

Records

UB40
Geffery Morgan
DEP International
British reggae has shone bright-

er than ever this year, with Steel Pulse returning to form, Aswad maintaining standards of sheer excellence, and now UB40, happy in their new Abattoir studios in hometown Birmingham, producing what sounds like their toughest work to date.

Labour Of Love was well-meant, but in the end it seemed that the songs were stronger in the band's memories than on vinyl. The versions haven't stood the test of time and UB40 are producing vastly better results in returning to

their own compositions.

As ever, UB40's songs are slightly understated, the Campbell brothers' singing deceptively mild-mannered. The songs are anything but. 'Riddle Me' echoes 'Here I Am', in both its feel and its theme of workaday drudgery. 'As Always You Were Wrong Again' hits even harder at Thatcher's Britain, where you're free providing you don't disagree. 'If It Happens' again sounded like a love song at first, but the words are actually much broader, on the subject of integri-

ty and selling out. Astro provides the light relief with 'D.U.B.' before 'The Pillow' closes side one with its grim tale of prostitution, drugs and suicide.

'Seasons' is a bittersweet love song over a heavyweight skank, while 'You're Not An Army' appears to be a blatant nod of sympathy for the IRA. At my kindest, I'd have to call it naive. 'I'm Not Fooled So Easily' targets the British media, whose biggest headlines this year have been reserved for million-pound bingo. The closer, 'Your

Eyes Are Wide Open', is a depressing post-nuke message to the apathetic.

Not a happy album, then, but one which will shake a few dancefloors in the coming months. get them by the feet and their hearts and minds will follow, the UB40's motto. You may not agree with all they say, but you have to admire their unshaking conviction and self-respect. Go for it, Geffery.
Duncan Campbell

All Dressed Up and No Place to Play

Ode
The record of the Venue. All the 11 bands on this record played at Auckland's under-age cabaret — and for most of them, it was the only place they could play in public. The average age of the band members here is 18 and that's with a few 'oldies' who have stumbled a few years into their 20s thrown in.

Russ Le Roq was the man who introduced most of the bands to public gigging and he's the producer of this record too. That's producer in the wide sense of the word — he chose the bands, chose the songs and worked with the Lab's Bill Lattimer on the sound. If that sounds a little authoritarian, remember that this was first time in a studio for almost all the musicians. Russ might be a bit young for a father-figure but that's effectively what he was.

No one's blown it too badly in the studio here but by the same token it's the more experienced bands who've produced the best tracks. Plastic Pegs' 'Bill' is a typically wry, clever little Pegs song, in which they manage to fit their name twice and the Bellboys (defunct since singer-guitarist Brett Adams became a Mocker) play boisterously and display a few ideas about making a pop song effective. It will be interesting to see what effect Adams has on his new band.

Elsewhere, Chinese Eyes impress with twin vocals and some genuine teen angst. Broken Edge come on enthusiastic and fast to save a pretty ordinary song. Stick No Bills show a bit of subtlety and nice structuring with 'Five Past Five' and the In-Crowd's 'Crying' is a dreamy, rather old-fashioned pop song with great backing vocals.

The thing that disturbs me a little is the rather pervading conservatism amongst these songs. Okay, it sets out to be a pop album but there are few risks taken and everything sounds very traditional, right down to the choppy ska beats that turn up in quite a few places. Perhaps that's the fault of Mr Le Roq, perhaps not. But what makes the record is the obvious enthusiasm of all those involved and the emerging creativity that can be heard amongst the best of these young musicians. No doubt many of these here won't go much further but this record has given those with the potential to go on to greater things an all-important start.

And that matters.
(Note: the Venue has received a last-minute reprieve and is to stay open for the time being anyway. If you're not old enough looking to bluff your way into pubs then you owe to yourself to at least give the Venue a try.)
Russell Brown

Wynton Marsalis Hot House Flowers

CBS
Take the jazz world's most astonishing young talent, his superlative group, and record their explorations of a set of timeless ballads. Mouthwatering, huh?

It certainly should have been. But rather than rely on the natural dynamics of his group members, Marsalis has arranged each

track as much, if not more, for a string section. The result is that instead of the free-flowing give and take of attuned improvisers, the performances seem stultified.

It's not that the string section exactly clutters the music — Marsalis is far too tasteful for that — yet it does remove a sense of space. It's often not until the violins cease that the music seems to really breathe. (Witness the beginning of pianist Kenny Kirkland's solo in 'For All We Know'.) And with such beautiful sidemen on hand as Kirkland and brother Brandford, any violins seem — to this listener anyway — unnecessary. Consequently both the aforementioned musicians appear cruelly underused.

Furthermore, on at least two tracks the arrangements' complexity seems clever at the expense of clarity. The well-known melodies of 'When You Wish Upon A Star' and 'I'm Confessing' stop, start, change tempo and are orchestrated beyond simple enjoyment.

Yet obviously this 22-year-old trumpet phenomenon knows exactly what he's doing. It is possible that Marsalis is seeking a new approach to ballad playing. After all, the straightforward, less-is-more approach was perfected by Miles Davis back in the 50s.

Last year, with the stunning *Think Of One*, Marsalis exuberantly claimed his place within the bebop tradition. On the strength of *Hot House Flowers* he has not yet secured the equivalent standing with respect to jazz balladry.
Peter Thomson

Thelonious Monk Tokyo Concerts Live At The Jazz Workshop

CBS
Time to bite the tongue, I guess. Having bitterly attacked the CBS treatment of the Branford Marsalis album last month, I'm now handed two lovely double albums, superbly packaged and a joy just to hold and look at.

Monk is summed up by Joachim Berendt as "one of the most important musicians from the in-group of the bebop creators," although, Berendt goes on to say, his influence was not realised until the late 1950s. Monk was a regular at Minton's Playhouse, the Harlem club which was the generally acknowledged birthplace of bebop.

Monk's erratic behaviour and eschewal of traditional lines earned him criticism even among his peers. During some 50s sessions for Prestige, Miles Davis was heard to complain that Monk played the "wrong chords". They weren't wrong, they were just different. But then, Davis didn't free up his ideas until the 1960s.

The Tokyo concerts were recorded in 1963, when Monk was starting to get the international acclaim so long denied him. He revels in the big audiences' delight, so much that his harmonics seem to chuckle. Just listen to 'Blue Monk', one of the most joyous examples of the blues format. The Jazz Workshop session came more than a year later, new rhythm section but tenor saxist Charlie Rouse, a man who both loved and understood Monk, still present. The quartet extends itself here, with a storming 'Don't Blame Me' and an outstanding rendition of 'Evidence', serving as a prime example of how Monk worked. There was never a "definitive" version of a Monk composition. He set up the themes, then allowed the players to improvise, going with the flow and occasionally pulling things back into line when they got out of hand. Such was his mood and his magic.

Buy these LPs and you have the perfect answer to the person who asks "Who is this Melonious Thunk?"
Duncan Campbell

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