

# Records

## SWING OUT SISTER Kaleidoscope World (Mercury)

This band's 1987 album *It's Better To Travel* was an honest and well-written gem that boasted not one cover version and a long playing time. Composer-keyboardist Andy Connell was fresh from leaving A Certain Ratio and was both keen and able to redress the indulgences that had relegated ACR to 10 years of cult status; Swing Out Sister were upbeat, unshamed pop. Their only fault was smiling too much, and a casual observer could be forgiven for thinking that there wasn't much forethought behind Corinne Drewery's grin.

*Kaleidoscope World* is the second album from the band and while it holds tight to their populist philosophy, it's a leap far beyond anything we could rightly expect from a boy with a piano and a girl with a haircut. Connell and Drewery (a duo since the departure of drummer Martin Jackson) have adopted the musical style of Burt Bacharach and the Fifth Dimension, and it fits them like a glove. *Kaleidoscope* contains some of the most buoyant, carefree and intelligent pop songs written by white folks since Scritti Politti.

Hyperbole? Nope. Check out the lopsided fizz of 'Tainted' and the giddy optimism of 'Waiting Game'. Note how 'Forever Blue' boldly jack-knives into a jazz number (Green Gartside turned the same trick with 'Rock A Boy Blue' and 'Faithless'). 'You On My Mind' curls into a Mary Quant soundtrack and 'This Heart's For Hire' is the Tijuana Brass single that got away. Production is unmistakably 80s but arrangements on 'Forever Blue' and 'Precious Words' are by orchestra man Jimmy Webb—who liked what he heard enough to take time off recording sessions with Frank Sinatra to work with Swing Out Sister.

The technical flair must have encouraged Ms Drewery to polish her talents, too; her singing hits all the notes, and holds them. Connell (sharing nearly all credits with Corinne) shows off on two instrumentals; 'Coney Island Man' (CD only), and the title track, a Harry Palmer, east-meets-west essay. But the stylistic change is more than cosmetic; the songs are solid, and the arrangements vigorous. The change in tack has distanced SOS from the vapid English charts, and focussed their sense

off fun.

In fact, *Kaleidoscope World* is the most fun on vinyl since Wham's *The Greatest*. Stack it next to *Stranded* and *The Fabulous Shirley Bassey*. Wunnerful stuff, just wunnerful. CHAD TAYLOR

## ALYSON WILLIAMS Raw (CBS)

Check out the cover. There's Ms Williams real bold in the leopard skin pill-box hat and gloves, set against the squalor of the city mess and destruction. Like a classic 70s soul album cover, it's a combination of ghetto awareness and silky soul forgetfulness.

This is a masterful thing, it shouts and shimmys. When she talks about "My love is so raw", you can feel it. There is no artifice; soul music is raw, the raw reality of life. But it's also life on a grand scale, where emotion is king. One review I read mentioned the "lapse into soul clichés" which I take to mean the exaggeration of emotion, placing love and sentimentality above everything in much the same way that country music does. It's that element that gives both styles their strength, the opening up of the heart shows its honesty.

Side one is the slow ballad showcase which burns like the sun in the sky, six tracks of soft sophistication for lovers everywhere. My favourite would be 'Masquerade', but it's hard picking favourites when each one is a standout. She's being promoted as an Anita Baker for B-Boys, and like Ms Baker's fine *Rapture* album it makes no concessions, no tricks involved. Just very fine soul ballads.

But then flip it over and the funk starts to flow. 'Sleep Talk' with the James Brown 'Funky Drummer' beat is just amazing, as is 'On The Rocks' with this vocal change in the middle that just chills. She's on Def Jam, and their best soul release ever (stable mate Chuck Stanley appears in a duet). Producers Vincent Bell and Alvin Moody should take credit, also Shocklee and Sadler, who add the hip hop. Most tracks on side two have a hip-hop edge to them, and Ms Williams raps in a nasty Millie Jackson way, she's real cool.

Ms Williams has been a classy backing vocalist for nearly everybody, even the Gang of Four. But now she's numero uno, is she ready for star time or what?

Also liked the way they printed Max Ehrmann's classic kitsch guide to better living, *Desiderata*, on the inside sleeve, containing this uplifting instruction: "With all its sham, drudgery and broken



Prince fan Mavis Staples



Slick Rick



Alyson Williams



James Ingram

dreams / It is still a beautiful world." Well, I think this album proves that very thing.

