

ROCK

SHORT TAKES

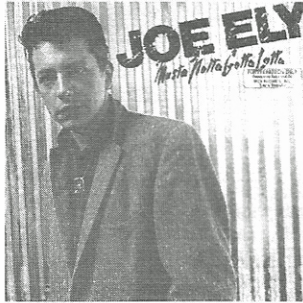
The Jam sound off, the Searchers look good, and Midnight Flyer never takes off. LKJ goes rub-a-dub-dub, but Leon Russell should stay off the bluegrass.

By David Fricke

Midnight Flyer



Joe Ely



Leon Russell



The Searchers



The Jam — *Sound Affects* (Polydor). What the Clash now take two and three albums to do the Jam still do in one, if you don't count the free single included in early copies. And where the Clash often sound forced by their own frustration with the punk form to jump on every musical bandwagon that passes by, the Jam accept the limitations of their basic sound — Who-ish three-piece thunder — while adding effective dabs of tonal color (horns, keyboards, even dub-wise mixing on the instrumental "Music For the Last Couple") in those spaces left by Paul Weller's pithy, poignant songwriting pen. So what if "Start!" is a fearless cop of Beatle George's "Taxman"? Have you ever heard the one about "My Sweet Lord" sounding like...

Abba — *Super Trouper* (Atlantic). Even at its sappiest (the tearjerking "The Way Old Friends Do" that closes this album), Abba's polar pop is good for what ails ya, as refreshing as the Nestea plunge. Bjorn and Benny add a few new wrinkles here and there as well, like the Devophonic overtones of "On and On and On." The winners take it all, again.

The Searchers — *Love's Melodies* (Sire). Moon Martin, John Fogerty, Will Birch of the Records, Motorsman Andy McMasters, and Alex Chilton are just a few of the ace tunesmiths who get the Searchers treatment here — crisp resonant Byrds-y guitars, snappy rhythms, and heavenly choir-like harmonies. Sure, you've heard it all done before. But rarely is it done better.

Leon Russell and New Grass Revival — *The Live Album* (Paradise). The so-called "Master of Space and Time" spins his wheels in an abortive fusion of New Grass Revival's infectious organic boogie and his own overbearing rock-gospel pretensions. Could have been

worse, though. He could have done what he did on his last live album — made it a three-record set.

Joe Ely — *Musta Notta Gotta Lotta* (South Coast/MCA). The best Joe Ely album since the last Joe Ely album. Why this killer Texan — with his 180 proof blend of rock 'n' roll moxie, honky-tonk soul, and Tex-Mex jive, not to mention a band as hot as homemade chili — isn't a star is a mystery. With any luck, this album is the solution.

Good Rats — *Great American Music* (Great American). This band, a Long Island rock 'n' roll institution, seems to suffer from the same jinx bugging Joe Ely. But like the little bar band that could, the Rats keep plying their trade and with this album (their seventh) their time may finally have come. Singer Peppi Marchello writes vigorously catchy songs with clever lyrical twists ("New York Survivor," "Audience," "Rock and Roll Point of View") and the band grinds them out with neo-heavy metal fervor. So why let Long Island bars have all this fun?

The Jags — *No Tie Like a Present* (Island). Just because this English quintet replaced a couple of members for their second album doesn't mean they don't still sound like third-rate Elvis Costello clones.

Robert Rental and the Normal — *Live — West Runton. Pavilion* (Rough Trade US). There's music on only one side of this twelve-inch disc (it sells for about the price of a disco single) and that one side sounds like it was recorded in a New York subway tunnel. But there is something morbidly fascinating, even hypnotic, about the manic application of abstract sounds to primal electronic composition — a kind of *musique confused* — by these two English eccentrics ("the Normal" is one Daniel Miller,

best known for his dirge "Warm Leatherette"). Not for the faint of ear.

Pere Ubu — *The Modern Dance* (Rough Trade US). A reissue of this experimental Cleveland band's classic first LP. If you've had trouble dealing with their later, more demanding records like *New Picnic Time* and *The Art of Walking*, then this 1977 album — a no less inflammable combination of Beefheartian clamor and otherworldly melodies but firmly grounded in 20th century rock — is a good place to start. In Ubu's world, you've gotta learn to dance before you can walk.

