

Records

Peking Man CBS

Do you know that feeling you get when you realise you've just been sneaked up on? That's the way I felt about Peking Man when their wave started to break upon the receptive citizens of NZ. For what amounted to years they'd seemed to mill about that middle ground of bands that try desperately hard but never really get too far. Suddenly, while a lot of backs were turned, they'd sped right by, headed straight for the land of the exalted few — possessors of a bona fide homegrown No 1 hit.

After a song as popular and successful as 'Room That Echoes', the time had to be right for the first album, titled simply *Peking Man*. Listening to the record one gets the impression that perhaps eagerness and over-keenness outweighed the facts of there being enough material to put on it.

What Peking Man have come up with is an album that in its genre is perfectly acceptable. Production-wise it is wonderful, crystal clear and bright — attributes which work very much in the favour of any dance-style music. Arrangements too are quite stunning, in particular the percussion effects and lovely slinky brass,

both of which are prominent in most songs yet refrain from being overpowering.

It is fair to say that Peking Man have a distinctive style and sound built round the dual-lead brother/sister vocals of Pat and Margaret Ulrich sitting on top of whatever beat music mood the band happen to be in at the time ... a splash of reggae, a bit of jazz, straight pop or the obvious funk influence. They're good singers and good players but unfortunately they seem to have cultivated an annoying "samey-ness" to much of their delivery. This is particularly noticeable on the album's weaker songs (much of side two) where tracks tend to merge and wash over the listener.

The most dominating songs on *Peking Man* are the three singles included — 'Room,' 'Lift Your Head Up High,' and 'Good Luck to You.' 'Room That Echoes' especially looms large, even over much newer pieces. One reason for the disjointed impression the album gives is that just maybe Peking Man have too many songwriters in their midst (everybody gets a credit or two somewhere) but in a band such as Peking Man, who make no bones about being an equal-share, co-operative unit, being a passenger could be death.

The nice thing about Peking Man and their music is that they manage to infuse their presentation with a kind of quiet, under-



Dwight Yoakam

stated yet supreme confidence. When everything clicks you can actually hear it bubbling through the music they play. *Peking Man* impresses as a taste of a collective talent as yet not quite refined. A first album is a tall order to fill indeed.

Something's brewing in the Peking Man camp, that's the feeling this record leaves me with. Taking your time ain't such a bad thing, after all. Look at their track record with singles — from a pretty nondescript affair four-odd years ago to a song that swooped in and stole a summer. My bet is, now that the trial run is over, they'll settle down and come up with an LP which says it better next time around.

How's that song go? ... "good luck to you"?

Brendon Fitzgerald

Dwight Yoakam Guitars, Cadillacs, Etc, Etc Reprise

On his latest album George Jones begs the question "Who's gonna fill their shoes?" — meaning the aging country music hierarchy. Well at least part of that is answered right here. Dwight Yoakam (great name), originally from Kentucky, cut his teeth playing bars in LA and opening for the likes of Los Lobos, Blasters, etc — and he just may have the right ingredients to become a major star. He appears to have it all. He writes songs that sound both

authentic and timeless, and sings them in a strong raw voice which audibly oozes emotion, whisky and dirt under his fingernails, and — perhaps most important to the fickle pop audience, he looks damn good doing it. Designer country, anyone? Maybe not, but definitely country music's best shot at hipville in some time.

'Honky Tonk Man' sets the tone for the album with the throbbing rockabilly-flavoured bass of producer Pete Anderson and the raucous fiddle of Brantley Kearns; played loud enough it should strip the paint off of your walls. This is followed by what sounds like a good case for the AA before the boy hurts himself in 'It Won't Hurt.' 'Guitars, Cadillacs' and 'Ring of Fire' (the old Johnny Cash chestnut) continue in this vein, brought to life by crisp, clear, no-frills production. Special mention must be made of the duet with Maria McKee of Lone Justice on 'Bury Me,' sounding remarkably like Emmy-Lou and the late great Gram Parsons.

For my money however the two most haunting songs are 'South of Cincinnati,' a tale of lost love and distance, and 'Miner's Prayer,' about a miner from Yoakam's native Kentucky wishing his life away. American music at its most effecting and poignant. I sincerely think you should own this record.

Mark Kennedy

Lou Reed Mistrial RCA

Uncle Louis marches into the second half of the 80s and, just like the rest of his countrymen, decides to go completely over-the-top with this one. But then, I suspect that his tongue is more firmly in cheek than Ronald Reagan's ever will be ...

Mistrial is full of songs like 'Outside' — all slappin' bass and crackin' drum machines left and right, with Lou in the middle of it all, laying down the law, that "outside, the world's a mindless child."

A huge disco drumbeat pervades much of *Mistrial*, and sometimes it seems as if that's the only thing holding Lou down on earth as his guitar just goes wild (the wildest for years and years) on songs like 'Video Violence,' where he flips out completely over all this modern day violence on TV — "na na na na na!" Eh?

