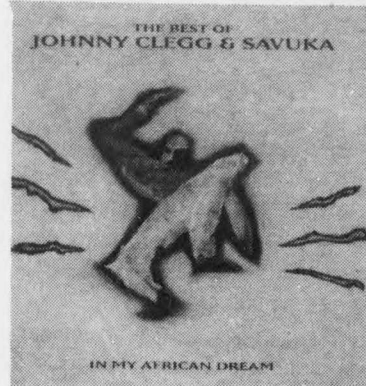


Music Reviews Music Reviews

The Best of Johnny Clegg and Savuka
In My African Dream
(EMI)

A creative writing teacher once told me that to achieve real poignancy, the emotional impact should be left to the imagination. Bring the audience to the brink of tears, but let them take it from there.



Listening to In My African Dream, one seriously regrets the fact that Johnny Clegg has never considered this notion. His often melodramatic lead vocals are the worst thing about this bitter-sweet, triumphant recording precisely because he pushes the emotional journey too far.

However, the solid backup vocals of Savuka go a long way to make up for this problem, and the effect of the African lyrics is beautiful. Also, Clegg's songwriting can be compelling: "something broke the place where the rain is born/something stole the promise from the light."

The music on In My African Dream is pleasant and upbeat, providing an interesting contrast to the serious political and social themes which dominate the lyrics of songs such as "One (Hu) Man One Vote," and "Siyayilanda." The ballad "Asimbonanga (Mandela)," originally recorded in 1987, is no less powerful now that Nelson Mandela is president of South Africa.

Eleven of the sixteen tracks on the compilation CD were recorded in the eighties, and have a too-clean, too-synthesized sound. One of the best songs is "The Crossing," recorded in 1993, which is noticeably more mature both musically and vocally. While much of the recording has an added layer of meaning in light of recent changes in South Africa, "Third World Child" reminds us that the struggle is not over yet. These developments, both historical and musical, suggest that it will be interesting to hear what Johnny Clegg and Savuka do next.

By Mary Rogal-Black

Weezer
Weezer
(DGC)

Weezer are one of the Geffen's "alternative" singings, as showcased on Ranties Vol. 1. Their eponymously titled debut album finds them trying to stake their claim in waters which are fast becoming overcrowded.

Their sound relies on chunky guitars, used extensively on 9 of the 10 songs presented here. However many of the best points on the album are when a subtle sound is employed - particularly on the funky "Say it Ain't So". River Cuomo is an amusing song writer, which makes up for his average voice. The main problem with this album is that much of it sounds very similar, which chunky guitar chords and a steady beat, and this is what will probably make its popularity short lived. There is nothing new or revolutionary about his album, you could call then a poorer heavier American Teenage Fanclub, but the album is well executed and shows promise for the future. But

is this enough when there are so many major label "alternative" bands seeking the same audience?

By Neil Duxbury



Al Tuck and No Action
Brave Last Days
(Murder Records)

Besides trying to figure out all of the words to "kokomo" this weekend, I also had the opportunity to study another epic tune - or tunes, I should say. Al Tuck has brought me new hope in the land of that blues-rock-country genre that everybody tries to pigeonhole into one of the aforementioned categories. I guess the only thing you can really call it is music. And sweet music it is.

Al Tuck hails from PEI but bases his band in Halifax. This album marks his second release this year on Murderrecords. "Arhoolie" was released in June on cassette format only and gathered a great bunch of Al's friends (including jale gal eve Horing). "Brave Last Days" follows up with seven new songs to groove you and more you. And Al does just that.

Even though I hardly know any of the lyrics, I find myself humming or making up my own words to every song. "Can I count on you?" has got to be my favorite - 'cause when I sing it I like to do my Tom Petty impersonation, which Tuck almost matches.

It helps to avoid liking this album; it's just cool to not like. They even cover Dylan's on "Sign on the Window". Buy this now and then look out for them on their Canadian tour in October. Write: Murderrecords, p.o. box 2372 Halifax Central, Halifax, NS, Canada.

