



# Records

## Jason and the Scorchers Fervour EMI

Country punk. Heeeeey ... it's the new thang! Yeah. It's not hard to fathom the appeal of a cowboy wave to American critics — it's indigenous, something the limeys are almost certainly incapable of. So far the names have been Rank and File, whose earnest left-wing injections into country style have resulted largely in dryness, the East Coast pretend of Rubber Rodeo and ... Jason and the

Scorchers. The first two haven't been able to give meaning to the genre that's been readybuilt around them. So how 'bout the Scorchers?

Well unfortunately the first side of this mini-LP can be more or less dismissed. There's an insensitive cover of Dylan's 'Absolutely Sweet Marie' and then 'Help, There's A Fire' and 'I Can't Help Myself', two unsatisfactory attempts at wacky rockabilly.

The band seems to recognise the above by only providing lyrics for the four songs on the second side. The opener, 'Hot Nights In Georgia', immediately features a much better vocal performance from Jason Ringenberg, even if the lyric does run out of steam as it progresses. It has a touch of the R.E.M.s about it and — surprise — a look at the credits reveals that R.E.M. singer Michael Stipe is in there on backing vocals.



Jason & the Scorchers

The next two songs, 'Pray For Me Mama' and 'Harvest Moon' (which bears the intriguing chorus line "Sickness has now become style") are attractive, if a little self-conscious mid-paced numbers, but it's on the closing 'Both Sides Of the Line' that the Scorchers really fall in behind Jason.

It's also the song that reveals the group for what it is — a rock-boogie band that makes a pretty good fist of incorporating country. The song storms along, but loud and the players all sound much happier being allowed to let loose. Mr Stipe's in there again, this time as the author of a beautifully respectful lyric.

There's both madder and badder than Jason and the Scorchers (the Orson Family, Tex and the Horseheads) but this record has three good songs and one great one.

Given that they're all on the one side, it really ain't bad ...  
**Russell Brown**

## Rubber Rodeo Scenic Views Mercury

These six art students from Rhode Island have been mentioned in the same breath as Rank and File and the Gun Club because of their country rock ambitions. But Rubber Rodeo are another breed.

Although they try to capture "that high and lonesome sound, the wide open spaces and the lonely guy" in their marriage of country and rock, their glossy secondhand East Coast country influences prevent the music from reaching the dusty, aching solitude that is the hallmark of authenticity of life on the prairie.

Okay, they've fallen short of their stated ambition but they still have some good songs to offer and ace pedal steel guitarist Mark Tomeo (renowned for his playing on the Gun Club's *Miami* album) can sure tickle a few nerve ends with that haunted geetar when he gets a chance. So 'Need You Need Me' is spaghetti western country and on 'Anywhere With You' Tomeo's steel shimmers through a song fronted by Trish Milliken. But the best efforts are the last two, 'Mess O' Me' and 'Before I Go Away' — all tearful verse and climactic choruses.

You'd be struggling to find a bad tune on *Scenic Views* and as a first album that's no mean feat. But Rubber Rodeo are a long ways from being what they want to be and that's partly because they've overloaded the songs with too much contemporary hardware and partly because Hugh Jones' production is grand when it should be gritty. Still, they've got the ingredients, now all they need is a recipe.

## George Kay

## Tom Waits Asylum Years Asylum

The whisky-sodden voice can seem mere artifice, the post-Kerouac beatnik stance affectation, but Tom Waits writes some wonderful songs. They drip with hurt (and humour), and the pain of romance. I like him a lot, even when it's over the top, or because it's over the top.

This double album brings together an intelligent selection of 20 songs from Waits' seven Asylum albums. Some can't hear beyond the gravel in Waits' throat. This collection shows much more than that. The after hours piano, the smoky saxophone, there's playing of great purity here.

As for the songs, well, 'Ol 55' and 'Looking for the Heart of Saturday Night' are almost worth the price of admission.

Unless you are that rarity, a Tom Waits collector, this is the place to start.

## Ken Williams

## The Gun Club Fire Of Love Slash/Big Time

It seems a shame *Fire Of Love* has taken three years to reach these shores. A natural introduction to the Gun Club, this debut stands as their best shot so far. The Gun Club hail(ed) from Los Angeles but their hearts are firmly set in deep Southern tradition, out-Yanking even the Cramps in being unmistakably American. The dominant figure throughout the band's chequered history has been singer Jeffrey Lee Pierce. Described by one unkind review as a "bleached, beached whale", there are times when Pierce is more blubber than bluster. However, on *Fire Of Love* he positively revels in his image as the bad 'n' boozy brawler.

The band are at their most concise on 'Sex Beat' and 'She's Like Heroin To Me' but it's only when Pierce loosens up that they start to get meeeean. Best example is 'For the Love of Ivy', an ambling tale of an appointment with hell that explodes and settles with evil regularity. Jeffrey Lee's obsession with the Delta blues leads to treatment of two old standards, with

varying results. The version of Robert Johnson's 'Preaching the Blues' is decidedly irreverent and the Gun Club are more on target with 'Cool Drink Of Water'.

*Fire Of Love* has little of the composure that marks the second album *Miami* but it's in that sneaking hint of a lack of control that its real power lies. Besides, anyone who comes up with a line like "you're looking just like an Elvis from Hell" has to get my vote on confidence.

## Shayne Carter

## Ritchie Pickett and the Inlows Gone For Water RCA

I'm really pleased Ritchie Pickett has made an album. There is a whole host of country rock fans in New Zealand who rave about the likes of Gram Parsons, Commander Cody, Joe Ely, Michael Nesmith et al, yet don't seem to realise that there are people like Ritchie Pickett, Punk and the Cartel and Al Hunter actually out there playing this sort of material locally.

But what puzzles me about this album is the overall sound. Fans of Ritchie's regular appearances on *That's Country* will appreciate the way this record seems to come at you through a two inch television speaker. Perhaps producer Ray Columbus has fondly remembered recording techniques from his own heyday and used Stebbings' computerised multi-track studio to curiously emulate that effect.

The best way to listen to this record — and believe me, it is worth listening to — is to turn it up really loud and stand in the next room.

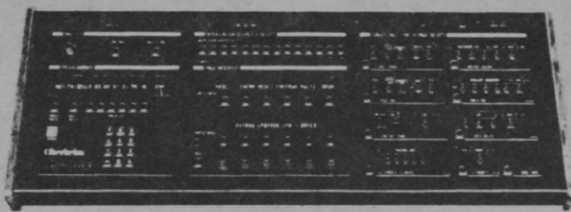
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