

RECORDINGS

NEW ZEALAND

JAN HELLRIEGAL *The Way I Feel* (Warners)

First single from her new album swerves and swoons and sweeps you up irresistibly in its wake just like a serious radio friendly pop song should. OK, so she pronounces some of her words funny and uses some funny words ('quagmire'? In a pop song?) but 'The Way I Feel' has got some sass.

DONNA YUZWALK

DEAD FLOWERS *Lisa* (Wildside)

After a brief lead gtr tribute to G'n' R's 'Sweet Child Of Mine' this song kicks in with a wah-wah thomp but skids all over the place, messy as Brian's hair when he sings. 'Walking in the Sun' has a much better hook and sees Dead Flowers sounding suitably sulky and reckless.

DONNA YUZWALK

HEAD LIKE A HOLE *Beetlebeasts* (Wildside)

It's all here on this four song cassette — stomping rhythms, pounding chords, freaky samples, nonsensical lyrics. Not so much heavy as loud. Head Like A Hole could be seen as the colourful, fun-filled, uptown alternative to Metallica. Four little embryos tossing merrily around in the womb of the local music scene before they get shoved into the big wide world. Harmless fun from Wellington's top pin-ups.

DONNA YUZWALK

ETCH *Feast of Stevens* (Failsafe)

ALL DIFFERENT THINGS

Throw (Failsafe)

These are two new EPs from Christchurch's once-cassette-only-now-CD-too Failsafe label. Much of Etch sounds remarkably like the classic — dare I say it — Dunedin sound, with twin guitars and vocals complementing each other lead and back-up wise, over bass and drums. Songs vary in style to a first-EP-era-Bats-sounding 'Sunday' to 'Old Man', 'Eyes' and 'Chance Bellef' which are rockier, reminiscent, maybe, of the Only Ones.

Over seven individually strong songs Feast of Stevens present a good sense of melody in guitars and voices, but perhaps don't cover as much ground as they might, playing things a wee bit safe song structure-wise. 'Alone At Home', the last song, suggests things might get a bit noisy, but even that is kept in check by fairly sensible arrangement. Maybe fewer, complementary (but contrasting) songs might present a stronger package, but then again seven tunes on an EP can't be too bad a thing.

Stronger both in songs and sound is Throw's All Different Things. With a warm, lush production (by bassist/Failsafe label boss Rob Mayes) the four songs here make a solid whole, but stand as four rich, separate slices — pretty but powerful, and managing to avoid the dreaded "power pop".

Highlights are probably the title track and 'Away', which has both a quiet beauty and a driving backbone, but 'Wishes From Her Heart' is a great little pop song too, with a lilting, almost-dancey rhythm.

Guitarist/singer Jeremy Taylor has a great voice that skips easily (except for just a couple of slightly dodgy melodies) through the songs, backed up a solid base of layered electric and acoustic guitars and bass and drums that fill out the rhythm and melody nicely.

All Different Things ends with a kind of pointless remix of 'Wishes From Her Heart' (almost the same, but with a few cheesier drums sounds), but all in all it's a fine collection of songs.

JONATHAN KING

MERENIA *When You Leave* (Pagan)

Merena is a sultry bad-girl-woman to Ngaire's sweet-voiced girl next door. Striking a bizarrely adult emotional tone for one so young, Merena sounds as if she's clawed her way up through a decade of provincial motel lounge bars when in fact she's a teenage daddy's girl from Whakatane. Here she writes and sings her own material, sounding frighteningly sophisticated and worldly wise. One tender song, one spiced up with funky wah-wah guitar.

DONNA YUZWALK

NINE LIVEZ *Take Me Back* (BMG)

This'll make FM radio rock jocks wet their panties! Put Aerosmith, Bon Jovi and Motley Crue in a blender and whaddya get — an internationally smooth ballad-rock song with a touching Skid Row acoustic bit at the end. B-side 'Stroke My Ego' — hmm, somehow I don't think these boys' egos are in need of stroking, I'm sure they're already as big as ... as ... the reverb on their vocals!

