

MARCH, 1978

VOL. 8, NO. 5

Homoglyph

r e c o r d m a g a z i n e

Warren
Zevon
Creative
Conflict
by Tom Nolan



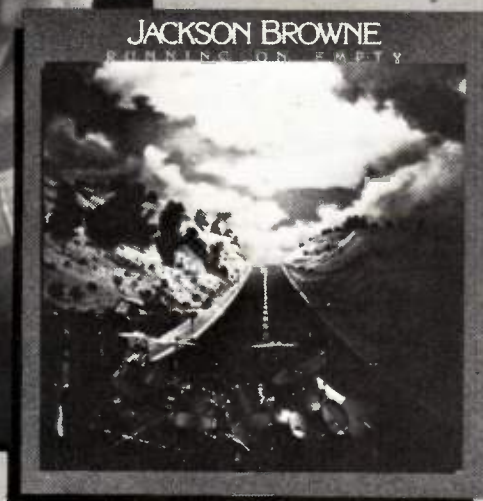
Midlife Rock: Five Case Studies
Bowie Biofeedback with Flo & Eddie
Beatlemania Anemia Hits L.A.
Renaldo & Clara: Dylan's Video Vampire

JACKSON BROWNE

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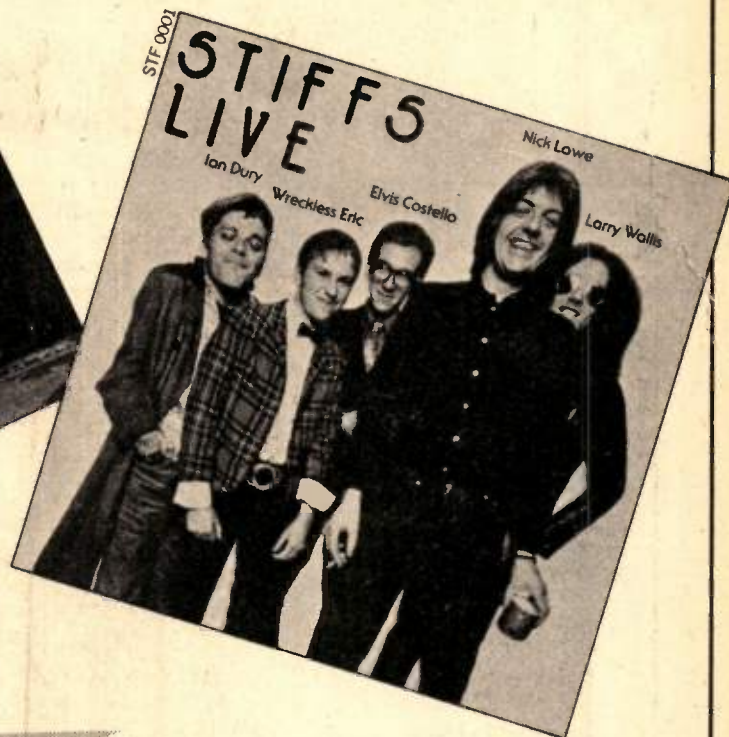
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Phonograph

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by Richard Cromelin
"They've completely

Phonograph

March, 1978

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by Tom Nolan Warren Zevon and Excitable Boy, respectively they're the most programmed 'new artist' and 'new album' at the nation's leading FM radio stations today.

So, now everybody wants to know about those oddball characters that spring out of Warren's forehead.

"This spooky sideshow of grotesques, these playful psychotics—what does it all mean?"

Performances

NEVER MIND THE SEX PISTOLS

HERE'S

Richard Cromelin

TOUR US FIRST



SEX PISTOLS

WINTERLAND, SAN FRANCISCO

Jan. 14, 1978

By RICHARD CROMELIN

Without fanfare, without introduction, they're suddenly there, on the stage. Johnny Rotten, rock 'n' roll's Anti-Christ, cases the crowd with a bemused, wary gaze. He looks like a Dickens street-urchin gone mad, eyes blazing with starvation, frame poised for a beggars' revolt. As the Sex Pistols plug in, his hypnotic stare seems to hold a challenge. None of this, "Great to be here, hope you like the show." More like: "Well, what did you crumbs *expect*? You think this is going to be better than all that punk garbage?"

They tear into "God Save the Queen," punk-garbage, to be sure, and a modern anthem of the first order. As the relentless sound pours out, the crowd hits back with an amazing downpour of debris. Ice, cups, bottles, cans and shoes shower onto the stage, and the Pistols look as if they're leaning into the teeth of a blizzard.

Sid Vicious starts spitting at the people in front of him, and they respond in kind. Before long, he'll start

picking fights, and he'll laugh at his chosen opponent's inability to get at him. After the song, Rotten is leaning on the mikestand when a bottle arcs through the air and shatters just above his hand. He looks down slowly, shakes his wrist as if flicking away a fly, and looks back up without a trace of expression.

What was perhaps the peak rock 'n' roll experience of the '70s had begun.

By now, everybody knows what it's about, but mere knowing is nothing next to looking it smack in the eye. The

structures, sterility and complacency, pillaging the ruins of contemporary rock, pointing out the stink of the '60s backwater where we've been mired, musically and culturally, throughout this decade. The Sex Pistols have no part of the compromises necessary for "success." There will be no billion-selling double live album from *this* Winterland concert. The subsequent talk about dissension and breakup is in keeping with the volatile nature of the whole program.

This has nothing to do with the nicely organized music industry and its drab values—ambition, pleasing people, playing interesting music. What we have here is kids grabbing rock 'n' roll back from the fat cats and making it their own again, and the situation is so desperate that they can do it only through something this

extreme and obnoxious.



You think it's repulsive? Great. The feeling's mutual. Leave us alone.

task facing the Sex Pistols on their first U.S. tour—one undertaken with the mixed blessing/burden of a potentially suffocating degree of publicity—was to

live up to what it's about, to embody their aura of anarchy on a large scale, to become the powerful force we've heard so much about. They made good on all promises and threats at Winterland, the last date and largest venue on the tour.

As advertised, the Pistols lay waste to

The Pistols are above it all. They've completely rejected such standard '70s rock elements as sexual posturing, ego preoccupation and a thriving career. "I could get rich this way," sneers Rotten, picking through the mounds of rubble like a monkey in the zoo. Apparently dissatisfied, he turns to the audience. "Let's have some cameras." Someone passes him a broken umbrella. "That'll do," he says, and tosses it back toward the drums.

In his utterly direct, personal lyrics—"I want this, I don't want that, I'm a lazy sod, no feelings for anybody else"—Johnny Rotten paints a less than ingratiating picture of himself.

In so doing, he reverses the "Love Me, Love Me" disease that rock has caught from showbiz. "Hate me if you like," he seems to say, "but you'd better listen to me."

The relationship between these snotty brats and their audience pivots on antagonism and abuse—ritualized, certainly, but still compelling, genuine and unpredictable. It's as if they've made a deal with the currently defanged Iggy—"Gimme danger, as long as you're not using it anymore." Because the alienation is shared, it creates contact, and because they convey their nihilistic thrust with such passion, it becomes an affirmative statement. It's an unmistakable something in the face of a chillingly portrayed nothing.

Musically, the three instrumentalists—Vicious, Paul Cook and Steve Jones—are a functional, powerful unit, playing an elementary, stripped-down heavy-metal. But it's not minimal/primitive trash, not the same song over and over. There are strong, dramatic chord progressions that recall Slade's power-pop, a tenaciousness reminiscent of the Stooges, and something of the spirit of the New York Dolls/Ramones school.

To complain that the music isn't very good is to miss the point. Lord knows, if you want good music you have plenty to choose from. What the Pistols offer is a lot harder to find. The Pistols' sound is simply the correct vehicle—lean, muscular, potent—to convey the group's essence. That resides in Johnny Rotten, who now must be counted among the most charismatic figures in rock.

Rotten's sheer presence, instinctive and untutored, is so thoroughly convincing that he needn't resort to a repertoire of fancy stage mannerisms. Rather, his taut, defiant stance signals the nature of the beast, while his voice, laser eyes and demented facial

expressions temper his poisonous personality with a sense of conspiracy—crucially, we're in on it with him.

Johnny doesn't sing so much as rant, but that abrasive voice is anything but expressionless. It's an insistent thing, constantly at your throat, and he pushes it with such a compulsive drive that it keeps bending into the strange shapes that constitute his distinctive style. Rather than settling for unrelieved angst as his only tone, Rotten invests his singing with an obsessive, maniacal glee, a pure insolence and a mocking playfulness, taunting and prodding his audience into his corner.

That, combined with the utter believability of the whole affair, results in some galvanizing moments: his catatonic chant of, "Problem, problem, problem"; the gloriously unfettered delivery of the classic lines,

"We're so pretty, oh so pretty vacant, and we don't care!"; the transcendent power that comes through when he proclaims, in dramatic, lengthened syllables, "I...want to be...anarchy."

It's tempting to think of the Sex Pistols as a source of salvation, but their perverse constitution works against such simple hopes. They might want to leave you unchanged, but they don't want the responsibility of your devotion. They offer no solutions, no comfort, no future. More important, they offer us this one liberating moment, and we'll just have to make of it what we will. •

collage-roy gyongy



By Bobby Abrams

Unlike many who will attend Beatlemania, I actually saw the Beatles and not just once, but several times. What does that mean? It means I have a pretty good idea of what a Beatles concert was like and how authentic this recreation could be.

Going into the theatre, I think this whole thing is one great amazing idea, better even than using Woodstock as a front for massive cocaine dealing, as well as getting to hear your favorite supergroups. An evening out with the Beatles. Oh, of course, it's not with John, Paul, George and Ringo but then everyone knows thoughts like that could only be a fantasy. No, just a mere evening out to hear the old songs and somehow imagine oneself back in the glorious sixties when most of us had zero responsibilities. It seemed just a dandy idea for making tons of money with a minimal outlay on plot, etc.

All I can say is most of those thoughts went right out the window as the show started. No sooner was I comfortably settled in my seat, than the first strains of "Let's Twist Again" could be heard. Well, I guess the producers had to write some profit into the show and it seems obvious that it cost far less for these five oldies than for the Beatles songs. Otherwise, why bother? Who needed to have the

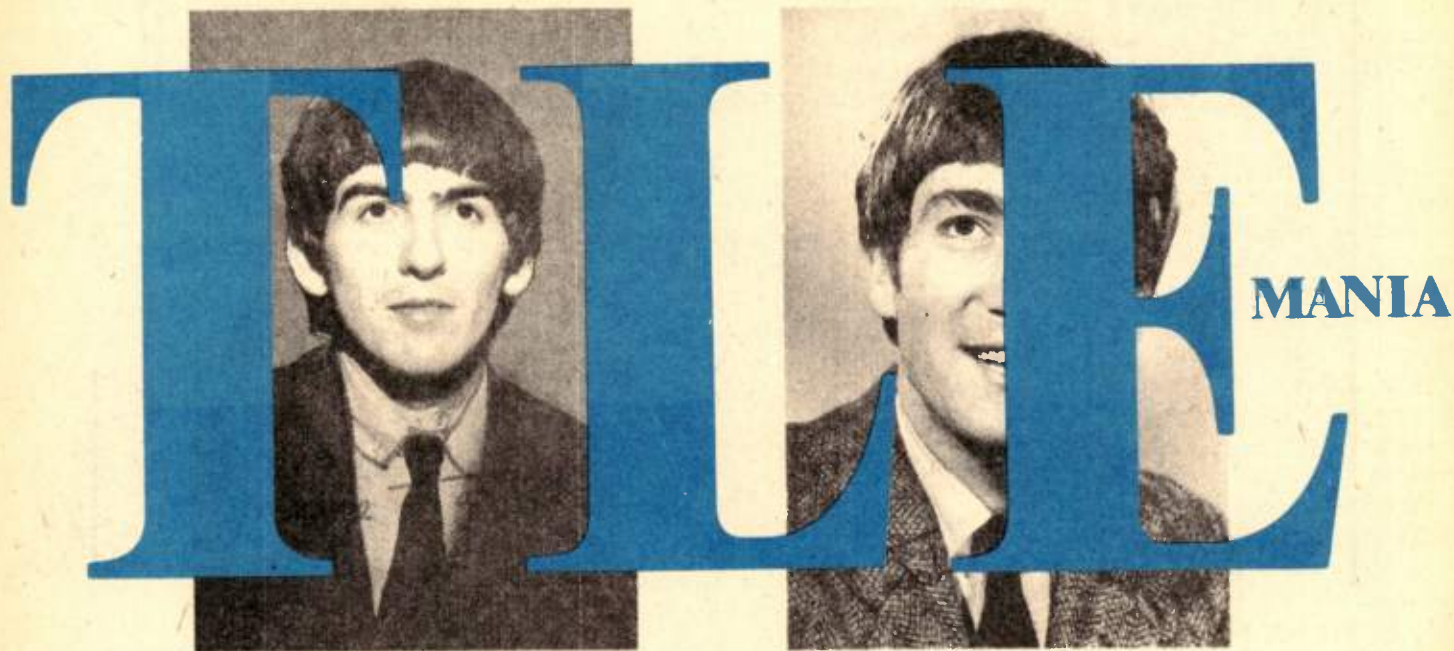
prehistory of life before the Beatles aired? After all, this was not the Story of Civilization that we needed to be complete and accurate. Besides which, the Beatles did a whole bunch of oldies (Twist & Shout)—why weren't these used? I thought the premise of the show had to do with the Beatles, not some Dick Clark Anniversary special.

