Sometimes I really go for hype. When a record is being highly touted, and it is supposed to be fairly reasonable, and I have a lot of money to throw around (which isn't very often), I'll spring four or five dollars or all it.

I bought three of the most hyped albums right before the storm hit, all of the dozen recordings, and have had all week to listen to them (when the electricity hasn't shut off anyway). The successes and failures of all three can be traced to their lyrics, or lack of them.

I was fairly reasonable, and I have a format -- a few short musical phrases repeated ad nauseam and stringed together for the length of the track. The repetition of lyrics combined with a few catchy tunes makes White Hot eminently listenable, but Angel does nothing that countless other groups haven't done in the past. Angel has the talent to become a fairly big name band. Their major problem is with their songwriting. If they can overcome the tendency to follow the same format for all their songs, and if they apply some original twists to their music, then they should be able to improve greatly over the style they have shown in White Hot.

White Hot -- Angel on Casablanca Records

This album has been the most heavily promoted of the three, and in some ways needs is the most. Angel demonstrates that they are fairly competent musicians on White Hot, but nothing spectacular. This five-man group can play reasonably well, but there is something lacking in their performance. Angel specializes in "harmless" music -- it isn't annoying to listen to but it isn't exciting either. The cuts on this record are all the "proper length" for AM airplay (3½ to 4½ minutes), and are based on the same basic format -- a few short musical phrases.

My Aim Is True -- Elvis Costello on Columbia Records

Like most people, the first time I ever heard of Elvis Costello was when he made his guest appearance on Saturday Night Live in December. And like most people, I asked myself, who is Elvis Costello, anyway? Is he a joke, or what? But then, what could I expect from someone who looks like he lives in a computer factory? In fact, he was a computer programmer before he cut My Aim Is True. And he looks and dresses as bizarre as his music sounds. Elvis Costello (not his real name) has evolved his style from many of the rockers of the mid-fifties, among them Buddy Holly and Elvis Presley. He hasn't copied any one particular -- his style is a combination of all of theirs, yet is uniquely his own. He doesn't sing well at all, and his guitar playing is mediocre at best. He gives you the impression that you could do better if you only half-tried.

His strength lies in his songwriting abilities, particularly his lyrics. They are pungent and biting, and very often depressingly yet, unlike most songs today, actually say something. The two most listenable, potent and biting, and very often depressingly so cuts from My Aim Is True have the most nonsensical lyrics of any on the album. With Alimony and (The Angels Wanna Wear My) Red Shoes, Elvis-Costello has put together his most atractive musical packages.

Elvis Costello is the type of artist whose record becomes a hit more because it is a novelty than anything else, then slides into obscurity. I hope this isn't the case. He hasn't yet shown his full potential, either as a songwriter or as a performer, and I'd like to hear more of what he has to offer.

Bat Out Of Hell -- Meat Loaf on Epic Records

Bat Out Of Hell is largely the efforts of only one person, Jim Steinman, who wrote the songs on the album, in addition to singing leads. Both Steinman and Bruce Springsteen have much in common. Both have bad voices, both arrange their songs so that the vocals are far more prominent than the instruments, and both sing about the desperation and frustration in the lives of teenagers.

The best cut on the album, and one of the best songs of the year, Paradise By The Dashboard Light, is a three-part mini-opera concerning a back-seat seduction. It is genuinely funny, and uses some interesting sound effects. Jim Steinman has started something interesting with Meat Loaf. If he decides to continue with the style he has shown on Bat Out Of Hell, there should be some good music coming from him in the future.

The cuts on his record are all the "proper length" for AM airplay (3½ to 4½ minutes), and are based on the same basic format -- a few short musical phrases. The songwriting is clearly the forte with their songwriting. If they can overcome the tendency to follow the same format for all their songs, and if they apply some original twists to their music, then they should be able to improve greatly over the style they have shown in White Hot.

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