

ASWAD: Don't let the name fool you

ASWAD
Distant Thunder
Island

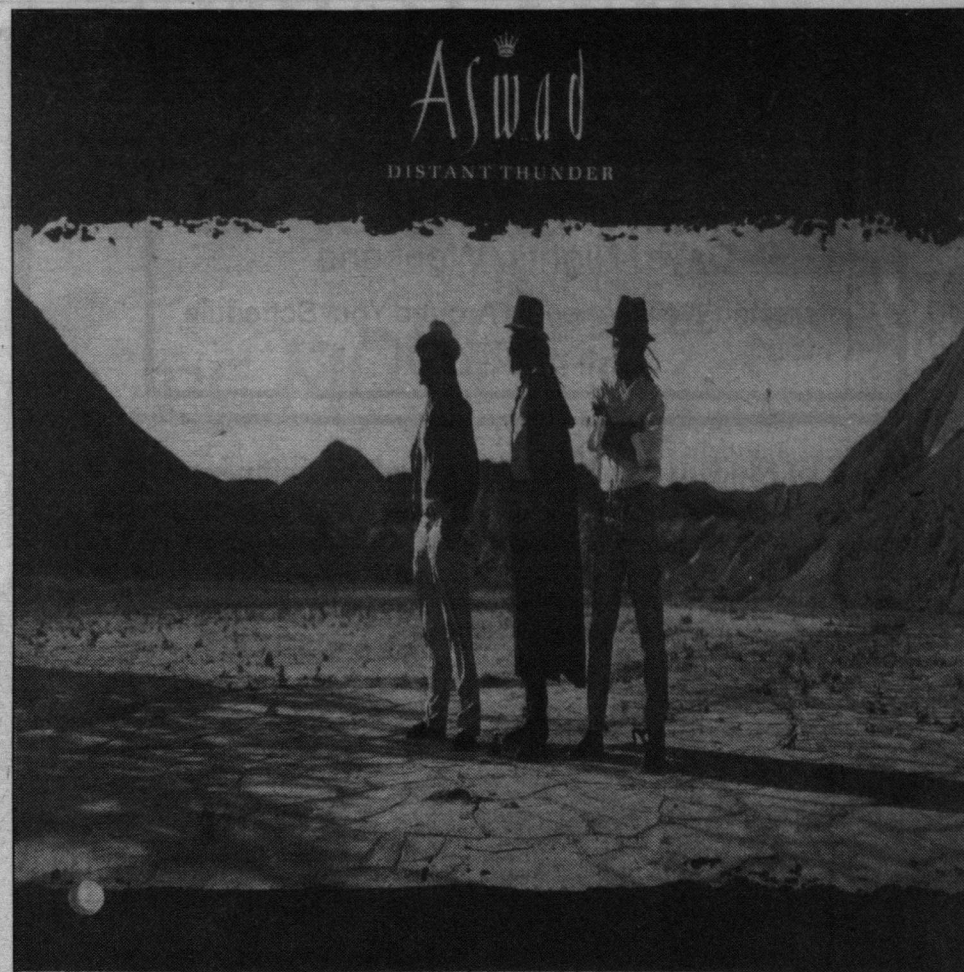
by Scott Gordon

British reggae artists Aswad have a mellow reggae style than Ziggy Marley and the Melody Makers or Black Uhuru, but this is no way lessens the power of their lyrics. The outrage they show in their songs is merely

tempered by their mixture of percussion and keyboards and the end product is a slow-burning patience for justice that is more chilling than the driving protest of someone like Bunny Wailer.

Even their love songs, like "Don't Turn Around," evidence barely subliminal outrage, and the listener can be forgiven for thinking that Aswad is merely a pop band using reggae rhythms and conventions. Their voices and harmonies can, and do, lull the listener into a euphoric commercialism thinking that the band is perfect to slow dance to.

Don't be fooled, however, "Give a Little Love" owes more to calypso than reggae and is about exactly what the title says; give a little love (and understanding) and the world *will* be a better place. Other reggae artists sing of the same concept, but it is backed by a harder, tougher music. Aswad chooses to present their message in a softer context, but that message is still there.



The Looters: Questions but no answers

The Looters
Flash Point
Island

by Scott Gordon

The first thing the listener is assaulted by on the Looters debut LP is a bone shaking bass a la funk powering the bone shattering voice of lead vocalist Matt Callahan. Once the initial assault is over, the subject matter of "War Drums" steps in and pounds the listener.

"in the mold of the clash," but the sincerity and passion of their music was fueled during a tour of Nicaragua where their salsa/reggae/funk beat was accentuated by gunfire and bombs. If that was not enough, they were faced with the daunting task of running a San Francisco nightclub, aptly called The Offensive, that thrived on social and political confrontation.