'Original Wrapper' is a furious rap, once more with Lou chastising just about everything American, from Jerry Falwell to baseball, over a funky backing with a power guitar that swoops in over the top of all of it ... wow!

Even the sentimental moments are over the top — Ruben Blades croons the sweet backing vocals on 'Tell it to Your Heart' and makes it work fantastically ... *Mistrial* goes the full hilt of Lou Reedisms, from the wild side of the tough title track, to the tenderness of 'Don't Hurt a Woman' and everything in between, all magnified to the point where it becomes almost a hugely wonderful caricature of himself.

For over the top, outta control Lou Reed, *White Light/White Heat* is still best, but here he's got a bit of control, and in the end, for someone older even than Chris Knox, still making dirty ass rock-'n-roll, Lou's doing pretty alright.

Paul McKessar

Television's Greatest Hits Liberation

Here's George Jetson!
His boy Elroy!
Daughter, Judy!
Jane, his wife!

First of all, this has nothing to do with Tom Verlaine's band. No, here we have 65 TV themes! Over 93 minutes of music! ... great fun, and a fascinating musical and sociological resource. During his visit here last year, Hollywood film composer Lionel Newman (Randy's uncle) described television music as a "melange of shit." For much television music, that's correct, but the form is an entrenched and valid part of our culture — a true, shared folk music for all of western civilisation — and can also be seen as a symbol of American cultural imperialism (for "truth, justice and the American way!" according to the *Superman* theme).

Television music is also a great way to study the formulas of popular music, to find out what the secrets are of reaching for the lowest common denominator and the largest possible audience. Here we have a litany of hooklines, and example after example of market-researched melodies. It's junk music, and just as addictive as junk food — the musical equivalent of the munchies. But there is plenty of good music here, despite the formulaised sounds (each genre has its own musical

cliches, eg: the group vocals of the early cartoon music, or the sinister jazz of the thrillers). Some of the themes are staggering in their complexity (eg: *My Three Sons*), and included here are themes by some of the great Hollywood composers.

Lalo Schifrin steals the show with his *Mission Impossible* theme — stabbing rhythms from baritone sax, and colour from congas and woodwinds. A discovery is the work of Earl Hagen, responsible for the martini-smooth jazz of *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, the simple-but-slinky *Andy Griffith Show* (just that unforgettable whistle set against a guitar vamped on the offbeat) and the energetic fanfare of *The Mod Squad*.

The themes for kids shows are mind-numbingly banal (Want to understand why Americans become *Americans*? Just listen to the lobotomised *Captain Kangaroo* theme) though there are some excellent exceptions to the Hanna Barbera assembly line such as the swinging jazz of *The Flintstones* ("Have a gay old time!"), the wonderful Lionel Newman-composed *Daniel Boone* ballad ("he was the rippingest roaringest fightingest man ...") or Paul Henning's *Petticoat Junction* — a great country song, even better than his *Beverly Hillbillies* theme, as Dave Dobbyn showed on the Party Boys tour. "Petticoat! Junction!"

But the last two sides venture into the world of adult television, and ... jazz! All the cop show themes have one thing in common, a relentless energy full of its own importance that insists you *don't touch that dial!* Once again, there are the standouts — *Get Smart*, Quincy Jones's *Ironside*, and, another classic, *Hawaii Five O*: arresting drum opening, strong timpani, then pumping baritone sax with frivolous trilling piccoloes above. Suck on this, Jan Hammer and *Miami Vice!*

There's a little evidence in these themes from the 50s and 60s of the coming influence of rock music, and there are some classics missing (*The Peter Gunn Theme!* *Hogan's Heroes!* *Rawhide!*); also, because it's limited to American themes, we miss out on the best-of-British (remember the paranoid fugue of *The Prisoner?* *Z Cars?* ... though we've recently been blessed with *The Avengers*) — but the marketing whiz-kid who thought up this package (and paid \$250,000 for the rights, reaping the benefits within days of release) has plans for two more volumes.

Made for a nostalgia burst at parties, and for students of commercial arrangement techniques, torture for flatmates, *Television's Greatest Hits* is irresistible and possessing ... but I think listening to it a lot would make you go nuts after a while. *Y'all come back now!*
Chris Bourke

Roxy Music Street Life (Greatest Hits) EG

Street Life is the big commercial goodbye, tying a tidy bow around Roxy Music and Bryan Ferry and presenting them as one. Which simply is not true. Roxy's song structures did draw on Ferry's solo cover versions ('Hard Rain's Gonna Fall', 'Smoke Gets In Your Eyes' and 'These Foolish Things' are all included) but this reached its peak with the wry country rock of *Country Life*, of which we hear nothing.

