

| ROCK |

Various Artists — "Rock and Roll Doctor: A Tribute to Lowell George" (CMC International/BMG) ★★

Unlike most tribute collections, which eagerly seek star contributions despite their inappropriateness (Elton John sings Leonard Cohen) or court controversy with deconstructions (a la the Carpenters "homage"), this tribute to Lowell George is almost a class reunion, with nearly every artist having an artistic or personal connection to the Little Feat founder.

The remnants of the band provide backing for a few artists, including Bonnie Raitt, who takes on the funky freeze of "Cold, Cold, Cold." The band itself finally gives a full Feat treatment to George's solo tune "Honest Man." The Bottle Rockets, appropriately, team with David Lindley to do a respectful "Rocket in My Pocket," while Randy Newman and Valerie Carter explore George's idiosyncrasies with "Sailin' Shoes."

The perfect closer is a touchingly tender "Trouble," sung by George's daughter Inara. **2543**

By Terry Lawson, *Free Press staff writer*

Fastball — "All the Pain Money Can Buy" (Hollywood) ★★

Pain? Nah. Your \$12.99 copy of Fastball's sophomore album comes packed with pleasures — tasty delights basted in the juices of power pop icons like Cheap Trick, Matthew Sweet and Elvis Costello. But Fastball doesn't make simple reductionist rock. By now, you're familiar with "The Way" — rock radio's reigning chart topper and one of the year's most infectious singles — in which the Austin, Texas, trio plops a crunchy chorus and surf guitar solo atop a modified Latin rhythm. It's that sort of playful tinkering that marks the 13-track album and pushes it out of the jangle jungle.

Spiced with Hammond organs and a guest vocal from Poe — and produced by Julian Raymond (Suicide Machines) — it's a blend that's crisp in the middle but ragged enough around the edges to feel real. **2544**

By Brian McCollum, *Free Press pop music critic*

Sonic Youth — "A Thousand Leaves" (DGC) ★★

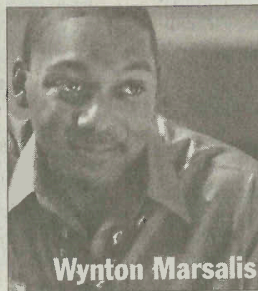
There was a period in the late '80s and early '90s in which Sonic Youth flirted with being the kind of rockin' out-band the kids could really dig. But if 1995's superb

"Washing Machine" didn't mark the end of that stage of the experimental rockers' long career, then the pleasingly subtle if uneven "A Thousand Leaves" cinches the case.

Even the perverse poppiness that occasionally peppered "Washing Machine" is largely absent now, replaced mostly by the kind of lengthy, quiet-but-not-always-so-guitar-trips that resemble the last disc's odyssey-like "Diamond Sea." Indeed, only two of 11 tracks on "A Thousand Leaves" clock in at less than five minutes. That's no dig: The disciplined interplay between guitarists Lee Ranaldo and Thurston Moore ranks near the top of rock's conversational pile, and the pair simmers on tracks such as "Sunday" — which features one of the group's patented and cathartic rhythm-driven plateaus — and "Wildflower Soul," a nine-minute metamorphosis from cool candescence to cacophonous catfight.

There are a number of clunkers, too, particularly those weighed down by bassist Kim Gordon's sometimes spoken, sometimes snarled vocals, which seem especially lacking in this context. Perhaps the more subdued approach doesn't hide her deficiencies the way the band's crunchier past did. By contrast, Moore's limited range doesn't keep him from displaying a wandering, wondering melancholy, which sets the tone for a disc that offers much the same. **2545. In stores Tuesday.** *Sonic Youth plays the State Theatre, 2115 Woodward, Detroit, at 7:30 p.m. Thursday. 1-313-961-5450. \$16.*

By Steve Byrne, *Free Press staff writer*



Wynton Marsalis

| JAZZ |

Wynton Marsalis — "The Midnight Blues: Standard Time Vol. 5" (Sony) ★★

"The Midnight Blues," a collection of torch songs with accompanying strings, revisits the territory Marsalis explored on "Hot House Flowers" back in 1984, but with more mature results.

The trumpeter strikes a majestic pose, reading such lovely melodies as "Glad to Be Unhappy" and "It Never Entered My Mind" with reverential restraint, save for a wide vibrato that recalls Louis Armstrong and a veritable instructional book of vocal effects: half-valve squeezes, glissandi and growls applied with rococo panache.

What's disappointing, though, is that many of Marsalis' subsequent solos fail to develop the material in a memorable fashion. The trumpeter's linear melodic invention remains his Achilles' heel. **2542**

By Mark Stryker, *Free Press music critic*

| GOSPEL |

Mississippi Children's Choir — "When God's Children Get Together" (MCD) ★★

Formed in 1990 and 200 voices strong, the Mississippi Children's Choir may be short, but not on talent or enthusiasm. Each of the 11 tracks is led by soloists whose voices sometimes seem shrill and untrained but always joyful. However, the last two songs, "Throne of Mercy" and "O Come Let Us Adore Him," are led in solo by adult pastors, which seems unnecessary as it's the children we really wish to hear. **2541**

By Chris Ledbetter, *entertainment editor*



Fastball

| ALSO |

Discs scheduled for release Tuesday:

Hanson — "Three Car Garage: The Independent Recordings '95-96"

Garbage — "Version 2.0"
Lenny Kravitz — "5"

Van Morrison — "The Philosopher's Stone"

Hayden — "The Closer I Get"

Massive Attack — "Mezzanine"

Soul Asylum — "Candy from a Stranger"

Ugly Americans — "Boom Boom Baby"

Xscape — "Traces of My Lipstick"

The Corrs — "Talk on Corners"

Olivia Newton-John — "Back with a Heart"

| TV GIGS |

Monday
Tori Amos, Leno

Tuesday
Olivia Newton-John, Leno

Ray Davies, Conan

Wednesday
Todd Snider, Conan

Thursday
Brandy, Leno

Friday
Prodigy, "Live From the 10 Spot," MTV

