

## LAUNCH NO. 28

### VIBREAKER REVIEWS

#### MANIC STREET PREACHERS

This Is My Truth Tell Me Yours (Virgin)

Rating: 4 out of 7

By Michael Lipton

Beginning with the Manic Street Preachers' 1991 EP, the Welsh quartet has tried desperately to generate fire, but, at least on this side of the Atlantic, it's succeeded only in stirring up a bit of smoke. The music--tepid, arena-pop metal that was but a few steps to the right of Ratt (which would have been an improvement)--never warranted the group's shock-rock attitude or reputation.

The band's latest--already tagged the "Best U.K. album" in the 1999 Brit Awards--is, at the very least, a major leap forward from 1996's abysmal *Everything Must Go*, the first release following guitarist Richey James's still-unsolved disappearance. While the lead cut, "The Everlasting," is still a throwback to the band's warmed-over '80s rock, the metallic crunch has been replaced by a sheen of strings, tremolo guitars, and sundry keyboard textures. The overall mix is more contemporary--punchy and in-your-face--than anything the band has released to date; the exception being singer James Dean Bradfield, who insists on singing in the Freddy Mercury-castrati range. If you happened to like bands like Styx and Kansas, tunes like "Ready For Drowning" and "Be Natural" will make you a happy chappy.

#### MANSUN

Six (Epic)

Rating: 4 out of 7

By Bob Gulla

Formed just four years ago in the medieval city of Chester, England, it hasn't taken Mansun--a quartet that learned to play instruments exclusively for this band--very long to come by a surprising sound of sophisticated majesty. On their second full-length, the band follows in the footsteps of complex, epochal U.K. bands like Radiohead, Gomez, and Suede, in that they're striving to splatter floor-to-ceiling musical canvases full of color and passion. On songs like the closer "Being A Girl" and the Zappa-esque "Shotgun," Mansun shifts gears through seemingly endless

style and tempo changes, reflecting more than a passing propensity for modern prog-rock.

On the other hand, that's not their only new propensity. On "Fall Out" they strive for the organic glam of Marc Bolan, while "Six" demonstrates a fondness for good ol' AOR in the style of the Smashing Pumpkins' latest. While this young anglophilic eclecticism can be charming, ultimately--in the same way a really fat person can be difficult to embrace--the record ends up being a huge handful. Admirable, but difficult nonetheless.

## **PAVEMENT**

Terror Twilight (Matador)

Rating: 5 out of 7

*By Rob O'Connor*

Some guys have all the luck; for everybody else there's sarcasm. And nobody's been better at turning a cheeky cheek than Steve Malkmus and his fellow ne'er-do-wells. No matter how hard they try, they can't help but give up a little sneer. This year's targets include a deranged version of folk music with "Folk Jam," where some poor soul got stuck plucking a banjo, and "Speak, See, Remember" where they sound like white guys learning the blues from their cousin, which is nothing compared to the trashy roadhouse blues ("Platform Blues") from the southern-rock Skynyrd league.

Malkmus has always sounded like a boy stoned on the pot and singing whatever came into his cannabis-resinated brain, but now the whole band has retreated into the warm, fuzzy textures of space. Half this album sounds like the band got lost staring at the really cool wallpaper and forgot how to rock. Which, all things considered, might be a "good" idea. Wink, wink.

## **HONKY TOAST**

Whatcha Gonna Do Honky? (550 Music)

Rating: 5 out of 7

*By Ken Micallef*

This is a band that most critics, feminists, and highfalutin' folks will dump as quick as a urinary tract infection. Honky Toast come on like juvenile cartoon figures, delivering a raucous swill of AC/DC riffs, Led Zeppelin rhythms, and Steven Tyler-ish squeals.

Sound like a recipe for trite rip-offs and ridiculous cliches? Parading like a band of dumbass misfits, Honky Toast sing about white trash ("Whatcha Gonna Do Honky?"),

oral sex ("Hair In My Teeth Again"), road sex ("Rocks Off"), and the eternal groove ("Listen To The Bass"). But it's not so much their subject matter as the way they execute this brain-dead drivel that make Honky Toast so much fun. Sure it's pure retread, but these Manhattan losers pack the muscle of John Bonham and the madness of Angus Young into 14 stoopid tracks of inane rock 'n' roll.

