

albums

your mouth simultaneously point in different directions, but there are certainly no songs to rival Wombat Williamson's Australian classic 'I Make Chicks Act Like Skippy (When They See Me They Jump)'. The instrumental 'Berwick Road' sounds like a five minute extrapolation on Curtis Mayfield's second fill in 'People Get Ready,' and Jeff Beck might like to hear it. The title song reminds me of Ted Nugent's 'Free For All', not sure why, but it does.

Bobby Mack's *Honeytrap* is a fine Stevie Ray Vaughan album, or at least the similarities are uncanny. And they're more than welcome. 'Love Can Be Cruel' scores higher than anything on *In Step*, with Mack's scorching guitar finding a perfect balance between melody and sizzle. The most interesting song is a ballad, 'Tell Me Who (Do You Love)', the chorus of which repeats the phrase 'who do you love?', the songwriting equivalent of walking 47 miles of barbed wire (ie. by invoking comparisons to that which is holy), but amazingly survives the Diddley curse, even when Mack plays the first half of the dreaded 'Wonderful Tonight' riff.

ANDREW PALMER

ROBBEN FORD AND THE BLUE LINE *Mystic Mile* (Stretch Records/GRP)

Since first recording with Joni Mitchell 20 years ago — while still in his teens! — guitarist Ford has worked with an impressive array of musicians, most prestigious perhaps being his stint with Miles Davis. Something of that range was showcased on Ford's first Blue Line album back in 92. For *Mystic Mile* the focus is more concentrated on the blues. There are fewer guests involved to supplement the basic trio format. And while this may make for a more focused album it also shows up a weakness not evident on its predecessor.

As instrumentalists these guys are simply awesome; as vocalists they have limitations. Ford's voice lacks the soul to take on a classic like 'Worried Life Blues' (you find yourself waiting for the guitar solo). And Roscoe Beck may be a master of the electric bass but he's a mediocre singer on his own 'Say What's On Your Mind'.

But Ford can still write a mighty pop song. The title track is exquisitely languorous while 'Busted Up' is joyously upbeat and contains some marvellous syncopated wah-wah playing. Most impressive of the non-originals is a remake of Cream's 'Politician' where the trio kicks some much needed life into a stodgy old riff.

PETER THOMSON

THE FREDDY JONES BAND *Waiting For The Night* (Capricorn)

One of the few joys of record reviewing is reconciling the anything-to-sell-it promotional rhetoric of record companies with what the music actually sounds like. The Freddy Jones Band are a fine example of this. The advertisements entice with (quote) "an invigorating mix of rock, R & B, and jazz" which is suspect enough, except I only hear the ghost of Billy Ray Cyrus' past: country-rock. Or rather, an uninspired, light-weight Eagles-without-wings. The "jazz" connection is the intriguing one. Having carefully perused the CD I'll concede that for about 20 seconds of 'The Puppet' the guitar player phrases his notes in such a way as to suggest Wes Montgomery imitating some mid-period Little Dutch Dick, but other than that there's no jazz here (there's not even any "jazz" either). What there is, is a little bit of this and a little bit of that, which adds up to a whole lot of nothing.

ANDREW PALMER

BILDERINE *Split Seconds* (Flying Nun)

As promised by the Nun, here is the third instalment of the four CD retrospective of the career of Bill Direen. Over 16-tracks *Split Seconds* covers three important periods in Direen's musical career — his earliest band (Christchurch punk pioneers the Vacuum), the classic early-80s line-up of the Builders, and material recorded in New York during his 1989 world tour.

Starting at the beginning is usually the best place. In 1977, Direen formed the Vacuum with bassist Stephen Cogle and drummer Peter Stapleton. They are represented here by two tracks, '(Love In The) Retail Trade' and 'Remember Breaking Up', both extremely VU influenced.

The Vacuum became Kaza Portico in 1980 upon the arrival of keyboardist Alan Meek, and during March of the following year Direen formed the original Builders with Meek and current Bats drummer Malcom Grant. Four songs from that period are included here. 'Baby Cum Back' is a noisy but melodic studio jam complete with backwards vocals, and the rocking 'Crossword' features some fairly exuberant drumming and keyboard

work. Completing the line-up is the dark, otherworldly 'Skulls' and the beautifully disturbing 'Circles of Blood.'

Jumping ahead now to 1989 and PPI Studios in New York City. Here Direen was reunited with Meek and joined by ex-Clean Hamish Kilgour for a brief recording session that resulted in *The Hat* tape. From that time comes 'Nutshell of Love', the hypnotic 'Serious' and perhaps the album's finest moment, the delicate melancholy 'Trees.'

Sandwiched between the Builders early material and the NY recordings are various solo and collaborative projects, the most notable being the haunting 'Spell', featuring Alec Bathgate of the Tall Dwarfs, and a gorgeous laconic ode to the capital city, 'Wellington Song.'

Overall *Split Seconds* is less immediately appealing than the previous compilation, *Beatin Hearts*, but after repeated listens becomes just as pleasing. Look out for the final chapter, *ConCH3* (first released by F.Nun in March 1985), sometime in May.

JOHN RUSSELL



curtis mayfield

VARIOUS ARTISTS *A Tribute to Curtis Mayfield* (Warner Bros)

To many Curtis Mayfield is best known for his dude vocal on the movie theme song 'Superfly'. But few realise his significance as a popular song writer — he's written and sung as a member of the Impressions in the 60s and since then he's been prolific as a performer or producer until 1990 when a lighting rig collapsed on him paralysing him below the neck. With his massive catalogue of fine songs it was no doubt easy to get the finest singers to pay tribute here. The underappreciated Gladys Knight takes on the pro-civil rights 'Choice of Colours', while Lenny Kravitz chooses duderera 'Billy Jack' and Narada Michael Walden chooses one of Curtis' most adventurous 70s tracks '(Don't Worry) If There's A Hell Below, We're All Going to Go'.

Few writers have so successfully as Mayfield combined melodic beauty with veiled but cut-

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