

Billboard's Top Album Picks

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Billboard SPECIAL SURVEY For Week Ending 12/4/76

Number of LPs reviewed this week **49** Last week **67**

Pop

LOGGINS & MESSINA—The Best Of Friends, Columbia PC34388. This "greatest hits/best of" LP is the first such studio collection from L&M who previously had collected their best-known works only on a live album. This set commemorates the amicable parting of the pair to continue recording as Columbia soloists. With a never-before-released short version of "Angry Eyes" as a catchy, tie-in single, the LP amply demonstrates what outstanding light-rock music the team was capable of at its peak. The pretty vocal harmonies, smooth melodies and immaculate productions here are a fitting monument to a brilliant collaboration. Kenny Loggins & Jim Messina made impressive contributions to our music.

Best cuts: "Angry Eyes," "Your Mama Don't Dance," "Danny's Song," "Vahevala," "My Music."

Dealers: Outstanding liner notes on each song by the artists.

SEALS & CROFTS—Sudan Village, Warner Bros. BS2976. Recorded live on tour with the Wally Heider remote truck, this LP in the wake of the duo's biggest single in some years, "Get Closer" concentrates on new material with a couple of instrumental jams filling out the set in fast, flashy style. The title tune has a colorful African ethnic feel and other cuts with vocalist Carolyn Willis guesting follow the successful format of the big single. The sound is crystal clear, the range of material is fascinating and the LP in general is a well-designed use of the possibilities of on-tour recording today, with the excitement of audience presence showing through in the performance levels.

Best cuts: "Cause You Love," "Baby I'll Give It To You," "Put Your Love In My Hands," "East Of Ginger Trees."

Dealers: This group always delivers highly professional albums and tours heavily.

WAYLON JENNINGS—Waylon Live, RCA, APL11108. Recorded two years ago at the Western Place in Dallas and the Texas Opry House in Austin, Jennings has a fast-paced powerful release containing several of his major hits, including "I'm A Ramblin' Man" and "Good Hearted Woman." Produced by Jennings and Ray Pennington on location in Texas, Waylon's live LP has a vocal crispness and clarity that didn't get lost in the non-studio atmosphere. It's heavy on guitar and the everpresent strong bass beat. The stress is on up-tempo items, but Jennings slows the pace beautifully with "The Last Letter." Predictably, "Bob Willis Is Still The King" draws a great crowd reaction from the Texans. Jennings is in full command for this performance that comes off effectively on record.

Best cuts: "T For Texas," "Me And Paul," "The Last Letter," "Bob Willis Is Still The King," "Me And Bobby McGee."

Dealers: Jennings, the reluctant CMA winner, has a strong live LP here to add to his heavy selling previous releases.

AL KOOPER—Act Like Nothing's Wrong, United Artists UALA702G. This is the first album in four years from the man whose past affiliations include BS&T, Blues Project, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Nils Lofgren and the Tubes. It's perhaps irrelevant that Kooper's previous solo track record (on Columbia) is less than spectacular, because this set is squarely in the bag of contemporary FM-based progressive rock acts who occasionally cross to AM. Highlights include a rock remake of "This Diamond Ring," the No. 1 single Kooper co-wrote in 1965 for Gary Lewis & The Playboys; a Bowie disco number called "Missing You"; and "(Please Not) One More Time," which borrows the harmony sound of the Eagles but also unmistakably evokes the fun sound of the all-time harmony masters, the Beach Boys. Backup from Tower of Power and Joe Walsh.

Spotlight

BARBRA STREISAND, KRIS KRISTOFFERSON—Original Soundtrack "A Star Is Born", Columbia JS34403. With a hot new single in the "Love Theme" from this film and reams of juicy controversial publicity about the ego clashes involved in making the movie, the Streisand-Kristofferson rock milieu remake of this classic story would seem to have even more up-front interest than the Streisand-Redford "The Way We Were" which proved to launch a surprise hit single and two hot albums. As for the soundtrack, it really does have the feel of an original score in the sense of bringing together a wide variety of musical styles. Most of the music is Barbra doing her inimitable big-voiced, note-sliding shtick on tremulous ballads or strong production tunes. She also does a creditable fem group rock novelty. Kristofferson, at least the way he's mixed here, doesn't sound quite at ease in the macho rock numbers his fading-superstar character performs onstage but he reveals an interesting smoother, lighter range in the love duets that would be well worth exploring further.

