

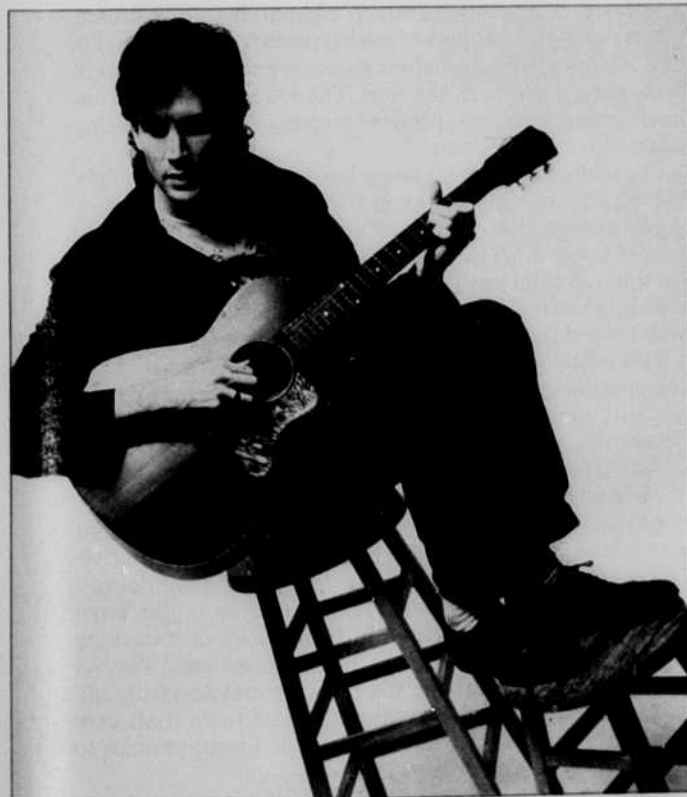
THE HOUSEMARTINS

Subversive: *The Housemartins*

song, she pulls it off. Ironically, the album's strongest track, "My Baby," harkens back to her more jaded, hard-bitten style, even if it is a love song.

Hey World! (EMI America). Ziggy Marley & the Melody Makers. From the ringing steel drums of "Give a Little Love" to the rock-bottom bass of "666," this album demonstrates the hypnotic rhythmic power of reggae. In their second album, these four children of Bob and Rita Marley—Ziggy, Sharon, Cedella and Stephen—have become self-assured and compelling performers. And the songs on "Hey World!," all written or cowritten by Ziggy, show the musical variety possible in this limited style. At times the Melody Makers rock steady in a more traditional way, as on "Freedom Road," but they also stretch the reggae form to the bursting point, with the very pop-ish "Fight to Survive." Just as Bob Marley mixed political songs with expressions of Jamaican mysticism, Ziggy Marley sings of racial injustice in "Police Brutality" and deliverance in "Lord We a Come." In the joyous way that "Hey World!" blends the old and the new, it makes reggae seem fresh again.

RON GIVENS



WARING ABBOTT

Incurably romantic to the point of mushiness: *Peter Himmelman*

NOVEMBER 1986

Classic Reissues

Often imitated, never duplicated." That was the motto of Chess Records, one of the most important labels in the history of blues, rhythm-and-blues and rock and roll. Throughout the 1950s this Chicago-based label recorded the titans of black popular music—Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf—artists who profoundly affected the shape of contemporary popular music. And now, thanks to an ambitious reissue effort (just begun with 12 classic recordings) by MCA Records, which bought the Chess catalog last year, today's listeners will find out just how accurate the Chess motto really was.

Chess was the most important label for Southern rural bluesmen who migrated to the upper Midwest after World War II and electrified their style of music. Eight of the initial 12 Chess reissues are by blues artists. "The Blues, Volume One" provides a nice overview, with cuts by a cross-section of the Chess roster.

But among the other seven blues LP's are some immortal recordings. "Moaning in the Moonlight" is the first Howlin' Wolf album; in essence, an early "best of" collection. Wolf was an elemental musical force: raw, crude, incredibly powerful. His harsh voice cuts like an acetylene torch, and his harp playing is almost brutal. The songs on "Moaning" are equal to Wolf's mighty talents.

Down and dirty: The two Muddy Waters records in this batch—"At Newport" and "Sings Big Bill Broonzy"—seem almost casual in comparison. In fact, Waters's best work for Chess is down and dirty. But "Newport" and "Broonzy" have double value, as powerful musical statements and demonstrations of the rural-urban stylistic tensions in Waters's music. Another strong recording is "John Lee Hooker Plays and Sings the Blues," with its simple framework—downhearted vocals and throbbing guitar. Simultaneously crude and polished, rural and urban, Hooker defines the blues on "I Don't Want Your Money" when he sings, "You got me down, down, down / You treat little Johnny any kind of way."

Dominating the R&B portion of the first Chess reissues are Bo Diddley's first two albums, "Bo Diddley" and "Go Bo Diddley." Here is the trademark Diddley sound—the sinuous chunk-chunk-chunk-uh-chunk rhythm, the nasty reverberating guitar, the use of maracas for percussive accents. In spite of his overt bluesiness, you can hear the beginnings of rock in songs like "Who Do You Love" and "Say Man." Also impressive is Little Milton's "We're Gonna Make It" album, with its big sound, carefully arranged and highly polished—guitar, rhythm section, horns, background singer.

And there's a lot more where this came from—over 25,000 titles in blues, R&B, jazz and gospel including, early next year, the first two Chuck Berry albums. The Chess project has been done uncommonly well, and MCA executive Bob Schnieders, who put it together, deserves a medal—or at least a bonus. All of the reissues feature original album artwork and original liner notes, plus updated liner notes and information on session musicians. At a list price of \$4.98, which translates into retail prices as low as \$3, the Chess records aren't just quality repackaging of quality music, they're amazing bargains as well.

R. G.



FRANK DRIGGS COLLECTION

Blues titan: *Waters (1960s)*