

albums

for that particular style of repetition, with 'Sylvia' and 'Sassafras' following the same formula. Throw in the distorted pop of songs like 'Witches' and 'Sometimes', and the twisted R'n'B of 'Wimple', and you've covered the album's territory.

There are tons of good arrangements — the boy vocals have that ability to hang precariously just off the edge of the note, the guitars distort and feedback throughout, the keyboards swirl and dirge and the bass wanders up and down its parts. Everything seems to be in place, but it fails the spark to lift it above the sum of its parts.

DARREN HAWKES

LOVES UGLY CHILDREN Cold Water Surf (Flying Nun)

And now a message from our sponsors. Loves Ugly Children release their first EP for Flying Nun. Their new sound really does get in. It's fresh. It's now. It's you. Do you really think you can make it through the 90s without owning at least one copy of *Cold Water Surf*? Don't become the laughing stock of your neighbourhood by missing out on *Cold Water Surf*'s frenetic, jagged, spiky, pointed, barbed (thanks Roget) power-pop. *Cold Water Surf* delivers more powerful pop, lush guitars and lyrical wit than any other contemporary b(r)ands. Not one, not two, not three, not even four, but five great songs. Buy now, stocks can't last, and kids, remember, Santa likes kiwi music too.

KEVIN LIST

NEIL DIAMOND Live In America (Sony)

Neil Diamond has released more live albums than many present-day artists have made studio ones. The best is still his first, the *Hot August Night* album, recorded in '72, but this double CD set shows he hasn't lost the art of working a crowd.

Beginning with the fanfare of 'America', it's virtually a greatest hits package, with Diamond powering through 'I Am ... I Said', 'Forever In Blue Jeans', 'Song Sung Blue', 'Kentucky Woman', 'Sweet Caroline', 'Cherry Cherry', a stirring version of 'You Don't Bring Me Flowers' and a further 24 obvious crowd pleasers.

The major disappointments are the studio overdubs and the polished production, that can render the odd song almost lifeless.

Realistically, this album is a purchase suitable for the fanatical fan only. For a truly 'going off' live document, pick-up his first.

JOHN RUSSELL



Lyle Lovett

LYLE LOVETT I Love Everybody (Sony)

Although it's likely to be overshadowed by his increasingly public life, *I Love Everybody* is a very wonderful album. Gone are the big bands and gospel extravagance of his previous two records, with Lovett opting this time for a simple, acoustic based ensemble. The 18 songs on show range from jealous odes to a boy with skinny legs, to a tribute to penguins ('Penguins are so sensitive to my needs,' sings Lyle), to a smutty song about the attractions of a record store employee. It is like being stuck at a table with someone and not being quite sure whether they're a dangerous psychopath or just a sentimental drunk. Interspersed throughout are

some of the most affecting ballads of Lovett's career in 'Just The Morning' and 'Old Friend'; the juxtaposition is, I think, part of the plan. The same guy who can sing a tender romantic ballad like 'Moon On My Shoulder' can also pen and sing (in 'Hello Grandma') a song about paedophilia, or as Lyle puts it himself at one point: 'Look around, and you will see / This world is full of creeps like me.' If at times he's a little too smart for his own good, his humour and his heart triumph. The thing is, by the sounds of *I Love Everybody* they don't seem to be particularly healthy. Yes, a wonderfully nasty little album.

GREG FLEMING

SUICIDAL TENDENCIES Suicidal For Life (Sony)

I'm in my room listening to *Suicidal For Life* and my mom comes in and she says: "We're worried about you son, we're worried about what you're listening to and we think you're on drugs." And I go: "Don't worry Mom, I'm OK, I just want a Pepsi." But Dad comes in as well, and he says: "Son, we're here to advise you like the sticker on the front of that filth you're poisoning your mind with says." And so we all sit down in my room and listen to the classic, well produced speed metal of *Suicidal For Life* and Dad says: "It's just like the last one." But Mom reckons it's a bit mellower and I'm going: "It could be awesome but for all the annoying fiddly solos that detract from the Mogadonish metal."

Still, I'm real glad Suicidal Tendencies took the time off from their busy 'slag Rage Against The Machine' campaign to even make another record. As we listen, Dad starts to get real agitated at all the improper language being used and I say to him: "Hey Dad, it's the lingo of the street you dig. It don't have the same impact if they sing about 'not giving a monkey's' or 'no bullpoos'."

Dad's not having a bar of it and decides censorship is the only answer. "Son, with a little remastering the whole family could enjoy life in the streets the way it really is, even lovely old grandma."

Incensed at Dad's un-American attitude to free speech, I pull out my Uzi and proceed to dust off my olds. "'Cause I'm not crazy, they're the one's that are crazy, they just kept bugging me, and all I wanted was one goddamn motherfucking Pepsi."

