

# Records

**Miles Davis**  
**Blue Christmas**  
 CBS  
**Duke Ellington**  
**Greatest Hits**  
 CBS  
**Thelonius Monk**  
**Greatest Hits**  
 CBS  
**Billie Holiday**  
**Lady in Satin**  
 CBS

These four albums belong to the *I Love Jazz* series, an 18-album collection for which CBS deserve plaudits galore. All the material involved is from the company's extensive back catalogue, and so helps provide a rich background for new listeners as well as a source of replenishment for established fans. Only six months ago anyone wanting to purchase this stuff needed to find twice the price for import copies, if and when they became available. Of the albums under consideration here, three are compilations and the Billie Holiday is a straight re-issue. All are valuable in one way or another.

The Miles Davis LP is named after a 1962 track featuring a wry but strictly conventional vocal by one Bob Dorough. The number is pleasantly enjoyable and intriguing for the rarity of its format, if not much more. However elsewhere on the album the tracks are all instrumental, and range from the first-rate to the masterpiece. The latter term definitely applies to two film themes recorded with the stellar line-up Davis would later use on his classic *Kind of Blue*. The date was in May 1958 (not April '56 as given on the album sleeve). Pianist Bill Evans was as capable of rich, brooding understatement as the trumpeter himself, while in John Coltrane and Cannonball Adderley he had two

effusive and energetic soloists. A perfect complement of styles. Virtually all the tracks on *Blue Christmas* have only ever been available on compilations, so anyone newly converted to Davis by this wonderful music needn't fear later duplication by starting a collection here.

Nearly all the great jazz musicians rework their material over time and with different musicians. *Blue Christmas* even includes two versions of 'Stella by Starlight' recorded three years and two band members apart. Duke Ellington was also no exception to this policy, and his *Greatest Hits* includes material he continued to record for much of his half-century long career. However, all but one of these tracks were recorded in the 50s, and while two betray the occasional histrionics his soloists were given to in live performance, at least twice that number are as exquisite as you'd want. Listening to, say, Johnny Hodges on 'Prelude to a Kiss' or the master himself ruminates in 'Solitude' will melt your heart away. If you don't own any Ellington this album is an excellent beginning. The only thing to recognise is that no single album could do more than scratch the surface of his best work. This one hasn't even got room for such obvious standards as 'I Got it Bad', 'Creole Love Song', 'Do Nothin' 'Till You Hear From Me', 'Rockin' in Rhythm'.... Wasn't it Miles Daves who said that on one day each year all jazz musicians should get down on their knees and thank God for Duke Ellington?

Thelonius Monk recorded what are often considered the best of his many reworkings of his classic *Greatest Hits* during his early years on Blue Note. The versions here come from a decade or more later — his mid-60s period with Columbia. While the general recording quality is better, the quartet recordings add little to the originals. But it is always fascinating to listen to the pianist. Monk's spiky, iconoclastic playing can find new nooks and crannies in tunes we

thought we knew by heart. Try this solo rendition of the perennial 'Round Midnight'.

Billie Holiday recorded *Lady in Satin* a little over a year before her death in 1959. Many purists dismiss this, her last album, completely, insisting that Holiday's reputation rests on her small combo recordings of 1936-42. Granted, her voice on *Lady in Satin* is only a husk of its former glory. And granted, the backing arrangements contain too many violins for their own good. But together the worn out voice and unctuous orchestrations make a bittersweet combination, giving a special poignancy to a shrewdly chosen selection of torchy ballads. While listening to this album it's difficult not to wallow a little in the myth of Holiday's tragic life. Nonetheless, tracks such as 'You've Changed' and 'I'm a Fool to Want You' genuinely resonate with heartfelt emotion. And isn't that a prime ingredient of good jazz?

**Peter Thomson**

**Aretha Franklin**  
**Yeah!!!**  
 CBS

This could be the start of something: Aretha "in person with her quartet", live in a New York club one night in 1965. The 22-year-old Aretha is coming to the end of her directionless days at CBS — not knowing whether she was a pop singer or a jazz singer, the producers made her a black Barbara Streisand. The quartet, which includes Ted Harris on piano and guitarist Kenny Burrell, is a light jazz "combo" and consequently the arrangements of the standards are uninspiring: competent but characterless. Aretha's voice is remarkably mature — not overflorid, but there is some pointless ornamentation. She's singing well, but not saying much. Because she never has to push it at all, there's no tension in her vocals. The upbeat tunes are better: 'More', 'Muddy Water', and the blues classic 'Trouble in Mind', but the Roberta



Robert Palmer

Flack-style elongated ballads just meander about. A curiosity is an upbeat 'If I Had a Hammer', one of three tunes with Aretha on piano.

All credit to CBS for releasing *Yeah!!!* as part of their budget-priced 18 LP "I Love Jazz" series; they seem to take better care of their Aretha back catalogue than WEA, who own the classic material. Admittedly a double LP compilation is on its way — but how about re-releasing some of the great albums: *Spirit in the Dark* or *Young, Gifted and Black*.

**Chris Bourke**

**Robert Palmer**  
**Riptide**  
 Island

After a career spanning over 20 years and eight mostly excellent solo albums, Robert Palmer has finally cracked the elusive worldwide hit single, not before time I might add, with the highly infectious 'Addicted to Love' off this new *Riptide* album.

Apart from the daft opening title track, which lends itself more to Peter Skellern than himself, the album is typical Palmer — uptempo, funky, rhythmic, tight as the proverbial duck's ass. Never afraid of experimentation, he sticks to a fairly proven formula on this outing, powerhouse drumming courtesy of Tony Thompson, a token appearance by Duran's Andy Taylor (the Power Station influence is strongly evident, and obviously opened up a whole new world of

punters to him). As a longtime Palmer devotee I find it quite ironic to be bombarded by him aurally via our wonderful commercial radio system, but I still love the single, a sure test of its class and worth!

