NEIL DIAMOND
Tap Root Manuscript

 Neil Diamond has been generating top-40 hits for years. His success is due to his "more than sum of the parts" approach: sincere-sounding, sometimes very dramatic ("Bobby Holly"), but above all, commercial. And this is laudable. If someone can sell a hit like "Cracklin' Rosie" and be rewarded for doing so, then it probably shouldn't be blamed too.

The second side shows the struggle between being commercial and maintaining sincerity. There is a booklet enclosed with the record in which Neil explains that he has taken up gospel music and has been inspired by the blues. The whole side is a trip on the road to gospel in its original form. The "New African Trilogy," it is interesting, but it seems to have been written by someone else. The theme is the desire to keep from turning off the public completely. For instance, one of the songs is an arrhythmic, six-minute chant. Twenty minutes of this would have been enough with it and "I Am the Lion" and "Sociodam." The three parts of the album are all part of a common motif but the songs are too similar to be compelling. African-American type music. The whole piece is just a little weak, although it seems that Neil Diamond is still trying to get as much of the African music to the people as he thought he could risk, then he probably shouldn't be blamed too much. It looks as if it is an effort to try something new and to not do before. His stature as an artist is not at all diminished by this record.

—Jay Pollack

BESSIE SMITH
Empty Red Blues — Bessie Smith

This is the third of five packages being released by Columbia Records and features the works of Bessie Smith. The cuts on this album (most of which were made during her career from 1924-1928) are included in the "New African Trilogy," it is interesting, but it seems to have been written by someone else. The theme is the desire to keep from turning off the public completely. For instance, one of the songs is an arrhythmic, six-minute chant. Twenty minutes of this would have been enough with it and "I Am the Lion" and "Sociodam." The three parts of the album are all part of a common motif but the songs are too similar to be compelling. African-American type music. The whole piece is just a little weak, although it seems that Neil Diamond is still trying to get as much of the African music to the people as he thought he could risk, then he probably shouldn't be blamed too much. It looks as if it is an effort to try something new and to not do before. His stature as an artist is not at all diminished by this record.

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