KEVIN LIST

MADONNA Bedtime Stories (Warners)

Sadly, a new Madonna album is past being an event, and *Bedtime Stories* is no exception. She no longer has the ability to generate the frenzied hype that surrounded her from the days of *True Blue* until the end of the *Blonde Ambition Tour*. And it's not just a case of familiarity breeding contempt, Madonna has forgotten how to write a good song. The last truly great piece of work she produced was 'Justify My Love', and that was penned by Kravitz, it's a sorry state of affairs.

On *Bedtime Stories*, Madonna's in love, rather than groaning through the throes of fake lust that consigned *Erotica* to a home in a place called Dogsville. Consequently, this album hardly has a pulse. It's ballad city. Now Smokey can get away with doing this, 'cause he's got the tunes, but Madonna and her team of writers, including Babyface and Herbie Hancock, have amassed a collection of bores. There's no point in even mentioning song titles as none deserve the honour of distinction.

Perhaps the failure of *Bedtime Stories* is due to a brilliant pop singer wanting to be viewed as a serious 'artist'. Where's the logic in that? What's wrong with being a brilliant pop singer? The sooner she returns to writing slices of heaven like 'Dress You Up' and 'Lucky Star', the better.

JOHN RUSSELL

MELVINS Stoner Witch (Atlantic)

A Melvins album is always a good time to wax lyrical about rock, spelt ROCK. They revel in the fact they are a loud, slow and overweight power trio. Leave subtlety and angst for the guys who want to get all sullen about their photo being in *Rolling Stone*. This is a different trip altogether. *Stoner Witch* is all about grabbing hold of as much power as possible and doing what you can. Don't be thinking this is some Pantera/Biohazard style stompathon though. These guys are far too clever for that. At no time does this slip into the dictatorial screaming associated with most heavy rock nowadays. The Melvins seem to be more con-

cerned with just slowly crushing with sheer bass heavy weight. For every rockin'-out, foot-on-the-monitor, head shaking track like 'Sweet Willy Rollbar', there's a 'Goose Freight Train', which drags just part of a riff through a song, sort of a lead footed rock monster, or even 'Roadbull', which quickly turns from a rock song into a mournful snare and whistle march. Hell, the whole album ends up with 'Lividty' which is pretty much tones, stray drumbeats and mumbling.

It's certainly a less 'catchy' release than their last major label effort (which would be *Houdini*), but considering the Melvins' last actual record was the AmRep released *Prick*, and that was nothing but weird sound-bites and heavily distorted snippets of songs, *Stoner Witch* is a nice compromise. None of those straight faced Kiss covers or things that sound like Kiss covers. There's no need to be satirical when King Buzzo has the best overblown rock voice you've heard. His best moments ('At The Snake') sound like Ozzy doing a Europe song while on a bunch of downers and bad dust, which is scarier than Danzig or any of those guys could ever hope to be. Instead, you have here the successful amalgam of a really twisted Flipper-esque musical vision and an urge to recreate the spirit of heavy rock, from 'Inna-Gada-Da-Vida' to the last good Zeppelin album. That, tender rock fans, is something we can live with.

KIRK GEE

TOM PETTY Wildflowers (Warner Brothers)

Rick Rubin produces Petty's second solo album (his first for Warner Brothers). As with Johnny Cash's last, Rubin keeps things pretty simple (bar the odd orchestral arrangement here and there). Songwise there's a few surprises: the folkie Tim Buckley-like 'Don't Fade On Me', the country tinged title track, but again it's the usual Petty collection of rockers ('Cabin Down Below', 'Honey Bee'), moral narratives ('To Find A Friend') and brooding ballads ('Wake Up Time' and 'It's Good To Be King'). Certainly it's the most reflective album of his career. "When I add up what I've left behind / I don't want to lose no more," he sings at one point. It's Petty's emotional rather than musical adventurousness which sustains *Wildflowers* which is, songwise, at times rather thin.

GREG FLEMING

ASWAD Rise and Shine (BMG)

Aswad celebrate two decades as one of the UK's top reggae bands with an album that mixes their pop smarts with a deep roots sensibility. *Rise and Shine* marks the maturity of a band that at one stage was accused of sacrificing its musical roots. With a tight riffing horn section and some dreader that dread lyrics, Aswad charge into another decade.

The radio friendly 'Shine' is an echo of earlier chart topping efforts but the band toughens up for 'Warriors Charging' and 'World of Confusion'. Yeah mon, *Rise and Shine* is a joyous celebration—the summer sound of a reggae band that straddles two worlds with infectious optimism.

MARK REVINGTON

DEAD CAN DANCE Toward The Within (4AD / Flying In)

I simply cannot imagine a union more destiny bound and divinely balanced than the sublime collision of nations, times and cultures created by Australian based Lisa Gerrard and Irish based Brendan Perry, aka Dead Can Dance. He has the voice of Frank Sinatra, unclouded by mob connections and nostalgia. She has, in her vocal chords, an instrument of unearthly resonance, the sound of which I would swiftly betray the cream of my favourite vocal enchantresses for.

