

> ALBUMS <

DAM NATIVE Kaupapa Driven Rhymes Uplifted (Tangata)

Aotearoa hip hop has really come of age in the last couple of years. A new maturity — evident in the evolution of a distinctive local identity — has already brought excellent recent material from DLT, and Lost Tribe, and now the much-anticipated (and often delayed) album from Dam Native.

KDRU may not have much in the way of poppy chorus hooks (aside from Teremoana Rapley's lines on 'Horrid One', and Che Fu's soul section of 'The Son'), but DAM's kool style, instilled with a flax-roots credibility, doesn't adhere to modern rap formula — opting instead to filter a myriad of reggae and jazz influences through the songs. Producer Zane Lowe gives 'Extremities' a subdued eeriness, adds an upbeat swagger to 'Battle Styles', and a real flow in the interludes.

Like the three singles, KDRU holds the balance between statement and understatement, and the lyrical weight is offset by the often low-key vocal delivery of Daniel Haimona and crew.

Adopting a holistic cultural approach, Dam Native have incorporated hip hop's 'Four Realms Of Existence' into a contemporary Maori context, and in the process, created an album with both indigenous relevance and an international flavour — and maybe one of the finest local releases this year.

TROY FERGUSON

THE VERVE Urban Hymns (Hut)

When the Verve split up two years ago, after the relative commercial failure of *A Northern Soul*, it seemed to be the end for a band whose self-belief and arrogance couldn't tolerate failure at any level. Their re-emergence this year from their "gravity grave" saw them wiser, more patient, more appreciative of each other, and carrying a blazing set of new songs more powerful and moving than anything they'd previously even hinted at.

So *Urban Hymns*, two years in the making, is the end product of lessons learned from a band who know they're dead lucky to be getting another grab at pop's glitter — and this time they don't blow it. It has to begin with 'Bitter Sweet Symphony', a torch song of personal/social disaffection ironically now 'owned' by Allen Klein, one of the operators that makes life so bitter(sweet). Admirably the band wrote it off as just showbiz. Next up is 'Sonnet', a beautiful ballad with Ashcroft's assurance, 'Yes there's love if you want it / Don't sound like a sonnet'. From there a change of pace with the Zeppelin stamp of 'The Rolling People', the ideal contrast to the following wracked country soul of 'The Drugs Don't Work' — a song criminally dislodged from the Number

One spot in the British charts by Elton John's mawkish re-make of his awful 'Candle In The Wind'.

Ethereal interlude, 'Neon Wilderness', recorded incidentally in the dying minutes of the album's studio time, essentially divides the album in two. 'Space and Time', with Ashcroft admitting 'I just can't make it alone', is the first of six superb ballads, lush, moving symphonies of hope, as in 'Lucky Man', or helplessness as in the refrain of 'Life is a game you've tried' in the countryish 'Velvet Morning'. This album may end with the cracking call for action of 'Come On', but *Urban Hymns* is predominantly about beautifully conveyed personal angst. Album of the year, no contest.

GEORGE KAY

EVERCLEAR So Much for the Afterglow (Capitol)

It could only have been the most cynical among us that managed to remain unmoved (in the up and down directions) by Everclear's breakthrough album, *Sparkle and Fade*. And I'll bet those cynics will be busting their cruelly sneering jaws with glee when they hear the many ways in which *So Much for the Afterglow* imitates its predecessor. The only real diversions from an otherwise strict adherence to the proven game plan, are the aptly titled scratch-rock



CHRIS KNOX

instrumental, 'El Distorto Melodica', the odd funny little sample (listen hard for the 'oh, oh's' in 'Normal Like You'), and the album opening, Beach Boys-style intro to the title track (which only sings 'gimmick' to my ears). The appropriately speedy 'Amphetamine' is even about a girl called Amphetamine, just to prove things aren't moving very far on the casting front either — still, it sure does fade out pretty. While it all adds up to a new album you could like as much as the old one, repetition always tends to come out sounding more watered down than original inspiration, and that's what will disappoint you.