Five seconds into "I Want to Hold Your Hand" the show was effectively over. Let's be brutally blunt: this song is no heavyweight. Indeed, I would think the problem in covering it is that without too much trouble any band worth their chops could cut the Beatles to shreds. Not so these four wandering refugees from a Bar Mitzvah. They absolutely could not sing, they were abysmally off-key and their playing, worse. With the second selection, "She Loves You" you realize that there is no possible redemption. The song choices are right, as is the mixed media presentation (in fact the special effects are nothing short of incredible and they are the most impressive part of the show. The flies in the ointment however, become glaringly obvious. In fact, I think of a little irony occurring here: if I were to list all that I found wrong with the Beatles, those seem to be the very characteristics the producers sought in casting the show. Moreover, they seem to exceed the Beatles (i.e. are worse than) in these very areas.

No one looks anything like the originals except for Mitch Weissman, a situation hard to explain because if that's not why the casting occurred, I'd be hard pressed to define what it was the producers did look for. George is uniformly terrible, except for the huge schnozz on Leslie Fradkin. The whole effect is ruined by the excessive amount of smiling he does—George *never* smiled. Ringo's big move was not merely bobbing his head up and down (which drummer Justin McNeill faithfully reproduces) but that incredible puppy-dog look he had. Nor do I know why they couldn't find anyway to portray this; there were at least three kids in my high school who looked exactly like Ringo (i.e. were just as ugly). Ultimately, what I condemn most about these performances is that these guys have *no* rock and roll feel whatsoever. Even the lamest band in L.A. knows how to stand on stage.

A few songs later, we get "Can't Buy Me Love," the first real rocker in the set and finally we begin to get a glimpse of what is going on—there is a backing track, so at most these guys are only singing (if that). Justin is playing the drums however, and he is a far superior drummer to Ringo, something roughly equivalent to winning a Polish scholarship. What's terrible is that the backing track is so gosh darn awful.

THE MANIA



Something else jars me and that was the Beatles' famous move to the mike—they were continually humping their guitars. Indeed, Dylan used to satirize the Beatles and the way they performed during his concert appearances of 1964. So what's wrong with these schmucks on stage?

A costume change to minstrel outfits (?) and we get "Day Tripper" with balloons bouncing around onstage. Okay, sure why not? They had to do "Yesterday" in the show; people would have felt cheated with the exclusion of this song more than any other; however, that's still not justification for butchery of this nature. The strength of "Yesterday" is its beauty; without that it's nothing.

The last scene before the intermission is entitled "Tripping." Well, this too is mandatory, and of course the visuals here are the most excessive, but it's great. A lot of the visuals are being used to cover up what's not going on on stage. If only the same care that went into putting all the slides, film clips and other special effects together had gone into casting, this might have been a terrific show.

It was now intermission and I should have left. How could it possibly get better? Could these guys learn to play and sing during their half-hour break? Is it too much to expect that in a show with no plot, no dialogue, no nothing

in fact (except a whole bunch of Beatle songs) that these songs at least sound good? About as good as they would on a decent home system? Would better musicians have cost more? Perhaps since Leber-Krebs also manage Aerosmith and Ted Nugent, they could have either of those groups sit in on occasional nights—I certainly would have preferred it. This show is incredibly sold-out, proving I don't know what, but there evidently are lots of people who want to see this show who are ignoring the critics. I absolutely can't imagine anyone saying anything nice about Beatlemania. So, if after reading this review you might still be tempted to actually plunk down real money to see it, give me a call—you might be interested in a bridge I have for sale.

Incidentally, if I had been a Beatles fanatic, I would have been looking for producers Steven Krebs and David Leber to wreak mayhem upon their physical selves for such sacrilege. How dare they insult both a fantasy and a

generation with such class exploitation? —I am reminded of the words of H. L. Mencken: "You'll never go broke underestimating the intelligence of the American public."



AM America

Ken Barnes



Before beginning, I'd like to call your attention to this column's new name for a paragraph or so. On becoming *Phonograph Record's* new singles columnist, I decided a name change was in order for the column for a couple of reasons. For one, I wouldn't presume to keep a title identified so strongly with its creator, Greg Shaw, who is now devoting all his time to the many facets of Bomp Enterprises, Unlimited. More important, though, my approach to the subject is different. While I'm a dedicated singles fan, continue to regard them as an art form quite distinct from albums, and intend to review them on their own merits, I'm equally interested in their natural environment—Top 40 radio. Of course, Top 40 has been a misnomer for over a decade, with 30 record playlists the norm and shorter ones common; similarly, "AM America" itself is inexact, since a growing number of Top 40 formats are found on FM these days. But the original idea of playing the most popular single hits in a constant changing rotation on radio was born in AM in

America with the Top 40 format, and the column title is a form of homage to that noble ideal.

Things are different on Top 40 (or singles-oriented radio) these days, as anyone who heard much radio around 1964 can ascertain by the turn of a dial. In its midsixties glory days, Top 40 was wide open. Stations usually played 40 or more (up to 100) charted current singles at any given time, plus new records. You wouldn't hear the lower chart items very often, and you heard the big hits a lot more, but there existed the *possibility* of hearing practically anything, with the further chance that it would be a total ear-dazzler. The stations themselves were loud, abrasive, full of Stridex and Coke commercials, and appealed to teenagers and (as a radio programmer recently said in another context) to the eternal adolescent in all of us.

All that's changed and there are some very good reasons. One is the intensifying of Top 40's comp-

etition.

In the midsixties Top 40 radio pretty much was the only game in town for kids, and kids were the best game in town because a huge bloc of the population (with unprecedented spending power) was under 25. Now that bloc is toddling along into its thirties and radio stations cannot pull the same kind of high ratings numbers they used to get by aiming at teenagers; they have to consider adults as well.

Besides that, radio formats have fragmented—a modern Top 40 station faces competition from all sides. There are the FM/Progressive or album-oriented rock (AOR) stations, who've stolen a significant part of the older teen audience away. And they in turn are divided into tight-format AOR's, featuring short playlists of current albums (usually just one or two tracks per LP), and the more traditional open-format, long-playlist types—plus the recent development of "soft" or "mellow" AOR's, playing toned-down, soft-rock LP cuts. Top 40's ratings are also being eroded by what used to be MOR stations but are now called Pop/Adult or Adult/Contemporary, which play a slightly softer (and usually wider) variety of pop and rock hits.

Since Top 40 stations, who are out of economic necessity courting that predominant bloc of young adults, have softened up their musical approaches, the main difference between modern Top 40 and Pop/Adult stations is usually the style of the air personalities (peppy "time-and-temperature" types on Top 40, more relaxed "personality" jocks on P/A) rather than the music itself.

All this background serves to explain why hard rock and youth-oriented rock are scarcer on Top 40 radio than ever before and why modern radio is so frustrating to fans of rock & roll singles. The developments are perfectly logical, and perfectly infuriating to devotees of exciting radio and transcendent records exploding out of the car radio in the dead of night, virtually forcing you off the road. Everything has softened up and tightened up and is likely to stay that way for a long time.

So you can adapt to current conditions and learn to appreciate the positive elements, or you can rail against the status quo (straight line for a bad joke there). I generally do both;



I've come to admire skillful, innovative MOR records like the Carpenters' "Calling Occupants" or fiendishly clever disco rockers like the Bee Gee's "Stayin' Alive." And I'm pretty irritated when I realize that a record like the Sex Pistols' "Pretty Vacant" (Warner Bros. 8516), the first U.S. single from a group generating more press coverage than anyone since the Beatles, featuring a mesmerizing intro, an undeniably powerful rock & roll sound, and lyrics without a shred of troublesome controversy, doesn't stand a chance in hell of becoming a Top 40 hit nowadays.

Rambling on, I recently heard punk rock records described as "immoral" by an acquaintance. I puzzled over that for awhile and concluded that while it's a term I'd rarely apply to mere singles, the most immoral one I could think of was Kansas's current "Dust In The



Wind," for its "we're all cosmically insignificant/dust in the wind/so nothing matters anyway" platitudes. Such sophomoric philosophizing should be more amusing than annoying, but thinking of the number of people likely to find it profound is a bit irksome, and on the whole I much prefer silly love songs.

Last column I commented on the glut of syrupy female ballads on the radio; in early 1978 we're getting a profusion of equally syrupy male ballads, such as Billy Joel's "Just The Way You Are," Dan Hill's "Sometimes When We Touch," and Paul Davis's "I Go Crazy" (the latter two of which are not entirely devoid of positive features). Expect more of these.

Hope on the charts for rock & roll comes from Tom Petty's "Breakdown" (Shelter 62008), still climbing steadfastly as I write; and Linda



Ronstadt, whose "Poor Poor Pitiful Me" (Asylum 45462) is a chunky, eminently clever number (the "woe-woe is me" bit is a killer). On the other hand, Van Halen's "You Really Got Me" could kill rock & roll once and for all. This wretched-excess extravaganza on a theme by Ray Davies has grotesque Black Oak Arkansas vocal posturings, and gut-wrenching elephant-scream guitar galore, and is therefore an instant favorite among radio programmers, most of whom are quite nostalgic for the heavy metal/progressive era. I'm convinced Van Halen is the Iron Butterfly of 1978 and that they'll become just as huge and four or five years from now everyone will be just as embarrassed for supporting them. But feel free to prove me wrong.

As usual, there's no shortage of good singles currently in release, as opposed to actual hits. I intend to cover a lot of these, though I've restricted the field to U.S.-released mainstream records for the most part, leaving the obscurities and foreign disks for my New York Rocker and Who Put The Bomp efforts. My favorite among recent rockers is Cheap Trick's "Southern Girls" (Epic 50485) from their second album, the catchiest tune they've come up with yet, with the usual fine singing and adept instrumental work. I'm also glad to see an American release for the Top 10 British hit by the Tom Robinson Band, "2-4-6-8 Motorway." It opens with a Raspberries-style chord burst and evolves into a near perfect marching (or motoring) rock chant.

You'd think a record called "Think Snow" (by Northern Light, Glacier 4502) would be a sureshot in the Midwest now, but they would probably rather not think about it at all, thanks. From my detached L.A. perspective,

it's a pretty song with a nice ersatz Beach Boys/Henry Gross falsetto sound. Also mining the ever-productive surf-sound vein is a British skateboard record (one of many over there) by the Carvells called "L.A. Run" (Lifesong 1760), all about "riding down the hills of old L.A." and similar concerns, definitely the skateboard "Beach Baby" for 1978.

In my never-ending and usually futile search for socially redeeming elements in disco music, I've come up with a new favorite, "Miss Broadway" by a French group called Belle Epoque (first put on Shadybrook 1040, now on Big Tree 16109). It's got a catchy riff, an occasional Bo Diddley backbeat, typical swooping Silver Connection strings which are so jackneyed by now that they're kind of amusing, and a raspy, urgent female vocal that almost qualifies the record as a successful disco/punk fusion. And while on that nebulous subject, the next record from Santa Esmeralda (of "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood" fame) is "House Of The Rising Sun."

Finally, a new wave offering from those well-mannered young adults, the Talking Heads. "Psycho Killer" (Sire 1013) is rather abysmally timed (at least for murder-scandal-beset New York and Los Angeles), but the record, French interjections and all, is fascinating and unsettling and a worthy investment for your collection (especially with an alternate non-LP version of the song on the flip side). And now that the seasonal and post-Christmas lull has worn off, expect a profusion of intriguing new singles next month. ●

TALKING HEADS PSYCHO KILLER





Leave it to Dylan. What other pantheon rock artist could turn his first writing-directing film effort into an excruciating endurance test, synthesize the most easily imitable and least likeable qualities of Warhol, Godard, Rivette, Cassavettes and Altman, and *still* make a move that should be seen (maybe in two separate doses) by anyone who ever cared about his work? *Renaldo & Clara* displays an egocentricity that poses two, not necessarily exclusive, possibilities: either Bob Dylan has tremendous respect for the intelligence of his audience and its eagerness to meet him more than halfway to "read" his film the way they pour over his records, or he has no idea who his audience is, and simply doesn't care whether he reaches it or not. A case could be made for either side, but despite the numbing amateurishness of the project and the unavoidable fact that Dylan has deliberately avoided any crowd reaction shots in his concert footage (undercutting the Rolling Thunder Revue's intent to bring music closer to the people), *Renaldo & Clara* looks more like a failure with good intentions than a pure act of artistic obstinacy. Dylan does believe there are people out there who'll be willing to share his vision, and there are. But how many?

