

**The Birthday Party**  
Prayers on Fire  
Propeller

Australian music that sounds good! First time since the Saints/Laughing Clowns and the occasional Mental As Anything single. Whoop de do. Cause for celebration; even NME liked it, although they don't seem to think it's very Australian. In fact, the Birthday Party are awfully Oz, except for one thing — they rip off creatively, and add new things of their own. That's a skill that most of their compatriots not only lack, but despise as being no way to run a rock and roll career.

What they do is take Beefheart, Pere Ubu, Bow Wow Wow, John Cale, all sorts, without shame, throw them all in the musical equivalent of a Kenwood and deliver a birthday cake of some substance and considerable taste.

The first track, 'Zoo-Music Girl' has (no, don't tell me!) 'tribal drumming', but it's OK. They sound like savages, not anthropology students. There's Cooper-Clarke babble over the top — it's all over the top. Side Two, track three, 'Yard', is cocktail jazz played by manic depressives. 'Figure of Fun' is daft.

None of the eleven tracks are bad. Nick Cave's vocals are awful — like Lydon or Mark E. Smith. Great. The band is constantly swapping instruments and roles. It's all loose and crazed, and recorded in Melbourne, where some of the worst bands in the world live.

Chris Knox

**Marianne Faithfull**  
Dangerous Acquaintances  
Island

Whether we like to admit it or not, much of the initial fascination with Broken English lay in its biographical associations. There was an almost voyeuristic frisson attached to knowing that Faithfull had lived so many of those lyrics. Yet ultimately the music's own power, at least on Side One, was strong enough to maintain our interest beyond the possibly unhealthy. But after an album ravaged by drugs, des-



Wah

pair, guilt and revenge, what do you do for a follow-up?

From the cover on in, *Dangerous Acquaintances* is distinctly less chilling, sinister or haggard than its predecessor. This time all the songs are original. True, elements of menace and uncertainty linger in such numbers as 'Intrigue' and 'Eye Communication' but they are balanced by a sense of self-knowledge, tentative growth and even 'Tenderness'. These songs of experience are broader ranging (even if Blake doesn't get his lyric-writing credit).

Appropriately there is a change in the music too. While the basis of steady, hypnotic pulse and stark, elemental melodies is as before, here and there a lighter touch of brass or piano replaces the previous obsessive guitar and synthesizer tones.

Nowhere is the change more marked than in the final track. *English* finished on an overkill of sexual venom. *Acquaintances* also keeps its 'major statement' till last, but this time, rather than smacking of calculated controversy, it contains possibly the album's most beautiful song and Faithfull's most affecting pathos to date: 'Truth Bitter Truth'. After the rage, resignation.

I, for one, thought that Marianne Faithfull's recording comeback would, by its very nature, only ever amount to a one-off. So much for cynicism. Given its context, *Dangerous*

*Acquaintances* is as good a follow-up as anyone has any right to expect. It is a thoroughly commendable album.

Peter Thomson



Neil Young

major asset is his soaring vocal capability. On 'Someday' and 'Death of Wah!', his voice is an extension of the music.

Ultimately, though, the songs

momentum, before the band bursts into the manic masterpiece 'T-Bone', with Young snarling repetitively 'Got mashed potatoes, ain't got no T-Bone', over a bone-crunching frenzy of sound.

'Get Back On It' provides breathing space before you ride on the 'Southern Pacific'. 'Motor City' snipes at the Japanese, and 'Rapid Transit' build the platform for the final chaos of 'Shots', with its searing guitars and cacophony of gunfire.

An album of awesome aggression, coupling slashing lyrics with a seething metallic assault. A major recording in any criterion, with a cover that flashes out a warning: Contents highly inflammable.

David Perkins

**Swingers**  
Practical Jokers  
Ripper

Take 'One Track Mind'. Great verse, great chorus, but wait, a bridge already? And what's this instrumental thing now? Aaahhhh, back to the verse, phew ... what? a fresh riff? and what's this now??? ... and so it goes. 'One Track Mind' is the Swingers' finest single so far, but its also an archetype of what keeps this band from living permanently in the top ten. Some good ideas, some fine bits, but if large-scale acceptance is what the Swingers are after (and, of course, it mightn't be) then they're just going to have to remember that too many hooks spoil the broth.