"I Wanna Be On Welfare" sports a frenetic beat and steamrolling '70s guitars over Eric J. Toast's squalling vocals. Slide-guitar blues work it out on "Shakin' And A Bakin'," while "High School Burnout" cranks a lopsided white-trash funk groove like Edgar Winter dancing with Jenny Jones. Check your brain at the door, but don't forget your booty.

## **BLACKSTREET**

Finally (Interscope)

Rating: 4 out of 7

*By Billy Johnson Jr.*

Hot hip-hop producers Rodney Jerkins and Timbaland may tally up more production credits these days than BLACKstreet frontman Teddy Riley, but the New Jack Swing inventor proves his ability to create catchy hit records without relying on production styles that become cliché.

The Virginia-based group's third album is filled with addictive dance tracks including the duet-with-Janet first single "Girlfriend/Boyfriend," the "No Diggity" contender "Yo Love" and the album's enhanced CD bonus jam "On The Floor." None sound too close to songs currently dominating the charts.

The group even manages to add an element of surprise to what sounds like formulaic pop ballads. The subject matter of the wedding song-styled "In A Rush" (featuring Stevie Wonder on harmonica) and the shocking duet "Drama" sound pretty, but when the female lead on the latter belts her vocals, she's calling it quits, telling her man that he's been cheating for much too long.

Sometimes R&B groups stick one gospel song on their albums, but BLACKstreet makes room for two: the introspective "Hustler's Prayer" and the title track, which features a mini-sermon from Hezekiah Walker.

We can expect Teddy Riley to remain an important man on the scene for years to come.

## **NAS**

I Am... (Columbia)

Rating: 5 out of 7

By Billy Johnson Jr.

Ras Kass, one of hip-hop's most prolific rappers, once said that his album *Soul On Ice* should have been praised merely for his song "Nature Of The Treat," one of the most well-developed and executed rap songs ever. Nas's "Undying Love" proves that one potent Pulitzer Prize-level offering can indeed carry the weight of an entire album.

Nas's storytelling earns a perfect score as he explains his reactions to finding his live-in girlfriend sleeping with another man. His accounts include murdering her lover, accidentally killing her, holding her body in his arms, placing the newly purchased engagement ring on her finger, and uttering "now under God we elope" before turning the gun on himself. This shocking closing song is followed with a police officer entering the house mumbling "stupid f---ing ni-gers."

While "Undying Love" is clearly the strongest song on the album, *I Am...* includes plenty of other thought-provoking (though average-quality) songs. "We Will Survive" includes moving parting words to the Notorious B.I.G. and Tupac. The self-explanatory "Life Is What You Make It" (featuring DMX), the consequential "Small World," and the chime-ringing "I Want To Talk To You" prove that it is possible to turn horrible experiences into uplifting parables.

Nas does take a break from the philosophical messages to rhyme about player haters ("Hate Me Now," featuring none other than Puffy on the chorus), rules of macking females (the super catchy "Dr. Knockboot"), and his gift of gab ("Nas Is Like").

Unfortunately, most of the production is somber. Two tracks from DJ Premier fail to elicit the impact of Nas's melodic "Ain't Hard To Tell." Several songs from L.E.S. are consistent and present nice rhyme beds, but offer no real punch, just chimes and xylophone sound effects. Echoing keys, stuttering salsa flavor, and a recycled bumping party groove from Grease, Timbaland, and Track Masters Poke and Tone, respectively, add the most excitement.

## **CHANTE MOORE**

This Moment Is Mine (MCA)

Rating: 4 out of 7

By Denise McIver

Though not a talent in the same vein as Whitney or Mariah

--who give even the most tolerant listener pause for all their vocal histrionics--Chante Moore is able to sing with an honesty and an earnestness of the "Girl Next Door."

Moore is refreshing in that she's neither bitter nor cynical when it comes to the subject of love. She appreciates and embraces love in all its variations. Whether it's from a good man on earth, or within the context of her relationship with her God, love according to Chante is a good thing.

