

Reviews & Previews

ALBUMS

EDITED BY PAUL VERNA

POP

VARIOUS ARTISTS

VH1 Crossroads
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: Linda Ferrando, Wayne Isaak
Atlantic 82895

Multi-artist collection culled from the vaults of VH1's popular "Crossroads" program features the likes of Blues Traveler, Melissa Etheridge, Darius Rucker, Joan Osborne, k.d. lang, Deep Blue Something, Del Amitri, Goo Goo Dolls, Tori Amos, and Jewel performing their hits in intimate live settings. The first single is Amos' solo-piano rendition of Bruce Springsteen's "I'm On Fire," also included as a videoclip on the interactive portion of the enhanced CD. A high-profile release that promises to boost careers that are already on a fast track.

ELTON JOHN

Love Songs
PRODUCERS: various
MCA 11481

Few recording artists have extensive-enough catalogs to yield genuine greatest-hits collections, let alone genre-specific ones. Elton John is in that rarified minority. His "Love Songs" set features not only a cache of time-tested standards—"Your Song," "Daniel," "Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me," "Candle In The Wind," "Can You Feel The Love Tonight," etc.—but two new tracks, "You Can Make History (Young Again)" and "No Valentines," both midtempo AC tunes.

BRYN TERFEL

Something Wonderful
PRODUCER: Sid McLauchlan
Deutsche Grammophon 449163

There is ample recording attention being given these days to the music of Richard Rodgers and his great lyric partners, Oscar Hammerstein and Larry Hart. Here, the salute—one of enduring beauty—is from the opera world's new young superstar Bryn Terfel. With a generous selection of 20 songs—including rare R&H material—the Welsh artist can both belt 'em out without sounding pretentious (i.e., "June Is Bustin' Out All Over") or be exquisitely tender ("Edelweiss"). Utilizing the best kind of crossover presentation, this album stays thoughtfully within the realm of its material.

R & B

CURTIS MAYFIELD

New World Order
PRODUCERS: various
Warner Bros. 46348
Set's title track skillfully spouts bitter truths blended with hope and positivity using a steady but simple melody. Veteran artist's calming yet philosophically urgent vocals remain steadfast, despite an accident that left him paralyzed from the chest down in 1990. A masterful storyteller, Curtis Mayfield continues to reveal social problems without coming off negative, as do many wannabe community informers. Artist gets contemporary boost from producer collective Organized Noize, while maintaining traditional roots with steady R&B production veterans such as

SPOTLIGHT



NIRVANA

From The Muddy Banks Of The Wishkah
PRODUCER: none listed
DGC 25105

Few defunct bands could get away with releasing two live albums of old material after only three full-length studio releases. However, the enduring Nirvana continues to capture the hearts of its fans with material recorded at its blistering shows. This set happens to feature particularly inspired performances that span the band's entire career—from 1989, when it toured Europe with former labelmate Tad, to the winter of 1993-94, which would be its last hurrah. The sound quality ranges from live-to-cassette board tapes to full-fledged multitrack recordings mixed by noted producer/engineer Andy Wallace. But what's consistent is the passion in the group's shows, evident from the late Kurt Cobain's primal screams that open the album. A record that shows why this band's legend has only grown with time.

Terry "Zapp" Troutman and Daryl Simmons, in addition to manning the board himself. Pop meister Narada Michael Walden also contributes.

COUNTRY

DERYL DODD

One Ride In Vegas
PRODUCERS: Chip Young, Blake Chancey
Columbia 67544

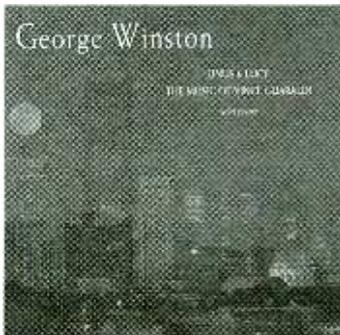
You can always tell which country singers grew up in the dance clubs of Texas—from George Strait to George Jones, from Lee Roy Parnell to Mark Chesnutt—their material has an easy assurance, and their musical manner bears an inherent confidence. Deryl Dodd is the latest to make the jump from the dance-hall circuit to a major label, and he represents the best of the genre. To begin with, he's a solid songwriter, having written or co-written eight of the 10 songs here, including the current single "Friends Don't Drive Friends." He's got to have song smarts to cover a classic like Tom T. Hall's "That's How I Got To Memphis." He's got a big comfortable voice that rides above the music. His live performances are honky-tonk grooves. And you can dance to them.

