

Records

TRACY CHAPMAN Crossroads (Elektra)

Pop culture situates itself in the arena of struggle; in political terms, race, gender and class struggle. Pop music reeks of racism and sexism and racism. It's what keeps it going, we learn from it, it helps us to understand the world. Like the soap operas that take place in NWA's 'Straight Outta Compton' with the bad ass bad boys giving lead to the rednecks and bitches on heat everywhere. It's all fantasy based on reality, evil shit I know, but that's pop music.

Out of all the 'isms floating around in pop music, though, the worst is liberalism. The desire to make the world something it isn't, nice and soft, free of complexities like sexism and racism. Liberals never had their own form of music so they had to invent it—folk music. Created in reaction to all that nasty rock n' roll with its fixation on sex and death. "Oh, it's so horrible. Let's all join hands and sing 'If I Had A Hammer' and 'We Shall Not Be Moved'. Oh, lookie, the world is warm and people just gotta be free!" And while they did that, capitalism licked its lips and continued to eat.

In a way Ms Tracy Chapman doesn't fit in the folk singer genre too neatly. She's not really yelling at the world telling it to stop. She writes good relationship songs, people falling in and out of love. Songs like 'Fast Cars' and 'Baby Hold Me Now', fine pop songs that led people like Neil Diamond to cover them.

The new album hasn't got anything as good as those; maybe 'A Hundred Years' and 'Bridges', but overall the album is too didactic, concerned with world views and those great liberal standbys the urban poor ('Subcity') and Nelson Mandela ('Freedom Now').

Hell, I want Nelson outta there, but yet another song will not do it. One of the great folk artists, Woody Guthrie, engraved on his guitar "this machine kills fascists," which is all very well if you hit them over the head with it. As Mao said, "political power grows out of a barrel of a gun," not guitar necks.

Crossroads is a far more folk orientated record than her debut, but as social conscience songs go you'd find better



Happy Mondays

on any Ramones album.

Public Enemy's Chuck D in the hip-hop magazine *The Source* called Ms Chapman "a disgrace to her race," partly due to her appeal amongst white liberals. If you drive around any, shall we say, white upper mobile areas, the sound of Tracy floats from each hot-tub party. That's her real market, and *Crossroads* succeeds in reaching it. It's the sort of album people have middle-aged crises to. It's going to shift heavy AOR units, but I bet Neil Diamond isn't going to cover any of these songs— it just doesn't have the pop appeal of her first one.

KERRY BUCHANAN

HAPPY MONDAYS Bummed (Factory)

Happy Mondays' second album is one of the more unusual variations on the Acid House theme you're likely to hear this year. They're attempting the kind of deep-fried trance that New Zealand clubs discovered last year (about 18 months behind the rest of the world) but the drum programmes / samples / water torture synth pulse formula is abandoned completely in favour of a refracted funk rock haze without precedent anywhere, including Happy Mondays' previous work.

The sounds are those of mainstream dance pop, entirely and inexplicably inverted. There's the trebly, incessant guitar, the heavily reverbed drums,

even occasional globules of hideous FM synth gel, yet somehow it doesn't even sound remotely radio-friendly. On the first listen it's almost unendurable, sounding merely like an incompetent attempt at something that's vile even when done properly, but eventually something about its unabashed twistedness, its almost joyful corruption, becomes appealing. Far from the standard funk practice of weak notes building up to strong ones that knock you back off your feet, it's as if everything is equally de-emphasised, with no focal point 'cause nothing's quite in focus.

Rather than being advertised by any single, artificial quirk, Happy Mondays' lunacy is all-pervasive, the only consistent thing about them, and, as far as it's possible to tell, strangely genuine.

MATTHEW HYLAND

THE GEORGIA SATELLITES In The Land Of Salvation & Sun (Elektra) JASON AND THE SCORCHERS Thunder & Fire (A&M)

Both bands are shit-kickers in the grand tradition of bar-bands who play hard, fast and pure. Sure they may have left the bar for greener pastures, but the spirit and the honesty of the bar-room remains.

