



Sting: back from Barbados with a stiff.

► HUNG UP ON NARCISSISM

The pretension only begins with the title of the new Sting LP, **The Dream of the Blue Turtles**. This was supposed to be his "jazz album" or, at the very least, a record that would take some chances, maybe break down the walls between white and black music. Sting did hire four terrific young black jazz musicians (Branford Marsalis, Omar Hakim, Darryl Jones, Kenny Kirkland) and whisk them away to a studio in Barbados—whereupon he had them play like session musicians on any other slick pop record. There is almost no improvising, and Marsalis' sophisticated saxophone is sadly undermixed, if not plain ignored. The arrangements are tasteful, but the songs are melodically stiff—nothing sticks in your ear—and the lyrics, when they're not narcissistically preening, are a crock of pseudo-intellectual tripe.

Not even Sting, who is in fine voice throughout, can redeem a verse like the one from his antiwar song, "Russians": "How can I save my little boy from Oppenheimer's deadly toy/ There is no monopoly of common sense/ On either side of the political fence/ . . . I hope the Russians love their children too." Even when Sting

sings about love on the record's smash single, "If You Love Somebody Set Them Free," this album has the feel of a position paper.

► POSSESSED BY LOVE

When Bryan Ferry sings about love, he doesn't do so from a stance of moral superiority. Ferry is possessed by love, and his new **Boys and Girls** makes that possession believable. It's a hypnotic, romantic record, the aural equivalent of that soft-focus Calvin Klein print ad for Obsession perfume. Ferry picks up here where he left off leading Roxy Music's 1982 *Avon*, now regarded as a pop classic. The songs are sensuous laments, clothed in a swirl of synthesizers, impressionistic guitars and horns, and steamy/cool background vocals. Ferry himself



Bryan Ferry: angst in a tux.

sounds like a million dollars—angst in a tux—singing in a voice that manages to reconcile passion with subtlety, desperation with restraint. The need for love, Ferry reminds us, is "how the strong get weak/ and the rich get poor." *Boys and Girls* is elegant and bittersweet and true. A gem.

► A MIXED BAG OF OTHER ALBUMS

Bob Dylan *Empire Burlesque*. It's nice to have Bob back on the planet, in the stone-cold secular world where most of us live. His cutting humor, bleeding vulnerability and cocky assurance are scattered throughout this first self-produced album. The songs are wildly uneven, but in the video of the excellent "Tight Connection to My Heart" he almost dances. This is a good sign.

George Clinton *Some of My Best Jokes Are Friends*. Back in the '70s, Clinton led the funkiest, funniest, hippest dance-band empire in the world, Parliament-Funkadelic. Things have now unraveled to the point where he has, for his third solo LP, released an entire record of filler. Ain't no hooks, ain't no laughs, ain't no funk. Even with techno-wiz Thomas Dolby on two tracks, ain't even no party.

Talking Heads *Little Creatures*. A stripped-down version of the band, mostly the original quartet, makes a slight album—not a watershed but a little reflecting pool. Lead singer David Byrne scores twice, on "Road to Nowhere," an existential march with an accordion lead—already an omnipresent video on MTV—and "Stay Up Late," a hilarious account of adults' need to be entertained by babies. Overall, the songs are pleasant amusements, little toys to be played with, puzzled over and abandoned.

Waylon Jennings / Willie Nelson / Johnny Cash / Kris Kristofferson *Highwayman*. Believe it or not, this did not start out as a marketing concept—and it ended up as a fine, though hardly historic, record. The spotlight shines brightest on Willie and Johnny, crooning classic country songs about unemployment, illegal immigration, insane asylums, funerals, reincarnated drifters, the passage of time and, yes, cowboys. Since there is no new songwriting by the foursome to be heard (a cryin' shame), it's been said that this is the kind of record these guys could make in their sleep, but as they all have a reputation for being good in bed, we'll take it. ♦

SINGING AGAINST SUICIDE

► Duets are the rage these days, with everyone gunning for magic combinations and crossover hits. The new **Aretha Franklin** LP, *Who's Zoomin' Who*, is a good (or, actually, not so good) example. One duet is with no-voice **Peter Wolf**, ex of J. Geils, and the other with all-image **Annie Lennox** of Eurythmics, on a feminist "message" song . . . ► Message songs, and not only those of the anti-hunger genre, are making a big comeback. **Billy Joel's** new single, "You're Only Human (Second Wind)," is a survival course for teenagers tempted to take their lives. With suicide now the second leading cause of death among teens (after car accidents), the song couldn't be better timed. Joel, who came close himself to ending it all as a teen, will donate his royalties to the National Committee for Youth Suicide Prevention.