Best cuts: "Love Theme (Evergreen)," "Everything," "Lost Inside Of You," "With One More Look At You."

Dealers: The movie will be out for the holidays. A string of major writers worked on the songs, with Strei-



sand doing some noteworthy collaborating with the likes of Leon Russell and Paul Williams. This is the first \$8.98-list single-disk album and will be watched closely in the marketplace.



GEORGE HARRISON—Thirty-Three & 8, Dark Horse DH3005 (Warner Bros.). After much legal maneuvering, ex-Beatle Harrison shifts his Dark Horse custom label to Warner and immediately turns in a sunny, upbeat album of love songs and cheerful jokes that is his happiest and most commercial package, with least high-flown postures, for perhaps his entire solo career. With a recent Monty Pythonish appearance on "Saturday Night Live" and a heavy personal promotion tour of major markets, Harrison seems to be serving notice that he is not only revealing a previously little-suspected jovial, even comedic, style that is most enjoyable, he is also out to take part in the business as a complete music man. The production is top-notch, Harrison doing the job himself with Tom Scott's aid. And Harrison's often-spectacular melody writing gift gets brilliant display here.

Best cuts: "This Song," "Woman Don't You Cry For Me," "Crackerbox Palace," "It's What You Value," "Pure Smokey."

Dealers: The single, "This Song," is a high-flyer already with an excellent chance at No. 1 by Christmas.

Best cuts: Above titles plus "She Don't Ever Lose Her Groove," "In My Own Sweet Way."

Dealers: Emphasize Kooper's background, and display the unprecedentedly unique album package prominently.

Country

MERLE HAGGARD—The Roots Of My Raising, Capitol ST11586. A nostalgic album produced by Ken Nelson and Fuzzy Owen. It's basically a straight country plunge into ten songs—only one of them written by Haggard, an excellent writer. Mellow than much previous Haggard product, this contains potent versions of such ballads as "What Have You Got Planned Tonight Diana." A few up-tempo numbers balance the majority of slower songs like "Colorado" where

voices, strings and Haggard's voice merge for a highlight. Interesting assortment of material includes two songs by Jimmie Rodgers—one of Haggard's favorite composers.

Best cuts: "What Have You Got Planned Tonight Diana," "Walk On The Outside," "Colorado," "Mississippi Delta Blues."

Dealers: Haggard has a legion of fans always ready for his latest LP release.

First Time Around

DAVID SOUL, Private Stock PS2019. The star of "Starky & Hutch" is unlike some other tv series stars who seem to turn to records as nothing more than an opportunity to cash in on their weekly exposure. Soul had a hand in writing four of the

songs here, and performs them all in the contemporary folk-rock-pop style of a Harry Chapin or John Denver. Shading with dixieland horns, banjo, fiddle and a children's chorus give several of the cuts a distinctive edge. Backup from Taj Mahal.

Best cuts: "1927 Kansas City," "Hooray For Hollywood," "Black Bean Soup," "Kristoffer David."

Dealers: To his credit, Soul doesn't even list "Starky & Hutch" on the album. But you should let the consumer know his tv identity.

DIRTY ANGELS—Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye, Private Stock PS2020. Unlike most of the young acts to emerge in the last year or two that specialize in high energy rock 'n' roll, Dirty Angels have the production strengths and cleanliness of sound to make significant AM penetration a possibility. There's not a great deal of variety in this set, but it is so clearly superior to most work in this genre that it merits attention.

Best cuts: "Tell Me," "Alley Cat," "Radio," "Long Gone Johnny," "You Got Me Runnin'," "Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye."

Dealers: The polished production will make this less alienating to non-believers than most hard rock, so don't be afraid to play in store.

