

Dance

FUN FACTORY Close To You (BMG)

Taking a while to find its way downunder, but worth it nonetheless. This is pure-pop Euro-disco, done well by studio/video band Fun Factory. The best mix is the 'Trouble Mix', only because it's a (slightly) stretched out version of the 'Radio Edit'. Ragga fans will be disappointed to find out the 'Ragga' version really isn't — it's more a whiny, pseudo K7-style rap. Not for thinking, just dancing.

DEEP FOREST Marta's Song (Sony)

Not really for dancing, this is the thinking-person's pop. Trancey, ambient dub/techno using sampled rhythms/vocals/percussions from around the world. Spooky, but interesting stuff. Fans won't be disappointed — except for the fact the album version isn't included, as promised on the sleeve. 'Cafe Europa' is — it's a Middle Eastern-style rhythm, no doubt inspired by the large Muslim community now living France. Don't let their country's nuclear testing put you off this band.

STRIKE U Sure Do (BMG)

Jeez, everytime I hear this on the radio I go nuts. Where did they sample the vocal from? I swear I've heard it before, but can't figure where. 'You sure do make me feel like loving you,' is pretty much all there is to this song vocally, but the beat is good — more pure-pop Euro disco as espoused by Fun Factory, 2 Unlimited, The Real McCoy, etc..

STONE AGE Zo Laret Remixes (Sony)

If Strike sound like Fun Factory (or vice versa), then Stone Age sound like Deep Forrest, only a tad more danceable. Five mixes in all, yet each one sounds very different from the others. The 'Tribal Trance' and 'Sextended' mixes are best, however, neo-hippies will love the 'Jungoluv' and 'Magic Carpet' mixes. A nice mix of percussion and ambient dance.

SHABBA Let's Get It On (Sony)

More ragga from the man who keeps it real, Shabba Ranks. Purists will call it pop, which it is, but compared to a lot of the other stuff coming out as 'ragga', this ain't perpetrating. The 'Radio Mix' is actually quite bass heavy, which is a surprise, considering what they like to play on air. I found myself preferring instead the lighter 'Salaam's Mix'. Also included is the 'Selector Mix' of 'Original Woman'.

HOCUS POCUS Here's Johnny! (Central Station)

Hardcore techno-industrial dance from Dutch outfit Hocus Pocus. This is what happens when you grow up listening to Kraftwerk and Yello instead of Giorgio Moroder, I guess. This is hard house, with the emphasis on hard — a frenetic hi-speed beat intercut with Jack Nicholson's unbeatable refrain from *The Shining*. Six mixes in all, all great, but I'm not sure I could listen to this for too long!

DARK TOWER Real Zealmen (Curious Records)

At 20 minutes long, this EP is exceptional value. Dark Tower are two Christchurch rappers who come across as kind of an Antipodean version of the Beastie Boys. They aren't afraid to try anything musically, and their rhymes are heavy on the humour (don't get me wrong — it's not a joke or novelty rap). Listening to The Eel and The Earl rap about sheep and rural life really brought me back home. Rather than follow the US hip-hop style, Dark Tower strike out on their own, sampling the old *Country Calendar* theme and tossing in a few barbies for good measure. That said, the beats are good, the rhymes strong ('just a half-caste brother in a half-caste land'), and the lyrical flow is excellent. Expect to hear this all over student radio.

LIVIN' JOY Dreamer (MCA Records)

Whoa momma, this Italian House is white-hot! The difference is subtle, but this stuff has it all over Euro-disco. Pure dancefloor sounds, guaranteed to fill any floor any time. Six big, thumping

mixes, including ones by Rollo and Junior Vasquez — I wouldn't even dare suggest which one is best. Single of the month.

SNAP The First, The Last, Eternity (Till The End) (Not One Second Sooner) (BMG)

Snap started out pop and progressively got harder. Better than starting out hard, then selling out, I guess, but purists will need to wake up and switch on to Snap. No longer Euro-disco, they've become Italian house/techno, and the production is lush and deep. Hard driving beats and a meaningless vocal hook from Summer make this an obvious hit.

