Once a year, the August critics of the Arts section get to express their opinions without having to justify them. The following lists represent the top ten albums of the year as chosen by each critic, plus a best single, rather than dismiss this compilation as a "tiresome eye exercise, find a critic with whom you agree with (at least in part) and see how well what a great job he's doing. We'd love to have a fun club.

Top Single: Signals, Calls and Marches, The Box Tops (Columbia)
Another wealth of riches. Elvis is still king.

Top Ten Albums:
1. Rage in Eden, Flying Nun (Chrysalis)
   One of the best creative synths works since Who's Next
2. Fresh Fruit for Rotting Vegetables, Dead Kennedys (IRS)
The first release from the grandaddy of hardcore, double time venomous, well-done.
3. Sound Affects, Jam (Polydor)
   Perfect pop from England's best.
4. Closer, Joy Division (Factory)
   Beautiful haunting.
5. Taking Liberties, Elvis Costello (CBS)
   A collection of gems previously unreleased in the U.S.
6. Sandinista!, The Clash (Epit) incredibly diverse: reggae, soul, disco, rock tunes, and even a waltz.
7. Let the Power Fall, Robert Friss (EG)
   An entire album of mellow Fripp:trains.
8. Wild Gift, X (Slash)
   Rockabilly overtones make this a worthy successor to Los Angeles, their first album.
9. Discipline, King Crimson (EG)
   Simply put, a superlative reunion disc.
10. League of Gentlemen, Robert Fripp (Polylil)
   Orchestrations, rootinest, tootinest, call it what you will. This is dance music for the 80's.

Top Single: Love Will Tear Us Apart, Joy Division (Factory)
For the title, if no other reason.

David Shaw

Eric Sada

There weren't ten records released in 1981 that I would list as "great." There were five.
1. Fresh Fruit for Rotting Vegetables, Dead Kennedys (IRS)
   Ultimate American punk.
2. Love, Gun Club (Ruby Records)
   White California punk with the Blues.
3. Wild Night, Sushi
   A breath of fresh air.
4. Pleasure, Swingle, Swingle (IRS)
   Funk/tap/disco with an intellectual texturing.
5. He Who Dares Wins, Theatre of Hate (Burning Home Records)
   The only way I survived early 1981—grim, black, but not without transcendence.
6. The Adolescents, The Adolescents (Fram
   Very hard, no fast, your body can't keep the beat.
7. Love at First Sight, Peter Dayton (Shoebot)
   Poor recording, but Dayton artfully transcribes the line between sadcancine and bissextraw pop. And why don't all bands just release LPs from now on?
   Perfectly satisfies his particular need.

Top Single: To Cut a Long Story Short, Syndual Buffet (Chrysalis)

1. Buy, U2 (Island)
   Probably the best debut album since Talking Heads in 1977.
2. East Side Story, Squercy (A&M)
   Elvis Costello's production finally fulfills the promise of a top-rate pop band.
3. Sound Affects, The Jam (Polydor)
   Great title, great record, still a great group.
4. Pleasant Dreams, Ramones (Sire)
   Surprisingly.
5. Absurd, Genesis (Atlantic)
   Progressive rock ain't dead yet.
6. Sails of Silver, Stereolyte Span (Tokoma)
   Perhaps the only great reunion album ever made.
7. Sandinista!, The Clash (Epit)
   The proverbial "master.
8. Trust, Elvis Costello (Columbia)
   More musical layers with all four eyes.
9. What's Up?, The English Beat (Sire)
   A nice avoidance of the sophomore jinx.
10. Discipline, King Crimson (Warner Brothers)
   An album of possibilities and potentialities.

Top Single: To Cut a Long Story Short, Syndual Buffet (Chrysalis)