

Pop

MIKE RUTHERFORD—Acting Very Strange, Atlantic 80015. Produced by Mike Rutherford. Genesis' guitarist launches a new solo career with this label debut, which should rival partner Phil Collins' own solo hit in quick AOR pickup. If anything, Rutherford's new songs stay closer to his band's recent upbeat triumphs than did Collins' more experimental album, and even spotlights a similarly thundering percussion style, thanks to help from Stewart (Police) Copeland, Paul Fishman and Rutherford's own drum synthesizer. As shown on "Maxine," already shipped as a single, Rutherford has a gruff but appealing voice.

ANNE MURRAY—The Hottest Night Of The Year, Capitol ST-12225. Produced by Jim Ed Norman. Murray and Norman's latest features a bit more emphasis on spunky mid-tempo pop material than past ballad-oriented collections. The subtle shift is exemplified by the single, a sprightly remake of Bruce Channel's "Hey! Baby!" which is already climbing the charts. "That'll Keep Me Dreaming" and "Song For The Mira," the set's most traditional ballads, are tucked away at the end of side two. Murray's album track record has been quite steady since the "Let's Keep It That Way" LP four years ago.

AEROSMITH—Rock In A Hard Place, Columbia FC 38061. Produced by Jack Douglas, Steven Tyler & Tony Bongiovi. What's this—Aerosmith doing "Cry Me A River" and "Bitch's Brew"? Fear not, headbangers, Steve Tyler screams rather than cries that old ballad, and the latter is a typically raunchy hard rock original, not the Miles Davis classic. In fact, despite a brand new guitar front line in Jimmy Crespo and Rick Dufay, this Boston quintet returns with the style and format of its biggest selling '70s albums intact, and with AOR on its hard rock rampage, these new performances could return the band to prominence.

WALTER MURPHY—Themes From "E.T." And More, MCA-6114. Produced by Walter Murphy. Play it again, "E.T." Murphy follows up his close encounter with the top 40 by conducting the orchestra through some hauntingly familiar musical territory. Space themes abound, with "E.T.," "Close Encounters" and "Star Trek" exploring the beyond, "Superman" somewhere in between, "Raiders" a globetrotting adventure, "Pottergeist" exploring inner space. For dessert, keyboardist Murphy suggests "Jaws." Gulp. MCA's "E.T." soundtrack reached the top 40.

VANGELIS—To The Unknown Man, RCA AFL4397. Produced by Vangelis. Capitalizing on Vangelis' worldwide hit with "Chariots Of Fire" RCA has collected some previously released material and packaged it with a cover that shows a runner breaking the finish line tape. As this LP demonstrates, "Chariots" was not the first time Vangelis came up with melodic and inspirational organ music. This album is full of similar tunes. This sort of pseudo-profound music can almost be addicting, though looked at another way it can be downright irritating. It's a matter of taste.

ICEHOUSE—Primitive Man, Chrysalis CHR 1390. Produced by Iva Davies & Keith Forsey. Reportedly a virtual one-man effort since songwriter Iva Davies dismissed the lineup heard on their 1981 debut, Icehouse shifts here toward a seductive, synthesizer-tinged pop style inviting direct comparison with Roxy Music's recent work. When Davies veers closest to Bryan Ferry's vocal inflections, as he does on "Street Cafe," the resemblance is eerie, but even with that risk in identity, this is strong, atmospheric music.

NOVO COMBO—The Animation Generation, Polydor PD16356 (PolyGram). Produced by Novo Combo, Elliot Scheiner. Last year, this quartet earned significant AOR and top 40 airplay and sales with its debut album. It was easy to write the group off as a Police clone but this second set possesses more of Novo Combo's own personality. The group has a wide variety in sound, ranging from the reggae-edged rock of "Too Long Gone" to the REO Speedwagon-shaded "Keep Your Love Alive."

