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Heart

It has been three years since Heart's last album, and that seems to have given Ann and Nancy Wilson and their men-in-waiting time to mellow out from the churlish, mean-spirited tone of Bad Animals.

Heart's music can still be as aggressive as a bonk on the noggin. The Wilsons can match Joan Jett snarl for snarl any day, and in case hearing the songs isn't convincing enough, there are those titles: "Call of the Wild." "Wild Child." "Cruel Nights."

This album, though, is much more varied in feeling, right down to soft, romantic lead vocals by Ann W. On Bad Animals, things never got more affectionate than a series of tunes that could have been grouped under the heading "I Rip Out Your Liver. Tear It into Little Pieces and Feed It to the Hyenas." Brigade, however, includes not only the affecting confessional "I Didn't Want to Need You" but also the positively gushy (and very pretty) "I Love You."

The Wilsons wrote most of the songs themselves, with an assist from drummer Denny Carmassi and Van Halenite Sammy Hagar. The four collaborated on "The Night"—"Take my flesh/I'll give you my soul"—which they claim was inspired by Anne Rice's vampire novels.

If songs like "The Night" give the album a Drs. Jekyll and Mses. Hyde feel, don't worry. Heart sounds versatile and adventuresome here, not erratic. Anyway, there are worse things in rock and roll than erratic behavior. Lists on request. (Capitol)

Alan Jackson

Here is a debut recording from an amiable-voiced country singer—songwriter that offers finger-popping tunes, sing-along lyrics, solid back-up help and a down-home feel that is both modest and big-hearted.

Leading off is the rambunctious "Ace of Hearts," the only song on this 10-track offering that Jackson did not have a writing hand in, followed by the wounded-but-wiser-now title number that better sets the tone for the rest of this admirable effort.

Jackson's style might best be described as retro-country. It doesn't pretend to offer anything fussier or fancier than tunefulness, tried and true balladry and an occasional hound-dog howl to spice up an ending or refrain.

While Jackson has neither the black-velvet vocalizing of Randy Travis nor the flashy Cadillac styling of Dwight Yoakam, he sings and plays (guitar) with a trueness to his material that gives the album an easy and enjoyable intimacy.

On "Chasin' That Neon Rainbow," Jackson shows off his keen ear for spunky, succinct lyrics with such lines as "Daddy won a radio/Turned it to a country show/I was rockin' in the cradle/To the cryin' of a steel guitar." Other stand-outs include the gently rocking "Short Sweet Ride" and the Hank Williams homage "She Don't Get

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the Blues," with its clever country-boy hook, "She don't get the blues, she gives 'em."

Taking his cue from the current return to roots movement in country music, Jackson has come up plain and simple with a winner. (Arista)

Abdullah Ibrahim and Ekaya

In the wake of Nelson Mandela's release from prison, this superb album by South Africa's premier jazz musician evokes a mood of painful longing mixed with hopeful expectation.

Now a devout Muslim living in exile in New York City, Ibrahim, 56, was christened Adolphe Brand and weaned on gospel music in the cosmopolitan port of Capetown. Nicknamed "Dollar" as a teen because he was forever scrounging U.S. currency to buy jazz albums from U.S. sailors, he eventually gained a devoted local following as a rollicking boogie-style pianist. But worsening political conditions prompted him to leave South Africa in 1962, the same year Mandela began his long prison ordeal.

Like his mentor, Duke Ellington, Ibrahim plays the piano, but his principal instrument is his orchestra. His septet, Ekaya, which takes its name from the Zulu word for home, sounds a clarion call for freedom on African River with the grace and power of a big band. As a composer, Ibrahim favors chantlike rhythms and gospel-inflected harmonies and mixes traditional African motifs with bits of township jive and modern jazz. "Toi-Toi," inspired by the dancing in the streets at political demonstrations in South Africa, is full of infectious energy. By contrast, the ballad "Joan—Capetown Flower" pays tribute in moody pastels to Ibrahim's sister-in-law and other long-suffering black women in his homeland.

During the early '70s, Ibrahim regularly visited South Africa. But he was forced into permanent exile in 1976 after he organized a jazz festival that flouted the rules of apartheid. Before he left South Africa for good, he completed a remarkable body of work, recently rereleased by Kaz Records. Voice of Africa, African Sun, Tintinyana and Blues for a Hip King include warmly melodic, sensual sessions featuring the outstanding South African saxophonists Kippie Moeketsi and Basil Coetzee.

