

# Records

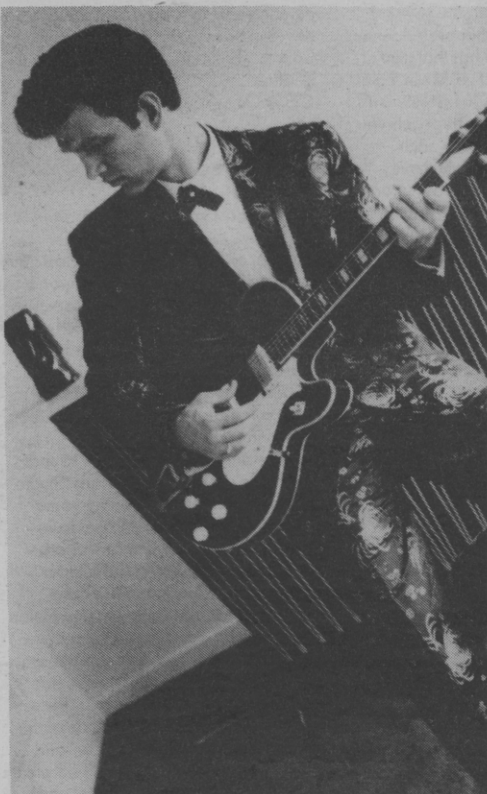
## CHRIS KNOX Seizure (Flying Nun)

Chris Knox solo records... Some of us remember 1983's *Songs For Cleaning Guppies* — C.Knox *Ego Gratification Album*. Some of us even own it, and tho' we're not exactly tortured but its presence in the record collection, it's not the sort of thing you haul out n' play all that often. This *Seizure* album is different tho', muchly so.

*Guppies* was lambasted as a kinda self-indulgent and smart arse affair. Some of that I'm sure was deliberate, and I hafta admit that bits of it did work, but not the nursery rhyme tone that was all but pervasive on the thing. Eight of its 20 tracks appear, along with a couple of solo bits elsewhere, as *Guppipius*, the 33rpm B-side of the 12-inch single companion piece to *Seizure* (the A-side's cool — 'Not Given Lightly', off the album, more on that soon) and to be fair, about half of 'em are very good — especially 'Over And Out', 'Justification Song', not 'Jesus Loves You'.

Back in 1982-83, Knox wasn't performing solo live, something he has been doing a lot of in the last three or four years. *Seizure*'s 15 tracks are the core of his live sets of this period, but the recorded context is a vastly different affair to their live performance.

To start with, it's musically more palatable and interesting, with the addition of excellent rhythm loops and a little extra instrumentation (all played by Knox) to the basic guitar. And *Seizure* lacks the arch-cynic persona that surrounds and overwhelms the songs' performance with commentary, often to the detriment of the ah, more personal moments of performances. It means that 'Not Given Lightly', an autobiographical love song, comes



Chris Isaak

without the sniggering "this is a love song, pahl" asides that make you wonder what it is he's deprecating.

This sense of autobiography is evident throughout *Seizure*, much more so than, say, Knox's Tall Dwarfs lyrics. They're operating at a more personal level, with less general philosophising and no B-grade horror (apart from the record cover). It's comparable to ex-Husker Do-er Bob Mould's recent solo debut, *Workbook*, but unlike

Mould's cathartic intent, an exorcism of "poison years", Knox uses his solo outing to invest his subjects, 'All Men Are Rapists' included, with uncustomary directness, relating ideas at an at times intensely personal level. Free of the cynicism that works all too well as a mask to the true feelings of songs, material like 'Not Given Lightly' ('This is a love song to John and Leisha's mother / It isn't easy — I might not write another,') lets us uncomfortably close to Knox's sensitivity.

In its musical effect, *Seizure* sits most comfortably alongside the unacknowledged album of the year, *Derry Legend*, by the Axemen. Both LPs overflow with ideas and a handful of glorious melodies you thought were



Hoodoo Gurus: stretched.



