

THE LILAC TIME **Paradise Circus**

FONTANA 838 6411 LP/Cass/CD

The Lilac Time's second album evokes contradictions like, "This sounds fresh — reminds me of old so-and-so." This may suggest it's fairly convincing classic pop, the old so-and-sos in question being a mélange of the obvious, Beach

Boys and Beatles, and the more *recherché*, such as Brian Hyland and Donovan. It's certainly not what you'd expect from a band led by Stephen (no longer "Tin Tin") Duffy, author of forgettable '85 hit Kiss Me. His deceptively pretty songs are greatly enhanced by his brother Nick on banjo, accordion and acoustic guitars, each dovetailed neatly into a dense, but light production. Well crafted as it is, the appeal of Paradise Circus depends on personal reaction to Duffy's late '50s wimpy-teen singing. To some it will be chalk on a blackboard, but catch the hints of wit and irony through the whinging and you warm to him — for instance, The Girl Who Waves At Trains is "as breathless as my fifth-form prose". Don't judge the album by the hackneyed subject and mundane sound of the single, American Eyes. Paradise Circus is full of clear ideas and affectionate feelings, plus loads of nice harmonies, guitar — and Nick's bits. ★★★★★

Phil Sutcliffe