DONNA YUZWALK

NGAIRE *Attitude* (Southside)

'Attitude' is a finger-waggin' ditty, kind of old fashioned sounding but noteworthy for the fact that M. Cammick himself penned the lyrics. 'So Divine' is retro in the best sense, faintly reminiscent of 70s disco classic 'Ring My Bell'. Could be popular on hi-energy dance floors (do they still have them?) especially with its repeated use of the "Divine" word. B-side 'I'm Naming Names' floats by on a cloud of Ngaire sweetness and light.

DONNA YUZWALK

SOUTHSIDE OF BOMBAY *All Across The World* (Pagan)

Feel good music for grown-ups with lite-reggae/ska inflections. Up-beat, up-market, sweet natured and smoochy with sophisticated instrumentation — trumpet, tenor sax, trombone, keyboards as well as bass, drum, guitar. Includes 'What's The Time Mr Wolf'.

DONNA YUZWALK

ANNIE CRUMMER *See What Love Can Do* (Warners)

Annie has grown up! Got serious! Where once she got down with the Cats on 'Melting Pot' now she's crooning in a restrained, elegant manner about "seeing what love can do" — nouvelle cuisine to the Cats messy gumbo stew. 'Make Up' is a spare, torchy number reminiscent of Barbara Streisand's 'Memories' only not as strident. Totally elegant packaging too.

DONNA YUZWALK

DAVID PARKER *In Summer I Fall* (Edge Music)

From the Donny Osmond of local white boy soul, four very Auckland tracks. Dig the names of the mixes: 'Stylee', 'Raga Less' and 'Selector' and at least one of them is done by Mark Tierney. Teremoana Ropley provides backing vocals on one. What it is, is gentle dub reggae with Parker undulating tastefully over the top. Smooth as a baby's bottom, cool as a summer breeze etc.

DONNA YUZWALK

LOS LOBOS *Kiko* (Liberation) *DRAMARAMA* *Vinyl* (Chameleon) *DIESEL PARK WEST* *Decency* (Food) *DEL AMITRI*

Change Everything (A&M)
Advances in studio technology aside, these four albums could've existed quite comfortably in the early seventies and that's no criticism. In fact, there's proof enough here that the rock n' roll medium doesn't have to exhibit the full bloom of fashion to be relevant or exciting.

This applies particularly to Los Lobos whose *Kiko* is an inspired assimilation and utilisation of rock n' roll, R&B and country traditions with their Mexican heritage adding spice to the fringes. Up until now their albums have been solid, stolid affairs of well-conceived material too conservative to enthrall; *Kiko* changes all that.

In mood, consistency and general sophistication, this album re-calls the hey-day of the Band. Mitchell Froom's production and the band's weighty, pessimistic sixteen song expanse result in an impressive, brooding presence that occasionally cracks into Rio Grande sunshine as in 'Saint Behind the Glass' and 'Two Janes'. Of the outright ballads the percussive echoes of 'Angels With Dirty Faces' and David Hidalgo's world-weary 'Just A Man' are nigh on brilliant. In the classically restrained rock mould, 'Wake Up Dolores' and 'Reva's House' are simmering exercises in rock n' roll tension, just as 'Wicked Rain' resonates with the age-old but true imagery of hard rain and hard times. For those of you who thought Los Lobos meant 'La Bamba', *Kiko* screams think again, and if there's justice in the world there will be due recognition for this very powerful album.

Down a notch, but barely, and we step on Dramarama. Careening out of New Jersey fuelled on New York Dolls-Stoned energy, they settled on the west coast where they pumped out records on their own label before finally landing a major deal with Chameleon. Looking like the archetypal rockists of yore with shaggy haircuts, mascara-lined eyebrows and bloodshot on-the-road eyes, they're really the pop/rock equivalent of the Black Crowes, a comparison verified by the rolling R&B of 'Train Going Backwards'. Vocalist John Easdale is an effortless Jagger-Petty understudy — one of the reasons for the band's great sleazy cover of the Stones' 'Memo From Turner'. In the psychedelic stakes 'What Are We Gonna Do' has been the surprise hit single of the year, a style they reconstruct on 'Tiny Candles'. But the album's real winners are the rockers; 'I've Got Spies' lurches with real venom, 'Until The Next Time' is a crackling threat delivered and 'Ain't It The Truth' uses the old cliché of studio phasing to stunning effect. Ignore the implications of the band's silly name because *Vinyl* is a very fine piece of timeless rock n' roll.

