

And then there was music. . .

By Michael Giltz

It was a poor year for movies, but a great one for music. Excellent releases came from all areas of music — pop, country, jazz, Broadway, soul and especially rap. This was the year that nascent genre of rock came into its own.

Previously, rap was lyrically concerned with boasts about sexual prowess and bragging about who was the best rapper. Like heavy metal, it also seemed to be dominated by misogynist, racist and homophobic songs and artists.

All that changed in 1989. The militancy of Public Enemy was replaced with a rush of artists that capitalized on innovative sampling to spread a message of positivity. Excellent albums were released by the Jungle Brothers, Kool Moe Dee, the Beastie Boys and De La Soul.

Rap also influenced Neneh Cherry and Soul II Soul, a dance/soul outfit that had tremendous success with its debut album and the great singles "Keep On Movin'" and "Back To Life." The mood of consciousness-raising even spread to mainstream artists like Janet Jackson and the Neville Brothers.

The following are 10 of the best albums of '89 — a difficult choice since the 10 runners-up would make an excellent list in a less-fruitful year. They are listed in order of preference, but the distinction is a minor one. If anything here piques your interest, it is definitely worth seeking



out. That's the whole point of Top Ten lists anyway.

k.d. lang/*Absolute Torch and Twang* — This is the third and best album yet from country artist Lang.

She once claimed to be the reincarnation of Patsy Cline, and anyone who has heard her sing would be hard pressed to disagree. The album mixes terrific originals with achingly good cover versions of classic tunes, proving that Lang will be around for a long time to come.

De La Soul/*3 Feet High and Rising* — What makes these rappers so exciting is their furious mix of samples taken from Steely Dan, French language

tapes and everything in between. They change beats and rhythms at a speed that makes even the MTV generation's head spin. It's all topped with witty, incisive lyrics and a silly game show concept that frames the songs. Very fun.

The Pogues/*Peace and Love* — These Irish rockers are a drunken mix of the Clash and the Chieftains and they just keep getting better. Lead singer Shane MacGowan is still the focal point, but a greater number of the lads join in on writing and vocal duties. Traditional Irish ballads stand side by side with political tirades and alcohol-soaked reveries. World-class music.

Mandy Patinkin/*Mandy Patinkin* — Patinkin is a Broadway star who has appeared in numerous musicals, including

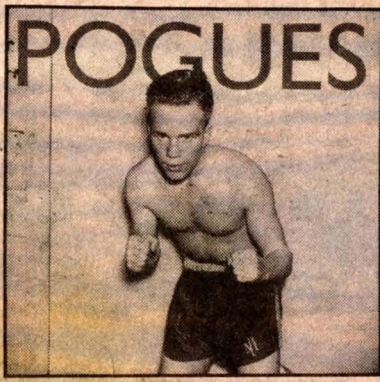
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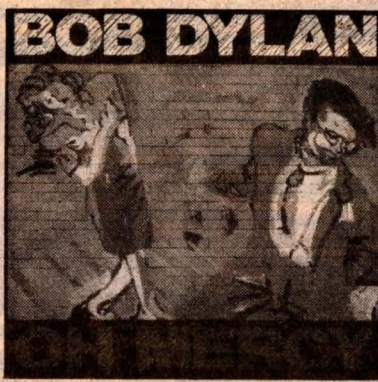
the lead in Stephen Sondheim's *Sunday In The Park With George*. He's a prodigious talent and this collection of show tunes and standards is the best of its kind since Barbra Streisand's *The Broadway Album*. Patinkin rips into songs like "Pennies From Heaven" and "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" with overwhelming intensity. Only once, on "Me and My Shadow," does he seem overwrought. The rest is sheer greatness.

Chris Isaak/Heart Shaped World — He looks like James Dean and sings like a cross between Elvis Presley and Roy Orbison. Yes, he's that good, and this is his third excellent album of clean, pre-



cise pop songs. Why Isaak isn't a major star is one of the great mysteries of the '80s.

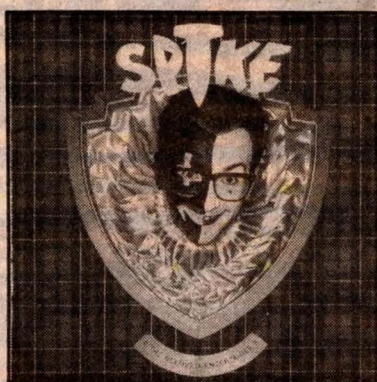
Bob Dylan/Oh Mercy — Dylan has been very consistent during the last decade. Whenever he wrote his own songs, the results were terrific. The last time that happened was *Empire Burlesque*, a good set of tunes marred by overproduction. Before that was the exceptional *Infidels*. After a mish-mash of live albums and ragged covers of other people's songs comes another great album. It's aided greatly by the marvelous touches of producer Daniel Lanois. "Most of the Time" and "Political World" rank with his very best and the rest are almost



as good.

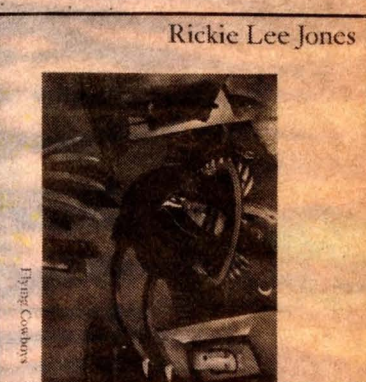
Rickie Lee Jones / Flying Cowboys — She's slow, but the wait is worth it. These songs are more open and emotional than those found on *The Magazine* and producer Walter Becker of Steely Dan has framed them in some of the most propulsive and jazzy settings Jones has enjoyed yet. That quirky, marvelous voice is also in great shape. Jones sounds relaxed and playful and her confidence shines through.

Elvis Costello/Spike — The best song Costello has recorded in a while is his duet with Paul McCartney, "You Want Her Too." That's on Paul's album, but *Spike* is no slouch either. It is filled with



sharp, biting songs and one of the nastiest attacks on Margaret Thatcher (or anyone) ever recorded. Considering the hate she inspires among liberal British artists, that is saying quite a lot. *Spike* proves again that Costello is one of the best lyricists around.

Philip Glass/1000 Airplanes On The Roof — Yet another piece from the prolific composer. Best known for his operas, the side projects of Glass can occasionally be just rehashes of previous themes, such as his flaccid score for *Powaqatsi*. But this chamber opera stands quite firmly on its own by spicing up his familiar, repetitive style with more choral music than Glass has used before. Ominous and involv-



ing.

Lou Reed/New York — The best solo album yet from the former head of the Velvet Underground. With two guitars, drums, bass and a clutch of great songs, Reed takes an angry, topical look at the world around him. Bracingly good, *New York* actually lives up to its title.

The very noteworthy runners-up are *Anything Goes*/ New studio recording conducted by John McGlinn, *Beastie Boys/Paul's Boutique*, *Various Artists/Brazil Classics Volume I and II*, *Frank Morgan/Mood Indigo*, *The Neville Brothers/Yellow Moon*, *The Pixies/Doolittle*, *Soul II Soul/Keep On Movin'*, *XTC/Oranges and Lemons* and *Neil Young/Freedom*.