RALPH MACDONALD

Surprize

Polydor 827 078-1 Y-1

Laying In His Arms; One Life To Live, Santa Cruz, Just Hold Me, You Need More Calypso, Charlo, Kiss And Make Up, Surprize

Rating — * * *

Here's the fifth solo album by a well-known percussionist who's been making music for more than 20 years, having written and produced music for such artists as Roberta Flack and Grover Washington, Jr. MacDonald brings us another bright, upbeat R&B showcase with "Laying In His Arms," the first single from "Surprize." It features newcomer Yogi Lee, a newcomer discovered by Ralph's son Anthony, on vocals. Some listeners who have enjoyed Ralph's previous work may be glad to hear such notable talents as guitarist Eric Gale on the jazz-flavored "Charlo," a tune dedicated to the late Rudolph "Charlo" Charles, a wellknown steel drum player. The album's title track is an instrumental, with lots of congas, bongos and percussion courtesy of Ralph and drummer Steve Gadd; overall, this composition sounds like a mellowed rendition from one of Herbie Hancock's late 70's albums.

L. L. COOL J.

Radio 3"

Def Jam BFC 40239

I Can't Live Without My Radio, You Can't Dance, Dear Yvette, I Can Give You More, Dangerous, Rock The Bells, I Need A Beat (Remix), That's A Lie, You'll Rock, I Want You Rating — * * 1/2

In the solo male rap category of modern music (a category which also includes, among others, Kurtis Blow and Spoonie Gee) is this debut album by one L.L. Cool J., whom you rap fans have heard before if you bought a copy of his recent 12-inch "I Need A Beat." Among these fresh beats are the two tracks on Cool J.'s latest single, "I Can Give You More" and "I Can't Live Without My Radio," both of which are your typical uptempo drummachine-backed raps. Perfect for any "yo" party. Thanks to the one they call Jazzy J., there's more scratching and fresh mixing in the new remix of "I Need A Beat" included in this LP. Sure, many non-rap listeners will tire of this stuff quickly, but for the "Krush Groove" crowd it's right on time

PHILIP MICHAEL THOMAS

Living The Book Of My Life Atlantic 90486-1

Livin' The Book Of My Life, Just The Way I Planned It, You Might Be The Lucky One, Fish And Chips, Everything Happens In Its Own Time, She's A Liar, I'm In Love With The Love That You Gave To Me, Stay (In My Loving Arms Tonight), All My Love, La Mirada

Rating - * * *

Already a big name on the small screen (TV, that is) 36-year-old Philip-Michael Thomas brings his charm to the music world with his first solo album. He plays a number of instruments, including piano. The album opens with the Jamaica-influenced title track, a rocking little reggae number with a story. Next comes the single, "Just The Way I Planned It," also written by Philip. "You Might Be The Lucky One" has an upbeat, joyous sound reminiscent of some of Luther Vandross's uptempo numbers, and Mr. Thomas gives us a creditable performance on the mellow "Everything Happens In Its Own Time," on which he sounds like Johnny Mathis in spots. "She's A Liar," with its opening guitar hook and telling-it-like-it-is lyrics, is one of the best songs here. By not sticking to just one formula, Mr. Thomas has created a better than average album, although his voice sounds very similar to quite a few other popular male vocalists. The album's title suggests that some of the material here is autobiographical. Not everything on this LP is a gem, but as long as he continues to let the more interesting aspects of his personality shine through on his recorded projects, Mr. Thomas's next album should also be worth hearing.

VIKKI LOVE WITH NUANCE

Sing Dance Rap Romance 4th + B'Way 4003

Stop Playing On Me, Someone To Love Me Back, Loveride, You're The One For Me, Just Love You, Sing Dance Rap Romance, Take A Chance, Your Love

Rating - * * *

Here's the first album by a 20-year-old Queens, New York native named Vikki Love. This album already has three dance chart hits.

It opens with the thumping "Stop Playing On Me," the most recent hit. The album also contains Vikki's first hit, the funky but typicallyarranged "Take A Chance," and the vocalhook-filled "Loveride." Side one closes with the ballad "You're The One For Me" (not the D Train hit). Nice piano intro and all, just a piece of pleasant forgettable filler. The title track seems suited to the hip-hop and rap crowd. Let me tell you, Vikki is one artist Sparky D. won't have to worry about losing a rap competition to. (Sparky D. has recorded several rap 12-inches, for those of you who could care less about rap). To say that this is basically just a very long 12-inch dance single just about sums it up.

Romantically Yours Columbia FC 40208

More, Why Did I Choose You?, Maria, The Shadow Of Your Smile, Fly Me To The Moon (In Other Words), I Won't Cry Anymore, Just Like, Walkin' In The Rain, I Live For You, Stranger In My Life, Happy Go Lucky

Rating - * * * The last Columbia release of Marvin Gaye material, "Dream Of A Lifetime," contained tracks recorded during the sessions that unfortunately ended with his untimely death. That album included "Sanctified Lady," plus other unreleased tracks from the Motown period. Side one of "Romantically Yours" sure is a major departure from the electric tracks that graced side one of "Dream Of A Lifetime." With "More," "Why Did I Choose You?" and "Maria" (from "West Side Story") from the Motown vaults (produced by Hal Davis and others), Marvin is everything the album title says, with orchestra, violin strings, and all. These are pretty standard pop orchestral arrangements, nothing even coming close to, say, "Your Precious Love" (1967). If you're not into movie-soundtrack fare such as that then side two might be more your style, with the soulful "Just Like" which captures all the old Marvin Gaye vocal magic. "Just Like" and the next three cuts on side two were written and produced by Marvin. The final track is "Happy Go Lucky," a fluffy Norman Whitfield creation. Remember, there are no uptempo cuts here, all slow numbers, so if you only liked things like "Got To Give It Up" then forget it. Actually, you'll probably find this to be a collection of unreleased similar-sounding tracks, not a true Marvin Gaye album — but look Ma, no censor bleeps.

MARVIN GAYE



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