

ON DISC

VAN MORRISON
Beautiful Vision

(Warner Bros.) Here's a scenario: William Blake and W.B. Yeats are swooped up in a cosmic time ray and transported to the Sixties where they're exposed to a relentless barrage of soul and R&B records, after which the poetic pair's respective consciences are fused together and transplanted into the pudgy body of a wacked-out Irishman who used to front a rock group called Them.

Maybe it didn't happen quite like that, but after listening to Van Morrison's latest solo album (his 14th), one begins to wonder. *Beautiful Vision* is a glorious, screwball affair featuring Van the Man in the throes of spiritual ecstasy, reveling in his Celtic roots, celebrating his heartfelt hodgepodge of religious beliefs and summoning up his uncanniest of musical chops.

Song titles like "Aryan Mist," "She Gives Me Religion," "Dweller on the Threshold" and "Across the Bridge Where Angels Dwell" tell part of the story, with Morrison knee-deep in mystical hyperbole, quoting from tomes as diverse as the Bible, the Bhagavad-Gita, Alice Bailey's *Glamour—A World Problem* and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. But then, on the stunning, funny "Cleaning Windows," Van forgets all the portentous deity-dropping to deliver a simple first-person narrative from a "workin' man in my prime" who washes windows on week days and then goes "blowin' saxophone on the weekend in some downtown joint."

Either way—adrift in metaphysical hooey or wiping clean his squeegee—Morrison gets away with it. Flanked by a trio of cooing female backup singers, Van grunts, groans, growls and warbles like a man possessed, while his band churns out rhythms and riffs that combine the earthiness of *Tupelo Honey* and the august, ethereal strains of *Astral Weeks* with a funky verve (check out Pee Wee Ellis' sax on "Cleaning Windows") heretofore unmatched in Morrison's career.

Steven X. Rea

LOU REED
The Blue Mask

(RCA) Our story thus far: Lou Reed, famed for penning such exercises in rock decadence as "Heroin" and "Walk on the Wild Side," cleans up his act and opts for the decent life. He marries (a woman, even) settles down and stops writing songs about junkies and senseless violence, ultimately releasing an album of (almost) conventional love songs, *Growing up in Public*, some two years ago.

Now there's an update: Reed's mellowing has (thankfully) not been total. While fans could congratulate him on his new-found personal contentment, there was evidence that his creative powers were not at their height. *Growing up in Public*, for all its good intentions, suffered from self-conscious lyrics and amorphous music. Reed's best work had addressed themes of ugliness and despair with a heroic directness—hearts-and-flowers sentiments didn't seem to suit him.

The Blue Mask is a distinct step in the right direction. If not up to the standards of his startlingly innovative

work with the Velvet Underground (his brilliant band in the Sixties), it nevertheless shows that he retains the grit and honesty that were his trademarks. His latest LP doesn't find him denying the changes in his lifestyle, but it does show him capable of more than mundane love songs.

The album's real strength, however, is its fierce musical approach. Supported by a new band, Reed plays guitar with a slashing edge that's sadly been missing from his records for some time. The atonal screechings he reveled in back in his Velvet Underground days are heard once more in "Waves of Fear" and "The Blue Mask." Complementing his renewed playing abilities, Reed's singing has regained much of its old dramatic nuance.

Barry Alfonso

D WIGHT TWILLEY
Scuba Divers

(EMI) "And now I'm back again, with a hole in my shoe/I'm back again, now everything's new..."

Dwight Twilley is unarguably back. Seven years after his "I'm on Fire"

torched the Top 20, three years since his last album, the boyish Southwestern popster returns. Twilley has a new label and a new album, but it sounds suspiciously like someone else's music.

It took me halfway through the first side of *Scuba Divers* to realize I wasn't listening to the new Tom Petty album. Even taking into account regional similarities and both musicians' fondness for buzzy Byrds-ian arrangements, "I'm Back Again" and "Somebody to Love" (DT's current single) uncannily resemble the mealy-mouthed Floridian at his worst. These are tepid pieces, exercises in recycling that add little and annoy plenty. They're not isolated instances either; the flipside offers "Dion Baby," weak-kneed pop of the most dismissible stripe, and "Cryin' over Me," an unsubtle attempt to toughen up that cops its lick from—of all the tired warhorses—Led Zep's "Whole Lotta Love."