By Jon Bartlett



BuckShot Le Fonque
(Columbia)

For a guy that doesn't like hip hop music much at all, I knew I was venturing into new territory when I picked up Buckshot. But, I'm really into some of Branford Marsalis's stuff and I thought Breakfast @ Denny's was a pretty good ditty. Little did I realize just how diverse Branford was going to be on this album. From jazz instrumentals to love songs to hard (even heavy)rock. Man, I almost went into a seizure when I heard "Shoot the Piano Player". I couldn't believe Marsalis would actually have anything to do with an Onyx-type tune. But Branford Marsalis has never been one to stick to one type of music convention; and that argument is justified in Buckshot. He successfully explores re-finishes sheet grooves, adding brass & saxes in the mix.

Buckshot Lefonque will bring smiles to most non-hip hop types like myself, and it ventures into crossing some musical bridges. Without making people turn the other way.

By Jon Bartlett



Lyle Lovett
I love everybody
(MCA)

I hate country music. Every stinkin' McGraw and Brooks and Dunn. All the chinin', drawlin cowboy-boot-wearing... I can't stand it! I hate CMT and TNN. I hate K-100 and I tried to set fire to Nashville once (maybe it was a dream). I hate everything and anything that involves country music. Almost. There's this one guy though, that everyone claims is a country singer, he's in the country section in Columbia House (and Tears for Fears are Alternative!), but there's something different about him. No hokey cheezy videos with bikini-laden blondes. No while leather suits and cowboy hats. And the boy can... (gulp) SING!

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, Lyle Lovett is a real musician, although many will try to deny it. He's got heart and soul and everything a good player should have. And an incredible wife. Everybody makes fun of the guy, but I don't understand it. Let's admit if people, Lyle Lovett is cooler than you and me. And your favorite country singer.

Besides being a man of style, Lovett puts out great records. Any stranger to Lovett's music (me) at least knows that he's been around awhile. I'm sorry that I was ignorant of it until early this year. As you may have already noticed, its probably due to the fact that I classed him with the "rest of the crap" that country music has to offer.

From the opening lick on "Skinny Legs" Lyle offers a nice, serene groove to his music. Add a great voice and you've got the perfect driving tape. From grandmothers to hippies, Lovett sings about pretty much everything he likes and dislikes. "They Don't Like Me" seems to discuss a dislike for Julia Roberts's parents, and their mutual feelings for Lyle. In "Creeps Like Me," Lovett reveals that he keeps his uncle Leon in his closet. He's not so plain now, is he? The little track is the coup-de-gras of the album, and even includes "the wife" as one of the twelve backup vocalists.

The theme of the album even seems to keep up in the credits where Lovett takes the space to thank 214 friends, record companies and associates.

"I love everybody" is about everyday people and everyday events. Lovett pulls us back from "diamond rings and movie stars" and gives us honest songs about life. Short and punctual, every track brings joy to my heart and a new zest for simple guitar and vocal music. No glitter.

No boots.

Just a "country boy" with a lot of charm and an odd haircut.

By Jon Bartlett



Mortal Kombat
The Album
(Acclaim)

If you like harmony and acapella or a nice flowing and catchy melody or meaningful lyrics then Mortal Kombat: The Album is probably not your cup of tea.

In the words of Johnny Cage, from the first cut of the album, you'd better "prepare yourself".

From the first track to the last, you experience a repetitious and mundane fusion of techno and bits of dialogue taken from the arcade game Mortal Kombat. Behind the relentless throbbing of the background drums, we move from one trade to another, describing each of the Mortal Kombat characters in less than glamorous detail. For example, in the sixth track titled, "Scorpion... lost soul bent on revenge," and "come Here, Get Over Here," a phrase the character Scorpion in the arcade version utters.

In "Sonya (Go Go Go)," the next track, there is a flurry of rap lyrics (behind the ever present technodrums again) which go on to describe the character Sonya.

All in all, this album is more appropriate as a video game supplement than something I would sit down and enjoy. It is an interesting experience, but after listening to the CD for more than five minutes you begin to feel like you're stuck in a giant video game in which no amount of quarters can get you out. The only way is to pull the plug... and that's what I'd do to Mortal Kombat—the Album. The End.

