

ROAD TO RUIN

Ramones
Sire (SRK 6063)

Don't turn to Woolite or to the wheelchair complacency of Boston or Firefall. Go mental on the *Road to Ruin* with the fabulous Ramones, four boys from the White Noise Riviera who were born with both rattles and bazookas in their hands. Which is to say, here we go again: The melodic cheerfulness of '60s AM pop and the British Invasion smashes into banks of brutal Velvet Underground chords on Route 66 while Joey Ramone sings like Herman's Hermit Peter Noone jammed up on Purina Cat Chow. I didn't think the '70s would be so exciting. Neither did Ralph Kramden.

Admittedly, *Ruin* may not mow you down with quite the force or humor of *Rocket to Russia*; the Ramones' usual breakneck tempo has curiously been slowed down on several cuts, lead guitar lines (!?) prominently grace "Don't Come Close," and Joey projects actual sadness on "Questioningly." Still, the lp often fills you with a transcendent lightheadedness. Not only are the Ramones armed with supremely catchy melodies ("I Wanna Be Sedated," "I Don't Want You") and an awesome rhythmic momentum ("She's the One," "Go Mental"), but they celebrate and satirize life with memorable wit and intelligence. At their funniest, they take things which hold some importance and dizzily reduce them to the level of flypaper. "I'm Against It" rhymes "Viet Cong" and "sex & drugs" with "ping-pong" and "water bugs," respectively. "I Wanted Everything" examines the gripes of proletarians ("Not much of a salary/No tip for delivery") and their quest for salvation ("There's money in the supermarket/And I'm going after it").

Though I would gladly trade in the Ramones' surprisingly pallid version of the Searchers' "Needles and Pins" for the Beach Boys harmonies from *Russia*, I probably will never forget *Ruin's* absolutely compelling finale, "It's a Long Way Back." A bouncy singalong whose 14 words seem to be about a relocated Nazi criminal forced to leave his woman behind in Deutschland, this song is perhaps the best example of intellectual bubblegum music to have emerged in this century.

(Mitchell Schneider)

CHANGE OF HEART

Eric Carmen
Arista (AB 4184)

"I wonder sometimes what's becoming of me," Eric Carmen admits at the end of this record, by which time the listener should be asking the same question. As leader of the Raspberries, Carmen crafted some of this decade's better rock 'n roll, but his solo works have shifted the focus from guitar to piano, and his songs have become progres-

sively more overblown and ponderous. Carmen has proved less adept at exploring the emotional conundrums of post-adolescence than at capturing teenage insouciance.

His last album took an assured, almost assertive pose, substituting an ill-fitting cynical voice of experience for one of innocence. "I think I found myself," he concluded. Apparently he hasn't, for *Change of Heart* favors insincerity over introspection. "Haven't We Come a Long Way" and the title cut are slick but stiff routines, while "End of the World" and the string-smothered "Heaven Can Wait" are nodding-out demos for Barry Manilow. Add a *Pet Sounds* knock-off and a version of "Hey Deanie" that inexplicably pales next to Shaun Cassidy's, and the shallowness of this effort becomes obvious. Carmen has come



Eric Carmen: *insincere?*

up with only six new songs, and the album is less than 30 minutes long.

Carmen partially redeems himself on the final song, "Desperate Fools." Fronting a string and harmonica backdrop befitting a '40s Western, Carmen confesses to becoming "what they want me to be"—resolve has become resignation. When he starts over, a little less attention to form and a lot more feeling will serve him well.

(Rick Cohen)

PETER C. JOHNSON

A&M (SP-4723)

Leaking electricity turns air to ozone, ozone makes you giddy, and there must have been quite a few ozone molecules drifting through Peter C. Johnson's apartment while he was recording his debut album there. Just like any other Boston folkie, Johnson has a three-chord vocabulary, reveres Van Morrison and reggae, and cultivates a sense of the absurd. Unlike any other folkie, Johnson chose to record most of his album in a home studio he taught himself to use. Things are doubtless thoroughly absurd at 3:30 a.m. as synthe-drums blip out rhythms and VU meters bounce, and that peculiar electro-goofy, suspended-time ambiance suffuses *Peter C. Johnson*.

Johnson recorded some catchy, uptempo tunes—the reggae-style "All the Good Ones Are Taken," the Youngbloods-ish "Georgio's Dilemma" and the smooth chorale "Get

Right-Back on a Horse That Throws You"—at outside studios, proving he'd be a good singer/songwriter under normal circumstances (but still a little strange—he overdubs crickets on "Horse"). The real piquancy of this lp, though, comes through on songs like the bouncy "Happy in Our Own World" and in "Snowblind," as phasers phase, Johnson incants "Elevator/I'm an aviator," and suddenly clarinets in thirds come tooting behind him. It's silly, odd, unprofessional—and endearingly human.

(Jon Pareles)

MONTREUX CONCERT

Don Pullen
Atlantic (SD 8802)

Don Pullen's pianistic career has led him from R&B to the outposts of avant-garde jazz, and his playing in this 1977 concert set covered a lot of territory. "Richard's Tune," which fills one side, was composed by Pullen's one-time teacher, Muhal Richard Abrams, founder of Chicago's AACM. Pullen plays the tune unaccompanied in various transformations, then is joined by bassist Jeff Berlin and drummer Steve Jordan. They allow him to stray further from the tune's structure, until the piano and rhythm section are two opposing forces. "Dialogue Between Malcolm and Betty" is a dramatic re-enactment of a conversation between Malcolm X and Betty Shabazz. Pullen's introductory solo alternates male and female roles; when the rhythm section enters (augmented by two percussionists), it lays down a Latin groove. Both selections are filled with melody so that Pullen's more frenetic keyboard assaults are never jarring.

(Mitchell Feldman)

LIVE DREAM

Cris Williamson
Olivia (D-3)

Live Dream is so humble that it seems at first like just another touchy-feely scam. Not so. Cris Williamson's live performances are suffused with a genuine sensitivity beyond the reach of most mainstream balladeers. As "If I Live (I'll Be Great)" shows, her forte is inspirational folk that grapples with mundane travail. Her ability to make clichés work is striking; it's rare that someone can sing "The truth will set you free" or overindulge in flight metaphors without sounding like a fraud or a simpleton.

Though her concerns are implicitly feminist, there's no reason Williamson's healing kindness can't speak to anyone who's not too cool for sentiment. Such an approach (not to mention the amateurish production) is admittedly better suited to those bygone golden '60s. But if and when America starts to warm up again, we're going to need people like Cris Williamson to help get our feelings back into shape.

(Jon Young)

Rawdaddy, 1978