

ROCK

By J.D. Considine

S H O R T T A K E S

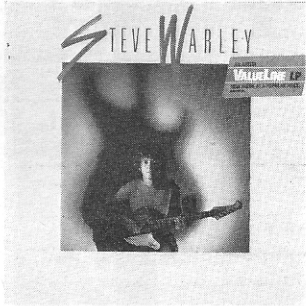
Bruce Springstone



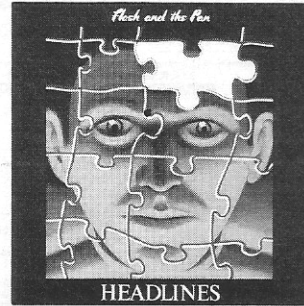
Peter Frampton



Steve Warley



Flash & the Pan



R.E.M.—*Chronic Town* (I.R.S.). With their poppishly direct melodies and starkly efficient guitar lines, R.E.M. seem like a lean and hungry version of the dB's at first listen. But as the songs sink in, you realize that the music is not so much hookish as simply hypnotic. Although the lyrics leave me frankly baffled, the five songs here are so completely accessible melodically that it would be hard to imagine any listener not becoming addicted eventually. In fact, the only problem with the record is that you end up wishing for a larger dose.

Bruce Springstone—*Live At Bedrock* (Clean Cuts single). Have you ever wondered what it would sound like if Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band did the theme from *The Flintstones*? Me neither, but Tom Chalkley and Craig Hankin have done such a remarkable job refitting the Hanna/Barbera chestnut in vintage Springsteen style, from the "when I was growin' up" intro to the Big Man sax wail at the end, that I was surprised the Boss didn't think of it himself. Funnier still is the B-side, where the original lyrics to "Take Me Out To The Ballgame" sound uncannily Springsteenian. The novelty record of the year. (Clean Cuts, P.O. Box 16264, Baltimore, MD 21210)

Peter Frampton—*The Art Of Control* (A&M). Funny how now that Frampton has discovered new wave, he suddenly remembered that he has a British accent.

The Reds—*Fatal Slide* (Stony Plain). The Reds use electronics the way great pop singers use strings—to define a mood, not to make up for lack of interest elsewhere. Which is probably why the Reds' music sounds so much more human than that of other circuit-bored

bands, not to mention infinitely more rock 'n' roll. Of course, good songs help too, and the Reds are inventive tune-smiths, although not quite as consistent as I'd like. But since the playing is generally exciting enough to take up the slack, I rarely mind. (Stony Plain, P.O. Box 861, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T5J 2L8)

Barry Reynolds—*I Scare Myself* (Island). Reynolds' combination of kinky rhythms and obsessive lyrics has made for some hauntingly powerful songs, as anyone familiar with Marianne Faithfull's *Broken English* can attest. But as much as the title track epitomizes his creative powers, his unexpectedly lightweight voice frequently fails to deliver when competing against the ace Compass Point rhythm section, making me glad that he balances things out with some touching, if less incendiary, acoustic numbers.

Au Pairs—*Sense And Sensuality* (Roadrunner import). Too much of the former and not enough of the latter for my tastes, although I should add that I'm not really complaining. Granted, the rhythmic directness of the Au Pairs' first album, *Playing With A Different Sex*, added an enjoyable dancefloor urgency to their songs of sex and politics, but the lithe jazziness that has replaced it on this album seems more attuned to Lesley Woods' husky declamations. Not to mention the way the occasional vibes and horns flesh out Au Pairs' barebones guitar approach.

The Scientific Americans—*Load And Go* (ROIR cassette). As you might have guessed from the name, these are smart guys with a sense of humor and a lot of electronics. Personally, I prefer the former, which finds them opening the tape with a hokey radio show snippet, to the latter, which provides some interest-

ing noises but leads them into an absurdly trumped-up version of "Ball Of Confusion." On the whole, though, I prefer the whole thing over most of the synth stuff coming out of England. (ROIR, 811 Broadway, Suite 214, New York City, NY 10012)

Steve Warley (Jive). For a guy who sounds like Van Morrison doing the Creedence songbook, Steve Warley manages to seem pretty original. It helps that he avoids most of the obvious affectations (although he does at one point warble, "We got the mojo/ We got the gumbo"), and that he writes some very attractive melodies. On the whole, Warley leaves me entertained and eagerly waiting to see what he can really do.

Flash & the Pan—*Headlines* (Epic). Former Easybeats Harry Vanda, George Young and Steve Wright emerge from two albums of studio anonymity as an honest-to-God band, with surprisingly pleasant results. Unlike the first two Flash & the Pans, Wright's *sprechstimme* delivery is augmented by an occasional melody, a concession that doesn't really work, and backing vocals, which do. For the most part, the music is as wry and moody as ever, sort of like an aural version of *The Road Warrior*. Which is why I play it all the time.

Icehouse—*Primitive Man* (Chrysalis). As is so often the case with primitivists these days, Iva Davies has hewn his raw, uncluttered world view from the latest in high technology. By synthesizing his sonic landscapes, he gives us rough edges that are still highly finished, tribal rhythms from the global village and a sense of nature that is highly cultivated. At the same time, he never lets us forget that the first part of artifice is art.

Altered Images—*Pinky Blue* (Portrait).
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Although most of Britain's new squeaky teen pop leaves me wondering what ever happened to the Bay City Rollers, I find Altered Images irresistible. A lot of it surely derives from Martin Rushent's glossy production, and no doubt their ingenious distillation of Siouxsie & the Banshees' childish dissonances doesn't hurt. Mostly, though, it's because of Clare Grogan's Shirley Temple vocals, particularly as applied to nonsense like "Song Sung Blue."

Shoes—*Boomerang* (Elektra). Fans of the first three Shoes albums will be happy to learn that the post-Beatles formula remains intact, with warm vocal harmonies, buzzing power chords and insistent rhythm work locked in exquisite tension. But the hooks are conspicuously absent, and, title to the contrary, none of these songs comes back to hit you by surprise.

Novo Combo—*The Animation Generation* (Polydor). Just like the big boys, Novo Combo is made up of faceless technicians, guys with plenty of chops and the personality of a brick. But unlike REO Journeywagon and the others, Novo Combo isn't out to make its fortune through a carefully airbrushed rehash of the last ten years of FM rock. Not in the least. Novo Combo's music is a carefully airbrushed rehash of the last three years of new wave. A big difference, you see.