



2 Pac

hip-hop cornered

2 PAC *Me Against the World*
(Interscope)

2 Pac has been in the media more than any other rapper: rape, assault and being shot five times while going to the studio. It's hard to review his music without reviewing the man.

Me Against the World is a self-realisation of his mistakes. There are a lot of songs about futility, and there's a 'nothing to lose, it's just me against the world' attitude. The word cemetery features five times in the first three songs, and death seems to be every second word.

The beats on the album are a vast improvement from his last couple, and production credits go to an array of producers. Easy Mo Bee would be the most recognisable of them, with hits for Biggie Smalls and Craig Mack.

Although the attitude of the record is: 'This is what I did, you shouldn't take this path,' I can't get over 2 Pac coming out like he's been done foul and it's not his fault, society and the police made his decisions for him... but rape?

There are some good moments. 'Dear Momma' is 2 Pac saying: 'I understand the things you had to do, I'm sorry,' and generally making peace with his mother. On the whole it is 2 Pac saying goodbye before going to prison, 'Thugg Life' tattooed on his belly, 'Fuck the World' on his back. 'Me against the world, or the world against me?'

OLI GREEN

TOO SHORT *Cocktails*
(Jive)

Too Short is a rap pioneer. A lot of things in rap have changed over the years, except Too Short.

Short dogg, pimp, hustler, cadillac, bitch, hoe, nigger, punk, muther fucker, Mack Daddy — OK, that is almost the whole record, and the vocal hasn't changed in all the years he's been rhyming. But Shorty doesn't care, because he will always sell records. He's earned his huge

fan base from the work he's put into the game, going from selling tapes from the boot of his car to being a platinum seller.

There's not much to say about *Cocktails*. The name says it all: set rhymes from Shorty the pimp. It's not for politically correct, new age men and women, but Too Short won't apologise. As he so eloquently puts it in 'Thangs Change': 'I get paid real well to talk about a bitch / And you bought it / So don't get mad that I'm rich.'

If you have always like Too Short, you'll love this record. If not, you'll probably hate it, but Shorty won't lose any sleep.

OLI GREEN

OL' DIRTY BASTARD

Return To The 36 Chambers
(The Dirty Version)
(Elektra)

The Wu Tang saga continues! Personally, I love the Wu Tang Clan, and everything any of them do, and this is just another reason to do so. Straight out of the Brooklyn Zoo comes the raw, unexplainable Mr Ol' Dirty Bastard, and yes, this album is dirty. The RZA takes care of most of the production, and almost the whole Wu Tang guest on it (bar U-God).

The beats are like infected dub, and Ol' Dirty is like the pus. Sometimes Mr Bastard repeats the beginnings of verses twice or three times, but unlike most rappers, who are getting the 'feel' right before they lay a take down, this dude keeps them on wax. He has operatic styles, Ol' Dirty love ballads, street commentaries, pimp daddy rhymes — truly a Bastard for all occasions.

The Genius stands out as the best guest, with Method Man a close second. The whole project sounds as if it could have been made over a drunken weekend after the footy, but I'm sure Monsieur Bastard wouldn't have had it any other way.

Long live the Wu!

OLI GREEN

Charlie Rich



back beat

CHARLIE RICH 1934-1995 R.I.P

Charlie Rich was drunk when, on live TV, he opened the envelope for the best male singer at the 1975 Country Music Awards. But that didn't affect his sense of style and taste. Reading that John Denver had won, he set the envelope on fire. The problem with Rich was he was too damn talented. He came to the Sun Studios in Memphis in 1958, after Elvis and Jerry Lee Lewis, and seeing the breadth of his talent, the legendary Sam Phillips let him follow his instincts. Taught the piano by a black sharecropper, Rich was well versed in blues and gospel, but he was also adept at jazz. He had pop hits with 'Lonely Weekends' and 'Molair Sam', then his genius languished through lack of focus, even though some of his songs became standards (Elvis Costello covered 'Sittin' and Thinkin', Jerry Lee and Bobby Bland, 'Who Will the Next Fool Be'). It wasn't until Billy Sherrill started producing him in the late 60s that Rich found a wide audience, singing smooth country. In 1973 they hit paydirt with the sublime 'Behind Closed Doors', but the follow-up, 'The Most Beautiful Girl', typified the countrypolitan schlock he was then burdened with. Sherrill even stopped Rich playing piano on his own sessions. Wealth followed, but so did alcoholic despondency — until, in 1992, journalist Peter Guralnick rescued Rich with the astounding *Pictures and Paintings*. For 25 years Guralnick had championed Rich; his essay in *Lost Highways* (Penguin) is a classic study of the fame vs creativity dichotomy in American music. Rich may have sung 'Don't Put No Headstone on My Grave', but a more appropriate epitaph is 'Life Has its Little Ups and Downs', a look at marriage filled with pathos, written by his wife Margaret Ann, who was with Rich when he died in a Louisiana motel last month. Almost anything Rich recorded before 1974, plus *Pictures*, can be recommended — and found in the bargain bin at your local second-hand record store.

TILL THE NIGHT IS GONE:

A Tribute to Doc Pomus (Rhino)

DR JOHN Afterglow

(Blue Thumb/BMG)

Doc Pomus was a Brooklyn white boy who grew up on R&B before it had a name. He was a blues singer who decided he was better as a songwriter, and his hits for Elvis ('Little Sister', 'Suspicion'), the Drifters and the Coasters say he was right. This is the best tribute album yet, because it shows genuine love for Pomus from a wide range of musical friends. It also shows the deceptive simplicity of the classic R&B songs. The old school (Los Lobos, BB King, Dr John, Solomon Burke, Brian Wilson) sits alongside some youngsters (Shawn Colvin, John Hiatt, Lou Reed) to pull off some great performances for their colleague, with a couple of special surprises: Dylan's 'Boogie Woogie Country Girl' swings with real commitment, and Dion's 'Turn Me Loose' is a devastating example of white blues.

1989 was a good year for Dr John — he quit heroin after a 30-year habit, and released *In a Sentimental Mood*, a lush album of jazz standard with the breakthrough hit 'Makin' Whoopee'. The superb follow-up, *Goin' Back to New Orleans*, proved the doctor was as much historian as sentimentalist. But nostalgia sells (ask Harry Connick, or better still, hit him after his travesty of a concert), so after last year's contemporary funk on *Television*, Dr John returns to big band jazz. These lesser known songs by the likes of Duke Ellington, Irving Berlin, Louis Jordan and Doc Pomus feature big horn and string sections (two are arranged by Kiwi expat Alan Broadbent) with Dr John's distinctive ivory tinkling and bayou growl. Reliable rather than ground-breaking.

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