

The Pop Music Desk welcomes loyal readers to 1986 from down in the trenches of popular culture, where the hits just keep on coming. Orientation time, crew: Twenty years ago this month The Beatles ruled with their "art" LP, *Rubber Soul*, while Nancy Sinatra broke into the Hot 100 with that seminal feminist anthem, "These Boots Are Made for Walking." Astute theorists have credited Sinatra with setting drag queens on the road to Stonewall; the lady sounded like she could lob a brick at a cop, even under a pound and a half of hairspray.

Ten years back, gays were getting fashionable. Barry Manilow was topping the charts with "I Write the Songs," while Queen's *A Night at the Opera* was all the rage. For those who had followed Manilow since he'd begun doing arrangements for Bette Midler at the Continental Baths, and Freddy Mercury since he first married coy camp to Led Zeppelin-blazing rock, there were appreciative eyebrows raised.

Five years ago John Lennon's "Just Like Starting Over" was lodged at #1, a month after his assassination. Disco was mutating into aerobics music with "Celebration" by Kool & the Gang, and Adam Ant was trotting towards his brief blaze of glory in kiddies cowboy'n' injun-drag with *Kings of the Wild Frontier*.

Last year Madonna, Prince, Tina Turner and Bruce Springsteen were slugging it out at the top of the charts, while "Do They Know It's Christmas" monopolized the #1 spot in England — with Boy George and Marilyn crooning away in the pop-glory charity-chorus. Twelve months later we're facing down a slightly less inspired crew: the anonymous hacks in Mr. Mister, a revived Heart, the good ole grey beards in ZZ Top and the molten muzak of the *Miami Vice* soundtrack. Ah, progress.

So, if you're sitting around trying to decide if you should convert your entire collection to CDs (don't bother, yet), or how you ended up with four copies of the new Streisand, and three *Follies* soundtracks (time to expand your social circle), or how Midler's comedy album turned out to be *such* a dog (called losing touch with your truly trashy roots), the Top Ten makes matters look dire.

Don't despair. Help is at hand with this special Quick Fix List to revive your listening pleasure — and I'm not talking about *Promise*, Vol. 2 from Sade's dim-torch, easy-listening mambo-lounge. Here are some more exhilarating stabs at taking back the night.

1) *This Is the Sea*, The Waterboys (Island): Fans of Van Morrison, The Band and Bob Dylan in their glory days will find a kindred spirit in Mike Scott, who hits his stride here: angry with memory, lush with wonder, drunk with musical promise.

2) *Billie Holiday on Verve 1946-1959*, Billie Holiday (Polygram Classics): This Japanese import offers 10 discs featuring 134 songs from the last seven years in the life of possibly

TEN TIMELY WAYS TO TAKE BACK THE NIGHT

the greatest interpreter of pop songs ever to rasp and croon. Toss out those Linda Ronstadt packages. This is a motherlode.

3) *Visions of Excess*, The Golden Palominos (Cell): Punk/jazz drummer Anton Fier's fake band invites REM vocalist Michael Stipe in for four cuts, John Lydon for one, and guitarists Richard Thompson and Jody Harris on board for four others. The leading lights ignite on the postpop jams.

4) *He Is the Light*, Al Green (A&M): These homoerotic love songs to the Nazarene are as sexy and soulful as any Green has cut since he sacrificed the secular. He is back with producer Willie Mitchell and, well — Sam Cooke be praised, this is my kind of inspirational.

5) *White City*, Pete Townshend (Atlantic): A welcome and startling return to form from the founder of The Who, as he goes back home and finds something a lot richer and more acute than nostalgia. He and his music face up and come to life.

6) *A Diamond Hidden in the Mouth of a Corpse*, Various (Giorno Poetry Systems): Gay poet/songwriter and guerilla record producer John Giorno's latest anthology from the edge features Husker Du, David Johansen, Sonic Youth, Coil, Diamanda Galas and William S. Burroughs. \$8.98 will bring you these telegrams from the pop underground. Write: GPS, 222 Bowery, New York, NY 10012. Postage included in price.

7) *Songs to Learn and Sing*, Echo & The Bunnymen (Sire): A greatest hits package from four years of alluringly dreamy work — never more haunting or grand than on the one new cut, "Bring on the Dancing Horses." Catch up.