PETER LEMONGELLO—Do I Love You, Private Stock PS2018. The artist who has created a sensation this year with his tv record pitches makes his label debut with a set of light contempo MOR. The material ranges from the 1943 classic "You'll Never Know" to Neil Sedaka's "The Hungry Years," with Paul Anka, David Pomeranz and Randy Edelman songs also included. There are a few upbeat numbers here, but basically these are ballads presented in the light, mass-appeal style of a Bobby Vinton or John Davidson. Produced by Jay Senter, backup from Nigel Olsson, Dee Murray, Lee Ritenour.

Best cuts: "That's A Melody," "All You Get From Love Is A Love Song," "Do I Love You," "You'll Never Know."

Dealers: Set will attract older female customers.

REX, Columbia PC34399. Hard driving rock in the Aerosmith vein from this quintet. Rex Smith spearheads the vocals intermingled into gusty guitar riffs.

Best cuts: "Trouble," "Feeling Better," "Stay With Me," "Dead End Kids," "Rock 'N' Roll Dream."

Dealers: Plenty of FM fare here and this brand of rock is particularly popular right now.

BILLY JACKSON & THE CITIZENS' BAND—RCA APL12029. Though the craze of putting old standards to a disco beat probably peaked a year ago, the recent success that Dr. Buzzard had on this label suggests there is still an opening on the charts for a merger of two styles if it is done well enough. Here, as Richie "Brazil" Rome conducts the strings and horns of *TSOP* through such evergreens as "Tenderly," "Mister Sandman" and "Cherry Pink And Apple Blossom White," one senses energy, sophistication and cleverness. Occasional salsa accents add to the uniqueness of this project.

Best cuts: "Tenderly," "The Way Of Love," "Old Fashioned Way," "Slaughter On Tenth Avenue."

Dealers: With Vicki Sue Robinson and D.J. Rogers making the charts in addition to Dr. Buzzard, RCA has had a strong year in pop-soul-disco.

Spotlight—The most outstanding new product of the week's releases and that with the greatest potential for top of the chart placement; picks—predicted for the top half of the chart in the opinion of the reviewer; recommended—predicted to hit the second half of the chart in the opinion of the reviewer, or albums of superior quality. Albums receiving a three star rating are not listed. Review editor: Nat Freedland; reviewers: Eliot Tiegel, Gerry Wood, Jim Fisher, Is Horowitz, Ed Harrison, Jean Williams.

Billboard's Recommended LPs

pop

SOUNDTRACK—The Pink Panther Strikes Again, United Artists UALA694G. Though it's been more than five years since Henry Mancini's last top 100 album, this film series has been good to him, with the original "Pink Panther" score making the top 10 in 1964. Some of the offbeat entries include "Come To Me," a lush ballad featuring Tom Jones and a vocal cameo from the Peter Sellers character, Jacques Clouseau; a jaunty polka; and a main title medley of such diverse songs as "The Pink Panther Theme," "Batman," "The Sound Of Music" and "Big Spender."

RORY BLOCK—I'm In Love, Blue Goose 2022. After disappointing sales on her fine first LP, Block left RCA and joined this small independent label. The result is a very fine album that showcases the many talents of this vocalist. She sings folk blues, disco rock and even jazz during the course of the LP, and at various times sounds like Bonnie Raitt and Phoebe Snow. **Best cuts:** "I'm In Love," "You Broke My Heart," "Strong And Lasting Kind," "Canned Heat."

TOM PETTY AND THE HEARTBREAKERS, Shelter SRL52006 (ABC). Petty, another punk rock, black leather jacketed offshoot, delivers an assortment of sullen ballads and up-tempo shrekers. This LP gains impact on its second spin. Petty's laid back vocals become rather inflectuous. **Best cuts:** "Home-town Blues," "Luna," "Mystery Man," "American Girl."

soul

THELMA HOUSTON—Any Way You Like It, Tamla T6345S1. Clear division between sides here, with side one consisting of three longish, funky cuts with the rollicking disco appeal of "Love Hangover." Side two is dominated by slower soul ballads that make fuller use of Houston's intense styling. Songs by the likes of Stevie Wonder, Gamble & Huff and Jermaine Jackson. **Best cuts:** "Don't Leave Me This Way," "Don't Know Why I Love You," "If It's The Last Thing I Do," "Differently."

