

SINGLES

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According to the trade magazine *Music Week* 3000-odd singles have been released so far this year, which averages out at about 75 per week. This week the Christmas rush starts and there are 118 pieces of plastic vying for your attention. To cover them all would be a waste of my time and your money so here's a selection from an industry in overload.

SINGLE OF THE WEEK (1)

GRACE JONES: Slave To The Rhythm (ZTT)

Après Conan and Bond, I had her figured as a washed-up mannequin, but somewhere down the line she made a pact and Trevor Horn is the man to make her keep the promise. Crafted like a grand finale, a rapturous story, a swansong, 'Slave To The Rhythm' is an undeniable jewel in little Ms Maneater's crown. It's a definite monster; a huge stalking beat accompanies the many-hued, multi-splendoured beast. It's simply lovely; there's snatches of Gil Evans' orchestral suites, glimpses of Eastern wonder, a modal change midway into a startime showstopping ovation. Grace uncurls, cobra-like—she goes strutting and there's tiny explosions, she rests by limpid pools and a balmy chorus rises, she dances in an Arabesque sunset and a glissando string section is at hand. Horn's execution matches the record's dizzying conceits, he's brought all the threads together into a real rich tapestry. Breathtaking.

SINGLE OF THE WEEK (2)

THE JESUS AND MARY CHAIN: Just Like Honey (Blanco Y Negro)

This is a love song with a difference—a sulphurous French kiss, Spector's symphonic dreams dragged screaming into a miasma of feedback and searing cackles. 'Honey' is an indomitable sound, a companion piece to the classic 'Never Understand' from the best popicians of the day. Good pop music has always captured the zeitgeist as a matter of course, so it's no accident that along with the compulsive melody and sweetness, The JMC plunder shocking atrophy, fear, waste and impotence. No one else would dare.

SINGLE OF THE WEEK (3)

SKIPWORTH & TURNER: Hot Pursuit (4th & Broadway)

Funk can still have the most freedom and intelligence of all musical forms. When properly layered and absorbed, all the rage, sparks and energy are there implicitly. How the heart pounds, the feet twitch and the head spins with S&T's pursuit of their goal—stringent synth horn lines, great bass notes on the piano juggling the rhythm with a sizzling hi-hat, voices warm and flighty then lowdown and demonstrative. The actual song isn't quite up to 'Thinking About Your Love', but it's a fine platform for their understanding of sound and dynamics.

THE CLASH: This Is England (CBS)

Their first record in 700 years and they manage to miss the real riots once again. Still determined to slay the totems, bare the social ills, attend the wake of our crumbling banana republic, Strummer's rant bears all the signs of agit rocker well into advanced senility—voice rambling and cracking over a mess of syn-drums flutter, football chants and ugly guitar grunge. Busking would appear a much more fitting vocation.

THE LONG RYDERS: Looking For Lewis And Clarke (Island)

The self pitying carpers who think the music press should be their stepping stone to national success seize on bands like this (former NME cover group) as part of a big Yankee hype keeping them off the front page. What a daft boundary to draw. Surely there are only two types of music (good and bad), regardless of time, place or origin. The Long Ryders impressed me with about half the songs on their last LP, there was a craft and love there are they transplanted the old into new vitality and vigour, but this double pack is a let down.

'Lewis And Clarke' rattles and creaks like any ill-defined garage bar band; 'Southside Of A Story' is hey hey we're The Monkees or Clash City Rockers self-mythology nonsense for beat cowboys; 'Child Bride' has tame conjunto strains as a purdy Texan newlywed crosses the border for some Hispanic adultery, it sounds like bad Nick Lowe; and 'If I Was A Bramble And You Were A Rose' sees Sid Griffin take his Gram Parsons fixation to ridiculous extremes.

THE COMMUNARDS (JIMMY SOMERVILLE—RICHARD COLES): You Are My World (London)

Continuing where the Bronskis left off with a few musical adjustments—Viennese tea party string section, the piano line from Queen's 'Seven Seas Of Rhye', and operatic vocal cadence. Like the words and the voice, all these elements are overloaded, overwrought and embarrassing in their attempt to attain qualities of reach and emotional pungency. Over-reaction was a Bronski mainstay and it's hard not to cringe at the mega melodrama of 'I will follow you to the end of time/I will be the blood flowing through your veins' when sung with the usual hysteria and stridency. I'll pass.

SIMPLE MINDS: Alive And Kicking (Virgin)

Preposterous over-inflated pomposity from a group that seems to have lost all sense of their roots, their aims and their proportion. There's little semblance of a song here, it's just an exercise in U3 gushing. Jim Kerr sounds like he's been sick, trying to clamber over the effluent of megatonne multi-track *merde* churned out by the band and the Clearmountain-lovine production folly. The closing howls could be a chorus of stadium yuppies, and with a record this bad, this

brainless, the cries may turn out to be for their own funeral.

