23/11/89

New offering from Belinda

Belinda Carlisle, the former member of the all-girl group the Go-Gos who overcame her personal problems to enjoy tremendous solo success in 1988, has a smashing new album.

The LP is called "Runaway Horses" and is her second recording for the Virgin label, following her "Heaven on Earth", "World Without You" and my personal favourite "Circle In The Sand".

I found the tracks that were not relesed as singles to be very dull and disappointing, but the new album shows a great improvement and Belinda's distinctive 'warbling' vocal style is even better.

"Leave A Light On" featuring George Harrison on guitar, has already been a Top Five hit, and the other four songs on Side One all have the same potential.

The title-song has a catchy singalong chorus while "Vision of You" is a beautiful, mellow, accoustic-guitar based ballad. "Summer Rain" has a haunting, melodic hook with terrific orchestration while "La Luna" has an instant appeal with ite memorable chorus, although it could be the type of song that one quickly tires of hearing.

The tunes on Side Two are not quite as strong apart from "Whatever It Takes" which features Canadian rock singer Bryan Adams on backing vocals.

"Runaway Horses" was arranged and produced by Rick Nowels who also composed most of the tunes in collaboration with Ellen Shipley. Belinda will be promoting the record with concert appearances in this country in the New Year.

Terence Trent D'Arby has opted for a very different approach in the making of his second album entitled "Neither Fish Nor Flesh".

He has shed the commercial, forthright pop song philosophy and opted for a more serious spiritual album.

Apart from the catchy, tuneful "Billy Don't Fall" there are no obvious hit singles on this package which needs to be listened to as a complete entity.

The whole work has been written, produced, arranged and mixed by Mr. D'Arby and while the production is quite brilliant, giving a fantastic sound on Compact Disc in particular, I do feel that he would have benefitted from outside opinions and input.

This point is best illustrated by listening to the track "I Don't Want To Bring Your Gods Down" which has a strong 1960s soul feel to it, influenced by "When A Man Loves A Woman", but it is completely swamped by overproduction, removing the simple charm of the song. A few other numbers suffer in the same way.

"Neither Fish Nor Flesh" is the kind of album that begs you to sit up and pay attention because it is far from relaxing and at times can sound positively menacing with its busy production.

It is the sort of music that can only be listened to a few times, and I would personally prefer Mr. D'Arby to return to his "Introducing The Hardline" style of music.

In my view the highlights of the new album are the acapella vocal numbers "I Have Faith In These Desolate Times" and "And I Need To Be With Someone Tonight" where the production is not a hindrance.

LP CHART

1 The Road To Hell (Chris Rea)
2 Enjoy Yourself (Kylie Minogue)
3 Journeyman (Eric Clapton)
4 Greatest Hits (Billy Ocean)
5 Level Best (Level 42)
6 All Or Nothing (Milli Vanilli)
7 Runaway Horses (Belinda Carlisle)
8 Stronger (Cliff Richard)
9 Spark To A Flame (Chris DeBurgh)
10 Holding Back The River (Wet Wet Wet)

Bob Woodhead

30/11/89

Tracy bares her soul

Folk-singer Tracy Chapman burst on to the scene last year, seemingly appearing from nowhere with a debut album that took the pop industry by surprise by hitting the top spot for three weeks and ending the year as the seventh best-seller.

She won many admirers with that debut and is likely to increase her following with the new L.P. "Crossroads."

Rather than trying to copy the great singer-songwriters of the 1960s and early-1970s, Ms. Chapman has carved out a unique style and sound that is very relevant to today's scene, and she bares her soul with her strong lyrics.

Banjo

None of the tracks sound like hit singles as they lack a commercial, tuneful quality, but they mostly stand up well as part of the long-player.

Particularly impressive is "Freedom Now" an attractively structured plea for the release of South Africa's most famous political prisoner, Nelson Mandela.

The song has a really strong banjo accompaniment. I would not be surprised to see "Subcity" released as a single as this tune has a fuller "pop" sound bordering on the mainstream. Tracy's music can sometimes be a shade too downbeat and depressing but she does vary her songwriting to include flirtations with other musical styles as can be witnessed on "Born To Fight" which veers towards a "bluesy" feel.

The pop-dance duo ABC have followed-up their brilliant "Alphabet City" album with a new set of eight songs entitled "Up."

They have moved even further into the field of dance-music on this L.P., but the tunes lack the great ideas, wit and straightforward appeal that was so prevalent on "Alphabet City."

I sense that they are probably aiming far more towards the American market with this new work, as white British dance music is not very well accepted by British club or radio disc-jockeys.

Seven out of the eight tracks have scorching, pounding dance-rhythms – the odd one out being "Paper Thin," a dreary mid-tempo song.

The best of the seven fast numbers is "Where Is The Heaven?" with its great, punchy bassline and memorable tune. Sadly though, this is the only song to reach the standard ABC set on "Alphabet City."

Incredible

Telstar Records are re-promoting "The Legendary Roy Orbison" album reviewed in this column exactly a year ago, and I have been listening to it on C.D. for the first time. Some recordings of the 1960s can sound decidedly "dodgy" on disc, showing up the poor studio-technology (the Kinks "Ultimate Collection" is a good example of this) but I am happy to say that this does not apply to Orbison's work. The laser technology really shows off his crystal-clear voice and that incredible vocal-range that will be so sadly missed.

Telstar have also released a fabulous C.D. featuring "20 Motown Heartbreakers" inclu classic songs like "Stop! In The Name Of Love" by the Supremes, "Farewell Is A Lonely Sound" by Jimmy Ruffin, "Ain't No Sunshine" by Michael Jackson, "Tracks Of My Tears" by Smokey Robinson and "Don't Leave Me This Way" by Thelma Houston which was the best version of this song in my view.

L.P. CHART

1. The Road To Hell (Chris Rea).
2. Enjoy Yourself (Kylie Minogue).
3. The Best Of Rod Stewart.
4. Spark To A Flame – The Very Best Of Chris DeBurgh.
5. Decade (Duran Duran).
6. Journeyman (Eric Clapton).
7. Stronger (Cliff Richard).
8. Greatest Hits (Billy Ocean).
9. Level Best (Level 42).
10. Slip Of The Tongue (Whitesnake).

Bob Woodhead