MADONNA: “Hanky Panky” (Sire/Warner Brothers)

This is the song that had to be toned down because of its association with Dick Tracy, a Disney film. Deleted, reportedly, were references to masturbation and heavy duty S&M. What’s left is a tribute to the pleasures of light S&M, done in a brassy ’30s style. Madonna sings in a lower key than usual, tosses off risqué lines, and heads for the top of the charts with barely an effort. (Ernest Hardy)

MIKI HOWARD: “Until You Come Back to Me” (Atlantic 3261-2)

Aretha Franklin put her stamp on this Stevie Wonder composition as surely as she made Otis Redding’s “Respect” her own, and unless a singer has the goods, he or she shouldn’t even attempt to do to Aretha what the Queen did to those two heavyweights. Miki Howard has the goods. Aretha’s version of “Come Back” is still the definitive one, but Howard blows through this with talent, confidence and ease. Remixes ensure (dance) crossover potential. (EH)

ALBUMS

THE BLACK FLAMES: The Black Flames (OBR/Columbia 44030)

Like Bell Biv Devoe, the Black Flames blend R&B, hip-hop (influences), and pop into a ’90s-style funk groove. But where BBD depend almost exclusively on attitude to drive their disc, the Flames possess actual and legitimate vocal talent. Also like BBD, they are enthusiastic and engaging performers. Unfortunately, all this talent is only serving mediocre material. This is another example of the production being far more noteworthy than the actual content. The mock-operatic opening of “Dance for Me,” with its humor and style, shows more imagination than any lyric you’ll hear here. State-of-the-art R&B that, by definition, only rarely goes deeper than style. (EH)

CHUCK WILLIS: Footprints in My Bed (ichiban ICH 1054)

B.B. King, Little Milton and Bobby “Blue” Bland are among the bluesmen who have often crossed over to soul. Similarly, Chuck Willis is primarily a bluesman, but shows different sides of his talent on Footprints in My Bed. While cuts like “Love Crazy” and “Hello Central” are straight-up blues, Willis ventures into soul territory on “Big Red Cabbage” (which is the Wilson Pickett/Sam & Dave vein) and “What’s To Become of the World?” a ballad stressing soul’s gospel heritage. The singer/guitarist embraces soul-edged rock on “Roll the Dice,” and there’s even a reggae/pop tune titled “Jack You Up” that be inna de rude boy stylee, mon. (AH)

ELECTRIC BOYS: Funk-O-Metal Carpet Ride (Atco 91337)

Despite what its title implies, the soul/funk element isn’t as prominent on Funk-O-Metal Carpet Ride as it is in the funk/metal/punk experiments of the Red Hot Chili Peppers or 24-7 Spyz. Rather, the Electric Boys add a pinch of funk to a guitar-crunching hard-rock foundation, incorporating some psychedelic elements (such as a sitar—little Beatles influence), and come up with one of 1990’s most individualistic rock efforts. Cheers to producer Bob Rock (the Cult, Motley Crue, Little Caesar, Blue Murder) for bringing out the best in the Swedish headbangers. (AH)

CASH BOX JUNE 23, 1990


DID SOMEONE SAY DECLINE OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION, PART II? Epic staffers and media folk congratulate Social Distortion, following the band’s headlining appearance at the Marquee In New York City. Pictured are: (rest, l to r) Dan Beck, Epic vice president, product development; Robert Greenbaum, music director, WDRE; Mike Ness, Social Distortion; Jack Iaquith, Epic senior director, alternative music; Dennis Danell, Social Distortion; Rick Kram, MTV; Polly Anthony, Epic senior vice president, promotion; Abbe Konoich, MTV; and (front, l to r) Christopher Distortion; John Mauer, Social Distortion; Glen Brunman, Epic vice president, media & artist development; Steve Backer, director, national video & pop promotion; and Jim Guerinot, manager, Social Distortion.

HERE’S A BAND WHOSE NAME IS GONNA GET REAL TIRED, REAL QUICK, FOR THEIR POOR PUBLICIST: It must get almost as bad as “Who’s on first?” for the members of Brixton, England’s Underneath What, shown here celebrating backstage at the Cat Club in New York City. The Atco recording group’s performance was part of a tour that took them to San Francisco and Chicago, as well as this stop in Manhattan. Pictured are: (top row, l to r) Mark Snider, Atco promotion, mid-Atlantic region; Steve Kleinberg, vice president, marketing; Tim Ashton, Underneath What’s