

Records

Dance Exponents Amplifier Zulu

It's a brave move to be a guitar band in 1986. In a pop marketplace awash with multi-layered electronics, those championing six strings are mostly undergrounders or country punksters. Dance Exponents initially launched onstage and into the hearts of many with what they've always done best — crunchy pop, swimming in happiness and harmony. *Amplifier* bridges the twists in style and material between their first album *Prayers Be Answered* and the follow-up *Great Expectations*. It contains some excellent guitar — the driving harmonies behind each chorus that give the songs their hook.

'Halcyon Rain' clips through

tuneful vocals to a welcome wave of space and harmonics. 'Birth of the Reds' picks up on a standardised formula and uses it to good effect. It's so good to hear an acoustic guitar, a refreshing interlude ... but then on an album called *Amplifier*, guitar blast is what you expect, and what you get. Maybe after half a dozen numbers an acoustic piano would provide a good break in the texture. Some songs are quite low-key without being relaxing in the right spots. 'If Only I Could Die (and Love You Still)' whips up the best storm on the album, but it needs follow-up and contrast. The Dance Exponents' musical strengths lie in their choruses, but the dum-de-dah to get there is hard going sometimes. A few dynamic twists with voice and rhythm could give 'Caroline Skies' the lift it appears to call for, and maybe provide the flow each side needs.

Chances are the Exponents' present marketing push will see them standing in the States, a

place where the cult market is proportionally bigger than New Zealand's. *Amplifier* has material, production, and the backing to do it. They are attempting to carve out a niche and mould their style, rather than just powering the realm they are successful at: the pop of *Prayers Be Answered*. Do what you do, do well, boys.

Barry Caitcheon

Various Artists Melt Down Town Meltdown

Palmerston North's Meltdown Records look to have a wonderful go-ahead policy. There has been an increasing number of releases from the label this year — both local acts and others such as Auckland's Warners. *Melt Down Town* is a showcase of Palmerston North talent, coming complete with a street map on the back cover for those of us who don't know the place.

I like the first side best, opening with 'I'm a Mess,' not the Remark-

ables' best song ever, but weird and funny guitars and vocals win me over. The Polar Bears' 'Sunday Morning' is a bit more wistful, but is immediately countered by Stat-mux's 'Vertigo'. Thin Red Line's 'Economics' (a radical departure from their earliest efforts) and Harry Death's 'Green Prospectus' — no future in the corporate wasteland ...

Side two has Cement Garden's 'The Valley' (a highlight closer to their EP) to recommend it, but after that it falls away somewhat. Iceland Bars' 'Full of Truth' brings momentary ecstasy, but is too lengthy, and the second side deteriorates, a letdown after the first.

Melt Down Town shows there are a variety of talented bands in Palmerston North — rest assured, there is nothing bad on this record. As to a Palmy North 'sound'? Don't make me laugh. Check this out for the difference though.

Paul McKessar

Shake Summation

Wayne Gillespie Losing One/This Place (CBS 7" & 12")

Crafted by a perfectionist, these songs reaffirm Wayne Gillespie's status as a contender for the big league. 'Losing One' has an immediate up feel, driven by a sure-footed bassist and fun cooing BVs. Gillespie has a voice with character (a pop Lou Reed croak) and sings effortlessly. Immaculately produced by Trevor Lucas in NSW, this has feel, and it's not lost in the technology. (Though on the 12" B-side 'Sweet Angel' the backing could have a lighter touch.) But if 'Losing One', the first single off *New Sensation*, unlocks the hit single door for Gillespie, 'This Place' will kick it open, with both chorus and verses full of hooks, especially the haunting synth motif. Freeway

rock, perfectly executed. These two songs should be on every commercial radio station in the country.

Texas Rangers Texas Rangers Live (Ode 12")

Recorded live at the Gluepot from desk to cassette, and it sounds it too — thick, blurred and distant. 'Teenage Werewolf' sets the tone for side one, a hokey piece of ominous horror, complete with wails and heaps of echo. 'Backwater Billy' is driven superbly by the drummer, with perfect stylised rockabilly guitar, while 'Jungle Juice' has a chorus like a jingle. The B-side is for dancing, with spirited versions of live favourites 'Johnny Reb', 'Dancen No 9' and 'Cut Across Shorty', a good, fast R&B shuffle. With both the songs and the musicians being so accomplished, I can't help thinking this EP is a wasted opportunity; all the elements are here for a great party record, so why throw it all away?

Chris Bourke

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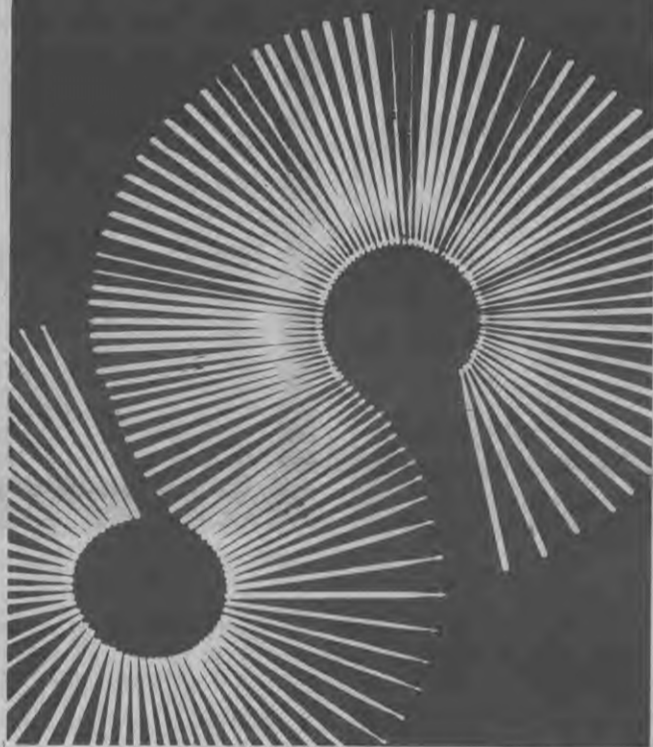
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