Black

THE TIME—What Time Is It? Warner Bros. 23701. Produced by Morris Day & The Starr Company. Minneapolis' own rock'n'funk mafiosi continue their self-styled fusion of dance floor momentum, rock firepower and provocative if usually witty erotica. Built around Morris Day's lively vocals and good-humored sexual bravado, the band builds more of the long, loping grooves that proved a major calling card at urban contemporary stations last year, calling on help from their sisters in Vanity 6 (on "The Walk") and generally nodding toward old Prince. With the exception of the sly ballad, "Gigolos Get Lonely Too," this is non-stop party music.

THE B.B.&Q. BAND—All Night Long, Capitol ST-12212. Produced by Jacques Fred Petrus. B.B.&Q. has been on the beat since they broke big last year, and placed by "Imagination," the group seems headed for new heights. Kevin Robinson's steady vocals anchor the band, and bolstered by Kae Williams, Timmy Allen, Tony Bridges, Johnny Kemp and songwriter/arranger/conductor Mauro Malavasi, the band bids for a breakthrough on this richly-varied, multi-textured vocal/instrumental showcase. Brimming with pop potential on "The Things We Do In Love" and "All Night Long," B.B.&Q. is bound for greener chart pastures.

Spotlight



THE WHO—It's Hard, Warner Bros. 23731. Produced by Glyn Johns. The veteran rock quartet continues its renewed emphasis on more economical songs and a punchier, upbeat delivery, both key factors in the top five acceptance accorded "Face Dances" a year ago. Here, though, the return of frequent production ally Glyn Johns yields a slightly lush ensemble sound, highlighting John Entwistle's horns and the synthesizers played by Entwistle and songwriter Pete Townshend. As previewed on the first single, "Athena," the new set underlines the band's interplay in rotating vocals (by the aforementioned duo as well as lead singer Roger Daltrey), and while these songs are identifiably within the band's past work, they allude successfully to the anger and energy of new rock. Look for their farewell tour to bring added consumer anticipation.

KIM CARNES—Voyeur, EMI America SO17078. Produced by Val Garay. Carnes' fourth album for EMI America has even more of a rock edge than last year's No. 1 breakthrough "Mistaken Identity." The album's highlight is the title track, as steamy and sultry as the screen sirens Carnes sang about in the Grammy-winning "Bette Davis Eyes." "Does It Make You Remember," one of three songs cowritten with husband Dave Ellingson, is a striking example of the use of harder rock textures in a ballad setting; "Breakin' Away From Sanity," one of two tunes cowritten by Craig Krampf, features a 17-voice children's choir arranged by Jimmie Haskell. A worthy followup to a widely-admired LP.



CONEY HATCH, Mercury SRM14056. Produced by Kim Mitchell. This four man group from Canada plays rock in the Foreigner mold with solid crunching chords, vocal harmonies, flashing guitars, and individual and recognizable songs. It's just that the lyrics are so off putting and downright misogynistic. In one song they put down a woman for having a "devil's deck" in another one they accuse a lover of "poisoning my love" in a third they declare that "You Ain't Got Me." And that's only side one. All this wouldn't be objectionable, or even noticed, but these guys really know how to play these instruments.

SHAKATAK—Night Birds, Polydor PD16354. Produced by Nigel Wright. Are you ready for soft jazz/funk performed by (mostly) white Englishmen? That's what ShakataK plays, and it doesn't do it badly. The music is studied and technically all you would ask, using a variety of vocalists. But the vocals are not the point here, it's the instrumentation, which ranges from elevator music bland to acceptable pseudo-soul. A pleasant departure is "Sleepwalkin'" with a guest lead vocal by Jackie Rawe of the U.K. Sluts.

DAVID KENT, Epic ARE38134. Produced by John Anthony. David Kent is the keyboard player for Hall & Oates and this is his first solo album. It is obvious this record was consciously geared for radio. The music is in a pop rock idiom, played at mid tempo, not too soulful, but with lots of pretty harmonies, synthesizer washes, and nonthreatening song material. The vocals are not especially distinctive, but the playing is technically proficient even if not overflowing with new ideas. In other words it sounds like everything else you (don't want to) hear on the radio.