Unfortunately the material on *This Moment Is Mine*, most of it written by Moore, fails to light any fires and elicit a true emotional response--except for, perhaps, boredom. This album is formulaic and lacking in rhythmic imagination despite the fact that it boasts formidable production "Top Guns" with the likes of Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis ("I Cry To Myself," "Blooming Flower," and "Easy") and Jermaine Dupri ("Heartbeat").

The best track on the album is the Robin Thicke-produced "In My Life," which provides a nice stripped-down "break" that allows the purity of Chante's vocals to shine through. Unlike the other tracks where her voice (at times thin to the point of shrill) practically has to compete with the overproduced, technological-sounding melodies, "In My Life" is just Chante and the piano. There's something to be said for simplicity.

Though at turns sweetly romantic and sensual, *This Moment Is Mine* is, at its best, merely average.

## **TRINA & TAMARA**

Trina & Tamara (Columbia)

Rating: 6 out of 7

By Billy Johnson Jr.

If you're thinking Trina & Tamara's first single "What'd You Come Here For" sounds a bit like something from Brandy or Something For The People, it's because the talented sisters from Gary, Ind., have sung background vocals and written for those very artists.

Their self-titled debut politely suggests that their contenders go back to the drawing boards. "What'd You Come Here For," "Nothin' New," and "Sister" offer the double beat and radio friendly element necessary to generate some attention, but it's only an introduction to their sophisticated stylings.

You can't help but fall in love with Trina & Tamara, sisters of male R&B vocalist Jesse Powell, when hearing them push the R&B envelope on the jazz- and blues-inspired

"Joanne," "Blue," and the Patrice Rushen remake "Settle For My Love."

Their metaphorical odes to taking a ride in a man's car ("Let's Go") and infatuation with a famed ball player ("29") make R. Kelly's "You Remind Me Of My Jeep" and "Half On A Baby" sound amateurish.

In a world when every artist is in a rush to create double albums, Trina & Tamara offer up a humble 10 tracks, each guaranteed to meet your liking.

## **TOM PETTY & THE HEARTBREAKERS**

Echo (Warner Bros.)

Rating: 5 out of 7

By Michael Lipton

It's no small feat that, after more than two decades of writing what are essentially three- (five-, tops) chord songs, Tom Petty can still come up with a focused album that warrants full-blown listenings.

More than ever a precarious hybrid between a singer-songwriter and a middle-aged rock 'n' roller, Petty's releases sink or swim on the strength of his tunes. Granted, this time around, things get off to a shaky start--"Room At The Top" showcases more of his faults than strengths. But the disc builds like a well-executed live set. Things start to jell on the fragile "Lonesome Sundown," with Petty affecting his voice to sound like Jerry Garcia (go figure), and guitarist Mike Campbell bending strings like a Nashville cat.

Petty & Co. begin flexing their collective muscles on the simple but effective "Swingin'," with Petty spinning one of his better tales. Growing tougher with each verse, by the song's end, his subject has grown from swingin' "like Benny Goodman" to Sonny Liston. Petty hits his stride on the title track, countering some bitter lyrical medicine with a buoyant track that builds like Dylan circa *Blonde On Blonde*. Both "Won't Last Long" and "Billy The Kid," like the anthemic "I Won't Back Down," celebrate a familiar Petty theme and are sure to be set-ending live staples.

Like most releases that clock in at more than an hour, *Echo* would benefit from some pruning. "This One's For Me" and "Rhino Skin" might have been saved for *Playback II*--not that he's included any real dogs, simply to accentuate the gems.

## **TOM WAITS**

## Mule Variations (Epitaph)

Rating: 5 out of 7

By Robert L. Doerschuk

A quarter-century past *Closing Time*, and still Tom Waits is at the bar, staring down one more shot. Think of his career as one magnificent bender, beginning pretty coherently, then blaring into extremes of sentimentality and delusion. On *Mule Variations*, his upcoming Epitaph release, the moods still swing, but the boozy raving seems a little tamer, the recollections of past heartbreaks a bit more reflective, and the shadows of a real closing time stretch closer.