HADDAWAY Fly Away (BMG)

Having already had his fair share of hits, I reckon he's going to have to take his turn on the bench for this one. Euro-disco, but nothing that matches other efforts released this month. Anyone pining for a slice of piano should try the 'Development Corporation Mix', however, the best mix is the entry-level hard house 'Hyper Space Mix'.

MICHAEL JACKSON Scream (Sony)

I almost didn't bother reviewing this one because I know you've already heard it — a hundred times. So, let's talk about the video instead. No, not the sickeningly narcissistic promo video for the album, but the one for this song. Michael has the moves, but when Janet lifts her top she steals the show. But if you can take your eyes off her breasts for one second (I don't care what her lawyers say, they look like implants), you'll see that Michael is really catching wreck. In one sequence he pops like an old school hip-hop master, well impressive.

VARIOUS Summerjam 95 (Zed Music)

Imported from the New York mixmaster specialists this is the ideal tape for riding round town, pretending you're rolling through the hood. Ninety minutes seamlessly mixed into one phat tape. Artists include Adina Howard, Dr Dre, Brandy, Naughty By Nature, Brand Nubian, Mary J Blige, Ol' Dirty Bastard, Notorious BIG, and others so new I've never heard of them. Excellent quality and all mixed live on the turntables!

NICK D'ANGELO

THE ALKOHOLICS Coast II Coast (Loud Records)

The party continues. J-Ro, E-Swift and Tash are back, complete with the sound effects. If you heard '21 and Over', you'll know the steelo punchlines and bragg raps. This is true for *Coast II Coast* as well. However, there is a lot of seriousness shown here also. '2014' is a song about the aftermath of a nuclear bomb, when the only people left on earth are hip-hop heads (serious Alcoholics-style). Q Tip rhymes on 'All the Way Live', and Flashback is a great old school tribute/parody.

The Alkaholiks are just as good as they ever were, with better beats... if you know what I mean. Well worth the effort and good for a laugh.

OLI GREEN

MOBB DEEP The Infamous Mobb Deep (Loud Records)

Queensbridge, New York: most recently the home of two gangsters with skills, Prodigy and Havoc. This album is scary. The stories they tell about being shot at, shooting, dealing drugs, etc. are told with such no-chalance and matter of factness it makes me think: 'Shit.'

The lyrics are mostly orientated around living in the projects and surviving on the street (nothing new here), it's just their delivery and the thoughts that surround the shootings and muggings that make the difference.

Both MCs are at the ripe old age of 19 and, as Prodigy says, 'I'm only 19, but my brain is old', sort of sums up the whole album. This could slide into the files of 'fillers who rap', except for their beats. It's also soooo well produced. Mobb Deep do their own production for the most part, but Q Tip creates three superb tracks.

The best song by far is 'Eye For An Eye', which features NAS (another Queensbridge local) and Rae Kwon (Wu Tang). There are well thought out chorus' throughout, and the 'Source' has gone through four and a half mic's. So, you work it out. I reckon it's brilliant. Picks up where NAS left off.

OLI GREEN



AJ Croce

AJ CROCE That's Me in the Bar (Private/BMG)

Is AJ the son of Jim Croce or Tom Waits? On this great album of piano ballads he has a voice almost as world-weary as Waits, but without the beat poet posturing. Helped out by LA veterans (Ry Cooder, Jim Keltner, David Hidalgo), Croce sounds as if he's been listening to the best of early 70s singer-songwriters. He's a deft piano player too — though he does love to stay on that 'The Piano's Been Drinking'/'One More For the Road' chord.

VAN MORRISON Days Like This (Exile/Polydor)

If my new girlfriend was formerly Miss Ireland, I'd put her on the cover, too. Van is still in happy mode, but these days he's nesting. This breaks no new ground, though the song-titles read like a psychologist's dictionary: 'Melancholia', 'Underlying Depression', 'No Religion', 'Russian Roulette'. The tone is still pleasantly mellow, and Van remains disturbingly paranoid: 'Won't let the bastards grind me down,' goes one refrain, and he duets with his daughter (I wish he wouldn't) on 'You Don't Know Me'. Time for Van to shake off the musos, get back to Eire and record with some real characters.