Not Drowning Waving

hackneyed, dead and overdone years ago, now made as fresh as the day your dentist fitted 'em. And both albums — rough, funny and honest — are everything that's great about rock n' roll, and, especially, wonderful old punk rock spirit.

Too bad if *Seizure* has to be consigned to the "losers on Flying Nun — why does Roger bother?" bin along with *Derry Legend*, 'cos if anyone else makes a record as good as *Seizure* this year by whamming a single barre chord shape up and down a guitar fretboard, I'll be pleasantly surprised. But good on ya, Chris; this one'll last. PAUL McKESSAR

## HOODOO GURUS Magnum Cum Louder (RCA)

The Hoodoo Gurus have always seemed like a good idea — their whole being always seemed attuned to the wonderful world of pop and trash — until you heard the music. Their albums have always had two or three songs that lived up to the aesthetics of compressed disposability, i.e. they would've made great singles. *Magnum* is no exception apart from the fact that you get four songs, 'Come Anytime', 'Another World', 'All The Way' and 'I Don't Know Anything', that together would have made EP of the year. The lesson is that these Gurus should stop making long players and concentrate on short, sharp splurges of technicolour. GEORGE KAY

## CHRIS ISAAK Heart Shaped World (Reprise)

Isaak's background is detailed in his interview but it's worth stressing that this guy has been touched by the Sun Sessions. He has seen the light — even the filament — that lit rock n' roll back in the 50s. And although he professes to be no purist, his three albums have stuck pretty damn close to the old essentials of rock n' roll: three piece bands, songs about girls, loneliness and cars and a sound that echoes with the ghosts of Sam Phillips' studios.

Isaak has everything going for him; he was wise enough to quit a boxing scholarship to bum around and bide time before trying a rock career. He was even patient enough to wait for the right musicians, and in his three piece backing band, Silverstone, he's got the players with the required credentials to evoke his songs — lonely moon-lit nights, teen dramas, teardrops, cheating hearts — and his voice, like the Big O's, is always trembling and on the edge of a quiver as it tries to hit notes that he's got no business trying for.

For the record, *Heart Shaped World* is his third album, a refinement of the traditional angst that he displayed on his first two, but this time he's

concentrated even more on his major strength which is the Isaak ballad, laced by guitarist James Wilsey's sparse and haunting picking. So 'Kings Of The Highway', 'Wicked Game' and 'Nothing's Changed' are right up there with 'Blue Hotel' as the best of Isaak's sad eyed ballads. Both the title track and 'Wrong To Love You' get more up-tempo, under pinned by two classic riffs and 'In The Heat Of The Jungle' is left to end the album with a dense, steamy shot just to show that Isaak can tackle any style.

*Heart Shaped World* confirms what his second album told us loud and clear — Isaak is definitely the king of his particular street. GEORGE KAY

## NOT DROWNING, WAVING Claim (Mighty Boy)

This album is a grower. Straightish 80s rock meets Japan/Eno style textural music. Sounds unpromising, I know, and the album doesn't immediately hit, but there's plenty here after a few listens. A mixture of instrumental numbers and songs with decent lyrics (just for a change) that are part political comment about Australia and the Pacific (intelligent but not too preachy) and part strong visual imagery.

A good mix of instruments and sounds (eg: mandolin, didgeridoo, samples and kettledrums), some tracks without rhythms, some with full drums or vaguely Latin-sounding beats. At least a couple of pop songs appear — 'Palau' would do nicely on BFM — and there's a seamless flow from track to track.

This won't be everybody's cup of tea as it doesn't rock very hard most of the time, but it's certainly a lot more adventurous, stimulating and sensitive than most Australian rock. It'll take me a little while to discover whether this is a great record or just a good one, since there's a fair bit of careful detail here. But for now, this is a recommended obscure record. RICHARD JAMES

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