

ROCK

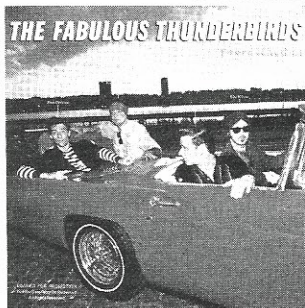
By J.D. Considine

SHORT TAKES

Diana Ross



Fabulous Thunderbirds



Chic



Talk Talk



The Jam — *The Bitterest Pill* (Polydor). An appropriate farewell, this four-song EP all too aptly conveys both the best and the worst of the Jam. The title track is Paul Weller at his Beatle-ish best, all well-turned melodic phrases and ringing chord changes; "Pity Poor Alfie" is a brooding romance dragged down by a hopelessly cheesy interpolation of "Fever"; "The Great Depression" is brash, hookish social commentary in the style of *The Gift*; and "War" is a stiff, unfunky retreat of the Edwin Starr hit.

Riuchi Sakamoto — *Left Handed Dream* (Epic). No synth-pop this. Despite Sakamoto's tenure with the incredibly hokey Yellow Magic Orchestra, the bulk of this album is given over to warm, almost organic blends of synths, guitars, percussion and an occasional wind instrument. In other words, a Japanese version of Japan. Except, that is, for an occasional cameo by Robin Scott, who at one point enjoins us to lay down our tools and party-hearty as the synths burble jauntily. Lotsa fun.

The Fabulous Thunderbirds — *T-Bird Rhythm* (Chrysalis). The pop album you always hoped they'd make. The songs are all killers, especially the Memphis-styled groover "How Do You Spell Love?," and the performances are sharp enough to shave with. But the masterstroke is the way producer Nick Lowe keeps the edges so raw and the mix so tinny that all this pop stuff sounds just like the T-Birds instead of trying to fake it so it would work out the other way around.

Rank and File (Slash). Punk country? That's right, pardner. Rank and File have somehow transformed the rigid pulse of L.A. post-punk into a sort of mutant twang that captures both the old-style

two-step and the Huntington Beach Strut. As cultural (con)fusion, it's pretty solid stuff, especially since the band has both the chops and the voices to pull it off. But since their country drift has them playing into conventions instead of playing off them, I wonder how long they can keep this strain mutating.

Heaven 17 (Arista/Virgin). Heaven 17 may be the only group in the British synth-funk camp to actually come off as soulful, something which makes songs like "Penthouse And Pavement," "Play To Win" and the notorious "(We Don't Need No) Fascist Groove Thang" as listenable as they are danceable. Too bad it took almost two years for these songs to see American release.

Diana Ross — *Silk Electric* (RCA). "Muscles," with its from-a-whisper-to-a-crash production and hysterical beef-cake sentiments, is the best thing I've heard on the radio in months. Amazingly enough, it doesn't outclass the rest of *Silk Electric* either. With Ross doing everything from ersatz 50s rock to extra-crunchy semi-metal, this is eclectic in the extreme but completely successful. Not to mention sexy as hell.

Jefferson Starship — *Winds Of Change* (Grunt). Third-rate imitation Journey.

Chic — *Tongue In Chic* (Atlantic). More funny than funky, but I take it that was supposed to be the idea. But also more funny than catchy, and I doubt that was in the plans. Aside from "Hangin'" and "Chic (Everybody Say)," these are just mannerisms posing as songs, so don't expect to find Nile and 'Nard laughing their way back to the bank anytime soon.

Dusty Springfield — *White Heat* (Casablanca). Like *Dusty In Memphis*, a pleasant surprise. Like everybody else

trying to sound with-it, Springfield has a few more synthesizers behind her than she needs, but her gritty drawl and tart inflection keep things sounding quite hot indeed. Best of all is her version of "Losing You," in which she accomplishes every vocal trick Elvis Costello ever attempted. Not to be missed.

Talk Talk — *The Party's Over* (EMI/America). Okay, "Talk Talk" is a great song, and "Have You Heard The News" isn't a bad one. But isn't one Duran Duran enough?

Magazine — *After The Fact* (I.R.S.). It's great to have flat-out rockers like "Shot By Both Sides," "TV Baby" and "I Love You, You Big Dummy" in one convenient package. But as the singles compilation progresses from early Magazine to the later issues, I begin to wonder if playing just my fave singles wasn't such a bad idea, after all. Or maybe just playing side one of this.

Tav Falco's Panther Burns — *Blow Your Top* (Animal). As rockabilly weirdos go, Falco is pretty convincing, sounding exactly like the kind of guy who's dodged beer bottles all night while ripping it up in some backwoods roadhouse. But since authentic isn't the same thing as real good, and since I don't like throwing beer bottles at my stereo, I think I'll stick with Bobby Lee Riley.

Plasmatics — *Coup D'Etat* (Capitol). Ever wonder what Black Sabbath would have sounded like with a chainsaw as lead singer?

Swingers — *Counting The Beat* (Backstreet). The title cut makes a terrific single, expertly toeing the line between quirky art-pop and hook-mongering top forty. The rest of the album favors art

over hooks, though, proving rather conclusively which of the two sold me on the title cut. And it ain't the art.

Jerry Garcia — *Run For The Roses* (Arista). "I Saw Her Standing There" reworked as a clavinet-fueled swamp rocker? "Knockin' On Heaven's Door" reduced to the sort of syrup they play at pet cemeteries? So much for the theory that drug use doesn't lead to brain damage.... ☒