JAZZ

MICHAEL BRECKER

Tales From The Hudson
PRODUCERS: George Whitty, Michael Brecker, Pat Metheny
Impulse!/GRP 191
Michael Brecker won well-deserved applause for his righteous riffery on

SPOTLIGHT



GEORGE WINSTON

Linus & Lucy—The Music Of Vince Guaraldi
PRODUCERS: George Winston, Howard Johnston & Cathy Econom

Dancing Cat/Windham Hill 01934 11184
New age pioneer George Winston continues his exploration of musical genres with a delightful solo-piano album of Vince Guaraldi music. The score composer for a raft of "Peanuts" animated specials from 1965 until his untimely death in 1976, Guaraldi remains an American icon who is not as well known by name as he is instantly recognizable through his music. Winston offers respectfully faithful readings of such Guaraldi classics as the jazzy "Cast Your Fate To The Wind," the boogie-woogie theme "Linus & Lucy," and the evocative "A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving." "You're In Love, Charlie Brown," and "Peppermint Patty." Also an advocate of Hawaiian slack-key guitar music through his Dancing Cat imprint, Winston has broadened his horizons well beyond his new age core.

McCoy Tyner's return to Impulse! this year, and his newest effort for the label shows his full transformation from a perennial sideman to an authoritative leader. With an all-star backing band of Pat Metheny, Jack DeJohnette, Dave Holland, and Joey Calderazzo, Brecker

burns up the traditional jazz trail with the powerhouse swing of "Slings And Arrows," the frenetic boppiness of "Cabin Fever," and the yearning, naive aura of "Naked Soul." Tyner and Don Alias back Brecker through the exotic, bounding changes of "Song For Bilbao" and "African Skies," which recalls one of Tyner's more Afrocentric '70s tracks.

WORLD MUSIC

FOLK SCAT

PRODUCER: Bob Haddad
Nomad 50310

If the Bulgarian Women's Choir crossed wires with the Manhattan Transfer, the resulting jolt might sound something like Folk Scat, one of the most original and engaging world music projects in recent memory. This Bulgarian quintet comprises three women and two men, one of the latter of whom is group director Kiril Todorov, who sings and accompanies them on violin and percussion. On the breathless "Ianinku," Eastern European tonalities meet African-American syncopation, while the McFerrin-like vocal counterpoints of "Chompilche" exude a distinct Middle Eastern aura. Other highlights include the surging, staccato vocal volleys of "Rachenitsa," the ethereal harmonies of "Orisnitsi," and a seamlessly swinging remake of Beethoven's "Fur Elise."

LATIN

ALBITA

Dicen Que
PRODUCERS: Albita Rodriguez, Julia Sierra
Crescent Moon/Epic 67757

Gender-bending darling of bicoastal gringos, Cuban-Americans, and assorted international celebrities makes a mighty leap from slack debut with a solid album that displays lively lyrical imagery and innovative explorations of Cuban roots sounds. Capricious image-making (she now sports blond-and-bustier look of Madonna circa 1986) and Cuba-centric grooves limit the vibrant performer's sales potential in the Latino market, but inviting 11-song set still could melt resistance at Latino tropical

VITAL REISSUES®

SUN RA

The Singles
REISSUE PRODUCER: Jerry Gordon
Evidence 22164

Jazz may not seem like the kind of music that should be released as 45-rpm singles (although it often was), and Sun Ra may not seem like a "singles artist," but this 49-track two-CD singles compendium offers a sharp portrait of the bandleader/composer/pianist/showman over the years 1954-82. Performed with his oft-renamed Arkestra, Ra's omnivorous style embraced free jazz saxes, exotic percussion, spacey synths, vocal chants, and hard-driving backbeats. Many Racionados will be surprised to hear his doo-wop productions but not their dense, slightly dissonant vocal harmonies. Some sessions featured historic R&B wildman Yochanan, while others spotlighted such Ra jazzmen as John Gilmore, James Spaulding, and Julian Priester. Includes such favorites as hard-bop theme "Saturn" and other fine examples of the extraordinary jazz made by a simple man from outer space. A worthwhile set, although these

cuts attest to the fact that audio quality was never Ra's first concern.