AARON NEVILLE The Tattooed Heart (A&M)

New Orleans' favourite prop-forward seems happily ensconced in the middle-of-the-road. When last here, Neville said he'd like to record a country album, a gospel album... this mainstream effort is probably what he meant. Yes, it's MOR, but it's beautifully made MOR. Thankfully, there is less vocalising and melismatic showing-off than usual, and some of the more rootsy grooves work, but Aaron's first solo album was produced with more musical taste and sympathy. For that, Linda Ronstadt never received her due.

FONTELLA BASS No Ways Tired (Nonesuch/WEA)

The American Explorer series exhumes another gem. In 1965 Bass had a huge soul hit with 'Rescue Me'; follow-ups failed, then she was lost to motherhood. Now she returns with a gospel album that has a Pentecostal fervour and jazzy-pop slickness. With piano and organ dominating (of course) the band hits infectious grooves, and Bass's voice soars.

DWIGHT YOAKAM Dwight Live (Reprise)

Driven, as always, by Pete Anderson's cutting Telecaster riffs, this album is swiftly paced like an old dancehall set. And with Dwight dressed, as always, in jeans as tight as denim condoms, the swooning audience never leaves the dancefloor. His country twang could shatter glass, but Dwight has successfully modernised the honky tonk sound for the 80s. This con-

centrates heavily on his recent classic *This Time*, with old favourite covers such as 'Little Sister' and 'Suspicious Minds' thrown in as crowd-pleasers. Surprising, from the class of 86 (Dwight, Randy Travis, Steve Earle) it is the image-conscious Yoakam who has been creatively strongest.

CRUMB Original Soundtrack (Rykodisc)

Terry Zwigoff's documentary about the misanthropic cartoonist (Fritz the Cat, 'Keep on Truckin'') is essential viewing at this year's festivals, a rivetting study of a seriously dysfunctional family. Robert Crumb never listens to anything made after the 1920s — after that, the humanity is missing, as recordings are made to sell rather than for music's sake. So here we have a charming album of authentic rags for piano and guitar, with many original versions — though most are re-recorded with the devotion you'd expect from 78 collectors.

TONY JOE WHITE Lake Placid Blues (RDM/Festival)

Mark Knopfler never played a note that Tony Joe White didn't play before. Tony Joe ('Polk Salad Annie') is the king of wah-wahed swamp rock, who recently made a comeback after writing 'Steamy Windows' and 'Undercover Agent For the Blues' for Tina Turner. His sound remains the same, and this is 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' time. He's written a strong set of songs, but with less local colour — no chompin' alligators or rifle totin' sheriffs — much of the character is lost. Check out the retrospective on Warner Bros.

ROBERT CRAY Some Rainy Morning (Mercury)

Cray's sweat-free sound has always been decor blues for me — however here he's cut back to a simple trio and made his most impassioned album yet. The minimalism works; with Jim Pugh's purring B3 organ as a foundation, Cray's singing and guitar-playing is edgy and committed. He'll never be Howlin' Wolf — sincere and careful, this is like a black version of the *Bluesbreakers* album — but Cray is really working now, not coasting on looks and chops.

THE BAND Live at Watkins Glen (Capitol)

Like the Beatles, every concert the Band played was virtually the same — it was like a recital of their favourites, with the only difference being the degree of commitment. Watkins Glen in 1973 was a huge event — bigger than Woodstock I — and the Band responded. But after *Rock of Ages*, *Before the Flood* and *The Last Waltz* do you need more? If you've heard this sensational version of Chuck Berry's 'Back to Memphis', the answer is no — and that's available on the box-set, or the even better value compilation *To Kingdom Come*.

JAMES BOOKER