VARIOUS ARTISTS—Golden Soul, Atlantic SD18198. The net proceeds of this excellent label sampler will go exclusively to a U.N. commission on refugees. Represented are a dozen of the biggest soul names ever signed to Atlantic and its affiliated labels. Seven of these numbers were No. 1 on the soul chart. The only commercial drawback is that only two songs are more recent than Otis Redding's "Dock Of The Bay," the Spinners' "I'll Be Around" and Roberta Flack's "Feel Like Makin' Love." **Best cuts:** those, Ray Charles' "What I'd Say," the Drifters' "Up On The Roof," Aretha Franklin's "Natural Woman."

VIVIAN REED—Brown Sugar, H&L HL69017698. The stylist who had some soul success in 1968 on Epic, but whose big break came in a starring role in the Broadway musical "Bubbling Brown Sugar," is impressive in this varied set. The title track uses its grittiness almost as a gimmick, but the other numbers are more legitimately soulful. These are split evenly between upbeat, funky songs and equally gutsy dra-

matic ballads, which show off Reed's deep, powerful vocals. **Best cuts:** "River Of Love," "Yours Until Tomorrow," "Mighty Lover," "Baby, You're A Good Thing."

EDDIE RUSS—See The Light, Monument MG7606. Good commercial blending of open piano work by the Atlanta pianist within a solid, commercial disco flavored motif. Eleven musicians and three voices work well together in this funky disky disk. **Best cuts:** "Stop It Now" (with its suggestive female voice), "Salem Avenue," "Tomorrow Is Another Day."

CON JUNK SHUN, Mercury SRM1 1120. This group has excellent harmony and passable vocals, but its choice of material leaves much to be desired. The ensemble is self-contained and offers impressive instrumental numbers. **Best cuts:** "Tell Me That You Like It," "Nothing To Lose By Trying," "Another World."

SINS OF SATAN, Buddah BDS5673. This disco-oriented LP offers both ballads and up-tempo tunes. Background vocals are one of the most outstanding features of the album. Although male vocalist is above average, instruments too often overshadow the singer. **Best cuts:** "Devils Disco," "How Would You Feel," "Dance & Free Your Mind."

LONNIE LISTON SMITH & THE COSMIC ECHOES—Renaissance, RCA APL1 1822. An energy-sapping contemporary jazz venture for Smith that has instruments flowing together so lightly it's difficult to determine where one leaves off and another begins. Vocals are clear, controlled and impressive. **Best cuts:** "Mardi Gras," "Starlight & You," "Mongotee," "A Song Of Love."

O'DONEL LEVY—Windows, Groove Merchant GM3313. A contemporary jazz artist has pulled together a group of accomplished musicians to display their versatility on tunes ranging from the mellowest ballad to a swinging bouncy number. Vocals are best on ballads. **Best cuts:** "Panama Red," "I Believe In Miracles," "I'll Sing From My Window."

country

DIANA WILLIAMS, Capitol ST11587. From emotional ballads to storytelling recitations to lively love songs, Williams displays her versatility in this debut album release. Although her chart success has come from recitation material such as "Teddy Bear's Last Ride," the artist's strength lies in ballad and up-tempo tunes. **Best cuts:** "The Loving Of Your Life," "Old Fashioned Love Song," "Storm In Tupelo," "Tell Me Again," "Someday She'll Lose You To Me."

DEL REEVES—10th Anniversary, United Artists UALA687G. A compilation of Reeves' hits spanning the years from 1956 with "Girl On The Billboard" and "Bells Of Southern Bell" to 1976 with "I Ain't Got Nobody." Side one contrasts and exemplifies Reeves' progression from earlier themes of truck driving and cafe days to the more recent ballads on side two. **Best cuts:** "Looking At The World Through A Windshield," "Good Time Charlie's," "There Wouldn't Be A Lonely Heart In Town," "Lay A Little Loving On Me."

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