KERRY BUCHANAN

## MAVIS STAPLES Time Waits For No-One (Paisley Park) ARETHA FRANKLIN Through The Storm (Arista)

Mavis Staples and Aretha Franklin have a lot in common. They both rate as classic soulsters, both come from a gospel background and both have used convenient superstars on their current LPs, although the results are quite different.

Mavis has worked with Prince, who doesn't so much interpret her style as let Ms Staples interpret his. The songs all bear that unmistakable Prince feel: choppy guitars, lots of little vocal

embellishments and rhythms that are all 70s funk. The end results are rather nice. Mavis's smokey vocals are pure class. The likes of 'Interesting', which would well have been written for Sheena Easton and her lingerie, are given a real kick, while 'Time Waits For No-One', well, Mavis was born to sing ballads like this.

Aretha, however, goes for a more mainstream mode. There are definite hints of swing-beat, a real bug FM sound and a plethora of guest stars. Some are not so hot—Elton John is just plain dull while Siedah Garret isn't given enough room to move, but at times it all comes together. James Brown is in fine form, dustin' and bustin' (before the dust got him sent up the river) while Whitney Houston indulges in a little duel on 'It Isn't, It Wasn't, It Ain't Ever Never Gonna Be' which features some great vocal stylings despite the

dumb "ad-libs".

Of the two albums here, I would personally put my money on *Time Waits For No-One*. Mavis Staples seems to have confidence and style that Aretha lacks (do we really need 'Think '89'?) though it's good to see a couple of living legends prove they are very much alive and kicking.

KIRK GEE

## SLICK RICK The Great Adventures of Slick Rick (Def Jam)

This is a strange one. Here's the slickster on the cover looking like some high school pimp with the diamond in the tooth to match the rock on his finger, with this real intense, friendly smile. When he starts rapping he sounds fresh, in a Dana Dane style, and maybe even Fresh Prince is in there as well. Like the storyline of *The Moment I Feared*; lots of things like getting all your gold chains ripped off, and sex problems. But the slick one can give you a word of advice on that score with the less than delicate 'Treat Her Like A Prostitute' and 'Lick The Balls'.

Produced by Hank Shockless and Eric Sadler, so you know it's going to sound good. Like 'Mona Lisa' with a version of 'Walk On By' sneaking through the mix, and the very weird 'Indian Girl' (an adult story) with Ricky Walters, Mr Slick Rick himself, in control of the mixing desk.

Not a traditional hip-hop album, it uses things not normally found in the genre. Like his voice, and unusual changes in tempo like 'The Rulers Back' with some psycho knights of the round table stuff. This boy is as loose as a goose.

Tracks that found favour overseas are the ballads 'Teenage Love' and 'Hey Young World'. But to me, the slickster is better when he gets dumb and dirty like 'Indian Girl', 'Let's Get Crazy' and of course the socially irresponsible 'Treat Her Like A Prostitute'.

KERRY BUCHANAN

## JAMES INGRAM It's Real (Warner Bros)

The last few weeks have definitely been full of the unexpected. Leeza's looking pregnant, Akeem's dancing has got worse, and the new James Ingram LP is seriously fine.

Actually, the quality of *It's Real* isn't all that unexpected. James Ingram has always had a wonderful voice but it always seems to be lost in a sea of

blandness. For this project, though, he is supported by an impressive array of producers. With the help of Gene Griffin, Gerald Levert, Mark Gordon and Bernard Taylor, it's hard to go wrong. Griffin particularly makes his presence felt with the dance material (the album has a "hard" and "soft" side). 'It's Real' and 'Love Come Down' are classic slices of swingbeat, tough and infectious with "hit" written all over them.

But ballads are definitely James' territory, and it's here he really shines. From the opening grandeur of 'A Natural Man' where James manages to re-work Aretha without sounding ridiculous, you know the man is in total control. Although he's definitely a contender for the Barry White Award for services to orchestration, Mr Ingram never descends into schmaltz.

Tight production and some superb vocals keep this album tough. James Ingram has one of the best jackets I've seen lately, and one of the best soul albums I've heard lately—a combination worth checking out.

