

Various Artists
Art For Chart's Sake
Rational

Q: When is a Dunedin band not a Dunedin band?

A: When the mainstream creeps in.

From the home of traditionally Flying Nun material comes 10 independent bands on a non-Nun compilation from Rational Records. The mixture is diverse — from the bloody horrible to the rather smart.

Okay, here goes. Aardvark's 'Lonely Like A Dog' ... well ... not surprising really. Armalite Hour sound a meld of Magazine and the Screaming Meemees, and there is definitely a touch of the Verlaines in 'Vandetta' by the Baxters — some pretty backing vocals and all. Take the harmony out of Pop Mechanix and punch in a pumping bass, and you're looking at 'Safe and Sound' by Craig Watt and his Horse — well, almost.

Let's Get Naked are great. No it's not the Monster Mash, but something close to it. Their contribution 'Funky Dunedin' is a Jonathon Richmond meets Ponsonby DC's humour session. 'Psychic Leech' by the Moon is relatively uneventful, and the watered-down 12-bar from Rhythm Cocktail on 'Girls Yeah Yeah Yeah' is a bit of a laugh.

The Idles (Yes, yes, yes, they've surfaced) lay on a fairly pacy and full sound in contrast to the rather thin production on most tracks. Did Jay Clarkson write this song? 'Big Drum Talk' sounds Expendable. The piano line opening 'The Urge' by the Shorts is okay business, but promises a little more than is actually delivered. The Spaghettil's country swamp track 'All Your Life' received nods all round. Could this be Canned Heat? Who cares, it sounds good, builds well and goes somewhere.

Who the hell am I to criticize? There is enough here to warrant a purchase, and if you don't like the record, keep the cover. It's excellent.

Barry Caitcheon

Randy Travis
Storms of Life
Warner Bros

And the hicks just keep on coming, this time in the lean, handsome shape of Randy Travis — singer of hard country, and owner of an extraordinarily expressive voice for one so young. Compari-



Randy Travis

sons are odious and sometimes an affliction, but in this case unavoidable due to Randy's remarkable vocal similarities with a certain Mr Jones. This, his debut album, has plenty to recommend it, a strong choice of songs (a couple self-penned) and very slick production and packaging.

My favourite so far is 'Reason I Cheat', which to these ears anyway, is absolutely beautiful. As I said to the "missus," "I'd cheat too if I could sound this good doin' it." The recent hit singles 'On the Other Hand' and '1982' draw for second place.

But as good as he is, this record lacks a certain spark of youthful exhilaration. At the tender age of 27 he's as world-weary and broken as George Jones and Merle Haggard, men whose personal commitment to pain and suffering (at times self-induced) took years to arrive at. Though their styles differ, where's the reckless abandon of, say, Dwight Yoakam? This may seem a little unfair, but life is unfair, as the songs in these grooves attest.

Mark Kennedy

Ricky Scaggs
Love's Gonna Get Ya!
Epic
Reba McEntire
Whoever's in New England
MCA

Ricky Scaggs and Reba McEntire are the leading male and female "new country traditionalists," a field in which Scaggs was the earliest groundbreaker. *Love's Gonna Get Ya!* is smoother than his earlier records, but he hasn't

abandoned his bluegrass roots — they're as firm as his blow-wave — although the emphasis is more on his distinctive nasal singin' than his guitarin'. Kentucky born, Skaggs's voice has a lilt similar to James Taylor, who crops up with a cameo vocal on 'New Star Shining'. The beautiful harmonies on 'I Wonder if I Care So Much' are pure Everlys' — like Skaggs, they grew up listening to Flatt and Scruggs.

The uptempo numbers immediately stand out, particularly the title track and 'Walkin' in Jerusalem', the album's highpoint — a foot-tapping bluegrass spiritual with soulful backing choir and tootling piano from Gary Smith. Another standout is 'Raisin' the Dickens', a finger-pickin' good western swing instrumental.

The rest of the album is accomplished but unexciting love songs and ballads, the latter reflecting the politics of farming in Reagan's 80s — 'A Hard Row to Hoe' discusses the idiocy of trade embargoes and stock surpluses, and the liner notes tell the US farmers to "put more water in the soup, cause better times are coming." Thankfully Skaggs has made no concessions to become a crossover success; the world has come to Kentucky.

Thirty-year-old redhead Oklahoman Reba McEntire has been compared to Patsy Cline for her ability to wring the drama from a lyric. Her voice has the sob of Fanny Wynette and the modern sassyness of June Carter Cash's daughters. After half a dozen "country-politan" albums she finally found her niche with 1984's *My Kind of Country* and the sound of the new traditionalist. *Whoever's in New England* continues the purist approach, and with a beautifully crisp digital sound.

While it doesn't set me on fire, the three upbeat numbers will make me hang in there until the emotion-wrought slow ballads which dominate sink in. 'One Thin Dime' has great fiddle and barn-dance rhythms, while on 'Little Rock' the band struts its licks; Reggie Young on guitar and pianist John Hobbs stand out. McEntire's voice is full of character; she's a worthy successor to the Patsy/Loretta tradition ... don't even think about Crystal Gayle or Anne Murray.

Chris Bourke

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