

VARIOUS ARTISTS The Promised Land
(Columbia)

Although slavery was abolished at the end of the Civil War, early this century Southern blacks weren't much better off, as racism and segregation persisted. So from about the First World War, they started to migrate from poor Southern states such as Mississippi and Alabama. They went north (on the "Midnight Special" train) to Memphis, St Louis and Chicago – and new musical forms evolved. This 2-CD pack is the soundtrack to a BBC mini-series about black migration. It's a quick overview of the rich history of black music this century, early country blues to hard-core rap. Although its marketing to a white audience means the emphasis is on crossover artists – musicians who were big with blacks only have missed the final cut – the selections may be obvious, but that's because they are essential classics. Just look at the lineup: Robert Johnson, Bessie Smith, Duke Ellington, Aretha, James Brown, Marvin Gaye ... with one track each, it's a quick lesson in musical roads that will repay a lifetime of exploration. Even the half-dozen remakes by apprentices such as Dionne Farris and Terence Trent D'Arby are credible.

GLEN MOFFATT
Somewhere in New Zealand Tonight
(Sun Pacific)

A strong debut from the 24-year-old boy wonder of Auckland country. Supported by the city's top players (Red McKelvie, Alastair Dougal, Jeremy Dart and Jono Lonie, Moffatt has produced a consistent album of songs rooted in local reality, particularly the title track, 'Anzac Day' and the one about week-end cowboys, 'Truck Driver in His Head'. Moffatt's earnest enthusiasm shows more passion than any Nashville hat act sizing himself up in the mirror, plus he has the songwriting skills. Once his nasal tenor weathers a bit, he'll be a stimulating foil for his idol Al Hunter (whose debut *Neon Cowboy* was also produced by Stuart Pearce, and with whom many of these musicians are still identified). Moffatt isn't shy about his influences, and they're all New Zealanders (Hunter, John Hore, Ken Lemon). The three Kiwi covers are smart choices too, particularly Max Merritt's 'Slipping Away' and Ritchie Pickett's 'Bastards of the Rodeo'.

JAMES BOOKER

New Zealand

STRAWPEOPLE Beautiful Skin
CD Single (Sony)

Thanks to this release, there's a squillion and one renditions of 'Beautiful Skin' out there, so it's difficult to remember which one's on what album, but the version sung by Stephanie Tauvehi on *World Service* is the best thing the Strawpeople have ever done. 'Beautiful Skin' shouldn't be messed with, it's a song of such untouchable beauty, and is a testament to the absolute-genius songwriting ability of its author, Greg Johnson. This CD contains three bastardised mixes, with vocals by new Strawpeople singer Victoria Kelly. Why?

SUPERETTE Rosepig
CD EP (Flying Nun)

The Rosepig EP harbours the first recorded offerings from a post-JPSE Dave Mulcahy. Teaming up with bassist Ben Howe and drummer Greta Anderson, they've cooked up five songs that don't stray too far from Mulcahy's contributions to the Experience. The sleepy, repetitive whine of the single 'Killer Clown' opens, while 'The Horse' rocks in an understated, S.Youth Goo kinda way. 'Disappear' is the real business, and the only track where Mulcahy's taste for a casually stunning melody truly comes into play. Simple but effective it chugs along nicely, before 'Beetle' brings the EP to a close at a snail's pace.

PUMPKINHEAD Third Eye
CD Single (Wildside)

'Third Eye' drops straight into the basket with 'Water' and 'Erase' as the best songs on Pumpkinhead's album *Sloth*. Kicked into life by machine gun-speed drumbeats, 'Third Eye' is instantly anthem material, ie. heavy on melody and big in the power chord department. Sheer brilliance. Also featured here are three tracks from Pumpkinhead's explosive set at *Strawberry Fields* earlier this year. 'Be Sure', 'Decaf', and 'Gruntruck' represent the more trad metal side of P. Head that I'm not totally sold on, but as a document of a superb live recording, it does the job.

