

Arts & Entertainment

U2 can deliver a kick in the ear



War
U2
Island Records

Very few times in the AI Franken decade will we come across something completely new and different. Punk has become predictable. New wave is fighting to sustain originality. I really wonder how many more times we'll get a true-to-life kick in the ear. Right now your own personal kick is available. You can get it from U2.

The album, titled *War*, is the third produced by the four-man Irish group. I won't hesitate to say it is fantastic. The entire work is fresh, satisfying and very different from anything you've heard before. It is U2.

The group consists of four people expressing what they think; in this case, what they think about war. There are no standouts among the performances by the four central musicians. Each song has equally powerful lyrics and instrumentation.

As it was with *Boy* in 1980 and *October* in 1981, *War* has something to say. The effort is successful. The lyrics never fall below excellent. They are delivered with a style you will not find in many other places. They are fantastic.

The instrumentation on *War* consists primarily of U2's unique guitars. They are not screaming, nor are they weird. They are a thoughtful blend of intricate instrumentation supporting the singer's lyrics.

You may have heard "New Year's Day" on the airwaves. The cut expresses a lot of what U2 and *War* has to say. Those who don't understand it may call it depressing. U2 acknowledges that depression, and wonders why it is there. With thoughtful listening, the music explains itself.

Although U2 and *War* are different from my own personal cache of vinyl, I plan on hearing more of both. I hope you will, too. U2 is not punk or new wave. U2 is powerful and unique. U2 is a fresh feeling from a musty undergrowth. U2 is a band I guarantee you'll hear more about.

—Todd R. Tystad

The queen cometh; 'gut' blues hit town

From the Heart of a Woman
KoKo Taylor
Alligator

KoKo Taylor is the reigning queen of Chicago blues. By proxy, her rule extends worldwide. There are few contenders to the throne; were there, though, her supremacy would probably still not be threatened.

From the *Heart of a Woman*, Taylor's third album, might just as aptly have been called *From the Gut* or *From the Monster*

Lungs of a Woman. At 48, she has some of the hardest working vocal chords in the business.

She can belt it out or scream in a whisper; she can strangle a note in passion or let it warble away in utter dejection. However she vents it, her pipes can sustain the abuse.

She pumps them tirelessly, enough to breathe irresistible life into a long evening of gritty, low-down blues. (An important aside to all this praise: KoKo Taylor will exhibit her throaty prowess tonight at Lincoln's own Larry's Showcase.)

If further documentation were needed, besides her records and shows, Taylor has a series of Grammy and W.C. Handy Blues nominations and awards for best female blues artist to testify for her talent.

Blues Brother Dan Aykroyd has said, "This music just does something for me. You know, if I had the chance, I'd get up there like a go-go dancer and dance all night."

"It's the only thing I enjoy doing — keeping the blues alive," Taylor has said. "I've been singing all my life, ever since I was knee-high to a duck. As far back as I can remember, I was singing and loved it. I'd always sing with my sisters and brothers around the house, out in the cotton fields. We played music with our homemade guitars. In the meantime, I



participated at church, a little Baptist church (in Memphis), singing gospel. In April of '53, I moved to Chicago."

Her powerful singing won her an almost instant audience there; soon she was performing with, among others, Elmore James, Muddy Waters and Howling Wolf. But Willie Dixon, Taylor has claimed, was her biggest fan. In 1963, he produced her first singles, "What Kind of Man Is This" and "I Got What It Takes," both eventually hits. Her biggest success came, two years later, with "Wang Dang Doodle," a million-seller that launched her first international tour.

Strapped to a guitar, she could be a female Muddy Waters. Yet, because of her gravelly vocals and her devotion to old-style, tar pit, Mississippi blues, she has been pigeon-holed by some critics and, possibly, has narrowed her potential audience.

From the *Heart of a Woman*, however, should dismiss these claims. Its 10 songs of jealousy and longing confirm Taylor as a superb singer in a variety of blues styles — all of them impeccably rendered by her band of card-carrying bluesmen, The Blues Machine.

The hard-punch soul of "Something Strange Is Going On," the smoldering gospel of Etta James' "I'd Rather Go Blind," the vintage R&B of "If You Got a Heartache" and Louis Jordan's "Sure Had a Wonderful Time Last Night," and the savory jazz of Dinah Washington's "Blow Top Blues" combine and contrast with songs in Taylor's tough Chicago style, cementing the album into a cohesive, compelling whole, her most solid LP yet.

Its price is money well-spent for any blues lover or anyone interested in broader musical horizons. (If you are doubtful, see her show and find out for yourself: that is what the devoted will be doing tonight).

