

# Records

## Steve Winwood Back in the High Life Island

Twenty years ago, as the singer and keyboard player with the Spencer Davis Group, 16-year-old Steve Winwood took on a bluesy classic ('Georgia on My Mind') and performed it better than Ray Charles. These days Winwood is content to take on the derivative soul-stylings of a Phil Collins or Peter Gabriel (whose 'Sledgehammer' aped Winwood anyway) and emerge the victor. Such are the diminished returns of an adult teen prodigy.

Wait a minute, let's back up here a bit. It's all very easy to sideswipe Steve Winwood just because he didn't fulfill 60s expectations and rewrite the entire book of white soul music. Truth to tell his new album is not bad at all and it's a considerable improvement over his last two. *Arc of a Diver* and *Talking Back to the Night* were all very bright and poppy but they suffered from an instrumental blandness that often occurs when everything is performed by one musician.

Now with *Back in the High Life* Winwood's got in a host of other instrumentalists, even singers, to supplement his still considerable, multiple role playing. (The many famous names present must give some indication of Winwood's reputation among his peers.) These additions give the tracks a bite that was previously lacking. Try, for instance, Winwood's guitar soloing over the punching brass section on 'Take It as It Comes'.

Five of the eight songs were co-written with Will Jennings who worked extensively on the last two albums. Another track was written with guitarist and Californian loopy Joe Walsh, while the final track was written with retired English loony Viv Stanshall. Neither number is in the slightest bit silly. In fact the Stanshall-assisted 'My Love's Leavin'' recalls the quietly measured brilliance of Winwood's first solo set back in 1977.

This track aside, the best stuff is largely on side one, which kicks off with the joyful 'Higher Love' and retains its consistency throughout. With all the care, influence and money that's gone into this album it's obvious Island Records were very confident about Winwood's current commercial viability.

Some of us old farts may continue to grouse on about the Win-

wood we revered back in the 60s and how he hasn't made a landmark album since then. Ignore us. True it's no landmark, but *Back in the High Life* is the best thing Winwood's done in almost a decade. And that's good enough.  
**Peter Thomson**

## I'm Talking Bear Witness Regular

Australia has a knack of producing large, good bands. Like INXS and Hunters & Collectors, I'm Talking lack a guiding ego, making them slippery and hard to define. It gives them an intense sense of democracy (group credits everywhere, thank you) and only the most general of lyrics, but it frees them from the cliched and produces rather good records.

*Bear Witness* is a bit of a gem. Although I kept confusing 'Holy Word' with something less, away from the dancefloor it grows into something rich, while 'How Can it Be' is a real sparkler, an example of how those who once worshipped Vandross may well have overtaken him.

Although produced by Scritti drummer Fred Maher with an obvious eye to play-safe dancefloor values, the craftwork shines through. The accent is off percussion and onto a chiming keyboard



I'm Talking

and sultry bass. Ian Cox is a saxophonist who can not only play but also knows when to shut up, and singers Kate Ceberano and Zan are exemplary in themselves.

This is a charmer, garrulous and sexy. The commercial collars are worn like crown jewels, and the pop shallowness ('Now it's clear you're really gone, how can I just carry on?') handled like rolling slopes. Not far from Marland & Wobblers' *Neon Moon*, I'm Talking have done so much within so little that it makes me wonder why they aren't a lot more famous. Fuck art, let's swoon. I've always been a sucker for a pucker.  
**Chad Taylor**

## Lee Perry Island Jacob Millar Island

Two more in the Island Reggae Greats series, which is building into quite a reasonable library of mainstream sounds.

The term "mainstream", however, is seldom applied these days to Lee "Scratch" Perry. Although he's cited as a major influence on many reggae artists, including Bob Marley, Perry has always lived on his own planet. This maddeningly eccentric and frequently misunderstood little man has produced some of reggae's most endearing and innovative sounds. His latest work, *Battle of Armageddon*, is as radical as anything he's done and his talent appears as sharp as ever.

The Reggae Greats compilation tries to balance Scratch the producer and Scratch the performer, with the accent slightly in favour of his undeniable skill at the panel. The Black Ark studio, which Perry built, trashed and rebuilt himself, has produced music which is instantly identifiable as pure Scratch. The nickname comes from the "chicken scratch" guitar rhythm which he's credited with inventing. Junior Murvin's 'Police and Thieves' and Max

Romeo's 'War in a Babylon' are standards, as is George Faith's 'To Be a Lover'. Perry's own performances on 'Roast Fish and Cornbread' and 'Dreadlocks in the Moonlight' typify his deceptively low-key approach, while 'Wisdom', recorded under his Jah Lion pseudonym, is pure stoned revelation. There are better compilations, but this one is a creditable introduction to the wickedest man in reggae.

Jacob "Killer" Miller died in a car crash in Kingston in 1980, at the age of 25. A big, aggressive man with a bright, hiccuppy tenor voice, the quality of his recordings only did occasional justice to his ability and charisma. His appearance in the film *Rockers* was a lasting memory, and the song 'Tenement Yard', which featured in the movie, is included here. Of equal stature is 'Tired Fe Lick Weed in a Bush', Miller's plea to Babylon to stop harassing the herbman. His Inner Circle band was a star attraction in JA's clubland, and if Miller occasionally wandered too much into cabaret in his search for fame, he can be easily forgiven with songs like 'Healing of the Nation' and 'Sinners'. A very special Dread and sadly missed.

**Duncan Campbell**



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## THE JAYREM RECORDS COUNTDOWN

THIS MONTH	LAST MONTH	Artist/Title	Label
1	NEW	Fay Lovsky Fay Lovsky	JAY 325 TC JAY 325
2	1	Free Dirt Died Pretty	CITLP 504 TC CIT 504
3	5	E Hine Aotearoa	JAY 139
4	10	Mona With The Children Doug Cameron	SNAP 1203
5	NEW	A Reggae Christmas Various Artists	RRS 004 TC RRS 004
6	11	Speed of Life Smithereens	SNAP 1201
7	7	Dancing In The Dark Cool Daddy	SNAP 1204
8	NEW	Return Of The Blues Breakers John Mayall	IMPORT
9	2	Weird Culture Weird Custom National Student Radio Compilation	NSR 001 TC NSR 001
10	3	Stoneage Cinderella Died Pretty	CIT 020
11	8	The Cutting Edge Low Profile	FR 4
12	4	Brutal Black Uhuru	RAS 3015 TC RAS 3015
13	12	Electrical Storm Ed Kuepper	HOTLP 1020
14	24	Live In Concert Linton Kwesi Johnson	ROUGH 78 TC ROUGH 78
15	13	Make Room Luke Hurley	JAY 324 TC JAY 324
16	9	Great Train Robbery Black Uhuru	RAS 7018 TC RAS 7018
17	NEW	Doctor's Orders Dr. Feelgood	IMPORT
18	15	Wings Of Steel Stonehenge	JAY 137
19	6	The Turgid Miasma of Existence Celebrate Rifles	HOTLP 1024
20	19	Sex Pistols Live Sex Pistols	BRLP 101 BRLL 101



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# JAY CLARKSON



8 track  
E.P

RELEASED!!

flying  
nun

## FLYING NUN

Able Tasmans/Raucous  
7" Single  
Laughter

Bats, the - "made up in Blue"  
3 track 12"

Chills, the - "the great escape"  
7" + 12" Single

Clarkson, Jay  
Long-player

Fold, the - "Woman in Red"  
12" single

Look Blue Go Purple - "2"  
5 track 12"

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