

# books

## Remembering Buddy: The Definitive Biography by John Goldrosen and John Beecher (GRR/Pavilion, \$32)

Certainly a definitive biography on Holly, crammed with facts and details, with the best discography ever done, plus a complete list of all his sessions. All in one of the most attractive presentations a rock book ever had.

An update on Goldrosen's 1975 book, with a lot of new text and photos. When it came out *Rolling Stone* described it as "the best rock biography ever done." I'd disagree with that, Nick Tosches' Jerry Lee book *Hellfire* and Chet Flippo's Hank Williams psychodrama *Your Cheatin' Heart* burns the pants off this one.

It's something in Goldrosen's gushy style that irritates — he loves his subject so much he loses his perspective. Excellent at the beginning with explaining Holly's influence, he begins to lose it when Holly becomes



Waylon Jennings & Holly

a big star and genius, like. The text remains informative but you never really get to know Holly because of the pedantic style; like the cop in *Dragnet* saying, "Just the facts, ma'am, just the facts."

We are presented with the traditional Buddy Holly, soft, sensitive and a real nice guy, which he was. But there was another side. Here's Little Richard from Charles White's *The Life and Times of Little Richard*.

"Buddy and I were good friends ... he would sit there and watch my stage act. And when I got ready to have an orgy, Buddy would come up too. He was huge! I've never seen anybody that big in my life!"

That's one thing that isn't in Goldrosen's book, but nearly everything else is. Apart from a few reservations, a very solid and well-researched book about a great star and yes, a genius.

**Kerry Buchanan**

## The Billboard Book of USA Top 40 Hits by Joel Whitburn British Hit Singles by Paul Gambaccini, Tim Rice & Jo Rice Billboard USA Top 1000 Singles by Joel Whitburn (Guinness)

Not light reading, but essential for newspaper reference libraries and sub-editors, and a satisfying experience for chart train-spotters are these books compiling the hits since the charts began. Surprisingly up-to-date, they can settle arguments, answer nagging queries, and provide correct spellings. Because of the dominance the US charts have on the rest of the world, the *USA Top 40 Book*

(\$39.95) is the most useful (though it's limited to the *pop* charts: country and black charts are in other books). It lists every Top 40 hit under artist, with all the relevant details, plus has an extremely useful alphabetical index of every chart hit. It also provides a chronological list of No 1 hits, by year, by decade, and whatever way you can think of.

Plus there's the entertainment value: did you know *Bonanza*'s Lorne Greene hit No 1 mid-1964 with a song called 'Ringo'? That the only hit that ever started with an X is 'Xanadu' (No 8, 1980)? Don't you feel more complete now that you do? Other trivia: comedian Jerry Lewis hit No 10 in 1956 with 'Rockabye Your Baby With a Dixie Melody'; Led Zeppelin, who only released half a dozen singles in the US, and none (I think) in Britain, had their only Top 10 hit with 'Whole Lotta Love' (No 4, 1969) — 'Stairway to Heaven' was never released as a single. Great, huh?

The *British Hit Singles* book (\$32.95) is also useful, because of the similarity our charts have with the UK. It's also wittier. The British charts are interesting because, although pop still dominates, they never seem to have lost the vaudeville side to their

show biz; TV stars, comedians or cabaret artists seem to dot their charts even to this day. Once you know your way around these books, you can work all sorts of things out. John Rowles made No 3 with 'If I Only Had Time' in 1968. What kept it from No 1? 'Cinderella, Rockefeller' by Esther and Abi Ofarim, a husband and wife team who now train Libyan guerillas. At the back are lists that interpret the charts in all sorts of ways. Who were the least successful chart acts (one week at No 50)? Believe me, the nine who make it are forgettable.

Compared to the others, the thin *Top 1000 Singles* book (\$19.95) is a waste of time. It ranks all the singles in US chart history according to their weeks on the charts, and lists the winners in order. Elvis's 'Don't Be Cruel'/'Hound Dog', with 11 weeks at No 1, wins. Sensational.

But did you know that only one full-blooded Red Indian has ever made the British No 1 spot? Marvin Rainwater's 'Whole Lotta Woman' stunned Britain in 1958; back home in the States, he only made No 18.

But back to the countdown ...

**Chris Bourke**

Vega seems to only fitfully reconcile the essentially personal nature of her music with its mass market packaging. She has an original talent that can and does shine when supported sympathetically. Her performance may well have been richer had she just chosen simple guitar and bass support, as demonstrated by Wayne Gillespie in his opening to the show. Gillespie and friends, although a might sloppy in their presentation, showed that it is even possible to achieve a sense of intimacy in the Auckland town hall.

**Peter Thomson**

FROM PAGE 4

## Word Sound & Power

Tosh maintained his profile through extensive touring with his Word Sound and Power Band, which included Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare. On stage, he could still cut it on a good night, and gave perhaps his finest performance at an outdoor show in Swaziland in 1983. Armed with a guitar shaped like a machine gun, Tosh attacked concert organisers until they relented and allowed in hundreds of poor people who had been unable to afford tickets. A bootleg recording of that show is one of my prized possessions.

Tosh's last two albums, 1983's *Mama Africa* and this year's *No Nuclear War*, were both uninspired and unoriginal. His ego problem also asserted itself and his rare interviews exhibited a strong streak of chauvinism verging on paranoia. It seemed he would do anything for a hit, even covering 'Johnny B Goode.'

If history regards the Wailers as reggae's Beatles, then I suppose Tosh will be its John Lennon. Cynical, provocative and never satisfied, his contribution too often underrated, overshadowed by a charismatic colleague with more tunes in his head. At the time of going to press, Dennis Lobban, a 33-year-old unemployed man with a history of violence, had been charged with Tosh's murder. The man who maintained reggae's militant face for all the world to see ultimately became a victim of the system he despised. In an unjust society, poverty breeds violence and crime. Peter Tosh's talents took him out of the ghetto. That, combined with his refusal to ever back down, made him a target.

*I can't find no love, no sympathy  
What kind of love they've got for me*

*I'm on my way to happiness  
Where I can find some peace  
and rest ...*

**Duncan Campbell**

# LIVE

## Suzanne Vega, Wayne Gillespie

Auckland Town Hall, Sept 30

With her new short haircut and boyish black trouser suit Suzanne Vega presents a youthful, even gangly figure. Especially striking is the fact that she's taller than her all-male band. If only her visual dominance had extended to the sound.

Vega began, as expected, acapella with 'Tom's Diner', and was then joined by the band for a hard driving 'Straight Lines.' However by the third number there were indications that, rather than just support, the four "backing" musicians might well overwhelm her.

'Small Blue Thing,' like much of Vega's work, is a highly introverted song. It was not helped by a very mobile drummer who treated his six-microphoned kit as if he were auditioning for Tina Turner. In concert this was the same band who plays on Vega's current album, only more so. Add on the typically difficult town hall acoustics and the fact that Vega's usually soft voice was further muted by a slight cold. The result was that more often than not she sounded like the singer with a band whose music took prominence over any lyrical content. Occasionally this situation worked well, such as when she put down her guitar to play pop vocalist and even dance a bit during 'Left of Centre' or 'The Saucy Neighbourhood Girls.' More often than not however, it proved irksome and one of the evening's highlights came when the band left the stage to allow a beautiful 'Queen and the Soldier' with just her guitar for accompaniment.

In working with her current band



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