In everything from cast to method to means of distribution, Dylan has made an archetypical early '60s post-best folkie movie, from a ten + year perspective and with a touch of traveling communalism thrown in. It was shot during the Rolling Thunder Revue, and the musicians on the mystery tour were employed as "actors" (there are also some professional thespians and non-musical friends in the cast) in semi-improvised scenes that are interspersed with songs. Some of the sequences are better than others, but they don't add up to anything cohesive, and the best way to view them is as stanzas from a Dylan song like "Memphis Blues Again": as random, dis-connected vignettes. Not only did Dylan and company construct their movie unorthodoxically, and outside of the studio system, but they're also, in the spirit of the independent anti-establishment '60s, distributing *Renaldo & Clara* themselves. Circuit Films, headquartered in Minneapolis, is fronted by Dylan's brother.

cinema veri- tame Dylan's



"RENALDO & CLARA" by Mitch Cohen

Although the fictional and documentary sections of the movie are weak, the background music and performance pieces are excellent, far superior to the *Hard Rain* television special done on the same tour. Part one of the film is musically bracketed as wittily as a Dylan LP, with "When I Paint My Masterpiece" opening the film and "It Ain't Me Babe" leading to the intermission, and there are other well-photographed, well-recorded and well-rendered songs: "Knockin' On Heaven's Door," "Tangled Up In Blue" (in an uninterrupted one-shot medium close-up of Dylan), a Baez-Dylan duet on the old R&B song "Never Let Me Go," "She Belongs To

Me." As an audio-visual record of the Revue, *Renaldo & Clara* is an impressive achievement.

The rest of the time, however, Dylan is either relentlessly dwelling on his political and romantic concerns (the Hurricane Carter case, his relationship with Sara), playing teasing fantasy-reality games with our curiosity and knowledge about his private life, using masks, costumes, and make-up to hide-and-seek with his identity. Consider: there is a man in whiteface on stage (Renaldo), played by Bob Dylan, singing songs associated with Bob Dylan, but never being introduced as such (nobody on stage is, and non-fans may not know Bob Neuwirth from Roger McGuinn from Jack Elliot, and may not even care); David Blue, as a pinball-playing commentator, talks about his early days in the Village with Bob; but Ronnie Hawkins plays "Bob Dylan." Joan Baez plays the Woman In White from Dylan's past, Sara Dylan plays Clara, and Ronree Blakely is credited as portraying "Mrs. Dylan." This nonsense goes on and on, tenuously testing our patience and our ability to get involved.

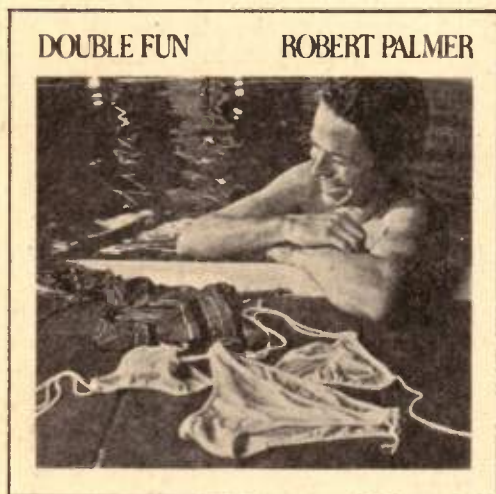
On most levels, *Renaldo & Clara* is a major miscalculation. Movies can be difficult, elliptical, impressionistic, sketchily plotted, even very long, but there has to be a controlling center and a sure sense of direction. It also helps if the hand of a strong personality—which Dylan is on record and on stage, but not as director-writer-actor—is felt shaping the material. Dylan obviously had only a vague *a priori* notion of the ultimate look and structure of this movie; having so many random moments on film to work with, the sheer volume of it had to be fit into a format, which is like cramming a coconut into an egg cup: a lot spills over the edge, and finally the casing cracks. Dylan, like Norman Mailer before him, believes that his talent makes such mundane considerations as plot, script, characterization, pacing, irrelevant to his movie-making, that his ideas and mere presence are all that matter. He's right, sort of—it *may* be worth sitting through tedious stretches to hear him sing "Kaw-Liga," "I Want You" and "Just Like A Woman"—but he's wrong. *Renaldo & Clara* is a million-dollar private journal, for Dylanphiles only. •

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ROBERT PALMER

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ILPS 9476

Produced by Robert Palmer and Tom Moulton



THE TEN MOST RIDICULOUS RECORDS of the DECADE

Records. God, didja ever stop to think the world is filled with *billions* of 'em? No, you didn't—chances are, if you read this magazine in the first place, you're more or less like the author of this article, whose most memorable childhood fantasy was growing up to have a mansion with *catacombs* underneath containing, alphabetized in endless winding dimly-lit musty rows, every album ever released. I can tell you what a psychoanalyst would make of that: he'd say I had some kind of anal fixation. And he'd be right. I like shit.

In my own defense I gotta say I wasn't always this way. The first record I ever bought was *TV Action Jazz* by Mundell Lowe & His All-Stars, as pristine a masterpiece as ever immortalized by RCA Camden. But from there one could only ascend so far into the heavens until one possessed all the celestial milestones of recorded art and there was nowhere to go but into the trackless depths of anomalies, absurdities and dogshit. When you've got three copies of *White Light/White Heat*, eight copies of *Raw Power*, and everything ever cut by Miles Davis, the next step is obvious: choo choo trains on location and the complete works of Gary Lewis & the Playboys. Besides which deep in my soul I'm not kidding myself at all: I know that when I started my record buying career back in 1958, I was already perverse enough that when I bought David Seville & the Chipmunks' singles I was *really* into the Ross Bagdasarian instrumental novelty B-sides, whose titles spoke for themselves: "Mediocre," "Almost Good," "Flip Side."

This same perverse streak obviously runs through the record industry itself: knowing that they have dedicated their lives to hyping product 90% of which is



HOT 10

1. HAVING FUN WITH ELVIS ON STAGE (RCA)
2. MUSIC FOR IRONING-Somerset Strings (Epic)
3. SONGS OF THE HUMPBACK WHALE (Capitol)
4. THE BEST OF MARCEL MARCEAU (MGM)
5. CHICAGO AT CARNEGIE HALL (Columbia)
6. URI GELLER (Columbia)
7. THE WIND HARP (UA)
8. DAWN AT NEW HOPE, PA. (Atlantic)
9. CALIFORNIA 1999 (ABC)
10. SENATOR SAM-Sam J. Ervin (Columbia)

by Lester Bangs

drawings-
Richard Blair

photos-
Bruce Osborn

essentially worthless now and will be dead in a few weeks or months, they like to compound their guilt by from time to time releasing records patently ridiculous that you'd think the game was up, were it not for the fact that occasionally one of these monstrosities will hit. For which I am eternally grateful as a connoisseur of all this stuff, because it only takes one such hit to justify ten tons more vinyl miscreants on the familiar 'who knows what those crazy kids will go for next' rationale.

Since the Seventies seem destined to go down in history as our most ridiculous decade, it only stands to reason that ridiculous records should become the norm instead of anomalies. Lissen buddy, today *quality* is anomalous, but that's okay with me, because I've already got all the best records ever made anyway, and personally am glad that the industry has seen fit to begin catering to those of my...shall we say *rarefied* tastes?

But, when that long road from preproduction brainstorm to bargain bin is finally run, certain albums will stand above all competitors, distinguishing themselves either by being so far off the beaten quagmires that what they represent could never be formularized and resold to the masses, or, conversely by being the most flagrantly excessive examples of their particular formula ever eructated on the public.

Here, then, in no particular order of importance for obvious reasons and because each stands by itself, are my Top Ten Abominations of the Decade (in other words, given above mentioned prevailing currents, the best records of our time):

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THE TEN MOST RIDICULOUS RECORDS of the DECADE



1. HAVING FUN WITH ELVIS ON STAGE (RCA)

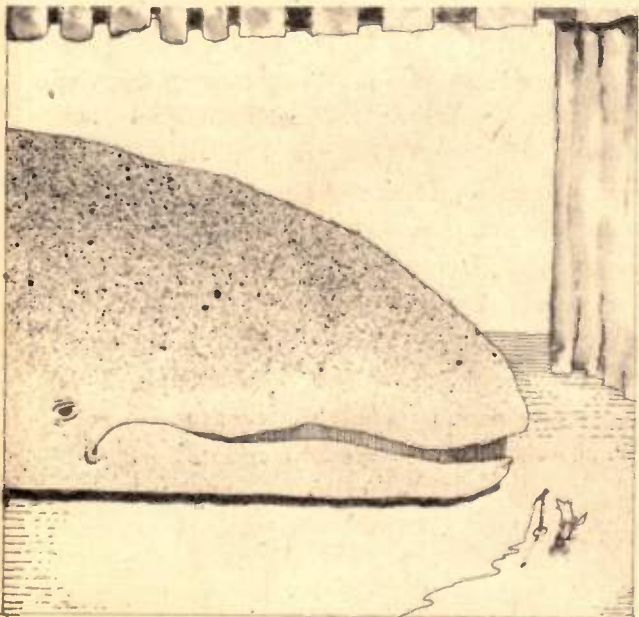
Proof positive that the King loved his fans with such blinding intensity that he never gave them less than the very best he was capable of: this entire album consists of his between song patter, a la "Hey, I think I'm gettin' my scarf caught in my mouth."

There are certain fanatics who feel that *Blue Hawaii* was a better album than this ultimate gift of gab, but then there are also people who feel that *The Don Ho Show* deserved to be cancelled.

2. MUSIC FOR IRONING-Somerset Strings (Epic)

Music for *Washing and Ironing* by the Somerset Strings. Yes, this is what America thought of women in the unliberated Fifties: the cover features two atmospheric black and white snapshots of a dumpy aproned drudge at basin and board. Liner notes: "*The therapeutic value of certain music has been known for a long, long time.*"

This is music for washing and ironing tightened technologically to produce a society of optimum production and consumption...Muzak 'nother words. "With this album you can actually experience the concept of stimulous progression. Move the needle of your record player from one selection to the other. Listen a few seconds to each. Feel the change in mood as the stimulation increase from the first selection to the other. Far more than a name, MUZAK has spear-headed the unique usage of the music called *functional music*...



3. SONGS OF THE HUMPBACK WHALE (Capitol)

Language and *Music of the Wolves* (Columbia) and *Songs of the Humpbacked Whale* and it's sequel *Deep Voices*—both on Capitol, appeared ca. 1970-71—obviously a good time to be a sentient nonhuman is you were looking for a recording contract. The *Wolves* record features one side of various solo and group howls by wolves of all ages, and one side of Robert Redford telling us all about "The Wolf You Never Knew." I still don't know him, because I never played that side, but the flip has provided both me and my canine cohabitants with many hours of pleasure over the years. As for the whales, prospective purchasers should note that the first album is more starkly minimalist, being mainly comprised of the big fellas making like Miles Davis on a bad night though, while *Deep Voices* offers more variety in such atmospheric numbers as "Surrounded by Snoring" and "Deep Breathing."



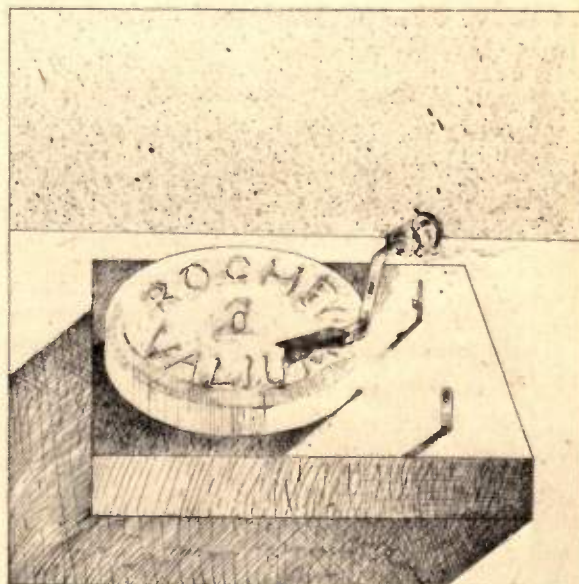
4. THE BEST OF MARCEL MARCEAU- (MGM)

Many feel this to be the ultimate concept album, while many others feel that it does not exist. But I ask ye unbelieving: would I, have I, ever lied to you? And if a record like this was possible, would MGM think twice about putting it out? Although the liner also mysteriously bears the imprint "Gone-If Records," as well as the word "Imagine!" in giant black letters. Conceived and produced by Michael Viner, a chops-buster if there ever was one. Label copy for each one: "1. Silence—19.00 2. Applause—1.00." Marcel and his audiences are equally precise in their respective arts. Okay, so that joke stinks. Today is the first time I have pulled *The Best of Marcel Marceau* out of its sleeve in five years, and it still smells good, not mouldy at all. Then again, this is one of those rare records that never dates. In fact it doesn't even fool around.

5. CHICAGO AT CARNEGIE HALL (Columbia)

No list of the greatest recorded accomplishments of any decade would be complete without inclusion of at least one live album, and while it is true that both the animals and Environments records were on-the-spot recordings, I think it's fitting that we should include one which is, after all, music. At least that's what the fans of Chicago keep telling me. The double live LP by a major rock band was one of the most oft-repeated formulae of the decade and I believe that *Chicago at Carnegie Hall* (1971) represents the genre at apogee.

This Chicago album was a boxed four record set, including a book, a poster, and a voter registration outline. It's musical highlight was Walter Parazaider's wildly eclectic flute solo in "It Better Be Soon—Second Movement," which started with "Morning Song" from Greig's "Peer Gynt Suite," shifted abruptly to "Dixie Land," to cheers from the audience, and thence to "Battle Hymn of the Republic," complete with martial drum-rolls.