Twilley's return isn't all bad; the title track, while nonsensical lyrically, packs some charge, and "Touchin' the Wind," which breaks the Petty lock of Side One, achieves the kind of yearning romanticism that so rightly earned Twilley praise in the wake of his first

(with Phil Seymour) lp, *Sincerely*. "I Think It's That Girl" is standard Beatle-esque stuff, good for a spin or two.

The lack of inspiration on *Scuba Divers* may have any number of causes. Apparently, the tracks were recorded over a period of time, at different locations, for several prospective labels. Or maybe the well's simply gone dry. Or the genre that Twilley works—melodic, Sixties-inflected pop-rock—may have yielded all its going to yield in terms of riffs and rhyme. Whatever the causes, Twilley's return delivers much less than fans who fell for "Fire," "TV" or "Twilley Don't Mind" had a right to expect.

Gene Sculatti

OKEH REISSUES

(EPIC) Culled from a half-century of pivotal American music, brilliantly and copiously annotated, handsomely packaged—Epic Records' five-album ten-LP reissue of the best from the gold mine vaults of the venerated

Okeh label may be the most significant reissue series of recent years.

Okeh Records (1918-1969) was known primarily as a purveyor of "race music," that euphemistic appellation that encompassed jazz, R&B, soul and the blues during each of those genre's halcyon eras. This beautifully conceived and presented series further documents the label's forays into Western Swing. With two-album packages highlighting the company's contributions to each of these musical forms, the listener is treated to the early recorded work of such pivotal names as Muddy Waters, Major Lance, Bob Wills, Little Richard and Ahmad Jamal cheek-by-jowl with such forgotten greats as Johnny Shines, Billy Butler and the Enchanters, the Light Crust Doughboys and the ineffable Sandmen. Screamin' Jay Hawkins shares the grooves with Doc Bagby on *Okeh Rhythm & Blues*; Sons of the Pioneers segue to Emmett Miller & His Georgia Crackers on *Okeh Western Swing*; Victoria Spivey compliments The Yas Yas Girl on *Okeh Chicago Blues* and on and on. It's a marvelous cornucopia, a musical motherlode that delights, astounds and preserves.

Davin Seay

IN PRINT

Pinball

JERZY KOSINSKI
Bantam Paperback, \$7.95

Goddard's not your typical rock superstar. No Hollywood Bowl concerts, no corporate-sponsored national tours, no full-color magazine cover shots of his dates or his arrests—in fact, no photos at all. Goddard wants the impossible: to sell three million records a year while maintaining a private life and identity despite (or because of) his fans.

To that end, he's managed an anonymity so complete that not even the executives at Nokturn Records have seen his face, or learned the address of his secret recording studio home. How Goddard becomes the prey of a fan desperate to know him is part of the story Jerzy Kosinski tells in *Pinball*. The rest of the story is not so straightforward. It involves Patrick Domostroy, a faded composer who's seduced into assisting the desperate and evil Andrea Gwynplaine; Donna Downes, a sensuous black Chopinist whose ambition at the piano needs Domostroy's experienced touch to succeed; and Jimmy Osten, the Clark Kent flip side of Goddard.

Kosinski's preoccupation with a celebrity's right to privacy is understandable. He was, after all, only hours away from meeting Sharon Tate for dinner at her home when an airline luggage mix-up prevented him from taking his flight to Los Angeles and a ringside seat at the Manson murders. It's his Harold Robbins-style perspective on male-female relationships, and women in general, that's hard to figure. Pianist Donna Downes speaks for all of *Pinball's* lascivious ladies when she tells of the night when "Marcello and I returned to the bar. I was still excited. My whole body oozed sex, and I spun from one orgasm to the next. Like heartbeats, they kept on

coming—for as long as I wanted..."