After six albums, this most transporting of global (hell, universal!) acts have recorded the shock equivalent of Nirvana's *Unplugged in New York* in a live set. Of 15 tracks, all but four are previously unreleased. New songs to die for include the perfectly placed (and mercifully uninterrupted by 'invited audience' applause) coupling of 'I Can See Now' and 'American Dreaming', both featuring lead vocals by Perry. They provide a perfect, poetic juxtaposition of prophecy ('There's nothing more dangerous, than a man with nothing to lose / Nothing to live for / And nothing to prove) and social comment (We've been too long American dreaming / I think we've all lost our way / Flail on, somnambulistic, maniacal, in the dark'). Then there's the sweet swoon of 'Don't Fade Away',

in: 'We'll dance through our isolation, seeking solace in the wisdom we bestow / Turning thoughts to the here and ever after / Consuming fear in our fiery halos.' From there, the huge leaps to the more earth bound elements of songs like the Gerrard lead 'Cantarra' (pure banshee incarnate) and the ethereal, yet bass tribal, 'Yulunga (Spirit Dance)', seem but heady skips.

You may not have expected the 'live', but you can certainly rely on the intoxication. 'Bring on a symphony of bird cries.'

BRONWYN TRUDGEON

CYNDI LAUPER Twelve Deadly Cyns (Sony)

There are no real pop stars anymore — no Durans, no Whams, no Culture Clubs and certainly no Cyndi Laupers. Throughout the 80s, along with Madonna, she was the quintessential female pop icon. *Twelve Deadly Cyns* collects the big hits from that period.

Perhaps unwisely, all the singles run together for the first half of the record — 'Girls Just Wanna Have Fun', 'Money Changes Everything', 'All Through The Night', 'She Bop', 'Change Of Heart', Marvin's 'What's Going On' and the beautiful double of 'Time After Time' and 'True Colours' — and this results in the second half falling flat, as by the time Lauper released *Hat Full Of Stars* in 1993, she had lost the pop sensibility that made her special.

But that's a small gripe, 'cause overall *Twelve Deadly Cyns* is ideal for those of us who like the convenience of prime cuts all in the one place.

JOHN RUSSELL

SHUDDER TO THINK Pony Express Record (Epic)

The first of the Dischord crew to defect to a major label, Shudder to Think have finally weighed in with that major label debut, and I'll be a monkey's uncle if it isn't a nice improvement from their last offering. They're a band who have always had a pretty surreal element happening, due largely to vocalist Craig Wedren's odd falsetto voice and cut up, dream state lyrics. At times it could all get just a little too fey. No problem with that here, as the musical side of things is more solid than I've ever heard from these guys. Guitars chop and slash precisely with a clean rhythm section, and it all gives Mr Wedren something to wrap his voice around. It didn't hurt anything having Ted Nicely and Andy Wallace handling production and mixing, respectively. They've created a really perfect sound for Shudder to Think; not guitar-stud big, but by no means tinny either. Best moments seem to come when the band cut loose and rock, with plenty of those patented DC tempo changes and vocals leaping from a rolling melody into some odd stratosphere. If Jane's Addiction can do as well as they did in the mainstream, I don't see why *Pony Express Record* shouldn't at least push Shudder to Think into some sort of cult notoriety.

KIRK GEE

THE BLACK CROWES America (BMG)

They are wearing their politically incorrect hearts, bless 'em, on their sleeves this time. Well, not quite a heart — it is, in fact an untrimmed pussy, spilling suggestively out of a tiny bikini bottom, decorated with the stars and stripes. It's typical of the record as a whole — a brash, belligerent, but often compelling rock 'n' roll record. The Black Crowes are still of the belief this stuff can redeem you from all manner of sins. Made amidst apparently heavier than usual debaucheries and fuelled by the always volatile relationship between the Robinson brothers, *America* may not be the masterwork the boys claim (again, too many riffs parading as songs, and Chris Robinson's vocals reveal their limitations spread over an entire hour), but it's easily the best Black Crowes record ever, and a lot more interesting than, say, *Voodoo Lounge*. The blueprint here is clearly the Stones' 70s classic *Exile On Main St*, and on songs like 'Gone', 'Non Fiction', the funky 'High Head Blues' and the obligatory big ballad 'Descending', they approach the amoral grandeur of the Glimmer Twins at their most debauched. After this they should never be underestimated.

GREG FLEMING

KITCHENS OF DISTINCTION Cowboys and Aliens (One Little Indian)

Consistently unfashionable, English three-piece Kitchens of Distinction have produced a string of exceptional albums since the late