EPs

OCTOBER DAYS, Do The Right Thing, Aim Records AIM12105. Produced by Bill Murphy, October Days. This is what well-done new wave rock should sound like: committed vocals, a bitter edge, songs with a purpose and a relentless beat. And that is what October Days, a New Haven based band does. Contact: (203) 333-1436.

INCREDIBLE CASUALS—Let's Go, Eat Records EATUMEP12. Produced by Vince Valium, Chandler Travis. This 12-inch 45 r.p.m. "maxi-EP" features eight songs by the Incredible Casuals, a New England area bar band that plays with brass and cheeky vigor. The songs are simple and catchy and go back to a tradition where all that was required from a good band was that it play goodtime music.

JIM FREEMAN & THE GOLDEN GATE JUMPERS—Romantic, Alive Records AEPO02. As can be seen from the name of his backup band, this San Francisco-based singer/songwriter has a sense of humor. Also a sense of musicality which he combines well in this understated six-song EP. The songs are catchy, even if Freeman isn't the most technically proficient singer in the world.

BIG BOYS—Fun, Fun, Fun... Moment BB001. Produced by Spot. Austin, Texas has one of the most innovative local music scenes and that town's Big Boys are definitely worth looking into. Four of the tracks here are fairly typical, funk-spiced punk thrashings. However, two songs—a remake of Kool & the Gang's "Hollywood Swinging" and an r&b instrumental called "We Got Soul"—put this band way ahead of the hardcore punk pack.

Billboard's Recommended LPs

pop

ALTERED IMAGES—Pinky Blue, Portrait ARR38110. Produced by Martin Rushent. The new English techno pop bands are becoming as faceless as arena suburban bands or the soul/funk/disco ensembles. Witness this LP which has a picture of the band in front, but nobody listed by name or instruments—only producer Martin Rushent is credited. Which is a shame because Altered Images has a bright cheery sound, and songs like "See Those Eyes" and "I Could Be Happy" that are perfect examples of current dance club rock.

JIMI HENDRIX—The Jimi Hendrix Concerts, Warner Bros. 22306. Produced by Alan Douglas. The performances may be new to vinyl, but the material certainly isn't in this two-disc simulated concert, which claims to be the first live Hendrix package to approximate his actual shows' pace and sequence. That may entice collectors and hard-core fans, but while the recording quality's fine and the playing typically

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Spotlight—The most outstanding new product of the week's releases and that with the greatest potential for top of the chart placement; picks—predicted for the top half of the chart in the opinion of the reviewer; recommended—predicted to hit the second half of the chart in the opinion of the reviewer, or albums of superior quality. Albums receiving a three star rating are not listed. Reviewers: Dave Dexter Jr., Enrique Fernandez, Laura Foti, Paul Grein, Douglas E. Hall, Is Horowitz, Kip Kirby, Roman Kozak, Irv Lichtenman, Ed Ochs, Tony Sabournin, Sam Sutherland, Robyn Wells, Adam White.

Country

CONWAY TWITTY—Dream Maker, Elektra 60182-1. Produced by Jimmy Bowen, Conway Twitty. One of Twitty's most striking (and enduring) traits is his refusal to cut formulaic material. He thinks nothing of trying songs like "Just When I Needed You Most" or "The Rose," and making them his own. One of country's best balladeers, Twitty nonetheless knows how to handle a rocker; he also knows how to pack emotion into a lyric. The teamwork of Bowen and Twitty is one of the best studio combinations in this artist's career.

ED BRUCE—I Write It Down, MCA 5323. Produced by Tommy West. This is a showcase for Bruce's writing skills, taking its theme from the last cut on side one, "The Songwriter (I Write It Down)." The album contains Bruce classics (written alone or with co-writers) like "Mammas Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Cowboys" and "Theme From 'Bret Maverick'" (from his recent tv series with James Garner), plus new material. West's production is, as always, right on the mark for Bruce's laidback style.