Mortal Kombat—The Album
Checklist:

Has...

Really funky cartoon pictures inside the cover

Really funky arcade sound effects

Really funky CD review by a really funky guy

A not so funky headache after listening to Mortal Kombat CD.

Has Not...

Meaningful lyrics

Meaningful melody

Any melody at all

Anything meaningful at all

By Joseph Lam



Dada

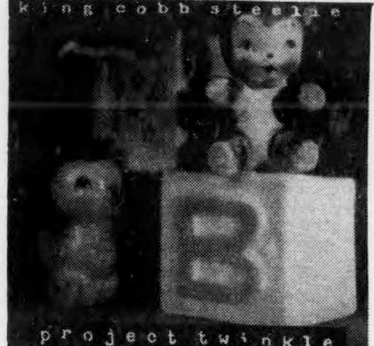
American Highway Flower
(EMI)

The music of Dada is a hybrid composed of roughly equal parts snappy pop and drifting bluesy rock. Striking a balance within one song that does justice to both aspects can be difficult — a lot of the songs on *American Highway Flower* sound divided. There's a light opening, then some nifty harmony work that sounds as if it comes as easy as pie to these guys, and then a change—some heard-it-before riffing and a long guitar solo that, although not grating, seems a bit superfluous. The elements are

there for some dense, tense pop craft work, but the band hasn't developed the seamless formula just yet.

In spite of the band-in-progress state of the music, *American Highway Flower* is a decent listen. Some of the tracks achieve the balance that shows the promise of this band. "S.F. Bar '63" works particularly well—the rough, deep electric guitar adds a dark dimension to the light pop melody, and brings out the bitterness of the lyrics in the process. "Scum" is similar—a balladlike piece with an old-style keening electric guitar adding pathos to the harmonies, acoustic guitar and cello. Also, "Scum" is one of the better written tunes on the disc, with the can't-forget chorus: "He's waiting for the/He's waiting for the world/To find somebody else/To deal with all the scum". Another high point is "Feel Me Don't You", which lands on the rockier side of the Dada mix. It comes on as a dark pop shuffle, and the chorus blows the whole song (the whole album really) wide open—"Feel me/Feel me/Feel me don't you/Feel me/Feel me/Don't you fucking touch me". Actually, they say 'feel me' more than that, and the effect is a good one.

Low points include the screeching voice on "Real Soon"—the vocals on this album are really terrific, except this noise that sounds like some person wandered into the studio uninvited and joined in. This should have been wiped from the mix. Also, whereas the pop writing and playing is pretty decent, the rock elements sound a touch derivative. Most of the time the borrowing isn't criminal, but "All I Am" is built on something way too close to a Neil Young riff (either a cross between "Fuckin' Up" and "Crime In The City", or something even more specific that I can't pin down). I hope *American Highway Flower* is not this band in full bloom, and that further down the road these guys get it together a little tighter.



King Cobb Steelie

Project Twinkle

(Luna Moth Records)

So your self titled debut does alright and your band starts building a decent name for themselves. Even out of your hometown Kingston. Then you call up the big guy, Steve Albini (Shellac), because you know he can produce another cool album. But it doesn't work out (prob'ly due to Albini's attitude problem) and you opt for a lesser known producer (in Bill Laswell) but still put out a good album. King Cobb Steelie did just that with *project twinkle*. And their name just gets bigger. KCS have made their mark on the Canadian scene with their distinct sound and driving rhythms. And long songs. On *project twinkle*, they manage to keep all but one song over the 4 minute mark. But they rarely bore in doing it, *twinkle* surprises and scares at times too. Italian urology today is frightening, especially walking through the woods with a discman on.

Overall Steelie's latest deserves a listen. With guest artists like Shadowy Mens' Don Pyle (scratching) and Ian Blurton of Change of Heart (the best band in Canada), its got to at least get your attention. And you just may find yourself into a new band, kids.

By Jon Bartlett