



Janis Gorzo

# Singles

Bite This!

Column by John Leland

**M**aybe it's the fallout from the independent promoters' payola scandal, but the airwaves and record companies seem to be recycling their drivel at an alarming rate these days. Aggressive instincts that once went to such worthy ventures as greasing DJs and paying off programmers are now lost on researching licks to steal, as everybody enters a furious race for second. If the circa '78 Maroderisms of Sique Sique Sputnik are really the

biggest news in the music industry since the circa '74 Village Peopleisms of Frankie Goes to Hollywood or similar vintage Sylvesterisms of Bronski Beat, then originality might as well leave town with its tail between its legs. And that's enough isms for this month. No earthly larceny, however, can be as dreadful as the so-called English soul revival. If the Blow Monkeys, Fine Young Cannibals, and Simply Red are soul bands, I'm Don Mattingly.

**Belinda Carlisle: "Mad About You" (I.R.S.)**

Buxom, bouncy Belinda Carlisle grew out of the high-school slumber party that was the Go-Gos and into the shimmering adult world of synthesizers and experience with a bundle of contradictions. "Mad About You" fizzles like Bowie's "Absolute Beginners." It thinks it's a knowing look at adolescent purity, but in its condescension it mistakes simple-mindedness for innocence. Carlisle's sanitized impression of teen luv (unless by some wild turn this is supposed to be adult love) is as sexless as one of the Stepford wives' fantasies. She doesn't sound like she's capable of being mad about anything. With its prefab plastic sequencer construction and Carlisle's bloodless vamping, this song is devoid of nothing so much as lust. Unless you count energy.

**Cut Master D.C.: "She's Good to Go" & "Rockin' the House" b/w "Brooklyn's in the House" & "We Came to Rock" (Zakia)**

The two great underground rap hits of the winter were Schoolly-D's "P.S.K.—What Does It Mean?" and "Brooklyn's in the House," a celebratory Mantronix rip-off by Cut Master D.C. that offered the choice couplet, "Hey good lookin'/You know you gotta be from Brooklyn." Patently derivative but on point, the song gave articulate voice to the dominant trends of the day. This cost-effective 12-inch reprises "Brooklyn" in an indifferent remix along with three tracks that sit tightly on that Mantronix electro-jones. Over the chilly silicon shufflebeat of "She's Good to Go," D.C. and his uncredited rappers debunk some sexual stereotypes and then build a song around them. Either that or they know a lot of frighteningly horny women. Like "Roxanne, Roxanne," "La-Di-Da-Di," and "Nightmares," another rap about not getting laid. Are the fearless hip-hop men really this scared of sex? The other two new songs are about (what else?) rocking the house, and show off D.C.'s cutmaster prowess. The original "Brooklyn" is the classic, but this 12-inch serves up some pretty amazing stuff.

**JFA: "My Movie" (Placebo EP)**

**Government Issue: "Give Us Stabb or Give Us Death" (Mystic EP)**

Each in its own way, these two early hardcore groups prove you don't need to be a speed metal band to be boring. JFA (Jodie Foster's Army) come from Phoenix, run their own label, and dish out an unfocused rocker and two fake Ennio Morricone spaghetti western instrumentals that deliver neither the tunes nor even the riffs that their ponderous acoustic intimations promise. D.C.'s Government Issue, on the other hand, has the riffs and proceeds to give them a proper burial. Without any emotional impact, this is punk more for what it lacks than what it has; at this point, you'll never slay .38 Special just by playing worse songs than

they do. And to think you could be listening to Big Black or Die Kreuzen or Schoolly-D.

**Peter Gabriel: "Sledgehammer" (Geffen)**

It's hard to believe now that Peter Gabriel ever inflicted all those ungainly progressive sludge tunes on the world or that the highlight of his live shows used to be the Chapman Stick solo. Like Phil Collins, he has updated his wardrobe and is now plundering American black music. Which beats the hell out of Druid folk music, or whatever Genesis used to nick. "I kicked the habit," he sings, "shed my skin / This is the new stuff I go dancing in." On "Sledgehammer," our party animal surrounds himself with horns and female backup singers, in what sounds like a heavyweight, less idiosyncratic analog to Talking Heads' "Slippery People." Lest Gabriel devotees fret, he still isn't exactly weightless in those dancing shoes. "Sledgehammer" lumbers along at a leaden funk crawl, and the lyrics still sound intensely paranoid. He hasn't lost his sledgehammer touch.

