Madonna smashes into the charts again

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Record Review

Madonna has released her first album to feature a full collection of completely new songs since "True Blue" in June 1986.

Not surprisingly "Like A Prayer" has smashed straight into the LP chart directly at number one this week, and the title song is perched proudly on top of the singles chart.

This tune is her sixth chart-topper, and only five artists have bettered this total, namely the Beatles, Elvis Presley, Cliff Richard, Abba and the Rolling Stones. George Michael has featured on eight chart toppers but these have included records with Wham, Band Aid and Aretha Franklin.

The new "Like A Prayer" album is very different to Madonna's earlier work, although she has maintained her songwriting and production partnership with Patrick Leonard and with Stephen Bray. She has also worked with Prince on the track "Love Song" which is performed very much in his style.

There are a few reminders of her famous dance music on numbers like "Express Yourself" and "Cherish" which is the best of the faster tunes and could become a major hit single if chosen for release on that format. But the new-look and new-sound of Madonna really comes to the fore on the slower songs.

Two of these "Oh Father" and "Spanish Eyes" are really excellent. Not surprisingly "Oh Father" concentrates on her relationship with her father and has a haunting, gospel feel to it, while "Spanish Eyes" is a very tuneful, folky ballad that also has massive hit potential.

Although the album has been favourably acclaimed by many critics and it may well end the year as the top seller, it is unlikely to be as popular as "True Blue".

Patrick Leonard has also produced the new Julian Lennon LP entitled "Mr. Jordon" on which Julian sounds like his famous father John Lennon on some of the tracks and like Billy Idol on others! Half of the songs are in a racy, raucous, rock vein, but the quieter numbers seem to work better, mainly because they suit his voice.

Calibre

He never really sounds comfortable on faster numbers. He composed all tne songs, often in conjunction with Cyndi Lauper and John Waite. Lennon has just returned to America after several weeks promotion in Britain and Europe, and is currently rehearsing a live band for dates in this country in the spring.

Husband and wife soul team Ashford and Simpson have released their third album for the Capitol label, entitled "Love Or Physical". Over the last 20 years they have become firmly established as performers, songwriters and producers of high calibre, working with such artists as Ray Charles, Ben E. King, Marvin Gaye and Diana Ross.

They are best known in this country for their hit song "Solid" which reached number three in 1985 and became a "signature" tune for the couple. The eight new tunes here were mostly written by Nick and Valerie themselves, and they include a diverse mixture of sounds from love songs to an uptempo, funky style. The musical menu is just what their fans would expect, but is unlikely to capture a wider audience as none of the tracks stand out enough to become major hit singles. Having said that, they all make pleasant easy-listening.

LP CHART

1 Like A Prayer (Madonna)
2 Anything For You (Gloria Estefan)
3 A New Flame (Simply Red)
4 Don't Be Cruel (Bobby Brown)
5 Original Soundtrack (S'Express)
6 Singular Adventures of the Style Council
7 Southside (Texas)
8 Stop! (Sam Brown)
9 Ancient Heart (Tanita Tikaram)
10 BAD (Michael Jackson)

Madonna