

RECORDS

Ocker Rockers

Various Artists
 Lethal Weapons
 Suicide
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 Guilty Until Proven Insane
 Mushroom
 Little River Band
 Sleeper Catcher
 EMI

One of the most popular party jokes of last year, the leading candidate for a "who needs it" award, was Australian punk rock. If the idea itself wasn't funny enough the Australian interpretation of it was: a *Time/Newsweek* idea of "punk" that led to one Australian punk rock group calling themselves the Hitler Youth Movement. Even Auckland's Suburban Reptiles (with their own reputation for bad taste) turned down the suggestion to rename their lead singer Mona Blades.

So nobody should have been surprised to hear of an Australian who had worked with Muff Winwood — Barrie Earl — forming an Australian record company with a roster of "new wave" bands called Suicide Records, and describing Suicide as "an alternative to boredom".

Suicide's first release is a compilation album of Australian new wave, pressed on white vinyl and titled *Lethal Weapons*. Of the album's seven groups, Teenage Radio Stars win extra points for their name but also sound best, like the Ramones with overtones of the Easybeats. They can be plain dumb as on "Wanna Be Ya Baby" or (ha!) intellectual — "(We're) The Learned One".

Wasted Daze re-work the Who's "Magic Bus" under its new title, "Mona", while the Boys Next Door do Nancy Sinatra's hit, "These Boots Are Made For Walking", and that's okay too. X-Ray-Z do the only political song — "Three More Glorious Years" — but they don't sound like real subversives and these aren't lethal weapons at all. Three points for audacity: this album will be a valuable artefact within five years, or it will still be a party joke.

Skyhooks were included on Vertigo's compilation, *New Wave*, but unlike Suicide's aspirants they have a greatest hits collection, O.E. and originality to their credit. Roger Jarrett's wild-eyed claim in 1975 that given two years in the States Skyhooks would be as big as Led Zep didn't really seem that impossible then because the band itself had the persuasive confidence and ambition to be a rock'n'roll success story. I'm prepared to believe it was only bad marketing that stopped them from conquering America in their short stay.

On *Guilty Until Proven Insane* there are evident changes in Skyhooks' established style; most noticeably as a result of Bob Spencer replacing Red Symons as guitarist. The Aerosmith and Alice Cooper production team of Jack Douglas, Eddie Leonetti and Lee Decarlo has shaped a hard rock sound that dispenses with such throwaway sing-alongs as "Blue Jeans" and "All My Friends Are Getting Married". "Women In Uniform" benefits most from this approach and would almost certainly have been a hit single if radio-land could have heard it through 18-inch speakers.

Like the Rolling Stones, Skyhooks still feel something of an obligation to be outrageous but they remain as strikingly original as when they first began.

The Little River Band's founders perfected their synthesis of LA country-rock in a band called Mississippi, formed in 1974. As a vocal harmony group the Little River Band is most often compared to the Eagles but their style is, more correctly, a combination of the best and the worst of a genre that began with Buffalo Springfield.

At best Little River Band are capable of songs like "Statue of Liberty", "It's A Long Way There" and "Help Is On Its Way". But they also have an unerring ear for clichéd lyrics (including the largest collection of "life on the road" songs I've ever heard) and they can be as bland as the group Chicago.

Their greatest strength is their vocal harmonies but *Sleeper Catcher* (co-produced by American producer John Boylan) is an unfortunate attempt at a "serious" work; over-orchestrated and too gushingly pleasant to be listened to comfortably. Only "So Many Paths" comes close to the material this group is best doing, although the song is almost destroyed by awkwardly matched allegorical lyrics. That aside, perhaps EMI need to be reminded that nobody listens to this sort of stuff during winter.

Jeremy Templar



Some Boys

The Rolling Stones
Some Girls

Rolling Stones Records

Let's lay it on the line. If the Rolling Stones never made another record this one would be perfect to go out on. If the RCMP hang it on Keef they'll be dancing to this in Cell Block Number Nine. The best thing since maybe *Let It Bleed*.

Culled from a total of 42 songs, the material is stro-o-ong. "Miss You" is a mid-tempo Stones instant classic. The sax of Mel Collins (ex-King Crimson) and the harp of Sugar Blue (said to play in the Paris Metro) add the sauce to one of the headiest brews from the Stones in a long time. Electric piano from Ian McLagan (Woody's old Faces compadre) and Charlie's no-frills drumming push this one to the limits. In a recent *Rolling Stone* interview Jagger indicates that somewhere a 12 minute version featuring Sugar Blue has been released. I'd love to hear it; he's seething as the track fades.

"When the Whip Comes Down" is one of the Stones' most insistent pieces. Just a

chorus driven into the ground. Meant to be about a gay garbage collector. Can't decipher the lyric. Unrelenting.

The Temptations' "Just My Imagination Running Away with Me" is given a similar treatment to "Ain't Too Proud to Beg" on *It's Only Rock and Roll*. Jagger suggests it's just an English band tuning up on a three chord song. He's too modest by half.

"Some Girls" is more than a passing nod in Dylan's direction, right to the "lethal dose" quote. The phrasing is straight out of *Blonde on Blonde*, and the lyrics seem to refer to recent Malibu marital follies as much as the Jagger soap opera. More great harp on this one.

"Lies", which closes Side One, is a Stones party song, four to the bar and a chanting chorus, more a pulse than a tune.

