

# Records

## ANITA BAKER Giving You The Best That I Got (Elektra)

Ms Baker is many things. To the soul fans she has entered the Parthenon headed by Queen Aretha, a goddess with a voice like molten gold. Held in high regard by the jazz contingent, who like the jazzy tinges to her voice, the Lena Horne guts, the gospel roots smoothed over. Then there's the "adult" market, who seek that soothing urbane glow of bought sophistication. And of course, the middle of the road listener, the followers of La Streisand and Madame Paige, who find Ms Baker a soul of a similar kind.

She's all of this and more, in a system where music is split like an atom into its many particles, she does the impossible and crosses all boundaries.

This was done with 1986's *Rapture*, aptly titled, it caused enough hysteria that this follow up was waited for with tense anticipation and fear that she couldn't repeat the glory of *Rapture*.

To me this was worth the wait. It may not have the immediate emotional pay-off that *Rapture* had, but in many



Anita Baker

ways the rewards in this one are greater.

Perhaps one of the best love albums ever made, a reworking of traditional themes like insecurity, jealousy, doubt—all these emotional cages that can only be opened by dissolving the self into another. Ms Baker sings about crazy love like 'Priceless' with her lover being compared to the "first rainbow in spring" and "a valuable jewel." Within love she can "do almost anything, baby"—which is repeated in 'Just Because' and 'You Belong To Me.'

Like in all classic teenage angst songs, the singer is wrapped up in

self-doubt and confusion before she meets the object of her desires. Ms Baker is never dominant, but passive, hence some of her popularity.

It's from this passivity that the power of her emotions seem to spring, the more tangled up in this crazy love the stronger her voice seems to be. What a voice, the gospel growls and the almost operatic highs she reaches.

Strangely enough, I like the sleazy quality she gets, the slurred vocals and the intensity of feeling. Like at times she's anything but restrained, there's subtlety but never blandness.

Impossible to say one track is better than another, but I like the exuberance of 'Good Enough' with the line "I hope you think I'm girl enough for you..." when Ms Baker is certainly no girl. The amazing depth of the title track is a wonder, a true soul classic.

Once again fine musical arrangement that oozes warmth, like the drumming by Omar Hakim and Nathan East's sympathetic bass. A joy to listen to. (NB—check out the CD single with two tracks from this album plus live versions of 'Sweet Love' and 'Watch Your Step').

Perhaps popular music's most accomplished singer with an album that

gives exactly what it says it's going to do—give you the best.  
KERRY BUCHANAN

## STEVE EARLE Copperhead Road (MCA)

Because they all emerged in 1986, the three young turks of country are often lumped together. But their styles couldn't be more different: Yoakam is the studied hillbilly, Travis the easy-listening crooner, and Earle the greasy rock'n'roller. Steve Earle quickly emerged as the major talent of the three; Yoakam is too image conscious, while Travis plays the establishment game.

But Earle plays country-influenced rock rather than the other way round, and he cements his reputation with this solid album. The sound retains the guitar clarity of *Exit O* and *Guitar Town* with added touches of bluegrass and Celtic folk, beefed up by a rock production aimed at the stadiums.

The songs have familiar themes of bitter love and political betrayal, but Earle retains his consistent excellence and hard-nosed delivery. The Pogues turn 'Johnny Come Lately' into a spirited jig, but above all Earle's Dukes are an

American band, taking their cues from the E Streeters and the Heartbreakers. However the best moments are the more reflective 'Even When I'm Blue' and 'Nothing But A Child', the latter being a lovely bluegrass duet with Maria McKee.

It could be said that like U2, Steve Earle has one song—but it's a damn good one that withstands reinterpretation. It is Earle's commitment and spirit that makes him stand out. And unlike his contemporaries, he's never satisfied by taking the safest road.  
CHRIS BOURKE

## PAUL SIMON Negotiations and Love Songs (Warner Bros)

Christmas time in the recording biz is compilation time and *Negotiations* will be the best on offer this season. A double LP of 17 tracks—only 16 on CD, but then you don't have to keep changing sides—it traces Simon's post-Garfunkel career to date. The selection is high faultless, given the qualification that both his first and latest albums really need to be owned in their entirety. *Graceland* we all know about, but anyone unfamiliar with 1971's *Paul*

*Simon* is missing out on a rare gem. Included here are only its two hit singles: 'Mother & Child Reunion' and 'Me And Julio Down By The Schoolyard.' From *There Goes Rhyming Simon*, a somewhat lesser album, we get twice as many tracks. And while I'd gladly swap 'Something So Right' (this compilation's only concession to Simon's wimpoid tendencies) for, say, 'American Tune' or 'Was A Sunny Day,' at least we're given the exquisite 'St Judy's Comet.'

Then things get really concise. 1975's *Still Crazy After All These Years* was only ever worth five tracks and here we get three of them. *One Trick Pony* was only ever worth one and here it is. Also included is the bleakly profound single 'Slip Slidin' Away'. And while three tracks is not quite fair to *Hearts & Bones* the choice is unerring.

So *Negotiations And Love Songs* doesn't encapsulate the essential Paul Simon of its time-frame. Such a collection would need to be twice the size. What it does do, though, is demonstrably prove the extraordinary range of a singer-songwriter who, when on form, is one of the greatest living talents in pop music.  
PETER THOMSON

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