Brilliant technique flashes throughout the album. You hear it in the music, as his sidemen continue to advance the peculiar art of accompanying Tom Waits. Anyone who's backed him on these or other recent sessions knows to keep the groove loose and raw on what passes for uptempo tunes, with plenty of room open for random thumps and clanks. On the slow tunes, one plays as if giving up on a fight to stay awake all the way to the end, with only the singer's eruptive delivery jarring you back to life.

More to the point is the brilliance of the words. There are breathtaking turns of phrase in every tune, yet not every track on *Mule Variations* succeeds as a lyric. Problems crop up when, paradoxically, Waits seems most inspired--that is, when some terrific twist pops up that must be used, regardless of its place within the context of the story. Even the music can suffer when the wordplay seems strained: Waits scatters gems throughout "Get Behind The Mule," for example, in which lines like "Never let the weeds get higher than the garden/Always keep a diamond in your mind" sound older and more settled than anything a contemporary songwriter could concoct. But none of these jewels string together into a single statement. With no such cohesion, the song doesn't develop, and we're left with a modular approach to arrangement--harmonica comes in here, drums drop out there--that acknowledges rather than corrects this impression. (Hang on until the fade, though, when some exquisitely greasy interplay between Smokey Hormel's slide guitar and Charlie Musselwhite's harp emerges unexpectedly.)

On songs like this, and the equally disappointing "Filipino Box Spring Hog," short substance forces Waits to play for effect, with megaphone vocals and bizarre mixes. But as on just about every album he's ever released, these are balanced by songs that ride compelling, organic grooves; and songs whose fragility and symmetry have few parallels in today's catalog. Waits rouses himself on these sorts of

songs to prove once again how well he can interpret a lyric. For all his skill with words, his reading of the simple "oh, yeah," at the end of the bridge to "Picture In A Frame" is a story in itself. It also says a lot about why Waits at his best has no peer as a lyricist. Unlike just about every other vital songwriter, he hides no irony in this resigned sigh, or in his vignette songs. When he takes time to unfold a story, Waits can be powerfully moving and--neat trick, here--as accessible as any pop hack. Over a Keith Richards-style groove on "House Where Nobody Lives," he presents the kind of story we'd hear from the Stones if Jagger had a poet's rather than a publicist's sensibility. Another Stones-like track, "Cold Water," sinks to the depths of a lunatic's rant, the likes of which would repel us on the street even as it demands our attention here.

No track will polarize listeners more than "Hold On," which can pass either as a blatant commercial grab or a landmark in the Waits catalog. I lean toward the latter: Though the melody and the restless groove might have been fashioned by Springsteen, the lyrics marry romanticism and loneliness more effectively than anything I've seen from either artist in recent years. By relying on the song itself rather than any eccentricity in texture to convey its impact, Waits shows both respect for his listeners and deserved pride in his accomplishment. Everything--the story, the images, the performance--balances here.

There's much more to *Mule Variations* than this, but suffice to say that on the last two tracks Waits exercises his right as a mature artist to reflect on his growing familiarity with the mortal coil. These songs contrast nicely: "Take It With Me," with its muffled piano and mumbled vocals, suggests Randy Newman on his deathbed, more reflective than affected. The final cut, "Come On Up To The House," is the bellowing Waits, shaking his fist at the inevitable over a stumbling graveyard groove. Neither is among the best songs on *Mule Variations*, but they do suggest that Waits is writing from the heart now, as he always has. We're long past last call, and soon it'll be time for another round.

## **JACK LOGAN**

Buzz Me In (Capricorn)

Rating: 4 out of 7

By *Bob Gulla*

Machinist/songwriter Jack Logan has come a long way since being "discovered" a few years ago. Back then, his



eclecticism encompassed punk, honky-tonk, shady goth-pop, and modern rock.

On *Buzz Me In*, his fourth original album in five years, Logan's eclecticism covers more sophisticated terrain with terrific fidelity: crisp, orchestral pop ("Worldly Possessions"), crackling acoustic strums ("Melancholy Girl"), uptempo post-punk ("Glorious World"), and jazz pop on "The Possibilities," led by the singer's closely-miked southern tenor. On "All Grown" a sax emerges from the punky R&B for a crazy Clarence Clemons solo, but that momentum only lasts 'til the next cut, "Hit Or Miss," a low-key chestnut featuring Logan's much-improved voice atop a chamber music ensemble.

