

# LPs

## Shakedown Street By The Grateful Dead c 1978 Arista Records AB 4198

The 70s are almost gone but there are still those who yearn for the decade before, when acid rock, electric kool-aid and freed Kundalinis flowed and mixed with the philosophies of Stewart Brand, Ken Kesey and Tom Wolfe.

But that was yesterday. Times have changed and San Francisco bands that haven't made the transition from then to now have withered. The Sons, the Airplane and Quicksilver won't see the 80s. Others, like Santana and the Grateful Dead, have changed as the West Coast's musical focus has moved on from San Francisco, south to Los Angeles.

For the Dead, moving from the commune to the freeway has meant replacing the band's rambling wait-till-it-comes-together pieces with a more polished repertoire. The last two releases have had outside producers and the group's studio music is more manicured, almost slick.

The title track of the Dead's new album, *Shakedown Street*, is a disco tune that prompts images of coordinated outfits and high-stepping hipsters. But those images are presented with class. Jerry Garcia's tasteful, light licks almost mimic his voice, darting in to fill the space between the lines, while Bob Weir's rhythm guitar

work bounces along, causing an involuntary shuffle and gyrations of the spine.

"Shakedown Street" is the choicest cut on the record and shows that the band has continued the tightening up it started on *Terrapin Station*. The fragmented sounds that started on that album also continue.

Like the last releases of the Airplane, Dead tunes are beginning to focus on an individual and his or her sound. Weir's "I Need a Miracle," is noticeably different from Garcia's "Shakedown Street" which is unlike Donna Jean Godchaux's "From the Heart of Me." The band blends the divergent sounds best on Hart's "France" and "Fire on the Mountain," but even those display a strong influence from Hart's offshoot group, the Diga Rhythm Band.

Like he showed in his recent Portland appearance, Garcia is responsible for much of the band's ethereal music. Complemented by Robert Hunter's lyrics, Garcia's tunes are aimed at the mind. Weir's are aimed about three feet lower.

Combined with Barlow's simplistic, often sexist lyrics, Weir's mundane rockers do little more than encourage the listener to shake his or her booty. Weir's disappointing influence climaxes on "All New Minglewood Blues" where we learn once again that "a couple drinks of whiskey and the

women around here sure look good."

It's been said before.

Donna Jean's contribution creates little excitement either. "From the Heart of Me" is easily recognized as a Dead song but, like "Sunrise" from *Terrapin Station*, creates a picture of beautiful but dispassionate women floating in knee-deep fog.

*Shakedown Street* was produced by Little Feat guitarist Lowell George, who like Kieth Olsen, producer of *Terrapin Station*, refines the band's sound. It's a refinement that tempers the spontaneity of the group's early releases with the polish that is 1978. The refinement also represents the kinds of changes that have kept the band alive.

## Totally Hot By Olivia Newton-John c 1978 MCA Records MCA 3067

It should come as no surprise that Olivia Newton-John's new album is called *Totally Hot*. Three platinum singles from the *Grease* soundtrack album have kept her on top of international charts for months.

Since she arrived in the United States in 1973, Newton-John's appeal as songstress/seductress has remained constant. The picture of Newton-John on the *Totally*

*Hot* cover is sure to attract in-store buyers even though the packaging seems to be pitched to the adolescent mentality.

Physical gifts and cultivated beauty aside, Newton-John can sing. She rocks like Ronstadt although Newton-John's voice isn't as full bodied or powerful as her southern California neighbor. Throughout the album, Newton-John shrieks, shouts and melodically sings with the naive spirit of an overly enthusiastic high school cheerleader. Or maybe she's a sorority girl at a post-football-game-party. The academic imagery isn't too far off. Newton-John's grandfather was German physicist, Nobel winner, Max Born, and her father was headmaster of an Australian college.

Producer/guitarist John Farrar's touches are everywhere on the album. He avoided making Newton-John too sugary by not adding orchestral arrangements or smoothening the rough edges of her voice. Farrar's composition (Farrar wrote three of the album's ten songs), "Totally Hot," is a cute jingle that any grade schooler could remember, and is bound to have as much appeal as "You're The One That I Want."

The album has its share of artificially sung tear jerkers that entertain but are not memorable. Her songs are straight forward love songs. There's no metaphorical imagery in the lyrics and no insinuated violence anywhere.

Farrar kept the sound down to rock basics — guitars, piano, percussion — and it remains for Newton-John to carry the album on the strength of her voice alone. She does, and Newton-John continually shows a boisterous attempt to produce entertaining and danceable pop music. None of the songs have any social comment. Most are naively worded and deal with capturing everyday instances between people.

Good vocals withstanding, there isn't much else to the album. There are no breakthroughs in style for Newton-John and her songs offer a minimum insight to the performer as do the songs of other talented women singers who rarely use their own material, like Yvonne Elliman, Linda Ronstadt and Barbi Benton. Newton-John's vocals are shown off to their best advantage on the two Newton-John penned compositions, "Borrowed Time" and "Talk To Me." An album of her own compositions might give Newton-John fans something a little more tangible to hang onto than the passable but ordinary material on "Totally Hot." **By Dave Steinman.**

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