

**Martin Plaza  
Plaza Suite  
CBS**

Singer, songwriter, guitarist and one-fifth of Mental as Anything, Martin Plaza has squeezed this, his first solo album in between the often fabulous *Fundamental* and the next *Mentals* long player.

It's safe to say that any of the 10 songs on *Plaza Suite* would've been at home on a *Mentals* album but 10 of them would have been a bit excessive so Plaza was given leave to go on his own. His pedigree as a pop tunesmith has already been certified with the likes of 'The Nips are Getting Bigger', 'Come Around', 'If You Leave Me, Can I Come Too' and 'I Didn't Mean to be Mean'. And for further proof of his knack at crafting a tidy tune check out the middle eight of the otherwise ordinary 'I Could Be So Good', or the sheer class of 'Use Me All Over', which has just that touch of country, or the rock of 'Rollerina', a tale of how the *Mentals* and the Dynamic Hepnotics drew only 600 people to the 4000 capacity Rollerina in Camptown last year.

For the serious side, that other dimension *Mental as Anything* are trying to develop (but not too hard), Plaza has reserved his two best songs: 'Out the Door' is a very natural, compassionate factual account about a three-year-old girl who died of malnutrition as a result of a water diet; and 'Bats and Balls' is a shimmering, heat-oppressed melodic squint from beneath the sunglasses at Aussie beach life.

But no way is *Plaza Suite* a brilliant album of unforgettable stolen moments, there's too many routine work-outs like 'Pit Stop' and 'Chalk and Cheese' for that. But its best songs vindicate its existence and Plaza's rise as a songwriter.

**George Kay**

**John Niland  
Inside  
Eelman**

With a pedigree that includes the Hulamen, Rodents and Tom-bolas, one would expect John Niland's solo piano album to be R&B influenced. But the flavour is light jazz; the two sides of the album reflect two different approaches. Side one is cocktail hour, on which Niland is ably helped out by Ross Burge on drums and Rob Mahoney on dou-

ble bass. This side doesn't bear too much concentrated listening, but that's not the point. All three musicians just ooze feeling; Niland has the lightest of touches, though his rhythms can be jerky. Occasionally they get a groove going and you can feel them relax.

On side two Niland is more creative. At its best, the influences are Jarrett and Nock, at its worst, Elton John. While his right hand is adept at improvisation, his left is the weak link — as evidenced by 'Birth of a Fantail'. 'Too Triumph' leans too heavily on its opening riff, there are some acoustic dabblings with the sound-board and strings, and an intrusive dud note in the middle section. 'From the Boatshed' highlights Niland's strengths: it's a lyrical Debussian piece, with a lovely simple theme. It works because it's not trying to do too much. It will be interesting watching John Niland's piano work mature.

**Chris Bourke**

**Red Guitars  
Tales of the Expected  
Virgin**

The Red Guitars emerged from Hull, of all places, with three singles on their Self Drive label in 1983. Those initial salvoes, 'Steeltown', 'Good Technology' and 'Fact' and their first LP the following year, convinced people that a tough, incisive and intelligent guitar band had at last arrived on the English side of the Atlantic. Last year's single 'Be With Me' which starred new singer/guitarist Rob Holmes and trickled through here on 12" import, was an impressively assured loved song which didn't do their reputation any harm.

*Tales of the Expected*, their first release on a major label, doesn't quite deliver their initial potential. With three guitarists on the paybooks you'd expect them to whip up a storm but Holmes, Hallam Lewis and John Rowley are only ever let loose on 'Suspicion and Fear' and 'House of Love' and even then they're confined within the strict limits of two weak songs.

So *Tales of the Expected* is about songs first and guitarists second, and it's got to be noted that 'National Avenue', 'Storyville', their current single 'Baby's Got a Gun', and the Tom Verlaine beauty of 'Love and Understanding', are all fine songs. But there was no need to re-work a song as good as 'Be

With Me' and there's too many likeable but anaemic fillers like 'Sweetwater Ranch' and 'Marianne' to pack the punch that this band should have delivered.

With a name like Red Guitars the average guy expects anarchy but what you get here is taste, restraint and some nice numbers. Is that gonna change the world?

**George Kay**

**Various  
The Colour Purple  
Qwest**

Just as the film *The Colour Purple* wallows in two-and-a-half hours of good intentions, so does its soundtrack sprawl over two records. Now no-one with any suss expects a double album to be all good, let alone one that's a film score. But given such low expectations, much of this stuff is surprisingly acceptable. Which is largely due to the range on offer.

For a start there's some old jazz, including a 1925 Sidney Bechet blues, a 1930 Louis Armstrong Hot Five, and Coleman Hawkins' wonderful 1939 'Body and Soul'. Then there are a few good vocals, both traditional and written for the film. Tata Vega and John Lee Hooker are each ably supported by a combination of studio aces and blues masters. A rocking new version of 'The Dirty Dozens' is an album (and film) highlight. We also get a couple of inspired uptempo gospel numbers from a 30-piece choir led by Andrae Crouch. It's a pity the marvellous sequence of 'Maybe God is Tryin' to Tell You Somethin'' appears so late in an already overlong movie.

Nearly all the other music is orchestral, and much of it is predictably lush. In the film its use is usually either obtrusive — a common Quincy Jones fault — or else further glossing Spielberg's already cute photography. However, alone on record, a few sequences are rather beguiling. There's never, say, the pomposity of a John Williams score, and when the strings are held under (relative) restraint this theme or that arrangement can be warmly attractive.

So, like the movie, the soundtrack contains some fine moments interspersed with passages of sticky sentimentality. But at least on record the proportion is better. And besides, you can always lift the needle on the really purple passages.

**Peter Thomson**

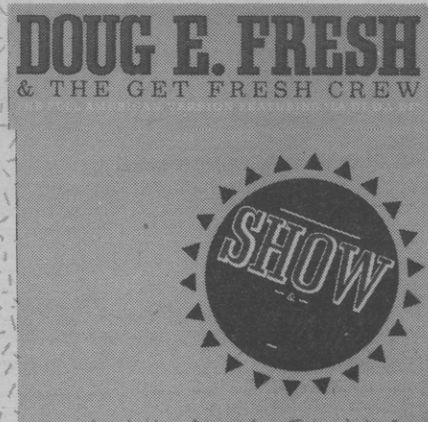
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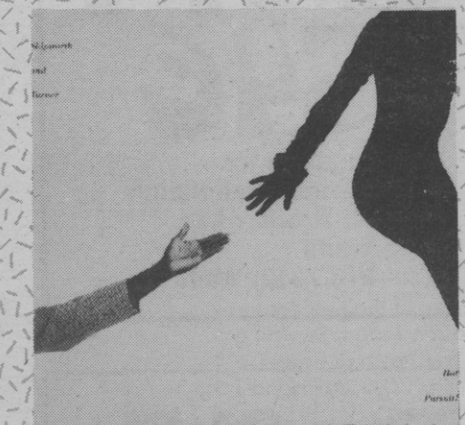
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