Despite the herky-jerkiness, the record as a whole feels more cohesive than his past work; it was Logan's off-handed checkerboard of styles, those unpredictable highs and lows, that made him such a charming and off-balance artist. Now he's just another terrific--and grown-up--songwriter.

## **TOMMY HENRIKSEN**

Tommy Henriksen (Capitol)

Rating: 4 out of 7

*By Bill Holdship*

In 1999 so far, I've often felt like my high school principal who informed our student council when we were planning our token Sha Na Na Na-inspired '50s dance: "I lived during the '50s...and the '50s really weren't that great." Likewise, this writer lived during the '80s, and he's here to inform you that, hey, they really weren't that great either. Nevertheless, that hasn't stopped bands like Orgy (or VH1 programming, for that matter) from pilfering the music of that era to give us something borrowed, but hardly anything new, in the '90s.

The newest entry in this sweepstakes is Tommy Henriksen, who--although a native of blue collar Long Island and currently a denizen of LA--apparently wants nothing more than to be British. If nothing else, the dude's surely a major Anglophile. His press material indicates that he was heavily influenced by and sounds a lot like the Psychedelic Furs and Peter Gabriel. Truth is, he sounds just like the Furs' Richard Butler most of the time, though he sometimes switches into Gabriel mode. May have something to do with co-producer Keith Forsey (who also produced the Furs) twirling the knobs for this release; whatever the case, it's a little disconcerting, especially when you keep reminding

yourself that Henriksen hails from a place where people still greet each other with the expression "Yo!"

The Gabriel comparisons are most apt when Henriksen is exploring world music; "If I Could," the opening track, samples some Tibetan monks in full chant mode--while the whistling that opens the clever "One Voice" is pure "Games Without Frontiers." "One Voice" then bursts into a semi-rock/rap sorta thing that's so reminiscent of the Stranglers' "Get A Grip On Yourself," it's almost eerie. Still, it's ironic that the singer-songwriter should title a track "One Voice," as he's actually a dude of many voices--and none of them sound American. On "I See The Sun," he sounds like Billy Bragg, and visions of a "groundbreaking" music video dance through my head every time I listen to "One Voice" with its Gabriel-inspired "Broken words don't exist" chant.

Henriksen can obviously write a song: "Right Here By My Side" is a beautiful ballad. And yet, when does songwriting become stealing? Case in point: the track "Uneasy Street" actually left me increasingly uneasy with each successive listen. The melody was a bit too familiar until it became clear--Henriksen nicked the chorus from Pink Floyd's "The Wall" here, whether intentionally or not. Same thing on the final track, "Heaven Only Knows," which sounds a lot like...wow! Pink Floyd's "The Wall"! Again!

Henriksen obviously is an extremely talented person. Still, old-timers like me may find themselves thinking "Been there; done that," when experiencing his debut LP...and truth be told, it really wasn't all that great first time 'round.

## **CASSANDRA WILSON**

Traveling Miles (Blue Note)

Rating: 4 out of 7

*By Chris Morris*

Cassandra Wilson has proven her ability to produce accomplished interpretations of virtually any kind of music on her previous Blue Note albums; here, she attempts a tribute to Miles Davis, with very mixed results.

Given her introspective style, the singer unsurprisingly sticks to the more lyrical and pop-oriented parts of the trumpeter's repertoire, resulting in needless covers of such Davis oddities as Cyndi Lauper's "Time After Time" and Disney's "Some Day My Prince Will Come." Her re-setting of the *Kind Of Blue* classic "Blue In Green" is certainly pretty, and she's in sync with the rhythmic twists of the

Davis/Victor Feldman ace "Seven Steps To Heaven." But the mad ferocity of Miles's early-'70s recordings is totally missing here; we wind up with a pleasant but incomplete picture of the man's music by a vocalist who seems a bit skittish about the darker corners of the Dark Prince's sound.

## **GATO BARBIERI**

Che Corazon (Columbia)

Rating: 4 out of 7

*By Tim Sheridan*

It's rather funny to think that the Gato Barbieri who made this record is the same Gato Barbieri who played with jazz iconoclasts like Don Cherry and Carla Bley so many years ago.

