



launch his (then) girlfriend into movies. The film may have been a travesty but, against all expectations, Ross made an astonishingly good job of the title role. And while it's a given that no-one can really cover Billie Holiday, Ross at least delivered the song with real feeling, albeit a feeling that meant we could listen to the songs without having to deal with Holiday's pain and passion.

So in the context of Ross's career that movie soundtrack ranks among her very best albums. And now *Stolen Moments* may even surpass it. The bands are superb and Ross has never sounded better. Her voice is sure and her interpretive understanding has deepened with age. 'Good Morning Heartache' for instance, takes on a wistfulness only hinted at in her earlier version. Sometimes artists mature and sometimes they just get older. With *Stolen Moments* Diana Ross is back in a position she has not seriously held for some 20 or so years — as one of the major popular singers of her generation.

PETER THOMSON

SHELLEYAN ORPHAN

Humroot
(Festival)

I once saw Shelleyan Orphan support the Cure but the only thing they have in common is that they

are both from England. At least Robert Smith has a couple of good ideas. These folk seem to have stolen their's from the Sundays and the Cocteau Twins.

Also, any band that has a song titled 'Long Dead Flowers Dried Out In Summer' are rather setting themselves up. This album does have a couple of good moments (yes at least two!) like on 'Burst' where Jem Tayle sounds like the Beat's Dave Wakeling with a sock in his mouth. Then there is Caroline Crawley not sure if she's Liz Fraser or Harriet Wheeler.

There are some nice string arrangements and a bit of oboe, trumpet, flute and fiddle here and there but to be perfectly honest your life will not be overly enriched by this release (the Orphans third, fact fans). Humroot, beetroot, it's all the same to me.

ALISTER CAIN

ROD STEWART
Unplugged and Seated
(Warner Bros)

The original MTV concept of Unplugged involved notions of simplicity and intimacy. It worked for a while too. (Try, for example, the Paul McCartney set). But ever since Mariah Carey's hit single and then the phenomenal success of the Clapton album, stakes have been raised. Rod Stewart may be seated

but he's accompanied by an 11-piece band and a substantial string section (complete with conductor). And if the organs playing aren't wind-pumped that means it's only the guitars that remain unplugged.

Despite having written only six of the 15 songs here Stewart delivers little in the way of surprises. Most of the non-originals are numbers which have become — at least partially — identified with him over the years. The only newie is his affectionate rendition of long time hero Sam Cooke's 'Having A Party' which closes the album.

There's no attempt at any re-interpretation (a la Clapton's unplugged 'Layla') so, aside from the concert's pervasive mood of bonhomie, each song tends to invite comparison with Stewart's prior version. While his voice is still strong enough, much of his old interpretive nuance is missing. There's also the fact that his musicians — apart from old cohort Ron Wood — are far too well-disciplined to adopt the instrumental looseness of those early albums. Small changes perhaps but significant nonetheless.

Now 25 years into his career, Rod Stewart has regained his credibility with 1991's fine *Vagabond Heart*. He also retains his essential, self-effacing sense of humour — some of *Unplugged's* spoken introductions are a delight. What he's

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