Random Record Roundup

It's Only a Movie!, The Raybeats on Shanachie Records.

About every two years, some pop music critic will put forth in an article in the Phoenix (which will spawn others elsewhere) that the sixties' garage-band legacy has finally died, being replaced by electro-funk, or reggae, or whatever. And always, within a few weeks, another Ventures reissue album will appear, three local groups will start doing covers of "Louie Louie", and the same critic will within the same pages marvel at the revival of the garage-surf sound, not once suspecting that it might never have gone away.

The success of the Raybeats' new album proves that the garage side of surf music can still be relevant more than twenty years after its first appearance. "Lock the Ripper", the album's opening track, is technically atrocious, having been recorded on cheap two-track equipment during a practice session. But between the loony miking and the shining feedback, the band's two guitarists Jody Harris and Pat Irwin (and guest bassist Bobby Albertson), propelled by Don Christensen's nonstop percussion, perform at energy levels unheard on most current vinyl.

The three-piece instrumental group makes up for lack of depth (and of vocals) on several tracks with keyboard and sax overdubs. Other notable side-one pieces include "Banzai Pipeline", a tasty, rockabilly-ish Henry Mancini cover, and "The Bad Little Caper", a danceable parody of (or tribute to?) the theme music in early James Bond films. "Jelly Bread", the blues as the Yardbirds knew how to play it, and the all-inlight-and-gloss, performance of other songs, and two cuts recorded live at the Opera House here is Boston. This is what compilation albums such as this should be — an introduction to the band for the casual listener, and a source of otherwise unavailable material for the fan.

The English Beat (they added the "Eng-"
lish" to differentiate between another Beat (based in America) was one of the ska-revivalist bands which coalesced several years ago. Many of these "two-tone" bands such as The Selecter have since broken up, and others such as Madness have changed the focus of their music away from ska and more toward standard pop. The English Beat's distinctive sound is due primarily to the amazingly fluid saxophone playing by Saxa, who performs on this hardworking septet in your heart and on your turntable.

What is Beat?, The English Beat on IRS Records.

Whenever a band releases a "best of" compilation, it usually indicates a stall in their creative engine. Not so with The English Beat, whose recent retrospective album marks their shift from Sire to IRS Records. What is Beat? contains several of their best songs from their three previous albums, must surely their debut! Just Can't Stop It, which remains their best collection to date. What is Beat? also includes several British singles heretofore not included on any albums, previously unreleased remixed versions of other songs, and two cuts recorded live at the Opera House here is Boston. This is what compilation albums such as this should be — an introduction to the band for the casual listener, and a source of otherwise unavailable material for the fan.

The English Beat's distinctive sound is due primarily to the amazingly fluid saxophone playing by Saxa, who performs on the band's records but is too frail to accompany them on tour. The rest of the band provides an amalgam of sound which clings along underneath the sax and vocals. Highly danceable, although some of the newer songs are more introspective and less likely to move the feet.

They did the same thing on Guitar Beat with "Four Zones".

If you like your music with the rough edges intact, you ought to hurry up and buy this album before the Raybeats sign with a major label and some big-time producer makes them start sounding like Pol-lyrock.

V. Michael Bove

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