8) *Tim*, The Replacements (Sire): Tawny, raucous, poignant and falling-down drunk, the Minneapolis quartet make a credible showing on their major

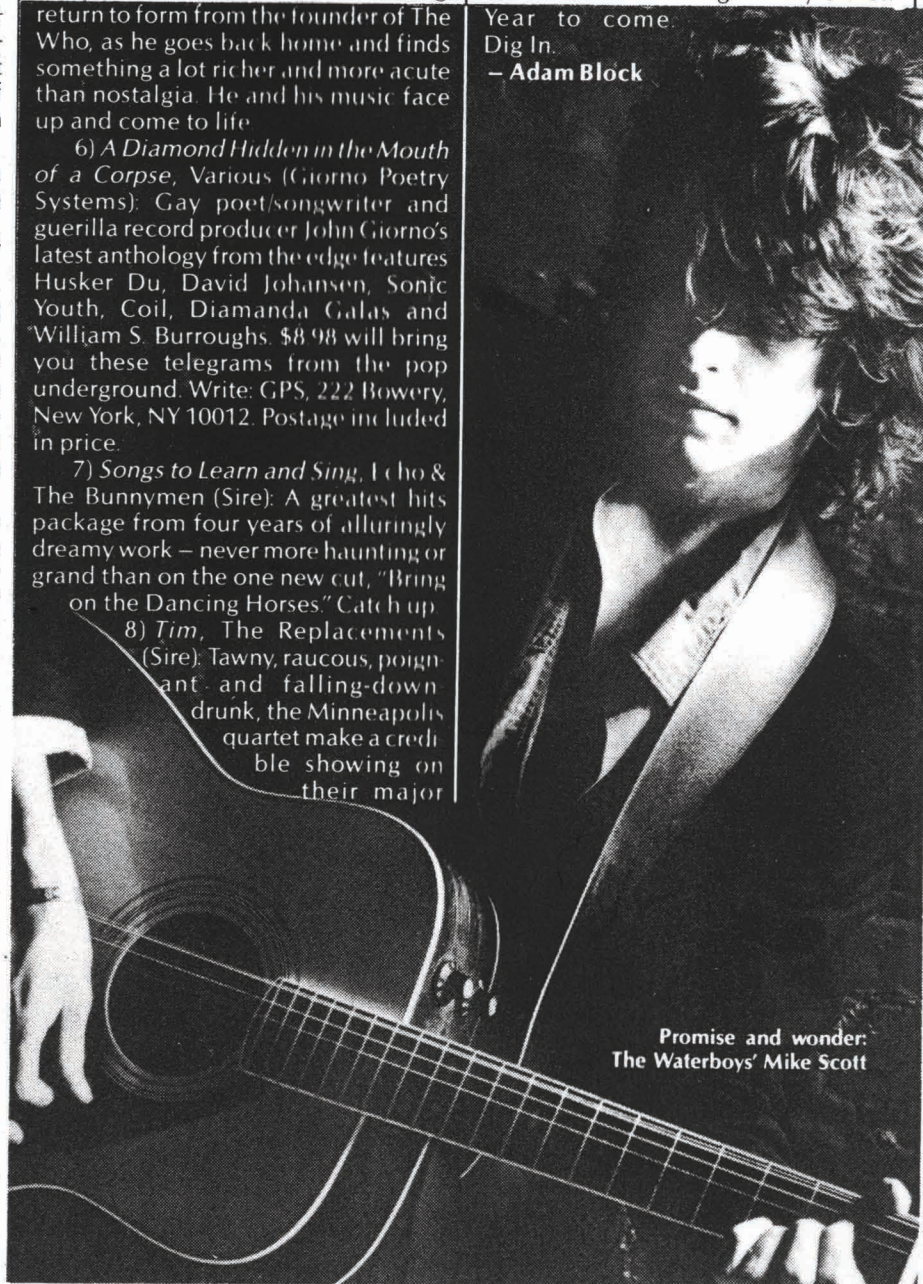
label debut. They don't have Husker Du's yawp, but this is a sturdy romp from the heroes of the burbs gone bad.

9) *Hounds of Love*, Kate Bush (EMI/America): The dreamy waif's odd-ball pop takes a winning turn toward the accessible, but she is still a moody enchantress. "Cloudbusting," her ode to Peter Reich's *Book of Dreams*, will send the lucky out in search of a copy.

10) *Atlantic Rhythm and Blues, 1947-1974* (Atlantic): You could save yourself a lot of worry just by shelling out the \$80 for this box of seven LPs, excellently annotated, that rank as Ahmet Ertegun's tribute to the company he built. From Professor Longhair through the Spinners, the collection is studded with gems. Atlantic's version of black music in America boasts landmarks that will stand through many a New Year to come.

Dig In.

— Adam Block



Promise and wonder:
The Waterboys' Mike Scott