

records



Genesis shocks

Genesis
Genesis
(WEA)
●●½

Genesis' latest offering is liable to shock a lot of people. The pomp-rock trio, renowned for making a tiny ensemble sound like an orchestra, has made a very small album of love songs and ditties that are probably going to disappoint many diehard fans. The music is simple and relatively unpretentious. Phil Collins' characteristic wail is as predominant as ever, but the album's tone is less oppressive than on recent albums, and the lyrical messages are more optimistic. With titles like "Silver Rainbow," "Home by the Sea," and "It's Gonna Get Better," it is obvious that the trio has finally escaped the self-indulgent wailings of *Duke*.

Michael Rutherford's guitar is more prominent than it has been since the *Trick of the Tail* days, while Tony Banks' synthesized keyboards produce several unique melody lines. On "Second Home by the Sea," Collins steps back completely, playing a simple electronic drum beat while Banks and Rutherford weave an innovative and thoroughly satisfying musical tapestry. Equally unexpected is a bit of upbeat nonsense on the second side called "Illegal Alien," which Collins sings joyously in a ridiculous latino accent.

The band at last sounds like what it is, three old friends, all gifted musicians in their own right, playing with, instead of through, each other. The important achievement for Genesis on this album is not that they've managed to exorcise all the old ghosts, but that they have stopped trying. The new Genesis bears little resemblance to the Gabriel-led surrealism of the mid-'70s, or to the pomp and pageantry of the *Trick of the Tail* years. But to dismiss the group as washed up is to miss some great mainstream pop. The new album isn't their best, but in many ways it is their most honest.

—KEVIN CONNOLLY

New Spoons sound too clear

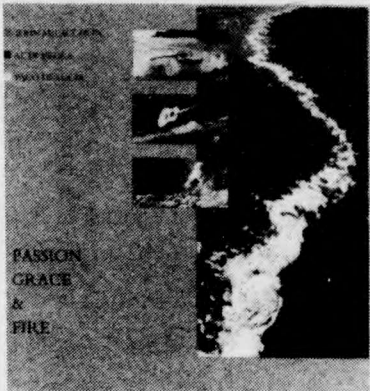
The Spoons
Talkback
(Ready)
●●●

Talkback is the much-awaited product of the relationship between prestigious producer Niles Rodgers and Canada's new wave prodigies. Rodgers, who produced David Bowie's incredibly successful *Let's Dance*, became interested in the band at a chance viewing in New York. On the new album, Rodgers wanted to produce a new Spoons sound, retaining their unique freshness while providing power with up-front vocals and drum work. While *Talkback* is the most consistent Spoons album to date, and the new sound will translate better to radio, Rodgers has also had to give up a lot in order to get the sound he was after. The new Spoons sound is cleaner but at the same time more ordinary. The vocals of songwriter Gordon Deppe are a little thin when emphasized in this way, and sound stale without a typical electronic backing.

Talkback took just six weeks to record and despite the band's insistence that Rodgers forced the best out of them, the record sounds rushed in spots. What's more, Rodgers seems to have made almost as many bad decisions as good ones. Sandy Horne's beautiful vocal qualities are still left unexploited—perhaps because female rock is hard to sell, perhaps because Deppe prefers to lead the band on stage as well as off. Horne's voice is so magical on "Quiet World," her one lead vocal, that the other songs pale by comparison.

Talkback is likely to make the Spoons a very rich group, but only time will tell whether or not Rodgers has given up too much in the process.

—K.C.



For guitar trio, three is nine

John McLaughlin, Al DiMeola, and Paco DeLucia
Passion, Grace & Fire
(Columbia)
●●½

This all-acoustic guitar trio's first album, a live recording, was an irksome thing. Besides attesting to the volume and carrying power of the voices of the male American guitar fans in the audience, the record seemed to prove one thing: when you put *three* great guitarists on the same stage, you get *nine* times as many notes in the bargain.

