

SOUND SALVATION

By Kirby Ferguson

Martinis and Bikinis
Sam Phillips
(EMI)

On *Martinis and Bikinis* (4) Sam Phillips isn't shy about displaying her influences: Beatles' quotations abound, "Same Changes" lifts its riff straight off the Yardbirds' "Heart Full of Soul," her clever popcraft sometimes recalls Elvis Costello. Phillips's songs are often so immediately gratifying you'll swear you've heard them before, but it all sounds fresh and punchy (thanks to the walloping percussion) in her hands. Odd enough for the college set, tuneful enough for the radio, *Martinis and Bikinis* is my lock of the week.



Son of Altered Beast
Matthew Sweet
(BMG)

Evidently, the sole purpose of *Son of Altered Beast* (3) is to redirect attention to last year's *Altered Beast*, the commercially disappointing follow-up to his breakthrough album, *Girlfriend*. One of last year's best albums, *Altered Beast* seemed to be a tailor-made solid follow-up, equipped with hooks aplenty and a super lead single in "Time Capsule." Inexplicably, the album misfired, but it's certainly worth checking out. *Son of Altered Beast* consists mainly of live and remixed versions of *Altered Beast* tracks, plus live takes of "Superdeformed," which originally appeared on last year's dandy *No Alternative* compilation, and Neil Young's "Don't Cry No Tears" and an outtake, "Ultrasuede." It all works fine, hooky with plenty of guitar, but it's a pretty haphazard little album that probably exists more for marketing than musical purposes -- but if it helps Sweet move some more copies of *Altered Beast*, I say a job well done.

Motley Cru
Motley Cru
(Warner)

"Heavy metal lunkheads make good," the headlines read. Since slithering onto the scene in the early eighties (with songs like "Ten Seconds to Love," in which Vince Neil actually seemed to brag about how fast he can ejaculate), Motley Cru have consistently improved with each outing to the point where their music is now almost as tough as they think they are. The biggest change is, of course, the departure of lead singer Vince Neil, and I say good riddance to the crap-music-makin' bozo. New vocalist John Corabi is a more traditional, gravel-voiced hard rock belter who rams home the band's biggest, beefiest, hardest-rocking outing yet, the self-titled *Motley Cru* (4). I once would have referred to this band



picture botched

Longing in Their Hearts
Bonnie Raitt
(EMI)

Bonnie Raitt has been commercially and artistically reborn with her last two albums, *Nick of Time* and *Luck of the Draw*, but her reliance on formula is beginning to tire. *Longing in Their Hearts* (3.5) follows the same pattern she's established with *Don Was*: tasty r&b stuff, pure blues and country, lovely ballads. It's tried and true and Raitt seldom surprises. What elevates it all above the banal country rock competition is Raitt's talent: she's developed into a classic (and unaffected) blues singer. Was's hack production renders Raitt considerably less distinct, but she's become such a fine singer and her song selection is so sure that the most hackneyed accompaniment and material seem heartfelt when paired with Bonnie Raitt.

Crooked Rain Crooked Rain
Pavement
(Warner/Matador)

The studied sloppiness of Pavement's sound -- the sometimes hopelessly off-key singing, the instruments all just a bit out of sync -- gives them a certain pathetic beauty. *Crooked Rain Crooked Rain* (4) proves that rock'n'roll often works best when it doesn't sound quite right. As on *Slanted and Enchanted*, Pavement's vibrant experimentalism is packaged in irresistible pop songs; even the most banal rock moves take on new life-- and while the band may be sloppy, they know how to nail the hooks.



ratings:
5) classic
4) excellent
3) good
2) fair
1) poor

Ro Sham Bo
The Grays
(Epic)

The Grays is a group that has taken bits of rock, disco, alternative and country, mixed them all together and created a sound all of its own. The first song, "Very Best Years", is a sorry excuse for musicianship. It sounds a lot like something kids learn when they are in elementary school, with drums and a few guitars thrown in the background; however, after fast-forwarding past the first song, you hear some good work, and for a first album, the four-man group does have some good stuff.

I can't imagine The Grays being big in the music scene for a while, but given some time and development, they might hit the charts. (3) -G. Kimpinski

Vauxhall and I
Morrissey
Warner)

On *Vauxhall and I* (4), the follow-up to his comeback *Your Arsenal*, Morrissey and guitarists Alain Whyte and Boz Boorer come up with as solid a set of songs as *Arsenal*, while producer Steve Lillywhite (U2) gives the album a more suitably ethereal, shimmering sonic personality. More buoyant tracks like "The More You Ignore Me the Closer I Get" and "Billy Budd" balance out Morrissey's bouts of self-pity and misanthropy, and, as on *Arsenal*, he once again displays a remarkably sure hand on the affecting slower fare ("Used to be a Sweet Boy," "Hold on to Your Friends"). As usual, there's lapses into bland, dreamy-jangly pop, but on *Vauxhall and I*, Morrissey produces music as sadly eloquent as his mystique.