I wouldn't like to pick a follow up single, but I'd love to hear the old R&B classic 'Trick Bag' over the airwaves; Palmer gives it his slinky, sinuous best — another hit, I'm sure. And maybe the *Rolling Stone Record Guide* might rethink their abysmal putdown of him — the fraud of funk indeed — you must be kidding!

**Greg Cobb**

**Marshall Crenshaw**  
**Downtown**  
 Warner Brothers

Marshall Crenshaw began his career playing in the musical *Beatlemania* and it seems he'll never be able to shrug off his memories of *Beatles for Sale*. But that's the album on which the Beatles most obviously displayed their influences, and you can't go wrong imitating the masters. *Downtown* is a fine, if derivative, pop album, far more immediate than the heavier *Field Day*, which Steve Lillywhite produced three years ago. This time Crenshaw coproduces with the aid of T-Bone Burnett, and they've come up with a strong, moody sound behind the melodies and musical signatures.

Buddy Holly's hiccup is there, on 'Shake Up Their Minds', while the multi-tracked vocals point to another influence — the Beach Boys. But Crenshaw's passions are more intense, he's more aggressively hurt, so his 'Yvonne' is a 'Barbara Ann' for the 80s. It's still party music though, and seems perfect for this winter — what the Jan and Dean did when they couldn't catch a wave. Nothing from the Class of '65 is left out: on 'Blues is King' Mitch Easter takes the helm, and points Crenshaw towards Roger McGuinn, adding a drifting, dreamlike vocal and Rick-enderbacker guitar. There's even George's sitar on 'Terrifying Love', and

a couple of McCartney slowies ('Like a Vague Memory' and 'Lesson No 1') that serve the same purpose 'And I Love Her' and 'Follow the Sun' once did....

Why is such a derivative LP so satisfying? For the same reason the originals were: the LP is full of melodies, and the sound was great then, so why not now? *Downtown* is more than a pastiche pizza, but I have a feeling that when spring comes, and I want to sing, dance, and reminisce, it'll be back to *Rubber Soul*.

**Chris Bourke**

**Mantronix**  
**The Album**  
 10 Records

Hip-hop purists will grab this record and ring every last beat and scratch from it. Mantronix, a New York team made up of rapper MC Tee and Jamaican-born DJ Mantronik, deliver an album that's high on dance and dangerously paced, an offering that British critics hailed and clubgoers split their track pants over.

It's old hip-hop, like the days of Pac Man and Al Naafiysh; when hip-hop was young and the bleeps and blurs of the video arcade fed the beat. There's none of the heavy metal and human beatbox sounds you've come to expect from New York style.

'Bassline' and 'Needle to the Groove' which kick the album off, are furious beats, mad arsed with black noise, chanting jumble-sale rhymes in an indistinct haze commanded by beat. It's infectious, with snippets of acapella songs and scratch dramatics, hard and insistent. Hip-hop purists will say "Say What?" You can hear some of Flash's 'Larry's Dance Theme' influencing the fanfare cut-up of 'Hardcore Hip-hop', and maybe 'Alice, I Want You' creeps into the 'Ladies' bassline.

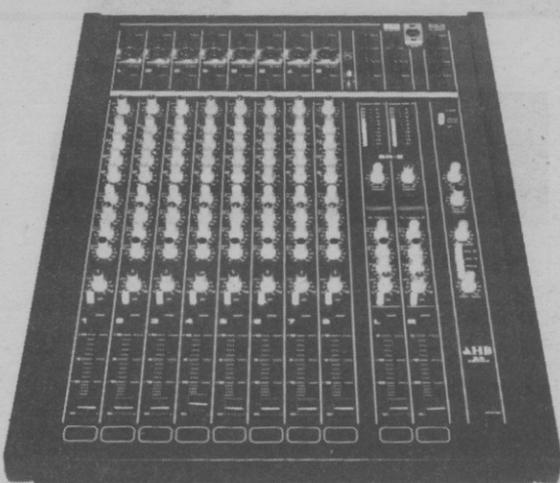
That adds up to terrific dance stuff, but analysts might be left clutching their kangols wondering if there's a story in all that rap — is it glib, or is that the way it is?

**Peter Grace**



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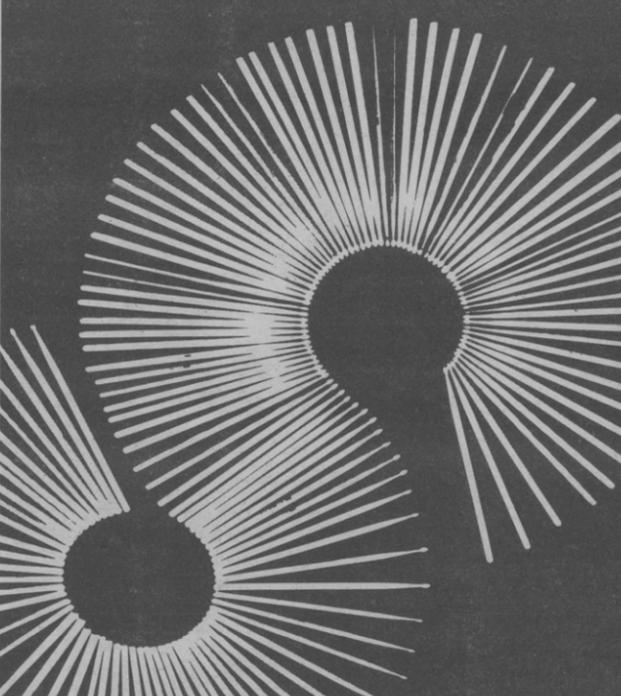
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