Side Two opens with Mick Jagger reincarnating Gram Parsons (sort of) with "Far Away Eyes". Sunday morning in Bakersfield, gospel radio and truck drivin' cafes. The best country music the Stones have done. Tear-drop steel guitar from Woody.

"Respectable" is the Stones ripping the joint. Frantic pace, jeering vocals, a wall of guitars.

Then comes the oddity of the album. Keith Richards' "Before They Make Me Run." Is this Keith saying goodbye? "I'm gonna find

my way to Heaven/cause I did my time in Hell." Apparently Keith's last complete song since "Happy", Keith's vocals are as poignant as they were on the more lyrical "You Got the Silver" from *Let It Bleed*. A disturbing song, more desperate than defiant.

Ringed guitars evoke Otis Redding and Wilson Pickett in "Beast of Burden", perhaps the Stones' best soul strut since "That's How Strong My Love Is."

"Shattered" is pure New York in a New York album (despite its Paris recording). Stuttering jive vocals, Sha-doooby back-up, a tight rhythm groove, occasionally shattered by squalling guitar.

This album is a total success. Every song is potent and the parts sum up to a greater whole. As Jagger said: "People expect a lot more of us than they do everybody else."

"I think it's a good album and I'm not going to be too modest about it. I think it has a continuity in the characterisations. It doesn't have the holes, it's a bit better than the others."

Some Girls is a highpoint for the Stones. The threat of Keith's court case still hangs over the band. Did that uncertainty draw from them this superlative performance? What value surmise? This is superb. Perma styled with elasticized inner pockets.

Ken Williams.

Positively Main Street

Bob Dylan
Street Legal
 CBS

A notable American magazine recently published an essay on the politics of fame. Its author discussed the inadequate machinery the modern world has for disposing of its celebrity overstayers. Amongst those he supposed the public to feel uneasy over, the name Bob Dylan was prominent.

Dylan, I'm sure won't lose any sleep over the comment, but it does illustrate that blended with other of his talents, Dylan has a genius for remaining contentious. The man has to be a P.R. wonder who, sixteen years and some twenty albums after his first record contract, can still arouse anticipation over a new release. The 'has - he - still - got - what - it - takes' speculation surrounding all he attempts is an ironic headstart many of his contemporaries must envy.

After the recent world tour of which we were privileged to catch a segment, appetites were particularly whetted for the recording which has taken the title *Street Legal*. Dylan has worked of late at assembling and maintaining a regular band. The advantages were manifest at his concert here. The combination he brought were a rehearsed, talented and dynamic unit. Musicians like

Steve Douglas, rock and roll sax-man from way back, Bobbye Hall who is an extraordinary percussionist, gave more zest to the performance than most of us had dared hope for.

Street Legal uses the basis of the band which came to N.Z. — Hall, Douglas, David Mansfield, Steven Soles and Dylan's three lady back-up singers, being of particular value. Theirs is a major contribution towards the sound of the album. The months spent together re-arranging old songs, rehearsing and touring have paid dividends. The first impression of *Street Legal*, before any evaluation of Dylan's new songs, is of the coherent, simple, yet inventive nature of the arrangements. To my mind *Street Legal* far outshines the rather rambling *Desire* in this respect, and may even have the edge on portions of *Blood on the Tracks* where backings do not always match song quality.

The songs to which this treatment is given on *Street Legal* need more cautious appraisal. Dylan himself, in an interview given in Australia, maintains that his style has established boundaries for itself over the years. Asked about where his work might move in the future he replied that it is in "the same old place it's always been . . . It won't get any more complicated or simple than it is." This

does not mean that Dylan has exhausted himself of new ideas or of his experimental urge, but suggests that he will continue to utilise the same raw materials.

Street Legal is a record which illustrates the point. It is, in several ways, a catalogue of Bob Dylan's song writing characteristics, the good and the bad.

Unfortunately there are no songs to lyrically match the best he has done in the 70s — no "Tangled Up In Blue's" or "Idiot Winds" — none to match the sophisticated love songs on under-rated *Planet Waves*. Dylan does nevertheless produce effective images. "Baby Stop Crying", opens with the brief statement:

You've been down to the bottom with a bad man babe

But you're back to where you belong.

Simple it is, yet with an underlying strong melody, it's the sort of song that in the good old days might have become a soul standard.

A gutsy sax break and the girly back-ups contribute to the impression.

The winners on *Street Legal* are all similarly direct. "True Love Tends to Forget" and "We Better Talk This Over" are more genuinely pop songs than any since "Knocking on Heaven's Door". In them rests the strength of the release.

I am less taken with the one or two numbers which are residue from surrealist - mystic - mumbojumbo days. In my humble opinion Dylan has always worn the garb of a good songwriter more comfortably than the robes of a latter day Ezekiel. The one opus on *Street Legal*, a thing by the name of "No Time to Think", wanders through vaguely metaphysical metaphors for eight minutes, stopping in the middle of each verse for a random sequence of abstract nouns. It sits uncomfortably with the rest of the material.

However, these are small gripes for I'm easily won over to an album which sounds so good. Douglas's understated saxophone style, a lovely mid sixties organ sound, soul backing vocals — of such things enjoyable records are made.

Despite our cynical essayist, I'm happy to see Bob Dylan around a while yet.

Bruce Belsham



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