

ROCK

By J.D. Considine

S H O R T T A K E S

Frida



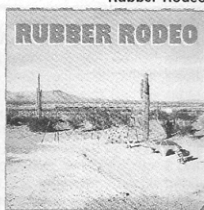
The Blasters



Brimstone & Treacle



Rubber Rodeo



Frida — *Something's Going On* (Atlantic). As one of the A's in ABBA, Anni-Frid Lyngström sings with the sweet voice of reasonable pop. Here, on her first American-released solo album, she powers her way through mid-tempo rockers and soars over energetic ballads with enviable aplomb. Credit Phil Collins' crisp, drum-heavy production for providing a solid enough runway to launch Frida's excursions into the stratosphere, and the aptly chosen material for giving her ample lift. Then ask yourself why most mainstream rock doesn't make being lightweight this enjoyable.

Luther Vandross — *Forever, For Always, For Love* (Epic). No question about it—Luther Vandross has a great voice and knows how to use it. In fact, some of the stuff he does on this album verges on showing off. What's unforgivable, though, is the way he wastes that magnificent instrument on such lame material, be it the Saturday night jive of "Bad Boy/Having a Party" or the cheap, synthetic romance of the title track. Only the buoyant "She Loves Me Back" fully recaptures the excitement of *Never Too Much*, and that's hardly enough.

The Blasters — *Over There* (Slash/Warner Bros.). This live EP is a great record if you think the Blasters are an energetic rockabilly revival band. It's also profoundly irritating when you know there's more to the band than Jerry Lee Lewis covers.

Pat Benatar — *Get Nervous* (Chrysalis). Get serious. Pat Benatar may be playing down the full-throated theatrics, but angst-ridden she's not. Still, it's nice to hear her stretch out a little, as the addition of keyboards has softened the band's sound to the point where Benatar can finesse the songs instead of having

to bully her way through the mix, and when she sings "The Victim" it's nice to see that the lyrics aren't as first-person as you'd expect. And Neil Giraldo remains an amazing guitarist.

Wall of Voodoo — *Call Of The West* (I.R.S.). This record is a sure cure for anyone who still thinks all synth bands sound alike. Not only does Wall of Voodoo shy away from the snap and crackle pop favored by the sequencer set, the group also manages to show a sly affinity for C&W, giving them a sound rather like a hoe-down at Hewlett-Packard. It isn't the pleasant change of pace that wins you over, though, but the combination of solid hooks and airy humor manifested in Stanard Ridgway's lemonade-art voice. That and the irresistible melody of "Mexican Radio."

Various Artists — *Brimstone & Treacle* (A&M). Three new ones by the Police, six by Sting solo, and a golden oldie each from Squeeze and the Go-Go's make this package seem a lot poppier than it is. Most of the album is atmospheric and instrumental, and so richly evocative of the film's mood that I'm sold on Sting's characterization without having seen so much as a trailer. Average rock, but great movie music.

Robby Krieger — *Versions* (Passport). "Tattooed Love Boys," "Reach Out, I'll Be There" and "Street Fighting Man" done as instrumentals? As guitar instrumentals? Where are the Ventures when you really need them?

Holly & the Italians — *Holly Beth Vincent* (Virgin/Epic). Aside from the sound, which is so cramped it makes *Nebraska* sound like it was recorded by George Martin at Montserrat, this is one terrific album. Holly and her Italians rummaged through the same psychedelic-pop territory Julian Cope of Teardrop

Explodes found so alluring, and have come away with performances that capture the layered swirl of rhythm and texture that the psychedelics never quite caught, along with a superb set of pop songs. And nary a sitar in sight.

Tom Waits & Crystal Gayle — *One From The Heart* (Columbia). Vocally, this works surprisingly well, with Crystal Gayle's lush intonation providing a nice foil for Tom Waits' must-be-emphysema rasp. The material is something else again, though, featuring fake jazz melodies and lyrics boasting more corn than all of Iowa. Sure, the point of the movie was that love can be foolish, but this is downright ridiculous.

Rachel Sweet — *Blame It On Love* (Columbia). Ever wonder what the slick Benatar/Foreigner/REO Journeywagon hard pop would sound like if it were based on Springsteen and Parker instead of airbrushed Bad Company? Here's as good a guess as any. Rachel Sweet isn't squeamish about using fat powerchords or glossy keyboards to fill out her backing tracks, and her drum mix is as hot as anything on AOR today. But her songs have heart, wit and spunk where the competition is still piling on the clichés, and her vocals cut through the perfect production with the kind of verve that doesn't come studio-assisted. It's enough to make you look forward to playing the radio again.

Rubber Rodeo (Eat). Perhaps the best way to describe this is to call it quirky and western. With their hillbilly twang, new wave moves and warped sense of humor, Rubber Rodeo try real hard to come off like cowboys from Mars, but even though their instrumental effects are pure Devo, their melodies are as down to earth as anything Joe Ely croons. It gets a little extreme at times,