

Billboard's Top Album Picks

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Billboard SPECIAL SURVEY For Week Ending 9/18/76

Number of LPs reviewed this week 47 Last week 56

Pop

OZARK MOUNTAIN DAREDEVILS—Men From Earth, A&M SP-4601. Group that has scored single hits in the past couple of years with both country rock material like "If You Wanna Get To Heaven" and cool pop items like "Jackie Blue," shows that same diversity on this fourth album for the label. Half of the songs have the summery feel and excellent Beach Boys harmonies that characterized "Jackie Blue," while there are also several downhome country numbers like the earlier hit. Also included is a slower country entry in the Gordon Lightfoot bag and a couple of hoedown harmonica-dominated numbers which open and close the album.

Best cuts: "Fly Away Home," "You Know Like I Know," "Breakaway (From Those Chains)," "Mountain Range," "Watermill," "It's How You Think."

Dealers: Group's first three albums all made the top 100.

DAVID BROMBERG BAND—How Late'll Ya Play Till, Fantasy F-79007. In his previous major label recording career, Bromberg has not succeeded in breaking beyond a cult following for his often antic, contemporary adaptations of folk blues material. He hasn't made that key hit single or established himself as a national concert headliner. But now, in his first LP for Fantasy he is taking a solid commercial shot at presenting his specialized style in the most elegant support package possible. This is a twin-disk set, evenly divided between live and studio cuts. Bromberg's virtuoso guitar picking and insinuating voice is backed with a horn group that comes on like a cross between the Dirt Band and Springsteen's E-St. group. The leader flashes brightly through his own tongue-in-cheek originals and raunchy blues ballads by the likes of Blind Willie McTell or Robert Johnson. A well-thought-out fan winner.

Best cuts: "Bullfrog Blues," "Will Not Be Your Fool," "Danger Man II" "Get Up And Go."

Dealers: Bromberg has long been popular in the Northeast and college markets.

DEODATO—Very Together, MCA 2219. Keyboard specialist extraordinaire joins the disco tempo brigade and his arrangements lift his work way above the level of commercially slapped together LPs trying to siphon some bucks out of this trend. Deodato has written five of the eight cuts and his tight, small group plays with an honest conviction. The opening cut, Henry Mancini's theme from "Peter Gunn," is reproduced in an exciting, modish disco fashion. While the LP is disco flavored, it is not totally given up to the dance beat; there are soft, flowing quasi-Hispanic undercurrents which add a lustre to the tunes like "Amani" and "Black Widow." The musicians are top N.Y. sidemen plus some soft vocalizing by the Ellington Sisters.

Best cuts: "Peter Gunn," "Spanish Boogie," "I Shot The Sheriff," "Juanita."

Dealers: Deodato's clever way of arranging old hits so they sound up to date, clicks again.

JON LUCIEN—Premonition, Columbia PC 34255. All the elements are here: an outstanding vocal stylist; protean musicians, excellent arrangers, a broad range of tempos to match the richness of MOR music. Vocalist Lucien's distinct West Indian accent is married into the body of the lyrics which speak of love and recollections of dreams sought and attained. Such luminaries as Benny Golson and Torri Zito are responsible for the charts for this large orchestral setting encompassing East and West Coast players. But this is Lucien's moment of glory as he cascades when required, escalates when needed and gallops when appropriate with his lyrical interpretations. Five of the nine cuts are by Lucien with "Spring's Arrival" his best effort.

Best cuts: "Hello Like Before," "Spring's Arrival," "You Been Away Too Long," "Child Of Love."

Dealers: Lucien's recent cross country tour brought out fans who have kept quiet about this fine talent. He's ready to explode.

Soul

TYRONE DAVIS—Love And Touch, Columbia PC 34268. Label debut for the man who had a couple of gold singles on Dakar in 1969 and 1970 with "Turn Back The Hands Of Time" and "Can I Change My Mind" is an excellent mix of ballads, midtempo material in the Johnnie Taylor bag and several uptempo, goodtime soul cuts reminiscent of the Spinners. Excellent arrangements back Davis with strings, sax and female voices.

Best cuts: "Give It Up (Turn It Loose)," "Why Is It So Hard (To Say You're Sorry)," "Givin' Myself To You," "Wrong Doers," "Beware, Beware."

