

good voice and he and his crew could churn out some cracker hooklines.

The title of this collection is, of course, far too grandiose a claim (yes I know it was one of his hits) but at least, in the case of Huey Lewis, the terms 'heart' and 'rock and roll' certainly belong together.

PETER THOMSON

HAPPY MONDAYS

Yes Please (Factory)

Apparently this is the most expensive 'indie' album ever made — but don't get your hopes up. *Yes Please* is an initially disappointing album. It sounds like



Tool



The Big O



Extreme

the final Manchester come-down: the hits are few, the mood is 'morning after' and it's bound to leave their Pills, Thrills and Bellyache pop fans in the cold.

That isn't to say it's a total flop. 'Stinkin Thinkin' proves they can still knock out those subtle, infectious grooves. Their stream of semi-consciousness lyrics still work most of the time ("get me an uzi and someone to use it who smiles" — that type of thing). And Mark Day's Rolling Stones guitar rescues a lot of tracks from the gutter, despite Shaun Ryder's jaded vocals.

Yes Please could hardly be called a success though. It sounds like the musical autopilot was hit far too often; like the hazy Barbados atmosphere in which they recorded diluted their immediacy; like producers Franz and Waymouth (ex-Tom Tom Club and Talking Heads) were painting over rust. It's the type of album that will throw them back into cult-status — though with all the cash spent on it I doubt that was the intention.

JOHN TAITE

TOOL

Opiate (Zoo)

Sometimes you get all caught up in the semantics of this reviewing stuff, so let's keep this one to the two basic questions. 1) Is it good? 2) Why? The answers here are pretty simple. Yes, most definitely and well, just because it is.

Everything is right for this sort of music. It's loud and powerful, all spine and no belly. There's a vocalist who can actually sing and songs that mix Black Sabbath type melodies into some real '90s hardcore sounds with just a touch of classic speed metal going on. *Opiate* is only a six track mini-LP thing and that's ideal, a short series of musical body blows that leave you gasping. 'Sweat' seems so huge you'd think 14 studios and a big buck production team were involved but then you hear the two live tracks and realise that Tool just simply sound this way. *Opiate* is a rather awesome offering, six songs that make most every corporate alternative star offered up at present smell like the shit they truly are.

KIRK GEE

From 1968 to '72 he released

SADE

Love Deluxe (Epic)

For those of us who can be bothered owning up, back in 1984 we briefly believed Sade to be the epitome of sultry soul. We snapped up her debut album in our millions, thrashed it for a month or so then put it away and forgot it. There were a couple of follow-ups but they basically skated across the same surface with diminishing returns. Now here comes her/their fourth album a mere four years since the last.

And it's no better — or worse — than those previous. Oh there's a politically conscious

seven albums which some considered to be milestones of progressive underground rock but which now sound embarrassingly naff. Then in '76 and '77, having largely shucked his efforts at merging basic blues with acid consciousness, Miller hit major mainstream success with two massively selling albums. They supply 13 of the 19 tracks here.

For once the Californian blandness of his vocals suited the style and catchy melodies. Even the silly cosmic synthesizer noises were kind of endearing. Today there's ten or so tracks which maintain a certain goofy charm. My favour-

ably patchy, it's let down by the songs — most are co-written by Orbison — but carrying it all is *the voice*. Like an anguished Italian tenor, Orbison is haunting and unforgettable. He exudes heartache, tragedy and longing.

One song here can stand alongside his 60s masterpieces: 'After the Love Has Gone', produced by Was. The beat is slow, the mood brooding, the treatment restrained; the voice is holding back back from tearing itself apart. It's a stately, emotional epic. 'Coming Home' is the other highlight; Chips Moman directs an all-Memphis crew on a dreamy ballad that

still a massive improvement on their Def American debut. Vocalist Eric Wagner possesses an interesting Plant-esque voice but suffers from that unique American mainstream rock problem of an inability to write lyrics of any real depth. Despite this flaw (and although many of the songs are very similar) the riffs are groovy. Just the thing for a hip rock party.

The End are probably the most diverse bunch here. Employing rock, funk and soul they come out with an interesting R&B rock hybrid that's gained them a large following in their native England. Produced by Roxy Music guitarist Phil

WHITE LION

Best Of (Atlantic)

MR BIG

Live (Warners)

SKID ROW

B-Side Ourselves (Atlantic)

THUNDER

Laughing on Judgement Day (EMI)

BAD COMPANY

Here Comes Trouble (Atlantic)

EXTREME

III Sides To Every Story (A&M)

Far better than Poison et al in their day, White Lion were a group whose songs everyone knew but no one could remember the actual name of the band. This retrospective compilation

lyric or two but otherwise it's still pretty much an exercise in terminal cool. *Love Deluxe* quickly reduces to three tracks which are moderately memorable and rather pleasant. The rest is aural wallpaper.

