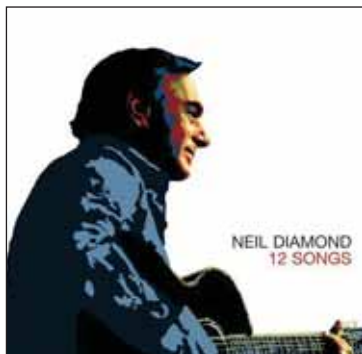


CD Reviews



Neil Diamond
"12 Songs"
 Columbia Records

All hail Rick Rubin, producer extraordinaire and lord of the music career resurrection.

He first worked his magic with Johnny Cash on his "American Recordings" series, where the third volume's cover of "Solitary Man" foreshadowed Rubin's eventual team up with the solitary man himself, Neil Diamond.

The result of the Rubin and Diamond collaboration is "12 Songs."

Before discussing his new album, it's important to remember just how talented Diamond is, even beyond his inspired wardrobe choices of shirts with flashy rhinestones and shiny things.

He was a songwriter in Tin Pan Alley in the '60s before going on to release numerous chart-topping hits like the aforementioned "Solitary Man," "Cherry Cherry," "Cracklin' Rosie" and "Song Sung Blue" to name a few. He's one of the highest-grossing touring musicians and his album sales are nothing to laugh at, with a bunch of gold and platinum records.

But as the years went by, Diamond became less relevant as many aging singers do. "12 Songs" changes everything.

Diamond returns to his roots with these 12-plus songs (the album includes two bonus tracks, one of which is an alternate version of "Delirious Love" with former Beach Boy Brian Wilson).

"Save Me a Saturday Night" is one of the singer's finest love songs, which leads into "Delirious Love," which would have fit perfectly into Diamond's '60s catalogue — poppy, catchy and rife with delicious chord changes.

The alternate version starts off the same way, but separates itself when Wilson's ethereal vocals chime in for a grander, deeper sound.

"12 Songs" is really a one-musician show, with Diamond and his guitar taking center stage. The album is reminiscent of Bruce Springsteen's "Nebraska" — it's very personal and stripped-down.

You might debate Diamond's talent or knack for songwriting, but there is no doubt whatsoever of the quality of "12 Songs," a stunning and brilliant comeback if there ever was one.

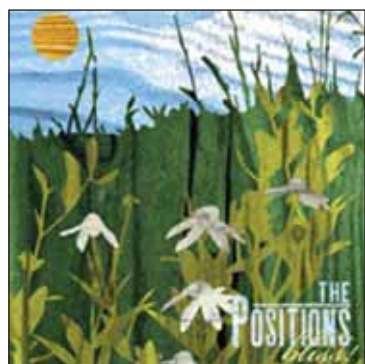
This album shows that a Diamond is, in fact, forever.

Scott Rosenberg



AP file photo

Don't call it a comeback. Singer-songwriter legend Neil Diamond returns with "12 Songs," his finest album in years, with the help of veteran producer Rick Rubin.



The Positions
"Bliss!"
 Lazyline Records

The Washington music scene always seems to be epitomized by two musicians: Chuck Brown and Fugazi.

But there is more to D.C. music than just Go Go and hardcore, and if there is any justice in the world, "The Positions" will make the beginning of a local indie-pop revival.

On its latest album, "Bliss!" The Positions perpetuate just that — bliss. With the help of a brilliant horn section (trombone, trumpet and flugelhorn), the band builds up an impressive wall of sound that would make Phil Spector proud.

Created from the ashes of another D.C. band, Barcelona, The Positions features two vocalists, Nicole Stoops and Ivan Ramiscal, who play off very well against each other. Neither really takes center

stage here, and instead work in tandem, so you'll have the female lead on the bubbly "Back To Me" and the male lead on horn-riffic "It's Okay It's Alright."

Hopefully, The Positions will mark the beginning of a new music scene for the indie kids to dance to.

Scott Rosenberg



Ozzy Osbourne
"Under Cover"
 Epic Records

Remember a couple of years ago when all-American old guy Pat Boone put out an album of metal covers? Yeah, you tried to forget it too, huh?

Well, now the Prince of frickin' Darkness is trying his hand at crossing over to different genres, and his is a much more memorable effort.

True, on every song on "Un-

der Cover" Ozzy Osbourne sounds like Ozzy Osbourne, but it's quite intriguing and sometimes amusing to hear his distinctive wail tackle hits like Eric Burdon's "Good Times" and Buffalo Springfield's "For What It's Worth."

He also pays a little tribute to The Beatles, with a subdued version of "In My Life" and a faithful version of John Lennon's "Woman" and "Working Class Hero."

While one might think the hard-rock tracks would be the better numbers — due to his being down with the darkness and all — they're a mixed bag. King Crimson's "21st Century Schizoid Man" and Cream's "Sunshine of Your Love" are total misses, but his down-and-dirty cover of Mountain's "Mississippi Queen," with raucous guitars courtesy of ex-Alice in Chains axe man Jerry Cantrell, is a swampy masterpiece.

The one tune you'd think Osbourne would be best suited for, the Rolling Stones' "Sympathy for the Devil," actually comes off a bit tame. The kookiness of the original is still there, but it is definitely a few pentagrams short of being pure evil.

At the end of it, Ozzy proclaims he's the devil, too.

Just the fuzzy, funny, reality-dad kind.

Brian Truitt



Traffic
"The Last Great Traffic Jam"
 Epic Records

"The Last Great Traffic Jam" is a recording from a 1994 reunion tour of the influential progressive rock band Traffic. And if there's one thing clear here, it's that even though these are aging rock stars, they can still jam.

This collection, which has two discs of music with DVD specials on the back of one of the discs, compiles many of the band's hits, from "The Low Spark of High Heeled Boys" to "Dear Mr. Fantasy" to "John Barleycorn (Must Die)," as well as rockin' version of "Gimme Some Lovin'."

The DVD includes all 11 tracks enhanced for your listening pleasure, as well as interviews with Steve Winwood and Jim Capaldi and rare photos and archival footage.

Scott Rosenberg