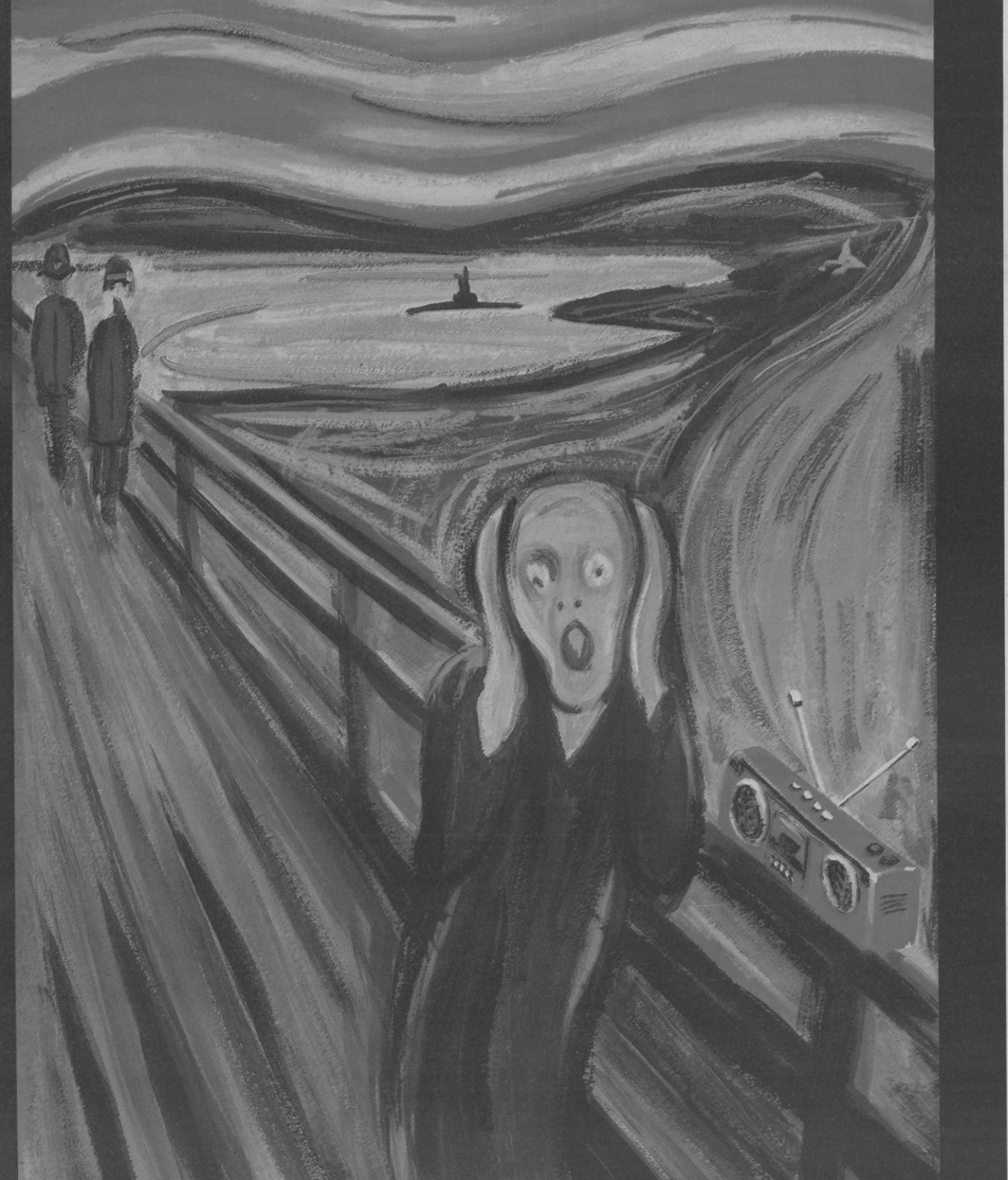
And while *Street Life* concentrates on the commercially successful singles of recent years, it ignores all the arty stuff. In 1982, Roxy released a B-side, 'Always Unknowing', which could have been taken straight off *For Your Pleasure*, and Ferry's recent 'Nocturne', 'A Wasteland' and 'The Chosen One' rattle Eno's bones. In a recent *i-D* interview, Ferry revealed that he and Eno had agreed to work together again. In their short, enigmatic instrumental experiments, the two have never been very far apart.

But compilations can never preach to the converted. This is an overtly commercial venture, and a very tasteful one at that (despite the inclusion of the sloppy 'Jealous Guy' and 'In The Midnight Hour'). There's also a large element of personal vendetta; Ferry is touted as the main figure (none of Manzanera's or Mackay's solo work appears, note) and Jerry Hall appears not once but twice on the cover — and there's nothing more dismissive than being cited as a mere stylistic prop.

Bryan Ferry is now involved in music that is nothing short of mannerist, revelling in its stylistic shortcomings. *Street Life* would have you believe that those days are over. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Chad Taylor

Wierd Culture Wierd Custom



National Student Radio Compilation Album
Twelve bound-to-be Hits! Out Now! Yow!