Music on Both Sides, the Records on Virgin International.

A friend of mine is fond of saying, "Power pop is boring." I tend to agree. Most of the bands around these days who purport to be making pop music are either dreadfully trite or just plain bad. There are some notable exceptions: Squeeze's East Side Story was my second favorite album of 1981, and a standard against which all contemporary pop can be measured. Music on Both Sides won't be my second favorite album of 1982, but it's still a pretty decent record.

The Records have been known primarily as a singles band. Such tunes as "Starry Eyes," "Teenarama" and "Hearts in Her Eyes" have brightened the playlists of the more liberal AM stations over the last few years. Music on Both Sides (great title!) is their third album, and it continues their tradition of top-rate singles. "Imitation Jewelry" is a pop hit in the grand style—a simple love song done from an unusual viewpoint. There are a number of other notable songs sprinkled throughout this album, including "Heather and Hell" and "Not So Much the Time." The Records continue their reputation for catchy lyrics, with lines like "They're calling you the postman / 'cause you always bring bad news" and "...with central heating turned up loud." There's nothing quite as clever as "Teenarama," but the lyrics are still far superior to most of what's currently being recorded.

The Records' music is solidly in the Merseybeat/British Invasion tradition. They've often been compared to the Beatles, and with good reason. The resemblance is strengthened on this release by new lead vocalist Chris Gent, who adds a distinctive voice to the group. On the other hand, his voice is a little thin and his Lennonesque vocal inflections grate in some spots. Gent probably sounds more like Ray Davies than anyone else well-known, and this characteristic works well on some of the more sarcastic lines. Drummer Will Birch also serves as producer, with generally good results. He appears to be trying for a sharp, clean new wave sound in the mold of Steve Lillywhite. There are traces of the Nick Lowe/Elvis Costello power pop production sound as well. Though they draw from a variety of sources, the Records manage to sustain an identifiable, distinctive sound on nearly every song.

Music on Both Sides sits in my record collection between Rawwberries' Best and the Records' first album. While it can't really compare with either of these, it's still a very enjoyable record. In a world where drivel like Styx and Journey pass for AM pop, that's saying quite a bit.

Tom Anderson