Dealers: Identify Davis' hit background.

DONNY GERRARD—Greedy G1002. For the most part this is a set of happy, uptempo material along the lines of the Spinners. But along with infectious soul/pop numbers by the likes of Curtis Mayfield and Janssen & Hart are a few excellent romantic ballads, including Lennon & McCartney's classic "The Long And Winding Road" and a masterful slow ballad by Van McCoy. Heavy use of female backup and good string and horn arrangements from Jimmie Haskell.

Best cuts: "He's Always Somewhere Around" (new single), "Words (Are Impossible)" (a recent chart single), "The Long

Spotlight



BEE GEES—Children Of The World, RSO, RS 1-3003. After some years of disappointment, as one good record after another failed to reach its potential market, the Bee Gees found that Number One single formula again by absorbing many of the hooks of the exploding disco music into its richly textured style. Now with the Bee Gees label, RSO, leaving Atlantic to go independent, this is the Brothers Gibb's first recent LP without Arif Mardin, who produced their comeback sides. On its own, the Bee Gees have lovingly reproduced and even further refined the blue-eyed disco sound it developed with Mardin. Lead vocalist Robin Gibb has deserted his distinctive vibrato for a pure falsetto that could be easily at home in the O'Jays or the Stylistics. Brothers Maurice and Barry provide lead instrumentals and vocal harmonies that also out-soul all but the best of contemporary soul groups. The Bee Gees have had the determination and good fortune to create themselves a second style that caught the public imagination as much as the group's earlier hits.

Best cuts: "You Should Be Dancing," "Love So Right," "Lovers," "You Stepped Into My Life."

Dealers: "You Should Be Dancing" was a recent No. 1 single, RSO's first as an independent.

And Winding Road," "Peace For Us All," "As Far As We Can Go."

Dealers: This will break first in soul, so stock in your soul section.

First Time Around

BUCKACRE—Morning Comes, MCA-2218. Produced by England's redoubtable Glyn Johns, this LP's first single, "Love Never Lasts Forever" won a Billboard pick this month. The group is middle American and has a laudable knack for writing pretty and easygoing songs that have a solid rock core. An excellent discovery for radio programmers is Buckacre. The effective vocalizing seems to be shared equally through the group with fine contrast. Overall, a most impressive debut of fine fare for a mellow evening at home.

Best cuts: "Love Never Lasts Forever," "Don't Let It Slip Away," "Out Of Touch," "Morning Comes."

Dealers: This is one new group it would be worth chancing a front display on.

MARK GADDIS—Heart Travels, Merrimae S-1175. Gaddis is a good-voiced and imaginative writer-singer in the vein of a neo-folk artist like Gordon Lightfoot. His album was recorded in Minneapolis with clean acoustic sound and his songs could well be covered profitably by more established artists, or this album bought out by a larger label. Gaddis is a true talent, matured and ready for national exposure.

Best cuts: "Carousel Man," "Pony Rider."

Dealers: If this album jacket had an address on it, we would be happy to tell you where to order it from.

CHINGA CHAVIN'S COUNTRY PORN, Country Porn Records. Outrageous in the style of Kinky Friedman (a fraternity brother of Nick "Chinga" Chavin at the Univ. of Texas) or the Tom Lehrer of 15 years ago, Country Porn has been gigging regularly in the San Francisco area for some 18 months. Although there is no spine number on this self-released album, it was not cut cheaply. Chinga's sessions were at Nashville's Quadrasonic Studio with many of the top sidemen in town playing the dates and Michael Brovsky, producer of Jerry Jeff Walker, at the mix console. No question about it, this is one of the smuttiest funny albums or funniest smutty albums ever released. There is absolutely no possibility of airplay except by the most crazed free-form FM jock. This is a country band that plays the way Redd Foxx talked on his old Laff albums, and today foul-mouthedness hasn't kept Richard Pryor from selling millions of albums. Country Porn is four-letter but funny.

Best cuts: "Get It On The Run," and "4:00 A.M. Jump" are the only titles not X-rated.

Dealers: You can order from Box 548, NYC 10022.

