SADE
"Diamond Life" (Portrait)

From promising young fashion designer to singing sensation in Britain and now America, Sade has made it — her first hit album in America is titled "Diamond Life."

Sade was born Helen Folasade Adu in a Nigerian village 50 miles from Lagos. She became a fan of American jazz, blues and soul music.

And so we have this multi-faceted effort from Sade, which includes these hit singles: "Your Love Is King," a hit in the U.K., the already familiar "Hang On To Your Love" and "Smooth Operator."

"Smooth Operator" is a recording as smooth as its title. Slick R&B vocal harmonies coupled with jazzy phrasing and tight instrumentation should make this track a big hit with lovers of contemporary music.

Equally as smooth is Sade's remake of Timmy Thomas's 1972 hit "Why Can't We Live Together." Sade keeps it mellow and classy.

At your first listen to "When Am I Going To Make A Living," you will probably notice immediately the Motown influence — Marvin Gaye was one of her favorite singers. Yet you can hear all kinds of styles in this track — you can hear similarities to such artists as Culture Club, Johnny Bristol, numerous others.

Sade

Other cuts: "Frankie's First Affair," "Cherry Pie," "Sally," "I Will Be Your Friend."

RONALD SHANNON JACKSON AND THE DECODING SOCIETY
Decode Yourself (Island)

Have you heard either of Herbie Hancock's last two albums, "Future Shock" and "Sound System"? If you thought that stuff was wild, check this out.

Here comes the sixth album by 45-year-old Ronald Shannon Jackson, "Decode Yourself," a modern collage of sounds and rhythms based on elements from jazz, R&B, African music, techno-funk, and more.

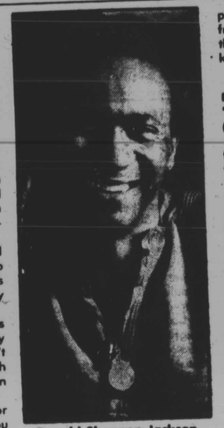
Techno-funk producer Bill Laswell, who produces hip-hop discs for Celluloid Records, has electrified the Decoding Society to the max on this one.

If you think Hancock's records are "nothing but disorderly noise," chanes are you won't like this album either, for both albums have quite a bit in common.

Even the album cover for "Decode Yourself" may leave you puzzled from the start. How does "snake minus balloon = nine"? You figure it out.

After a brief, high-speed high-tech version of Dizzy Gillespie's "Bebop," we get into "Decoding" and the album takes off with its pulsating electric bass, steady, pumping synthesized percussion, violin strings that weave in and out and all around in totally unpredictible patterns (or non-patterns, as the case may be), and unearthly-sounding guitar break.

Or feast your ears on "Software Shuffle," a John Lee Hooker-inspired boogie that often sounds like a Bill Haley And The Comets record played with computers; this stuff has much of the same qualities as records like Herbie Hancock's "Metal Beat" and other modern machine-made music recordings which are sometimes criticized as meaningless noise, although this stuff is obviously not aimed directly at the dance-music market.


Ronald Shannon Jackson

With this kind of record, musical categories and labels fail to give an accurate description of what comes out of the speakers when the needle hits the grooves. As long as there are those artists who continue to experiment, and are willing to stray from tried-and-true formulas in the search for true expression, I'll keep right on listening.

PARLIAMENT
"Parliament's Greatest Hits" (Casablanca)

Speaking of bands who stray from tried-and-true formulas, no funk band could copy the unbelievably crazy, witty and original musical style of George Clinton and his group Parliament. Nobody could write such weird, uncategorizable, humorous nonsense and fun like Clinton and his bunch.

That's why Parliament was one of my favorite artists. And now Casablanca has released ten of their past singles from the late seventies on this compilation album. Of course, there was no reason for me to buy this album; I have every Parliament album and single since the "Osmium" LP already.

The album starts with the first song I ever heard from Parliament, "Up For The Down Stroke." The same edited version that appeared on the single appears here. If you remember this one, then you were a real Parliament fan.

You also get the edited version of one of their two biggest chart hits, "Flash Light" (dance, Sir Nose!).

"Give Up The Funk (Tear The Roof Off The Sucker)" and "Bop Gun (Endangered Species)" are also included (get the "Funkentelechy Vs. The Placebo Syndrome" album if you want to know what a Bop Gun is). I notice that on these two cuts they've decided to give us the first four minutes or so of the original full-length versions, rather than the edited versions that appeared on the singles.

As would be expected, the song with the long sub-title is here: "Aqua Boogie (A Psychoalphadiscobetabioaquadoloop)." I told you these songs were crazy.

Rounding out the package is "Chocolate City," "P. Funk (Wants To Get Funked Up)" (edited version), "Mothership Connection (Star Child)" (edited version) and "Theme From The Black Hole."

Of course, you cannot fit every Parliament single on a single LP. Singles that were left out include "Funkentelechy," "Rumpofsteelskin," "Dr. Funkenstein," "Agony Of DeFeet," "Fantasy Is Reality," "Party People," and their first hit under the name The Parliaments, "(I Wanna) Testify." I know my Parliament.

This is a worthwhile collection for P. Funkers who don't have these singles.

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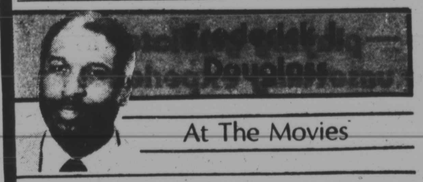


Berry Gordy's "The Last Dragon" — Surefire Hit Movie and LP

"The Late Dragon," a movie produced by Motown czar Berry Gordy, is a fun flick that is guaranteed to gross mucho dinero at box offices nationwide because of the unique way it combines martial arts, video and contemporary music by major stars, including an on screen performance of the chart climbing tune "Rhythm of the Nighe" by DeBarge.