BRONWYN TRUDGEON

CHRIS KNOX Yes!! (Flying Nun)

Better than *Seizure* (previously my favourite Knox solo) with more experimentation in terms of song and vocal styles.

Knox may be a modern Kiwi folk singer with songs to make us look at ourselves, both personally and politically (see 'Song to Welcome the Onset of Maturity' and 'Song for 1990' as examples of both) but on 'Pibroch' he goes one step further and adds a reflective, melancholic (Leonard Cohen-ish??) lilt to his voice which makes it a treat, both in a hunched over the lyric sheet and a swirling-with-a-pint kind of way. If that is a nod to the folk generation, then 'Uncoupled' is Knox's tribute to

Eurobeat, and Reed/Velvets get a look in on 'Tantum to Treasury.' For the word-geeks, there's the four line masterpiece 'Almost Tempted', which should turn more heads than any epic poem with its sheer building brilliance.

Yes!!, as an exclamation of final and life-changing understanding, is quite easily Chris Knox's best solo album yet.

JESSE GARON

SWEET 75 Sweet 75 (Geffen)

Whoever started the rumour that Krist Novoselic's new band had made a lounge album should win the Tall Tale Run Amok Award for 1997. Singer Yva Las Vegas has got a set of lungs on her that could smash a

martini glass at 50 paces; and although she keeps such talents under wraps as you ease into the album, when she finally lets the cat out of the bag on track three ('Bite My Hand'), it's pretty obvious she's not one of the gentle people. I suggest diving in at the guitar end first, where often maniacally inventive arrangements will lead you through a proliferation of primo horn playing (that's big Herb Alpert on the Venezuelan number, 'La Vida'), with much of the time kept by some splintering stick work from one 'William' Rieffin (Ministry saga followers might be interested to note). It's a little bit country, it's a lot rock 'n' roll, and I don't recommend it for a civilised soiree soundtrack.

BRONWYN TRUDGEON

dominating independent record label (Ninja Tunes), running a highly successful club night, starting a multimedia company — which put together the CD-ROM which comes with this album (games, videos, biography — the usual sort of stuff) — as well as turning their talents to reworking other people's music. They're back now, and back with an album large on hype and publicity, but surprisingly low on good songs.

Not too often is there the jaw-dropping 'wow' factor you'd have hoped for with this record. In fact, some of the material seems to be far from inventive, perhaps a consequence of the album's long period in the production process. 'Every Home a Prison' features spoken



SWEET 75

TANYA DONELLY Love Songs For Underdogs (4AD)

Love Songs For Underdogs hardly marks a radical shift in Donnelly's signature sound. Fans of Throwing Muses and Belly will be familiar with the musical stylings on offer here, but as the title suggests, it does display a softer underbelly than she has previously revealed. This is due in part to a more direct lyrical approach, which eschews some of the wilfully cryptic and perverse tendencies of Donnelly's previous work. Occasionally, this makes for a less interesting listen — particularly when Donnelly slips into the grandiose sentiments of 'Mysteries of the Unexplained' or 'Clipped'. The gorgeous Sinead-like lament of 'Manna' aside, Donnelly's improbably girlish voice is unable to impart the necessary gravity these heart-felt lyrical moments demand. Far more effective is the off-the-wall pop-smarts of opener 'Pretty Deep'. Here, sweet 'n' sour vocals, over-driven guitars and a stunning melody are whipped into a heady brew — frothy on top, but with a kick like a mule. Or perhaps a goat. For on the delightfully irreverent 'Goat Girl', Donnelly is found, 'thinking goatish thoughts / Dreaming goatish dreams / Digging up tin cans / Chewing on your sleeve.'

It's been nigh on two years since Tanya Donnelly's former band Belly breathed their last. The usual bout of soul searching that comes when a band breaks-up seems to have done little long-term damage to the Donnelly psyche. Her ability to write a winning tune, with unexpected chord changes and tempo twists slipped in for good measure, remains undiminished. In spite of the odd lyrical blue, it's clear she's not about to fall into comfortable indie-middle-age just yet.