AUTOMATIC MAN—Island ILPS 9397. The hotshot reggae label turns to funky, electronic space rock, at least on the second side of this album. Side one, despite the same frequent use of synthesizer, guitar and clavinet solos, emerges more as a modified pop-soul sound that stands the best chance of bringing radio attention to this set. Mostly driving, uptempo material, though there are also one or two mellower cuts.

Best cuts: "My Pearl," "Geni-Geni," "Interstellar Tracking Devices."

Dealers: Cover image like the infant head in "2001" is just right for this kind of LP.

C. B. VICTORIA—Dawning Day, Janus JXS-7029. This singer/composer/pianist is from Canada, not England, but at times he sure sounds like Elton John. Which is to say for Victoria this is a high-quality debut if not a terribly distinctive one. Set is split evenly between sweeping, symphonic ballads and midtempo numbers with a bit more bite. Highlight of the album is an uncompromisingly uptempo version of a relatively unknown Lennon & McCartney song from 1964, "Anytime At All."

Best cuts: that one plus "To Claudia On Thursday," "Natalie," "Come And See My Man."

Dealers: Stock in pop male vocalists.

MICHAEL HENDERSON—Solid, Buddah, BDS 5662. This first solo LP since leaving the Norman Connors fold as lead male vocalist, has Henderson giving creative imaginative lyrics an impressive vocal treatment. His style, although often rough, is pleasing to the ear. Henderson, writer, producer and arranger of the entire LP, has selected background vocals and instruments to complement his rock/jazz vocal arrangement. This album even offers discs something to select from while giving up equal portions of vocals and instrumental selections.

Best cuts: "Make Me Feel Better," "Solid," "You Haven't Made It To The Top," "Valentine Love."

Dealers: This album offers across the board appeal.

THE SANFORD/TOWNSEND BAND—Warner Bros. BS 2966. Duo of Ed Sanford and John Townsend offers an exceptionally tasty set of mostly mid-to-uptempo, sax-dominated, soultinged rock, which has been so successful in the last year or so for the Doobie Bros. Jerry Wexler co-produced and had a hand in the arrangements, while Kenny Loggins wrote a song and did backup vocals. Recorded in Muscle Shoals, LP also includes a couple of deliberate, slow-paced numbers for variety.

Best cuts: "Smoke From A Distant Fire," "Shake It To The Right," "In For The Night," "Rainbows Colored In Blue."

Dealers: This will probably start FM, but there are a number of cuts that could work as Top 40 singles.

Country

TANYA TUCKER—Here's Some Love, MCA 2213. Excellent offering from Tucker who continues to broaden her appeal beyond the boundaries of country. Titled after her present hot single, the LP displays Tucker at her best, giving a good ride to several strong songs. Jerry Crutchfield's production is on the mark and he has combined an unusual assemblage of musicians—from Johnny Christopher to Mylon LeFevre—to provide an impressive instrumental and vocal background. Material varies from Tony Joe White's "The Gospel Singer" to David Gates' "I Use The Soap." Well balanced in material and talent, the album should move the young Tucker another giant step forward in her career. "Short Cut" indicates an almost jazzy side of Tucker with her warbling and the flute work.

Best cuts: "Here's Some Love," "Comin' Home Alone," "Holding On," "The Gospel Singer," "I Use The Soap," "Take Me To Heaven."

Dealers: Tucker's closest approach to a crossover LP, this might generate some pop action as well as strong country sales.

REX ALLEN, GENE AUTRY, EDDIE DEAN, TEX RITTER, ROY ROGERS, JIMMY WAKELY—The Great American Singing Cowboys, Republic IRDA-LPN-R-6016. There appears to be a revival of interest in America's silver-screened cowboys, galloping up from the '40s and '50s with a song from the saddle. A recent twin-LP set from Autry has hit the chart, and this should follow close behind. A compilation album that's both history and fun as a half-dozen singing cowpokes return from the range, offering their biggest hits. Autry's "Back In The Saddle Again" perfectly launches this nostalgia-ridden set. Each artist provides a pair of selections. Eddie Dean includes his classic "Hillbilly Heaven." Roy Rogers scores with "Yellow Rose Of Texas" and Rex Allen's unique version of "Streets Of Laredo" are also highlights, along with Tex Ritter's memorable performance of "High Noon" and Jimmy Wakely with "Tumbling Tumbleweeds." The narration carries some pertinent information about the cowboy singers from a long gone, but not forgotten era. A powerful LP by the men who put the western in country and western music.

