

# CLEAN CUT AND CLASSY

**CITY BOY: 'Young Men Gone West' (Vertigo 6360 151)**

CITY BOY got class. Now class ain't so useful in 1977 as it was a few years back. In fact it's currently a bit of a disadvantage. City Boy are the sort of band critics like to slam - polished pop, clever clever.

They're OK though. Their last album 'Dinner At The Ritz' got me

interested - some very smart melodic riffs, very quality commercial product.

'Young Men Gone West' is lighter, more 10cc than 10cc. They fill that gap well, better than 5cc do (Stewart, Gouldman), but they fall prey to some of the same mistakes that outfit made - gimmickry for the sake of gimmickry, feel from the head, the production console instead of the heart.

It's the sort of music Habitat could sell next to their range of Finnish pine tables or Yaks' wool tablecloths - slightly smug, very clean, NICE. An Old Grey Whistle Test - type band, a cut above

average though.

To carry on the 10cc parallel - the lyrics are all little novelettes, short stories, comic cuts, obvious puns - 'I've been spun and spin dried. But still the tears fall from my eyes. I've been spun but I'm cry - dyed Do me a favour and wring me' ('I've Been Spun').

The trouble starts when they get serious - "You remember how it used to be Making you smile like some half forgotten melody" ('Millionaire'). Cliche overkill.

The only thing I really find interesting about City Boy is the way they print all their lyrics in three different colours. +++ TIMLOTT



CITY BOY: Finnish as opposed to polished

**CARPENTERS: 'Passage' (A&M AMLK 64703)**

**KAREN CARPENTER:**

the dummy in the shop window. Devoid of emotion, each song a re-run of the last. Flat monotonous whether she's singing about pain or love, depression or joy.

A supermarket voice. Stick it in the wire trolley and run the gauntlet of washing - powder shelves. On 'Passage' she tries, tries very hard in fact, to bend those white line vocals and there's Richard in the back trying very hard to lift those barbed wired fences so she don't get caught.

And how does he do it? By choosing things like 'On The Balcony Of The Casa Rosada / Don't Cry For Me Argentina' and 'Calling Occupants Of Interplanetary Craft' written by Beatle bombers Kilaatu.

Does it work? We-I-I... put it this way: I suppose it ain't bad as far as Carpenters' albums go, which ain't very far. No matter how flash the production, no matter how melodic they strive to be, their records leave me as flat as a pie without self-raising flour.

Karen's the girl you pull in a dance hall who don't say a word when you jive and after buying her drinks all night you find she's got her own car outside.

The two 'experimental' tracks, which amount to little more than typical Carpenters jelly moulds only twice as long, have mixed success. 'Argentina' just don't belong. The operatic intro sounds like something straight out the local Gilbert And Sullivan Society and Karen's voice adds nothing to the song.

'Occupants' is the new single and I guess you could call it catchy despite the clumsy phras-

ings - 'Calling occupants of interplanetary most extraordinary craft'. For what it sets out to achieve it succeeds.

Just tease please, Karen. Slip out of those surgical stockings and put on some with seams and maybe the tiniest garter. And forget Steve Harley. He'll only make things worse. +++ BARRY CAIN

**VARIOUS ARTISTS 'Beserkley Charibusters Volume One' (Beserkley BSERK 6).**

IN BRITAIN in '77 humour isn't too fashionable. Everyone has a cause to fight for, everyone is serious.

So American labels are welcome relief from all that, being based in a country where they can afford to make FUN their main aim.

This is a reissue of an album which, when originally released in '75, precipitated the four

# Albums

## Sparks still flying



SPARKS: distinguished as ever

**SPARKS: 'Introducing Sparks' (CBS 5593)**

STRANGE TITLE you might think, considering this is Sparks' sixth album. Anyway, this is their first for nearly two years and their first on the CBS label.

Two years? That's a long gap. Perhaps it should have been titled 'Re-introducing Sparks'. Still lingering on the title, the record company reckon it's apt because in some respects Sparks are starting afresh.

The band is Ron and Russel augmented by a number of session men. The sound is Sparks. As distinctive and distinguished as ever.

The songs? Up for starters is 'A Big Surprise' which also happens to be their new single. Actually it holds no great surprises - the only surprise being the fact that it has been chosen for the single.

There are far stronger

and more commercial numbers to be found throughout the platter. Still, it serves as a foot-tapping warmer for side one's ultimate track 'Ladies'. Lifting fair-ground keyboards provide the backing for the fantasy lyrics. It's a great song, with lines like 'Ava Gardner cracking

jokes while Joan of Arc just sits and smokes'.

Difficult to pick out individual tracks: the class shows through all of them. 'Over The Summer', with its layered vocals, has a strong Beach Boys and surfing sound while 'Mysteria' closes the album asking a lot of questions -

lyrically, not musically.

The musical question is answered: yes, they're as good as ever they were. No, they haven't changed much. Yes it will chart. The boys produced it themselves. They're currently based in Los Angeles. Welcome back Sparks. +++ JIM EVANS

artists involved from complete obscurity into... even more complete obscurity.

Maybe they were ahead of their time. Maybe. At any rate they're only now beginning to make their mark on the record-buying public, as they call them in the business.

