

tions to several tracks that add nothing but playing time to the record.

Unlike the Miracles, Billy Paul continues to record safely within one of the big black music companies. Most of his material is provided by the Sigma Studios writers and producers. The backing is of course by the very competent M.F.S.B. Billy Paul does not write his own songs but his material is good. The arrangement of Paul McCartney's "Let 'em In" with civil rights speeches added is commanding. Though the songs range from punchy soul numbers to the middle of the road ("Without You"), Billy Paul's vocal style keeps the album together. His best vocal performances are on Sigma Studio material, however his version of the Badfinger song, "Without You" is weak.

Billy Paul's album, made in the security of the Gamble and Huff set up, is less adventurous but a more successful recording than the Miracles *Love Crazy*. But look out for the Miracles as they are one of the few black vocal groups not dependent on the big black music producers (Curtis Mayfield, Thom Bell, Norman Harris etc.) for material and direction.

Important messages (education, C.I.A., changing the world around) rarely make important recordings. Before the Miracles and Billy Paul can "change the world around" with their music they will need to work with more appropriate forms from the black music tradition. Compared with the best of sixties black music, current soul is too often lightweight and unable to bear substantial lyrics.

**Murray Cammick**

#### The Four Seasons Helicon Warner Bros

#### Beach Boys Love You Warner Bros

Long ago in 1962 two groups from opposite coasts of the USA shot to the top with the first of long sequences of hits. The appeal of both was founded on catchy melodies and soaring vocal harmonies. From California, The Beach Boys "Surfin' Safari" and from New York, the Four Seasons "Sherry", began a long rivalry for the honours of top American vocal group. For rivals they certainly were, often fighting a chart battle to virtual standoff, trading hit for hit for over five years. (Anecdote: On a '63 album the Beach Boys warned "Four Seasons you better watch out". On the flip of their '64 hit "Dawn (Go Away)" The Seasons replied with "No Surfin' Today".)

Today The Beach Boys body of hits is indubitably the more popular — School-girls, who weren't born when "Surfin' Safari" first broke, have the group's name scratched on their pencil-cases beside *Starsky and Hutch*. This situation is, I suspect, due more to availability of Beach Boys music on a plethora of budget albums than unquestioned musical superiority. Try lining a few of the respective hits up against each other and see for yourself. Are "I Get Around", "Fun Fun Fun", "California Girls", "Help Me Rhonda", all that superior to "Walk Like a Man", "Rag Doll", "Workin' My Way Back to You" or "C'mon Marianne"?

Fifteen years later both groups are still around, and on evidence of their new albums both seem unsure of their current musical direction. Has the original following grown up, leaving them behind, content simply to refer to past work for nostalgia purposes? Should the group maintain the same sound, so successful in the past, and hope to win a new generation with it, or change and try to find a new audience altogether?

On the evidence of *Helicon* The Four Seasons seem to be adopting the latter approach. Frankie Valli and Bob Gaudio, the only two original members, own the group's name. They have gathered around them four musicians to create a sound intended, they say, to "show the group off as a unit". What this means is that The Four Seasons are now essentially a band rather than a vocal group. Instead of falsetto harmonies riding on a simple backing, we now have a rhythm section that is mixed as far forward as the vocals, and harmonies that, if present at all, remain comparatively in the background. If, then, they are to be regarded primarily as a band, then The Four Seasons evince several shortcomings which once didn't seem important. Firstly, the arrangements are uninspired and over a whole LP tend to become monotonous. Too many of the songs are both introduced by and basically depend on Gaudio's limited bang-on-all-beats piano style, coupled with a strict, clipped, flat rhythm section. Yet if the piano is repetitive the electric keyboards are often simply silly: in "Rhapsody" the arp imitates the hum of long-distance power cables; it adds a tinny whine to *Helicon*, and *twit*

## The Great White Hope for 1977

### TELEVISION MARQUEE MOON



#### Television Marquee Moon Elektra

Let's get this right: Television is not a punk rock group, so if you're looking for some guys who stick safety pins in their cheeks and spit and vomit all too often then you'd better look some place else. But come to think of it even the Sex Pistols aren't *real* punks, they're just marketed outrage that bears little in common with the efforts of America's real punks — the garage bands of 1965-1968 like the Seeds, the Chocolate Watchband, the 13th Floor Elevators and, oh yes, Question Mark and the Mysterians.

