Dark End of the Street', 'Do Right Man', 'It Tears Me Up' and 'I'm Your Puppet'. Assisting him with passionate, effortless support — like RSA veterans returning to the trenches — are his old buddies from Muscle Shoals studios. The most successful, and essential, comeback of an unacknowledged legend since Arthur Alexander's *Lonely Just Like Me*. Why has local release of this wonderful album taken so long?

VARIOUS ARTISTS Come Together:
America Salutes the Beatles
(Liberty)

The Beatles were the great Irish country band before the Pogues: check out 'I've Just Seen a Face', 'What Goes On', 'I'm Looking Through You'. Here, C-grade country wannabes pay tribute to the Fabs with a little too much reverence (and too little talent). The result is MOR wallpaper from complete unknowns, with every McCartney nuance copied by the taste-and-talent-free (those who *aspire* to be also-rans on the country Grammys). This is headed straight for the bargain bins, and two exceptions make it worth \$5: Willie Nelson's spirited honky tonking of 'One After 909', and Kris Kristofferson's bizarre 'Paperback Writer' (Johnny Cash goes HM).

GUY CLARK Dublin Blues
(WEA)

The aristocrat of outlaw songwriting returns, with a solid album to accompany his spellbinding recent Auckland concert. Wry tales and seductive singalongs, conveyed in a voice as mellow as aged port and just as complex. The acoustic backing is spacious and sympathetic for this old rogue and romantic: 'I threw a rock through your window / just to let you know I cared.'

BOB DYLAN MTV Unplugged
(Columbia)

Some say he should never have plugged in. Just when you think Dylan's doing it all in his sleep, the wily old bastard pulls a fast one when you've nodded off. Here, among the redundant remakes, the surprise is a riveting return to 'Desolation Row'. From the days when he could do no wrong (1965), every couplet is a gleaming gem. Rarely performed since then,

it is sung here with utter affection. It shows how easy another *Blood On the Tracks* comeback would be, if only he took time out from the Never-ending Tour to re-group.

TODD SNIDER Songs for the Daily Planet
(MCA)

The best "new Dylan" in years, and so much more. Snider (change that surname) comes fully formed, like Springsteen in '74. An alternative singer-songwriter for Kurt Cobain naysayers (ie, aging rock critics), Snider has the humour of cloth-capped Dylan, the earnest wordsmithery of early Springsteen, plus Stones raunch. The grooves are varied, but it's all good fun, especially the bonus surprise, a talking blues satirising the marketing of Seattle grunge acts. A clever-dick who doesn't take himself seriously, Snider is the discovery of the year so far.

BUTCH HANCOCK Eats Away the Night
(Sugar Hill/Global Routes)

Aging "new Dylan" Hancock is part of the Lubbock set which threw up Joe Ely and Jimmie Dale Gilmore (all three were in the legendary Flatlanders, whose 1972 album is an essential re-issue). His nasal shaggy dog stories are good-humoured and romantic, resembling Woody Guthrie as much as Dylan. A consummate wordsmith, Hancock's recent songs ('Pumpkinhead', 'Eileen') sit well alongside new — if unnecessary — versions of his classics 'Boxcars' and 'If You Were a Bluebird'.

MICHAEL FRACASSO When I Live in the Wild
(Bohemia/Global Routes)

Second album time from this Italo-American "new Dylan" ('Words are Weapons'), a strong songwriter with a heartfelt delivery which, with repeated listening, recalls more the plaintive urban folk of Grant MacLennan.

THE MINUS 5 Old Liquidator
(Glitterhouse/Global Routes)

To quote Roger L: "The Byrds on bad acid — or Paul McCartney on good acid." Like an alternative Latin Playboys, this busman's holiday from Scott McCaughey (Young Fresh Fellows) and Peter Buck (REM) is full of sassy, Beatlesque doodles. Chris Knox would love to make this, but wouldn't admit it.