Passion, Grace & Fire is a great improvement. There are no screams of "go, Johnny, go!" or "faster!" on this studio recording, and although there is a certain amount of superfluous hot dog guitar, this album proves the three can actually make music together.

But then again, there are problems. The playing time of the album is a meager 31 minutes. John McLaughlin's involvement seems minimal—his two compositions here are reworkings of songs from his *Music Spoken Here* LP from earlier this year and he takes few solos compared to his partners. The songs all have a Spanish feel to them that sometimes verges on monotony.

And despite the nice touches, the slow and lyrical passages, and the pretty things Al DiMeola does with a string bending and detuning, these guys are still going to have to do a lot to give their music more than a part-time-novelty-throwaway appeal.

—ROMAN PAWLYSHYN

Beat farewell a cash-in

The English Beat
What is Beat?
(I.R.S. Inc.)
●●

What is Beat?, a farewell collection of songs old and new, has hit record stands following word of the band's recent break-up. Although souvenir-mongers will be quick to snap up their latest offering, the album is nothing more than a Christmas stocking stuffer, conveniently released to grab a share of the lucrative Yuletide market.

More than half the songs are from the *I Just Can't Stop It* and *Wha'ppen* albums, with four new songs never before released in North America. The new singles from the U.K. are mediocre numbers with none of the

feverish ska rhythm and witty lyrics that made the Beat famous. Instead, they have a sombre, disco sound. Ranking Roger is no longer yelping and shouting sexual innuendos, but rapping in a listless voice. The U.K. singles are used solely as a novelty lure for selling an album full of songs everyone's already heard.

Other gimmicks include remixed versions of old songs such as "Can't Get Used to Losing You." Unfortunately, they are virtually identical to the originals. There are also two poor live recordings from the Boston Opera House which sound like they were taped in an empty bus terminal.

If you're looking for an introduction to the English Beat, your best bet is the *I Just Can't Stop It* album. As for this assemblage of old and new—forget it. The album is just a slick grab for Christmas shopping dollars.

—PAUL PIVATO

Respect

The Carpenters
Voice of the Heart
(A&M)
●½

Recorded in the months before Karen Carpenter's death earlier this year, this disc features a cover photo of the singer that looks like it was shot in the embalming chamber.

The music is only slightly livelier. When Tom Scott blows a few notes on "Prime Time Love," things almost threaten to become funky, but then it's not long before a no-name bunch of Muzak barbershoppers called the "OK Chorale" washes over the grooves again like toffee.

The dead deserve more respect.

—R.P.

Journey man goes fusion

Steve Smith
Vital Information
(Columbia)
●●½

Drummer Steve Smith has been on the payroll of platinum rock mega-band Journey for four years now, but *Vital Information* points in a different direction—jazz-rock fusion.

Not that that should seem like such a surprising move for Smith. Before joining Journey, Smith played with electric violinist Jean-Luc Ponty. Before that, he studied jazz at the Berklee College of Music in Boston. For this date, Smith has assembled a group of his Berklee classmates—guitarists like Mike Stern and Dean Brown, bassist Tim Landers, and saxophonist Dave Wilczewski—and the result is a likable group of tunes that lean toward the more commercial end of the fusion spectrum. The songs are short, tightly-arranged, and for the most part, they stick to the beat.

But there's also some very good soloing here. Wilczewski's fluid tenor sound bears the unmistakable stamp of Jan Garbarek and is at its best when allowed to stretch out on the longer, less-structured numbers. Guitarist Stern proves again that the energy of rock can be successfully grafted into the harmonic sophistication and sensitivity of jazz. Stern, one of the key elements in Miles Davis' recent music (he's now with Jaco Pastorius' *Word of Mouth*), and has many fine moments on *Vital Information*, particularly in the free-form staccato guitar wars with Brown on the title cut.

As for the drummer, there are no solos here that approach the sweat-drenched barrage of thumping that you might hear on a Journey album. Smith lays back and lets his guests do all the serious soloing.

Jazz fusion in the 1980s is alive and well and in the hands of the heavy metal exiles.

—R.P.

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