

Record Reviews



Stump comes on like a Gentle Giant

Stump
A Fierce Pancake
Chrysalis/MCA

by Mike Berry

Just what the hell do you do with music that has no middle ground? Love or hate? Any review is bound to be merely subjective but here goes anyway.

Take a mixture of Gentle Giant, pathos from some alcohol-laden Irish novel, stir in a dash of eccentricity and the result is Stump.

The sheer diversity found on this album is amazing; yet few of the songs could be deemed light-hearted ditties. From the more accessible sounds of "In The Green" to the bizarre Alexei Sayle-ish "Buffalo" the album picks up the listener bodily and sets him/her down with a jarring thud in the middle of some Joycian playground.

Characters appear and leave not-silently in the wings, driving back perhaps to the days of Matching Mole and the like

with songs like "Whoops too Soon." The turn done Charlton Heston on the self-titled tune is something he could probably have done without, and "Boggy Home" explores that peculiar Irish love of hearth that remains a wonderment to observers from across the seas.

Like the Australian music scene, which I think is the fairest to compare this attitude to, Stump are unique in the midst of a burgeoning "Irish" music plateau, even though like most smart bands, they do live and work out of London.

Strong vocals override much of the music, and in doing so render the album hard to ignore. It probably won't make many best-of lists, but does deserve consideration as a starting point for any discussion on the relative merits or problems of alternative music. A good Christmas present for people who have too much!

P.S. Who are Gentle Giant and Matching Mole? That's your homework for the week, folks!

Copeland *Party* a winner

Johnny Copeland
Ain't Nothin' But a Party
Stony Plain

by Mike Spindloe

On *Ain't Nothin' But a Party*, Johnny Copeland demonstrates that he knows how to turn the heat up live, playing a solid mix of blues and uptempo numbers all based around his smooth guitar licks and gravelly vocals.

The album begins with a throwaway version of the Copeland-penned title track; ironically, despite the atmosphere conveyed by the title and echoed by the rest of the album, this one feels like a warm-up exercise.

Fortunately, the pace picks up immediately with "Johnny Gone". Well, actually, it slows down, but the soul voltage triples. And so it goes with the rest of the six tracks. Copeland stays in the blues groove, which is what he does best, right through until the next-to-last cut, a smoldering version of "Baby Please Don't Go"

that takes the Williams standard, often done as a rave-up, and slowly turns it inside out.

The band then revs it up one more time, rocking out for an extended round of soloistics on "Big Time". Here Copeland steals a snatch of "Twenty Flight Rock" during his guitar solo and Bert McGowan lays down some mean tenor sax riffs. The band as a whole sounds as tight as they have throughout the entire album.

There is only one complaint to register about *Ain't Nothin' But a Party*: the segueing of the songs, or rather the lack thereof. Several songs are faded out on the final chord and a couple begin abruptly; apparently the result of bad editing. On an album which sounds (and is) live, these awkward methods of minimizing applause pose interruptions to the flow of the music.

Copeland's talents are such that one can easily forget about these glitches in no time at all, however. As Ashley Kahn writes in the liner notes to the original Rounder release, it's "hard-kicking blues that'll knock out your troubles and get you feeling good all over again."

Springsteen live EP for Amnesty

Bruce Springsteen
Chimes of Freedom EP
CBS

by Eric Anderson

This record has been released to coincide with the recently completed "Human Rights Now" tour to support Amnesty International's ongoing work in promoting the 40th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

"Chimes of Freedom" is an old Bob Dylan song which Springsteen eloquently turns into a call to arms, much as he did with "War" on his 5-album live set a couple of years ago. Springsteen has an aptitude for taking someone else's song and making it into his own anthem. This one makes me think that Bruce is going to come charging over the hill, guitar in hand, to encourage people everywhere to take action and wake up from their apathetic slumber.

The rest of the record is a mixed bag of gutsiness, predictability and the usual rocks and gravel vocalizing which has become Springsteen's trademark. "Born to Run", once a hopeful entreaty to youth and freedom, is done only with an acoustic guitar and harmonica. This version, which could have been included on the LP *Nebraska*, is stripped right to the core that

was originally disguised by thundering guitars, honky saxophones and driving pianos. The image of someone looking back and seeing a lot of wreckage and burning bridges in the past comes to mind with this bittersweet version of a once proud song.

"Tougher Than The Rest", a song from the *Tunnel of Love* album, is not done with a great deal of inspiration, sounding only like the LP version being played over a public announcement system. "Be True", on the other hand, is from the B-side of the *Tunnel of Love 12"* single, but dates from the sessions for *The River*. It's a song that implores the singer's girlfriend to not give up on a relationship, promising that the singer will be as honest as possible if a two-way communication link can be established between him and her. Thumbs up for a passionate delivery on this one.

Bruce is an honest man who cares deeply about injustice and his participation in the "Human Rights Now" tour is a commendable gesture to that end. He is going through a divorce right now and perhaps one could cynically say that he's doing the tour to avoid having his personal life exposed in such a vulnerable way. He's not the impenetrable icon that some have painted him as. Bruce is a human being who struggles with personal turmoil and who just happens to be a superbly talented individual in a highly visible profession.

Redemption feels like a Burn

Malcom Burn
Redemption

by Chuck Painter

Malcom Burns' latest release, *Redemption*, is appropriately titled because that is exactly what one wishes to do upon listening to it. Advertised as a "triumphant" return, it fails sadly in attempts to break new ground. The leadoff tune, "Walk, Don't Run," is a fairly decent song, with a haunting and rhythmic melody. But for ten bucks, it's one hell of an expensive single, because the rest of the album just doesn't cut it.

It seems that the bass guitarist, Andy Curran, is trying to showcase his work during the first four songs of the album. In fact, it's almost as if he were the star instead of Burn, because his bass over-

powers almost everything else on side one. Now, if the bass playing was at all proficient, this wouldn't be so bad. But song after song, Curran puts the listener to sleep with dull repetition.

The most embarrassing moments on *Redemption* are actually found on a track called "Indian Summer". It's a song that should have been sung by Buddy Holly... on LSD! With its pre-school lyrics, such as "ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh", it's just too funny to take seriously.

Burn also showcases his ability to reproduce various artists' vocal techniques, such as Michael Hutchence's of INXS on a track called "The X-roads", and the Violent Femmes' lead singer in "Losing You".

I could go on, but the idea here is clear; save yourself the \$ and buy yourself a pizza or something you'll enjoy. This album is a definite two thumbs downer.

