

Some of Skeet's stocking stuffers

# More winners and losers

by Michael Dennis Skeet

Doing my public service bit this week - got a fair number of records on the turntable here, and some of them would make excellent gifts should you decide to reward yourself for managing to survive exams.

Gauche  
Steely Dan  
(MCA 6012)

Superficially *Gauche* (MCA 6012) sounds a lot like the last Steely Dan album *Aja*. Initial impressions can be deceiving, though, and that's one of the many pleasures of this new album (actually the second on MCA, the Dan's new label): careful listening opens up to a greater extent the art of Walter Becker and Donald Fagen.

There were rumours this spring that Becker and Fagen were thinking of establishing a more or less permanent band for a tour. That idea may still be in



steely dan  
gauche

the wings, but *Gauche* is an album made by sidemen. What sideman, though! From jazz, people like Joe Sample, Steve Khan, Michael and Randy Brecker, and Tom Scott. Pop artists sitting in include Mark Knopfler, Valerie Simpson, Michael McDonald (a Dan alumna), Rick Derringer and Patti Austin. These talents do not scream their individuality, but mold into a complete whole that has the unmistakable mark of Becker and Fagen on it.

The genius of these two gents lies in their collective ability to take a multiplicity of sources - jazz, raggaie, R & B - and create music that is as identifiably *Steely Dan* as it is a series of unique, distinctive tunes. Searching out the musical roots of the seven songs on this recording is another of the pleasures it affords.

Three examples stand out: *Babylon Sisters*, with its almost-hidden reggae beat, *Time Out of Mind*, in which Becker and Fagen out-do Michael McDonald doing Becker and Fagen, and the terrific title tune, with its jazz flavoring, extremely lush arrangement, and delightfully kinky-obscure lyrics.

I've gone on for longer than I intended, but the final message remains simple - *Gauche* is innovative, intriguing, and well worth having.

Beat Crazy  
Joe Jackson  
(A & M SP-4837)

Joe Jackson's latest *Beat Crazy* (A & M SP-4837) is a curiously flawed work. Jackson possesses one of the most sardonic wits, and impressive writing talents to come out of the English pop explosion. Unfortunately, he seems to have intentionally blunted his wit on *Beat Crazy* and given us an album of Message Rock.

Most of the Messages are still well-written, but it seems as though experience has saddened Mr. Jackson, and something in the lyrics is suffering along with him. A muted overall sound (sloppy production or lousy pressing?) doesn't help matters much.

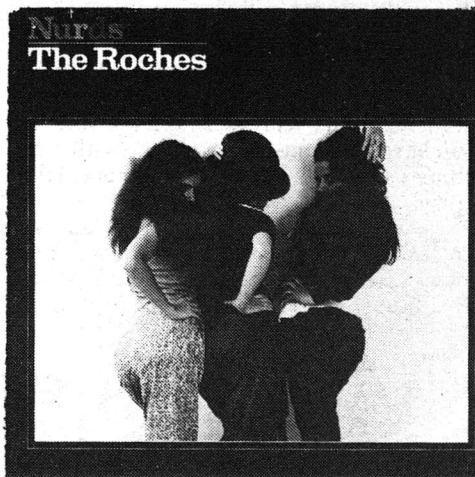
There are high points, of course. Jackson's delving into reggae works, although another rocker (to complement *Mad at You* and *Pretty Boy*) would have



been nice. There are no bad songs. *The Evil Eye*, *Crime Don't Pay*, *One to One*, *Biology* and especially *Someone Up There* are good, but there are no songs on *Beat Crazy* that stand out the way *Is She Really Going Out With Him?* and *I'm the Man* did on earlier albums. And although I like the album and am glad I've got it, it's not Jackson's best. I prefer him laughing at the world rather than crying along with it.

Nurds  
The Roches  
(Warner XBS 3475)

What can you say about three happily-sleazy women who sing about the joys of being totally rejected by their peer group, or about the fantasy-assassination of one of the trip by a frustrated laundromat attendant? About the only thing you can do with *Nurds* by the Roches (Warners XBS 3475) is listen with wide-eyed wonderment, and don't bother trying to suppress the giggles.



This is a charming album, from the cappella rendition of Cole Porter's underrated *It's Bad For Me* to the title tune *Nurds* (*I'm so glad I am one*). These women are wonderfully competent, whether telling twisted tales or twisting rhythms - the Andrews Sisters smashed on applejack.

Their message is one of liberation: it's OK to be a terminal nebbish. I will now stick my thumb up my nose with pride.

Beat Boys in the Jet Age  
The Lambrettas  
(Rocket PIG 3257)

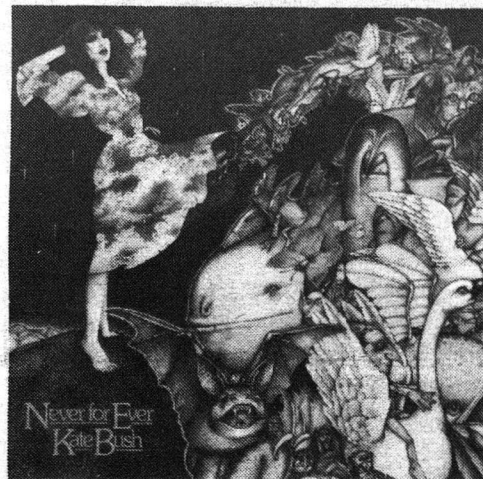
The Lambrettas are a British mod-revival band with all the sincerity of The Knack. There's something more than a little disturbing about a band that claims the mod revival is a result of a careful marketing plan: You'd best believe we speak the truth/A finger on the pulse of youth. The album *Beat Boys in the Jet Age* (Rocket PIG 3257) is a derivative of a derivative, and The Jam does this sort of thing a whole lot better.

