



Stereolab

Velvets/Can influenced, organ-driven mantras hark back to a simpler time when bands thought one chord was all you really needed.

Indeed, time and again Stereolab have proved themselves to be the undisputed masters of rock 'n' roll restraint, never using two chords where one will suffice. But when it's called for, they can play that second chord... and how. Its arrival is like being woken from a blissful slumber on a sunny rural train platform by a passing Tokyo-bound bullet train. The senses reel, but there's barely time for a 'what the...', before you're dragged, twisting and spinning, into its slipstream. All the while the song, the groove, the note, thrums and resonates in the space between your ears. Which is not to say Stereolab are all about scaring the living crap out of you — the pristine pop of 'Lo Boob Oscillator', or the gentle strains of 'Toneburst (Country)' show there's more than one string to the Stereolab bow. Yet it's the sheer inexorable sense of purpose that Stereolab bring to bear on track after track that makes their music so compelling. Overall, the 13 tracks here make a convincing argument for Stereolab being the most consistently wonderful (and prolific) singles band of the decade, and for *Refried Ectoplasm* being their best album yet.

MARTIN BELL

## SKUNK ANANSIE

Paranoid and Sunburnt (Virgin)

They've got the metal of Therapy and the funk-rock of Dub War, and they're filling the hole left by Silverfish. They're Skunk Anansie — driven drumming combined with granite guitars, providing the perfect stomping ground for the stunning vocals of Skin.

Not only is Skin (the six foot

black skinhead in army duds) one of the most striking (and frightening) female singers to come out of rock's ranks, she's also one of the most talented. Her vocal range doesn't disintegrate into banshee screams. The angrier she gets the more control she exerts, making sure you get to the lyrics while you're knocked about by the power of the band. Not politically correct so much as politically pissed off, their songs rage about plonkers who 'intellectualise my blackness', about domestic violence ('Blanked out your anger with my face / Wasted my days to hide disgrace'), about abuse and pain and anger. If happy people have no stories, then Skunk Anansie have had it tough.

JOHN TAITE

## BIG AUDIO DYNAMITE

Planet BAD (Sony)

## CARTER, THE UNSTOPPABLE SEX MACHINE

Straw Donkey (Chrysalis)

Big Audio Dyna-shite, more like. Mick Jones hasn't go much to show for 10 years with this plinkety plonkety synth outfit. He made a wrong turn after the Clash and was too stubborn (or stupid) to turn back. Mick knew if he stuck at it long enough, something would come along. Three songs came along, 'Rush', 'Looking for a Song' and, to a lesser degree, 'The Globe'. The rest of this best of amounts to forgettable, toe-curling blah from a former punk hero dabbling with twee synth pop. The mighty fell with a thud. Mick's pointless hopes are summed up on a two cent lolly on the album cover, meekly proclaiming: 'Lennon Lives'.

As for Carter, well, the Unstoppable Sex Machine seem to have come across the immovable creative block in recent years. Hopefully they'll just give it up gracefully and leave us with the memories. These memories. *Straw Donkey* is seven years of Carter singles, from the early 'Sheriff Fatman' to the dipsomaniac tale of 'Anytime, Anyplace, Anywhere', and their lawsuit riddled zenith, 'After the Watershed'. There are also

views from the downward spiral, with 'Glam Rock Cops' and 'Young Offender's Mum'.

Their Pet Shop Pistols brand of synth punk, the loud thrashy guitars and the drum machines, all seemed so simple and effective. The lyrics were quirky, the hooks were catchy and, in the early 90s, it all seemed like maybe a weird duo with some jagged pop tunes could storm the charts. But now we're in the midst of pin-ups and guitar heroes again, and poor old Carter don't stand an ugly dog's chance. Fun while it lasted, though.

JOHN TAITE

## SUKA

Nimrodiabolique (IMD)

Right from the opening bars of 'Full Fathom Six', you know you're on to a good thing. Dunedin's Suka have managed to capture the fire of their live performance on *Nimrodiabolique* — 14 tracks of sweetness, bitterness, melody, and noise.

Tracks like 'Ferment' and 'Mister' are fiery, fast paced numbers. 'Eet Personal...' entices you with its sheer playfulness. 'Death of a Moa' is a beautiful acoustic guitar/cello arrangement. 'Drift' is a lengthy, sinister dirge.

The production is great — crystal clear, but still warm and inviting. With this CD, Suka have produced probably the best New Zealand release of the year. Buy it, and love it.

SHAUN JURY

## MERCURY REV

See You On the Other Side (Beggars Banquet)

Even after firing their frontman/lead persona David Baker, Mercury Rev have somehow made an album that could well be the ultimate progression from *Boces*, which featured Baker's last



Suka

and finest contribution. All the regular hallmarks are there — songs that start from simple, snappy rhythms and analog twiddlings, then build through swirling guitars, flutes and Beatlesque vocal harmonies, until they've somehow become full blown psychedelia. It all sounds somewhere between good prog rock and the Smashing Pumpkins if they lost the commercial aspirations and self pity and just concentrated on the jams.

