

Briefs

Ryuichi Sakamoto
Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence
 (Virgin)

With Mr Bowie's photo emblazoned on the cover the unwary could be forgiven for mistaking this for one of his records. It's not. It's the soundtrack to *Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence*, a Pacific war movie in which Bowie stars alongside Tom Conti and Ryuichi Sakamoto. Ryuichi is better known as a founder member of the Yellow Magic Orchestra and this is his soundtrack album. As such it's a collection of pieces of incidental music, most incorporating older and oriental styles of music. It includes the '23rd Psalm' and an embarrassing David Sylvian vocal on 'Forbidden Colours'. The best moment is the theme track, achingly beautiful and worth playing over and over. Advice? See the movie first. DT

Various Artists
Live Letters, Warts and All
 (Music World)

Wanna hear the Thompson Twins before they got famous? Not really, 'cause they weren't a hell of a lot better in 1980 than they are now. As for the rest on this compilation of English bands recorded live at the 101 Club, only the Fixx show any form at all. Their 'Acrobat' is the best song on a decidedly dodgy album. In fact, this record has about as much subtlety as a flick round the legs with a wet towel, especially Huang Chung who are tacky and End Games, which is where I'll stop. AC

Medium Medium
The Glitterhouse (Cherry Red)

This album, a popular import item for about two years, has finally been released locally. Now these boys come from the oh so serious school of British white funk, where anthems to angst are anchored to minimalist bass, drum and guitar combinations. There's not much fun in *The Glitterhouse*. All the songs seem to be about dreams gone wrong or unreachable goals. The music equals the bleakness of the lyrics, with an uneasy and edgy groove to it. An invitation to the dance of death. Best tracks are the powerful 'So Hungry, So Angry' and the strange 'Gury Maharaj Jnr.'. KB

Martin Briley
One Night With A Stranger
 (Mercury)

If you've sampled *The Salt In My Tears* you've probably typed Briley already: a mid-stream 80s version of what used to be known as hard rock, but with the edges smoothed off for mass consumption. Yunno - the John Cougar market. Well, close, but Briley's got a certain verbal adroitness that almost counts for originality. 'Put Your Hands On The Screen' is a very smart jab at TV evangelism. Elsewhere he largely uses the lyrics to maintain his machismo while mocking it. (Check also the 'out-of-my-depth' cover pics.) It's all pretty lightweight though. PT

Carlos Santana
Havana Moon (CBS)

Here the master guitarist pays tribute to the music which put the rhythm in his growing up. A fine salute it is, too. Supported by such perfect collaborators as Booker T. Jones and the Fabulous Thunderbirds, Carlos reworks great rockers like Bobby Parker's 'Watch Your Step' (the basis for the Beatles' 'I Feel Fine' riff), Bo Diddley's 'Who Do You Love' (not definitive), and Chuck Berry's Latinesque 'Havana Moon' (marvellous vocal by Booker T.). Willie Nelson makes a guest appearance, as does Carlo's Dad, Jose, contributing a rather affecting Spanish serenade. KW

Frank Zappa
The Man From Utopia (CBS)

Zappa's musical skills have always outdistanced his abilities as a lyricist. While the Zappa lexicon contains moments of rare wit, too often he has been guilty of the cheapness he ridicules (perhaps that is the point, but it wears thin). This is the case here, with shots at sitting-duck targets. And even the music, usually Zappa's saving grace, sounds over-familiar. There is a cover of Young Jessie's classic rocker 'Mary Lou', which has been done better by the likes of Ronnie Hawkins, Bob Seger and Steve Miller. For completists only. KW

The Call
Modern Romans (Mercury)

The downfall of civilisation begins here? The Call, a North American four piece who've picked up on the bad news chic of the Bunnymen and the more basic The Sound, have decided to try rock'n'roll analogies. *Modern Romans* (or Americans, etc), to their credit, doesn't slouch into self-pitying funeral marches (too often). The first side whacks along with pace and an ear for dynamics while the doomsday stuff is left to the second side. And even some of it ('Violent Times') isn't too bad. GK

The Grapes of Wrath (Epic)

Theatre of Hate fans, prepare to be disappointed with this, former frontman Kirk Brandon's latest venture. The new sound is an all-too-pretentious white synthesis of black spiritual and soul traditions. Despite the band's highly polished instrumental arrangements, this album suffers from laboured and dreary vocals and a bad case of melodramatic overkill. Although Mr Brandon obviously enjoys his newfound role as modern preacher of doom and despair, he may soon find his flock departing in search of more appetising fodder. RR

King Cobra
Magic Rainbow (RCA)

A rum one, this. Scenario follows: Ghanaian trumpeter Eddie Quansah, who seems to have played with everyone from Osibisa to Bob Marley to Cat Stevens, moves to Australia (!), forms Afro-Rock group. Sydney is hardly a haven for black music, even though it does have a couple of good reggae record shops. Quansah's band includes a Yugoslav, a South African, two Aussies and a Maltese. The music owes its largest debt to West African rhythms, but pales beside King Sunny Ade. DC

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