Down another notch and across the Atlantic to Surrey, home of the Diesel Park West fan club where they can add half-a-fan for their second album, *Decency*. They first appeared in 1989 with *Shakespeare's Alabama*, a sturdy mixture of U2's heroism and Springsteen's less pretentious work ethic. *Decency* is more of

the same except that it's more consistent, the songs are more carefully honed and are executed on better tunes. Relying principally on singer/songwriter John Butler, the band are right behind him with ringing, spiralling guitars on the big imagery of 'Walk With The Mountain' and 'Somewhere In The Afterglow'. Diesel Park West are hardly working over new ground but Butler is at least a distinctive enough singer and honest enough song grafter to eke out a credible existence for his modest employees.

Glasgow's rock n' roll heritage is richer than most. From the whiskey throats of Alex Harvey, Frankie Miller and Maggie Bell to the wide-eyed Euro-romanticism of Simple Minds to the current crop of crusaders like JAMC, KLF and Primal Scream, the city has been a breeding ground for a variety of talent, if nothing else.

Del Amitri are benefactors of the Harvey-Miller hard work, no-shit lessons in integrity. This is only their third album in ten years but three years ago they slumped their way around the States absorbing vibes to give their music an empiricism absent from the phonies. The result was *Waking Hours*, unspectacular but sincere. *Change Everything* is a further step towards Glaswegians sounding like natural born Americans. They cut some handsome tunes in the slow burning single 'Always The Last To Know' and 'When You Were Young'. They get meaner on 'Surface of the Moon' and more ambitious on 'Just Like A Man' and 'As Soon As The Tide Comes In'. All good songs but only adequately defined by producer Gil Norton and still too indebted to the Youngs and Springsteens in foreign lands. Del Amitri should shrug off the modesty and carve their own way out of anonymity.

GEORGE KAY

25TH OF MAY *Lenin and McCarthy* (Arista/BMG) *FATIMA MANSIONS* *Valhalla Avenue* (Kitchenware/BMG)

It seems that pop and politics are allowed in the same room again. So in America they have mass poverty, homelessness, drive-by shootings and the gigantic neurotic seizures of Consolidated and Hiphopripsy. In England they have the 25th of May, who dream of "Mass collective action" and sound a bit like early Pop Will Eat Itself. When, as on 'Fuck The Right To Vote' they stumble across a really nasty sample, they start to sound like a simple, effective rabble-raising/ adrenalinizing machine. Mostly though, the noises are too friendly, too musical, the raps strident but unthreatening, and the beats and basslines just comfortably, pointlessly funky. BMG should send them to Libya or Cuba for guerilla training, then unleash them on the music industry.

Uglier, less "contemporary" in every respect, but probably angrier are Ireland's Fatima Mansions, fronted by ex-Microdisney spleen-idol Cathal Coughlan. Their sound is uncompromisingly, brutally awkward: AOR instruments — electro pianos, clarinets, shrill synths and leaden, undanceable drum machine patterns are mixed up with pugilistic guitars, monomaniacally repetitive structures and Coughlan's alternation between Sinatran baritone and animal howl. The best moment is a cover of REM's 'Shiny Happy People' that casts the original's smug chords into



Stanley Demeski, Dean Wareham and Justin Harwood

LUNA² *Lunapark* (Warners)

Lunapark, the debut album from Luna², heralds the return of one of indie music's prodigal sons — ex-Galaxie 500 frontman Dean Wareham. Also featuring are one of the 100 or so ex-Chills currently in the galaxy, bass player Justin Harwood, as well as drummer Stanley Demeski, lately of the Feelies.

Luna² have retained much of what was special about Galaxie 500. A certain understated elegance runs through all the songs but whereas Galaxie 500 would sometimes wallow and drown in turgid reverberation laden arrangements, Luna benefit from the extra power and good impetus provided by the new rhythm section. Tracks such as 'Can't Wait', 'Time To Quit' and 'We're Both Confused' positively race along.

