



(*****) BAT OUT OF HELL - MEAT LOAF (EPIC)

Have you ever heard an album that simply overcomes your resistance and by sheer brilliance and power blots out everything else around you? Meat Loaf's debut album is such a one.

The man responsible for this brilliance is Jim Steinman, who fronts Meat Loaf as lead singer, piano player and composer of all the tunes found here. Each facet of the man's talents is developed to knife-edge precision. The lyrical content is similar to Bruce Springsteen on the title cut, "Bat Out Of Hell" which resembles a nine-minute version of "Born To Run". Steinman isn't confined to Springsteen for lyrical and musical inspiration, though, as the rest of the album's music varies from Chuck Berry rock 'n rollers to orchestrated ballads of pain and confusion.

Steinman's voice is remarkably similar to Cat

Stevens, particularly on the three slow songs. An added surprise is the vocal ability of Ellen Foley as exposed on "Paradise By The Dashboard Light". The female member of Meat Loaf adds that extra touch of class that sets the whole album apart. Meat Loaf, as a group, do not play any instruments. Todd Rundgren, who produced the album, also provided standout guitar work backed up by Utopia.

All seven cuts on this album have become some of my favorite music of all time. With strong AM play of their first single "You Took The Words Right Out Of My Mouth", Meat Loaf deserve to be bigger than last year's lucky rookies, Boston.

(*****) JT - JAMES TAYLOR (COLUMBIA)

It appears that 1971 is returning in 1977. In 1971 Carole King, James Taylor and Don MacLean all combined to make the singer-songwriter a viable alternative to the heavy-metal of the late sixties and early seventies. The artists mentioned above peaked in 1972 and have since maintained a low profile.

JAMES TAYLOR COMES BACK

Both Taylor and King have returned in 1977 with hit singles and new albums, sounding as good as they ever have. JT is a fine, well-produced album, containing great Taylor originals ("Terra Nova" co-written with wife Carly Simon is especially fine), a couple of decent cover versions, and sparkling musicianship. Easy listening fans should be satisfied.

(**) RAM JAM (EPIC)

They never wrote their hit single, "Black Betty", but they take credit for writing the rest of the garbage found on Ram Jam. The longer version of "Black Betty" is the only thing this record has going for it. Avoid it.

(*****) PHIL SPECTOR'S GREATEST HITS (SPECTOR-WARNER)

Phil Spector is acknowledged as the best producer to ever cut a record. A producer having a greatest hits album may sound strange but it's not in the case of Spector. He used the artists he worked with as simply musical instruments to be manipulated. The artists never complained as he produced most of them into at least one top ten song a piece. Phil Spector's "wall of sound" made number one hits out of the Ronette's "Be My Baby" and "Baby I Love You", the Crystal's "Da Doo Ron Ron", "Then He Kissed Me", and "He's A Rebel"; the Righteous Brothers' "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'"; the Teddy Bears' "To Know Him Is To Love Him", Benny King's "Spanish Harlem", and Ike and Tina Turner's "River Deep - Mountain High". These songs are only Spector's most famous production hits from 1960 to 1967. Spector is also noted for his work with the Beatles while they were together and also individually. Although the Beatle tunes are not included, the two record set contains 24 classics in all. It's one of the most important historical records to surface in a long time.

(*****) NIGHT AFTER NIGHT - NILS LOFGREN (A & M)

Nils Lofgren is probably the most noted imitator of Keith Richard. The

fact that he has never had a partner such as Mick Jagger to co-write and sing his songs is why Lofgren remains with only a devoted cult following and not widespread popularity. He's produced some brilliant work on his studio albums, most notably his Cry Tough album. Unfortunately, Night After Night, a two record live set, fails to provide one basic ingredient. There is just no excitement generated here at all. In fact, in places it sounds almost like a studio album. Lofgren fans only need apply for this one.

(***) PURE MANIA - VIBRATORS (COLUMBIA)
(***) THE CLASH (COLUMBIA)

Punk rock is the latest fad that has risen far enough out of the underground to be marketable. Reaction to punk rock is usually fairly cut and dried. Either you love it or you hate it. I find myself sitting in the middle because on first listen to each of these records I disliked them. By about the third time through I really liked most of the songs on both albums. But by the fifth listen, boredom had set in. The only exception from both albums is the Clash's "Police And Thieves", which is a reggae anthem given the punk treatment. That's not a very good percentage when you consider there are, in total, 29 songs on these two albums.

(***) CAT SCRATCH FEVER - TED NUGENT (EPIC)

Now that Ted Nugent has finally come up with a popular sound, he's sticking to it. Cat Scratch Fever varies very little from its two predecessors, Ted Nugent and Free For All. If you want the same bone-crunching guitar-centred heavy metal sounds from Nugent, this album will keep you contented. If you're growing somewhat tired of Nugent's continuous grate as I am, then bypass the Madman from Detroit this time out.

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