

## op/Rock/R&B

All reviews based on a five star rating system

### errance Simien **There's Room For Us All**

(Black Top/WEA)

The title reflects an admirable attitude, and Simian's eclectic taste in Louisiana boogie, reggae, and blues is getting ever more refined. Ranging from a remake of Daniel Lanois's "The Maker" and several Zydeco stompers, to the '60s-style soul of "Groove Me", and doo-wop of "Will I Ever Learn". The friendly music is dressed up with guests like the Meters, string-man Bill Dillon, and co-producer (and Neville Brothers veteran) Daryl Johnson on bass. But Simian doesn't have a distinctive voice — literally or stylistically — and the songs are more memorable for their eclectic reach than for anything personal or definitive.

### am Phillips **Martinis & Bikinis**

(Virgin/EMI)

Wow! She just keeps getting better. On her third outing with a man's name (well, I guess the original Leslie was fairly indeterminate), the songs are tighter, brighter, and punchier than ever. Not that she and producer/partner T Bone Burnett eschew artsy touches or melancholic interludes. In fact, the whole set recalls Revolver's blend of deadly hooks and out-there experimentation. This Beatle-mindedness, which you can gather from titles like "Same Rain" and "Strawberry Road", is obviously shared by

guests like XTC's Colin Moulding, Van Dyke Parks, and ex-Dan Hicks fiddler Sid Page, who leads a nifty string section on the Phillips-defining "Baby I Can't Please You" ("you say love when you mean control," she growls). The moptop connection is made complete by closing the set with John Lennon's howling "Gimme Some Truth." But even then, she's her own woman—no yellow-bellied son of Tricky Dicky's gonna Mother Hubbard soft-soap her.

## Tori Amos *Under the Pink*

(EastWest/WEA)

It's not like Tori Amos (at right) really cares what we think, or she would not have put her most inaccessible song at the start of her new album. Sure, "Pretty Good Year" sums up her wispy rhapsodizing and cacophonous rage, but do we want that in the same song? The rest of the record also follows a slow/fast/slow rhythm that makes for a pretty unfocussed hour of listening. Taken individually, though, there are rewarding songs here. "God", with its clanking percussion and bad attitude ("Do you need a woman to take care of you?", she smirks at the Bearded One) is an obvious standout, and "Cornflake Girl" is catchy single material. She's still under the sway of Joni Mitchell and Kate Bush, though, and even adds Peter Gabriel to the influence pile on the creepy "Past the Mission". I'm putting my money on the third album.

## Ant Condition *From the Mint Factory*

(Perspective/PolyGram)

Now that the harmony thing is back, groups of young men (and women, a la SWV and En Vogue) are competing for the Boyz II Men sweepstakes. This lively sextet, straight outta St. Paul (and exec-produced by Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis) is one of the most creative New Jack outfits yet, combining streetcorner soul, gospel fervour, and fusion jazz (really) with contagious ease. The hour-plus disc never flags, and the lads have equally strong voices — although the one-named Stokley standing out on the gently bragging "Nobody Does It Better", the churchy "Harmony", and "U Send Me Swingin'" (that's pronounced swangin', of course).

## Bonnie Raitt *Longing in Their Hearts*

(Capitol/EMI)

Bonnie's found her groove now, with her third, and best, collection of slinky blues and

sultry, Celtic-soul ballads co-produced with Don Was. A groove ain't the same as a rut: she brings back Anglo-Irish pals Richard Thompson and Paul Brady, but has the latter sing backup on a glorious reading of the former's "Dimming of the Day", and turns Brady's meditative "Steal Your Heart Away" into an intense mid-tempo shuffle. There are harmonies from David Crosby and Band-man Levon Helm on "Circle Dance" and the title tune, and harp-meister Charlie Musselwhite helps close the set with the spare "Shadow of Doubt". But the guest writers and performers never outshine the host — just check out Raitt's exuberant singing and Hammond organ-playing on her sexy "Feeling of Falling" to find out who's in charge, and why that's such a good idea.

## **inx** **The Storyteller**

(Pangaea/EMI)

In which the Sting-discovered singer-percussionist expands his sound with a variety of instrumentalists, including saxist George Howard, flamenco guitarist Django Porter, and a jazzy piano-plunker called Stevie Wonder. He goes slightly grungy on the enraged "Letter to the Killer", about his father's violent death, and streetwise on "Living in the Metro". Despite the variety, the whole record is marked by his lounge-ish croon, as typified by a remarkably tuneless reading of "Moondance" (it defeated Bobby McFerrin, too). Vinx has some pretty interesting stories to tell, but he's still having trouble keeping the listener's ear.

## **ennedy Rose** **Walk the Line**

(Pangaea/EMI)

Mary Ann Kennedy and Pamela Rose have found a nice harmonic, Indigo Girls blend. Aiming for inventive country pop, they've had help from friends like label head Sting, Emmylou Harris, and new-age keyboardist David Lanz. Too bad they didn't even try on the lyrics. Even with titles like "Without Your Love", "Real World", and "Love Makes No Promises" (haven't those been taken already?), some words fall far below cornball level. Check out "White Horse": "The freedom that she feels is more than free/There's a young girl in her eyes/It's funny how she looks a lot like me". This may make acceptable college-dorm fare (in rooms with horse posters, anyway), but other listeners will have to wait for Kennedy Rose to graduate to songs where language is as crafted as sound.

## **ulee Cruise** **The Voice of Love**

(Warner Bros./WEA)

As befits the David Lynch camp, the music of Julee Cruise is long on ironic atmosphere and short on everything else. Posing like a hopelessly jejeune member of the Vienna Boys' Choir, the gamine singer never rises above a whisper, and she's written neither

words nor melody here. The former chore fell to Lynch, who seems to think “I fell for you like a bomb/Now my love’s gone up in flames” is a clever play on pop clichés; the music belongs to Twin Peaks veteran Angelo Badalamenti, who serves up a diet of soothing ersatz jazz and cool pseudo-dooop. But the songs have no development, contrast, or meaning, and anyway, who needs this bland nonsense while Peggy Lee records are still in print.

## he Golden Palominos **This Is How It Feels**

(Cargo/MCA)

Past GP vocalists have included Michael Stipe, Syd Straw, and Richard Thompson in ad-hoc stylistic free-for-alls. This time, band founder/drummer Anton Fier worked up some smokin’ late-night tracks with bassist Bill Laswell, guitarists Nicky Skopelitis and Bootsy Collins, and keyboardist Bernie Worrell (all connected with New York’s avant-funk Material). The boys then made a tres big mistake: they handed the tapes over to singer Lori Carson. With her breathy, glottal-stopped soprano, Carson makes Edie Brickell sound like Aretha Franklin. And the tunes constitute an instantly forgettable mishmash of “ethereal” repetition and sophomore philosophy (“If the answers answer anything at all/They do by making the questions small”). If you own one of those karaoke machines, however, you could probably still have some fun with the backing tracks.

## reddie Jackson **Here It Is**

(RCA/BMG)

Yes, it’s here. A collection of 10 new smooth ones from Mr. Candlelight ‘n’ Wine himself. The songs, of course, are variations on love (“Make Love Easy”, love (“Come Home II U”, and still more love (“My Family”). Even so, the singing is the thing, and Jackson’s slick tenor has deepened and grown more adventurous — sexy, but still in a mom-approved kind of way. He even turns up the tempo on (slightly) funkier ditties like “Addictive 2 Touch”, whatever that means, and the propulsive title cut. He’s never startling like Luther Vandross, but Jackson’s still nice to have around.

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