Television has often been mistakenly included in the renaissance of punk rock along with other CBGB groups who have a better claim to the title; groups like the Ramones, the Heartbreakers, Tuff Darts and the Miamis. Television's elementary sound; a reliance on a simple guitar, bass and drums line-up (no synthesisers or mellotrons) with Tom Verlaine's occasional keyboards and their concise style

ters irritatingly in "Long Ago". Only in "Down The Hall" do electric keyboards really contribute, lifting the harmonies of a good up-tempo number. (In fact this song's strong melody and sensible lyric make it one of the album's few fully satisfying cuts.)

As mentioned above, the vocals have been mixed well into the album's overall sound. Although this may at times be an advantage — some of the group members are not strong lead singers — it is disconcerting that Frankie Valli's warm voice is not better displayed. Furthermore, many of the numbers do have attractive, albeit fragile, melodies, but due to the mixing cannot survive the cumbersome arrangements. Sometimes we are left with merely a memorable line or two rather than a coherent tune; witness "Let's Get It Right" or the gorgeous harmonies of the hook in "Rhapsody" ("Rhapsody" is possibly the only track to have the harmonies sufficiently "up front" to satisfy old Seasons fans).

Despite my critical carping there are good things on this album; it's just that they seem to clash with detracting elements: the fine driving beat of "New York Street Song" is irritatingly interrupted by a "clever" moog and percussion break. Similarly the happy cruising melody and straight harmony backing of "Put A Little Away" is interspersed with gimmicky phasing of guitar and vocals.

I have gone into some detail concerning this album because only in mentioning details can I hope to explain its frustrating overall effect. The Four Seasons haven't yet fully resolved whether they are to be a moderately heavy band or a vocal group. I hope they decide to become a vocal group again because, as this album shows, they can write melodies, can sing fine harmonies, and Frankie Valli's still got that voice.

If The Four Seasons show a certain indecision of direction, the Beach Boys seem to be totally lost and foundering. *Love You* is their first album in who knows how long to be totally written and produced by Brian Wilson, but after repeated listenings it is virtually impossible to believe he is the same man whom the sixties rock press labelled as 'genius'. What has happened to the mind that created a whole musical genre, almost mythic in its ability to make teenagers the world over into surrogate Californians, vicariously surfing and cruising through their summers with The Beach Boys? Alright, that was 10 or so years ago and Brian is now a married man and hasn't shown interest in the beach or the strip for a long time. Granted; but what is so tragic about this album is that in sticking to the style of writing and arranging that worked so brilliantly on the '67 album *Pet Sounds* he has only turned in a wretched self-parody. On *Pet Sounds* Brian quixotically mixed unusual musical elements —

— two notes aren't used where one will do — has probably led to their being lumped in with New York's punk rock groups. But there is no question of their musical competence; they are musical sophisticates among the punk groups. Verlaine and Richard Lloyd share the cutting guitar solos which are the basis of their sound, at their most incisive on "Elevation", while Billy Ficca and Fred Smith, on drums and bass respectively, add powerful — if often minimal — backing to Verlaine's vocals.

Verlaine is also a good lyricist (although his medium doesn't demand it) and he uses imagery in a similar way to Patti Smith but his images are more ordered. His lyrics are often menacing.

And this boy can sing! Verlaine is a Ramones' "Beat On The Brat". Verlaine's vision is stark, often pessimistic — on "Friction" he sings "My eyes are like telescopes/I see it all backwards but who wants to hope?"

And this boy can sing! Verlaine is a convincing and often compelling vocalist with a delivery similar to that of Patti Smith. The words are stretched to their full meaning and he makes count what would normally be throwaway lines. Like his repartee with the band in "Venus" — the band ask what sounds like "Do you feel low?" Verlaine replies "Not at all" with the surprised response from the band, "Huh?" Like the way Verlaine puts malice into the single word "confidential" in "Prove It".

What Television shares with the best of the new punk rock groups (and among the chaff there are some good bands) is a common feeling for R & B basics and anger that hasn't been heard since the early days of the Stones and the Who. And think about it: when did white boys last sound so good?

**Jeremy Templar.**

fuzzed bass, chimes, wood blocks, harmonica, fair-ground organ and so on — yet somehow made the whole work triumphantly. Much of that album's success rested, of course, with the beautiful languid melodies and vocal treatments. It is precisely here that *Love You* is so disappointing: it contains some of the most trite songs I have heard in years. Brian was never a particularly strong lyricist but once, with tunes like those, it didn't really matter. Now, with 'melodies' that are often no more than one or two line fragments stretched out to song length, (eg. "Mona"), one is thrust at the lyrics in the hope of finding interest. They are uniformly fatuous.