6. URI GELLER (Columbia)

This record, circa 1975 proved conclusively that Geller is a fake. Not only did his poetry eat rat root, but but we must face cosmic facts: if the cat really had his act together, you wouldn't have to get up and turn it over to hear side two. Not that you'd want to, anyway. Come to think of it, if Uri was what he claims to be, not only could he *will* or should I say *weld* you into your chair until you had listened to every last second of this piece of dogswill, but it would also have been the bestselling album of all time, as hands in record shops around the world moved, propelled by strange forces from out of the air to pick it up, pull out their wallets and...

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Blind Date ←

With Flo & Eddie

Blind Date of 1978 finds Flo & Eddie with an inordinately receptive attitude towards the music of the 70's in general and New Wave in particular. Paraphrasing the eminent British philosopher Disney Vicious, Flo

pointed out that people who grew up in the 60's were snobs who considered themselves personally responsible for inventing the whole of modern culture. Both Flo & Eddie, however, were prepared to accept the music of the 70's

Edited by Ken Barnes

BLONDIE—"Denis," other excerpts from *PLASTIC LETTERS* [Chrysalis]

Gotta be Blondie—she's got roots. One of my favorite tunes, "Denis," great production, too. Richard Gottreher's Strangeloves background is obvious—"My Boyfriend's Back" was his, too. Just one problem—why is Debby singing so flat? The Helen Reddy of punk rock. Is this deliberate? Are they trying to go up-market? A verse in French, too. The tracks are great, though. But those vocals... Blondie on Bland!

ANGEL—"Ain't Gonna Eat Out My Heart Any More," other excerpts from *WHITE HOT* [Casablanca]

A flashy group that wants to play stadiums. Real flashy, like Angel? It is Angel? I don't know...Thanks for playing another remake! Punky is looking sweet as ever. Where are his whips? Did you know that as an Angel Earth Force member you will receive (reads): An exciting full-color poster, one 8x10 autographed photo, five individual 4x5's, and six color wallet photos, personal biographies of Frank, Greg, Punky, Barry, and Felix, a full-color folder to hold all of your Earth Force information, your own

official Membership Card, an Earth Force Newsletter that keeps you up to date on Angel happenings...and a mediocre remake of a Young Rascals song! They recorded this album in the studio of the Record Plant that burned down—and look at the flames on the cover. Hall of Flame.

TED NUGENT—"Baby Please Don't Go," "Cat Scratch Fever" [Epic]

Another remake!!! Stadium rockers? The Yankees? It's not Aerosmith. Or Z.Z. Top. It must be like the Amboy Dukes, that level. That exact level? Nugent is a great guy, and what an image! His Halloween ad with the kids in the Nugent masks was a classic! Who sings for him anyway? They're trying to sound like old Them. Who are they trying to kid? Double live gonzo! Gonzo the wind. Gonzo dog dew band. Been Gonzo long it seems like short to me. Stop it—let's hear "Cat Scratch Fever!" This is pretty tame.

SHAUN CASSIDY—"Do You Believe In Magic," other excerpts from *BORN LATE* [Warner/Curb]

She hates the Sex Pistols—she says "Take that noise off!" But she loves Shaun. This makes me suffer. If you're

and ready themselves for the onslaught of the 80's. Could this generous attitude in two 60's-rooted commentators who had recently slagged off virtually the entire New Wave in recent Blind Dates be perhaps connected with the pair's newly-disclosed deal to produce Boston punkers DMZ for a major New Wave label, I wondered. Sure thing, said Flo & Eddie, adding, "Let's get on with it."

going to do an old song, do it right at least. This is right—it has all the same notes. Sounds like a cream puff. Michael Lloyd, right? He's got a monopoly on this stuff. Somebody's going to cut "Happy Together" soon—somebody's already cut "She'd Rather Be With Me?" What do you mean, a "Turtles revival?" I'm sick of remakes. Where's Leif?

LEIF GARRETT—"California Girls," "The Wanderer" [Atlantic]

Right here, as a matter of fact! Leif! Turn over Leif! This is too much! Let's see him. Leif's got his shirt open down to his crotch, and he looks real cute. This is the teenage music of the 70's. I can't stand this. No more teen idols! No more remakes!

COLIN BLUNSTONE—"Care of Cell 44," "Planes" [Epic-import]

Great—another remake. This sounds exactly like the Zombies version. It is the Zombies version. It's the same singer, anyway. Colin, for sure! Semi-colon, anyway. Colin occupants of inter-planetary craft. Diseases of the Colin. We could go on forever. Or even if we couldn't, Ken could make it look like we could! We demand editorial control over this column. What was that? Column Blunstone? I'd rather hear remakes than go through any more of this!

TOMMY JAMES—"Baby Don't Leave Me," "Love Is Gonna Find A Way" [Fantasy]

Where's the remake? I don't know this song. Yes I do, it sounds exactly like "Best Of My Love" by the Eagles. A pop star of the 60's? Gary Puckett? Where is Gary Puckett? Puckett, who cares? He kicked the Puckett? Initials are the same as a famous Mexican border town? Nuevo Laredo? Tommy James! Didn't he become a Christian? Bored again...This cut is nice. I could not tell it was Tommy. Why doesn't he do any remakes on this album? No wonder it's not selling. Maybe we should do a remake. How about "Elenore?" That's not funny!

Flo & Eddie have a feel for this kind of music.



BRUCE OSBORN

ROCK AFTER 30?

★★ Five Case Studies ★★

I. FRANK ZAPPA



II. PETER ASHER



III. GRACE SLICK



IV. BRUCE JOHNSTON



V. GEORGE CLINTON

by Tom Nolan

Is rock dead, or merely doddering into middle age?

As the punk barbarians make noises at the gates, some stars inside the rock establishment feel intimations of their own mortality. Mick Jagger tells a reporter he doubts that rockers like himself can age gracefully. ("Rock and roll...is adolescent music. It's a dead end.") Elton John has announced his retirement from the concert circuit, saying he doesn't want to end up "a 50-year-old rock 'n' roller." Meanwhile the charts continue to be dominated by people 30 and over—including Elton and the Stones.

What of other music-scene veterans? Do they recognize an age limit to their

appeal, or are they determined to rock blithely into the future, ignoring that touch of grey in their long locks?

I recently spoke to five such survivors, whose careers began in the '60s and who have so far endured the notorious shifts and changes of popular taste. Two of them—Frank Zappa and Grace Slick—have been doing essentially the same routine for a decade. Two others—Bruce Johnston and Peter Asher—have made successful transitions from performing to backstage roles. The fifth—George Clinton, aka "Dr. Funkenstein"—has had great underground success as a producer/performer and may be on the verge of huge mainstream recognition.

Each had different motives and rationales, but what I found was a common determination to continue in a field where the illusion of youth has—until now—been a central part of the appeal of a music born out of rebellion against the uptight grownups. Unlike Jagger, or the New Wave punks, they see no anomaly in their continuing to kick out the jams. Maybe we'll all follow them into rock's mature future; maybe the punk contingent will shove them out; or maybe there's enough room for everyone—but these five aren't about to hang up their rock 'n' roll shoes.

NORMAN SEEFF

MID-LIFE
ROCK



I FRANK ZAPPA

brother to spiritual teenagers of all ages. Frank has created a timeless, bizarre world that perpetuates itself year after year, a self-contained universe in which the age of the proprietor is, he thinks, irrelevant.

How is he different from performers like Elton and Mick, who seem to see performing as a dead end?

long I'm really *good* at it. And I didn't need to get a facelift, either, like Mick did, years ago. That's why he looks like a gnome. He went and got a god-damned *face lift*!

"People have to become aware of the fact that performers like myself are an invaluable natural resource. We are resilient, and we keep going! We don't just have careers—we make *music*. That's the difference.

"You make it sound as if it were unusual for a person to stay in *any* business for a long period of time," he goes on. "In the popular music field, endurance might be statistically unusual, but what makes it look so weird is that everybody else flakes off so fast—which means they weren't cut out for it to begin with, or else they were a hype.

"I know what the age ranges are of people who buy records, but that doesn't mean I tailor my records to that age group. I certainly don't function on the level of selling a lot of singles to 13-year-olds.

"There've been a lot of adjustments since we first started out, because then nobody knew about us or was interested in what we were doing. So we were kinda operating in a vacuum. It took about three or four years just to let people know we were alive. It's the difference between waiting around for someone to hire you for a concert, and touring six months a year."

That young audience, though, is important for survival; and the Mothers are always able to draw new fans when they tour. Whether or not the music is *aimed* at 13-year-olds, it *appeals* to many of them.

"Some of the people at our concerts, especially in the East, are real diehard; they're literally the same people coming backstage year after year. But every year there's also younger kids. When we got a gold album with *Apostrophe* and it was getting a lot of airplay on AM stations, we had 15-year-old girls screaming at the front of the stage at Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C., doing all that teeny-bop-a-gogo thing. We'd never

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MID-LIFE ROCK

A three-year-old named Ahmet, playing Aquaman with a rope coiled over his shoulder, greets me with, "F--- You! F--- your ass! I hate you!" An older boy named Dweezel is asking where's the cow skull his pet snakes like to slither through. Except for the presence of children, little has changed in Frank Zappa's workroom since he moved into this Mulholland Drive house several years ago. The walls are still lined with hundreds of boxed, unreleased tapes of concerts by Zappa's group, the Mothers of Invention. Desks and consoles still overflow with the endless multi-media projects in various stages of completion. And Zappa himself—barechested, a bit fatigued from an all-night recording session—looks the same as he's always looked since his debut on the scene in 1966: the ponytailed, Dada-moustached eccentric older

"For them it is a dead end, 'cause I don't think what they're doing is making music. What they're talking about is a career decision. If you're makin' music you just keep makin' it until you don't feel like it anymore. I happen to be working in a field of music closely tied to live performance. And since we give the best possible live performances of my own music, there's no reason I shouldn't go out there year after year and play it. I don't see anyone else standing in line to play my tunes, and if the world's gonna hear my music then I'm gonna have to be its representative, whether I'm out there with crutches, a wheelchair, or an iron lung, and I don't give a f-ck if anybody knows how old I am either. I've never tried to hide the fact that I'm 37 years old, and you can all kiss my ass.

"Not only that, I've been doing it so

MID-LIFE ROCK

No one could be further from Zappa's outspoken isolation than Peter Asher, the 33-year-old manager and (often) record producer of James Taylor and Linda Ronstadt. Asher is a soft-spoken Englishman with pale freckled complexion and red, red hair. He no longer wears the black Buddy Holly glasses that were his visual trademark, but the baby face is still recognizable from the years when he and partner Gordon Waller ran up a string of melodic hits ("World Without Love," "I Go to Pieces") as a singing duo during the English Invasion of the early '60s.

As he sits with feet tucked under him on a couch in his office on Beverly Hills' Doheny Drive, I ask him if it seems odd to still be engaged—even in a much different role—in an art form usually associated with teenagers.

"No," he answers, "it really doesn't. I don't think the music is for young people. I don't know the exact demographics of people buying James and Linda's records, I don't know their average age. I know singles are usually bought by very young people; but in both James' and Linda's cases, the album sales are more significant than singles sales. We're certainly not aiming at them. That would be as though we were *designing* it for someone, you know, which of course we're not. Linda and James are just making the best records they know how to make, singing and playing as well as they can.

"Rock 'n' roll is in a situation it's never been in before," Peter continues, in considered tones appropriate to a former philosophy student at King's College, London University. "There are much older people listening to it and liking it, in addition to new young people. Perhaps the day that James and Linda are 40 they'll never want to sing again, or no one will want to hear them. But who knows? It's conceivable they could go on even longer. "So, no—it doesn't seem an odd thing for me to be doing."

If it is not odd, neither was it exactly planned. While Peter has skillfully negotiated a series of life changes which seem dramatic on the surface, he describes them as unforeseen, almost haphazard twists of fate.



II. PETER ASHER

"Going from being an artist to a producer isn't that huge a transition. In many senses the change between being a philosophy student and being a rock 'n' roll star was more extreme. Every artist is interested in production. I wasn't very happy performing and I didn't think I was very good. I was always a harmony singer and never had any ambitions to be a lead solo performer. I still enjoy singing, and I usually end up either singing or playing in a background capacity. But I like being responsible for how it comes out, rather than for actually singing it.

"Managing I started doing by default as much as anything else. I thought I had some idea of what to do, based on what I'd seen, and some of the things done wrong for our (Peter & Gordon) careers. Most of it seems to be common sense, but then most of most things do."

The rock world can be a mercurial place and Asher's spontaneous style has served him well in it.

"Most of the things I've ended up doing came as sort of a surprise to me. In other words, when I was at school I had no real ambition to be a rock 'n' roll star. When I was a rock 'n' roll star, I had no

ambition to be a manager and producer. Ahm, I'm very ambitious within certain projects and ideas. The minute I'm making a record or setting something up, I want it to be the biggest and best; I'm ambitious for success and things like that. But I don't have any real long-range plans at all. I have really no thoughts in my mind as to what I'll be doing five years from now.