Michael Chapman  
Michael Chapman  
(Criminal CRIME-1)

Michael Chapman is of the same generation of folk-influenced Britishers that produced John Martyn, Ralph McTell and Al Stewart. *Michael Chapman* (Criminal CRIME-1) is Chapman's first North American release after 12 albums recorded in England. The album has no new material on it; it's actually a compilation of highlights from his last three English releases (*Playing Guitar*, *Life on the Ceiling* and *Looking for Eleven*).

For the most part, Chapman has abandoned his folk roots to spend more time playing rock 'n' roll. The two styles are thrown together on this album and the result is more than just a little disjointed. *Babe*, a duet with Lesley Duncan, is a good song, and, overall, the album makes for pleasant listening. It'll do until newer releases are available here.

Never For Ever  
Kate Bush  
(Harvest STAO-6476)



In a world of female pop vocalists who all sound like clones of either Linda Ronstadt or Deborah Harry, Kate Bush is

a welcome oasis. *Never For Ever* (Harvest STAO 6476), like *Lionheart* and *The Kick Inside* before it, highlights an amazing voice and a talent for writing that may be overshadowed by that voice. All I know is, I keep humming *Babooshka* the way I keep humming *Wuthering Heights* and I think that's just great.

Kaleidoscope  
Siouxie and the Banshees  
(Polydor PDS-1-6292)

Not so *Kaleidoscope* (Polydor PDS-1-6292) by Siouxie and the Banshees. A passable band in the Blondie mold, Siouxie et al have produced an album that is too murky and inconsistent to be of much interest when compared with, say, the Pretenders' debut album. There are a couple of tunes that work, but most of the album sounds laboured and slow.

Yehudi Menuhin/  
Stephane Grappelli

Strictly For the Birds  
(Angel DS 37710)

I want to close this pre-Christmas listing with the ultimate treat: an album entitled *Strictly for the Birds* by Yehudi Menuhin and Stephane Grappelli (Angel DS 37710). The world's two greatest violinists have released a fourth album of jazz interpretations of pop songs from the '20s, '30s and '40s.

Charming is too weak a word for this record. Menuhin and Grappelli play with and against each other in fascinating fashion, the smooth lyricism of Menuhin's style highlighting, and highlighted by, Grappelli's swirling, dizzying climbing and diving. There's a rhythm section on this album, but it wisely stays in the background, leaving centre stage to the masters.

There is no 'best' song on this album - all 14 cuts are superb. What's more, each of the three previous albums is equally as good. They're an excellent introduction to the world of jazz, the pop world of the '20s, '30s and '40s, or just plan wonder listening by themselves.

## Dumas rides again

by Marc Moquin

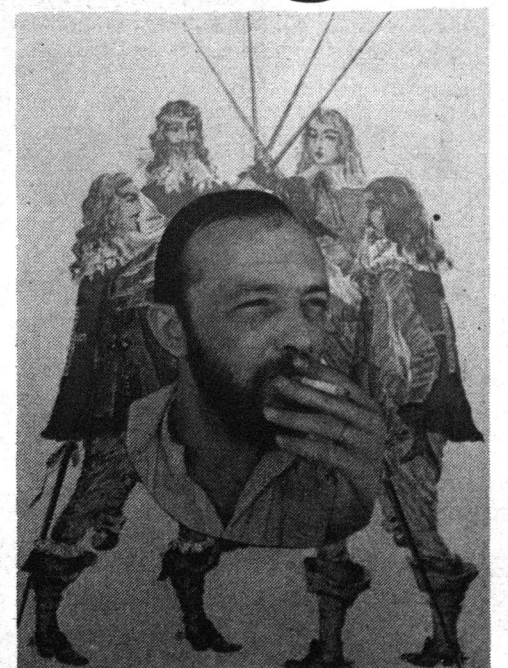
Le Theatre Francais' upcoming play *Les trois mousquetaires* promises to be a highly entertaining bit of drama. The script, an adaptation by Pierre Bokor of Alexandre Dumas' *The Three Musketeers* should certainly provide a scenario capable of rousing the audience's sense of excitement.

The costumes add a very multi-colored dimension to the already colorful action. Although the name tag on all the actors' costumes could have easily been done away with for they appear talky and superfluous.

From the standpoint of the cast, abilities and talent vary greatly. This is annoying for one minute we are witnessing a very fine role interpretation and the next, we succumb to absolute boredom. Mr. Bokor, the director, would be wise to keep his cast small so as to assure a more even distribution of talent and hence a better production. Despite this problem, the play has an enjoyable amount of continuity and at no time are we left in the dark. Mr. Bokor must be congratulated for the tremendous amount of work he put into directing his fourteen actors, eleven of which are novice actors.

A very fine aspect of the play is the authentic and polished sword fight scenes. In the end, these scenes make the play stand up by itself.

It would be impossible here to comment on all the actors' performances, but a few mentions are definitely merited. Athos, played by Normand Latour, gives the drama a much needed powerful and polished element. The narrator, played by Guy Priseau, assures the audience of a



Theatre Francais' Director Pierre Bokor.

certain stability and catalytic substance. Porthos, interpreted by Denis Lalier, promises a great deal of potential if only he could learn to use his stature to better dramatic use.

*Les trois mousquetaires* assuredly will provide some very entertaining French drama. Unfortunately, Le Theatre Francais d'Edmonton bit off more than it could chew.

The play runs December 5, 6, 7 and 12, 13, 14 at 8:00 p.m. in the Faculte Saint-Jean Auditorium at 8406-91 Street, Edmonton.