KIRK GEE

## INDIGO GIRLS Indigo Girls (Epic)

Anyone who cites Joni Mitchell as a major influence and can boast REM and Hothouse Flowers as session musos on their debut album on a major label have got to be worth checking out. Being a major fan of all three myself, Indigo Girls seemed too good to be true. Furthermore, they're an acoustic, university circuit, female duo from Atlanta, Georgia. I mean how cred can one band be? Add to that the fact that it's all produced by Scott Litt and you've got the recipe for jangly dynamite.

You want to hear about more cookie points? The inner sleeve gives contact addresses and phone numbers for Amnesty International, Greenpeace, Coalition for the Homeless and People for Ethical Treatment of Animals.

The first track, 'Closer to Fine' is one of the most worthy singles in a long time and the understated, spiritual lyrics and clever cross-melodies of the rest of the album make it well worth widening your record collection by another few millimeters.

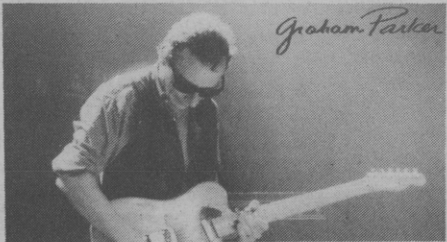
ANDREW DUBBER

BIG CIRCUMSTANCE BRUCE COCKBURN



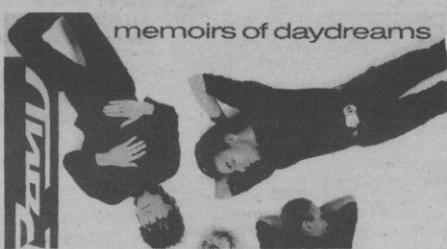
## BRUCE COCKBURN

**BIG CIRCUMSTANCE:** On the single "IF A TREE FALLS", Cockburn tackles the issue of rainforest destruction with dramatic urgency. "Cockburn has created art so clear and touching, it can't fail to seep past ears that are nailed shut".



## GRAHAM PARKER

**LIVE-ALONE IN AMERICA:** Last year Parker hit the road in America armed with his guitar, "Live" features dramatic reworkings, plus two new tracks. Spine-tingling stuff.



## THE PONY

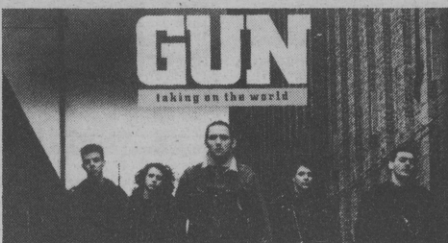
**MEMOIRS OF DAYDREAMS:** Is evidence of a great band in the making. Singer Pierre Baroni is a fine lyricist, check out "Sell my clothes, I'm going to Heaven, I don't need them anymore . . ."

## NEW MUSIC August



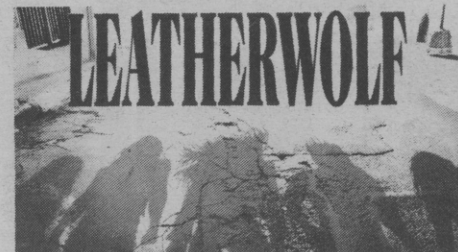
## KEVIN McDERMOTT

**MOTHER NATURES KITCHEN:** Glaswegian singer/songwriter McDermott and his three piece band arrive with one of the strongest debuts of the year. Its packed with rousing, passionate, rock songs, charged with some gutsy and emotive electric and acoustic guitar work. Songwriting has never been so honest and uplifting. Features the single "WHEELS OF WONDER".



## GUN

**TAKING ON THE WORLD:** GUN are a fiery, Glaswegian five-piece rock band in the classic sense. With influences from AC/DC to U2, GUN pack a huge punch, without ever losing any pace or subtlety. It's truly rare for a band so young (most of them are teenagers), to be blessed with this much class and maturity. Look out for the single "BETTER DAYS".



## LEATHERWOLF

**STREET READY:** Leatherwolf's triple (!) axe attack gives the band a powerful, guitar-lead fusillade that goes straight for the throat. This isn't trash or the blues, but no bull, straight-ahead Heavy Metal.



## JASON & SCORCHERS

**THUNDER AND FIRE:** Nashville's finest have put together an album that will blow your cowboy hat off and have you reaching for the volume knob!



## THRASHING DOVES

**TROUBLE IN THE HOME:** The Doves return with another slice of power, this is the Doves at their hardest and direct best. Produced by Gavin McKillop and featuring guest appearances by James Eller and David Palmer.