It could be that the cardboard women like Donna effectively serve to point out the existential despair that only Kosinski's men are capable of feeling. Or, it could be that the pop novel formula of sin-seduction-and-servitude doesn't easily adapt to the serious and worthy questions Kosinski seems to have in mind about privacy and society's expectations of its artists.

Or, it could be that Kosinski hasn't noticed that the mechanics of pinball have been replaced by electronic video games, and that the mechanical sex of the pop novel has been replaced by living, breathing sensuality in the best fiction of the Eighties.

R. Sue Smith

Majipoor Chronicles

ROBERT SILVERBERG
Priam Books, \$5.95

Majipoor Chronicles is not really a novel—it is a collection of short stories set on the planet Majipoor, the world of Silverberg's *Lord Valentine's Castle*. The stories are linked with an ingenious narrative device—Hissune, Lord Valentine's successor-designate, is allowed to delve into the Hall of Records, where telepathically encoded memories of the citizens are stored.

We see Hissune, at first merely a mischievous boy, grow and mature as he lives these people's lives. Some of them are giants of intellect and courage, some are petty, lost in their prejudices and hatreds. All are fascinating, and all help Hissune to understand the world he will one day rule.

Indeed, the only time one can truly smell blood flowing through the tales is during the numerous and varied sexual encounters. In fact, sexuality is the most dominant form of physical action. This is by no means an insurmountable problem: Silverberg's talent is so strong that his concern for these

people and their lives pierces the veil of intellectual satyrism.

Majipoor is a fascinating creation, a tree which will undoubtedly bear additional fruit, but it is to be hoped that further adventures will be experiences of fuller spectrum—it is something of a cheat to give us such a tantalizing world, and then limit our perception of it.

Steven Barnes

Sound Effects

SIMON FRITH
Pantheon, \$8.95

Simon Frith leads an intriguing double life: on the one hand he is a professor of sociology at the University of Warwick, England—a most respectable position—and on the other, a smirk—*rock critic*. The happy convergence of these two seemingly contradictory employments is a writing style which, transmitted to us via columns in *Creem* and (presently) *New York Rocker* and now through this book, is consistently informed and thought-provoking.

In *Sound Effects* Frith sees rock'n'roll (which he uses to describe chiefly the Fifties form) and rock as a cultural phenomenon grounded in the youth and leisure activities of the past (particularly the 1920s) but with a value and meaning all its own. The book is structured around a production/consumption theory of rock culture—the chapters are titled "Making Music," "Making Money," "Making Meaning" and so on—but the emphasis is important: Frith's analyses of the means of production and of marketing are vital but not unprecedented; his real concern is how music is consumed, an area he feels has been unjustly neglected. He explores with great insight and care the uses of rock: as background music for teenage activity, as the rallying point for youth

community," as a means of making sense out of one's existence.

Sound Effects is clearly intended as a text and is, as Frith himself introduces it, "a solid and generally sober work." Thus, the going may be slow at times—a comparison between the Frankfurt School and Marxist theories of mass culture doesn't exactly make for fun reading—but Frith has a way of making sense out of even intellectually abstract concepts.

Mikel Toombs

Are the Kids All Right?

JOHN G. FULLER
Times Books, \$13.50

Rock and roll will never die, but you just might. That seems to be the message John G. Fuller is attempting to convey in this gripping recreation of the infamous Who concert at Cincinnati's Riverfront Coliseum on December 3, 1979. Fuller's unique—and certain to be controversial—theory endeavors to explain the forces that contributed to the deaths of the eleven fans who were asphyxiated as they stood among the huge crowd waiting to enter the Coliseum.

Using the Who concert as a focal point, Fuller traces the history of hard rock violence from the mid-Sixties clashes between England's Mods and Rockers to recent disturbances at Van Halen concerts and argues that such disturbances result from a hidden death wish on the part of the rock generation. Fortunately, Fuller keeps his theorizing from becoming too dry by combining it with fascinating biographical information on Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, the Doors, the Rolling Stones, the Who and other such rock superstars. The central story of the events leading us to the disaster at the Who concert is suspensefully told, and makes the book difficult to put down.

Richard Graham