Jonathan Richman has already had a hit, the Rubinoos are on the verge of one and you can expect exciting new recordings from Greg Kihn and Earthquake in the near future.

Of the four Earthquake are the most mainstream and so perhaps the least instantly catchy, although I liked 'Friday On My Mind' and 'Tall Order For A Short Guy'.

Greg Kihn hasn't done anything in Britain yet but he has a great pop voice - listen to 'All The Right Reasons' and you'll see what I mean.

The Rubinoos contribute only one number, 'Gorilla', but it's a cracker.

As for Jonathan Richman... well, you know all about him. 'Roadrunner' is included here, but my favourite is 'The New Teller', a touching little tale about how it feels to have everyone knowing you've got a crush on someone.

But these are just my personal choice of tracks... there are plenty more to choose from. So don't take my word for it - go out and get it. You'll love it. +++ SHEILA PROPHET.

**PHIL SPECTOR: 'Echoes Of The Sixties' (Phil Spector Int 2307013)**

WITHOUT SINGING a note Spector has created a unique sound - and it's all here, demonstrated by the artists who have done so well out of his genius.

I know there's been something of a glut of Spector compilation albums but each one contains classics. And that includes this one.

On the album are tracks by the Righteous Brothers, the Crystals, the Ronettes, Ike and Tina Turner, Checkmates Ltd, Darlene Love and Bob B Soxx And The Blue

Jeans - enough talent to beging on with.

All-time and old-time gems are 'River Deep Mountain High' (Ike and Tina), 'Then He Kissed Me' (Crystals) and 'Walking In The Rain' (Ronettes).

Unless you've been living with your head in a bucket for the past few years you must have heard them already. There's not a lot of point in going on about how good they all are. An excellent compilation. +++ ROSALIND RUSSELL

**ROY MILTON & HIS SOLID SENDERS: 'Roy Milton and his Solid Senders' (Speciality SNTF 5019)**

**JOE & JIMMY LIGGINS: 'Saturday Night Boogie Woogie Man' (Speciality SNTF 5020)**

**VARIOUS ARTISTS: 'Rock 'n' Roll Dance Party of the 50s' (Speciality SNTF 5022).**

A SERIES of albums from Sonet billed under the general banner 'Original R & B Hits from the 40s and 50s - genuine recordings of the stars who started it all.' You've probably not heard of any of the artists involved, but they played an important role in the development of R & B music. Roy Milton, drummer and vocalist, dominated the R & B charts from 1946 to '52. His music is best described as jazz-based blues. Two of his biggest hits 'R M Blues' and 'Milton's Boogie' are included on this collection of laid-back and off-times repetitive music. Jimmy and Joe Liggins were also big-time in the same era. Joe's boogie piano playing, specially on 'Honey-dripper' is the outstanding feature on this platter. Sample also the delights of the one-time hit, 'Pink Champagne'. The third album has 14 tracks, most of which made the lower echelons of the American charts, but never did anything this side of the pond. All have the spirit of early rock 'n' roll - fun. Tracks include 'Haunted House' from Johnny

Fuller, 'Justine' from Don and Bewey and 'Oh-Rooba Lee' from Arthur Lee Maye and The Crowns. +++ Jim Evans

**DENNIS WATERMAN: 'Waterman' (DJM DJF 20513).**

BRITAIN'S OWN singing cop has another bash at stardom - bash being the operative word.

He's used Cliff Richard's backing team of Brian Bennett, Terry Britton and Hank Marvin but their solid playing fails to salvage what is, in the end, a totally mediocre album.

The slow ballads a la Soul are the worst - heavy, monotonous and obviously a strain on Dennis's husky vocal chords. The rockier numbers like 'Heartbeat' are better in a masochis-



DENNIS WATERMAN: masochistic

tic sort of way. I can't really see anyone shelling out £3 or more for this sort of stuff. A definite case of arrested development. ++ SHEILA PROPHET.

# Don's done it again

**DON WILLIAMS: 'Country Boy' (ABC ABCL 5233)**

THIS HAS to be Williams' best album to date. It's a cracker. If 'Visions' was a huge hit this has to be bigger.

One of the most noticeable things was that after I'd listened to it just once I remembered all the songs. With a lot of country artists - and a lot of rock artists too come to that - a few of the songs tend to slip into the same mood or become indistinguishable from one another. Not so here.

His resonant, rich voice handles each song differently and somehow he sounds bolder on this album. If I had to choose which track to pull off for a single I'd be lost because I think almost any of them would make it.

I especially liked 'Louisiana Saturday Night' and 'Sneakin' Around', both of which emphasise the point that not all country music is for the single-minded country fan.

I think this album has a far-reaching appeal so I'd ask you to listen to it before you say you don't like country music.

Williams covers a few of the usual topics country artists favour. But these days they're not so slushy - people realise you can sing about subjects that would have been taboo a few years ago. 'Rake And Ramblin' Man' for instance. I admit shotgun weddings aren't a very startling subject but Williams' approach is slightly unusual.

I'm sure this album will help consolidate his position as a cross-over artist - from country to pop. I think it's quite exceptional. +++ ROSALIND RUSSELL



DON WILLIAMS: real cracker

## NEXT WEEK

# David Bowie

# Heart-breakers

# Leo Sayer

## NEW ALBUMS REVIEWED