This record finds the saxophonist at his smoothest and most sentimental. Even his work on the soundtrack to *Last Tango In Paris* seems downright avante garde when compared to these slickly produced tunes. But fans of his more recent work will find much to enjoy in his latest effort.

"Cristiano," an easy driving pop tune, brings the jazz-rock of Pat Metheny and Lyle Mays to mind, while "The Woman In The Lake" bounces to a subtle funky groove, like the work of Michael Franks. Naturally, many of the tunes are tinged to various degrees with a Latin flavor, such as the playful cha-cha of "Sweet Glenda" and the samba of "1812." But the highlight of the album is a lush interpretation of "Auld Lang Syne," with a nice orchestral arrangement leading into a full-bore gospel vibe that seems truly hopeful. So although his past seems rather incongruous, to hear Gato tell it, the future is rosy.

## **THE ROBERT CRAY BAND**

Take Your Shoes Off (Rykodisc)

Rating: 5 out of 7

*By Chris Morris*

Singer/guitarist Robert Cray has always been comfy with the Southern soul sound; he first worked with the Memphis Horns, who appear here, on his '86 breakthrough *Strong Persuader*. On his first album for Rykodisc, he swerves away from the suave contemporary blues style that's been his bread and butter to plunge wholeheartedly into updated Bluff City soul territory.

It's a winning move. Tracks like the ballads "Love Gone To Waste" (arranged by Al Green's hitmaking producer Willie

Mitchell) and "That Wasn't Me," and the bumptious rocker "What About Me" contain the proper mix of Cray's velvety smokiness and Beale Street grit. Only on the final cut, a remake of the late Lowell Fulson's "Tollin' Bells," does Cray return to straight-up 12-bar blues, and he still handles the form with panache. Young Bob's put together a handsomely cut soul stew that should sound jes' fine to old fans and newcomers alike.

## **CHARLIE HUNTER/LEON PARKER**

Duo (Blue Note)

Rating: 5 out of 7

*By Bob Gulla*

Guitarist Charlie Hunter and drummer Leon Parker, two of today's edgy and most promising jazzers, are *simpatico* musical souls on the lookout for mutual terrain on *Duo*, their first collaboration together.

With Parker fluent in percussion as well as drums, and Hunter in charge of 8-string guitar and bass, the two have created some casually fascinating moments: from some Jeff Beck-style Strat-funk on "The Spin Seekers;" to the Santana-esque bongo workout that opens the album, "Mean Streets;" to the excellent, woozy fade-out on Hunter's "The Dark Corner." Hunter has also proved to be a top-rate interpreter, having covered Bob Marley's "Natty Dread" in a must-hear version for jazz and reggae fans alike. Here, he tackles Brian Wilson's *Pet Sounds* classic "Don't Talk (Put Your Head On My Shoulder)," with heavy reverb and tremolo.

Fast becoming a seasoned pro on the jazz circuit--one of the more stylish ones at that--Hunter is at last surging into a new groove as a player/composer, and Parker makes an excellent accompanist.

## **KULA SHAKER**

Peasants, Pigs & Astronauts (Columbia)

Rating: 4 out of 7

*By Ken Micallef*

Raga-rock specialists Kula Shaker took a lot of grief for their supposed pro-Nazi statements in the past, and their latest epic shows no signs of paring back the hyperbole, musical or otherwise. And damn, these Brits remain one of the most ambitious bands around, coupling mystical, end-of-the-world pronouncements with pounding blues rock and grandiose arrangements worthy of *Sgt. Pepper's*.

"Mystical Machine Gun" boasts lyrics about "alien identities," "turning on your destiny," and "retaining a

sense of suicide" over flamboyant brass peals and a Jimmy Page-ish guitar solo. Spooky, huh? Kula can rock out too: "S.O.S." cranks the lyric "Man became the spawn of Satan driving around in cars" over a boiling Deep Purple groove. Say what you will, this is pure fun, a guilty pleasure on a Saturday afternoon.

