

BRUM

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BEAT

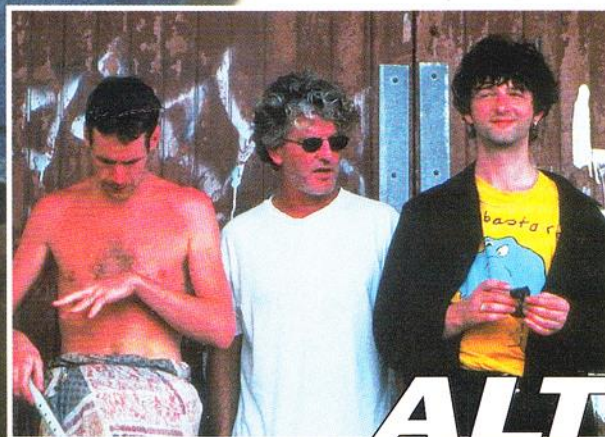
july 1995 issue 173
summer special

rat's tales

*a rummage in
ned's atomic dustbin*



plus:
the vulgar boatmen
del amitri ... kim fowley
high llamas ... the waltons
big country
the essential gig guide
news ... reviews ...



ALT

ragged but right?

PETER JAGGER

The Rough Edge (Valve)

One time manager of Rouen, Stourport's late lamented answer to Bob Seger & The Silver Bullet Band, Bruce Cockburn lookalike Jagger (no relation though Judging By Appearances has a melody line not a million miles away from Honk Tonk Women) has been pursuing the acoustic blues route to much success in Germany while enduring a no arrest situation here. While there's some laid back front porch bluesing to be found on Late In The Evening and Uncertainty, this, his debut album, leans more toward rootsy rock than the Terry and McGhee country blues of his duo partnership with harmonica sidekick Alan Richardson. As such it evokes comfortable comparisons with early Paul Brady and (Especially in the vocal department) Richard Thompson. Jagger plays a mean guitar, knows how to deliver a performance and as Trader John's, Remember Me, City Living, Tongue Tied Blues and Southern Comfort demonstrate is patently no slouch in the songwriting stakes either. The last line of The Way It Is bemoans turning up at a gig and playing to seven people. This album is ample evidence of the injustice that represents.

★★★★ Mike Davies

STEVE JAMES

American Primitive (Antones)

A bottleneck guitar picker of some distinction, James favours his blues dusty and folk-country in the rootsy style of Mississippi John Hurt and Terry and McGhee, and save for contemporary references to newfangled things like VCRs his own songs could just as easily have been plucked from the 30s and 40s along with covers of those by Bumble Bee Slim, Tampa Red and Memphis Minnie. If you've not previously encountered James, but have Ry Cooder or Leo Kottke's early albums in the collection, this will make a perfect companion.

★★★ Mike Davies

KIERAN KANE

Dead Reckoning (Dead Reckoning)

Aside from being Kane's long awaited new album, Dead Reckoning also marks the like named debut of what promises to be one of the nineties most significant labels. It's a kind of country repertory company with a group of terrific artists, all of whom find themselves shunned by mainstream labels seeking only airbrushed gimps, determined to make the records they want to. And going by Kane's own, records we'll want too.

This eleven tracker is, like his preceding solo albums and his releases as half of The O'Kanes, deceptive. There's a sim-

licity and ease that won't hit you over the head. It takes time for the melodies to get a grip and for the lyrical lucidity to hit home.

Kane's country is largely acoustic though the lightly amplified electrics of Dan Dugmore and Mike Henderson add the necessary bite. Elsewhere it's the fiddle of Tammy Rogers or the accordion of ex Tom Russell sideman Fats Kaplan that add texture. Emmylou Harris guests on two tracks, alongside Lucinda Williams on the striking opener This Dirty Little Town. And there can be few who can cover Hank Williams Snr. as convincingly as Kane does on Ramblin' Man.

When, in twenty years time reruns of most CMT videos are only raising a despairing snigger, you'll be playing this album.

★★★★ Steve Morris

TAJ MAHAL / N. RAVIKIRAN / V.M.BHATT

Mumtaz Mahal (Water Lily Acoustics)

Like Bhatt's previous Water Lily album with Ry Cooder - A Meeting By The River - this is a sensational album, in every way. The label's obsessive regard to recording quality makes it a consummate delight to listen to, while, unlike most hi fi specials, the music will also blow you away.

In a simple sense it's a blues album with Taj Mahal's gritty vocals and fine guitar taking centre stage though the perceived roots of the blues are jolted by his accompanists. Bhatt shadows him with his Mohan Vida - roughly a fusion of slide guitar and sitar - and Ravikiran floats a web of Chitra Vina (a sitar like instrument) around them. The sleeve note tells the tale better than I can; all I can say is that the performances are immaculate, Mahal staples like Johnny Too Bad and Come on In My Kitchen becoming poetic in the setting. Hypnotic, soulful, spicy, an essential album.

