

I'm Going To Smack Your Face

**IV Rattus Norvegicus
The Stranglers**
United Artists

When you put a record on and the first words you hear are:

"Sometimes I want to smack your face" it is obvious something is up. After years of success and, lately, a lot of wind, the "pace and love" that made so many florists rich, is retreating down the most worn paths of contemporary music... people are losing interest; simple as that.

Frankly, I'm surprised that a group like the Stranglers hasn't evolved out of the NZ community. Every Saturday, on every football field and in every hotel (I don't know about the race-tracks) someone wants to smack someone's face so why is 80% of NZ music so nice? I guess it's because the NZ circuit is one of those "once you're in you can't get out" affairs and complacency is rife. With complacency comes boredom and that's that. The groups become boring and you can't escape them.

The Stranglers played the London pubs for many, many moons and it shows. They remind me of Television though more amusing, lyrically stronger and musically

more interesting (in other words, better). The keyboard player and bassist have very distinctive styles (and sounds) being most noticeable on "Grip" their current single, and "Peaches", a great song about going down to the beach to check out the tits.

*Looks like I'm stuck here all summer
What a bummer*

Still I could think of a lot worse places to be

... like down in the sewer ...

Dare I say it, the album is very male oriented and that is half the attraction. Apart from the gaudy packaging with terrible photographs, the album is very good. If I were a judge on New Faces, I would give it a B plus but then I'm not likely to go bankrupt soon.

The playing is very strong and Hugh Cornwall's vocals (really the focal point of the album) put across the crazy lyrics particularly well. And guess what? *You can hear the words.*

... I admit I even stole

But the worst crime that I ever did was play some rock 'n roll

But the money's no good ...

He's so right.
Mike Chunn.

Michael Nesmith
From a Radio Engine to the Photon Wing
Stetson

Listening to this record creates difficulties for your average cynic. It is reasonably common knowledge that Michael Nesmith, after discovering country music, made the logical next step into religiosity. He became a fully-fledged Christian Scientist. Like many a believer, he does not confine his religion to getting all purged up of a Sunday, and subscribing to *Plain Truth*. It is lying right there in the grooves for all to see.

The doctrines of Christian Science are rather more, um, cosmic than those expressed in the usual run of country music, and this is often the cause of overstatement. Evidence of this can be found in Nesmith's ill-fated *Prison* project where he attempted to deliver an unabashed slice of religion to a determinedly deaf public and then compounded the commercial folly of sincerity with marketing suicide by attempting to sell it mail-order.

At the same time, that very sincerity, as the handful who saw his 1975 Auckland concert will agree, is the most winning aspect of Nesmith's approach. It is a very risky attitude for a rock 'n' roller, but like Townshend's *Who Came First*, *FARETTPW* is a tribute to the cardinal song-writing virtue of actually wanting to say something.

Once you have taken the preliminary step of throwing away the lyric sheet, it is possible to appreciate the virtues of the artist's deceptively easy songs. With ingenious chord changes over a frequently Caribbean rhythm, they insinuate themselves into the most resistant subconscious. So many of them have the same kind of simple directness (probably more self-conscious) that makes the McGarrigle sisters' work so charming.

That's what this record is. It's downright charming.
Francis Stark

Carole King
Simple Things
Capitol

Tapestry must be one of popular music's all-time great selling albums, up there with *Dark Side of the Moon*, *Hot August Night* and *The Sound of Music*. It has continued to sell another million copies every year since its initial market blitzkrieg. (I know of three people who are onto their second copies.) No similar fortune has befallen any of Ms King's subsequent albums, two of which can be found languishing in fair numbers in sale bins around the city. How

The Staples Boogie Too

**Family Tree
The Staples**
Warner Bros

Pop Staples and his three daughters are now known as the Staples. Before the albums *Let's Do It Again* and *Pass It On* (both produced by Curtis Mayfield) they were known as the Staple Singers. Then they were recording primarily gospel or social issue songs such as "I'll Take You There", "Respect Yourself" or "Washington We're Watching You".

Mayfield's songs and production focused primarily on the expressive ability of Mavis Staples, the lead singer. Their new album *Family Tree* returns to a more familiar Staples Sound. Once again Pop is heard and Cleo and Yvonne are up-front of the mix with Mavis. The one track featuring Mavis alone, is disappointing.

Eugene Record's production on *Family Tree*, featuring strong vocal and rhythm tracks captures the energy in the Staples performance. "Boogie For The Blues" and "Let's Go To The Disco", two of the best songs on *Family Tree* are written by Aretha's sister, Carolyn Franklin. "Let's Go To The Disco" has the fastest bass line in town and the strings make Van McCoy sound plain.