But Kula can also get all touchy-feely, as in the authentic Indian trance of "Radhe Radhe" and "Namami Nanda Nandana," or the Cat Stevens-inspired "I'm Still Here." Twenty years from now, Kula Shaker leader Crispin Mills may be off in Iraq with Islam convert Cat Stevens, praising Allah and cursing the American devils. For now, Crispin gets his carnal rocks off, western-style, and what a show it is.

## **B\*WITCHED**

B\*Witched (Epic)

Rating: 3 out of 7

By Bill Holdship

So what we have here--or at least what people are going to assume we have here--is an Irish Spice Girls. After all, what the '90s pop charts have been over the last several years, at least in terms of teenage music, is a constant rehashing of manufactured teen idols (Backstreet Boys begets N-Sync and so on...) in a way that hasn't been seen since those manufactured "Idolmaker" days of Fabian and Frankie Avalon.

These mostly "good" (with only a hint of sexual naughtiness) teenage gals from Dublin (including twin sisters), however, actually have more in common with predecessors like Debbie Gibson (B\*Witched's members actually play and sing quite well), Tiffany, or even Olivia Newton-John. After all, "Rev It Up"--simply about going to the beach with friends--goes back spiritually to the film version of *Grease*.

Produced for AM radio with that "Adult Contemporary" sheen and sound, the girls' Irish roots--the first track is actually an electronic-based jig with fiddles (I kid you not!)--makes a lot of this music reminiscent of Celine Dion's track (and other incidental music) from *Titanic*. Which is why, coupled with Sony's big bucks, B\*Witched should be huge by this summer, when it's time for friends to actually be heading to the beach. At least "C'est La Vie," the first single and kickoff track here, displays that the girls (or their handlers) know their teenage roots, since the song has an intro riff lifted directly from the Jackson 5's glorious "I Want You Back."

Elsewhere, there's more teenage "joy" ("Rollercoaster") and several ballads that would do, say, Vanessa Williams proud. Ultimately, though, there's way too much sugar here (not enough spice, no pun intended)--and even a '90s "girl" group should beware ending an album with a tepid song called "Oh, Mr. Postman" 'cause--next to the Marvelettes' and Beatles' (heck, even the Carpenters') versions of the girl group classic, "Please, Mr. Postman"--it only illustrates just how much the concept of "teen" music has devolved over the years.

## **UB40**

Labour Of Love (Virgin)

Rating: 3 out of 7

By Rob O'Connor

If you're like me, you probably stay up nights worrying about where the future of music is going. I mean, what happens if it falls into the WRONG HANDS? The horror, the horror. I shudder to think (at the possibility of things falling into the hands of Shudder To Think). So you can imagine how wonderful I feel when in the mail comes the "third installment" of UB40's *Labour Of Love* series. It's 15 cover songs given the reggae treatment as seen through a pop viewfinder. Neil Diamond's "Holly Holy," Bob Marley's "Soul Rebel," Peter Tosh's "Legalize It," among others are being "reintroduced" to the pop marketplace. And not a moment too soon! The public service these guys perform is unparalleled! They make reggae music for people who don't like reggae, and they make money for other songwriters who don't need it! Whoop! You say Grammy? I say Nobel Peace Prize.

## **CREE SUMMER**

Street Faërie (WORK)

Rating: 4 out of 7

By Michael Lipton

Nouveau Native American Cree Summer has come up with a solo debut that is sure to turn heads.

In a different musical setting, the 29-year-old singer-songwriter could have been cast as a spiritual Indigo gal. Thankfully, Lenny Kravitz stepped in, becoming the driving force, producer, and love interest. The result is an effort that expertly places the talented Summer in challenging yet complementary musical settings.

Surprisingly, the most intimate collaborations produce the best results. "Miss Moon" (co-written by the two for

Kravitz's ex, Lisa Bonet), is driven by a rhythmic loop and a droning dulcimer and mandolin, while "Still Heart," an edgy pop duet with Kravitz makes for the disc's most radio-friendly moment.

Forgettable bits of pimply spiritualness like "Life Goes On" and "Still Heart" are overshadowed by ambitious tracks like "Fall," in which Summer works up a lather ruminating about a dying leaf, and Kravitz simply outdoes himself with instrumentation and arrangement. Not bad for a gal who grew up living in a mud house outside an Indian res in Saskatchewan.

