


**Ry Cooder: Jazz** (Warner Bros.)

This musicologist-musician's latest tour is through what he refers to as the "fringes" of jazz, created during the period of 1890-1930, or thereabouts. Typically, the mixture of rags, coon songs, and gospel material is as entertaining as it is educational, and an album of the stuff is likely to nudge you in so many new musical directions that your whole listening life will change — and for the better. Titles include "Big Bad Bill Is Just Sweet William Now," "In a Mist," "Shine," "Happy Meeting in Glory," and "Nobody." And, friends, Cooder's singing is improving radically!

D.P.

**Larry Coryell and Philip Catherine:**  
**Twin-House** (Elektra).

These are acoustic guitar duos (with a little bit of overdubbing snuck in) by two very good contemporary guitarists — neither of whom has been heard anywhere often enough in so pure a context. Coryell has, in

fact, been playing mostly rubbish for some years. Here he sounds fine and strong; he has forgotten none of his eloquent speed. Catherine is ultimately the more interesting of the two players, both for his calmly stated single-note lines and his almost spidery delicacy. Next, how about Catherine with Herb Ellis, or Coryell with Barney Kessel?

C.A.

**Daryl Hall and John Oates:**  
**Livetime** (RCA)

I understand that these guys are supposed to be intense and soulful, but nevertheless I can't help chuckling at their exaggerations of black Philadelphia clichés. They aren't the first white act to rub burnt cork on their musical faces, and they're far from the worst. But still . . . they're one of the funniest. This one-disc album was recorded live, somewhere, and features particularly strong readings of "Do What You Want, Be What You Are" and "Abandoned Luncheonette," the latter held back somewhat by the fact that Hall (or is it Oates?) sounds as though he's singing with a clothespin on his nose. "Sara Smile" goes on forever (eight minutes, actually). The band is a bunch of guys who used to work for Elton John. And whatever happened to Hall's solo album with Robert Fripp?

L.M.

**Etta James: Deep in the Night** (Warners).

Damn, but this woman sings good. Not flashy. Not pyrotechnically incommensurable. Just good. She never goes for the hard stuff, but then she never goes for the easy stuff, either. She's just right there. Jerry Wexler produced the album, and, yes, it's overdone in places, and yes, it's shamelessly commercial. But there are true gems here: "Only Women Bleed," done as a torchy blues; "Take It to the Limit," brimming

over with soul; Kiki Dee's "Sugar on the Floor"; "Blind Girl," which Etta James wrote (and which Rod Stewart sings as "I'd Rather Go Blind"); and, best of all, a raw, hot gospel tune called "Strange Man." Zowie! This album will make Etta James, again, a star — and if it doesn't, this writer, for one, is going to join the Longines Symphonette Society.

C.A.

**Rick James and the Stone City Band:**  
**Come Get It!** (Gordy)

According to his official record company biography, James was in bands with Neil Young and Bruce Palmer before those two formed the Buffalo Springfield in 1966 — and James is now only 25 years old! Stevie Wonder had better look out! But seriously, folks, James is a singer-guitarist whose apparent influences include George Clinton, Sly Stone and Larry Graham, and Johnny "Guitar" Watson. The resulting debut album is hip, funky, danceable, and not just a little fun to listen to.

R.C.R.

**Etta Jones: My Mother's Eyes** (Muse)

Not to be confused with soul singer Etta James, Etta Jones is a jazz vocalist in the Billie Holiday mold. This collection of standards from the Twenties through Forties — with one ringer — is lovingly sung and played by an ensemble including saxophonist Houston Person, drummer Irdis Muhammad, and vibraphonist George Devens. That all don't play at the same time is one of the album's strong points: the musicians are grouped for tastefulness, not bombast. Jones' versions of two songs strongly associated with Holiday — "Don't Misunderstand" and "Gloomy Sunday" — more than hold their own. The self-consciously funky reading of "This Girl's in

Love with You" is both the album's weakest link and briefest track. Maybe they knew.

R.C.R.

**Randy Meisner: Randy Meisner** (Elektra)

Like fellow high-voiced Poco alumnus Richie Furay, Randy Meisner has chosen to include a 1960 Drifters' hit, composed by Doc Pomus and Mort Shuman, on his current album for Elektra/Asylum: "Save the Last Dance for Me." Other tunes include Gene Pitney's "It Hurts to Be in Love" (1964), a reggae reading of Jimmy Soul's 1963 "If You Wanna Be Happy," and a somewhat thin carbon of Meisner's own oldie, "Take It to the Limit," dating all the way back to his stint with the Eagles. Time does fly. In any event, Meisner's fans will find little here to surprise or disappoint them, and detractors of what is reputed to be the characteristic Los Angeles country-rock sound will find plenty of that here, too. Look at it this way: now there can be twice as many Eagles albums released every year.

L.M.

**Melanie:**
**Photogenic — Not Just Another Pretty Face** (Midsong International)

Too long absent from the recording scene, Melanie disappears for a couple of years at a time, resurfacing on another label; this is her fifth, at least. The program is a typical mix of standards and the singer's originals, performed with customary taste, insight and wit. Songs you'll know right off include "Knock on Wood," "We Can Work It Out," "Let It Be Me," and a sex change performed on Jesse Winchester's "Yankee Lady." Her own songs are not to be ignored, with the funky "Spunky" a particular standout.

T.E.

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