

Records

The Jam Snap

Polydor
Rock'n'roll is littered with sad tales of bands being plundered by unsympathetic record companies releasing countless dusty live tapes and reorganized Greatest Hits. The Kinks and Hendrix are victims who immediately spring to mind.

But every once in a while a band's achievements are given the handling and respect they deserve. The Buzzcocks' *Singles Going Steady*, *Complete Madness* and the Beat's *What Is Beat* are proof of that. Now add to that list what must be the best compilation ever bestowed on a punk band — the Jam's double compilation, *Snap*.

Like *What Is Beat* or the fabulous *Kink Kronikles* (yeah occasionally they were treated right) *Snap* not only accounts for those great Jam singles but it also caters for their best flip-sides and representative album cuts.

Locally it is of even greater value since some of their singles never made it here in any form. So I'm talking about 'News of the World', the brilliant 'Strange Town' (which along with 'Down the Tube Station' and 'Going Underground' are arguably their best singles) the calculated beauty of the reverse, 'Butterfly Collector' and the later 'When You're Young'. Other classics like 'All Around the World', 'A Bomb In Wardour Street', 'Eton Rifles' and the under-rated 'Bitterest Pill' all queue up for honours.

The choice of album tracks (although most have been issued as singles somewhere in the world) and the intelligence behind the inclusion of certain flip sides ('Dreams of Children' and 'Tales From the Riverbank') make it obvious that Weller and co were instrumental in choosing the contents. Bonuses include a remixed and much improved version of the messy 'Funeral Pyre', the demo immediacy of 'That's Entertainment' and a four track live EP, with one song, 'The Great Depression', being something new.

If I believed in putting compilations in my five best albums of the

year then *Snap* and *What Is Beat* would be right there. As it is these two retrospectives indicate just how good things were. It's wishful thinking, but let's dream that 1984 can dawn with bands this great. George Kay

The Fall Fall in A Hole Flying Nun

These guys are close to my heart. The temperament that breeds the Fall's radicalism makes their music so personal and extreme that despite the power of its invention and ideas it lays outside mainstream appreciation, which to me is a damn pity. One marvelled at their Auckland shows at the isocratic understanding within the group and the impish, caustic bawl of Smith. It was his display of Anglophile snobbery that seemed at once to startle and amuse the audience. Moreover, this man Smith's inspiration is decidedly corrosive, identifiably antagonistic to the values of contemporary song. He has guts.

This double live album stretches back to the abrasiveness of *Live At the Witch Trials* to their latest work *Room to Live*. Along the way the Fall have tapped into the power of repetition, a rawness stripped to bare essentials. The violence of this music is made virtually abstract, unstable, achieving a compelling and discordant unity. Just listen to their Falklands commentary 'Marquis Cha Cha' with Robert Wyatt's 'Shipbuilding' and you'll get my meaning. It's a pungent realism to what is genuine and valuable, always striking, always contesting.

At times the sound and recording is hesitant and perhaps the real weapon of the Fall — Hanley's bass — is not turned up enough, but this is a minor grievance. Emphasis, then, is placed more in Riley's spidery organ which gives a brittle edge to the thrash of the band and Smith's severely unprincipled delivery.

As a live album, it has some splendid moments — the sinister opening of 'Impression of J. Temperance', the awesome *Hard Life in Country* and the rambling, disjunctive 'Solicitor in Studio'. I say buy it, it's an important release and a watershed in New Zealand recording. Perhaps *Flying Nun's*

greatest achievement. S.J. Townshend

Freeez Gonna Get You Beggars Banquet

There is in film theory a body of thought called Auteur Criticism which is a search for the real creator of the form of a particular film — going beyond the raw materials like actors and narrative. In the case of Freeez it's a matter of looking at the work of producer, arranger and mixer Arthur Baker. *Gonna Get You* is more Baker's album than that of Freeez, who on the opening track tell us:

*We're the boys from London town
In New York just gettin' down.*



Depeche Mode

They then go on to compare themselves with every hip funk unit around. They are only able to do this because Baker transforms their limp jazz-funk into a majestic wall of sound — the Phil Spector of the 80s — constantly searching for that perfect beat and creating a complex monster of a rhythm like 'L.O.U.'.