Most of all, Ibrahim offers proof of the power of the human spirit. His hymnlike laments have a hypnotic quality that will leave you feeling emotionally cleansed. And his anthems to the possibilities of an apartheid-free South Africa will make you want to shout for joy. (Enya)

Sam Kinison

We should never have encouraged this guy. Kinison got so much attention for his novelty remake of the Troggs's "Wild Thing" that now he thinks he's a comic and a musician.

The first half of this album presents Kinison as stand-up in a Las Vegas comedy club, spouting off about detox centers, homosexuals, amyl nitrate, Dr. Ruth and breast reduction. Let's just say his deeper-shade-of-blue humor doesn't live up to the ham-headed irony of his billing—"Mr. Family Entertainment."

The album's second half isn't obscene, but it's almost as distasteful, with four rancid servings of road-kill rock, covers of AC/DC's "Highway to Hell," Cheap Trick's "Gonna Raise Hell," the Rolling Stones's "Under My Thumb" and a revised version of Mountain's "Mississippi Queen," which features Leslie West and Poison's C.C. DeVille on guitar. When it comes to musical pretenders, Kinison is preferable to Eddie Murphy, but not by much. (Warner)

Laura Branigan

Lambda! No, wait a minute—wrong dance imperative. Get down!

This is a disco recidivist album, full of rhythm-defined dance pop—and very attractive rhythm-defined dance pop it is too, despite the fact that it seems a bit dated.

Branigan has a steely voice that can cut through the synthesizer overlay, and there are effective, rechargeable tunes, such as "Bad Attitude" (Paul Bliss—Stephen Kipner) and "Unison" (Bruce Roberts—Andy Goldmark). Oddly enough, the vintage disco tune "Turn the Beat Around," a 1976 hit for Vicky Sue Robinson, seems on the lame and halt side, certainly nowhere near as effective as Branigan's revival of "Name Game" on her previous album, Touch.



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While Branigan tends toward the histrionic, her slower-tempo tunes—especially "Never in a Million Years"—make for effective pace changers amidst all the belting. She seems capable of moving out of dance mode one of these days. Laura is clearly not out to lull anyone with this album. At 32, she's a little too mature to be Madonna and Paula Abdul's sorority sister and not quite mature enough to be their housemother, but there's a relationship there somewhere. (Atlantic)

Chris Flory

Back in the 1930s, when swing music was king, a young guitarist named Charlie Christian took a seat in Benny Goodman's orchestra and, through his endlessly inventive playing, helped define the role of the modern jazz guitar. Even though he died at 23, Christian left a stylistic legacy of rhythmic tension and release, creating a full, flexible sound that jazz guitarists have been cadging and copying ever since.

One such self-admitted disciple is Flory, 36, who is best known for his work with tenor saxman Scott Hamilton's quintet and who also played numerous concert dates with Goodman's smaller combo. Along with his fellow Hamilton quintet pals—bassist Phil Flanigan, drummer Chuck Riggs and pianist Mike LeDonne—Flory has put together a delightful compilation of jazz standards, plus two original tunes, that make his debut CD a swing feast to savor.

Flory's relaxed style, playing to but never hurrying the tempo, and his bluesy chord shadings are especially evident on the relatively obscure ditty "Tain't Me" (which, according to the liner notes, Flory once heard Nat Cole perform) and on his own "Ninth Avenue Shuffle," where you can hear echoes of the pearly style of another of Flory's guitar heroes, Texas bluesman T-Bone Walker.

LeDonne's swirling organ accompaniment on such favorites as "Close Your Eyes" and the Goodman goody "Soft Winds" lends these selections an even breezier swing flavor.

"Air Mail Special" is the one number co-written by Christian—it was one of the Goodman sextet's standbys—and Flory does a handsome job capturing the flying single-line soloing and the sense of propulsion that were two of Christian's trademarks.

This is a welcome first recording, one whose pleasures will be particularly rewarding at the end of your all-too-post postmodern day when what you really want is to get into a good old-fashioned groove. (Concord)

>PASS IT ON DOWN

The boys make Brazil/still a rough rhyme (Brazeel/steel), but if Alabama's accents aren't in the right place, their hearts are. The tune on the environment—"It's only ours to borrow/Let's save some for tomorrow"—is illustrated by eco-imagery: gunky waterways, garbage and belching smokestacks juxtaposed with kids romping. The verdant hillside the Alabamans are on is in L.A.

UNTIL YOU COME BACK TO ME Saluting the cosmic inanity of most videos, director Mark Romanek and editor Robert Duffy sprinkle prettily floating fruit and frilly stuff around Miki Howard, who vamps sweetly and sings a buttery version of the great Stevie Wonder-Clarence Paul-Morris Broadnax song.

Contributors: Ralph Novak, Lisa Shea, David Grogan, David Hiltbrand.

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