Jason Ringenberg and the boys reached their peak with *Last And Found*, and unfortunately this one



Georgia Satellites

doesn't match it. It has its moments, like their version of Phil Ochs' 'My Kingdom For A Car' and the Steve Earle-penned 'Bible And A Gun'. At times they almost get as rocky as 'White Lies' (off *Last And Found*) but the production lets it down, like the addition of horns on 'You Gotta Way With Me'.

There's no such trouble with the Georgia Satellites' third album. Unlike *Open All Night*, which tried to re-write 'Leave Your Hands To Yourself' on every track, this one is a whole new ball game. It's got rock n' roll rousers in 'Slaughterhouse', about a hard-working schmuck with love problems, and a fast look at life on 'Dan Takes Five'. But it has shades of the other albums lacked, like 'Another Chance' and the country-styled 'Sweet Blue Midnight', with Nicollette Larson on backup-vocals, plus some stuff that reminds me of the Rolling Stones circa *Sticky Fingers*, like 'Bring Down The

Hammer'. All their records boast cover versions, too, and this one has Joe South's 'Games People Play', which is great.

Pity about the Scorchers, but don't forget the Georgia Satellites when you feel like a barroom rumble.

KERRY BUCHANAN

ENUFF Z'NUFF Enuff Z'Nuff (Atlantic)

"Well, I shattered my left testicle perfecting the scream on 'I'm Down', and I'm glad!" says Donnie Vie, Enuff Z'Nuff's lead singer, and with commitment like that the band has to be taken seriously. This Chicago-based four-piece formed two years ago after a five-year collaboration between Vie and the band's bassist / songwriter Chip Z'Nuff and shape up as the latest pretenders to the pop-metal crown. A solid debut album it is too, melodic vocals, punchy lead guitars combined with catchy tunes mean the band are onto a winner.

Even though, at times, the album lacks a consistency of quality material, it still generates a good time summer feeling with songs like 'Hot Summer Girl', 'New Thing' and 'Little Indian Angel' leading the way.

Complete with a happy, trippy peace sign on the album cover and the advice to "get high on a new thing" in the first song, "Chip" Z'Nuff may just be asking for the tomato sauce at my summer barbecue.

BRUCE HUDSON

MICHELLE SHOCKED Captain Swing (Mercury)

Let's make it plain from the outset: this is one delicious record. Packed with love and lust, heartache and humour, this is definitely a big one for a performer who has already shown loads of promise.

After starting out with an amateur recording of songs around a campfire, Michelle Shocked has strayed from the folkie approach and gone for a big production number. Pete Anderson produces, arranges and plays some wicked guitar. There's also a big, punchy brass section courtesy of Lee Thornburg. The production brings out the best in Shocked's rich, warm voice which is one of the sweetest sounds I've heard all year.

There's an amazing variety of styles on display here and Shocked sounds equally at home with all of them. The opener, 'God Is A Real Estate Developer' is one of three numbers with a strong blues feel which socks it to those who hustle in the name of God: "They say one day he'll liquidate / His holdings up on high / I say it's all speculation."

'Sleep Keeps Me Awake' is more in the Chicago style while 'The Cement Lament' is a New York hooker's blues. 'Streetcorner Ambassador' features jazzy upright bass, while 'On The Greener Side' works to a reggae-latin beat, although the sentiments are pure country.

Also in that vein are 'Silent Ways', with wonderfully weepy Texas violin, and 'Too Little Too Late', which starts off in Nashville but shifts north as another fine brass arrangement takes over. 'My Little Sister' is Memphis-style rock n' roll, 'Looks Like Mona Lisa' is closer to the folk roots, and 'It Must Be Luff' is a terrible pun but great fun, with a very '20s arrangement. The album finishes with the inexplicably uncredited 'A Hole In My Head', just acoustic and slide guitar in the background.

Michelle Shocked has made an album that transcends all tastes and looks set to ensure a full house when she tours in the New Year. Versatility, virtuosity and bags of swing. Superb.

DUNCAN CAMPBELL

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