



James McMurtry



Christy Moore

**JAMES McMURTRY**  
**Too Long In The Wasteland**  
(CBS)

James McMurtry is in the tradition of artists like Lee Clayton, country but packing a punch that would make the toughest rocker feel proud. Given a sympathetic production from John Cougar Mellencamp and backed by the latter's excellent band, McMurtry delivers as good a debut album as you're gonna get.

McMurtry combines stark backdrops with shattering guitar assaults underpinning the laconic vocal delivery -- shades of Lou Reed on a good day. This is perfectly illustrated on the title track with the band building up an awesome aura of tension, the ideal backdrop for the cutting lyrics; "hear the trucks on the highway / and the licking of the clocks / there's a ghost of a moon in the afternoon / bullet holes in the mailbox / key holes in my mind".

It's difficult to pick out the highlights as every track is a winner, from "Painting By Numbers" with its pawn in the game theme, to "Terry" where recklessness creates a terrifying nightmare, to the closing bars of "Poor Lost Soul" which studies the loss of rural innocence. Maybe the sheer power of this recording has been responsible for Lee Clayton's return from a lengthy desert exile in order to toss down the gauntlet in an attempt to reclaim his stolen throne. Par excellence!  
DAVID PERKINS

**FULL FORCE**  
**Smoove**  
**CHERYL PEPSII RILEY**  
**Me Myself And I**  
(Columbia)

The first time Full Force appear on the cover wearing a decent amount of clothes. The last LP featured the band visiting a nice white middle class family and inside Paul Anthony stands in a leather posing strap. So I suppose the boys on the new one are on the serious trip, like no bare chests and gold chains. It's all serious portraits with leather medallions of Africa and Paul Anthony is chilling out with a book on Marcus - Back To Africa - Garvey. So I'm impressed.

Even more so when the needle hits the record. Right away we have Full Force rocking in a James Brown groove in "Don't Waste My Time", then in their own version of new jacksing, "Ain't My Type Of Hype". Full Force come on like a modern version of the Temptations, classic black vocal styles with the bass dropping and the addition of a modern rap style, and like the Temptations, they can carry a ballad beautifully. Like the wonderfully titled "Make Love To My Mind" and "Kiss Those Lips". The best track is "4V (Full Force's Mellow Medley)" combining Smokey's "Ooh Baby Baby", the Delphonics' "La La Means I Love You", Marvin Gaye's "Distant Lover" and Bobby Keyes' "Love On A Two Way Street". This is serious stuff and deserves attention. Like the track off the *CriB* album about "Black Radio", this puts itself into the historical discussion about the nature of black music. Full Force see themselves as part of the great tradition.

The Cheryl Pepsii Riley album is Full Force's latest production project, and it comes on a bit too cute for my tastes, but has a solid ballad foundation and Ms Pepsii has a great voice.

Full Force have another winner in *Smoove*, another very fine album from the kings of rhythm. It swings and has fun with itself, like "Don't Waste My Time" where the boys answer back to all the female dissing songs like Janet

Jackson's "What Have You Done For Me Lately" and gives Ms Pebbles the run around. And let us not forget their duet with Sam Fox on "All I Wanna Do."  
KERRY BUCHANAN

**CHRISTY MOORE**  
**Voyage**  
(WEA)

A legend in his native Ireland, Christy Moore became an integral part of the renaissance of traditional Irish music through his work with Plurocty. He's since widened his horizons through his involvement with the up-tempo Moving Hearts and his own burgeoning solo career.

Moore's early Polydor solo albums were steeped in traditional Irish music interspersed with folk standards but his move to WEA signalled a change in approach. Traditional gave way to showcasing the talents of up and coming Irish songwriters such as Jimmy McCarthy and the Pogues' Shane McGowan.

Moore's last album *Unfinished Revolution* was a masterpiece and *Voyage* maintains the standard. Between albums Moore suffered a heart attack which probably accounts for the circumspect nature of this most recent offering. Almost half the songs are original including the highpoint of the album, "Missing You". Ewan McColl's much-recorded "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" sounds as fresh as the day it was written and Moore demonstrates his virtuosity on Elvis Costello's quirky "Deportees Club". As with his previous solo albums, the crystal clear production comes courtesy of his old Plurocty comrade, Donal Lunny.

Moore's skill lies in his unerring ability to choose outstanding songs and then arrange them in a way that makes them his own, the warm vocals exuding a total love of music. If you've not had the pleasure of Christy Moore before, *Voyage* is as good a starting point as any. Marbecks have an excellent range of Christy Moore albums, as well as Plurocty and Moving Hearts.  
DAVID PERKINS

**NANCI GRIFFITH**  
**Storms**  
**HOLLY DUNN**  
**The Blue Rose Of Texas**  
(MCA)

Nanci Griffith's eighth record is something of a departure. Those who had the Texas songstress pigeon-holed has a dewy-eyed promulgatory of happy endings may have to think again -- *Storms* has little of the blue bonnet spring optimism Griffith is renowned for. Whilst retaining the singer's irresistible buoyancy, veteran producer Glyn Johns has opted for a more spartan scenario that displays little evidence of overdubs and the like. At times its confessional honesty borders on the claustrophobic.

*Storms* is very much the pervasive metaphor here reflecting a series of anecdotal crises by Griffith's own admission -- the result of "a very hard year for me". Songs like "It's A Hard Life Wherever You Go" and "I Don't Want To Talk About Love" are indicators of a hitherto unexplored darker side. Apparently not all *Little Love Affairs* last forever. But don't get the impression that Griffith the incorrigible romantic has come to grief on the rocks of cynicism and heartbreak; her positivism and belief in love as a redemptive force continue to shine through.

Nanci Griffith is a genuine hand on heart romantic but not in a self-conscious, bedsit manner. Her strengths are her ingenious and an

unrepentant devotion to *amour*. As long as she continues to produce work this sincere, this honest, then this reviewer will remain a fully paid-up true believer.

Holly Dunn is by coincidence a Texan also and although *The Blue Rose Of Texas* is her fourth album she remains largely unknown in this country. Her star is very much in the ascendance Stateside, however, where there's always a market for pretty, personable country singers who don't stray too far from the mainstream. This album is well played, crisply produced and Holly Dunn has a perfectly acceptable voice. It's just a tad, um, characterless, and coming after Nanci Griffith's emotional *tour de force* it pales by comparison. Holly Dunn is the acceptable face of country music in 1989 and if I tell you she's also planning a duet with Kenny

Rogers, I think you'll guess what I'm getting at.  
GARTH SEEAR

**RY COODER**  
**Johnny Handsome**  
**(Soundtrack)**  
(WEA)

*Johnny Handsome* is a muddled and unsatisfying movie but we get some good things from it: a pistol whipping Ellen Barken, one of Mickey Rourke's better performances to date, and this, another Ry Cooder soundtrack for lazy evenings spent basking in the heat of the CD player.

This album is more consciously scored than the rambling instrumentals of Cooder's much-loved *Paris Texas* soundtrack but still the tracks recall (and indeed are responsible for) the movie's best moments. The concise scoring

does mean some tracks are less easy on the ear but there's more variation here, with Ry and pals wrapping themselves around everything from Cajun rockabilly to ambient wanderings worthy of Lanois & Eno. It's as sentimental and cosy as the soundtrack for *Betty Blue* and hell, I don't even own a Saab.  
CHAD TAYLOR

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