

albums

CROWDED HOUSE Woodface (Capitol)

Woodface is a tough and tender masterpiece. Tender because of its love songs, tough for the same reason. It owes nothing to what's around at the moment. It is stuffed full with melodies in an age where melody is an endangered species.

Right now the first NZ-Australia rugby league test is on TV. The young Kiwis are taking it to the ageing world champion bruisers. Woodface is a little like that. Naturally, it's aimed at the soft underbelly of America. So it makes sense to be nice to the programmers. But: "The excess of fat on your American bones/Will cushion the impact as you sink like a stone ... Can I have another piece of chocolate cake?"

You'd expect something this uncompromising to be buried down the tracks. But it's track one, the first single, spearheaded by the hi-FX video. Did I say this was a tough record?

The songs are too much for one sitting. And, disconcertingly, they change at every listening. The killer phrases jump out ("There goes God, in his sexy pants and his sausage dog") but you find yourself being stroked by ordinary phrases made extraordinary ("up the creek and through the mill"; "black clouds hanging over the domain").

Most of it was written in a frenzied two weeks and put down in a home studio. Neil and Mitchell Froom share the production, which is as evocative and as playful as George Martin's. The harmonies do things only brothers can do.

It keeps coming. The chorus of 'Italian Plastic' ("when you wake up with me") is destined to be a mass singalong on the next tour. It's written and brilliantly sung by drummer Paul Hester. Did I say this was a surprising record?

Neil says the group is "gathering energy for another descent into hell" *He moana pukepuka e ekengia e te waka*. Our thoughts go with them.

ARTHUR BAYSTING

SKID ROW Slave To The Grind (Warners)

Skid Row have discovered heavy metal. This becomes very apparent after the first few minutes of *Slave To*

The Grind. It seems like we are now dealing with a totally different group than the one responsible for such radio friendly rock as 'I Remember You'.

The new record kicks off with 'Monkey Business' and what a scorcher it is. The distortion pedal is now on ten and Skid Row seem to be aiming towards the sound of older bands like Keel while still bringing in a healthy dose of young attitude. Sebastian Bach is probably one of the finest singers in this genre today. He has the rare ability of being able to sing screeching hard rock and love ballads without a hint of contradiction of feigned emotion.

Despite the heavier musical stance now adopted by Skid Row it is the ballad area where they really excel. Check out 'Wasted Time' and 'In A Darkened Room' for pure songwriting brilliance. A strong and uncompromising second release.

LUKE CASEY

VARIOUS ARTISTS Til Def Do Us Part (Def American)

Not so long ago Rick Rubin was bringing us the cutting edge in Rap as one of the Def Jam crew, something he fired off as Def Jam became more soul orientated. Being a rockin' sort of guy, Rick decided to bring us the cutting edge in metal, and lo and behold Def American was born. Now nine or so albums on, Def American have brought out this fine sampler so we the public, can, well, sample this selfsame cutting edge.

Strangely enough, it all sounds very seventies, with a couple of notable exceptions and Wolfsbane who just sound boring. There's the Four Horsemen who feature Mr Haggis, late of the Cult, and sound an awful lot like AC/DC which is sort of cool, as are the quite wonderful Black Crowes who resemble the Stones when they were interesting. Black Sabbath weigh in as major influences for Trouble, whose self titled album I now feel I should buy, and in a more mellow style for Masters Of Reality, who are currently re-recording their album for those other White boys doing Rap with Metallic leanings, the Dust Brothers.

Last up are my favourites, Danzig and Slayer. I've already gone on at length about Danzig, so in keeping with the "sounds like" theme, I just say imagine Jim Morrison real pissed about life, and fronting a killing metal act, and that's coming close. Slayer, meanwhile do that speed schtick as only they can. I love this stuff, it's the logical extension of Classical Music as I see it. Forget those pussies like Nigel

Kennedy, this is the real deal, incredibly complex and Baroque, but with a double kickdrum sound that made my spine take a holiday and vocals that killed my hippy neighbours pot plantation and seriously disrupted their karma.