**Fresh Force Crew: "Rock Me" (Sutra)**

**Spyder-D (Featuring DJ Doc): "I Can't Wait (to Rock the Mike)" (Profile)**

Call this cultural reclamation or derivative opportunism; either way you're wasting big words to describe some pretty simple music. "Rock Me" sets raps over the metallic guitar line to Falco's "Rock Me Amadeus" and the Neanderthal beat from "We Will Rock You." "I Can't Wait" takes apart the Nu Shooz crossover hit of the same name and tries to cross back over again. While the pleasures to be had from these records are circumscribed from the outset, both acts at least picked good songs to work with. "Rock Me" adds balls to the Falco lick and begins strong with a kittenish dub intro, but by the end the Fresh Force Crew is doing "Tequila" (aka "Pee-Wee's Dance"), and I'm totally lost. Nonetheless, a more balanced if not more compelling pop-rock-rap hybrid than Run-D.M.C.'s "Walk This Way." Spyder-D's "I Can't Wait" sounds like the old school: a rap version of an R&B hit. 'Cept in the Sugar Hill days, they always tried to funk up the original. It gets the job done, but that's about it.

**Bob Dylan with the Heartbreakers: "Band of the Hand" b/w Michael Rubini: "Theme from Joe's Death" (MCA)**

"Down on these streets the fools rule/ There's no freedom or self-respect/A knife's point or a trip to the joint/Is about all you can expect." Dylan's mythological street epic is as far removed from reality as any of his recent music and as stylized as *Miami Vice*. And it's so far off the mark that it almost works. Tom Petty's irredeemably lame Heartbreakers camp up (or, more probably, fake) a sloppy gospel groove. "Band of the Hand" offers 12/8 time and organ and harmonies as a symbol of the apocalypse, and the formula is recognizable enough to work



even in such a perfunctory workout. But Dylan is so obviously intent on painting a sordid scene that he invests his apocalyptic scum with bald affection. Which is where these stylized street epics generally go astray. The record sleeve doesn't tell you, but you also get a sub-Jan Hammer instrumental by Michael Rubini on the B-side. Some things are best left unsaid.

**Big Audio Dynamite: "E=MC<sup>2</sup>" b/w "Albert Einstein Meets the Human Beat Box"**

As unsatisfying as the album was, Mick Jones has atoned for most of his sins on his three 12-inch remixes. Rick Rubin scrapped Jones' techno-cuteness and dropped big beats onto both sides of "The Bottom Line" b/w "BAD" 12-inch, and matched his knucklehead minimalism against the dubwise landscaping of Paul "Groucho" Smykle on the A- and B-side remixes of "Medicine Show." This EP included a non-LP collage called "This Is Big Audio Dynamite" that crammed the choicest goods from the album onto a three-minute track, proving a point best left alone. "E=MC<sup>2</sup>" is a routine remix, but the flip side pulls the song apart and reassembles it around an English human beatbox named Sipo. Since Laswell used Doug E. Fresh on the Sly and Robbie album, I'm surprised more groups haven't added a human beatbox. As much as the Fairlight, it's the instrument of our time. "Einstein" is the closest Jones has come to real dub since *Sandinista!*.

**Dhar Braxton: "Jump Back (Set Me Free)" (Sleeping Bag)**

A good disco groove is the ideological fulfillment of multitrack technology. Witness this spectacular bit of mindlessness from a newcomer named Dhar Braxton and her producer/producer Jhon Fair. Like a shoplifter on holiday, Fair appropriates familiar electronic handclaps, synth tweets, and mix effects from all over, including his own production of Chocolate's "It's the East Street Beat," to produce the most irresistible slice of tem-

porary music since the equally derivative "I Can't Wait." I know that covers a pretty short period of time, but so it goes with temporary music. Even if you don't know all the sources and references (I sure don't) this song sounds strikingly unoriginal. It dares you to call it a fraud. But damned if I can think coherently enough when it's on to do so. Fraud or not, this thing moves.