"I don't think I'll do this forever. I like it, but at some point I suppose one would find oneself getting the feeling that one year was sort of the replica of the preceding. I have found one metier; I hope others appear."

At 33, the changes Asher is going through have less to do with his profession or his aspirations than with the larger, existential questions faced by anyone who reaches the midpoint he's arrived at.

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BRUCE OSBORN



THE EVOLUTION OF ZIGGY STARDUST BY DAVID BOWIE

the Bowie biofeedback sessions as told to FLO & EDDIE

New York City, early 1978.

We're Flo and Eddie, *PRM* corresponding editors, bon vivants and all-around good guys. We haven't made a record for awhile—we *know* too much—but we've been doing a network television show in Canada every week for the CBC, and we've just spent three weeks in Long Island, producing the already-famous *From Rats to Riches* album for our pals, The Good Rats.

As soon as we finished the latter, we crossed the bridge from Long Island into The Big Apple to tape an interview for our CBC show, with...David Bowie.

We talked about raw squid (the night before our formal interview, we all had dinner together at a Japanese restaurant), and about our own stay in London in 1967 (in our Turtles days), and about David's tour with Gene Pitney as a saxophonist. And then David talked about David Bowie, and some of the things he has done, and some of the other people he has been...

The first album I made was later called *Space Odyssey*, but the first title was "Man of Words, Man of Music." It was recorded in 1968 and wasn't released until '69, 'cause I couldn't find a company to take it.

Then came *The Man Who Sold the World*, my "songwriter" album. That was my first album really trying to establish a characterization. Trying to create some kind of character in narrative form. *Hunky Dory* was an interim thing, another songwriter's album, really. I like that one very much. I don't like them *all* very much. *Actually*, some I don't like at all...

Then I conceptualized the character of Ziggy Stardust. I was stuck with him for a long time. Took a long time to shake him off because, after I'd finished working with him, people related to him more than to David

Bowie.

The point was, I wanted to go whole hog and not just create a character for the stage and then become somebody else offstage for interviews. So I'd do interviews as Ziggy, and not let anybody know I was interviewing as Ziggy. And when I changed to Alladin Sane, I would interview as him.

Ziggy was the most arrogant of all my characterizations. I would go out and say, "If you haven't heard this, you just haven't heard anything yet.

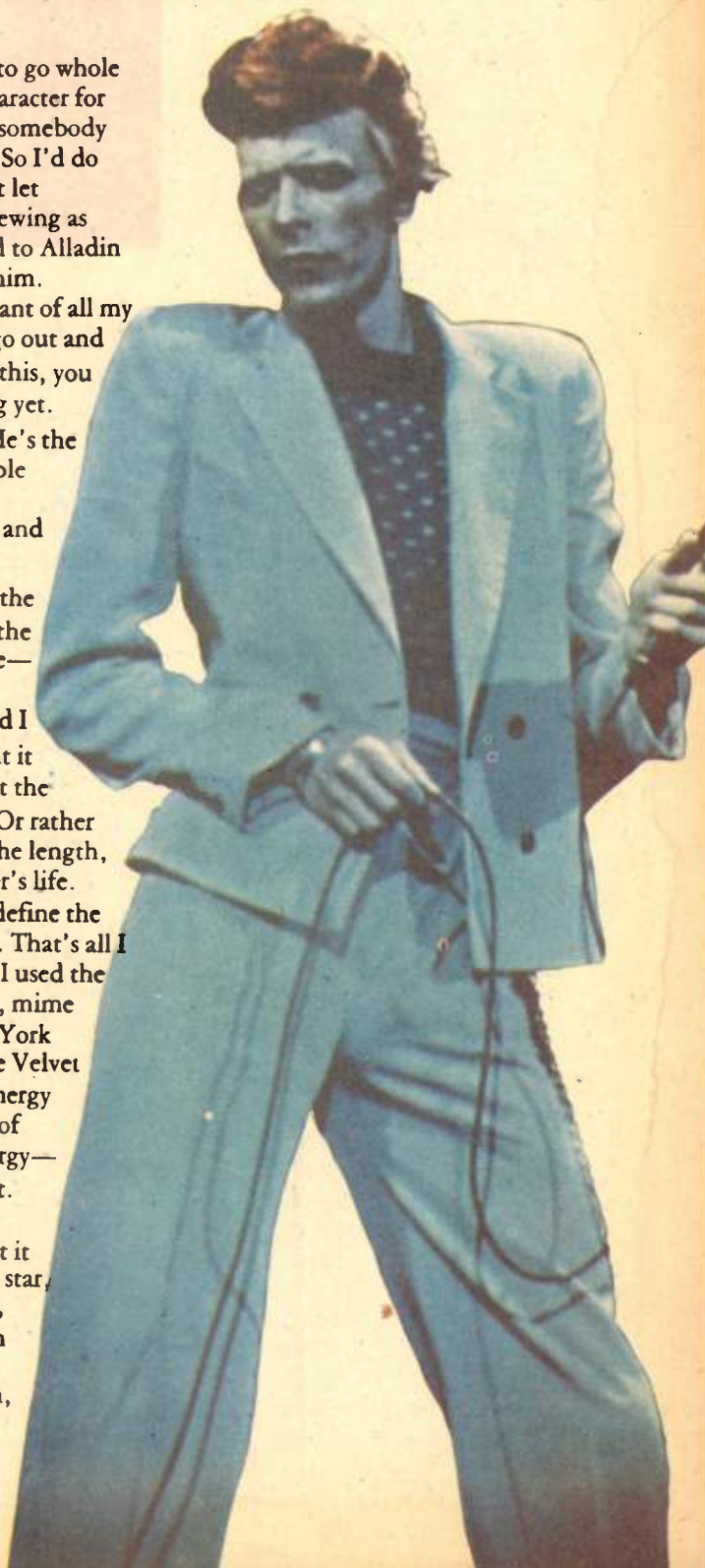
You've got to hear Ziggy. He's the archetypal rock artist." People would say, "Who's your favorite rock artist?", and I'd say, Ziggy Stardust!

It got so involved that even the band, the Spiders, thought the whole thing would continue—that they'd go on as the Spiders and everything. And I had trouble explaining that it was just a theatre piece, that the Spiders didn't really exist. Or rather that they existed for only the length, the duration of the character's life.

With Ziggy, I wanted to define the archetypal Messiah rock star. That's all I wanted to do. And to do it, I used the trappings of Kabuki theatre, mime technique, and fringe New York music. My reference was the Velvet Underground. It had that energy value... It was a British view of American energy, street energy—which I knew nothing about.

So Ziggy for me was a very simplistic thing. It was what it seemed to be—an alien rock star, who, for performance value,

I dressed and acted out with references to the mime company I'd once been with, and to, as I said, Kabuki theatre. I tried to create something very unreal on



continued from previous page

stage. I left it at that. But other people re-read him, and contributed more information about Ziggy than I'd put into him.

I put three viewpoints on the Ziggy album: I'd looked at him as an observer, I'd actually *been* Ziggy, and I put some arbitrary statements as well. My only information was my own input. But Ziggy grew with people's recognition of him.

That pleased me so much, in a way, because I could see the potential for using music and lyrics in a way in which I could give two or three view points on one album, from three different areas. Maybe the character himself would appear and then there would be two other statements by two other people, all on one album—which was kind of confusing. It was the way an author would write a book. I mean, it hadn't been utilized that much in records—having three different points of view on one album, all talking about the same subject.

"Alladin Sane" occurred quite easily. I never got to a position where I thought, 'What should I do next?' It was always on top of me. Every time. I mean, I was already doing it. What was happening to me is that I was going through the terrors and rigors of an American tour, and with Alladin Sane, we had the rocker going through America in that very blinkered kind of stream-of-vision.

I don't think the album came off very well, though. It was sort of confused, because I slipped out of character halfway through it. Which I guess makes it a valid album, in a way, since the point of Alladin was schizophrenia, and what you had there was an artist who couldn't decide whether he was still Ziggy or was trying to relate personally to America. So it was half Ziggy, half David Bowie...

I was trying to hard to figure out how I could get rid of Ziggy, and I tried Alladin—but that didn't completely do it. So I needed a breather to see who I wanted to develop next. I thought, 'Well, what do I want to record now?'... I thought back to all those old R&B things that were happening in London in the '60's, and I came up with *Pinups*.

I wish I could have made that a ten-record set. I mean, there are so many things I would love to have done on it. Other than that, there's very



little to say about *Pinups*. I mean, I made it quite clear that I was wearing a mask, by defining the mask around my face with a line. That was important.

After that, I came to a disagreement with the Spiders about what we should be doing. I wanted to carry on with my original policy, which was what I did when I was a painter, and I made different paintings every time I put a brush to canvas; I wanted to do the same thing with records.

Diamond Dogs came out of the stage where I had to leave the band out of things, because they wanted to be the Spiders. And that's understandable. I mean, what I wanted to do was pretty risky. It was still very hard for anybody to realize that a rock artist could go on stage and be a different person every time. Nobody else was doing that.

So, when I made the *Diamond Dogs* album, I was there without a band. I had to play just about everything apart from bass and drums myself—which I'd never done before. And from having to do that, I developed another strength. I found the strength, the conviction, and that made me know that I was right about what I wanted to do.

And out of that, I developed 'Halloween Jack' and went out as a city boy who had to cope with a crumbling city, and who just didn't know where to run anymore.

The original germ for the idea of the Young Americans thing came from the Diamond Dogs show—which was the kind of music that person, Halloween Jack, had been listening to, and which

had caused him and his society to become what they had become. From there, it led vaguely to Warholism, to the taking of a Polaroid. So I took a Polaroid of music as I saw it in America at the time, and it became *Young Americans*. It was a Polaroid album. It was as accurate as I could possibly make it.

It wasn't a statement album. It was an album that didn't have any character or any narrative, and I didn't try to project any personal statement into it. A lot of it was romantic, because the genre of the lyrics at that time around R&B was very romantic, and I reproduced that sentiment. When it started to do well on the R&B charts, I think I was bemused. I wasn't shocked, though. I thought, 'Well, if people recognize a photograph, then it must have been a very good photograph...'

Station to Station was starting to get to be a personal album again. I still had one more character in me, which was the thin white duke. He was an isolationist. He was very much on his own. He had no commitment to any society. He was the antithesis of Ziggy Stardust. He was the exact end of the spectrum. And there were a couple of things in there that cried for my need to get back to Europe, or at least to get out of the American environment. I had been stuck in it for such a long time. I was intending to leave at one point, but then the film came along—*The Man Who Fell to Earth*.

Anyway, I finally left America, and I knew that when I did, I had to get to an environment that was totally different from Los Angeles. So I thought of the most arduous city I could think of, and that was West Berlin—so I stuck myself there. I left everything—left Bel Air, left my millions of videos, left my Chinese rugs...

When I got back to Europe, I could start getting involved with characters or narratives again, but before I could do that, I had to define a new form of musical language. And that's where I needed assistance. I needed somebody to bounce ideas off of and somebody to give me input. I was so confused, with all these blessed people running around my head. So I got together with Brian Eno—who was somebody I'd known for years and years but had never had the chance to work with. Out of that came *Low* and *Heroes* because Brian and I

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"HORSLIPS IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO RESIST"

Circus Magazine

"Horslips is the most popular band to emerge from Ireland in many a year... synthesizes traditional, Irish folk melodies with good, hard rock... rousing... irresistible..."
The New York Daily News