Wareham's voice is not likely to set the world on fire, nor are his fingers likely to cause pyrotechnics on the fretboard, but in the context of Luna² they sit perfectly together. Songs about insecurity and unsureness are reflected in his voice. There's a pleading, questioning quality to it which achieves a rare intimacy far removed from the typical bombast of the rock singer.

Sound takes precedence over song — many tunes being in themselves largely unmemorable. However, by employing deceptively simple song structures and sparse arrangements, the end result is often mysteriously hypnotic. The advantage of this approach is that the easily obscured subtleties of tone are given new freedom; the smallest of nuances is afforded room to breathe and the vaguest shifts in inflection can have a dramatic effect on the overall song.

This is where the charm of Luna² lies. It creates a personal, earthy live-in-your-livingroom feel. If you liked Galaxie 500, then Luna² are more of the same only better.

MARTIN BELL

a cauldron of toxic samples including one that cackles 'fuck your showbusiness' over and over again. Most of the time Coughlan's too moral to live up to his own t-shirt slogan and "keep music evil", but not always.

MATTHEW HYLAND

HOUSE OF LOVE

Babe Rainbow (Fontana)

A House of Love album with a title — unique, even if it is only an obtuse psychedelic allusion that ties in with Chadwick's appreciation of rock culture. An appreciation that has led to Beatles and Cream covers on the *Feel* EP. And like, say, Martin Phillipps, whose 'Pink Frost' he's also covered, Chadwick's informed and extensive listening tastes have added depth and maturity to his writing rarely encountered in post House of Love/Stone Roses bands.

This background, combined with Chadwick's own sizeable ego and writing flair have ensured his status as one of the few current writers capable of making a truly brilliant album. *Babe Rainbow* isn't it but it takes him and the band one step closer.

In many ways, *Babe Rainbow* harks back to their first album on Creation with its insistent, aching guitar arrangements and its ten tracks are Chadwick's most compact and consistent statement. Leading the race in the melancholic stakes have to be the two singles, 'Feel' and 'Girl With the Loneliest Eyes'. Both, criminally, have failed to sell in droves.

'You Don't Understand' is a sign of Chadwick's minor debt to Ian MacCulloch with its graphic, lavish imagery and dramatic melody. By comparison, 'Fade Away' is a beautiful acoustic apology and 'Cruel' borrows George Harrison's Indian vibes to make the only really dense track on the album.

Babe Rainbow certainly belongs to sparse, tingling textures, rising then subsiding as in 'High In Your Face', 'Crush Me' and 'Ver Eyes', leaving 'Burn Down the World' to simmer menacingly on the side. These

days a ten track CD album may be considered a meagre body of work but this is close to an immaculate conception of disciplined, focused writing and execution. Chadwick's next album could be his genius move but it's possible that *Babe Rainbow* could be held in that esteem in time to come.

GEORGE KAY

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Tribal Stomp (Tangata)

Tangata Records might not want to be all things to Maori music but it has a pretty good shot at it with this compilation of styles on *Tribal Stomp* have at least one thing in common: high standards. More tenuously, there is a link in the way the musicians have assimilated outside influences with their own cultural background, so no matter whether it's hard rock or soul ballads it's our music.

The influence of Herbs encouraged a generation of musicians to play a uniquely Pacific style of reggae. The only example of that here is by Survival, who manage to both sing beautifully and make the Urewas the hookline of a pop song. The gentle singer-songwriter ballads of Ahurangi aside, most *Tribal Stomp* artists aim at being streetwise. Young and hip they may be, but not all have won the battle to find their own voice yet. Maree Sheehan's 'Make U My Own' would be the hottest song here if only the samples weren't so naggingly familiar, a problem shared by Ruaumoko's state-of-the-nation rap, though they borrow accents as well.

Vocal strength is something shared by all, be it as soloists or in harmony, and not just on the ballads (such as the sweet delicacies of Hinewehi Mohi); it's apparent even on the dated grunge of Aunty Beatrice's 'Mince Pie' (great title). The songs by Emma Paki particularly stand out, especially the sparse, hypnotic 'Wanea Ngakau'.

Apart from the in-yer-face assault of 'Mince Pie', *Tribal Stomp* is a seductive sampler of classy pop from Aotearoa. It