Record Review Ratings

By Carl Matthews

Excellent ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Very Good ★ ★ ★ ★ Good ★ ★ ★ Fair ★ ★ Poor ★

JANET JACKSON

Dream Street
A&M SP 4962
Don't Stand Another Chance, Two To The Power Of Love, Pretty Boy, Dream Street, Communication, Fast Girls, Hold Back The Tears, All My Love To You, If It Takes All Night

Rating — ★ ★ ½

Let's see, now. Michael gave us "Farewell My Summer Love 1984," Jermaine brought us his self-titled LP on Arista, all the brothers came out with "Victory," LaToya released "Heart Don't Lie." It's Janet's turn now, with "Dream Street," her second album on A&M. There are some notable similarities between this new Janet Jackson album and LaToya's current album even though different producers, arrangers and writers are involved. Thus I predict both albums will sell equally well. The first single from "Dream Street," "Don't Stand Another Chance," was produced by Marlon Jackson. The tune is exactly what you'd expect from Janet if you've heard her last album: a jumping pop/R&B number. The recent single by Cherelle, "I Didn't Mean To Turn You On," also has the same style of synthesizer playing, same rhythm, etc. "Dream Street" also includes "Two To The Power Of Love," a duet with Cliff Richard, the veteran English pop singer. This may not get played on a whole lot of album-oriented rock (AOR) stations, but producers Giorgio Moroder and Pete Bellotte have done a pretty good job of creating a Bee Gees record without the Bee Gees. As with The Jacksons' "Victory," about one-third of the album is forgettable, but for Jacksons fans a worthwhile buy.

PRINCE

Music From The Motion Picture "Purple Rain"
Warner Brothers 25110-1
Let's Go Crazy, Take Me With U, The Beautiful Ones, Computer Blue, Darling Nikki, When Doves Cry, I Would Die 4 U, Baby I'm A Star, Purple Rain

Rating — ★ ★ ★ ½

By now, if you haven't heard the smash hit record, "When Doves Cry," you're just not a rock and roll listener. That song from this latest Prince album was a number one hit on the pop, soul, and dance charts all across America. "When Doves Cry" and the follow-up single "Let's Go Crazy" are the best songs on the album, the way I see it—everything else on the LP is somewhat less interesting. The opening guitar riff of "When Doves Cry" jumps out at you; that's what makes it great singles material. With its dance beat, it sounds like it knows where it's going. The keyboard chords that begin "Let's Go Crazy," along with your standard Prince lyrics, distinguish this rock tune from your average crazy song. This stuff is fine for the die-hard Prince fan, but I can understand others giving this LP only an occasional listen. The slower-moving tune "Purple Rain" is obviously not designed to be catchy, so perhaps the visual element of the movie is necessary to grasp the full meaning of the song. Every Prince LP contains a couple of great hits, so "Purple Rain" is a good continuation of this tradition.

LILLO THOMAS

All Of You
Capitol ST-12346
Your Love's Got A Hold On Me, Holding On, Show Me, Settle Down, All Of You, My Girl, Never Give You Up, I Like Your Style

Rating ★ ★ ½

Here's Lillo Thomas's second album on Capitol. It is probably true that "Lillo" is not yet as popular a name in the music world as, say, "Peabo" or "Lionel" or "Luther." But give him time. Lillo sounds capable of carrying a tune as well as Mr. Vandross and seems to do just as good a job singing ballads as Mr. Richie. The title cut, a pretty ballad in which he shares vocals with the above mentioned Melba Moore, is one of the best ballads he's done so far. Motown fans may enjoy his version of "My Girl." The old Temptations hit is done in almost the same key and tempo, with a nice simple arrangement in which the horn parts have been replaced by synthesizers. Of course, I like the original better, but at least Lillo knows a good tune when he hears it. By the way, he wrote a few of the tunes on this album.

