Wanna Take A Chance?

You Wanna Buy a Bridge??

Second Chance, James Chance on P/S/ZE Records, distributed by JEM.

I gotta admit that no one's got as much mileage out of two songs as James Chance out of his own two hits, "Contort Yourself" and "Heatwave," plus he's pretty much on a SOB too, and he put two "f*ck off" versions of "Contort Yourself" on his latest EP release (the records company of the Paris-New York-stab-jet-set) Second Chance, which looks suspiciously like a sword — there are lots of reasons to slag the whole James White/James Chance/James White and the Blacks/Contortions/etc. conglomerate... but, oh, help — I can't resist that dirty funk.

While funk got side-tracked from its hypnotic dance roots during the production and down-sized '70's, Chance, at the end of that decade, proved he still understood by releasing a 12" single ("Contort Yourself," b/w "Heatwave," both on this LP). No one's been the same since, and Chance probably deserves some paternity credit in the current British funk revival. But Chance is as New York as they come, a man whose vitriolic, crazed, entralling vision is matched only by NYC itself.

Chance's great talent is distortion — everything's stretched tight, fingernails-on-skin, horrifically stoned, yet grounded in proto-punk that are eerily recognizable and therefore danceable. People find the Contortions dour and disturbing — it depends on how seriously you want to take Chance's attitude (and his attitude is enormous) if you step back from a knee-jerk reaction to his temper tantrums and pause enough to dance, you can appreciate the Contortions for what they do best — guaranteed merciless funk — and discard the rest.

If you already have other James Chance releases, you probably don't need this one; indeed gimmick is that one side features James White and the Blacks while side two has him with the Contortions. Fantasmas AFFRONTS your new dimensions as you flip from side I to side II comparing the emotional mix of "Contort Yourself" with the New York mix. If you own nothing by the Contortions, this is a near-perfect "intro-sampler," although I'm sure that's not ZE's intention. There are great versions of all the important Chance classics. Besides "Contort Yourself," with its irritatingly engaging taunt of a chorus, you get "Tropical Heatwave," "Throw Me Away," and "Stained Sheets" (which used to make me leave the room in a pale ofFinest werks, but which now has me in its leathery mesmerizingly sexual grip) all are highly representative, and therefore worthwhile, if not exactly new.

Chance is commendable in his position as an independent, noncommercial artist; he plays something to which he has a large emotional and aesthetic commitment. A certain amount of arrogance and redundancy does mar his work, but lesser performers have been forgiven greater sins.

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