

Town shows up at the very end of side one.

Actually, "Backslidin'" isn't that radical a departure, considering all the different types of songs Joe's recorded through the years. I do wish Baker had unplugged the Nashville String Machine in spots, but there's enough updated Sixties rock-'n'-roll here to keep it loose, and even something called *Everything but the Lady*, a pretty effective reading of male insecurities. *A.N.*

THOMPSON TWINS: *Side Kicks*. Thompson Twins (vocals and instrumentals); instrumental accompaniment. *Love on Your Side; Tears; Lies; We Are Detective; Love Lies Bleeding*; and five others. ARISTA AL 6607 \$6.98.

Performance: **Mannered**

Recording: **Good**

There is no more controversial style in popular music today than the technopop, a.k.a. synthpop a.k.a. electrobeat (no one can agree on a name for it), of such bands as Soft Cell, the Human League, Duran Duran, Yaz, and hundreds of others. It's "sophisticated" to some, "soulless" to others; it makes some people want to dance and it makes others wince.

The Thompson Twins are typical enough practitioners of synthesized pop, and their new album seems to exemplify the form in many ways, for better and worse. It features a heavy, eminently danceable disco beat, unfocused synthesizer fidgeting that ranges in tone from the cosmic to the flatulent, half sung, half intoned-through-the-nose lead

vocals and stagey, whispered call-and-response background vocals, an ad-jingle songwriting sensibility, and arbitrary conga breaks. In all honesty, this stuff is no more predictable or formulaic than, say, Delta blues. The problem for me is, the Thompsons just don't put any value on their own message. If they did, they wouldn't set lyrics like "my love lies bleeding" to such slight, mincing accompaniment. There may be a potent irony in putting a la-la-la-la chorus into the grim, Gary Numanesque *Kamikaze*, or it may be that the Thompson Twins can't decide whether they want to be serious or silly. In the end, this is music at war with itself. *M.P.*

RECORDING OF SPECIAL MERIT

DONNA WASHINGTON: *Just for You*. Donna Washington (vocals); vocal and instrumental accompaniment. *You Can't Hide from the Boogie; Where You Are Is Where I Wanna Be; I'm into You; Don't Be an Island; Do You Wanna, Huh?*; and three others. CAPITOL ST-12233 \$8.98, © 4XT-12233 \$8.98.

Performance: **Full-bodied**

Recording: **Good**

Although Donna Washington is no relation to the late Dinah Washington, she shares more than just the earlier singer's surname. Donna Washington has the same kind of affecting, full-bodied vocal lustiness that distinguished Dinah. Her uptempo numbers here are sharp and sassy, and on the more

intimate items she drives the lyrics home with intensity and finesse. Some of the credit should go to Chuck Jackson, who produced this set. He was a producer for Natalie Cole when her career was on the upswing, and a mighty fine job he did. He has showcased Donna Washington on this album with comparable care. A class act from background to center stage. *P.G.*

GROVER WASHINGTON, JR.: *The Best Is Yet to Come*. Grover Washington, Jr. (soprano and tenor saxophones, saxello); Ralph MacDonald (percussion); Eric Gale (guitar); Jon Faddis, Frank Wess, Alex Foster (horns); Patti LaBelle, Bobby McFerrin (vocals); other musicians. *Can You Dig It; The Best Is Yet to Come; More Than Meets the Eye; Things Are Getting Better*; and four others. ELEKTRA 60215-1 \$8.98, © 60215-4 \$8.98.

Performance: **Better than usual**

Recording: **Very good**

The easy-listening, jazz-flavored popular sounds of saxophonist Grover Washington, Jr., are often dismissed as little more than high-class Muzak. But he does come up with some delightful tunes.

On "The Best Is Yet to Come" he follows the pattern we have come to expect of him, laying his solo sax over conservatively tailored arrangements laced with the telltale rhythms of funk. But there are some interesting highlights here. The title selection features Patti LaBelle in an uncommonly subdued mood, teasing her way through a



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