

SOULSIDES

Chris Wells springs into soul.



Feeling like Monty Burns, rubbing my hands together and breathing, 'Eggggssellent!', as some top stuff has been arriving this month. [Thankfully, 'cause I'd been getting a little worried.]

Let's start with **China Moses** – daughter of Dee Dee Bridgewater, in case you'd forgotten – whose new set, *Nightintales*, is something of a corker. Recorded in London, this one finds Ms. Moses sitting right there between soul and jazz, her vocal delivery of the highest, most expressive class at all times. The first three tracks are just great: the bouncing, upright bass- and piano-propelled *Running*, the slinky, jazzy slider *Put It On The Line*, and the neo-soul-jazz of *Disconnected*, the latter maybe my fave track on the whole thing. OK, not so struck on the stagey-ballad *Ticking Boxes*, but the smoky, late-night-club smoulder of *Whatever* is superb, *Hungover* is all tease and sass from China – quite *brilliantly* sung, actually – and the wind-up track, *Breaking Point*, filled with brooding, mid-tempo desperation. A fine body of work.

1968: *Love Power* completes **Rasheed Ali**'s trilogy of albums recalling his younger days, this time, as the title indicates, finding the politically and socially aware commentator exploring more emotional matters. No that it's any less groovy than *Black Power* and *Soul Power* – it's just more relaxed and bathing in Californian sunshine. Opening with a trio of cool and hooky mid-tempo tunes – the last of which, *Once Upon A Time*, features some EW&F background voices and an early Cameo feel about the guitar/keyboard riffs – Rasheed then gets seriously Maurice White on *Holiday*, slows it down for a sad tale of domestic abuse on *Hypnotized*, comes on a little Frankie Bev and Maze on *Forever*, more like War on *Surrounded By Your Love* and *Love Light*, and then with a touch of down-beat Kleer on *Take My Body*. A pair of ballads right at the end are hypnotic, too. Nineteen tracks long and teeming with riffs, runs, grooves and reflections, it rounds out the picture of a teenage life in late sixties LA. A remarkable three-album effort from a completely independent musician.

Look out for a new EP from **Nicole Willis**, *Big Fantasy [For Me]/ Tear It Down*, from March 31, where she teams up with longtime collaborator Jimi Tenor and renowned electric bassist Jonathan Maron - he played the bassline on Maxwell's classic *Ascension [Don't Ever Wonder]* -

for some funky, good times. Released on Nicole's own Persephone Records imprint, both cuts feel like late seventies/early eighties New York club tunes, Nicole adding some real edge to the vocal while Maron bubbles and percolates away on the bass. Good stuff.

Depends what your views on country, blues, gospel and roots music in general are as to whether or not you'll enjoy **Valerie June**'s *The Order Of Time*. If you do like some slide, acoustic, fiddle and handclaps with your soul, then her occasionally Badu-ish, always southern vocal twang is sure to eat its way into your brain across the dozen songs here, most of which

are deceptively simple in structure, yet often subtle and intriguing blends of sound. The driving *Shakedown*, for example is all three of gospel, blues and country at once. The delicate, ethereal *Astral Plane* is almost folksy. *Slip Slide On By* is a southern country-soul tune, set at waltz tempo. The closing cut, *Got Soul*, is pretty damn near a late sixties Stax record. It's an acquired taste, for sure, and a million, trillion miles away from most of the other music featured in this column, but it is compelling, atmospheric stuff. If it's your thing.

Toronto's **Tanika Charles** – see *20 Questions* this month, page 12 – has a tremendous debut package on Record Kicks coming April 7. *Soul Run* has an authentic mid-sixties sound, courtesy several producers, including Slakah The Beatchild, but the real star of the show is Ms Tanika herself, whose personality, vocal and lyrics positively glow throughout the set. The funky title tune talks about how she left her man, stole his car and ran away to fame and fortune. And that's only the beginning. The baritone sax and tambourine on the no-nonsense *Two Steps* make it sound like a Motown hit. Loving the rhythmic skid, horns and vocal hook of *Sweet Memories*, the straight-up dirty Winehouse talk on *More Than A Man*, and she sounds convincingly like Betty Wright on the shuffling *Endless Chain*. Tanika's hot and gritty on the ballads too: *Heavy* is southern and bluesy, whilst final song, *Darkness And The Dawn*, which she handled all by herself, feels personal and full of anguish. Most impressive.

Not sure what to make of **Thundercat**'s *Drunk*. So many tracks! And so many short ones! Why doesn't he just get the fuck on with it and, instead of 23 different ideas, give us, maybe, a dozen good 'uns? OK, I'm half messing about: the guy is a considerable talent as a bassman. His voice is not all that, however – kinda like George Duke's pleasantly light instrument. I did enjoy *Show You The Way*, a nice little mid-tempo tune featuring Kenny Loggins and Michael McDonald on joint lead vocals. *Them Changes* is OK, too: another in the Clarke-Duke Project style. But,