**Force M.D.'s: "Here I Go Again" (Tommy Boy)**

**Juice: "You Can't Hide From Love" b/w "Curiosity" (Def Jam/Columbia)**

Since hip hop has engineered the return of the independent black producer, it shouldn't be too surprising that it has also

launched a new breed of vocal group. Full Force, the Force M.D.'s, and Oran "Juice" Jones all lay their voices over strong Spartan accompaniment to give the old pros a run for their money. Luther Vandross should be this bad. "Here I Go Again" is like a vintage Jacksons ballad; not the sort of thing you can outright endorse, but pretty tough to resist. The Force M.D.'s are so much more convincing now that they've accepted themselves as singers rather than rappers; they've shed the New Edition cuteness without losing their charm. Juice betrays his roots when he sings, "You can't front on feelings," but really gives it up on the hip-hop mix of "Curiosity," put together without music by Chuck Chill-Out. And on the straight version, when he lays down the law: "The next time you get curious about Juice, I want you to get curious about getting a job. I want you to get curious about mass transit." This is balladry for b-boys. And if it's more reformist than innovative, that just means that it's the cure.

**SIDESWIPES**

If you can't buy a programmer, you might as well buy a hit, right? Elektra's crack A&R squad spotted **Joeski Love's** "Pee-Wee's Dance" silliness on its way up the charts, and now one of modern hip hop's pure indie race records (originally released on the Bronx-based Vintertainment label) is out on a major... as is the **L.A. Dream Team's** "The Dream Team Is in the House," which MCA just sucked up. With its unnecessary synth polish, this is a prime example of West Coast rap. I'll take the New York stuff any day... Massachusetts agitpropers the **Proletariat** resuscitate their long absent selves and their '78 Anglompunk dogma on "Marketplace" b/w "Death of a

Hedon" (Homestead), a simplistic but sonically compelling art-guitar romp... **Mantronix** remixed the coolly computerized "Bassline" (Sleeping Bag) into a hardcore display of beatbox wizardry. This guy (Mantronix, that is) is so hot right now it's pathetic... the always hopelessly naive **Del-Lords** bring their naïveté to a triumphant head on "Heaven" (EMI America), a rousing call-and-response anthem that's more an exorcism than a delusion. Easily their best song... **Regina**, the ranking industry pick to be the new Madonna, proves that this isn't such a meaningful designation with her laminated "Baby Love" (Atlantic), which comes complete with wallpaper dance arrangement and synthesizer trills. Not the Supremes song, incidentally... her fellow contender **Alisha** runs into the same problems on her follow-up to "Baby Talk," a slow machine product called "Stargazing" (Vanguard), but has a much bigger nose... **M.C. Shan**, Roxanne Shante's writing partner, calls LL Cool J's mother a sleaze-bag slut on "Beat Biter" (Bridge), an answer to LL's "Rock the Bells" that boldly accuses the original of stealing from him. Best is Marley Marl's acrobatic street-scratch production... **Sly Fox's** "Let's Go All the Way" (Capitol) spreads singing over the beat to the Boogie Boys' "Fly Girl," and on its second time around after a two-year hiatus, scores a big pop crossover hit... the impossibly cool **Fats Comet** express keeps the pressure on with what sounds like an answering machine and beatbox collage on "Rockchester" (World) and a reissue of their monstrous "Stormy Weather" (Upside). No kidding, folks, this is the best dance music now being made... and the **Celebrity Club Featuring Royal Silk** offer the girls' answer to Kurtis Blow on "Girls (Rulin' the World)" (Sutra).

Opposite: Former Go-Go Belinda Carlisle offers her sanitized impression of teen luv. Above: Mick Jones proposes a unified field theory on the remix of Big Audio Dynamite's "E = MC<sup>2</sup>." Right: Bob Dylan with Tom Petty. Jimmy's latest single is so far removed from reality that it almost works.