The lack of Mr Baker does seem to have let the band tighten up the stoner meanderings, and even get down and hard in an early Amboy Dukes style in places. *See You On the Other Side* is certainly worth the attention of those who enjoy finely crafted and chemically influenced music, and the guitar player's name is Grasshopper, so it gets the 'recommended' stamp.

KIRK GEE

## TAPPA ZUKIE

Tappa Zukie in Dub (Blood and Fire/Chant)

The sound of Jamaica, 1976, drum and bass-wise rhythms from David Sinclair, aka Tappa Zukie. More from the Blood and Fire label set up to re-release crucial roots reggae. It comes with excellent liner notes from Steve Barrow, a white English boy who was around when this dub collection was recorded and, almost 20 years later, recorded the interview that's included inside.

Tappa Zukie was just 17 when his mother packed him off to England 'cuase she didn't like the company he was keeping. He returned to JA in 1974, and hung round with legendary producer Bunny Lee. He bugged Lee so much that he was eventually given eight rhythm tracks, voiced them in two hours, and came up with the *MPLA* album. The 'MPLA' track resurfaces here in dub, along with a whole bunch of well-known rhythms from people like Robbie Shakespeare, Earl 'Chinna' Smith and Santa Davis, collectively known as the Musical Intimidators.

Tappa knows where to find the reverb button, but mostly his dub is created by dropping instruments in and out of the mix, all recorded in King Tubby's studio, with that legendary warm sound, like summer never went away. The man himself is still in JA today, with his own

pressing plant and a catalogue of artists like U Roy, Max Romeo and Brigadier Jerry.

MARK REVINGTON

## SWERVEDRIVER

Ejector Seat Reservation (Tri-Star)

Perhaps they weren't dropped by Creation because of this album. Perhaps.

Swervedriver have gone all psychedelic on us and, lets be honest, that's not what we wanted from them. Even the album title points to their escapist desires.

*Ejector Seat* opens with an instrumental, 'Single Finger Salute', but it's not a raging, pulsing, two-headed sex beast, it's a polite little mood piece. Track two, 'Bring Me the Head of the Fortune Teller', touches on country, and makes you wonder if their talent for a great chorus is long gone. What the hell has happened to the raging fire of the sons of Mustang Fords? (The title of track four, 'Son of Jaguar E', might explain something).

*Ejector Seat* is full of acoustic guitars and trippy effects. Yes, it is very relaxing, comparable to Ride's *Carnival of Light*. But as nice as it all is, it sounds, ironically, like they've lost that Swervedriver feeling. The guts are being worn as garters.

JOHN TAITE

## VARIOUS ARTISTS

### Sound and Pressure:

Volume One

(Pressure Sounds)

More classic reggae, this time from the Pressure Sounds label, which is an offshoot of On U Sound. *Volume One* is a tasty taster of the artists available on the label, and compelling evidence of the good work they're doing in bringing these classics out on CD. It opens with the easy lilting skank of Keith Hudson's 'Barbican Dub', which appeared on the *Brand* CD as 'Darkness Dub'. Then it's straight into Horace Andy's 'Problems', which he recut for his *In the Light/Dub* set. Augustus Pablo's melodica gets a workout over the top of congas for 'Ras Menilik Congo'. There's Prince Far I, more Keith Hudson, Little Roy and, the stand out, the tortured vocals of Black Skin the Prophet on 'Red

Blood'. A vital collection for anyone into heartbeat rhythms.

MARK REVINGTON

## THE LEVELLERS

Zeitgeist

(China Records)

There probably isn't a nice way of saying it: the Levellers sound like the 90s version of Dexy's Midnight Runners. It's the violins, you know, the folk abomination that turns any attempt at rock and roll into fiddly diddle dos.

They're so bloody 'of the land' you hope they go the whole hog and travel in ye olde caravans, dressed in medieval rags, playing to squirrels and peasants in forrest clearings. Mr Leveller likes to say 'hey' in every song, he goes on about how 'dreaming birds have flown', and sings of 'the goddess of everything burned' and 'Mr Tree is a friend to me'. Well, he didn't sing the tree one, but you get the picture.

I guess if you wanted a spot of the Waterboys and Back To The Planet sitting around a cauldron of weed water, then this sort of carry on would thrill you out of your dungarees. Anyone else should just tell them to folk off.

JOHN TAITE

## VARIOUS ARTISTS

### Judge Dredd

Original Motion Picture Soundtrack (Sony 550 Music/Epic Soundtrax)

Here's one that's been flexing my CD player's programme button. With new tracks, all essential for collectors, from the Cure (the impassioned 'Dredd Song'), The The (the foreboding 'Darkness Falls') and the Cocteau Twins (the sublime 'Need Fire'), plus White Zombie's way rockin' 'Super-Charger Heaven', the good groove of Leftfield's 'Release the Pressure', and Alan Silvestri's tension-filled orchestral score, it's certainly an eclectic bag, and not one you often feel the need to empty all at once.

I recommend playing the disc in two parts — the first five tracks to get you moving, and the orchestral tracks to keep you put. This has got to be the best project Sylvester Stallone's face (in full Judge Dredd regalia, recognisable only by its sneer) has endorsed in quite some years.

BRONWYN TRUDGEON

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