All in all *Til Def Do Us Part* is a pretty excellent compilation and a nice insight into Rick Rubin's musical influences. This is the sort of metal that never makes it to the chart, but is usually a big influence on the mainstream stuff. You probably should buy most of the albums this record draws from, but in lieu of that *Til Def Do Us Part* will do nicely.

Kirk Gee

SHONA LAING Retrospective 1905-1990 (Columbia)

Retrospective is a collection of nearly two decades of songwriting, about half taken from the 70s and half from the Pagan period which brought Laing back into prominence. The extraordinary thing is how consistent the songs are, right from the beginning. Sure, they are often let down by their production, particularly in the 70s when the producers were trying to do too much with limited technology and even less taste. But in the 80s, when Laing was co-producing herself with Stephen McCurdy, the songs are enhanced by their warm, colourful arrangements, even if the sequenced rhythms now pall quickly.

Laing's strength is in the conviction she brings to her songs. This earnestness can get a little much over 75 minutes, but taken on their own each song has some element that captivates: a melody, a recurring lyric, a revealing sentiment. Although nowadays there are none of the gushing (if honest) teenage reflections, Laing's concerns haven't shifted that far. The only difference between her introspective humanism then and now is the shift from naivety to world wearieness.

It can all get a bit grim, which is probably why radio has been so inconsistent in its support. 'Kennedy' got away with it because of its bouncy rhythm and melodic hooks. But one craves for more songs in which the concerns are expressed with the jaunty humour of 'Neutral and Nuclear Free', or the nutty toss-off 'I Love My Feet'.

South, heavily represented here, showed how Laing had developed a Pacific consciousness, and her arranging skills. She seemed to be reaching her creative potential, only to find herself in limbo once again while



Badlands

she was kicked around by the once-great soul label Atlantic.

Retrospective is a body of work to be proud of, but also shows Laing's work comes across best when it is not trying to be moulded to someone else's formula. Left to her own devices but with the right musical companions, and a budget her talent deserves, maybe that great work that has been building up inside her for 20 years will finally emerge.

CHRIS BOURKE

BADLANDS Voodoo Highway (Atlantic)

Killer guitar, acoustic blues guitar, electro-fried blues rock guitar and more killer guitar. That's what Jake E. Lee gives in abundance on *Voodoo Highway*, the second Badlands album and four years further down the road since quitting Ozzy. Their ferocious first album was more straight forward hard rock than this one but now Badlands branch out blues-wise to make them a band to be reckoned with in more ways than one. Songs range from the brilliant boogie stompin' 'Whiskey Dust', the simplistic title track which features dobro and "size ten boot" through to 'Soul Stealer' which is a real heavy screamer with Jake waxing down some of his most wicked playing ever. Because he's produced it himself this time, Jake's guitar sound is most prominent taking hold and not letting go til Ray Gillen sings 'In A Dream' at the end.

Gillen proudly crows out vibrant vocals in the manner of 70s mega-singers Plant, Coverdale and Rodgers. Jeff Martin has real feel as a drummer too, although he and bassist Greg Chaisson at times get lost in the

mix to make for Jake. Other highlights are the loveable 'Silver Horses', the got attack of 'Love Don't Mean A Thing' and a Badlands version of James Taylor's 'Fire And Rain'. There may be a flood of ace albums out there at present but make sure not to miss this *Voodoo Highway*.

GEOFF DUNN

AARON NEVILLE Warm Your Heart (A&M)

Aaron Neville has a voice to make hardened criminals weep: a physique to make hardened policemen run a mile. Ironically, like all great soul singers — Sam Cook, Aretha, Al Green — he has never left the church. Neville, the man with the angelic tenor who stands like a colossus among his brothers, has finally had a chance to make the solo album his unique talent has deserved since his fleeting moment of glory 'Tell It Like It Is' 25 years ago. And although it is mostly a pop album made with the cream of the 70s El Lay musical mafia, it is dripping in gospel. Who do we have to thank? Linda Ronstadt.

