

the guitar and ignore everything else.

Thusly, the Excite Button gets pushed when Mack gets down, or gets down and wahs (as on Freddie King's 'In The Open' and Willie Dixon's 'All Night Long'). However, in the main on this recording the E.B. seems only half-pushed, and neither here nor "there". A "genre piece" anyhow.

A. PALMER

**LUCINDA WILLIAMS**  
**Sweet Old World**  
(Chameleon)

Four years have passed since Lucinda Williams was released. It was a timeless gem of a country-folk album, packed with wise and emotional songs given life by a fragile and expressive voice. When you have been madly in love with Lucinda Williams for so long, the prospect of disappointment with the follow-up is very high.

But *Sweet Old World* is everything real music should be: inspiring, uplifting, thought provoking, informative and you can sing along as well. And best of all it is unpretentious. This is not a marketing product, it is music without attitude.

In style *Sweet Old World* encompasses folk, country rock and blues. Williams switches from one style to the next effortlessly with guitarist Gurf Morlix providing vivid colour. The lyrics take in love fulfilled and love denied; child abuse and suicide — people searching for meaning, sometimes succeeding, sometimes failing.

Sounds depressing doesn't it? Well it's not. Neither is *Sweet Old World* a let down for those who loved *Lucinda Williams*. If you haven't heard either album, then buy both. Your life will be better for it.

KEVIN NORQUAY

**THE SUNDAYS**  
**Blind**  
**EMI**

The Sundays have a rare factor on their side. I'm not too sure



Lucinda Williams  
Right: Jan Hellriegel



what it is, but it allows them to sound delicate without sounding weak, and passionate without seeming unrealistic. There's probably a French word for it — 'poignant' just doesn't say enough.

The production on *Blind* finally does them justice — it's so warm and close it makes *Reading Writing and Arithmetic* sound like a demo tape you'd left in the sun. Harriet Wheeler's lavish larynx floats and ebbs over David Gavurin's uplifting guitar melodies, while the rest of the band add to the mood in their support roles (in a similar way to a certain Manchester four-piece).

But as charming as it may sound, the Sundays are not about happiness. Beneath their enticing pop tunes lie bleeding tragedies. Have a listen to 'Medicine' smashing one of those 'soothing' myths with "Don't go imagining that time is medicine". Even the glorious 'Love' has lines like "If you don't have a clue about life, then I'm happy to say, neither do I". They are definitely from the bewildered and sad school of British indie

pop, but then, no great art ever came from unproblematic joy.

You'll be disappointed if you expect much of a change from their debut — but that's like expecting next season's roses to be multi-coloured. *Blind* confirms that the Sundays are as smooth and gorgeous as they ever were, and that's not a bad thing at all.

JOHN TAITE

**SHABBA RANKS**  
**X-Tra Naked**  
(Epic)

Part two of the Americanisation of Shabba started with *RoughaReady: Volume One*. Here we find Shabba even further enveloped in the stars and stripes but his heart remains in the Kingston Yards. Like this is a tough SOB despite the attempts to soften Shabba's ardour, opening with the currently popular Ting-A-Ling rhythm (also done in fine fashion by Ninjaman) with a sort of Kriss Kross/ House of Pain jump thing in the background, anyhow it's a riot of sorts. Next up is a real killer diller, a combo swingbeat come dancehall

grindalong, helped by the very smooth MeJohnny Gill on the aptly named 'Slow and Sexy', this is the sort of track that makes traditional reggae fans worry about the state of the world but to me this is the future, the here and now.

But of course we all need a bit of historical background as in the old time rhythm of 'Will Power', the sort of perfect beast that V. Roy would have ridden or in the boisterous fervour of 'Rude Boy', aside from the hip hop references, this is pure dancehall.

Talking about hip hop, Shabba links up with two big names (and I mean big) in Chubb Rock and Queen Latifah for a quick work out, the Latifah track is the most interesting using the rhythm arrangement from Fela Kuti's 'No Agreement'. Naturally for Shabba, sex rears its head on many tracks, most notably on '5-F Man', 'Bedroom Bully' and 'Cocky Rim' and what would a dancehall album be without such songs.

Perhaps his most consistent work to date, apart from the hits compilation. Anyhow, it's

got a flow to it, despite the mixture of producers who include Steely and Cleve, Bobby Digital, Lakim Shabazz and surprisingly Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis.

KERRY BUCHANAN

**JAN HELLRIEGAL**  
**It's My Sin**  
(Warners)

OK, so Jan's got a new "sexy" image to go with her debut album. Big deal. Anyone who thinks sex and rock n' roll don't go hand in hand needs a large bite of a reality sandwich. So enough of the fatuous comment on the new look, soft focus Jan Hellriegal and on to more important matters — namely the music.

Bigger and badder than anything she's done previously with former band Cassandra's Ears, *It's My Sin* is a showcase for a newfound confidence and maturity. You can hear it in her voice — when she hits a note it stays hit and the conviction in her singing cuts a swathe through the mix. That's not to say the album finds Jan Hellriegal finding her own voice

completely as she's occasionally guilty of wearing her influences on her sleeve. She has managed, however, to weld those influences into a cohesive sound of her own.

Bookended by the marvelous Straitjackets-like lilt of 'The Way I Feel' and the bluesy 'Westy Gals', Hellriegal displays real control over musical style and an ability to evolve a strong sense of place. While there are no dud tracks, some are no more than solid, tripping over themselves in overly clever arrangements and fills. The most fully realised tracks are the ones which have a little breathing space. The title track and 'No Idea' being prime examples.

*It's My Sin* is by no means a definitive statement but it's still a forceful step forward for an ex-Westy gal.

MARTIN BELL

**TH' FAITH HEALERS**

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