

Records

David Bowie
Tonight
EMI

Last year may have been international Bowie year, what with his money-making world trek and the

mega-sales of *Let's Dance*, but from a critical point of view it was probably his worst ever. No arguments, the Serious Moonlight tour was an over-rehearsed, preening circus and at least half of *Let's Dance* tried too hard to make a popular comeback and so sacrificed Bowie's usual strengths of depth and durability.

At first glance *Tonight* seems to suffer from the same artistic laziness, since five of the nine songs are covers, three of them lifted from Iggy Pop. Bowie may have defused *The Idiot* version of 'China Girl' for his own purposes on *Let's Dance* but Iggy should

have no complaints about the brash showbiz swing of 'Neighbourhood Threat' or the easy, reassuring reggae of the title track, both originally on *Lust For Life* and co-written with Bowie. From *New Values* comes 'Don't Look Down', the Iggy Pop-James Williamson advice on living on the edge and Bowie adopts another reggae temper, nice and cool, making the song deceptively casual.

Looking at the other covers and his treatment of the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds* number 'God Only Knows' is as assured as the heady ballads on *Station To Station* and



The Bluebells

that only leaves 'I Keep Forgetting', a Leiber-Stoller standard roller recorded in 1962 by Chuck Jackson and Bowie cranks it up the way it has to be.

The originals may be outnumbered but they all hit the target. The crucial seven-minutes-plus opener, 'Loving the Alien', is a spiritual and musical cousin to 'Ashes To Ashes', a great song. 'Blue Jean', the single as a cheap shot, fits perfectly into the album's scheme of things, as does a new collaboration with Iggy. 'Tumble and Twirl', the last chance to dance before 'Dancing With the Big Boys', a song that ironically recalls the tenor of *The Idiot*.

Bassist Carmine Rojas wasn't far wrong when he jokingly told *RIU* last year that Bowie was so unpredictable that his new album could be swing-time. With the Borneo Horns tightly laced through most of the songs and a nightlife production engineered by Hugh Padgham, the album is a blaring, blinding trip through the bright lights and precarious nature of pop and life. So those people who thought — and maybe hoped — that he was down and out with *Let's Dance* better think again, because *Tonight* is Bowie back on form.

George Kay

Box of Frogs
CBS

After forming out of the famed Marquee Club 25th anniversary in mid 1983, Box Of Frogs held a tonne of promise as an overview of the 60s blues boom 20 years on.

Comprising three ex Yardbirds (Jim McCarty on drums, Chris Dreja on rhythm guitar, producer/songwriter Paul Samwell-Smith on bass) and former Medicine Head multi-talent John Fiddler on vocals and guitar, this debut should have torn the lungs out of most of the competition.

Unfortunately, however, it

comes across as a characterless collection of tunes performed by a mid-70s style old boys club (with the addition of another ex Yardbird Jeff Beck on guitar for four tracks, and famed Irish tenor Rory Gallagher for two) unhampered by anything so simple as a direction.

The vocals could be almost anybody you've never heard of, and the whole shebang only really works on the opener 'Back Where I Started', a boogie in the vintage John Lee Hooker style. A good production, but even with all these reputations behind it, this record is less than memorable.

Dave McLean

The Bluebells
Sisters
London

Not too long ago you could classify Scots bands into two main categories; the Postcard clan of Joseph K, Orange Juice and Aztec Camera, united in their belief of garage and the Velvet Underground, and the opposing Big

Sounds of Simple Minds, Big Country (nee Skids) and the Associates.

These days things aren't quite so clear-cut, with the emergence from Glasgow of the likes of Lloyd Cole, James King, Friends Again, the Blue Nile and the Bluebells, who all fall somewhere between the two extremes.

