

SEEN & HEARD



Amy Winehouse – *I Told You I Was Trouble*

Amy Winehouse has achieved a hell of a lot in a relatively short space of time. Her fame, or infamy, has guaranteed her more tabloid coverage than Britney Spears, what with her husband in jail pending trial for GBH and attempting to pervert the course of justice and her own well-documented battles with drugs and booze. But none of her woes have managed to overshadow what has been a meteoric run coupled with almost universal critical acclaim. Winehouse, the daughter of a north London taxi driver, made the top 10 singles chart in the US and earned rave reviews, along with a record five Grammy wins last month to add to the Mercury and Brit Awards. The appositely named *I Told You I Was Trouble* is a full-length DVD of last year's show at the Shepherd's Bush Empire in London bundled with an interesting documentary charting her rise (and fall). The concert section of the DVD is halfway between superb and disorientated. Her musical chops are still fairly impressive (but not as dynamic as on her second studio album, *Back to Black*), but comprehending what she's saying runs from difficult to impossible as she slurs her way through the set. Her voice glints with possibility: tart, smoky, ready to flirt or sob, and capable of the jazzy timing of a Dinah Washington or the declamation of soul singers like Martha Reeves and Carla Thomas. What she doesn't have, and may not want, is the kind of focus the older singers brought to their songs. The band, in contrast, is tight and supportive as she belts out all her best material (and a few choice covers). – GERAINT PRICE



Mary J Blige – *Growing Pains*

When MJB released *What's the 411?*, her most powerful and memorable ballads were those through which you could feel her pain. Since 1992, she's grown from a girl to a woman while going through trials and heartache, and telling her story through music. Her latest release, *Growing Pains*, is different; the woman feels more empowered and her struggles are waning. Laudable sentiments for sure, but by the time you're halfway through it's the interest that starts to wane as you crave for the Mary of old. – GERAINT PRICE



The Cardigans – *Best Of*

The land of Volvo and Ikea has produced a disproportionately high number of music exports, and one of its more durable has been this Malmo outfit, fronted by Nina Persson. Formed in Sweden in 1992, The Cardigans' most celebrated songs hail from the mid 1990s and early 2000s and most of their big hits from that period – *Lovefool* and *My Favourite Game* among them – are collected here. Like all really good songs, they sound just as fresh today as when they were first released. But some of the Swedes' best work has come in more recent times after their fanbase dwindled. *For What It's Worth*, *Godspell* and especially the deliciously catty *I Need Some Fine Wine And You, You Need To Be Nicer* are among the best songs Persson has written. Meanwhile, the band's future looks in some doubt. Persson has recorded a second solo album under the A Camp moniker (her solo debut was brilliant, if little heard) and that's due to appear this summer. – GERAINT PRICE