Conspicuously absent from Summer's official bio is the fact that, from 1988-1993, she played Winifred "Freddie" Brooks on NBC's hit sitcom *A Different World*, and provided the voice of Susie Carmichael in *The Rugrats Movie*.

## **THE VAULT:**

### **DUSTY SPRINGFIELD**

I Only Want to Be With You

Dusty

OOOOOWEEEE!

You Don't Have to Say You Love Me

The Look of Love (Mercury)

Dusty in Memphis

Dusty in London (Rhino)

Rating: 7 out of 7

By *Billy Altman*

Ironic, isn't it? A full array of Dusty Springfield albums from the 1960s are scheduled for re-release in the spring of 1999 to coincide with her induction into the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame in March. Then Springfield loses what had been a very private battle with cancer and passes away just weeks before those Hall of Fame ceremonies, turning these reissues from joyous, career-celebrating tributes into bittersweet posthumous souvenirs. Coming back to these works--her six releases for Philips in the mid-to-late 1960s as well as her much-heralded 1969 Atlantic collection, *Dusty In Memphis*--one is immediately stricken by the unmannered, forthright soulfulness that was so much a part of Dusty Springfield's unique vocal style.

That such soulfulness emerged from a singer whose background had been in folk was just one of the many artistic surprises that Springfield had in store for listeners during the 1960s. While she first became famous in the U.S. as one of the few female presences in the 1964

British Invasion, she'd actually been a star in the pre-Beatles U.K. pop scene of the early '60s as a member of the Peter, Paul, & Mary-ish folk trio, the Springfields, and had even tasted American success when the Springfields' version of the old folk standard, "Silver Threads And Golden Needles," made the Top 20 here.

When she went solo at the end of 1963, Springfield immediately unveiled an astonishing understanding of several more distinctly American musical idioms. Her earliest solo hits, 1964's "I Only Want To Be With You" and "Stay Awhile" were as fine a brace of "girl-group" recordings as anything by the Shirelles or the Chiffons. Even more significantly, she grasped the essence of rhythm 'n' blues of the era--the "sophisticated" uptown R&B sound that young U.S. writing/producing teams such as Gerry Goffin & Carole King and Burt Bacharach & Hal David were in the process of creating.

At once a student and participant, Springfield quickly developed as an interpreter and stylist: 35 years after the fact, one still marvels at such pop tour-de-forces as "All Cried Out" and "I Just Don't Know What To Do With Myself" (both from '64's *Dusty* album), as well as her ease with gospel-tinged soul numbers such as Marvin Gaye's "Can I Get A Witness" and Leon Huff's "Live It Up." While the American hits slowed down in 1965, Springfield continued to grow and experiment, delving into more European-styled pop, and in '66 she scored a huge international and U.S. hit with "You Don't Have To Say You Love Me," an English version of an Italian ballad. Even with such full-throttled, melodramatic performances, though, she could still generate considerable heat with just a whisper, as evidenced by her oh-so-sultry, bedroom-voiced version of Bacharach & David's "The Look Of Love" in 1967.

Like most of her pop colleagues, the lightning-fast changes in music in the latter part of the 1960s caused Springfield to try to tailor her music towards an audience that was in the midst of re-defining itself. That ultimately brought her to Atlantic Records, which shrewdly took her to Memphis, resulting in the classic *Dusty In Memphis* album and the major 1969 hit, "Son Of A Preacher Man"--a song that one of Dusty's idols, Aretha Franklin, had turned down. (Franklin eventually recorded it, too--after acknowledging the special magic Springfield had brought to the tune.) While "Son Of A Preacher Man" was to become a closing chapter to Springfield's story as a hitmaker, the reverence with which successive generations treated both her music and her influence has remained strong indeed. Her cameo on the



Pet Shop Boys' "What Have I Done To Deserve This?" in 1988 underscored that respect, and for most of this decade fans and critics were left to wonder why Dusty Springfield had yet to be inducted into the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame, where she should have been ensconced long ago. With all of these terrific albums by this timeless artist now readily available, I guess you can now wonder, too.