MARTIN BELL

COLDCUT Let Us Play (Ninja Tune)

Coldcutters Jonathan More and Matt Black haven't been very musically productive in the past three. Instead, they've been setting up a world-

word from Jello Biafra, while William Burroughs sneaks in posthumously for a few words as well. Hasn't this been done before? Another track, 'Timber', samples something which sounds like Deep Forest, and comes off sounding like... well, Deep Forest. Of course, when Coldcut are good, they're damn good and this is the case with a select few cuts here. 'More Beats and Pieces', with its near-industrial noises and samples is faultless, and on 'Rubaiyat', Coldcut show they can do the breakbeat thing as well as anyone. But the best is saved for last, the humour-filled 'I'm Wild About That Thing'. Then, and really only then, do Coldcut live up to the hype.

DOMINIC WAGHORN

BJORK Homogenic (Mother)

'If travel is searching / And home what's been found / I'm not stopping / I'm going hunting / I'm the hunter / I'll bring back the goods / But I don't know when...'

So opens the next chapter for the little songstress who could, and as for those goods, they're right here right

now. This lead lyric (from 'Hunter') is typical of the acid clarity coaling every word within the album, and the delivery finds Bjork scaling peaks of ever more surprising heights, with a beat box always strapped firmly to her back. The spooky industrial sounds of 'Pluto' bear the finest example of Bjork's cyborg-like fusion with technology, when she begins a scale 'loop' which anyone else would have sampled, and manages to sustain it to levels capable of making your heart stop.

The album's beatscape comes courtesy of Mark Bell from LFO, and its third major contributor is the Icelandic String Octet, scored by Bjork and Eumir Deodato. For an epic example in around five minutes of how well all this gels, check 'Bachelorette' and be sleighed. Although additional mixing on some tracks was done by Howie B and the Wu Tang Clan's RZA, there is nothing of the 'on walks the guest star' feel the varied nature of *Post* displayed.

Homogenic is a bold and beautiful trip you will be unable to disembark from till the conductor has well and truly wrung you out by journey's end. If we all lay down and listened to this album at the same time, I'm sure Bjork's message of, 'Don't get angry with yourself / I'll heal you.' ('All Neon Like') could really take effect. Just tune into those heart-like beats, and let the lady show you what the world's designs may well add up to.

BRONWYN TRUDGEON

BENTLEY RHYTHM ACE BRA (Parlophone)

Forget the record company jumping politics (they moved from Skint to Parlophone with this album). No matter who you get it through or when you get it, *BRA* is up there as one of 1997's top dance albums, alongside the Chemical Brothers and Daft Punk. They describe themselves as 'CarBootTechnoDisco', which is handy for reviewers, but pretty poxy if you want to know what they sound like. So here goes.

They sound like cool. Like if you drank a glass of cool and started to exude dance music out of every orifice you'd be like a Bentley album. Every noise is a new joy, from cartoon FX to submarine horns to 'Thing On A Spring' samples to god knows where half of this stuff originated. Add their rhythms that sway and pulse and hype and groove — breakbeat with a dash of drum 'n' bass and some seriously delicious all encompassing beat magic. There's enough voodoo in here to make baboons boogie in the cold moonlight. And there's not a hint of hard-arsed ego dance, Mike Stokes and Richard March (ex Pop Will Eat Itself) just radiate good vibes and humour. It almost feels like the Beasties' *Paul's Boutique* in some ways. So buy it, play it, and get the party started right.

JOHN TAITE

THE CRAMPS Big Beats From Badsville (Epitaph)

Once upon a time, the Cramps skated on the razor-sharp side of the cutting edge; sounding like the genetically-engineered progeny of Elvis and Screaming Jay Hawkins, which had fallen into a fetid swamp, mutated and was out to paint hell-town red. Truly manic and spine-tingling, they gave the 70s and 80s 'deviant rockabilly', which mixed visual elements of fetishism, bondage and

THE VERVE



BENTLEY RHYTHM ACE