Jazz

CHICK COREA—Touchstone, Warner Bros. 23699. Produced by Chick Corea. The prolific keyboardist returns to fusion from his recent mainstream and chamber jazz projects with this mystical concept album. Hewing to rhapsodic melodies and atmospheric ensemble playing, the set works because of Corea's emphasis on both smaller groups and expanded lineups, and a subtle shifting from acoustic passages to electronics and percussions. An all-star cast—including Stanley Clarke, Lenny White, Lee Konitz, Paco DeLucia, Al Di Meola and Gayle Moran—will spur added interest.

Gospel

ARCHERS—At Their Very Best, Light 5815. Various Producers. This collection of the Archers' popular songs of the past decade proves their versatility, covering mainstream pop, light jazz and near-choral arrangements. The retrospective finds several tunes holding up well over the years, including "It Wouldn't Be Enough," "Picking Up The Pieces," the soothing "Music," and the popular "Make Me An Instrument."

ANDRAE CROUCH—Finally, Light 5784. Produced by Bill Maxwell, Andrae Crouch. Crouch moves back into the gospel mainstream, at a time when many felt he was on the verge of mass-appeal "secular" stardom. A lush flow of back-up singers decorates all tracks, even leading the vocals on three

numbers, although the weight of their singing sometimes burdens the arrangements. Crouch hits his stride with the intense whisper-singing on "Finally," the melodic "We Need To Hear From You" and "Sweet Communion," with its drum intro and synthesizer refrains.

INSPIRATIONS—Someday, Canaan 9887. Produced by Martin Cook. This six-member, million-sellers group is back with more simple, steady Southern gospel. Backed by spare arrangements of piano, steel guitar and occasional dobro, the singers hit high notes ("They're Holding Up The Ladder"), harmonic country ("I Sure Do Want To Go") and rhythmic old-style numbers ("Someday"), forming a well-rounded, lively set.

First Time Around

HUGHES/THRALL, Boulevard Records ARZ38116. Produced by Andy Johns, Hughes/Thrall, Rob Fraboni. Though this is a new LP by a new band, its principals are rock'n'roll veterans. Glenn Hughes is best remembered for his stint with Deep Purple in the mid '70s, where he was the singer and bass player. Pat Thrall was until recently the guitarist for the Pat Travers Band. The two mesh well together, playing well, staying within the rock mainstream without being too esoteric or venturing into unknown ground.

CATHOLIC GIRLS, MCA MCA-5350. Produced by Evan Pace. Now that the Go-Go's have helped finish off the old reservations about lady rock bands, this East Coast quarter should have a clear field for radio acceptance, particularly in light of the new stirrings of post new wave styles on AOR. Still, their label debut does offset the band's clean, classic guitar rock with an ironic problem, packaging: while the campy cover and parochial uniforms hint at an underlying spoof, songwriter Gail Petersen delivers her confessions in an earnest, appealing stance closer to Robin Lane than Belinda Carlisle or Chrissie Hynde.

KIT HAIN—Looking For You, Mercury SRM14053. Produced by Mike Thorne. Kit Hain, formerly part of Marshall Hain, writes some interesting songs, which she sings with a voice that "soars, seer and soothes," the press release says. It's true and Hain can write and perform in a number of pop styles. Yet the material is always uniquely her own. The songs are always intelligent and musically fulfilled, revealing a range of emotions. Hain is a perfect example of a new artist that can appeal to an older demographic. If only radio would listen.

BURNING ROME, A&M SP4916. Produced by Liam Sternberg, Ed Stasium. Burning Rome is of a new generation of rock acts whose principals first honed their skills on the new wave scene, but who have since adopted to the realities of the pop mainstream. Lead singer Vicki Thomas was signed after a gig at Madame Wong's. Producer Liam Sternberg worked on early Stiff Records projects. Drummer Mickey Shine played on Elvis Costello's "My Aim Is True" LP. The focus here is on the big voice of singer Thomas, performing material that is perfectly acceptable to AOR while eschewing the genre's cliches.