

RECORDS

SEX PISTOLS
FLOGGING A DEAD HORSE
 VIRGIN

CHIC
LES PLUS GRANDS SUCCES DE CHIC
 ATLANTIC

The Sex Pistols and Chic represent the times of the late seventies as much as do the oil crisis and unemployment. Better than most anyone else, they epitomise punk and disco. We'll leave it to sociologists to explore questions of lifestyle and attitude, and look at the music, which modified the mainstream and was itself modified in turn.

The music is in the grooves, but before one gets to it one is struck again by how important image-making was to both phenomena. At a time of Callaghan greyness, Johnny Rotten may have been the best-known face in the land (the Queen's excepted, of course). Chic are essentially faceless, but they wear clothes costing more than some of us will earn this year.

The 'upwardly-mobile' face of disco is in Chic's Gallic album title. "Greatest Hits" sounds so much less vulgar with a French accent. The back of the Pistols' cover features a turd nesting in the golden grooves of *Never Mind the Bollocks*.

Bollocks is summed up by side one of *Flogging a Dead Horse* (surely this is the last Pistols' showcase?), a cacophony of anarchic guitar and thrashed drums and the malignant vocals of J. Rotten. This side contains the three singles, "Anarchy in the U.K.", "God Save the Queen", and "Pretty Vacant" (genuinely revolutionary), as well as "Did You No Wrong", which I mention solely because I like it a lot. This is terrific stuff and doesn't suffer from datedness as much as one might imagine.

Side two is rather disposable — Ronald Biggs sings (sort of), Sid Vicious sings (sort of), the Pistols cover Eddie Cochran and the Monkees — although its stumblings chart the fall of the Sex Pistols just as side one landmarks their blaze of glory.

Chic are as precise as the Sex Pistols are out of control. Disco has been criticised as a producer's music with the artist merely the mouthpiece for the mind at the mixing board. Chic stand apart in that guiding lights Nile Rodgers and Bernard Edwards produce, write and play. Furthermore, the rhythm section of Rodgers (guitar) and Edwards (bass) is very hot indeed, lifting their best songs ("Le Freak", "Chic Cheer", and, especially, "Good Times") above mere invitation to boogie down. Chic are as immaculate as their slick tailoring, with the good and bad that implies.

It may strain the imagination to try to reconcile the yobbish rancour of the Sex Pistols with Chic's metronomic discipline, but both 'greatest hits' albums are bookends for an era. They characterise a time now passed.

Ken Williams

More Ska Madness

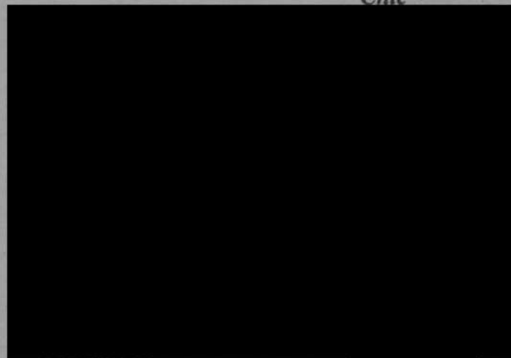
Chic Your Booties



Chic

Madness

Selector



MADNESS
ONE STEP BEYOND
 STIFF

Ska has become the password to instant credibility and good reviews. The Specials, who were the first and look like being the best exponents of skapunk, have sparked off a small rock steady boom that already includes Selector, Beat and Madness.

Madness are seven all white nutty bleeders from London who cut their teeth as the Invaders and Morris and the Minors before becoming Madness proper near the end of 1978. Taking their name from Prince Buster's (one of the bluebeat pioneers) song "Madness" they released their first single on the Specials' Two Tone label. Entitled "The Prince" its tribute was obvious and the flip side, their version of Prince Buster's "Madness", hollers uncredited as the second last track on *One Step Beyond*.

Incorporating a healthy dose of irreverence and spontaneous humour Madness are the lighter side of ska. Keyboards' player Mike Barson has the Jilted John eye for mundane romanticism and common situation, and coupled with his ear for bluebeat melodies he chalks up a few gems, though none better than "My Girl".



*My girl's mad at me
 I didn't wanna see the film tonight
 I found it hard to say
 She thought I'd had enough of her
 Why can't she see she's lovely to me
 But I like to stay in and watch TV all alone
 every now and then.*

Vocalist Graham McPherson and guitarist Chris Foreman join forces on "In the Middle of the Night", a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde story about a respectable newspaper agent who is "a knicker thief underwear taker" at night. Hilarious but with more than just a little impact in the home truth department.

On the music side of things the album's emphasis swings towards the dance floor and here Lee Thompson's burping sax turns the title track and "Night Boat to Cairo" into near riots, and Barson wallops the ivories on "Tarzan's Nuts" and "Swan Lake".

With the exuberance of this album in mind, it is hard to believe that at the start of last year Madness briefly dropped their bluebeat numbers because of lack of reaction. Now with three hit singles behind them and this hot debut album on the floor Madness won't be looking back.

George Kay

THE SELECTOR
TOO MUCH PRESSURE
 2-Tone

So what does 2-Tone mean? "It means a hell of a lot. It means a non-separation of things, like the way the whole world tries to separate everything away from everything else, things and ideals. For all of us, it means a bringing together and seeing everything as a whole in its entirety, seeing it in its context..."

The speaker is Neol Davies, rhythm guitarist and sole white member of The Selector, the latest prodigy of the wondrous 2-Tone label to emerge in this country.

2-Tone has an enviable track record to date, with every single and album issued making the British charts, indicating the popularity and vitality of the music.

The Selector are no exception. Those with the sense to tune into Radio B during its all-too-brief fling on the airwaves will have bent an ear around an unstoppable little bit of ska called "On My Radio". The band responsible for this is The Selector.

The Selector started out around Coventry in 1978, playing heavy roots reggae, which they found boring (to each his own). The rhythm was what they wanted, and so they delved further back into the origins of the sound, and took up the banner of bluebeat and ska.

Lyrical, The Selector retain at least some of their reggae roots. If 2-Tone has a hard political wing, then this is it. The Specials make the occasional point in their context, but The Selector go straight for the groin:

*Look beyond the people that tie your hands,
 You're living in the time of shifting sands,
 I'm getting off my knees,
 I'm going to teach myself a new philosophy...*

("They Make Me Mad")

The 2-Tone sound preaches not only liberation for black and white, but also for the sexes. Pauline Black dominates the vocals and makes significant contributions in the songwriting field.

As Madness took "Swan Lake" into the rock steady vein, so do The Selector make mincemeat of the James Bond theme. Traditional numbers like "My Collie" are also given the once over. That particular number was cleaned up and released under another name by Millie Small. Listen and you'll know why.

Too Much Pressure is as danceable as anything else on 2-Tone; in other words, it's too damn infectious to stand still to. But The Selector, all seven of them, pack a hidden punch.

Drawing from impeccable roots, the 2-Tone bands bring a new mode of dance music into this uncertain decade. The distinctive figure in pork pie hat and shades is called Walt Jabsco. Definitely the logo to watch for.

Duncan Campbell

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