Nowadays, the Staples message may not be very substantial, but the sound is still good. Even their social issue lyrics in the old days were simple, and here, the exhortations to boogie are no more trite than the lyrics of their classic, "Oh La De Da". The only difference is that "Oh La De Da" was about clapping your hands.

The more extrovert lyrics and sound predominant on this album are preferable to the more restrained albums recorded with Mayfield. I certainly would not knock an album because mention is made of that five letter word — *disco* or because I cannot boogie.

Murray Cammick

Blondie Chaplin
Blondie Chaplin
Elektra

I never heard of this guy before, but that ain't particularly surprising. He's from South Africa, but he's no Boer, despite his deceptive moniker. Apparently he's been around the British and American scene for a few years, and has played for the Beach Boys on some of their studio efforts. This is his first solo outing.

And it's not bad. There's a whole bunch of solid rock 'n' roll songs that (accompanied by the appropriate medication) could get you up on yer feet and rocking at any all-night boogie session. Mr Chaplin has got a fine set of musicians behind him. Famous names include Richard Tee, Kenny Gradney, and Gareth Hudson. His own guitar work is consistently good.

The problem that stops the album from being an out and out success is the lack of any real flair. There isn't the originality and fire that immediately distinguishes a Lowell George or a Frankie Miller. While his guitar playing is good, it's no better than a legion of rock guitarists, and while his songs are good, his voice lacks the personality and range of expression required to drive them home in true rock style.

What can you say about an album that doesn't quite make it (without sounding like a blase and bored critic)? Give it a listen. Great to dance to — play it a lot — Four Stars?

John Malloy

Much More Than Average

The Average White Band and Ben E. King
Benny and Us
Atlantic

The uniting of Ben E. King with the Average White Band might seem like a curious pairing on paper. But fear not. On vinyl, the collaboration works surprisingly well, producing the most energetic and creative work from both parties in some time.

There are few surprises. Instrumentally, it sounds exactly like the Average White Band and while Ben E. King sounds less distinctive than he did in his prime, he's nevertheless in fine voice. He's still a classic soul singer and, though occasionally mixed too far down here, he remains a stronger voice than either of the Average White Band's vocalists.

There's no new material from the Average White's here. Instead, they've opted for a wide selection of outside material including oldies from both collaborators. One of

the best performances is the opening cut, "Get It Up For Love", which manages to be danceable without descending into disco-dreck. The other killer on the album is Donny Hathaway's "Someguy We'll All Be Free", a soul ballad with a grandly quirky chorus which segues into a funky version of John Lennon's "Imagine". The closing song of the album is Alan Gorrie's "Keeping It to Myself", which was featured on the AWB album, and here is performed in even more convincing style.

A fruitful collaboration then, that only once or twice descends into wasteful jamming. Producer, Arif Mardin, has given the album the best soul production heard in some while. It's a no frills job that allows Steve Ferrone's muscular drumming to power the whole thing alone.

If you've ever been a fan of either Ben E. King or the Average White Band, check this one out. It's a collaboration that seems to have brought many of the best features out of both of them. Recommended.
Alastair Dougal.



A Winning Hand?

Poco
Indian Summer
ABC

Rock 'n' roll, as Ian Hunter once sang, is a loser's game. But there are winners as well as losers. Too bad then that Poco has been losing for nine years now.

Since their move from Epic to ABC Records in 1975 and the beginning of a production collaboration with Mark Harman, the band's improvement has been notice-

able, developing a more polished sound that is further away from their country/rock roots. The first album for ABC, *Head Over Heels*, was their best up to then, producing a top 50 hit in the States, "Keep On Trying". The next album, *Rose of Cimarron*, looked set to further improve their fortunes. But the title track, which with any justice would have been a king size hit, bombed and the album sold less than any of its predecessors.

Poco nearly called it quits during the recording of this, their thirteenth album, their third for ABC. But, after consideration, Rusty Young, Timothy Schmit, Paul Cotton and George Grantham have stayed together as Poco to keep on trying.

Indian Summer is undoubtedly Poco's best album to date, marking the complete transformation from country to rock that earlier albums had begun. But unfortunately the album lacks the potential hit single needed to attract new listeners to a group name so well-worn.

Poco's perfect vocal harmonies form the basis of their distinctive sound but their harmonies sometimes threaten to outweigh the songs themselves. And, with the lead vocal spot seldom shared around, it is too easy for an air of sameness to prevail over an entire album.

The sameness is an illusion which disappears after close listening. In the meantime, though, the Eagles — the most successful group to plough the fields originally sown by the Buffalo Springfield and the Byrds — are more readily accepted.

While it can only be small comfort to Poco, it is the Eagles' lyrical banality and more simply structured songs which makes them the more popular group. And why compare diamonds to dust?

Jeremy Templar