

— On tracks —

Looking back at the year's best debut albums

By **RANDY BULLOCK**
Special to the DTH

Generally around the beginning of February, people cease looking back fondly at the year past and instead force themselves to grimly survey the upcoming year. With this in mind, a brief, functional retrospective of the best debut albums of 1987 may help the music fan in keeping an eye on the people who showed a great deal of potential last year. Some of these bands have been together for a while and some have EPs out, but all the

albums below are initial domestic releases by each artist. If these albums are any indication of what may come out in 1988, we should all say a silent prayer of thanks.

Soup Dragons — Hang Ten (Sire)

Ever since the Buzzcocks broke up, there has been a sickening gap in the face of pop music, leaving a bunch of moody, pale-faced razor blade cases to entertain us with their pessimistic maundering. Only recently has there been an upswing

in the fast, fun variety of pop band that forgets to take itself too seriously. The Soup Dragons are the best of this new breed. They play fast, tight pop songs with lots of Beach Boys-esque vocals/harmonies and lyrics that celebrate the less weighty things in life. It is derivative stuff to be sure, and sometimes uneven, but they do what they do with flair and give the music scene a much needed playful kick.

Dukes of Stratosphere — Psonic Psonspot (Geffen)

Lewis Carroll is alive and well and living in the grooves of this album. It starts out unusual and gets curiously and curiously as it goes along. *Psonic Psonspot* is a refreshing change from the brutal, cynical weirdness of bands in America. Instead of being twisted askew by a cruel and insensitive world, the Dukes (or XTC) are disturbed by a quiet bustling in their own hedge-rows. It is psychedelia that is safe for children. Musically, they are standing on the shoulders of giants, but the vision is great up there, and a package with this many ace psychedelic tunes should not be ignored.

Pianosaurus — Groovy Neighborhood (Rounder)

A funny thing happened to these guys on the way to the toystore — they came up with the bravest, simplest concept to hit the music world in some time. It is merely a plus that this album is as good as it is — any album relying solely on toys for instrumentation deserves to be on everyone's "legendary" list. The rockers propel you into manic toy air-guitar accompaniment and the ballads are so ingenious and poignant, you'll want to cry. With one foot in Toys-R-Us and the other in the heartland of America's roots rock rebel, these guys will plinkety-plunk their way into even the most jaded music lover's heart.

Big Dipper — Heavens (Homestead)

Too heavy to be a pop band, too tuneful to be anything else, these Bostonians submerge their psychedelic lyrics into a big, warm, fuzzy guitar sound and serve up a wonderfully mysterious world where men are men and women are trains. The Big Dips have great credentials, having played in various Boston

bands, (most notably the Volcano Suns) and they know that a stack of Marshalls alone won't make memorable music. They're loud and they're tough, but they write songs that could very well prove to be the thing that pushes Bon Jovi and Whitesnake back into the weenie farm they sprang from.

Andy White — Rave On (MCA)

This effort from Ireland's contribution to the folk revival sprang from oblivion and was subsequently ignored by nearly everyone. This is particularly unjust because, given proper promotion, it could have easily been one of those rare, worthwhile mainstream successes. The lyrics are the strong point throughout, with many memorable images and some passages bordering on poetry; the music is augmented guitar-oriented balladeering. He was hailed as the new Dylan, but aside from the cover art and a voice that inspires the same kind of flinching at first, he comes across as having a very distinctive style all his own.

Opal — Happy Nightmare, Baby (SST)

This is one of the most menacing collections of songs to ever bless vinyl. Opal mingles the pop ethic of the late Marc Bolan, hypnotic keyboards and their own style of impure blues to create a world where they quietly accept science fiction as their fact and musically lure you down a dirty alleyway just to beat you up. You'll love them for it. The first ever Cyberpunk album.

Balancing Act — Three Squares and a Roof (IRS)

If you have lived in the pop belt (from Hoboken to Athens) for any amount of time, you probably have already battled the uncontrollable urge to slam Don Dixon and Mitch Easter into a wall until they promise to stop playing midwife to every three minor chords and wants to make the Great American Pop Record. Well, this record is America. And it's pretty great. The pop on this record doesn't jangle so much as it twangs, with one tentative foot in the country and western tradition and the other grounded in folk. They harmonize beautifully and consistently deny expectations, instead of slavishly following the standards that are ruining pop music for our children.

Ladysmith Black Mambazo — Shaka Zulu (Warner Bros.)

OK, you heard them on Paul Simon's album. You saw them on the Tonight Show. You saw them on Saturday Night Live. Judging by the success of this album, however, most of you probably did not treat yourself to a large enough dose of the heavenly sounds created by this a cappella group. NO amount of hype could possibly do LBM justice. After countless years together, and as many albums (released only in South Africa), these guys have perfected their glorious harmonies. They create music in one of the oldest and purest forms, and they uplift in a way Western music never will. Do yourself a favor — recognize what these people are doing.

There it is: the albums that helped shape 1987 and the artists that will, with hope, shape the years to come. Stick this to your refrigerator for easy reference in the upcoming years.

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF "A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET"



Don't bury me...
I'm not dead!

WES CRAVEN'S

the Serpent and the Rainbow

KEITH BARISH PRESENTS A ROB COHEN/DAVID LADD PRODUCTION

"THE SERPENT AND THE RAINBOW" STARRING BILL PULLMAN · CATHY TYSON · ZAKES MOKAE · PAUL WINFIELD

SCREENPLAY BY RICHARD MAXWELL AND A.R. SIMOUN INSPIRED BY THE BOOK BY WADE DAVIS MUSIC BY BRAD FIEDEL PRODUCTION DESIGNER DAVID NICHOLS

EDITOR GLENN FARR EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS ROB COHEN AND KEITH BARISH PRODUCED BY DAVID LADD AND DOUG CLAYBOURNE

R RESTRICTED
UNDER 17 REQUIRES ACCOMPANYING PARENT OR ADULT GUARDIAN

DIRECTED BY WES CRAVEN

DOLBY STEREO A UNIVERSAL RELEASE

OPENS FEBRUARY 5TH.

La Residence



Individual Wine Tastings in the bar

January: What is Oak?

Three California Chardonnays

February:

Sherries by Lustau

March:

Sauvignon Blanc

California, Loire, Graves

Wines notes by Mark Yonce and Bill Neal

Tastings nightly without reservations

967-2506
220. W. Rosemary St.
Chapel Hill