The tale focuses upon a young karate wizard named Leroy Green and his efforts to achieve total mastery of himself and the martial arts. Having studied karate and kung fu for years with one of the greatest teachers alive, he becomes so proficient at catching flying arrows with his bare hands, and speeding bullets with his teeth plus wielding ferocious karate chops that he is known on the streets of New York as Bruce Leroy. His master tells him that there is nothing else that he can teach him and that his apprenticeship is over. His master further explains to Leroy that he has approached the level of knowledge that transcends being a dragon and that when he reaches the final level of achievement, his body will "glow."

Leroy remains unsure of himself and feels that he still needs a teacher, so his master sends him in search of Sum Dum Goy, an ancient sage who supposedly can help him achieve the final hurdle to total self mastery. Pursuing his goal relentlessly, Bruce seeks the fabled wise man and finds that there are still many obstacles that stand in his way.

First and foremost; there is Sho'nuff, a long, lanky and mean dude who has proclaimed himself to be the meanest fighter in all of Harlem. Infuriated by the fact that many people on the streets refer to Bruce Leroy as the inheritor of the karate skills of Bruce Lee, Sho'nuff becomes obsessed with meeting him in mortal combat. Sho'nuff goes to Leroy's Karate school and challenges him in front of his students, but the protagonist of the story refuses to fight him. Fearing that one of his students will be injured, Leroy submits to Sho'nuff's demands that he perform an act that goes beyond obeisance by kneeling and kissing his shoes.

This scene is difficult to handle, but perhaps it is understandable because at this stage of the game, Leroy fears Sho'nuff and, therefore, regards him as holding a high level of mastery. Maybe Leroy understood what he was doing, but his students and his family have a hard time figuring out where the young man is coming from. In fact, the members of his family think that he is crazy and his little brother does not even want to be associated with Leroy whom he regards as "chicken" and "weird."

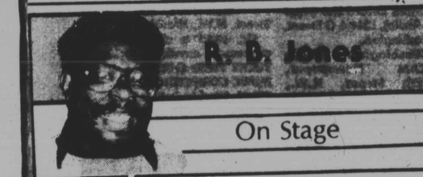
The plot thickens when Leroy meets Laura Charles who is played by Vanity, formerly the leader of Vanity 6. He rescues her from a group of thugs representing a man named Eddie Arkadian who wants to coerce her to play a ghastly video by his female protege. You guessed it. Sparks fly and the two fall in love.

Laura Charles (Vanity), in "The Last Dragon"

Actually, "The Last Dragon" is one of those movies where you always know what is going to happen next. But the movie is fun and you will find yourself enjoying it because of the beat of the songs, the slick photography and seeing good triumph over evil. Karate fans will enjoy the battles that come near the end of the movie and will undoubtedly like the battle between Leroy and Sho'nuff which has echoes of the battle between Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader in "Star Wars."

About the Music: "Upset Stomach" by Stevie Wonder, "Inside You" by Willie Hutch and The Temptations and "Star" by Alfie are first rate tunes that will definitely do well on the charts. "7th Heaven" by Vanity and "Peeping Tom" by Rockwell will also probably do well because of the current popularity of these two performers. I'm certain that the sound track from "The Last Dragon will become as popular as the album of music from Eddie Murphy's hit "Beverly Hills Cop."

The movie is rated PG-13 because of the language used by Sho'nuff, but I think you should take your children to see it because they will enjoy the flick immensely. The day I viewed the movie at Reisterstown Plaza, there was mixed audience of adults, teenagers and pre-teens. Everybody enjoyed the movie and they even cheered at the end. Besides, if your children ride the bus to school or walk around downtown Baltimore, they have definitely heard much stronger language.



Social Amnesia at Theater Project through April 7

"If one wants light, frothy dinner," theater style entertainment then "Social Amnesia is the current production at the Theater Project is not for you. On the other hand, if you want to see slides, computer graphics, sound effects, music and acting couched in a theater piece that reveals the neglected aspects of American social development then "Social Amnesia" is the play to see.

It is a play that uses visual images to startling and frequently frightening effect. The style of the play is the perfect allegory of the history of the United States which this play examines with a radical perspective and a keen eye to the grand developments and the individual tragedies of modern America and the way it became what it is.

A native American cigar store Indian and a bag woman sleeping over a heat vent on the street watch the hustle and bustle of yuppies rushing along a city street to work and later to quick bites of dinner and entertainment. The Indian comes to life as slides of foliage and mountains, representing the pristine condition of this continent before the coming of the European, flash behind him.

He warns of the approach of Columbus as slides with quotes flash on the back wall and a narrator tells of Columbus' atrocities against the Arawak Indians. They were completely wiped out in a few years; there were 100,000 of them when Columbus arrived.

The production is not a political treatise nor is it propaganda. It is an evening of thought provoking theater that takes the viewer on a tour of the forgotten alleyways of America's history and then gives the viewer cause to think about the alienating aspects of work, computer use and the seeming indifference to suffering that is pervasive in this country, at least among the elites of society.

The group performing the play, The Impossible Theater is a Baltimore based group which in conjunction with playwright - director John Schneider of Theater X or Milwaukee created the piece. Their sources of inspiration for the work were **A People's History of the United States** by Howard Zinn and **Social Amnesia** by Russell Jacoby. Also quoted in the play are Black Elk, Jack London, Helen Keller, John dos Passos, Bertoit Brecht and the members of the company.

"Social Amnesia" is a play that any lover of graphics and visual presentation in theater must see. It is stunning.

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