Ms Adu can undoubtedly perform the whole album without raising her pulse rate (let alone a drop of perspiration) and one even wonders whether the blokes in the band got through the complete set without nodding off.

PETER THOMSON

THE LETTER FIVE

You Are Here (Flying Nun)

Letter Five is actually singer, writer, guitarist Richard James with a shifting group of accompanying musicians. Nowadays he's playing with Matthew Bannister of the Dribbling Darts of Love and John Pitcairn from Drill and recording new material. This seven track EP was recorded three years ago at the Lab, and on various four tracks, and it appears belatedly as the last Flying Nun 12 inch ever.

This is a collection of seven simple, meditative songs with odd, ironic lyrics given oomph by Richard James' matter-of-fact singing style and pared down instrumentation: guitar lines are vital but elusive (except for 'Misery' with its extended lead work), rhythm section adds texture rather than volume and there's a bit of sax in there somewhere too.

Sometimes the guitar reminded me of quiet Neil Young, sometimes ('No Conversation') Richard James' voice sounds dark as Leonard Cohen. This record has a deceptively innocuous surface — listen again and you'll find lots of little complexities to stir the mind.

DONNA YUZWALK

THE STEVE MILLER BAND

The Very Best Of (Liberation)

This compilation probably grew from the interest in 'The Joker' following a Levis ad on TV (remember the motorcyclist cruising the office floor and tossing jeans at the feet of his intended?) Otherwise it's been a long time since anybody reckoned Steve Miller could get away with calling himself "the space cowboy" let alone "the gangster of love".

ites include those with the risible rhyming, for instance: "Billy Mack is a detective down in Texas/ You know he knows just exactly what the facts is".

Lightweight period pop which can still be amiably diverting.

PETER THOMSON

STEVE EARLE

We Ain't Ever Satisfied: the Essential Collection (MCA)

Blow-waved country stars dominate the US charts like an army of bland robots. Steve Earle is groomed too, in tattoos and leathers, but compared to them, he's the real thing. He's a spokesman for greasy dropouts in the forgotten backblocks, whose prospects are limited to a six-pack and a trailer home. His music is their music — hard rock with a bad attitude — not the processed schlock whose only ambition is to be inoffensive. The Bush baby-boomers want to keep blinkered from realities like factory lay-offs, solo parents and bad beer.

Earle's voice is somewhere between a snarl and a whine, and he's backed by the Dukes, a well-oiled E-Street Band with a hint of pedal steel. The trad-rock backing is a handicap, because it detracts from his masterly songwriting. 'Devil's Right Hand' and 'The Rain Came Down' could be Carter family standards in a modern setting, while the Springsteen influence ranges from *Nebraska*-style ballads ('Billy Austin') to USA stompers ('Gold Ole Boy Gettin Tough').

On *Copperhead Road* Earle started to diversify, lightening up the rock thump with folk touches. But by *The Hard Way* he was back at it, and the relentless wise-ass swagger and gloomy outlook may be the reason his career has stalled while the blow-waved army lulls the masses into a stupor.

CHRIS BOURKE

ROY ORBISON

King of Hearts (Virgin)

Roy's last album, *Mystery Girl*, released just after he died, has an important advantage over this one. He was alive when he made it. *King of Hearts* is a collection of leftover vocal tracks given backings by an array of big-name producers: Don Was, Jeff Lynne, Robbie Robertson, Chips Moman. Un-

floats on strings reminiscent of John Lennon's 'Mind Games'. Robertson's effort is a non-event — too tasteful by far. No such accusation could be made of Jeff Lynne's two solo electronic toss-offs, which, strangely, Virgin thinks will be the hits. 'After the Love' aside, most of the songs on *King of Hearts* are after-thoughts, but Roy Orbison's voice will last forever.

CHRIS BOURKE

CLIFFS OF DOONEEN

(Critique/ Festival)

SKEW SISKIN

(Giant/ Warners)

TROUBLE

Manic Frustration

(Def American)

THE END

Gusto

(Mad Moon/ Festival)

SCREAMING JETS

Tear of Thought

(RooArt)

New Boston band Cliffs of Dooneen take their strange name from an old Irish folk song. Musically, we are talking a Guns/ Mission/ U2 hybrid with some Madchester beats. The result is uninspiring. COD are another in the current industry craze to sign bands who are simply not ready to release records. There are some interesting compositions: 'Blackwater' and 'Restless Sun' but these are weakened by lyrical immaturity and the desire to "rock out" at every opportunity.

