



Rick Steele

Island of Real

With the upsurge of interest in country bands overseas, it is heartwarming to see that there is home-grown talent to match anything that we can import on vinyl. But as any good shitkicker will tell you, country music has gotta be heard live before the feet start stomping and the yaas start ho-oing. So I strapped on my Colts, pulled on my boots, and with my C.F. Martin patch embroidered prominently on my jeans, I headed off to the Island of Real to catch Rick Steele.

Well it ain't no Texas bar, and it sure ain't no Eagles Eyrie, but its not bad, to paraphrase Merle ("I'll fix your flat tyre.") Haggard. Rick now performs with "and Friends", but when they start playing, the music takes over. They ran through a number of songs, including some of his own, a few country classics, and some so-called "longhair country" tunes.

Rick Steele certainly puts himself into his music. He bobs up and down like his guitar was wired up through his pants, and with the whole band grinnin' and stompin', it doesn't take long before some anonymous

city cowboy is punctuating the solos with rebel yells.

Speaking of solos, there was some rather fine pedal steel playing from Billy Brothers. Mostly he's pretty laid back, but he really started to rip when they did the Truckie's anthem, "Six Days On The Road". Just a few more decibels, Billy, and Hank himself will be humming the refrain. Dave Maybee, ex of Smokestack, played some sweet guitar riffs, and he sure can make your eyes sting when he's running with the slide guitar. Harmony vocals were beautifully supplied by Colleen Ralphs (who also sang on Rick's album) in a voice reminiscent of Emmylou, or perhaps Dolly Parton. Bass was supplied by John Dacre on guitarrone, an acoustic bass guitar. He also played a mean piano at times.

If you missed this one and you like country music in a big way, keep your eyes out for Rick Steele and Friends. Your feet keep tappin' all the way home.

Drew Siegert

Urban Road

Island of Real

Urban Road are an Auckland rarity, a band with a horn section providing a general diet of soul music.

They opened with a protracted version of George Benson's "Breezin'" which was, frankly, a mistake. The weakest member of the group is the guitarist and this was somewhat too ambitious a project, lacking the fluency which makes Benson's work pleasant if not distinguished.

Not until sometime later when the band took to playing shorter snappier songs did they start to impress as a controlled unit, although I was pleased to observe that Keith Ballantyne's horn arrangements were consistently simple, effective and tightly played by himself on trumpet and Julian Barre on tenor sax.

The surprise of the night was an excellent version of Sanford Townsend's "Smoke from a Distant Fire" which, although largely a cover of the hit single, gained from being short and to the point.

Both Ballantyne and Barre soloed well throughout, my one major criticism being that the solos were often too long, developing initially but continuing well past their logical points of conclusion.

Yet given more time together, a few more songs and perhaps a greater sense of economy Urban Road should develop into a good working band.

Bruce Belsham

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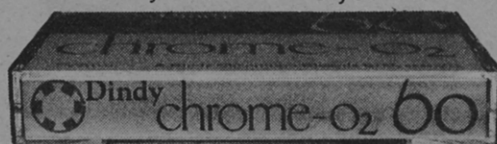
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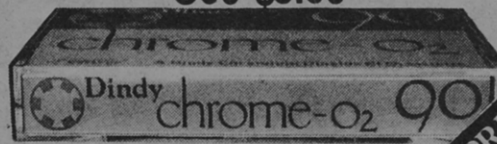
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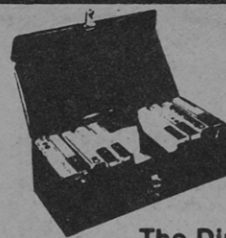
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