FATBACK

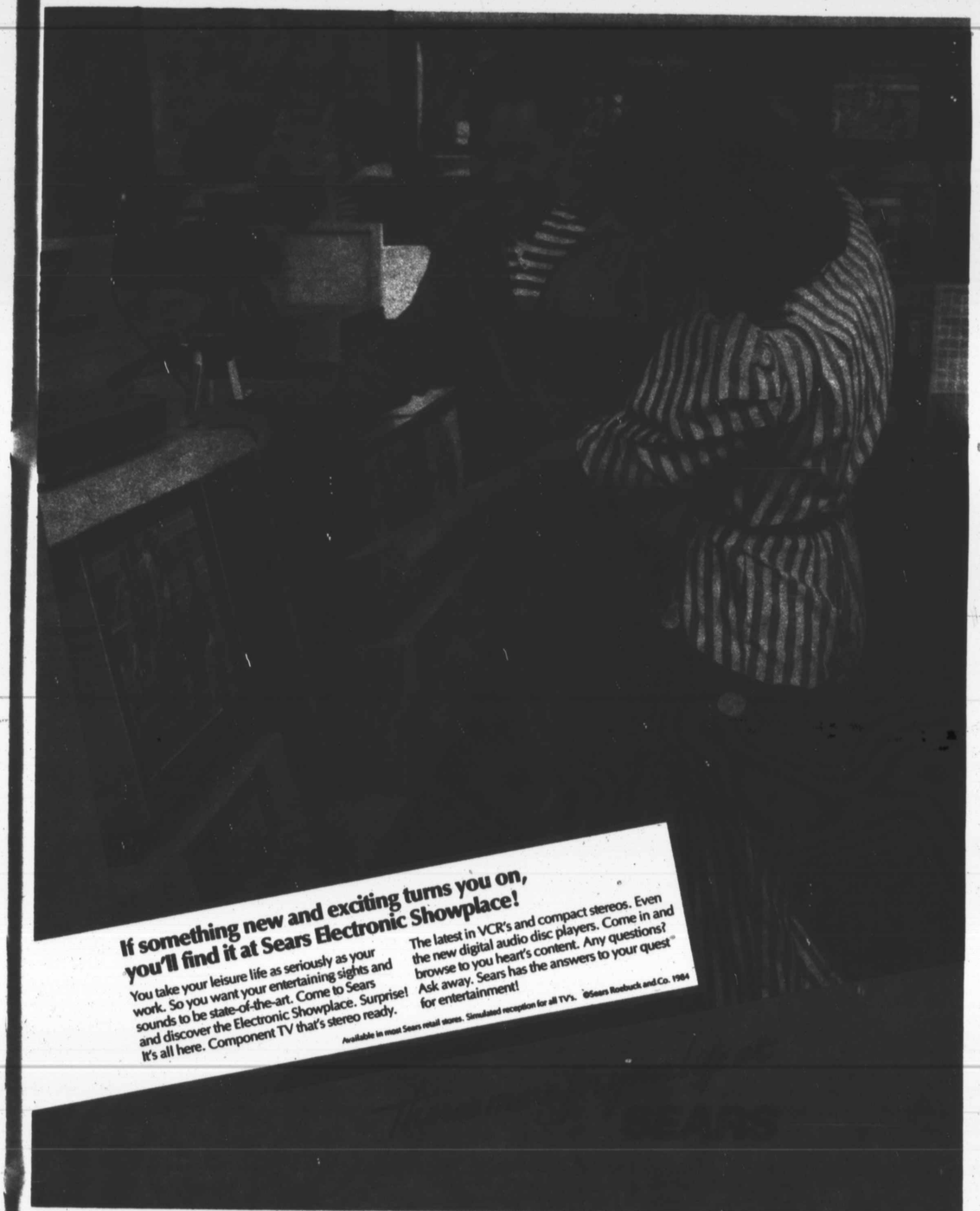
Phoenix
Cotillion 90168-1
You've Got That Magic, Call Out My Name, Lover Man, Just Be My Love, The Drum Song, I Love You So, Jump Up Baby Jump Up!, Big Brother

Rating — ★

Fatback's twentieth album is their first on the Cotillion label. Their past releases, like "Hot Box," weren't exactly the cream of the crop of R&B, but at least they had that "live" Fatback beat that made them fun. Now with their latest, Fatback has headed in a new direction, but it sounds to me like they've been misguided somehow. In their attempt to be more pop-sounding, with more sophisticated vocals and harmonies, Fatback has produced something that is not as consistent as the best of their past stuff, nor even as interesting as the material currently out by the artists whom they sound like. They lack the solid hooks of Kool And The Gang and the expressiveness of artists such as The Gap Band. Michael Walker's lead vocals on the bouncy "I Love You So" aren't bad; he sounds a bit like Luther Vandross on the cut, but it sounds ordinary. "The Drum Song," an excursion into drums and synth noise in which the group chants "Let the drums speak..." is pale compared to their early '80s stuff. "Big Brother," with producer/leader Bill Curtis on lead vocals, is reminiscent of the old Fatback beat, with its funky bass line (sounds like "Gotta Get My Hands On Some Money"). I've heard better Fatback. I'll leave it at that.

KURTIS BLOW

Ego Trip
Mercury 822 420-1
8 Million Stories, A. J. Scratch, Basketball, Under Fire, I Can't Take It No More, Ego Trip, Fallin' Back In Love Again

Rating — ★ ★ ★ ½

Kurtis Blow has given us an album every year since 1980, and he's back with his latest, "Ego Trip." As you would expect, it's more of his own brand of hip-hop rapping with that ever-present funky beat. To add to the fun of his latest album, the words to all the songs appear on the back of the album cover. The album opens with "8 Million Stories," the first single. The song's title comes from the introduction to the vintage TV cop show "Naked City." The beat never lets up for a moment, and guest rappers Run-D.M.C. ("It's Like That," "30 Days") put in a guest appearance. Could be his biggest social commentary rap yet. If you like scratching (as people who buy records by Malcolm McLaren And The World's Famous Supreme Team obviously do), Kurtis introduces deejay A.J. as he works the magic turntables on "A. J. Scratch" (A. J. is Aaron O'Bryant). "Fallin' Back In Love" is the slow number here, written by Oran "Juice" Jones, who also wrote "Daydreamin' "