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Group deserves full marks for effort

Shakatak have followed Sade's example by releasing their first new album for two and a half years. The quintet were one of the pioneering outfits for the British jazz-funk movement in 1980 and 1981, together with Imagination and Level 42. While Imagination's success was relatively short-lived Level 42 went on to eclipse all of them into mega-stardom, but Shakatak have always rested comfortably in the middle.

= Record Review =

Their biggest problem has always been trying to follow "Night Birds" which was one of their earliest L.P. releases in 1982. Quite simply, in musical terms they "peaked too soon" and have been in steady decline ever since. However, this new album could signal a new beginning for them if it receives the radio promotion it deserves.

Their songs used to be instantly recognizable as Shakatak music with their distinctive "tinkly" piano sound, but on "Manic and Cool" their style is broader and more diverse. This is probably because the songwriting is now shared throughout the group rather than just keyboard player Bill Sharpe and drummer Roger Odell. Vocalist Jill Saward and bass player George Anderson have contributed several cuts and guitarist Keith Winter also wrote the jazzy instrumental "Orient Express."

The best numbers are "Mr. Manic and Sister Cool" and "Something Special" which have already been released on the 45 format, and also "Releasin' the Feelin'" which is a delightfully catchy mid-tempo affair, performed in their traditional style. Shakatak deserve full marks for their brave effort to sound contemporary on some of the tracks which have House and Hip Hop rhythms and inspiration.

K-Tel records have recently issued two first rate compilation albums, namely "The Sound of Philadelphia" and "Hits Revival 2 – Replay." The former is a double-LP featuring some of the best music from the heyday of Philadelphia Records in the 1970's. During that period the company took over from Motown as the leading label marketing American soul music, and when you listen to hits like "I'll Always Love My Mama" by the Intruders, "You'll Never Find Another Love Like Mine" by the deep-voiced Lou Rawls and "Ain't No Stoppin' Us Now" by McFadeen and Whitehead, it is easy to understand why. "Hits Revival 2" features some of the strongest songs from the aforementioned Motown stable, mixed in with a few from other labels. The cuts that stand out are Thelma Houston's "Don't Leave Me This Way," Diana Ross's "Ain't No Mountain High Enough" and the original and superior 1972 version of "Papa Was A Rollin' Stone" by the Temptations.

At the opposite end of the musical spectrum Capitol Records have recently released the second album by Los Angeles-based rockers Poison, whose music sounds more solid and interesting than many of their contemporaries. They composed all the numbers on "Open Up and Say Ahh!" and called upon the talents of veteran producer Tom Werman to oversee the project.

On the singles scene two stand out tracks from brilliant albums are likely to be battling it out for the No. 1 spot in the coming weeks, namely "Chains of Love" by Erasure and "There's More To Love Than Boy Meets Girl" by the Communards.

LP CHART

1 Tango In The Night (Fleetwood Mac)
2 Niteflite (Various)
3 More Dirty Dancing (Soundtrack)
4 Lovesexy (Prince)
5 Dirty Dancing (Soundtrack)
6 Whitney (Whitney Houston)
7 The First Of A Million Kisses (Fairground Attraction)
8 Popped In, Souled Out (Wet Wet Wet)
9 Heaven On Earth (Belinda Carlisle)
10 Christians

Bob Woodhead