



Capitol Records

JAMES TALLEY
A quality troubadour

THE RUNAWAYS: *Queens of Noise*. The Runaways (vocals and instrumentals). *Queens of Noise; Take It or Leave It; Midnight Music; Born to Be Bad*; and six others. MERCURY SRM 1-1126 \$6.98, © MC8-1-1126 \$7.95, © MCR4-1-1126 \$7.95.

Performance: **Improved**
Recording: **Likewise**

It's becoming more and more obvious that the Runaways are not what they initially appeared to be—that is, the first truly mainstream female rock band—but rather are simply Los Angeles' response to the New York Dolls. The parallels are unmistakable. Both bands were the creations of high-powered huckster/managers; both were supported by small but noisy subcultures in their respective cities; both wanted to be the Rolling Stones when they grew up, even down to having Keith Richard look-alikes (Johnny Thunders in the Dolls, Joan Jett in the Runaways); both play basic hard rock pitched to some imagined idea of an emerging teenage consciousness; both are only marginally competent at their instruments. They even shared the same record label. The only real difference I can detect is that the Dolls were guys who came on like girls, whereas the Runaways have reversed the process.

"Queens of Noise," the nymphets' second album (and their last, if it fails to sell any better than their first, another parallel with the Dolls) is a slight improvement over their debut disc, largely because of its production. Engineer Earle Mankey has given them a little more thud to their sound, and the result is compelling in a gross kind of way, something like castrati Kiss. But in the long run, it's the same punk posturing and unimaginative tunes we've heard from a zillion other bands. Although they're looking cuter than ever, aurally the Runaways still bore me to tears. S.S.

JAMES TALLEY: *Blackjack Choir*. James Talley (vocals, guitar); instrumental accompaniment. *Bluesman; Alabama Summertime; Everybody Loves a Love Song; Magnolia Boy; Up from Georgia; When the Fiddler Packs his Case*; and four others. CAPITOL

ST-11605 \$6.98, © 8XT-11605 \$7.98, © 4XT-11605 \$7.98.

Performance: **Very good**
Recording: **Superb**

I've been meaning to do my bit to help spread the word about James Talley, a quality troubadour. This album doesn't seem a typical one with which to encounter him for the first time; the songs may be a little less ambitious than some of his earlier ones, much of it has a bluesy flavor, and the populist streak in his writing comes to a head only once, really, in *Migrant Jesse Sawyer*. But then it's a pretty good album of whatever sort it is. The songs don't tingle with urgency but are well built, Talley's vocals are clear and sure, the backing and arrangements are excellent (Talley also produced it), and it is all extremely well engineered. What more could one ask? Well, maybe for something more personal—but this one will help you bide your time. N.C.

TELEVISION: *Marquee Moon*. Television (vocals and instrumentals). *See No Evil; Venus; Friction; Marquee Moon*; and four others. ELEKTRA 7E-1098 \$6.98.

Performance: **No flesh tones**
Recording: **Hard-nosed**

I'm sure someone is going to call this avant-garde, in spite of how much it sounds to me like warmed-over Bruce Springsteen. Then again, the group may not be sufficiently inept on the instruments to qualify for a "visionary" label—although it sure is with the vocals. The punk posing sounds a lot like the Fifties recycled, and it is starting to seem as dull to me as pictures of Ike playing golf did back then. These chaps seem capable of playing well, but singing and writing? Well, I have my doubts. N.C.

DAVE VAN RONK: *Sunday Street* (see Best of the Month, page 79)

MUDDY WATERS: *Hard Again*. Muddy Waters (vocals, guitar); Johnny Winter (guitar); James Cotton (harmonica); Pine Top Perkins (piano); Charles Calmese (bass); other musicians. *Mannish Boy; Bus Driver; I Want to Be Loved; Jealous Hearted Man; I Can't Be Satisfied*; and four others. BLUE SKY PZ 34449 \$6.98, © PZA 34449 \$6.98.

Performance: **Muddled**
Recording: **Good**

The Boss Man's bands usually are somewhat rougher than the big-name backing he has here, and maybe roughness is what it takes. I can't find much excitement here, and I don't think Waters' performances themselves are what's wrong. Johnny Winter, who produced it, brought in himself on guitar and James Cotton on harp, among others, but then nobody did much of anything. Cotton, a much smoother, more accomplished harp player than the last two or three who've worked for Muddy, takes it easy for some length of time here and then doesn't put much feeling into it when he becomes louder and/or faster. Winter as producer if not Winter as guitarist is responsible for a slide guitar solo in *I Can't Be Satisfied* that is downright shaky near the end, and he's also got some guitar bits in several other places that could surely be less hackneyed. Then too, he has to answer for the selection and sequencing of the tunes, which bring on twelve-bar tedium a time or two. If you think I think this one is just about sunk by

slapdash production, you're getting pretty close. N.C.

Z Z TOP: *Tejas*. Billy Gibbons (vocals, guitar, harmonica, fiddle); Dusty Hill (vocals, bass); Frank Beard (drums). *It's Only Love; Arrested for Driving While Blind; El Diablo; Snappy Kakkie; Ten Dollar Man*; and five others. LONDON PS 680 \$6.98, © PS8-680 \$7.95, © PS5-680 \$7.95.

Performance: **Not bad, I reckon**
Recording: **Good**

I couldn't find much contrast in the last couple of Z Z Top recordings, which were mostly bash and crash and other things ending (or likely to) in ash, but this one's different. A little sleepy at times, but different. Not bad, though, taken as a whole, even if it does have titles like *Enjoy and Get It On* in it. It doesn't have much in the way of lyrics that you can't afford to miss, but it has considerable instrumental depth and variety for a three-piece blues-based rock band. Rock wouldn't be on the rocks if more of its post-1970 bands played this well. N.C.



THE CHIEFTAINS: *Bonaparte's Retreat*. The Chieftains (vocals and instrumentals). *Chattering Magpie; The First Tuesday of Autumn; Green Grow the Rushes O; Bonaparte's Retreat*; and five others. ISLAND ILPS 9432 \$6.98.

Performance: **Great day for the Irish**
Recording: **Very good**

The Chieftains are a cheerful group of Irishmen with a formidable grasp of the Gaelic musical idiom, which they employ to fashion artful medleys of reels and folk songs and tone poems based on Irish history. The most ambitious of these, *Bonaparte's Retreat* (which runs almost fifteen minutes), depicts in music the plight of the chieftains Napoleon forced to leave Ireland to serve in his armies abroad, the defeat of Napoleon in Russia, and the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy. This is a rather heady program for music that relies on the potentialities of such limited instruments as tin whistles, clacking bones, bodhrans, pipes, and concertinas. Yet the Chieftains carry it off, along with the ballads and hornpipes and Kerry slides that round out an unusual and beautifully recorded album. P.K.

STEAMBOAT'S A-COMIN'. Bill Jackson, Tom Williams, Lawrence C. Shoberg, Scott O'Malley, Raymond Bazemore, Charles Harper, Harry Johansen, Michael Cooney, Jay Ungar (vocals); Elliot Stringer (calliope); vocal and instrumental accompaniment. *Oh, Them Golden Slippers; Wish I Was in Mobile Bay; Georgia Camp Meeting; Old Dan Tucker; Sounding Calls; Dance, Boatman, Dance*;