★★★★★ Steve Morris

MARILLION

Afraid Of Sunlight (EMI)

No concept work this time, just a handful of songs - though themes of fame and the handling celebrity do somehow inform several of them. On first hearing it sounds a little denser than you remember the band being, though subsequent listening reveals the typical melodic swell that marks Marillion's appeal. And that's not to mention the humour and drive of the excellently non-typical Beach Boy-ed Cannibal Surf Babe, a cut that, with it's lyrical and musical gags, would mightily brighten summer radio. Mind that's also true of the aptly named Beautiful. A huge Marillion ballad that only the stone hearted will spurn.

If you're looking for traditional, so called prog rock, with a beating pulse - stick your finger on this.

★★★★ Steve Morris

NATALIE MERCHANT

Tigerlily (Elektra)

Despite claiming she can now do exactly what she wants, Merchant's first solo

album after quitting 10,000 Maniacs sounds, well, like 10,000 Maniacs actually. Not as full as their latter albums, more stripped down to bring out the voice and, by natural extension, the lyrics. As ever these underline Merchant's empathy with her subjects, be they deeply personal or simply deeply observed, and a social conscience that's previously led her to voluntary work for homeless children. Never exactly rock'n'roll, there's a few moments when things threaten to musically perspire (Wonder, Jealousy, the quasi funky-blues Carnival) but mostly these are laid back, meditative and unassuming melodies designed to complement the air of melancholy that suffuses songs generally concerned with love, loss (Beloved Wife is a moving portrait of her grandfather's reaction to the death of his wife of 52 years) and, perhaps not surprisingly after 13 years in the spotlight, the illusionary temptations of fame (San Andreas Fault, Carnival) and the predatory nature of the media (River). Not a classic album perhaps, but a quietly pleasurable one.

★★★ Mike Davies

BILL NELSON

Crimsworth (Resurgence) / Practically Wired (All Saints)

It's a hell of a way from Be Bop Deluxe to the two half-hour long ambient doodles that make up Nelson's aural backdrop for Crimsworth, an art installation by Rob Ward. They're the sort of thing only Brian Eno or an Earth mother in the midst of natural childbirth could get excited about. So it's a refreshing jolt when 'Wired opens with a more familiar burst of electric guitar. Not that I should've been surprised, with track titles like Big Noise In Twang Town. The two soundscapes couldn't be more different, indeed couldn't be made by one person if he or she didn't have the enormous imagination possessed by Nelson. Sadly, only one is worthy of financial outlay.

★/★★★★ (respectively) Andy Mabbett

PARADISE LOST

Draconian Times (Music For Nations)

A remarkable, gothic and dramatic velvet curtain of red and black metal in the rich vein of recent Danzig and Type O Negative releases. It's easy for those standing outside the metal scene to miss the importance of a band like PL - but they're creating some of the finest work in the genre, they're extremely well respected and they've built up a massive following in Europe (which is now starting to be emulated here) since their humble Halifax beginnings, and this fifth album displays a haunting maturity that few bands could ever hope to match. Time to start looking a bit deeper, people - step into the dark side.

★★★★★ Max

PENNYWISE

About Time (Epitaph)

Not since Offspring's Smash has there been such a perfect punk-pop album, crammed full of maddeningly addic-

tive, riff-drenched, chorus-chanting classics like Searching and Perfect People. This now travels with me everywhere. Monsta.

★★★★★ Max

PINK FLOYD

Pulse (EMI) / VARIOUS ARTISTS

A Saucerful Of Pink (Cherry Red)

These two double CDs, released on the same day, make for interesting comparisons. One is the traditional live-album-of-the-tour, straight in at number one all round the globe, the other a tribute album with an unlikely array of indie bedfellows as one could hope to find, and, sadly, likely to sell in quantities smaller by a factor of thousands. Few seem to question the wisdom of double live sets from two consecutive Floyd tours, even if the newer is the better one, despite its gimmicky, environmentally unfriendly flashing LED (curious, considering the Floyd's generosity toward environmental charities) and a rendition of Dark Side of the Moon that is not a patch on the original, or even the much-bootlegged 1974 BBC concert broadcast.

While hyperbolic banner headlines like 'Corporate Rock Whores' are unlikely to appear in Brum Beat, this does seem to be a tired exercise in marketing, rather than the creative artistry which sustained the band from 1967 until 1968/ 72/ 82/ 94 (delete according to prejudice).

Saucerful, on the other hand, sees a bunch of ne'er-do-wells (notably including Psychic TV and Hawkwind's Nik Turner) reinterpreting, rather than merely re-cycling, a cross-section of the bands career highlights (not to mention a 1970's original from Ron Geesin). For all Pulse's packaging, polish and panache, there's more imagination and more feeling on any one track here than the whole of that collection.