Stiv Bators — *Disconnected* (Bomp). Former Dead Boy vocalist cools the Iggy-isms in favor of a more competent hard-rock approach on his first solo album. The result is a young, loud, and snotty Tom Petty, which is actually quite refreshing considering how many ersatz Iggys are crawling around L.A. these days. Add ten points for a bullish cover of the Electric Prunes' "I Had Too Much to Dream Last Night."

Various Artists — *I.R.S. Greatest Hits Vols. 2 & 3* (I.R.S.). New wave entrepreneurs, the International Record Syndicate, pat themselves on the back with this two-record sampler of acts and tracks they've released over the last two years. Obvious selling points are the \$9.98 list price and rare tracks by the Police (their debut 45 "Fall Out"), John Cale, and the Cramps, but then you also get an inexpensive chance to savor the eccentric joys of Skafish, Wazmo Nariz, Fashion, the Fall...

Various Artists — *Rising Stars of San Francisco* (War Bride). Of the eleven Bay Area hopefuls, at least four of them could qualify for this label's "Greatest Hits" in a few years. The Kingsnakes

feature two former Flamin' Groovies, which should be explanation enough. Debra Knox of the Fun Addicts sings "You Don't Care" with all the lust and vigor of a punky Ann Wilson. New Romans contribute a bouncy "She Doesn't Play (With Yo-Yo's)" and the sorely underrated Readymades check in with the bold menacing pop of "Runnin' Too Fast." Songstress Holly Stanton and another ex-Groovie Roy Loney, also included here, have War Bride LPs of their own out now worth checking out as

Linton Kwesi Johnson — *L.K.J. in Dub* (Mango). Reggae poet Johnson and his pen take a vacation while co-producer/mix-master Dennis "Blackbeard" Bovel cooks up a dub-ble bubble stew of rhythms culled from Johnson's last two LPs *Forces of Victory* and *Bass Culture*. Johnson's powerful way with words is conspicuous by his absence, but Bovel's way with the music is sheer **Midnight Flyer** (Swan Song). The production by Mick Ralphs of Bad Company is punchy, the band (ex-Foghat, Whitesnake, among others) competent, and celebrated Scottish throat Maggie Bell has a magnificent set of Joplin-esque pipes. Why, then, doesn't Midnight Flyer ever get off the ground? Because most of the songs are tired, overworked Anglo blues-rock clichés. Exceptions: the jazz-tinged "In My Eyes," a dramatic ballad called "Rough Trade," and "What Ever I Want," which is best described as heavy metal **Hawks** (Columbia). This fresh-faced five-piece, hailing from deepest darkest Iowa, uphold the Midwestern tradition of British Invasion classicism (Raspberries, Blue Ash, Cheap Trick, Shoes) with style and taste. They can't help drawing on the same '60s pop clichés as their predecessors, but their cranked-up rock 'n' roll drive, flawless instrumental mesh, and winning harmonies make all the difference in the world.

Ian Gomm — *What a Blow* (Stiff/Epic). This former Brinsley Schwarz singer-guitarist-tunesmith's brand of sophisticated pub-rock goes down just as nice and easy here as it did on his first solo album *Gomm With the Wind*. There is nothing here as immediately memorable as his 1979 hit "Hold On." Still, the mellow shuffle "Here It Comes Again (That Feeling)," the Bo Diddley-style bouncer "What a Blow," and his version of Jack Tempchin's "Slow Dancin'" (very much like the way the Brinsleys might have done it) come real close.

Ted Nugent — *Intensities in 10 Cities* (Epic). He sings like a hyena in heat, plays his Gibson like an instrument of war, and the closest thing to a ballad on this live album of mostly new material is the Nuge's nuking of "Land of a Thousand Dances." True, if you have one Nugent album, you've basically got them all. But don't kid yourself. Ignoring him won't make him go away. **M**