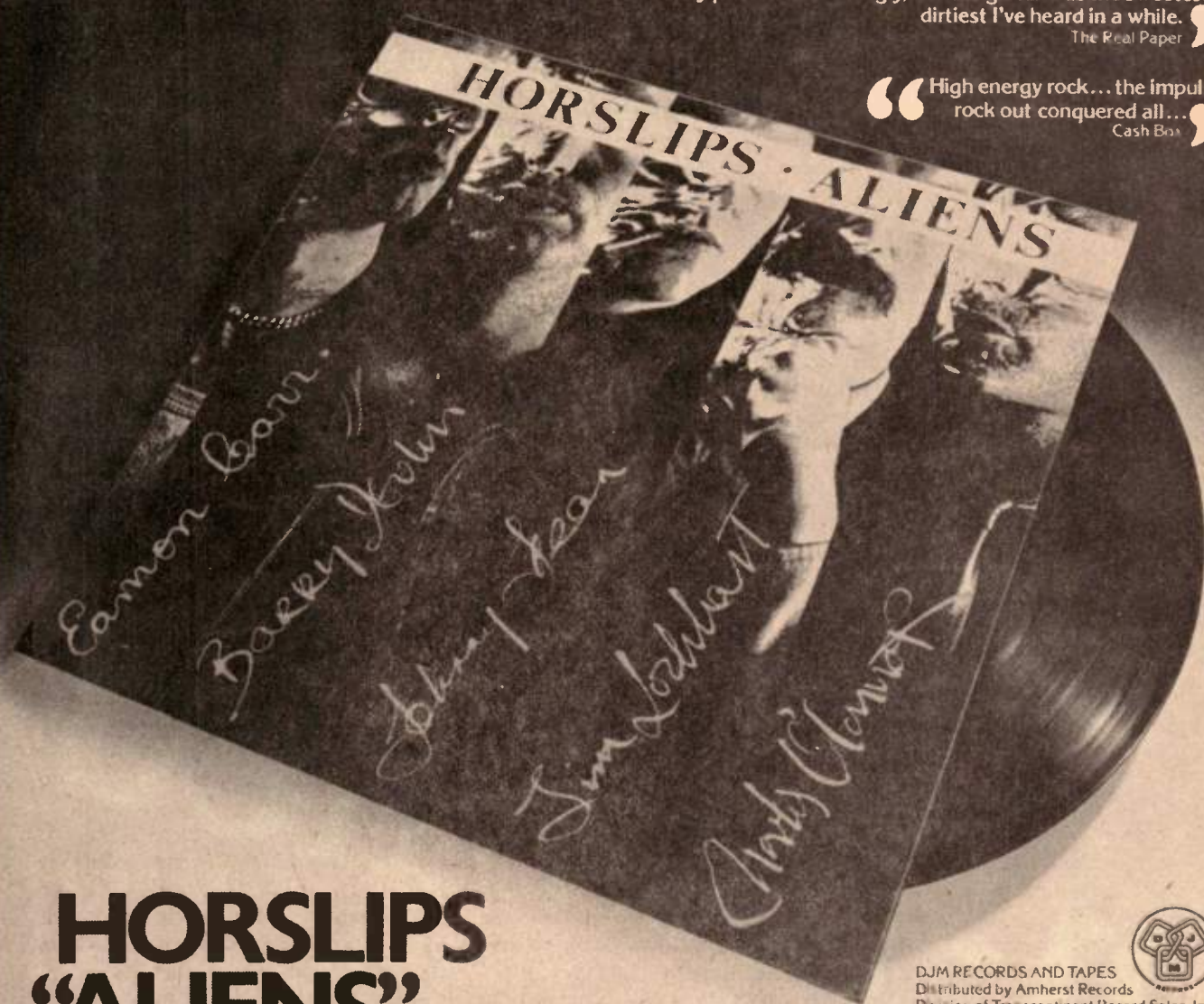
"...stirring rock 'n roll, nicely flavored with touches of jazz and Irish folk music."
The Los Angeles Times

"Melodic... hard driving... highly inventive, something needed in rock these days..."
Variety

"Remember when Jethro Tull used to be fun? Horslips still are."
Good Times

"Lovely and joyful... The powerful, raw passion of their music blasted forth, unchecked by studio walls... They performed movingly, and the guitar was the sweetest and dirtiest I've heard in a while."
The Real Paper

"High energy rock... the impulse to rock out conquered all..."
Cash Box



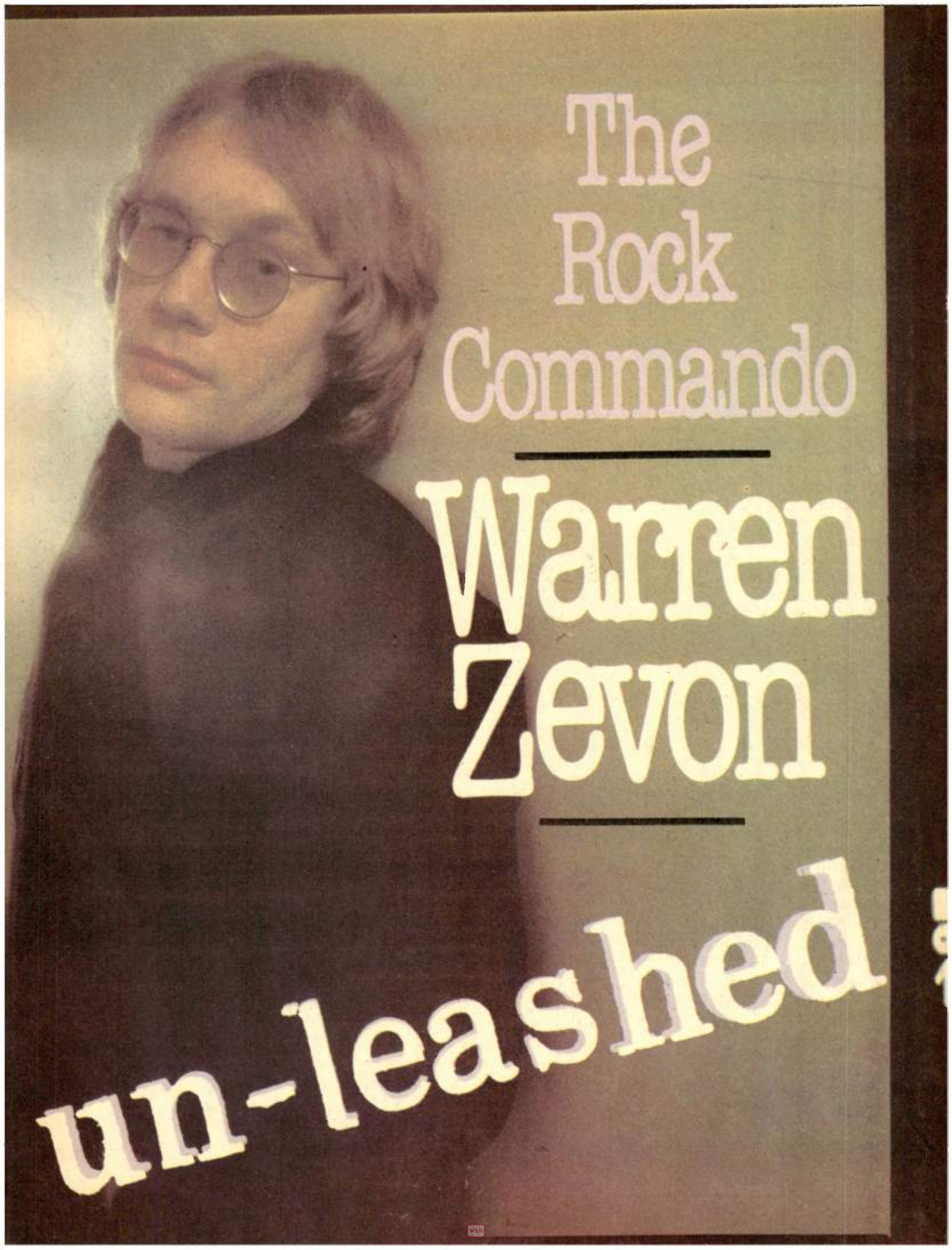
HORSLIPS "ALIENS"

DJLPA-16

Watch for Horslips' tour in February, March and April

DJM RECORDS AND TAPES
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A portrait of Warren Zevon, a man with shoulder-length brown hair and round glasses, wearing a dark turtleneck sweater. He is looking slightly to the left. The background is a solid olive green color.

The
Rock
Commando

Warren
Zevon

un-leashed

Warren Zevon, 31, wearing a white shirt, clean Levis and big black boots, is stomping around the living room of his Los Feliz house. Momentous day, this Saturday: Lindy's in town. May be arriving at any moment. No one knows when, exactly; no one knows from where...Lindy, the former proprietor of the Dubliner Bar in Sitges, Spain, where Warren sang for his supper in 1974...Lindy (David Lindell, actually), the onetime (who knows) soldier of fortune, coauthor of two songs on Warren's new Asylum LP, *Excitable Boy*. Lindy could show up at any moment...

Meanwhile Warren pours himself a straight shot from a bottle of Russian vodka, and perches on the piano bench. He's been practicing Beethoven at the Steinway grand. Unwinding after a week of photo sessions and interviews inspired by that new album. His wife Crystal and daughter Ariel are in Arizona...family matters...The kid's got the house to himself. This is where the interviewers come. Sometimes it's interesting...stimulating...being asked what you think by people who write it all down...Sometimes it's a bore, when they ask you to go over ground that's been ploughed to death already...When they want to know what brought the author of 'Werewolves of London' to this house in Los Feliz, the family, the tiny chair in the living room in which is seated Barbar the Elephant...the May Company sofas, the chrome and glass tables and etageres...the Steinway...the framed and autographed *Stravinsky Conducts Stravinsky* album cover...It's all so...normal...

Okay, yeah, if you insist...Capsule history of the past seventeen years. Born in Chicago, raised in California mostly. Father played cards for a living. Thirteen-year-old Warren dreamed of being a classical composer/conductor; had Stravinsky, Craft and Copeland for idols. Fourteen-year-old Warren took

up the guitar. Trip to New York to become Bob Dylan. Back to California to play in bar bands. Rolling around down on the stage, moaning and warbling, hoo^{do}o you love, hoo^{do}o you love...Good exercise...Became Lymme of Lymme and Cybelle. Made an early album, *Bones Howe* producing, for Imperial Records. Endured some depressing years playing jingles or something at an ad agency. Became Berkeley folkie. Signed a fast songwriting contract—all dismal stuff he doesn't want to talk about. Then roadwork with the Everlys, until they broke up. He'd married Crystal by then, and in '74 they went to Spain.

Probably he couldn't have done it without her, her strong sense of herself, her sense of humor, her daring. It was Crystal who hid the last \$100 travelers' check, pulling it out of thin air when they needed money to go to London for Phil Everley's session, which gave them

Nevertheless...it makes for a rosier memory than a fact...Lean years. But infinitely preferable to knocking on doors at sleazoid record companies in in L.A., using words like 'commercial' to sell yourself to some apathetic A&R man, then getting stuck with wearing a green suit or something as your trademark...neon glasses...No, Warren held out until the time was right, then came back to California and signed with Asylum, where he made his first 'real' LP, *Warren Zevon*.

It was an anthology, really, a gathering of the best songs from the preceding five years. Some of them strike him now as rather...anachronistic...obsolete... 'The French Inhaler,' *par exemple*. He remembers sitting in his room at the Tropicana Motel on Santa Monica Boulevard and writing that tawdry, pathetic account of his affair with a would-be starlet, all of it true, his most autobiographical song ever, a piece of journalism is how he thought of it at the time: "You said you were an actress, yes, I believe you are; I thought you'd be a star. So I drank up all the money, with these phonies in this Hollywood bar. With these friends of mine in this Hollywood bar."

All of that was before Crystal, before the house, before the interviews...The Tropicana was an interesting place to be in '74...but in '78...Who cares; it's a joke. Life goes on...

Nevertheless, the first album...He pulled it off, all the songs coalesced loosely into a sort of L.A. chronicle, a lowlife tour de force, a guided tour of decadence. Not your glamorous Beverly Hills Rodeo Drive decadence...not even a West Hollywood sort of strungout exhilaration...more of a...low rent Hollywood Boulevard sleaze grind. Um hmm.

by Tom Nolan



money to make it back to L.A....after that romantic spell in Lindy's Dubliner Bar in Stiges...

No, let's be realistic about those memories, Tom. It was poverty time. Singing in a bar in Spain, after all. No money. Brawls. Not being able to play what you wanted. Having to do weird Irish shit about the old woman living in the woods and stabbing her babby inna head with a penknife, why lilly, why lo...Rather amusing that one, actually, and Warren is still good for a few choruses of it now and then, of a fogdrunk night in Los Feliz...



at it, Jack, crank these things out on order, not like some of his contemporaries...not to name any names...The guys who specialize in the geometry of love affairs, whether they're emotionally involved at the time or not. "I would like to be with you tonight. I sure *would* like to be with *you* tonight..." Not that Warren doesn't wrench a pretty honest, emotional opus from his own breast now and then...but only when it's important...real...Better to write a song that tells a *story* instead. Which is what he'd rather do, anyway. Which is his tendency...his specialty...once they come...

Songwriting itself isn't difficult at all. It's spontaneous, it's fun, it should be fun or it wouldn't be fun to listen to. It's the waiting that kills you...Of course you can do a song a day...like Warren did when he was under contract...But forget that. That's medical school, something you have to learn, some kind of necessary education in putting chord changes together and then forgetting *how* to before you start to *really* write.

If there were a drug that opened the inspiration floodgates he probably would have found it by now. But there isn't. He just has to wait. And each wait is—what's the word... 'painful' is a little melodramatic—exasperating, let's say. So he'll sit down at the piano and fool around with 'Black Jack Davey.' Blunder through Beethoven. Work on his long-suffering unfinished symphony.

Yes. That symphony...

Warren is kneedeep in these scores he's been working on for years, fragments of some incomplete work he toils away at laboriously, note by note. Maybe it's some kind of pipe dream, or maybe he's stumbling towards some new kind of form, but that thirteen-year-old would-be classicist inside of him still yearns to express himself...

What Warren fantasizes doing is somehow bringing together these two isolated traditions of music, the 'serious' classical music and the popular rock 'n' roll idiom. It galls, amazes, frightens and frustrates him that they

continued on page 44

period, just after the album came out, where he thought he had to write another 'Hasten Down the Wind,' another 'French Inhaler,' another 'Carmelita.' But then he realized he'd already written those, once was enough, it was time to move on.

Or to wait, rather...for the next idea. Every song is different to Warren, in content and theme. Which attitude makes it, um, a bit more *difficult* to be a songwriter! You can't just plug away

Warren Zevon



EXCITABLE BOY

Warren Zevon
Asylum 6E-118

By COLMAN ANDREWS

Excitable Boy, Warren Zevon's second album (well, really his *third* album, but if he doesn't want to mention *Wanted Dead or Alive*, I'm sure as hell not going to bring it up), is just about the damndest piece of vinyl that's come along in years.