I'm not going to deny Gilmour's right to continue under the Pink Floyd banner, as some still do, but if Pulse is the best he and his crew can come up with, with all the resources at their disposal - well, what's the point?

★/★★★★ respectively.

Andy Mabbett

CHARLIE ROBISON

Bandera

BRUCE ROBISON

Bruce Robison (both Vireo - Import)

Having settled in the Texas Hill Country, Kinky Friedman's been penning detective novels, Peter Rowan has maintained his interest in borderland music, while Robert Earl Keen became a father and occasionally makes musical excursions to Gnashville. Robert's home is in Bandera, the self proclaimed 'Cowboy Capital of the World', and that's where the Robison boys hail from.

Both albums were cut at Cedar Creek Studio in Austin, Texas toward the close of last year and taken together, the line-up of backing musicians is akin to a who's who of local pickers. Charlie's album, co-produced with Lloyd

... AND NÖW YOU HAS JAZZ

Here's a tip from one who spent much of the past assiduously avoiding anything tarred with the word jazz; consider JOHN COLTRANE as a sax wielding Jimi Hendrix. May be sacrilege to the buffs but f*** 'em, the music is like any other and not something made for pundits to build intellectual walls around. So Coltrane's THE COLLECTION VOL. 1 & VOL. 2 (Castle Communications) is two CDs full of the sound of a man chasing his soul; and it's a sound that's thrilling, soothing and involving. The material is borrowed from the man's MCA and GRP sides and the only black mark for the discs is a woeful lack of sleeve info. Music Club's six quid, seventy plus minute CHARLES MINGUS In A Soulful Mood is a fine primer for the jazz genius. Compiled by NME/Vox scribe Roy Carr, this set does have a well written note that along with the bargain basement price (something certainly not reflected in the mastering or presentation, incidentally) makes exploration of the bass icon mandatory. Big bands, doubtless because of the treacly sub Glenn Miller goo that the very name invokes, seem to occupy the lower end of the jazz totem. That should be amended by EMI's BIG BANDS IN HI-FI VOL.1 & VOL.2; two double disc sets, both with informative booklets, that between them offer 93 fine examples of the genre. There's Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, Duke Ellington, Glen Gray and more demonstrating that wit invention and swing used to be second nature to large line-ups pre James Last.

Finally THE INEVITABLE SQUIRREL NUT ZIPPERS (Mammoth) take the Temperance Seven twenties jazz back to it's roots and play it with a punky zest that it must have had in the drinking and vice dens from whence it came.

Sam Mitchell

Maines, opens with brother Bruce's Red Letter Day, includes another tune Bruce co-wrote with Paul Kennerly, plus the traditional I Am A Pilgrim. The nine remaining tracks were self penned. Ten cuts long, brother Bruce includes one cover tune on his disc ... Atwood Allen's It's Gonna Be Easy, while one song was co-written with Mas Palermo [Kelly Willis/Monte Warden]. Approaching their fourth decade on this earth, the Robison boys hail from that proud lineage ... Texas Contemporary Country. Says it all, twice over. By the way, their debut albums are damned fine examples of the aforementioned genre.

★★★★(each) Arthur Wood

SLOWPOKE

Med Chen (Grass)

Dark, but not impenetrable quality 'alternative' rock debut from these heavy Texans. But that's a heaviness shot through with an accessibility that, although perhaps not immediately obvious; is nevertheless still there - other 'odd' bands have made the crossover into the mainstream market for far less. Moody, hard, yet catchy.

★★★ B.Lee

THE STEAMBOAT BAND

Runners And Riders (Polydor)

The Steamboat Band are a young - late teens to mid twenties - six piece that plays a gloriously rough edged southern boogie that'll delight devotees of The Black Crowes, Allmans and the ilk. The problem seems to be, if you believe

the inky, that despite the fact that they play great, write convincing songs and add the textural spice of fiddles, banjos, steels and mandolin, they come from Warrington!

Hell, they make vodka in Warrington too. That'll get you pissed as sure as The Steamboat Band'll hit your hips, heart and feet.

★★★★ Steve Morris

SUNDIAL

Acid Yantra (Beggars Banquet)

As the title and cover might suggest and the presence of tabla, mellotron and tone generator confirms, this is a churning psychedelic wash of feedbacking wah wah guitars stapled to a shoegazing sensibility. Fly Into The Sun takes the mood into folksy acid Haight Ashbury territory and Yantra Jam more or less sums itself up, concluding an album that aims to marry Hendrix, early Floyd and the electric hippie head trips of San Francisco and, for the most part, succeeds admirably.

★★★ Mike Davies

TEARS FOR FEARS

Raoul And The Kings Of Spain (Mercury)

Can't think why Roland O hasn't changed it to Tear For Fears now that it's essentially a solo voyage ...

