

RECORD COLLECTOR

SERIOUS ABOUT MUSIC

AUGUST 2008 No 352 £3.80

Soul[★] Collector

By Lois Wilson

When **DIANA ROSS** left The Supremes in 1969, Berry Gordy's money was on her to make it. But it was the remaining Supremes (Mary Wilson and Cindy Birdsong) who, after recruiting Jean Terrell in her place, had the initial success. Their next single, *Up The Ladder To The Roof*, hit both the US and UK Top 10. Ms Ross, meanwhile, found herself just scraping the US Top 20 and UK Top 40 with her debut single, the 1970 Ashford & Simpson-penned *Reach Out & Touch (Somebody's Hand)*. She hit No 1 with her next release, *Ain't No Mountain High Enough*, but Ashford & Simpson's copy book had been blotted – they produced Ross' eponymous debut solo LP, but its follow up fell to Deke Richards and Hal Davis to oversee.

Richards had previously worked with The Supremes on their *Funny Girl* and *Love Child* albums, and on Ross' sophomore solo outing *Everything Is Everything* (★★★★★ **Hip-O Select**); he coaxes out a very special set. The Gene Page-arranged *I'm Still Waiting* is the perfect vehicle for Ross' coquettish nasal delivery, and hit No 1 in the UK. Elsewhere on the album she reveals her mastery at interpretation, her take on The Beatles' *Come Together* (The Supremes would record their own reading on the same year's *New Ways But Love Stays* album) is a superb slice of psychedelic soul, a version of Aretha Franklin's *I Love You (Call Me)* shows Diana at her most seductive, while on cuts such as *My Place* and *Everything Is Everything* she recalls the transcendental lightness and sweetness of Syreeta.

This month sees the release of two records from **SOLOMON BURKE**, the self-styled king of rock'n'soul. The first, *This Is It* (★★★★★ **Shout!**), takes us back to the first time he stepped into a recording studio for Bess Merman's Apollo Records in New York in 1955. A

God-loving hustler, Burke had started preaching aged seven, sang on the radio aged 12, and was signed to the Apollo label by 15. The results, gathered here, are a real joy. It seems that Burke, who was raised by his grandma in Philadelphia's Bottom district, was born to do this – that is sing sincerely from the heart. His baritone voice is wonderfully soulful, already rich and textured, while his songs, many self-penned are (aside from his writing debut *Christmas Presents*) wise beyond his tender years. While his influences are worn on his sleeve – Nappy Brown, Brook Benton, Johnny Ace, Chuck Willis – and his pioneering mix of gospel and country still many years off, songs such as *I'm All Alone* and *I'm In Love*, nevertheless, marked Burke as a raw talent.

Jump forward 53 years and *Like A Fire* (★★★★★ **Shout Factory**), Burke's follow up to 2006's country outing *Nashville*, reveals the baritone still firmly intact. The winning formula behind 2002's sublime comeback *Don't Give Up On Me*, where his songs were penned in tribute by his musician fans, is repeated. Eric Clapton contributes two, the title cut and the Burke co-write *Thank You*. Ben Harper, Jesse Harris and Keb' Mo' also feature on the writing credits. While there are some nice moments to savour, herein lies the problem: ultimately Burke's own songwriting skill eclipses that of those who have contributed.

Ronald, Rudolph and O'Kelly Isley, aka **THE ISLEY BROTHERS**, 1973 outing *3+3* is arguably one of their finest. The first to officially acknowledge younger brothers Ernie (guitar) and Marvin (bass), and brother-in-law Chris Jasper (keyboards) in the line-up (hence the title's "4+3"), it's a delicious blend of the brothers' slick but emotional soft soul, crafted through a career that took in recordings for RCA (Shout), Wand (Twist & Shout), Tamla Motown (This Old Heart Of Mine) and their own label T-Neck (It's Your Thing), and soaring guitar from the Hendrix-modelled Ernie, which gave their music its funky edge. There's much to enjoy here, and not just their



King Solomon: still the wisest man in soul business.

hits, including *That Lady*, an enthralling rewrite of 1964 single *Who's That Lady*, and their majestic take on Seals & Croft's *Summer Breeze*. See also the mellow, floaty *You Walk Your Way*, the uplifting take on The Doobie Brothers' *Listen To The Music* and the palpitating funk ballad, *What It Comes Down To*. The album is coupled with 1977's platinum-selling *Go For Your Guns* (★★★★★ **SPV**), a funk-meets-disco slab referencing Hendrix and Eddie Hazel with handclaps throughout. The black power salute, *The Pride*, is a highpoint (it also hit the R&B No 1 slot), as is the poignant *Footsteps In The Dark* (Pts 1 & 2) and the Funkadelic-esque bomb *Climbin' Up The Ladder* (Parts 1 & 2).

Also out this month is **JAMES**

HUNTER's fourth LP, *The Hard Way* (★★★★★ **Hear Music/Fantasy**), the follow up to 2006's *People Gonna Talk*. The singer/guitarist once melds the gospel tones of Sam Cooke with the R&B flamboyance of the Five Royales and T-Bone Walker. Allen Toussaint guests on the title track, *Til The End* and *Believe Me Baby*, but it's the delicious *Carina* and the pulsating *Don't Do Me No Favors* that steal the show. **ELI PAPERBOY REED & THE TRUE LOVES**, like Hunter, also look to soul's glorious past for inspiration. Their second LP, *Roll With You* (★★★★★ **Q Division**) stirs up rafter-raising gospel spirit with down-home dirt and spit, and a Wicked Pickett style sense of abandonment.