Their music is littered with Latin and African influences, and this is evident in their exquisite harmonies, and complex, yet seemingly simple, melodies.

The five members of The Looters come from different social backgrounds and musical traditions. This diversity is not felt on the album because they are all in agreement on their social and political views, and it is this solidarity that powers the album. The listener is not given a chance to ignore the message in the words, or the words themselves, but it is not because of repetitiveness; it's because they are singing and playing about the truth. And the truth is that there is so much horror in the world and no one seems to be doing anything about it.

The Looters ask tough questions: "How can it be/ Innocence is punished?/ How can it be/ That the evil ones thrive?" They may not be able to provide answers, but at least, they are asking questions. And their music does not give its listeners a chance to ignore those questions.

The listener is not given a chance to ignore the message in the words.

This is not a band to be taken lightly or to be ignored. They may be billed as being

Psyche: live or Memorex

Psyche
Flashback
Thursday, September 15

by Rodney Gitzel

"These boys are weirder than I thought!" Maybe some of you know of whom I spoke — maybe you went to school with them — Darren and Stephen Huss, otherwise known as E. Panic and A. Red or, simply, as Psyche. Those of us who went the other night expecting a gig were also treated, courtesy of Flashback's numerous black and white TV sets, to a mini-festival of extremely bizarre and macabre Huss-made short films. The neighbors must have been glad when THESE boys left town a few years ago.

Anyway, the gig itself finally got going, much later than expected, opening with a fave tune, "Prisoner to Desire". A lot of the material in the ninety-minute-plus set was from the recent *Mystery Hotel* album, with several tunes from previous albums interspersed throughout. That most of the music was played from a tape isn't

surprising, considering that the Huss handling keyboards would need a few more hands to be able to cover all the parts. However, it was a tad disappointing that the newer material was reproduced verbatim from the album, with Darren (?) providing (live) vocals and Stephen (?) pretending that he was actually playing the parts — or, so it seemed to me. Happily, the older material was rearranged a bit, and featured actual playing, even to the point of taking the chance of being played on a sole keyboard.

Watching these two fellows was a rather interesting experience. The singing Huss, whose dancing was described beforehand by someone who knew him as "quite sexual", was constantly in motion, be it dancing, crawling on the floor, looking like Paul Weller, or whatever. The other stood demurely among his keyboards, playing almost disinterestedly and leaving his brother to be the focal point of the proceedings. This division seems strange to a few who attended the gig for, if I've got the names straight, it is THIS brother, the introverted one, who was largely responsible for those extremely, well, extreme films. It all makes me wonder just what he thinks about up on stage.

Courtney Pine: Jazz for the future

Courtney Pine
Destiny's Song & the Image of Pursuance
Island

review by Mike Spindloe

Courtney Pine is an extraordinarily talented young British saxophonist and this album, only his second, puts him squarely at the forefront of the emerging generation of jazz players. Like most players these days, he's well versed in the stylings of greats like John Coltrane and Sonny Rollins. Unlike some, however, Pine's musical vision seems clear; his ideas translate easily into music, and somehow, back into the words he uses to give us an idea of the thoughts behind the music.

Of course, the improvisatory nature of jazz music allows us each to draw our own conclusions, but it's nice to hear an

artist who is attempting to achieve something definable in words with his music (this makes things much easier for us poor scribes). What Pine is striving for here is no less than a series of musical statements about... striving to make musical statements, or, as he would have it, "the image of pursuance."

If you find all of this somewhat grandiose, pretentious, or perhaps even incoherent, rest assured that metaphysics have not gotten in the way of Pine's ability to blow a mean tenor (and occasionally soprano) riff. In fact, the album opens with him doing just that in a too brief solo. The immediate impression is one of a player in possession of vast amounts of confidence, issuing a challenge to himself.

Pine rises to this challenge on all counts. From these first notes onwards, we cannot doubt that this is HIS album; the backing musicians rarely step out to solo and the

background is, for the most part, kept deliberately sparse, with just piano, bass and drums providing support for Pine's soloistic excursions.

Despite titles like "Prismic Omnipotence", however, Pine keeps at least one foot planted firmly in the past while the other is out wandering. This fact is evident throughout; he isn't doing anything really revolutionary, after all, and he even closes side one with a solo version of the standard, "Round Midnight".

Courtney Pine's destiny, then, might just be to be a fine jazz saxophonist. At this point he possesses a good range of expression, a superior grasp of technique and the growing ability to write his own signature in his music. These are no mean feats in themselves, and yet Pine aspires to do much more. That should be interesting to look forward to, but for now, what he has done is impressive enough.