

Armatrading and The Beat show their best



Joan Armatrading
Track Record

side two features a sound owing a lot to acoustic guitar strumming and Glyn Johns' California production.

It's interesting to note that almost half the songs on *Track Record* are produced by Steve Lillywhite (two new songs are co-produced with Armatrading) who is in possession of the "sound of the 80's" if anyone is. Lillywhite produces groups on the leading aural edge of pop music, such as U2, Big Country and Peter Gabriel.

What he gives Armatrading is that big sound characterized by shining electric guitar chords swimming in space punctuated by a steady, strident drum THWACK.

While Armatrading is still something of a buried treasure, The English Beat have had a bit more exposure, although not nearly as much as their talent deserves.

Alas, *What is Beat?* is not only a "Best of," but also a "last of" as the group's two vocalists, Ranking Roger and Dave Wakeling, have left to form another band. With only three albums to their credit, this new compilation needs the allure of remixes, live versions, and non-lp singles to justify its existence. And this album's existence is easily justified upon a few listens.

The Beat came out of the Ska revival in 1978-79 England as easily the fastest, most frantic dance band of the lot. Their trademark sound from the *I Just Can't Stop It* album was a very sped up drum base with two guitars, one

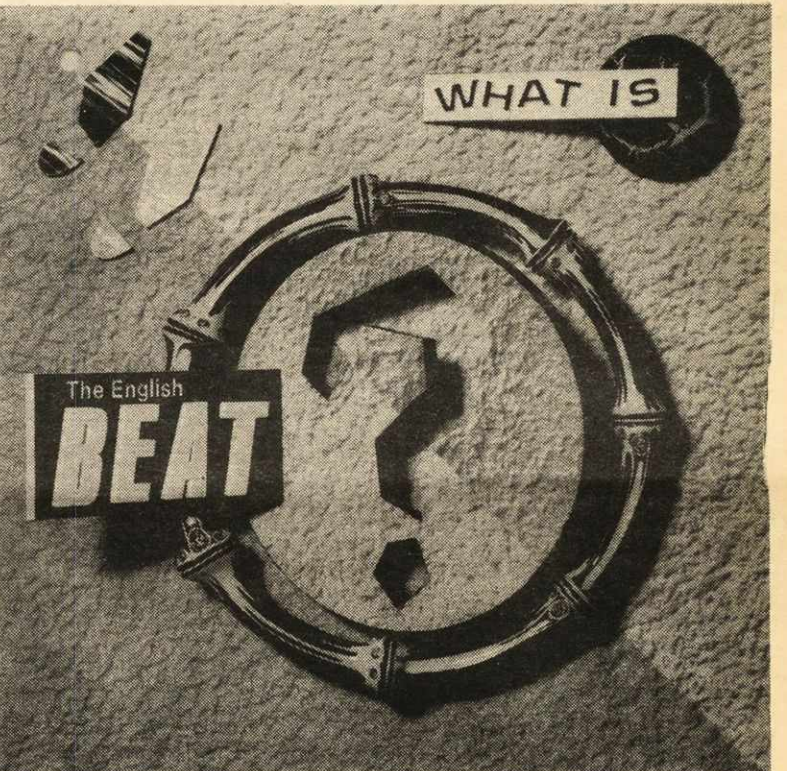
strumming, the other chugging and clicking, as the bass pinned everything down for Saxa's short melodic honking sax lines between fast vocals. Of the twelve songs here, five show up in some form or another from that first, best album.

The album has a few tracks it could easily do without, such as extended versions of perfectly tight pop singles like "Save It For Later," one of last year's best. As well, their most recent single, "What's Your Best Thing?" doesn't go anywhere, seemingly being something dreamed up in the studio to kill off a B-side of a

better single.

Despite the awkward passages here, the Beat are still one of the premiere party bands of recent years, in all the best senses of that term, while still maintaining a strong anti-Thatcher streak of social comment in the lyrics ("Stand Down Margaret," done live here, is a call for the Iron Lady to resign).

It's truly a shame that buying these two records will only help one active artist now that the Beat are defunct, but Joan Armatrading deserves attention every bit as much as Wakeling, Ranking Roger and crew.



Track Record
—an album by Joan Armatrading
What is Beat?
—an album by The English Beat

A review by Ken Burke

The "Best of..." record is an animal that's produced some worthwhile albums but also an awful lot of dreck. Fortunately, new releases by two very deserving artists, Joan Armatrading and The English Beat, rank among the best of the "Best of" 's.

Armatrading's *Track Record* is, like the Beat's *What is Beat?*, a record bereft of historical info (i.e. liner notes). Only the names of producers and the recording

dates are used to inform us how far back Armatrading's recording excellence stretches (back to '76). But that's okay, since the music more than makes up for the scarcity of info about it.

Best known for her recent semi-hit "Drop the Pilot," Armatrading is a woman blessed with not only a strong, controlled voice, but also with the ability to write some of the most emotionally accurate lyrics in pop music. She then puts them to catchy songs ranging from slow ballads to joyously electric rock 'n roll.

The album's first side contains more of the recent rockers, and

Bad music and The Cramps could be worse

Bad Music for Bad People
an album by The Cramps

A review by Siobhan McRae

If your criteria for music includes seriousness, sophistication or technical skill, I suggest you steer clear of *Bad*

Music for Bad People by the Cramps. But if your taste is diverse enough to appreciate music that is downright silly and junky-sounding, then you'll probably have fun with this album.

Bad Music for Bad People is the latest domestic release by The Cramps and contains selections from the albums *Songs the Lord Taught Us* (1979) and *Psychedellic Jungle* (1980), which were both released in Canada, as well as cuts off various compilation and greatest hits packages put out in the U.S. and Britain.

This collection emphasizes The Cramps at their silliest and while they are not as silly as the songs on *Bad Music* would lead you to believe, it is something at which they naturally excel, somewhat in the style of early B-52's.

The most obviously outrageous aspect of the band has to be the vocals of Lux Interior. He takes rockabilly vocal techniques, which were always a bit

overdone, and elevates them to the height of ridiculousness.

Accompaniment to Lux Interior is provided by three guitars (Ivy Rorschach, Brian Gregory and Kid Congo Powers) and drums (Nick Knox), but no bass. The production is as raw as possible and the technical skill of the players leaves a lot to be desired, but with this type of music, enthusiasm and a sense of humour are all that's required.

If you want a formal title for The Cramps' music, you can call it "Voodoo Shockabilly". Basically this involves using

ghoulish subject matter in a musical format that carries the elements of rockabilly to the ultimate extreme.

The "Voodoo" aspect of this band is pure camp. Although the songs deal with such subject matter as narcotics, sadism, disease, corpses, and dismemberment, the overall effect is about as harmless as a Halloween party. The Cramps are like a musical version of *The Munsters*.

So for those of you who don't find "bad" taste and "bad" playing an obstacle to your enjoyment of music, give *Bad Music for Bad People* a try.



Bad music for bad people

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