

# New LPs

## LOUISE GOFFIN

### This Is The Place

WEA WX 136 LP/Cass/CD

The daughter of Brill Building songwriting team Gerry Goffin and Carole King, Louise Goffin is confident enough with her '60s pop ancestry to include a sliver of her parents' composition, Little Eva's Locomotion, at the end of a song called Brand New Drum. The fact that this is the most attention-grabbing moment in an otherwise stylised mid-tempo rocker suggests that This Is The Place's self-consciously commercial Swain/Jolley production has done Louise no great favours; indeed the poppier songs on this conformist debut tend to make her voice squeak. The best tracks here are the slowest: Fifth Of July and Bridge Of Sighs are hazy, atmospheric ballads that find her heavily influenced by Rickie Lee Jones, while Ghosts On The High Street filters this stream of consciousness sensibility through some uptempo sass that recalls Prince spin-offs Wendy and Lisa. She's lately been working with ex-Gang Of Four guitarist Andy Gill, the results of which collaboration can only be more interesting than this less than compelling set. ★★  
*Steve Goulding*

## THE GRIP

### Be Yourself

RAZOR RAS 29 LP/Cass

Raw, jolly, uncluttered, undemanding stuff from a trio who have all the tightness and discipline that being a three-piece

engenders. Their sound is a solid, high-energy rock shorn of effects and enhancements and it comes at you with the all-join-in enthusiasm of a Friday night pub pianist. All the tracks are mobile and eager, even When The Rain Comes Down which sounds like it ought to be a dirge but is actually a dinky little guitar boogie. Be Yourself carries some bright and definite riffs, notably Bet Your Gonna Lose Her (sic), the opening track, Crush On You, and Two Hearts. You'll gather that the lyrical content is not particularly taxing but then the band's appeal lies in simplicity and honesty, not great emotional depth. ★★★  
*Emily Fraser*

## GWEN GUTHRIE

### Ticket To Ride

4th & BROADWAY BRPL 516 LP

Gwen Guthrie is hampered by the same problems as many a soul diva: she has a voice as strong and clear as a bell but a paucity of material on which to exercise it. Ticket To Ride is a ragbag compilation of old and new, though it could scarcely be called a Best Of — if it were, 4th & Broadway would surely have included her witty paean to self-sufficiency Nuthin' Going On But The Rent. For the most part it's workaday funk propelled by the Dunbar/Shakespeare rhythm machine, but not even their virtuosity can set this collection alight. It's notable for two covers, one a bizarre rendering of the eponymous Beatles standard, the other a shockingly bad version of Sly Stone's Family Affair. ★★  
*Anthony Quinn*

## MERLE HAGGARD

### Chill Factor

EPIC EPC 460783 LP/Cass

"I'm old-fashioned music, I'm old-

fashioned music, I'm like a man from another time." Merle Haggard sings on this new LP, and so, it seems, he is. His hairline is receding, his face is crinkly, but his smooth-as-velvet voice is still capable of extraordinary things. "Wish I could be 30 again/Wish time didn't wrinkle my skin". Perhaps because of Merle has to take it easy nowadays, the material here is pretty much one-paced — little more than an elderly saunter; the songs are not particularly interesting — always vaguely melancholic, lots of sorrowful looking back and bucketful of regrets. The arrangements are sometimes curious though — occasional '50s-style backing vocals and instrumental breaks, brass fills and even a couple of moody trumpet solos. Still, despite the moaning middle-aged dreariness of most of Chill Factor, Merle Haggard's singing is always worth hearing. ★★★  
*John Bauldie*

## ROY HARPER

### Descendants Of Smith

EMI EMC 3524 LP/Cass/CD

Way back at the rear end of the British folk boom, Roy Harper released Come Out Fighting Genghis Smith, an album of full-bodied whines and troubador romance; almost 20 years on, he offers up Descendants Of Smith, an album which, despite slight musical differences — he's now using synthetic strings and drums instead of the real things — features essentially the same worldview of self-righteous raging and romantic naivete. His songs are still mainly political protest rants of a predominantly Green hue (eg, Gardens Of Uranium, and Government Surplus), with his romantic side given free rein on oh-fair-maidenly minstrelly like

Maile Lee. The targets are just about anything in the modern world that happens to incur Harper's displeasure: Some Shoes criticises the culture that lionises icons like Dean and Monroe, but from a jaded, obscurely ironic perspective, whilst Pinches Of Salt seems to be a slap on the wrist for someone, though I'm buggered if I can be bothered to figure out who. All this miserablism might be palatable (after all, one hardly expects Party Time with Harper) had he taken the trouble to set his spleen to more user-friendly melodies. But no: the devil has all the best tunes, and Descendants Of Smith is about as cheerful as a churchful of remorse. ★★  
*Andy Gill*