LOU REED: September Song (A&M)

Reed has ironed out the creases in his myth, unlike many of his peers. The subject matter of this Kurt Weill song (from the forthcoming LP 'Lost In The Stars') is perfectly in keeping with growing old gracefully. There's a swagger in his voice but the pledge is played straight. In a week with all manner of effects and contrivances, the power and simplicity of the neat ensemble is a welcome blast of fresh air. The only thing spoiling it is Lou's onerous guitar work which acts as a link between rolling country gait and fully ripened horn chorus.

On the flip, two giants of deep soul, Johnny Adams and Aaron Neville, sing 'O Heavenly Salvation' and it is indeed a divine match.

SHRIEKBACK: Fish Below The Ice (Arista)

A pox on all this jittery da da theoretical funk. Shriekback have two poses—epileptics on a problematic dance floor or laboratory boffins examining life in a test tube. This has a bit of both—the state of the world, the individual's ultimate powerlessness, a mild retort to Band Aid may or may not be some of the themes between the tribal mantras, the thunderclaps and the tremors. 'Shake it up/break it down.' Shriekback are an exercise in studied seriousness but they hope to be recognised as wacky chaps—and, as Marvin said, as long as you're dancing there's always a chance. In their case it's more likely to be a chance they'll fall flat on their rump. They do it for me every time.

MADONNA: Gambler (Geffen)

From the *Vision Quest* soundtrack that brought you the ersatz soul cream of 'Crazy For You', 'Gambler' is uptempo FM butch broad pose unredeemed by the superior dance track of 'Into The Groove' or the flighty cheek of 'Material Girl'. There's not even an especially interesting cover shot to recommend it.

SADE: The Sweetest Taboo (Epic)

'Diamond Life' was a serious case of too much blancmange poured down the listener's lughole. This pulls her away from that LP's studied torch song affectations with a few bright twists of rimshot and chunka-chunka guitar. She's still well over rated—a one-dimensional singer unable to zap or sting but the movement here produces an airy confection preferable to the usual lifeless sheen.

THE TEAM: We Are The Team (EMI)

THE FATBACK BAND: Wicky Wacky (Important)
CANUTE: No Looking Back (EMI)
TROUBLE FUNK: Still Smokin' (4th & Broadway)

ANDRE CYMONE: Dance Electric (CBS)

JESSE JOHNSON REVUE: I Want My Girl (A&M)
The Team continue with anthems for weekend funkateers—mob-handed and well greased, the girls bill and coo while the boys holler and insinuate. There's too much clutter in their cranking, whizzing and japing. The Fatbacks' mid-'70s slice of restrained muscle funk (which comprised half of the last Team record) shows the value of absence. The Canute record suffers from a bad dose of computed lifelessness, illustrating exactly why there is much looking back.

From the movie soundtrack *Good To Go*, Trouble Funk deliver a whumping clout of studio sweat and finesse but sadly they're grounded on the self-referential rock that sunk the good ship RAP. Mounting to an orgy of slam rhythms, 'Smokin'' ends with a heave-ho grunt—either someone had a premature ejaculation or overdosed on one too many stylisms.

Andre and Jesse are Prince offsprings; yea, he sent his children into the world and lo his gifts were many. To Andre he gave squiggly synth lines, runaway sperm shooting guitars and the voice that launched a thousand lingerie parties. I can just see them shimmying lamé hula hoops over leather-covered contours to this on *Soul Train*. I can see Jeffrey Daniels pouncing in front of the camera giving a high kick and a wink like the major embarrassment to humankind that he is. It's one of those come-on-and-join-the-party-baby records. The party may be over, out of time, but there's enough life pumped in to keep the eyelids from falling shut.

Jesse's got the piano and the heartbreak, he sobs for his lost spouse like a man whose just had a silken ruffle on his collar ripped in a bar fight. His mentor would never have let the tune pass by so slowly—where the high dives, the orgasmic fury, the spiritual screech easing out of carefully nurtured sensual awakening? Well you didn't expect the Purple nymph was going to give all his gifts away, did you?

FERGAL SHARKEY: A Good Heart (Is Hard To Find) (Virgin)

I've been listening to 'Positive Touch' and 'Sin Of Pride' a lot—remember the wit, the maelstrom, the magic? Sharkey sure helped me forget that in a hurry. First fruits of his partnership with David A. Stewart shows his vocal pearls cast to swine—blundering MTV rawk-out bombast. Catch the strange, sparse 'Anger Is Holy' flip for a reminder of Sharkey's special talent and wonder just what he's doing with the rest of his career.

TALKING HEADS: Road To Nowhere (EMI)

Byrne's attempt to return to the pastures of their debut album—the common man in anytown USA

looks to the future and its promises—is suitably filled with lethargy and spiritual hunger. He's caught something in this quirky snapshot—off-beat militarism, wheezing accordion, disconnected gospel harmonies—but he's too jaded and I'm too incredulous to let him hammer it all into place.

BRILLIANT: It's A Man's Man's Man's World (WEA)

An elaborate joke, I suspect. Youth's revamped outfit render the JB song with female vocal and a relaxed reggae lilt rather than the Godfather's smouldering intensity. The Residents do a much better, funnier version.