Equally insipid is the debut release from Berlin based band Skew Siskin. Even the most sympathetic of reviewers could not find many redeeming features in this record. Apparently a fourth generation cassette of the group found its way to America and presto, Skew Siskin had a deal. The record is seemingly a dub from that cassette as the production is horrendous. The whole mess is swamped in reverb and only the vice grip wails of Nina C. Alice are audible over the din. Skew Siskin are a strong reason for the speedy introduction of wipeable compact discs.

Trouble seem quite peeved at the success of bands like Alice In Chains and Soundgarden because they've been churning out Sabbath inspired grunge for much longer without equivalent material rewards. *Manic Frustration* is not the epic album to gain them their place in the annals of rock history but is

Manzanera, this debut release glistens with a maturity lacking in its American counterparts. Although only a few of the songs are memorable there is an attitude here that demands attention. Keyboardist Matt Hammond gives the group an added pleasure, particularly on the vocal/ piano duet 'Cut Me Loose'. The End are far from finished.

The new Screaming Jets is my favourite this month. They continue to establish themselves as the premier Australian band producing melodic heavy rock. There are undoubtedly some obscure alternative influences here but they don't undermine the essential straightforwardness of the Jets' 4/ 4 rock vision. They share an affinity with AC/DC, if only for the expressway pace with which they move through 16 long tracks. First single 'Think' highlights the nonchalant inner anger of singer Paul Woosen, an Australian Elvis Costello.

LUKE CASEY

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Honeymoon in Vegas (Epic)

For Elvis fanatics, their marriage to the king was to have and to hold, for better or worse. But the movies were strictly easy come, easy go. However *Honeymoon in Vegas*, a vehicle for Nicolas Cage, looks like more fun than Acapulco, judging by this soundtrack in which mainstream stars tackle their favourite Elvis hit.

Billy Joel's 'All Shook Up' and 'Heartbreak Hotel' may be note-perfect covers, Amy Grant's 'Love Me Tender' and Bryan Ferry's 'Are You Lonesome Tonight' typically bloodless, and Jeff Beck's guitar instrumental 'Hound Dog' just plain daft ... but there are gems here. They come from musicians who identify with the real Elvis: the country boy of simple tastes who grew up listening to black radio. So put your hands together for Dwight Yoakam's nasal romp on 'Suspicious Minds', Travis Tritt's rollicking 'Burning Love', John Mellencamp's dobro blues 'Jailhouse Rock' and Willie Nelson's tortured 'Blue Hawaii'. Surprisingly, for someone who discovered Elvis circa 1988, Bono takes the honours with his ethereal 'Can't Help Falling in Love'.

CHRIS BOURKE

goes from the very cheesy 'When The Children Cry' to the very good 'Lights And Thunder'. The best material is culled from their final *Mane Attraction* record. White Lion promised more, delivered far less.

Mr Big, however, have delivered themselves a great deal of readies with the lovely 'To Be With You'. Although a hashed version is presented here, the album is rescued by excellent versions of 'Green Tinted Sixties Mind' and 'Shy Boy'. Even so, it's far too early for a live Mr Big album.

From Skid Row comes the ultimately disposable *B-Side Ourselves* EP. While it may satisfy fans in the interim between *Slave To The Grind* and the next studio opus, it does not give credibility to their moronic bad boy posturing. Skid Mark's version of 'Little Wing' is undoubtedly sacrilegious and let there be thunder! 'Low Life In High Places' is being heavily rotated on yer local rock station and the album has hit stamped all over it. Certainly not progressive. Stadium rock with good choruses, plain and simple. Axl Rose loves them too.

Another English band, Bad Company have been around for donkey's years. Only original members Kirke and Ralphs remain and they are notable by their absence in the songwriting department. More like "Here Comes Poverty" if the boys don't put pen to paper soon.

Extreme save rock's bacon this year. 'Warheads' would make Van Halen proud and the hook-laden songs just keep coming. The three part album concept seems unnecessary because the songs are strong enough to stand alone. It seems like a redundant justification for the gargantuan length of the record. With vision and Beatlemania retrospection, Extreme is the band to go for if you like your rock hummable and White Lion if you like nostalgia.

LUKE CASEY

DEAD MOON

Strange Pray Tell

(Music Maniac import)

Stop me if you heard this before but it matters not one rooty-toot-toot what "they" tell you, rock (and roll) in the 1990s is pretty much of a washed up and moribund form. Doesn't matter tho', cos anyone that