*Pat, pat, pat her on the butt  
She's going to sleep . . .*

Or

*We've got extra sensory perception  
You can send me thoughts  
I've no objection . . .*

Maybe lyrics should rhyme but some writers can invoke meaning as well.

Perhaps my major complaint about this record is its almost total lack of strength or energy. There are at most one or two memorable tracks, (eg. "Good Time"), and the tempi are nearly all so dirge-like that, as a friend succinctly put it, the arrangements sound like a carousel winding down. Added to this is a rhythm section that, although never noted for subtlety, has become monotonously ponderous.

Not content with writing and arranging, Brian sings some lead vocals. Unfortunately his voice sounds in permanent need of a cleared throat. (The dog begins howling whenever "Love Is A Woman" comes on.) The record's inner sleeve contains an effusive gushing dedication of love from the group to Brian. After hearing the album this note seems less dedicatory than some sort of desperate reassurance to an ailing spirit.

**Peter Thomson**

### Wanted

Information on New Zealand performers and performances. A Free listing of performances (concerts, clubs, pubs) will start in the July issue. Write to **RIP IT UP**, P.O. Box 5689, Auckland, by the 20th of the month prior to publication.

### TANGATA WHENUA

Pictures, Sound, Video of the occupation of Bastion Point. **SNAPS 30** Airedale St. Until June 18. Mon-Sat 11 am to 5 pm.

**TANGATA WHENUA** People of the Land

#### Kiki Dee EMI

Kiki Dee sounds like the name of an exponent of bubblegum music. But in her recent release on Rocket Records, *Kiki Dee*, which is co-produced by Elton John, she reveals a voice that is strong and clear and true.

Unfortunately she doesn't sound as if she's enjoying herself. Combine that with banal lyrics and you have a recording that I personally have not felt like playing much. Elton's influence is evident in the strong, driving narrative quality of most of the numbers, with piano dominant in a largely-uninspired backing band.

Sophisticated recording techniques do not improve a singer who has nothing substantial on a feeling level to sing about. With female recording artists of the calibre of Joni Mitchell and Joan Armatrading churning out magnificent stuff, any newcomer has a lot to aspire to.

But it's early days yet. Perhaps Kiki Dee is presently engaged in acquiring the experience that will, one day, enable her to sing from the heart.

**Rhonda Bosworth**

#### Willie Nelson Live (I Gotta Get Drunk) RCA

This album will give folks who have just picked up on Willie Nelson, an opportunity to hear that his career did not begin with *Red Headed Stranger*. Too few people know that Faaron Young's "Hello Walls", B.B. King's "Nightlife" and "Aint't It Funny How Time Slips Away" are Willie Nelson compositions.

This album was recorded live, at the famed Panther Hall Ballroom in Texas before an exuberant or should I say drunken crowd of 'rednecks' all trying to get their voices recorded for posterity.

Unfortunately, you won't recognise many of the songs on first playing, not because of crowd noise but because Willie flies through the numbers barely pausing for breath between each.

The best cuts definitely appear on Side One, while Side Two is somewhat samey/boring apart from the medley (one of three included) "Opportunity To Cry/Permanently Lonely".

Side One opens with "I Gotta Get Drunk", a classic bar room song in the western swing tradition. The truly immaculate bass playing on this track is, I presume, by Bee Spears who, together with all the other members of the band, is a long standing member of the Nelson band. James Clayton Day plays a really nice pedal-steel break on this track, which is also notable for the great lines:

*There's a lot of doctors that tell me  
That I better start to slow it down  
But there's a lot more old drunks  
Than there are old doctors  
So I guess we'd better have another round.*

That's truly what country music is about — earthy, real and retaining a sense of humour.

"Hello Walls" as part of a medley, loses the impact that it would hold as an individual number but it is still, undoubtedly, a country classic. The only other cut really worth mentioning is "I Never Cared For You", one of only two songs on the album that manages to rise in tempo above a dawdle. Willie here picks a fine solo on his holed, gut-strung Martin and as in most of his other songs, plays some very tasteful Django Reinhardt-ish jazz chords.

While all this material is at least five years old and none of his post '73 material is included, it is still a collection of Willie Nelson classics and, as such, an historically important release. Anyway, I hope the cash does come in, even if only for Willie Nelson's pocket. He deserves the compensation.

**Alan Hunter**