There is nothing else on the album that comes close to that masterpiece but every track bears some aspect of Baker's style that makes it well worth listening to. Kerry Buchanan

Depeche Mode Construction Time Again Mute

Anybody who has followed Depeche Mode over the years is probably aware that they have grown up. No longer are they naive Basildon boys. Now they are men of the world. Or at least that seems to be the message built into *Construction Time Again*. Gone is that sweet pop sensibility of the first two albums, that idyllic love of 'See You'. How can we

believe Dave Gahan when he sings "This is more than a party" or "Hope alone won't remove the stains"? This is a very different Depeche Mode.

Earlier this year Depeche Mode released 'Get the Balance Right', a powerful single that on reflection exposed their internal thoughts. It doesn't appear on this album, it just wouldn't fit. Instead this story starts at 'Everything Counts':

*A handshake seals the contract
From the contract there's no turning back*

A cynic forever, Martin Gore must have been truly hurt in business as well as in love.

Gore is a clever man. There is no doubting that. On 'Told You So' he brilliantly bastardises the

Culture Club's debut album of last year, *Kissing To Be Clever*, was a teasing stab at various directions, an attempt at finding the most comfortable skin. With *Colour By Numbers* they've found it.

It's no surprise that it's a continuation and refinement of their four hit singles ('Do You Really Wanna Hurt Me', 'Time', the best, 'Church of the Poison Mind' and 'Karma Chameleon', the last two being on the album) and so it emerges as an effortless concerted commercial motion.

The mood is generally sweet in the Philly-Motown style of delivery that Boy George has down to a fine art. The sting is in the lyrics but they can't interfere with the commanding charm of 'It's A Miracle', 'Miss Me Blind' and 'Stormkeeper'. 'Mister Man' and 'Church of the Poison Mind' are the only songs that try to get tough, and they're pushovers. And while 'Black Money' steals your affections, 'Victims' tries to make its mark as the big ballad, and succeeds.

Every song on *Colour By Numbers* is a potential single, an indication of the album's consistency and Culture Club's knack for craftsmanship. A difficult album to dislike. George Kay

Dance Exponents Prayers Be Answered Mushroom

Call it beginner's luck but Dance Exponents' rapid rise to national prominence remains unrivalled. Admittedly their natural exuberance and friendly disposition has helped but these days you've got to play to your real strength, which in this case is the superior songwriting of Jordan Luck.

So I'd prefer to call them Luck's beginners, as this album is but a satisfying start. Y'see, if Luck has penned 60 songs then surely the 12 here are merely a taste of things to come.

But if this record was a bottle of lager, not a piece of plastic, I'd be thinking: is it watered down, or has someone left the cap off? The Exponents' bubbles are still there but they don't exactly tickle your nose. It would seem producer Dave Marrett found it hard to recapture the band's essential brashness and vitality on vinyl.

But HEY! Don't let that worry you because the songs are neat, super, fab, groovy and really silly. You just can't ignore a refrain like:

Checking to see that your kiss is the same.

By rereading all of your letters again.

And how about the images of bar-room romances conjured up by the loopy 'Swimming to the Table of an Unknown Girl'? There are serious moments, though — 'Envy the Grave' and 'Shattered Ornaments' contain the necessary ingredients of love and despair and I suppose the marvellous 'Victoria' is pretty damn serious.

And that's only mentioning a few — this is better than I thought. Except for poor old 'Poland', that is. If they ever manage to get that right I'll shout them a trip over there.

Still, 11 out of 12 ain't bad at all. Beginner's luck? Nah, Dance Exponents haven't even started to get lucky. Alister Cain

Big Country The Crossing Mercury

Picture a bleak winter's day in rural Scotland. Put it to contemporary music and my bet is you'll have something sounding like Big Country. *The Crossing*, the debut album by this Scots four-piece which includes ex Skid Stuart Adamson, is epic; guitars skirl like bagpipes, drums pound majestically and the singing is rousing.

This is music from the heartland, an appeal from the past couched in modern terms and delivered with an almost religious fervour. For that reason Steve Lillywhite's productions works. His bombastic touch suits these songs, accentuating the very things that cull Big Country from the rest.

The standout track is 'Fields of Fire', one of 1983's great non-hits and anthemic in the way 'London Calling' was way back when. 'In a Big Country', 'Harvest Home' and 'Chance' near those heights.

The Crossing is a remarkable debut album. It has warts — a couple of average tunes and some awkward lyrics — but these don't interrupt its flow and there are sufficient high points here to make Big Country a band worth following. David Taylor

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