It has as crazy a combination of moods and qualities as anything since "Shoot the Piano Player" or maybe "Cyrano de Bergerac." It's a real mix-and-match affair. Some of this and some of that. Disoriented separates. A combination dinner—Heartreder Helper on the plate with a Hari-Kari Pop-Tart. (Or a Smith & Wesson on the plate with a bunch of glistening vegetables, as depicted photographically on the album's inside sleeve—and don't think nobody noticed the cilantro on the plate, oh mexican madness, where the parsley ought to be, Warren, because we *did*.)

What we're talking about here is being all over the emotional/literary/musical map: Parts of this album are as good as anything on *The Pretender* or *Prisoner in Disguise*, but parts of it are also as good as anything

on *The Spotlight Kid* or *Armchair Boogie*.

When it comes to artistic sensibility, this fellow obviously has, as they say, a ready versatility of conviction. Studio time in the switching yard.

The first thing to remember about *Excitable Boy* is not to let the cast list fool you. It's produced by Jackson Browne and Waddy Wachtel, all right, and the musicians include Kenny Edwards, Leland Sklar, Russell Kunk, and Wachtel himself, and the back-up singers include Browne, Edwards, Wachtel, John David Souther, Karla Bonoff, the ineffable Jennifer Warnes, and Linda Ronstadt—but what comes out somehow manages to be something quite different from the usual California jamming, the ordinary California pap.

None of that tequila rock here. This stuff is pure mescal. The kind with a worm in the bottle. A worm and a little clown who pops up and scares you when you pull out the cork.

The best songs on the album—the ones that are most impressive on early hearings *and* that hold up time after time—are "Werewolves of London"

continued on page 47

Phonograph ← Record Reviews



THE ALBUM

Abba

Atlantic SD 19164

By BOBBY ABRAMS

The Album has a whole bunch of esoteric moves on it, including the fact that this is essentially a concept album, to accompany

"Abba—The Movie," (a film which "will-be-released" in the States shortly). I ask you, what do mini-musicals and rock opera have to do with songs like "Ring, Ring" or "Honey, Honey" ... I feared the worst, that like other groups who got hung up on making the Art Move, it might be all over. Then I remembered writing about *Satanic Majesties*, that no matter what, *the Stones always make it!* I believe now, that the same can be said for Abba.

So then, this album is great! Opening with the very bizarre "The Eagle," which seems right out of Pink Floyd, and maybe there's a connection: both were called bubblegum groups in their day. This is the only song on which Janne Schaffer plays (he formerly handled most of the lead guitar chores) and he, along with Benny on synthesizer, conjur great sounds. Moreover, the words are so weird, it pretty much

presages that this won't be your typical ABBA album concerned with sex, love and teenage romance. It is somewhat Jonathon Livingston Seagull, but somehow manages to transcend that banality.

"Take a Chance on Me" is the real thing, the essential ABBA that we've come to know and love. Rock and roll is about fantasy, and what greater fantasy can there be than having two *really* gorgeous Scandinavian broads singing "Take a chance on me," (male chauvinist pig fantasy #106).

A major departure on this album is three related songs as part of a mini-musical; "The Girl with Golden Hair," a number which the group performs both live and in the movie—It lasts for about half an hour, during which the girls wear wigs of golden hair and interchange the lead creating massive confusion, much like Dylan's new movie, *Renaldo and Clara*. Anyway, the first song in this triad is "Thank You for the Music," a number which successfully updates the German cabaret style and tradition.

"I Wonder (Departure)"—B-side of the current ABBA single is strongly rooted in the Broadway musical tradition, complete with very lush string arrangements, but the song itself has a vitality of its own, and anyway it's much better than "Send in the Clowns" and light-years ahead of that current sentimental pablum, "You Light Up My Life." It's quite esoteric, yet, if you can get beyond the obvious prejudices, it's quite beautiful as well.

Concluding is "I'm a Marionette" which is just simply great, that's all! The song is perfect and the vocal is appropriately punchy and ballsy, yet Anni-Frid and Agnetha's singing is totally obliterated by the power of the jam, which is ultimate. Mucho congrats to lead guitarist Lasse Wellander, as well as the other musicians here. If ABBA were played on FM, this would be an instant FM classic and it might just be the cut to cross them over.

The Album is right up there with all the great ABBA albums; it's got more substance so perhaps they will crossover and finally capture the totality of the American market this time. It seems evident that ABBA, one of the top five groups of alltime internationally, now should finally tour America in 1978 and prove their renown here to all those people who listen to music with cauliflower ears. •





WAITING FOR COLUMBUS

Little Feat

Warner Bros. 2BS 3140

By BUD SCOPPA

"Someone had arranged for us to be trampled to death!"

—*Sherlock Holmes*
The Seven Percent Solution

"...First form-
fitting record
for the 'Feats'..."
--Bud Scoppa

heavy weather and big swells in Airplay-Alphaville, gang, cuz Lady Luck pulled the "record" lever on the multi-track just as the ushers were shutting the doors on the stacked heels of a foot-stompa-typa set for the Feats, and this double disc need only be heard to be disbelieved. Unbelievable; right. Roots '66.

This Lowell George is such a character...Hollywood High and the Mothers, can you imagine? Funny Phlegmish beret, Citizen Kane's eyes, the posture of a lounge lizard with eyes for the good life and a credit rating as

some of that—and they coax their mass of musical tangles into luxuriant strands that curlicue in endlessly familiar waves. When they really get it going, they dispense entirely with the beginnings and endings of songs—just teasing with those strands until they run out. On these kindsa nights, when something's so right, Lowell and the sidekicks—smart Billy Payne and earnest Paul Barrerre on top with rocksteady swinger Richie Hayward, Kenny Gradney, and Sam Clayton down in the engine room—turn clandestine bickering into flickering incandescence, tying it all together.

As it is with the Feats' hot nights, so it is with *Waiting for Columbus*: the thing galumphs along so infectiously, not so much because of the looney tunes, merry melodies, and mythopoeic garlands, but because of the spaces in between. In the spaces—that's where the action is: That's where the Feats make the hips say "samba" while the



Feat fanatics don't say "Little Feat"—they call 'em "the Feats." "The Feats" is a two-headed snake that's always slithering in two directions at once. One head is smart, level-headed, and conscientious; the other head is smart, too, but so eccentric and undisciplined that it often neglects to shed its skin, clean up its room, or go to sleep at a decent hour. The eccentric head causes problems for the practical head: there's lots of hiss-trionic confrontations, sidelong glances, and backward slitherings, but somehow it all keeps working out, because the two heads realize they move on common ground and have a common end.

So it's *Waiting for Columbus*, huh? Get it?—waiting for America to discover them; right. Welp, pray for

telltale as the first rays of the a.m. sun. He keeps it going, though. (That's the fantasy, anyway.) See, Lowell's had the good fortune to be dropped into the world in an eon that inordinately indulges—and even encourages—individuals of limited means who insist on confronting and then exalting those limits in gallantly foolish ways.

So, there's Lowell—dumpy and pink-eyed but oozing charisma—sliding his cylinder over the frets while gazing at the lead sheet he's placed upside down in front of him. And there's Lowell's band in the next room, noodling through some routines of their own while waiting for Lowell to get purposeful with them. Lowell comes around, eventually...he always does, and he's better late than never. The Feats make music—some of this,

toes insists, "boogie!" That's where they swap day for night and switch the low-beams-to-hi-beam-to-Jobim in ticklish transitions. That's where the metal cylinders slide past the last fret to sighin' wispy trails of slug longing. That's where it's all about.

Thanks to the Tower of Power horns for playing right in the right sections. Thanks to Lady Luck for not running out of tape. Thanks to the boys in the band, not just for working inside the spaces, but for giving the Big Cheese some space to recline in. And thanks to Lowell himself (a Tennessee lamb from Hollywood High) for sacrificing his rest and endangering his health in the completion of his duties as producer and mixer on this project, hereinafter to be referred to as "the first fully form-fitting 'Feats' record album."

MARCH, 1978

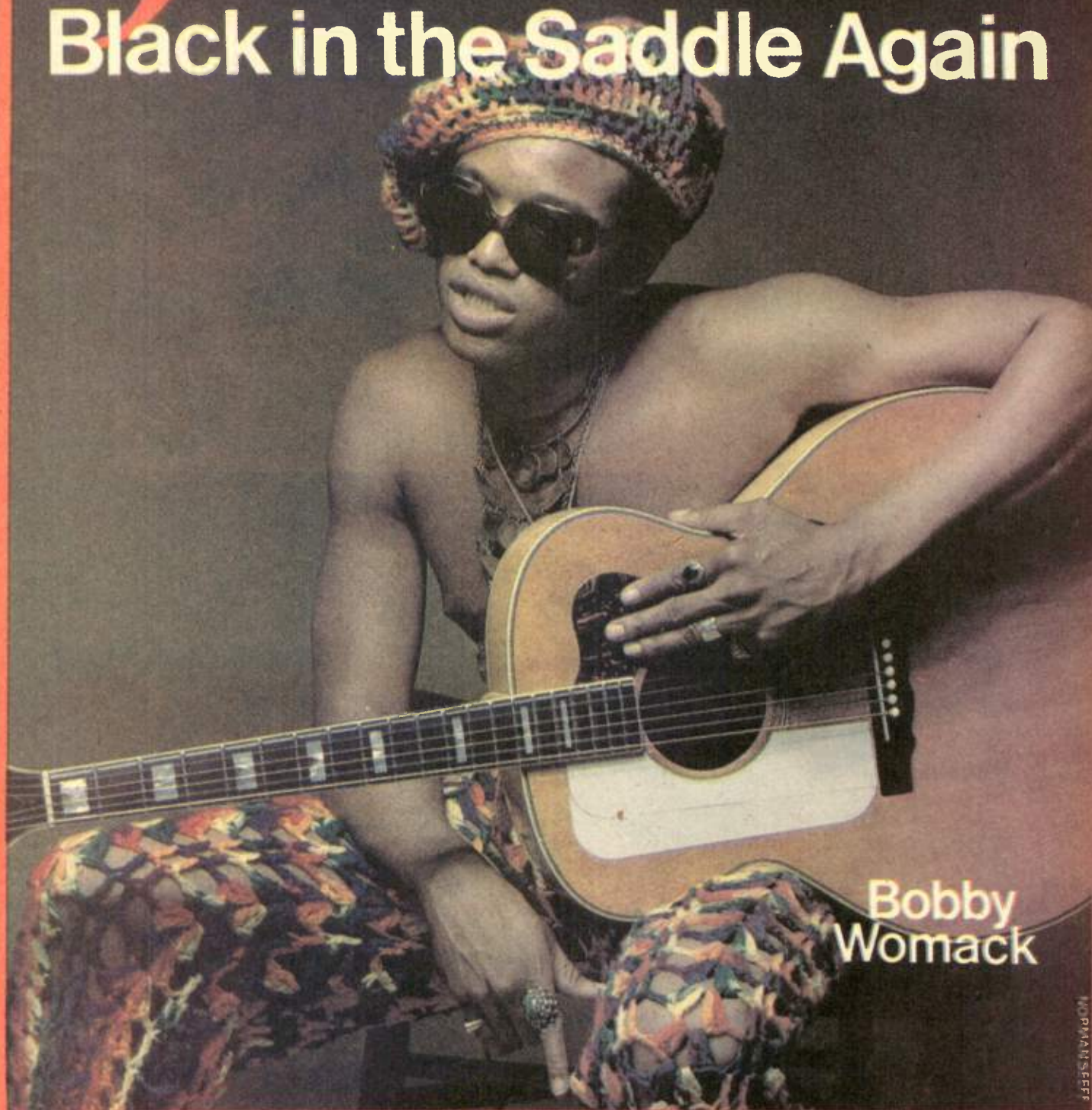
ISSUE 42

Muddy Waters
"I'm Ready"

JAZZ

SOUL
&

Black in the Saddle Again



Bobby
Womack

NO PHAN SEFF

THE GREAT WOMACK ATTACK OF 1978 - By Lita Eliscu

Bobby Womack laughs, and says that in the last couple of years, he'd been writing songs but not cutting any in the studio. He had this one song, "Breezin'," which he'd decided not to use on his own album. So he gave the song to his good friend George Benson, who was just about to go into the studio. Shrugging, Bobby Womack says, "I figured the song would be kind of buried—I mean, who's listening to jazz albums, right? But I didn't want to do it myself, couldn't then."

Next thing he knew, a check for \$35,000 arrived in the mail. "And that was just for the album—not even the single!" Womack hoots, jumps up and down. "I realized people were buying music again, and that record companies were goin' to promote music instead of all that hype and shit."

So it was time to get back into the business. Womack has just finished his second album for Columbia, *Pieces*. He wrote, produced, arranged, played and sang—same as he has been doing throughout his career. But this time, everything seems to be working for him, and the songs somehow sound better.

