

Back To The CD Pile



Eccentric eclectic dub reggae pioneer **Lee "Scratch" Perry**, 76, who produced a generation of Jamaica's finest including Bob Marley, is back with *Master Piece* (MVD) wherein "The Mad Professor," as he's known, gets free rein to indulge his inner soundtrack dreams. That means the title-track, for instance, rumbles, rants, burps, pitches forward and backward in an adventurous bumpy journey of intrigue so alluring, the listener gets caught up in the psychedelic miasma of stoned-out sound effects. Ditto for the 11:45 "Medusa Dub." Perry plays the studio like an instrument and without an artist to have to conform to, he can be his wild and free self.

Paul Simon, at 71, is at the top of his game. His voice is just as strong, his new songs are just as poignant, and his guitar playing is still the overlooked ace up his sleeve. It's all on display in the three-disc *Live In New York City*, a June 6, 2011 stunner of a show at Webster Hall.

"When I think back of all the crap I learned in high school," he sings, "it's a wonder I can think at all." It's been 39 years since he wrote that opening salvo

for "Kodachrome," and it sounds just as fresh and invigorating today, as does the reggae of "Mother And Child Reunion," the gospel of "Gone At Last" and the African *Graceland* material. The beautiful and profound compositions of his current *So Beautiful Or So What* are all instant classics and, as filtered in within a 90-minute, 20-song set, add a wistful element.

Backed by two guitars, drums, piano, sax, keyboards, bass, extra percussion and multi-instrumentalist Tony Cedras, Simon can fulfill his worldbeat aesthetic beautifully while remaining true to his folk roots, rock 'n' roll propensity, crazy-sweet pop croons and funky rhythm and blues. Cameroonian guitarist Vincent Nguini has been a mainstay of his bands, adding visual as well as aural drama (as does that poppin' bassist Bakithi Kumalo).

Waylon Jennings died in 2002 at 65. He was working on a new album at the time and now, because of the diligence and love of his band, it's out and it's like having him come back for one final encore. The voice is intact, maybe a little vulnerable around the edges, but the ideas are still rough-hewn, rebellious

and independent. *Goin' Down Rockin': The Last Recordings* (Saguaro Road) starts out with the title tune, a Tony Joe White duet that sets the tone. The 11 songs that follow are vintage Waylon, the country singer with the rock 'n' roll heart. Unlike his dear friend Johnny Cash, who sounded like he was ready for the grave on his last recording with Rick Rubin, Waylon, here, is still snarling. From "If My Harley Was Runnin'" to "Shakin' The Blues," he's still the thing that Nashville feared most: someone who refused to do it their way and was proven right by becoming one of the greatest of 'em all. He even addresses it on the fitting closer, "Wrong Road To Nashville." Welcome back, Waylon. (I only wish the title of this CD was *Goin' Down Rockin': The Second-To-Last Recordings*.)

Waylon had to go to 1970s Austin, Texas to find his voice. Austin has since gone on to become one of the premier music capitals in America. Just ask singer-songwriter **Michael Fracasso** who moved there in 1990. His *Saint Monday* (Little Fuji) is a badass rock, folk and country statement that combines literate compositions, hellfire attitude, sterling musicianship and some unforgettable melodies. Funny thing, that town's so rich in talent, he's more the norm there than the exception. But in listening over and over to *Saint Monday*, one gets the feeling he's learned his lessons well. From a Nick Lowe, Marshall Crenshaw, Roy Orbison base, Fracasso juxtaposes humor and anger with verve and resolve. He has the balls to cover John Lennon's "Working Class Hero" with the proper venom yet the smarts not to sing John's line "if you want to be a hero, well just follow me." And he'll even look for love in his neighbor's trees when it comes to the object of his affection, "Eloise." In song after song, Fracasso's high ethereal tenor cracks in the all right places.