JAMES BLUNDELL Earth & Sky
(EMI)

The Tom Cruise of Australian country has spoilt us with a double CD — and you kinda wish he hadn't. The rocky *Sky* is a lot better than the folksy *Earth* — the varied acoustic-rock backings flatter the assured songs more than Blundell's bland voice does. Still, all credit to JB for taking risks and making the big statement: this kicks the shit out of the Beatle tributers.

STEVIE WONDER Conversation Peace
(Motown)

The music still drips from his fingers. Wonder returns after five years with a superb new album that proves he's still the cock-eyed, pop-eared optimist. Funky, jazzy, a cornucopia of melody, this wonderful album shows a pop mastermind on top of his form — and hidden within the slinky hooks are plenty of political messages. Irresistible songs such as 'Tomorrow the Robins Will Sing' and 'Take the Time Out' make you feel good to be alive. Isn't that what pop music's for?

JAMES BOOKER

Reissues



MARVIN GAYE The Master 1961-1984
(Motown)

There are three things that make me exceptionally happy — being fast asleep, being dead drunk, or listening to Marvin Gaye. He has the ability to deliver what many human beings seek, transcendence — he can take you away from yourself — and he sings, as the Commodores observed, with "his heart in every line."

Smokey Robinson once remarked, "the driving force behind Marvin Gaye's immense talent was his pain. Marvin was a soul that was basically in pain." The result of this was that his life could be mapped out in his songs, and at the root of all Marvin's songs was love, either true love or the kind that at its worst, screws you up for life. But this approach to his music wasn't calculated or designed to gain him sympathy, he was just very upfront, and very honest, and that's what I appreciate most about him, of many things I could claim.

The four CD box-set *The Master*, is a companion to the 1994 release, *The Marvin Gaye Collection*, a grouping of the albums *Let's Get It On*, *I Want You*, *Trouble Man*, and an album of previously unreleased tracks, *Love Starved Heart*. *The Master* is a visually glorious piece of work, filled with lavish colour and black and white portraits of Marvin, a comprehensive discography, and liner notes written by David Ritz, author of the Marvin biography *Divided Soul*.

Disc one covers Marvin's first three years at Motown, though ignores his first six months with the label, when his dream to become a crooner in the style of Frank Sinatra produced the failed album *The Soulful Moods Of Marvin Gaye*. Convinced by Motown founder Berry Gordy that he needed to establish a young audience, both black and white, before he could crack the adult market, Marvin went crazy in the studio, recording his own compositions and those of Norman Whitfield and the legendary trio Holland/Dozier/Holland.

His first success was the autobiographical 'Stubborn Kind Of Fellow', which was followed by a string of hits including 'Can I Get A Witness', and 'How Sweet It Is'. On the recordings from this early period of his career, Marvin's voice is so effortlessly powerful and beautiful at the same time, not yet tainted by the painful end to his marriage to Gordy's sister, Anna. It wasn't until later in the decade that the songs he would record would begin to feature stories of yearning and despair.

Not only was Marvin scoring hits solo, in the mid to late sixties, Gordy began to pair him with various female vocalists including Mary Wells, Kim Weston, and Marvin's eventual favourite singing partner, Tammi Terrell. 'Ain't No Mountain High Enough', 'If I Could Build My Whole World Around You', 'Your Precious Love', 'Ain't Nothing Like The Real Thing', 'Keep On Lovin' Me Honey', and 'You're All I Need To Get By', all became instant classics once recorded by the duo. Much of disc two is devoted to this optimistic and fruitful period, but is indisposed with tracks not written by Marvin, but ones he insisted on recording — 'This Love Starved Heart Of Mine (It's Killing Me)', 'More Than A Heart Can Stand', 'How Can I Forget' — that point to the inner turmoil that was destroying him, but was also responsible for the most memorable songs of his career.

At the start of the 70s, Marvin decided to set his own agenda, he chose a new artistic direction of his own making, began to produce himself for the first time, and recorded mostly his own compositions or those he had co-written. The first release was *What's Going On*, a landmark in soul music. Inspired to a degree by