That aside, this could well be the best album yet to fly the logo. It's a meticulously written and performed piece that's either very brave or head in the sand dumb. See, as well as being prime Tears For ... it could also be the best

Supertramp album ever. No, it doesn't sound like them but it's a prog rock concept platter which could either be as welcome in '95 as cold porridge or a groundbreaking unshackling of the post punk / grunge straitjacket. You know, the one that dictates that the application of taste and excellence to rock are heinous crimes. To complete the prog - nosis, the record is also somewhat pompous and the self proclaiming I dig Miles titular pun, Sketches Of Pain should provoke muted critical mumbling.

★★★★ Steve Morris

U.ROY

Original DJ (Virgin)

Ice T, Ice Cube, iced bun ... the roots of the musical rhyme is Jamaica and long before rap there was toasting, the DJ on the sound system. And supreme was U. Roy. A fact borne out by this compilation of his mid to late seventies work for Virgin's Front Line label.

This twenty five track resume is simply electrifying - the rhythms are spot on and U. Roy's great, great voice flowing over them like THC infused molasses is one of life's luxuries.

Brilliant and essential.

★★★★★ Steve Morris

VARIOUS

Glastonbury 25th Anniversary Celebration (Chrysalis)

In truth this would be a Ronco / K-Tel / Telstar TV tie in - you know licence a stack o'tracks by artists who have played the fest, Weller, Oasis, Sinead, Proclaimers, Radiohead, Primal Scream, Black Uhuru to fill the title concept, irrespective of the fact that not one cut was captured at the event - were it not for the presence of a Glasters celebration song, Going Back Top Glasters, from Mike Scott. And that dippy hippie ditty is well worth the price of the album (the only place you'll ever find it, we're told), especially when it's in the cut out bins - and that's not going to be to long a wait, I fear. On a positive note Chrysalis are going to send a slice of the profits to Greenpeace and the sleeve note does evoke some of the real Eavis spirit.

★★ Steve Morris

VARIOUS

Jungle Hits 95 (Virgin)

VIP Volume 1 - 16 Jungle Hits (VIP)

Jungle probably ranks as the true underground of the moment. A brand new bastard fusion of dub, soul, dance and amphetamine crazed beat boxes it's a sound impenetrable to the outsider and casual listener - except for the skimmed milk MOR covers that adorn TOTP.

Both of these sets deep mine for material with the Virgin disc perhaps casting a wider net to gather more hits from more labels. However the VIP set has the distinct feel of the underground, the sounds are sharper, edgier ... and there's the bonus cut on disc two; a mad-cap fifty plus minute mix for only the fittest and most crazed.

Easy listening? You what!

★★★★ (each) Sam Mitchell

recorded
delivery

VARIOUS

United Flava Of British Rap (Ticking Time)

Time was when the very notion of British rap would raise disapproving eyebrows. The perception being that only the urban ghettos of the US could spawn the *real* thing. And yet, despite the obvious debt owed to the American originators (and they go back well before Grandmaster Flash or Public Enemy, young master latecomer) British rap has grown, diversified and matured whilst the US has sunk into a cliché of pose, adopted attitude and lyrics more defined by crotch than brain.

The 16 cuts here flow from supple jazzy grooves of Marxman and Urban Species to the urban venom of Kaliphz. There's wit and wisdom aplenty in both the tracks and lyrics on display here. Eyebrows raised today could only be in surprise at the superiority of British rap.

★★★★ Sam Mitchell

HOLLY VINCENT

/JOHNETTE NAPOLITANO

Vowel Movement (Mammoth)

Vincent used to front Holly & the Italians, Napolitano was the voice of Concrete Blonde, but this is a long way from the preconceptions of either outfit. Sparse, angular, sometimes spooky, lo fi stuff that plays around with distortions, feedback, sonic freakishness and deconstructed garage rock n roll. Las Vegas hints at Suicide via Laurie Anderson, Death Of a Surfer is jazzy spoken word over nerve fraying scraped guitar strings, When we Collide is druggy slouch. Clearly a don't give a shit indulgence for the indie art-heads, but if it keeps Concrete Blonde out of the studio it can't be all bad.

★★ Mike Davies

WHALE

We Care (Hut)

Anyone fearful that all Sweden had to offer was identikit dance acts should take comfort from this mutant trip hop slouch rock conglomeration. A little too self-consciously artpunk at times, the chuffing techno, weirded-out chat, and flying tangent metal guitar suggesting something like Zappa filtered through industrial Euro and laced with Blank Generation girlie pop. But for all that, they make a compelling noise and since songs such as I'll Do Ya, Hobo Humpin' Sloba Babe, Pay For Me, and the unambiguous Young, Dumb & Full Of Cum suggest a passing obsession with sex, even if the music baffles you at least there's some sentiments to identify with.

★★★ Mike Davies