While her own duets with Neville were heavy-handed, she has produced (with George Massenburg) this album with subtlety, sympathy and taste. And the song selections couldn't be better. He sings Randy Newman's gorgeous 'Louisiana 1927' with an emphasis that brings the tragedy home: John Hiatt's 'It Feels Like Rain' is exquisitely gentle; Burt Bacharach's song for the Drifters 'Don't Go Please Stay' has a cathedral-like clarity that typifies the album. There's a Nevilles' funkout ('Angola Bound') and a lilting Allen Toussaint ballad ('With You In Mind'). Only the embarrassing duet

with Ronstadt is a miss. But the album closes with a spiritual trilogy that reiterates his gospel ancestry. 'Warm Your Heart', with Dr John on piano, could be a Dixie Hummingbirds workout; 'I Bid You Goodnight' is a lightfooted Bahamas folk tune with Ry Cooder on guitar. And 'Ave Maria' is... 'Ave Maria', with a lush but tasteful choral/orchestral arrangement.

I'll be very surprised if the delicate 'Everybody Plays the Fool' (No 3 for the Main Ingredient in '72) isn't a hit and if Linda doesn't win the producer's Grammy. She deserves it — but we should have had a dozen albums like this by the singer's singer over the past 25 years.

CHRIS BOURKE

THE KENTUCKY HEADHUNTERS Electric Barnyard (Phonogram)

The Kentucky Headhunters are one way cool Hillbilly combo, they don't come much more authentic than this. These boys are utterly, unashamedly ugly. No fooling around, they're plain hideous. Even if they did try to beautify themselves, no amount of airbrushing could conceal a scrawny, bald drummer who favours a coonskin cap complete with tail and a set of sideburns that hang down to his shoulders. Add to this the fact that they play serious, ripping country with a slant towards the rock side of things and still sound genuine, and you've got a real good time.

After winning Grammys and such like for their first opus *Pickin' On Nashville* it makes sense the Headhunters should stick with the old formula and if anything, they didn't stick close enough on *Electric Barnyard*. There's some classic kick-ass stuff here, 'It's Chitlin' Time' which is 'Davis Walker' part two, or a stompin' 'Only Daddy That'll Walk The Line', a song that travels the traditional country lyrical route, all 'I'm a pore ole boy' but without sounding at all whiney. The problem here is a few excursions into standard rock territory ('Diane') and a novelty song approach. That's cool as a one-shot thing, like the great version of 'The Ballad of Davey Crockett' (I still know all the words!) but spread over a few more tracks it starts seeming a little desperate, especially if the songs are as bad as 'Big Mexican Dinner'. Still, if you dug the first album then *Electric Barnyard* is certainly fine enough and even better, these guys have been doing shows in the US with the Texas Tornados and that, suckers, is a well rocking bill.

KIRK GEE

SDJ 3400-SE PROFESSIONAL DISCO MIXER with Sound Effects & Echo \$690



LIMITED QUANTITY AT
\$599 incl GST

DJ 1800 B PROFESSIONAL TURNTABLE DESIGNED WITH THE PROFESSIONAL USER IN MIND

- * FAST START * STROBE ILLUMINATOR * FORWARD-REVERSE SWITCH INPUT
- * REMOTE START/STOP SWITCH INPUT * SLIDE LEVER PITCH CONTROL
- * TARGET LIGHT * GOOSENECK LIGHT INPUT

COMPLETE WITH CARTRIDGE!

BUY TWO AND RECEIVE FREE GOOSENECK LIGHTS & SLIPMATS

Drop in for a demo or phone for a brochure & price list
EDWARDS SOUND LIGHT AND VISION CO



666 DOMINION RD • AUCKLAND 3
PHONE: (09) 606-597 • FAX: (09) 606-597
P.O. BOX 96069 BALMORAL

LOOK FOR THESE SUPERB NEW ZEALAND RECORDINGS IN YOUR LOCAL RECORD STORE NOW!

SIX VOLTS Stretch

New single **CRYING SHAME**



CHARLOTTE SOMETIMES Queen Charlotte Sound

New single **RED LETTER**



BRENDON POWER State of the Harp

MUSIC CASSETTE & COMPACT DISC



RIMU

