

**Iggy Pop  
Choice Cuts**  
RCA

Firstly, *Choice Cuts* is a marvellous title for an Iggy Pop compilation. It conjures up visions of James Jewel Osterburg gyrating over stained stages, twisting his wonderfully wasted torso into absurd contortions as blood drips from a fresh wound on to the dazed masses below.

So what do you get for a cover? A photo of a record wrapped in brown paper with a portion ripped back revealing that the disc is gold. The torn tab reads "featuring China Girl". Now as far as I know Iggy's never had a gold record anywhere so it's obviously alluding to what's-his-face.

Aha, the track listing confirms it. Side One, the craziest from *The Idiot*, Side Two, *Lust For Life's* liveliest. Both 1976-77 collaborations with David Bowie and Pop's only albums for RCA.

Well excuse my manner darlings but it all seems so terribly supermarketish. If it's a bid to introduce Iggy to the mainstream by cashing in on Bowie's success (which, of course, it is) then it seems an extremely belated one considering it was last year that 'China Girl' scored. It's also cheapening.

Iggy, fresh from the asylum, lends an imbalance to 'China Girl' that Bowie, despite his undisputable cleverness, could never convincingly achieve. Among the gems on this album it stands as average — anything up a notch ('Lust For Life', 'Funtime', 'The Passenger') enters the sublime.

It's easy to resent the marketing of the man by way of association.

Maybe that's too idealistic.  
**Shayne Carter**

**The Fixx  
Phantoms**  
MCA

The Fixx have an image identity problem. They came in wearing expensive haircuts when the Blitz brigade was long since passe. So marketers tried to place them among the silly-synth set, except that Fixx usually lead with their guitar. Then their first single (to reach this country anyway) 'Saved By Zero', was far too mild for the long grey raincoat and teenage angst brigade. 'One Thing Leads To Another' and the band was without an identifiable audience.

Now there's a new album and the problem remains. Someone selected 'Are We Ourselves' as the single. And while it's by no means the best track available it does sound distinctly Police-ish (hence its selection?). The pity is that, whereas last year's album boasted little more than the singles and some potential, *Phantoms* shows a band strong and confident in its identity. Their sound is primarily characterised by Cy Curnin's vocals and by the skilful guitar work of Jamie West-Oram.

The fact that all four members collaborate in the writing may account for both the variety and yet overall distinctiveness of the material. This is a straightforward pop band yet one that commands an impressive range of rhythm and tempo. Some numbers are immediately appealing, ('Woman On A Train' for example) while others require several hearings. Ultimately though, the majority of these tracks contain something to recommend them.

So The Fixx should neither need nor want comparisons with such pop major leaguers as Police. The Fixx may still be only second division contenders but *Phantoms* suggests the likelihood of promotion.

**Peter Thomson  
John Cale  
Caribbean Sunset**  
Festival

"Lou's had his 'Walk On The Wild Side', I want my 'Walk On The Wild Side'."

So spake John Cale recently when discussing this, his ninth solo album. Certainly it's Cale providing an explanation for the orthodoxy of *Caribbean Sunset*. What he misses is that in his search for the ever-elusive *hit* he's produced an album of exceptional dullness.

Five of the nine tracks are co-written with guitarist Dave Young. It's the first time Cale has shared credits since the Velvet Underground — and on the strength of this, hopefully the last. Each of the songs, ranging from the Velvet copyist putdown 'Praetorian Underground' to the truly horrendous 'The Hunt' can be unflinchingly filed under flop. And Young leads a band so colourless they border on invisibility.

On the rare occasions when Cale does get fired up, as on 'Magazines', the band sounds almost embarrassed by his passion. Describing them as unsympathetic would be a little like labelling Natassja Kinski's looks as "pleasant".

But it's no use hammering the tools when the craftsman is making such a mess of the job as with *Caribbean Sunset*. Cale is operating within purposefully narrowed horizons. What he obviously doesn't realise is that this time he's played it safe to the point of maddening mediocrity.