## HIGHWAY 101

### Highway 101

WARNER BROS 925 608 LP/Cass

Debut LP from a young four-piece country band whose songs are hard-driven by punchy rock 'n' roll bass-and-drums. Singer Paulette Carlson has a not-quite-so-sweet Emmylou Harris style and she tackles contemporary songs — some her own — more than competently, the lively band playing tightly throughout. Highway 101 might well attract the vague "new country" tag; they're more "country" than "new", but the meatiness of the playing carries the band far enough away from the Nashville bars for them to interest a rockier audience. Well worth checking out, and besides, how can you resist a band with a guitarist called Jack Daniels? ★★★  
*John Bauldie*

## ROCKY HILL

### Rocky Hill

VIRGIN V2510 LP/Cass/CD

Guitarist Rocky Hill is the elder brother of ZZ Top bassist Dusty

Hill's greatest claim to fame remains his former membership of the American Blues, a Dallas-based '60s garage band which released two albums and included in its ranks both Dusty Hill and drummer Frank Beard, two-thirds of the future ZZ Top.

Eighteen years on, and although Hill's solo debut is a workmanlike collection of well-travelled blues/rock material, leavened by the odd excursion into the Star-inspired R & B hinterland, there is nothing to indicate his awareness of a single musical development subsequent to the release of the first Allman Brothers Band LP, which is where hard-driving boogies like HPD and Take My Love would fit perfectly.

His voice is adequate for the kind of white blues shouting that essays the lifestyle of a tuff-living Southern man in rhymes like "gun" and "fun", while his guitar playing is predictably redolent of his Texan peers Gibbons and S. R. Vaughan. But despite flashes of excellence, like the incisive slide section in New York Turnaround, the album is hobbled by an absence of individual purpose and betrays a bar band mentality in its lack of originality. ★★  
*David Sinclair*

## HURBY'S MACHINE

### The House That Rap Built

LONDON FFRLP 2 LP/Cass/CD

Hurby is Hurby "The Love Bug" Azor, a New York rap producer and a name to watch. What makes him different from and better than most is that his records — he contributes writing and rapping as well as production — add melodic structure to rap with the sampled sounds of real instruments. His style of verbals too is often thematic rather than mere boasting and yelling. This blend of rap with pop roots has already brought Hurby one UK near-hit with Sweet T's I

# MELLIFLUOUS

Joni Mitchell might have nothing left to prove, but she's got plenty left to say.

## JONI MITCHELL

### Chalk Mark In A Rain Storm

GEFFEN WX 141 LP/Cass/CD

Given a musician whose career has encompassed more than 20 years and a welter of styles ranging from flower-child folkiness through rock and jazz to her present offering, it's little surprise to find Joni Mitchell sounding unhurried. As she approaches middle age, she's put aside the dizzying invention of times past, and like Van Morrison, perhaps realises that she no longer has anything to prove. Yet this doesn't mean that she no longer has anything to say.

Her first recording since Dog Eat Dog three years ago, Chalk Mark In A Rain Storm has a decidedly cosmopolitan feel, not only because Mitchell has absorbed a fabulous musical vocabulary but furthermore has assembled for the outing a diverse cast of players, including Don Henley, Willie Nelson, Tom Petty, sax-player Wayne Shorter and Benjamin Orr (of The Cars). Happily it's also free of Thomas Dolby's cluttered production, which buried her last album beneath an avalanche of studio gimmickry.

Opening with My Secret Place, a duet with Peter Gabriel that turns on a haunting piano figure, the keynote is Mitchell's multi-tracked vocal, featured throughout the record and lending it at times an eerie, echoing quality. It's best exemplified on side two's



Joni Mitchell: languid ease.

centrepiece, Beat Of Black Wings, where the layered harmonies induce an almost hypnotic melancholy and huge shafts of synthesizer beam over its gentle percussive roll. Wonderful, in other words.

What's pleasing here is the languid ease of tone and pace — she's not striving to be "modern". Only once does she stray into modish terrain, on Reoccurring Dream, a disparate patchwork of found voices as explored by the likes of Big Audio Dynamite. The modernist trappings fail to disguise the fact that there's not really a song there, and it's the one time her step falters. Elsewhere, there are forays into the mystic, though I'm at a loss as to what Tea Leaf Prophecy (vocals courtesy of Wendy & Lisa) might be about. Dancing Clown is a middling adult rocker (featuring Billy Idol, if you please) but her lightness of touch carries it off. The closing track A Bird That Whistles, with her mellifluous warbling at its crest, all but floats away in a fugue of horns.

Joni Mitchell has come a long way from Big Yellow Taxi and Blue. There's nothing here to match her creative apogee of the mid-'70s, viz. Court And Spark, and The Hissing Of Summer Lawns: yet even if her demons have been exorcised, her lyrical sense retains much of the wit and intelligence that characterised her best work. ★★★  
*Anthony Quinn*