RAY PRICE

Night Life
PRODUCERS: Don Law & Frank Jones
Koch 7928

New Country Music Hall of Fame, inductee Ray Price is best remembered as a big-voiced balladeer, but in the '50s and early '60s, he was a stone honky-tonker. This album came from Nashville sessions in 1962 and 1963, just before he began to shift to the country-politan sound. The songs are classics: Willie Nelson's title track, Charlie Rich's "Sittin' And Thinkin'," Hank Cochran's "If She Could See Me Now," and Hank Thompson's "A Girl In The Night" among them. And the sidemen from these sessions are classics themselves, including Nelson, Floyd Cramer, Harold Bradley, Grady Martin, Pigh Robbins, Shorty Lavender, Buddy Emmons, and Johnny Paycheck (then known as Donnie Young). This is music that has lasted and will continue to last.

radio with stirring romantic shakers "Mirame, Rózame, Árame" or "Dicen Que Tu Amor."

CHAYANNE

Volver A Nacer
PRODUCERS: various
Sony 82058

Handsome, sweet-voiced singer could replicate early '90s success thanks to a wide-ranging disc boasting a host of groove-braided love songs, such as lead-off hit single "Solamente Tu Amor" and killer uptempo ode to his native Puerto Rico titled "Ramito De Flores."

CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN

POINT OF GRACE

Life, Love & Other Mysteries
PRODUCERS: Michael Omerian, Phil Naish, Scott Williamson, Blair Masters
Word 7019694608

The latest collection from the Gospel Music Assn.'s reigning group of the year boasts the uplifting songs and stellar vocals that have made Point Of Grace members Heather Floyd, Denise Jones, Shelley Phillips, and Terry Jones one of the most successful acts in Christian music. The foursome deliver the buoyant harmonies that made their two previous albums so popular and spawned 11 hit singles at Christian radio. "Keep The Candle Burning," the first single, is already garnering tremendous response from Christian AC and pop stations. Highlights include title track and ballads "Jesus Doesn't Care" and "Any Road, Any Cost." The simultaneous release of a book by the same title and the group's current tour with popular quartet 4 HIM should add to the impact of this fine release.

RHONDA GUNN

Forgiveness
PRODUCERS: Billy Smiley, Bryan Lenox
Damascus Road 8000

The title cut is a smoky, textured tune that immediately draws the listener in, and then newcomer Rhonda Gunn proceeds to deliver the goods cut after cut on this promising debut. The artist grew up singing in church, but when she moved to Nashville, she landed a country/pop deal with Warner Bros. She returns to her roots in Christian music on this well-crafted pop set, which includes tunes like the rollicking "Living Well" and the infectious "Without Love." Among the other standouts are ballads "No Turning Back" and "Valley Of The Shadow" and the rousing "Stand By Me." A satisfying collection from a singer/songwriter to watch.

NEW AGE

STEVE ROACH, STEPHEN KENT & KENNETH NEWBY

Halcyon Days
PRODUCERS: Steve Roach, Stephen Kent, Kenneth Newby

Fathom/Hearts of Space 11072
If there could be a supergroup in the world of ambient instrumental music, this may be it. Noted synthesist Steve Roach teams with Stephen Kent and Kenneth Newby from the world fusion group Trance Mission. The result is a swirling landscape of slow-throb percussive rhythms, sinewy Indonesian flute melodies, and dueling didgeridoos—all morphing through a luminous electronic veil. This trio sculpts a sound world that merges the technological and the primal in a meeting of cyberspace and the global village.

ALBUMS: SPOTLIGHT: Releases deemed by the review editors to deserve special attention on the basis of musical merit and/or Billboard chart potential. VITAL REISSUES: Rereleased albums of special artistic, archival, and commercial interest, and outstanding collections of works by one or more artists. PICKS (▶): New releases predicted to hit the top half of the chart in the corresponding format. CRITICS CHOICES (★): New releases, regardless of chart potential, highly recommended because of their musical merit. MUSIC TO MY EARS (♫): New releases deemed Picks which were featured in the "Music To My Ears" column as being among the most significant records of the year. All albums commercially available in the U.S. are eligible. Send review copies to Paul Verna, Billboard, 1515 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10036. Send R&B albums to J.R. Reynolds, Billboard, 5055 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90036. Send country albums to Chet Flippo, Billboard, 49 Music Square W., Nashville, TN 37203. Send Latin albums to John Lannert, 1814 Fern Valley Road, Louisville, KY 40219. Other contributors: Havelock Nelson (rap/N.Y.); Irv Lichtman (Broadway/cabaret/N.Y.); Heidi Waleson (classical/N.Y.); Drew Wheeler (jazz/N.Y.); Deborah Evans Price (contemporary Christian/Nashville); Gcrdon Ely (gospel); John Diliberto (new age).