**Shayne Carter**

**Coconut Rough  
Mushroom**

Heaven knows what might have happened if Andrew Snoid had chosen to stay with one-time local greats Pop Mechanix. Paul Scott wrote simple yet very effective songs which should have been heard by a much wider audience. Well, things didn't go exactly as planned and Snoid left to join the Swingers who, in turn, had the unquestionable songwriting talents of Phil Judd to call on. Ultimately and inevitably, both bands folded in Australia and Snoid returned here.

After a brief recess he began to get the basis of Coconut Rough together and things gelled quickly. Initial reaction was over the top (as they say) but it soon became apparent that behind the impressive exterior was a songwriting interior of varying strengths and qualities. That is to say both Snoid and ace guitarist Mark Bell write okay tunes but neither is in the class of Judd or Scott.

Naturally the standard of musicianship is particularly high, with keyboardist Stuart Pearce shining throughout, but nothing here is exceptional. Perhaps the most compelling piece of music is Judd's 'Magic Hour', where Snoid proves that he can sing quite well. At this stage it must be said that none of the other songs are

helped by David Marrett's rather inoffensive and weak production.

But don't get me wrong, this album its few moments. For instance, 'Bone China' and 'As Good As It Gets' are two of Snoid's better efforts to date, in fact the latter was always superior to the ad jingle mentality of 'Sierra Leone'. The crunch, though, comes on Side Two, where only Bell's haunting 'Everything Or Nothing' saves it from being a total disappointment. 'Tango (It Takes Two)' and 'Once In A While' are just plain lousy.

The new, slimline Coconut Rough that is playing live at the moment is an entirely different proposition to the band that made this record. Already they have dispensed with some of the material presented here and replaced it with seemingly stronger songs which suggests that they rushed into doing this album.

**Alister Cain  
The Brian Smith Quartet  
Southern Excursion**  
Ode

If guys this good blew in from, say, New York we'd queue up to pay big bucks for their one-off concert. As it is I've been used to catching them mid-week in a pub without even paying cover charge. Plentiful seating too. While this excellent group has so

far attracted only a very small live following, *Southern Excursion* deserves to rectify things.

Smith and co play neo-bop mainstream jazz, strong and sinewy with no concession to pop or funk crossover. Which is not to suggest that this album's inaccessible. On the contrary, each of the seven pieces here — six original, one Ellington — is as attractive as it's honest.

The rhythm team of Frank Gibson and Billy Kristian pulsates with drive and energy. Both are superb craftsmen of course, and if in times past each has sometimes indulged in overplaying, here they are both robust and sympathetic. Pianist Geoff Castle is also in top form. From the sensitive comping on a ballad like 'Marianne' to the crackling fireworks of 'One For Monk' (both his own pieces) Castle is as impressively fluent as I've heard since his arrival here from England.

And then there is Brian Smith. Given his striking talent and exemplary pedigree overseas, New Zealand is damned lucky he came back. There's many a local saxophonist would kill just for Smith's tone and technique, let alone his sheer musicality. Whether on tenor or soprano Smith always blows such satisfying solos — and this album contains some corkers. (There's also one track featuring his flute.)

When considering local music we reviewers often lean toward generosity. Encouragement is important after all. This album needs no special pleading however. *Southern Excursion* is so good it evokes pride in a way similar to that felt for our Olympians. If they only gave gold medals for music.

**Peter Thomson  
Primitive Art Group  
Five Tread Drop Down**  
Braille

You name the noise; it's here and they fit together to form a curious whole. Primitive Art Group's two EP set works on two layers — the first layer one of improvisational/experimental jazz for the fun of it, but underneath an inventive, intuitive understanding of their art/craft. The overall feeling of these records is one of self-determination and accomplishment, but not without a sense of humour ('Troubles With Maurice', 'The Big R'), without which all would be lost.