The structure of a typical Swingers song, plus the layered



Birthday Party

**Wah!**  
Nah Poo, The Art Of Bluff  
WEA

Wah! (formerly Wah! Heat) are the third part of the Liverpool triangle. Guitarist/singer Pete Wylie was in a band called the Crucial Three with Julian Cope of Teardrop Explodes and Ian McCulloch of Echo and the Bunnymen.

Musically, they are more akin to the Bunnys than the Drops. The privileged few may have heard the excellent 'Hey Disco Joe' from *Hicks From The Sticks*. A fine introduction.

*Nah Poo* has a harshness which is mainly due to Wylie's scorching guitar. The instrumental 'Seven Names of Wah!' best displays his ability to handle delicate discords. Wylie's other

make this an essential record. 'Why'd You Imitate The Cut-Out?' and 'Seven Minutes To Midnight' are absolute gems. Some of the others may be a little rough, but that's the way they were intended.

A sumptuous debut.  
Mark Phillips

**The Dance**  
In Lust  
Statik

Often the best records are the ones that surprise you. This is one of the best surprises I've had all year. The slightly-pornographic cover will either put you off or turn you on, depending on your views.

The product here is erotic, modern-dance rhythm, free of the pomp and circumstance of Spandau and Duran, and the mindless repetition of the rappers. The music is intelligent, while remaining unashamedly sexual.

For comparisons, start with the B-52's, taking a line through early XTC and recent Bowie. What you end up with is funk that challenges, laughs and excites. Fragmented moments, not unlike Flying Lizards, blend with the smoothest of European soul, to produce an irresistible mixture.

I know not a thing about The Dance, except that they are two white guys, two black guys and a white lady. I only know that I find their sound warm, evocative and delightful. Like I said before, you're bound to spot the cover. Try what's inside, and surprise yourself.

Duncan Campbell

**Neil Young & Crazy Horse**  
Reactor  
WEA

Of all the established songwriters, no one has led such a perplexing trail as Neil Young. Taking chances that would have seen a lesser talent fade into obscurity, Young keeps pulling the surprises.

In the wake of the successful *Rust Never Sleeps*, with its split sides of acoustics and power rock, last year's quiet restraint on *Hawks And Doves* was given the thumbs down, albeit unjustly. *Reactor* reverts to the powerhouse electrics of *Rust*, but without the acoustic contrast.

With Crazy Horse sounding like some professional demolition crew, Young rips into a series of pulverising rockers of numbing intensity. 'Opera Star' sets a frantic pace, with the sound underpinned by a sardonic ho-ho chorus. 'Surfer Joe And Moe The Sleaze' continues the

arrangements, mix-shifting production and often ragged singing, all ensure that *Practical Jokers* is not a record you work out after two or three playings. But the genuinely fine achievements gradually emerge — the three singles ('Dance' has been remixed), 'True Or False' with its glorious climbing melody and cake-icing ending, the middle section of 'Hit The Beach', the irresistible pop chorus of 'More', the buoyant sixties-styled verses of 'Funny Feeling' ... again you come back to bits as often as you do to songs, but, the desire to make the listener work for his supper notwithstanding, there are undeniably talented writers at work here.

The Swingers' debut album is not unlike a Swingers performance: both reward perseverance, but both too could benefit from more overt recognition of the audience. For all that, an absorbing and highly recommended record.

Roy Colbert

**Mental As Anything**  
Cats and Dogs  
Regular

A while back, an English critic said something to the effect that, sooner or later, Mental As Anything are going to be huge, they were so good that it was simply unavoidable. He was talking about the debut album, *Get Wet*, and he was right. It hasn't happened yet (at least not outside of Australia) but it will.

This is the third album, the second being last year's immaculate *Expresso Bongo*, and it further confirms my suspicions that this band is one of the all time great Oz pop bands (and they're not that common) and will be remembered as such.

For the uninitiated, this album's most obvious reference point is the recent turntable hit 'If You Leave Me, Can I Come Too?', but that's just the tip of the iceberg. Songs like 'Beserk Warriors' (about ABBA's marital problems, would you believe), the new single 'Too Many Times' and 'Lookin' for Bird', are every bit its equal, and have that indefinable something that separates good songs from great songs.

I don't know if *Cats and Dogs* is better than the last two albums, but it's every bit their equal, which is to say it's great.

Simon Grigg

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