ADX: Falling In Love Again (Sire)

The ideas even Peter Burns rejects ADX gobble eagerly—rabble-rousing rubbish version of an old camp horror.

CLANNAD: Closer To The Heart (RCA)

Sometime purveyors of haunting choral Celtic magic clock in with a hopelessly preppy piece of Barbara Dickson style whingeing.

THE TAXI GANG WITH BERNARD FOWLER: Down On The Corner (Island)

The guts torn out of the John Fogerty classic and replaced with Bacardi and tropical niceties. An outrage.

THE O'JAYS: Just Another Lonely Night (Philadelphia International)

Mr Levert still has a fearsome earthy growl, but slotted in between their '70s golden work this was revealed as a drippy candlelit ballad for two in a velvet-walled restaurant of your choice.

SHANNON: Urgent (Club)

Gorgeous lady with the great Foreigner song of palpitating desire and desperation, but her reading fails to light up the old circuit board like I expected. Junior Walker's last LP has a much better version.

MICHAEL MACDONALD: Don't Look Back (Elektra)

'I'm fading out of time...' the voice slays me—it's gasping, chased by heartbreak, bleached tones bearing the scars. Always a treat to hear him, but he deserves better tunes than this FM freeway romp ordinaire.

TINA TURNER: One Of The Living (Capitol)

Grace Jones for headbangers.

BRASS CONSTRUCTION: Conquest (EMI)

Randy Muller and co. return with a sliver of breathy, sappy hi-tech designer-era disco peacock prawl. But this time the furry dice don't swing, the pink gin don't fizzle, the chest wig and creepy come-on just don't work. 'Conquest'? Not tonight, me old son.

DAVID LINDLEY: Pretty Girl Rules The World (WEA)

Terrifying record, as it shows even an old hippy washout like Lindley can make an '85 radio fodder hit with ease. Three of pop's fave things—gorgeous girls, globetrotting and a guy going ga-ga—combined with a bumpy beach buggy beat and a few tropical inflections are all you need. Sid Jenkins will love it.

SHAKATAK: City Rhythm (Polydor)

A cruise through Debarge tune and video of similar title in Radio 2 time.

ANIMAL NIGHTLIFE: Preacher (Island)

Still sound like a group who have never encountered life as she is lived outside a Soho night club.

TRAMAINÉ: Fall Down (Spirit Of Love) (A&M)

A natural glow surrounds this snug heartbeat throb and aching vocal exhortation. Magnetically irresistible, especially when played off against the serious big-bam-booming on 12-inch.

RICKY SKAGGS: Four Tunes (Epic)

One more chance to catch the true mastery of ole Rick—'Waiting For The Sun To Shine' and 'Highway 40 Blues' has his vocal at cool yearning best, gems of heartbreak and loss; while 'Uncle Pen' and 'Honey Open That Door' are wild hypergrass wing-dings. Couldn't have chosen them better myself.

MICRODISNEY: Birthday Girl (Rough Trade)

The classiest little indie on offer this week, two lovers given a thumbnail sketch, traced from the cradle to the grave. A determined attempt to bring some breadth and focus to the merry fallout of pop life, a good tune too.

THE FEVER TREE: The Pixl Shop (Plan B)

Clambering up that hill gormlessly—straddling mad axes and slipping on a hellish splatter goth dance track along the way. It's slung together like a Big Flame tune—every which way is obtuse, there's a new angle and a different play after every line so you end with a spaghetti junction of ideas and no lasting effect.

PLAGUE OF FOOLS: Heart Of Hearts (Partizan)

A communal hoo-hah about the highly dubious notion of inner strength to be found in the abiding sheep mentality. Punk metal stampede and sloganeering that would be more at home on a football terrace.

CLICK CLACK: Sweet Stuff (Rough Trade)

Some brittle-boned leching from the thin end of Sheffield's nocturnal funk scene. Singer sounds like he'll do himself a serious injury long before his wish to sound like Captain Beefheart comes true.

THE HIT PARADE: You Didn't Love Me (JSH Records)

The illness of Albion—inane cheerfulness—isn't confined to the big league as this mess of derivative chiming guitars and Cheshire-cat grinning proves.

THE EDGE: Round Round Round (Volume)

From County Durham, gentle strumming leads into a fully fledged Olympian crescendo, the usual pseudo-sensitive HM ballad.

THE KEEP: Not So Wonderful (One By One)

From Belfast, latter-day Depeche angst laboured over a self-explanatory song title.

WOLFGANG PRESS: Sweat Box (4AD)

An interchangeable bunch of Xmal Deutschlanders and Cocteau-type people get together to produce the wearisome dirge that is customary from this label. Dance music if you are in leg irons, therapeutic if you're shrink-couch fodder.

VERNON HAYWOOD: Only A Conservative Dream (Red Flag)

Forty-year-old Vernon's contribution to scoundrel Kinnock's campaign trail. A piece of Lowry land mawk released and financed by the Labour Party, it's aimed more at Working Men's than Youth clubs, though I wonder if 'oor lads' will readily accept such blatant politic profiteering from the unemployment industry. I have a record collection and a political conscience both of which will survive very nicely without this.