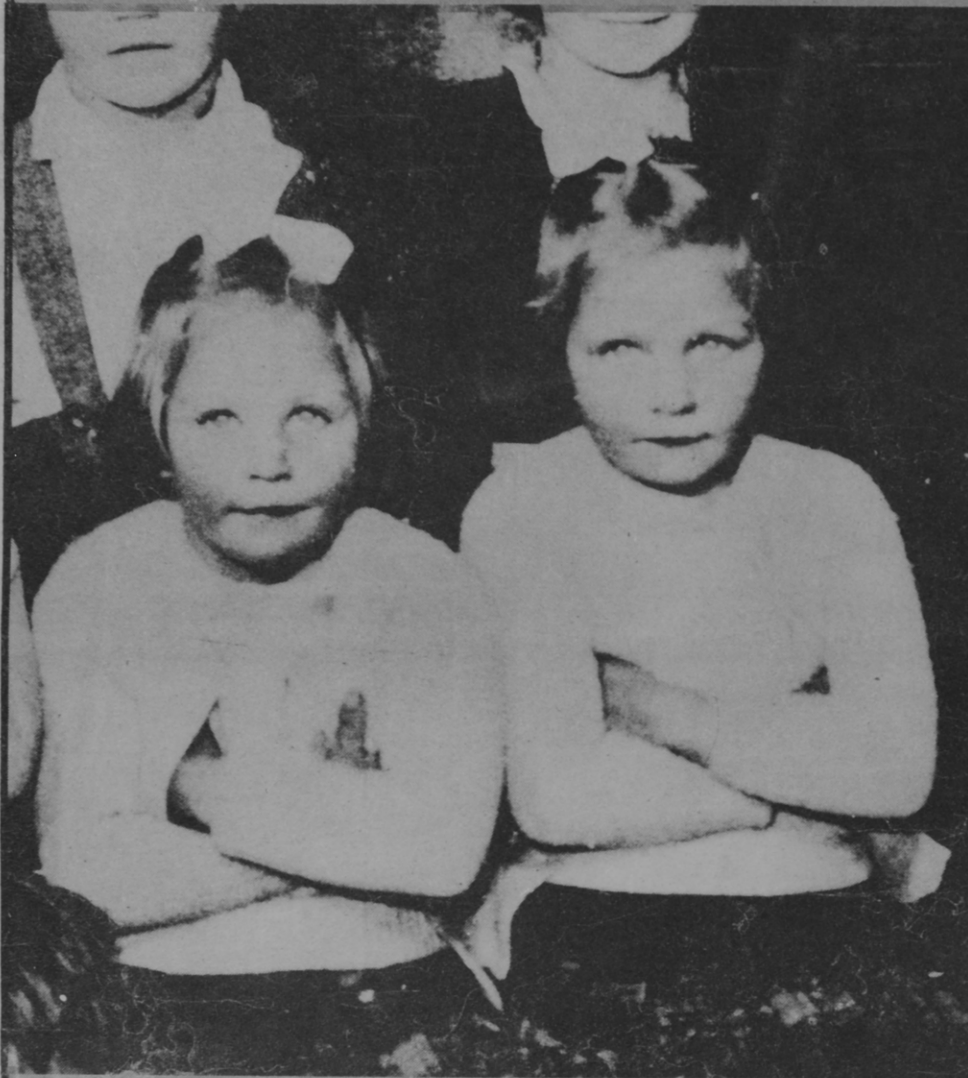
Take the Bluebells, who've often been compared to the Postcard people because of their jangling guitar sound and unpretentious approach to the world of song. And that's a comparison borne out by the likes of 'Red Guitars' and 'Syracuse University' on their debut album, *Sisters*. But the band, based around the nucleus of chief songwriter Robert Hodgens and the McCluskey brothers, owes more to the 60s pop harmonies of the Hollies and the plaintive style of those other brothers, the Sutherlands, than to the vague secondhand influence of Postcard Records.

Love songs like 'Everybody's Somebody's Fool', 'Cath' and their new single 'I'm Falling' are a cut above the average boy-girl romance hard-luck story, not only in lyrical honesty but in catchy melodic hooks. The Bluebells also dabble in politics, sometimes too explicitly, as in the Falklands plot of 'South Atlantic Way' and the Celtic lilt of 'The Patriot Game', a song written by a friend of theirs, Dominic Behan. But on 'Learn To Love' their point is more veiled and therefore more effective.

Although they scale no great heights or set new standards in songwriting, the Bluebells have a fresh-faced sincerity that avoids tartan sentimentality and new image hype.

George Kay

TWINSET THE Pearls



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