THE ASHVINS/SHOESHINE
Heavy Load/Wide Load CD (Spotty Dog)

The facts: There's 16 tracks, eight from Shoeshine, seven from the Ashvins, and a single dose of blues cacophony from Rob Haakman. Shoeshine knock out a harsh blast of twin guitar, and drum (no bass!) mania. Oddly bluesy in places, the gats alternate between a collision 'n' retreat idea, otherwise they play call and answer in a series of feedback frenzies. There's the odd dull moment – the five minute 'Cactus Farm' – but mostly this is good stuff esp. 'Take It', 'Shoeshine', and the SPUD-like instrumental 'Dirty Wounds'. More uneasy listening, buzz-saw guitar hymns from the Ashvins follows. This trio excel at speed, particularly on 'Pisces House' and 'I Live In A Swamp' (also available on seven inch single). A rum-

Superette

bling bottom-end jam called 'Where We Dwell', and the pleasantly irritating 'Rose By Nature' sound cool too.

Available for \$10 postpaid from Spotty Dog, PO Box 1500, Palmerston North.

VARIOUS The Sheep Technique Vol. 2
Cassette

The second in a series of tape compilations from Christchurch's campus station RDU, this one plays host to eight Chch bands. The varied bag within ranges from the flat-out three chord punk served up by Nerve, to the angular pop-wank of Sifter who should stop trying so hard, and the overly sensitive pops sweets of Atomic Blossom. There's two enormous highlights: Hawaii 5-O's 'Take It' is a swirling, fuzzy keyboard-driven pop delight, and the atmospheric greyness of In Vitro's 'Song Of Lyrical Indifference' is spellbinding. The stinker is, they have so few copies of this I have to send it back!

SWEET FAMILY UNIT
Cassette EP (SFU)

Sweet Family Unit are the kind of band you need to see live to have your opinion clarified. I suspect they could put on a good show, but on record they sound tiny and weak. These big wide open grooves manage to make a start, and SFU threaten to take off, before the thin, whine of the guitars envelope everything. Imagine the rhythm section of HLAH backing the Las. This all smacks of potential not being reached.

SFU can be contacted at PO Box 9212, Te Aro, Wellington

HELL IS OTHER PEOPLE
Blah, Blah, Secret Message
Cassette EP (Hlop Chudley)

Not only is 'Swedish Exchange Student' a great title for an opening track, it's a great return for the cost of

a distortion pedal. Hell Is Other People do a twisted take on already twisted pop with considered finesse ('Red'), and still they can manage a line in sick, sleazy, grunge ('Linger On'). Neat stuff, and a pat on the head to the singer who owns the most interesting, indescribable tone to a voice I've had the pleasure of discovering for ages.

Write to 14 Kenwyn Terrace, Newton, Wellington.

MASTER CHEESEMAKER
Today Is A Good Day To Die
Cassette EP (Cheese)

Recorded at Stomach, this EP runs the gamut from slow metal, to grunge, to hardcore, to power ballad, to fast metal, and it's all unbelievably bad. If you want to save some time just check out 'You Can't Start Again', and hear all styles in one user friendly package.

Available for five dollars from 74 Bell Street, Wanganui.

STONE CAGE Pieces Of Today
Cassingle

Stone Cage are big Zep fans I'd say. Their debut cassette is home to four no-nonsense Page/Plant influenced tracks, but much to their credit, Stone Cage avoid the catalogue of cliches usually associated with bands doing the 70s metal thing in the 90s.

Write to 93 Clarendon Terrace, Christchurch.

JIMI B Blue Boy
Cassette (BBM)

Auckland singer/songwriter/guitarist Jimi B's debut *Blue Boy* is filled with 15 deeply personal, mostly acoustic flavoured folk-pop tunes. This is a style that I endeavour to avoid if at all possible, especially if I've just eaten.

Available from PO Box 106056, Auckland.

JOHN RUSSELL



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