—David Wood

Album Review

Hank's strong stuff not on weak album

Strong Stuff
Hank Williams, Jr.
Elektra

For the moment, let's accept the premise that it takes one-one hundredth the effort to review an album as it does to make one. (Even this may be too generous to the record critic). Given this scenario, I would have to write 500 reviews in the next 12 months to match Hank Williams Jr.'s output during the last year.

Even the most accomplished reviewer would begin to pale after the 150th review or so. Similarly, after putting out more than 12 albums in the last three years, Bocephus (as he incessantly insists on being called) has run dry. Perhaps a more talented performer could handle an average of four albums per year (Willie Nelson, for example, has a similar output, yet his albums are of consistently high quality. However, Hank Williams Jr. simply does not have the ability to do it.

Strong Stuff is a perfect example of what is wrong with most of Hank Jr.'s recent recordings. First of all, Hank Williams Jr. sings about himself too much. Not songs in the first person, mind you, but songs telling what a neat guy Hank Jr. is. No less than four selections on this outing are autobiographical written in the most arrogant manner.

This would be more bearable if Williams was not such a terrible songwriter. (Evidently, genealogy alone will not make you a capable songsmith). However, contained within this album are some of the most insipid lyrics known to man. Some examples:

From "The Girl in the Front Row at Ft. Worth":

*What a surprise, was her answer to mine
When I said I think I'm in love
She said me too and if I go with you
You'll see what Texas women are made of*

From "Leave the Boys Alone":
*Ol' Waylon has been known to play half-time
And he's been known to get out of his mind*



*Don't know whether he's right or wrong
Got a string a' hits 'bout two miles long
And, most incredibly, from "A Whole Lot of Hank":*

*I'm an outlaw from the South
I got country in my mouth
And I'm lookin' for good lovin' all the time...*

There's a whole lot of Hank in my hat! (Exclamation marks are mine).

As if the words weren't bad enough, Williams, for some inexplicable reason, has developed a Neil Young-like whine which makes even the adequate songs unbearable.

There are a few good moments here. "La Grande" is OK and his rendition of Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Made in the Shade" is passable. Additionally, "Blue Jeans Blues" is a pleasant enough parody of blues music. However, I wonder if Williams meant to satirize, or if, heaven forbid, he was actually serious. These tolerable moments, though, are overshadowed by the arrogance of "Leave

Them Boys Alone," the sexism of "Gonna Go Hunting Tonight," the pseudo-psychadelic of "In the Arms of Cocaine" and the sheer idiocy of "Homecoming Queen."

In short, there is no reason for *Strong Stuff*, or any of the other ones Hank Williams Jr. has released in the last three years. If I had to prescribe an antidote, I would recommend a hiatus from recording in order to let Williams rediscover his artistic self as he did on his brilliant *Hank Williams Jr and Friends LP* a few years back.

However, I'm too busy to worry about it. I've got another 499 reviews I need to finish by next March.

—Mike Frost

King of Comedy: consistent, varied



The King of Comedy (Soundtrack)
Various Artists
Warner Bros.

Making the rounds is a film entitled "The King of Comedy." Featured performers in the film consist of such varied talents that you may just wonder what consistency the film has (i.e. Robert DeNiro, Jerry Lewis and Tony Randall). If the soundtrack can speak for the film, there should be no doubt that consistency can indeed occur with a high degree of variation.

As far as soundtracks go, variation would have to be the word for *The King of Comedy*. All the songs are done by established performers, and some are done by people we haven't heard from in awhile. The tricky part is that you won't find this wide variety of talent on one disc anywhere. Even with the amazing variation in feeling and style, blues impressions appear most often, but alas, blues doesn't tie the album together. The underlying theme here is talent. Every performer on the disc has his or her own style and comes through with one heck of a performance. This could be the perfect album for the listener looking for the perfect variation. Here's how the story goes:

The Pretenders —

"Back on the Chain Gang":

With the band's original drummer Martin Chambers, real woman Chrissie Hynde delivers a powerful punch with two new guitarists on this single enjoying Top 20 success.

B.B. King —

"Tain't Nobody's Bizness (If I Do)":

"Blues Boy" King proves that at age 58 he can still play the blues better than the rest of the crowd. The whole song sparkles like gold.

Talking Heads — "Swamp":

With David Byrne and the rest of the Talking Heads, you get not only the newest phase of this intense band, but the most outstanding lyrics on the album.

Bob James — "King of Comedy":

Expert synthesizer work by Bob James dominates the instrumental theme from the film. It's something to keep Mike Post on his toes.

Rickie Lee Jones — "Rainbow Sleeve":

Done in the thoughtful style of Roberta Flack, Jones does a top-rate job with this song written by Tom Waits.

Continued on Page 9