It's not true that you need a university education and a beard to listen to jazz (and its offshoots) and it seems a great pity that Primitive Art Group's audience will probably limit itself. For those who know little about free jazz, Primitive Art Group are certainly worthy of a listen.

**Fiona Rae**

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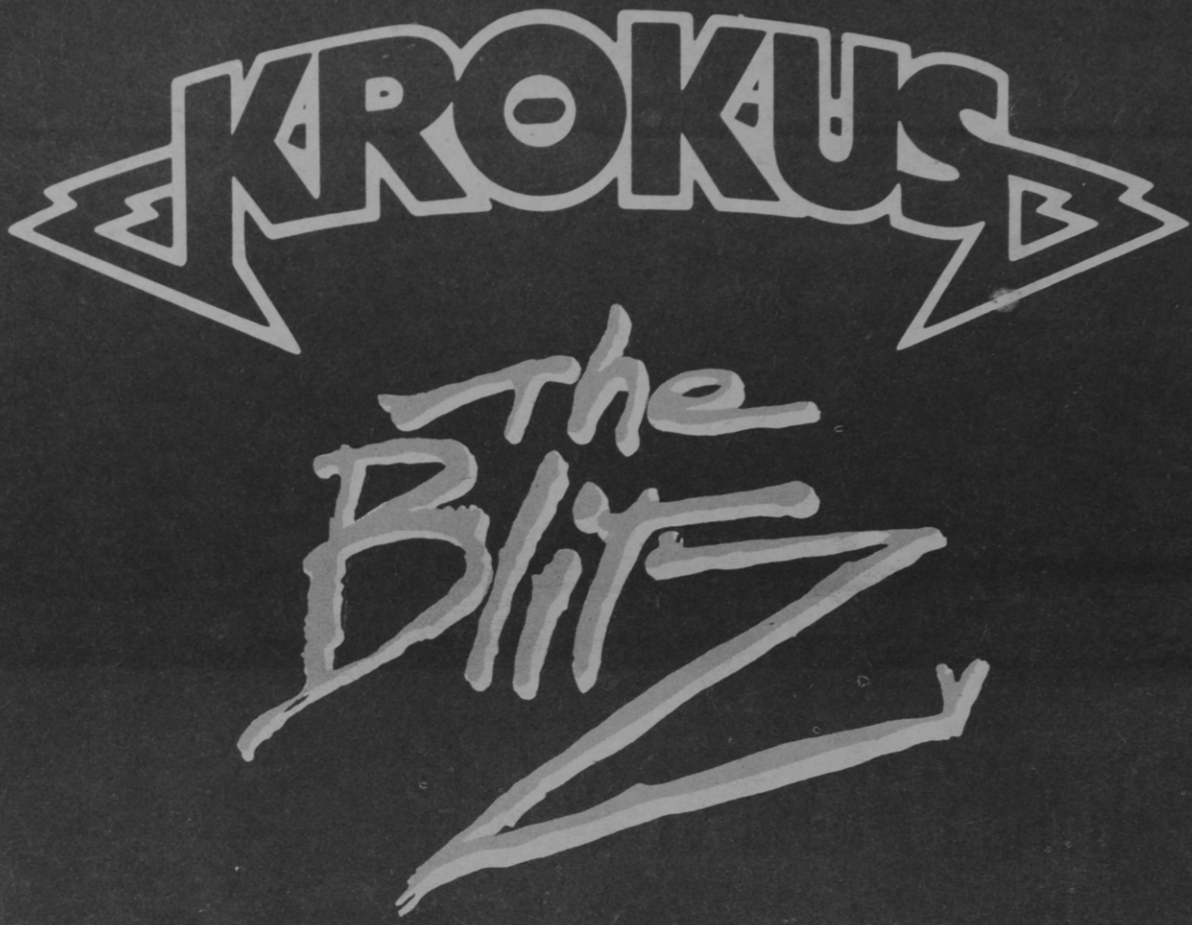
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