Best cuts: "Back In The Saddle Again," "High Noon," "Tumbling Tumbleweeds," "Hillbilly Heaven," "Yellow Rose Of Texas," "Streets Of Laredo."

Dealers: A strong national campaign, possibly involving a network tv tie-in, can be expected.

Billboard's Recommended LPs

pop

TRAPEZE—Warner Bros. BS 2887. For the most part a rock'n'roll assault reminiscent of Bad Company from this veteran British act that just hooked up again with bassist Glenn Hughes, who had departed in 1973 to join Deep Purple. Though the trio emphasizes tight, cooking, soul-tinged hard rock, there is also a midtempo cut or two and even a ballad in the Stevie Wonder vein. Highlight is a hard driving boogie version of a sunny standard. **Best cuts:** "Sunny Side Of The Street," "Chances."

DALTON & DUBARRI—Success And Failure, ABCD-964. Duo seems to be searching for its identity on this wide-ranging set, but it comes across convincingly on a philosophical mid-rock that has the appeal of Steve Stills' "Love The One You're With," a couple of infectious, uptempo rockers in the Loggins & Messina bag and a well-arranged ballad or two. Adding to the range are a couple of straight rock numbers and a soul-rock entry along the lines of "Fame." **Best cuts:** "Success And Failure" (the single), "Cold Outside Your Love" and "Joy Of Coming Home" (the fun uptempo cuts), "Rainbow," "Sweet Slow Grind."

DAVID BLUE—Cupid's Arrow, Asylum 7E-1077. Blue's latest try to expand his audience beyond the fans of the Dylan-Ochs Greenwich Village urban folk music axis is a versatile LP with some of the writer-singer's most commercial tunes ever, plus the usual solid assortment of old friends sitting in. Blue seems most at home now on material that is in the area of outlaw country progressivism. It suits his limited voice better than the more ambitious art-songs he is most known for. **Best cuts:** "Ballad Of Jennifer Lee," "I Feel Bad," "Cordelia."

PFM—The Award-Winning Marconi Bakery, Peters Intl. CCLPS 9014. This is the latest release in the collectors, this time featuring Italian rockers, PFM. All of this material was recorded this year and features the rock semi-classical sound that's become the group's forte. **Best cuts:** "Generale," "Impressioni Di Settembre," "E' Festa."

soul also recs

BLUE MAGIC—Mystic Dragon's, Atco SD 36-140 (Atlantic). This group always gives up a tasty mellow sound. This LP is no different, but there is a new element. The falsetto lead vocalist seems to offer a more mature sound. Spacy instrumental arrangement blends well with vocals. It seems impossible for this group to convey a raunchy sound although it makes a feeble attempt on this LP. The group is at its best while singing pretty ballads. **Best cuts:** "Freak-N-Stein," "See The Bedroom," "It's Something About Love," "Spark Of Love."

WALTER JACKSON—Feeling Good, ChiSound CH-LA 656, (United Artists). Jackson offers strong vocals capable of moving up and down the musical scale with ease. He sighs, moans and seems to feel deeply each word, particularly on "Too Shy To Say." Violins, violab and cellos offer a perfect cushion for Jackson's lyrical style. Included is the tune "Welcome Home," which he recorded nearly a decade ago. **Best cuts:** "Too Shy To Say," "Welcome Home," "Feelings."

PERSUADERS—It's All About Love, Calla CAS 1238 (ATV). A group that has been around for some time and had its share of hits in the past turns to a crisp, well-made all-around soul package this time around. There are bouncy vocal harmonies,

(Continued on page 64)

Spotlight—The most outstanding new product of the week's releases and that with the greatest potential for top of the chart placement; picks—predicted for the top half of the chart in the opinion of the reviewer; recommended—predicted to hit the second half of the chart in the opinion of the reviewer, or albums of superior quality. Albums receiving a three star rating are not listed. Review editor: Nat Freedland; reviewers: Eliot Tiegel, Gerry Wood, Jim Fishel, Jim Melanson, Is Horowitz, Ed Harrison, Jean Williams.