Which is hard to do. He wrote "It's All Over Now" for the Rolling Stones. "Ninety Nine and a Half," for Wilson Pickett. "That's The Way I Feel About 'Cha," "Woman Got To Have It," both early hits for Bobby. At one time by his own not immodest admission, he was the top session guitarist in

the business. His special slick/funky sophisticated guitar riffs could be heard on everyone's album, from Aretha Franklin to the Allman Brothers. Womack's roots go back to Sam Cooke, his close friend and adviser. His early career was under Cooke's protective wing, but then Womack went on to write for and produce the legendary singer. Cooke's murder left Womack shaken. Unsure what to do, he married Cooke's wife, became a top arranger and writer, then sessions guitarist.

He signed a long-term contract with United Artists and put out several albums. Womack is still unhappy about his years with the company. "One album had four gold singles, four huge hits, and they still told me the album never went gold." He shakes his head, eyes darting about, hands drumming on the table. He is never completely still. His trademark smoked glasses and chunky gold medallion catch the soft lights in the restaurant where we sit. He snorts, "Why, I actually heard somebody there sayin' that they didn't have to put money behind my albums—they sold 250,000, 300,000 without spendin' a dime. And then they'd turn around and spend a fortune on some group nobody

ever heard of before or again."

Womack rocks back and forth in his seat a moment, chomps down the rest of his lunch in record time, orders a pack of cigarettes. "I wanted to record a C&W album. That's really my roots, ya know. Growin' up, I heard more Floyd Cramer than R&B. But UA said, 'Bobby, no way'. But I went in to the studio and put a few tracks down...I recorded Gene Autry's "Back In The Saddle Again," only I changed one word." He croons softly, "I'm Black In the Saddle Again"...Autry wrote a letter saying one word got out and he'd sue their ass off. So the company decided I was gettin' crazy."

A period followed in which Womack drifted in and out of recording sessions with friends, often saying he'd show up and then not doing so. He became infamous for that. His private life also drifted apart. In 1975, he recorded *Safety Zone* for UA, David Robinson producing. "He appeared with a stack of Stevie Wonder hits in his hand for me to pick from. I told him I was a writer." The situation did not improve. Womack cut "Daylight" and was so dissatisfied with his version, he turned around and gave the song to Leon

Russell, telling him he was sure it could be a hit if done properly. And it was—for Russell.



Right after that, Womack seemed to disappear from public view. What he did was to get divorced from his first wife, go out and see friends, meet his present wife and proceed to conceive a baby with her. A baby boy was recently born, and Womack's whole face lights up. He chortles, "Whooo! I never used

'I wanted
to record
a C&W album...
the company
decided
I was crazy.'

to want to know about child being born, about the delivery, you know? But this time, I think I know what love really is. I was in the delivery room. I even went to some of the Lamaze classes with my wife. And it was all beautiful. So real and beautiful."

Sly Stone dropped by the house and told Womack that he had *the* name for the child, to forget whatever they had in mind. "Sly said, 'His name is Truth, because that's what he is'. 'Tru' for short."

Womack gives a huge grin again, then starts talking seriously, his eyes and hands remaining almost still. "That year and a half, my manager, friends, they would all say I was doing nothing. But not me. I said I was doin' *something else*. You know? It was important to be with my wife, to have the baby, to look around." Underneath the street-smart, cool voice is real warmth.

During that time, and in the years before, he wrote a bunch of songs which form the basis for his new album. Columbia had to buy him out of his UA contract, he says, pleased at the show of faith. Guests on the album include George Benson, David Ruffin,

Sly, the Funkadelics (George Clinton, et al).

"It seems hard to write when you're happy," he muses. "I wrote all those songs during a time which was very unhappy. But I didn't write down songs. I'd go out dancin' or partyin' with friends, then write while the juices were still strong. But there must be a way to stay happy and still write."

Womack's career spans two decades, during which he has gone on to build an ever more solid reputation as writer, arranger, guitarist and singer. But he has never really been a star, never really gone through the star trip, like friend Sly Stone.

"I never got up that high that the only place I had to look was down. I never got to the point where I had no one to trust. What I do, what I've done all along, is just fulfill my destiny. I believe that. I like to make music, keep on doin' it." He gulps down his drink, waits for the waiter to come over and light his cigarette. "I just wanted enough to keep me goin', provide my family with a living, have a few cars and things." We both laugh at that—Womack is famous for his cars: a two-tone Rolls Royce Corniche is

parked outside right now. He continues, "But now, with the baby and all, and my wife, I want them to be proud as well as provided for."

His new band is made up of studio musicians, mostly unknown. He will go out on tour with Aerosmith. This afternoon, he goes to New Orleans to play for the Columbia convention.

The new album just explodes with energy. The gospel/soul roots shine through the sophisticated riffs woven through the layers of sound. The Womack voice has never sounded surer as the lyrics talk about carrying on—surviving—whether one is dancing, loving or just trucking along. Although the call-and-response shouts may be reminiscent of church, there is no preaching. The music is generous, sensuous, rhythmic and full of what must be called humor, even when it's quiet or reflective. "I want to write about all the different situations in life, good and bad," says Womack, "but that doesn't mean, it shouldn't have to mean, that you got to depress people. It's important to find a way to write about things that other people know about, understand, and yet make them feel strong, not weak." •





I'M READY
Muddy Waters
Blue Sky J234928

By COLMAN ANDREWS

Singers are sometimes compared to old wine, wine which grows better and smoother with age. Muddy Waters is more like old whiskey—it was good, strong stuff to begin with, and it still is, but it isn't changing very much in the bottle.

Reviews ←

Waters has had surprising success with pop and modern blues material—more so than any other blues singer of similar background has had—but here, he returns to purely traditional or traditional-style material.

Included are Willie Dixon's classics, "I'm Ready" and "I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man," Sonny Boy Williamson's "Good Morning Little School Girl," and a whole passel of solid Muddy Waters originals. Johnny Winter plays guitar on most tracks, "Pine Top" Perkins supplies some surprisingly graceful piano lines, and the superb Walter Horton, one of the great underrated blues harmonica players, is in generous supply.

Im Ready is slick, professionally produced (by Johnny Winter) urban blues, but it's nothing we haven't heard before—messier, rougher, and better.



SMOKEY ROBINSON

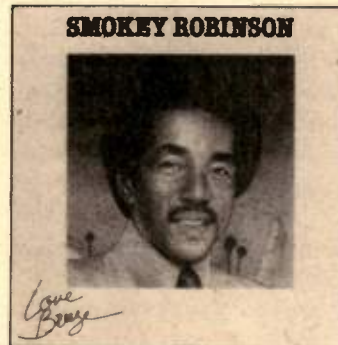
Love Breeze

A New Album of Love So Fine.

Includes
"Why You
Wanna See
My Bad
Side?"



On Motown Records & Tapes
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HOW TO WALK.

In a city where fashion is at least equal to function, walking is more than moving one foot in front of the other. Walking is a tasteful variation on different themes for your feet. Besides a startling selection of Frye/Stitching Horse Bootery collaborations for both men and women, The Bootery offers a fine limited edition of shoes and clogs by our own design division,

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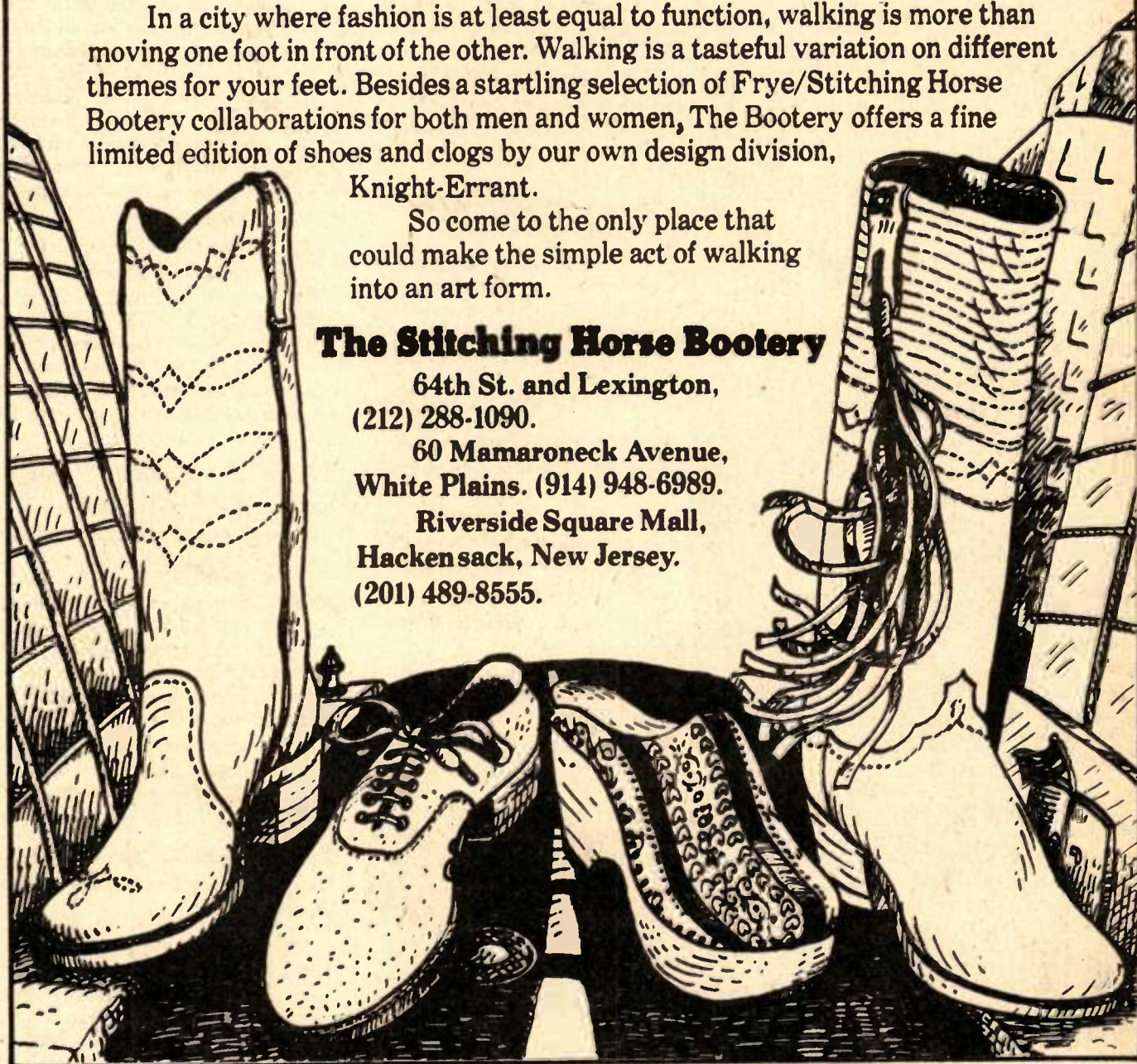
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Puffy face, raspy voice, slightly gruff manner—Grace Slick has a cold. Dressed in jeans, fighting-dragon tee-shirt and baby blue cardigan, seated in the office of her publicist on the second story of a Victorian house in San Francisco's seedy Richmond district, the singer who urged us in 1967 to "feed your head" spurns an offer of prescription cough syrup: "That's narcotics! Codeine makes me puke." At 38, Slick is a veteran of many scenes, from the psychedelic Haight through Woodstock to Altamont and into the present. Jefferson Airplane, the group synonymous with her ringing strident tones, was dismantled in '73. Some of its components, including Grace, combined in Jefferson Starship, a streamlined space-age ensemble with a smoother, more universally palatable sound exemplified by "Miracles," the hit romantic ballad written by Marty Balin, the Starship's other lead vocalist.

III. GRACE SLICK

In the context of the drug-oriented scene from which she emerged, Grace is a true survivor; but for a '70s person she is remarkably uninterested in the fashionable introspection so often credited as our generation's survival mechanism. She stopped drinking a while ago to salvage the friendships she says she was sabotaging with her drunken wit, doesn't take acid anymore since the chemists who formerly supplied her are no longer in the business ("I wanna make sure I know the guy who made it hasn't already fried his own brains"), is a mother and, for the second time, a wife, but claims, "I'm still the same person I've always been. I don't think people essentially

change their personality. Things happen. I don't really look for stuff. Except double zipper pants, because they're hard to find."

An analytical biography of her currently being done by New York Times writer Barbara Rows might provide an opportunity to analyze things more closely, but at the moment Grace isn't particularly interested. "I don't think about why I do stuff. Because my mother beat me? It's possible. Barbara says, 'Where did that anger come from?' I don't know."

Maybe I'm mad at myself...so I bring it out in some other way. It just takes up too much time to wonder about that. I would rather *do* than find out *why* I'm doing. Maybe some day I'll get interested in it."

Nevertheless, despite her disavowals, Grace betrays germs of selfawareness. She is just beginning to recognize ways in which she defers to her partners.

"Uh, for instance. I was gonna call George Lucas and say, hey, I got a great idea for the next *Star Wars*. I would like to play Darth Vader's old lady. She'd be this chemist, dressed in red with big black Cleopatra cat eyes, Medusa hair, long fingernails. She'd be just the opposite of Princess Lea, and a perfect fit for my personality: sarcastic, and...kinda cruel; a pretty woman, but...you wouldn't want to mess with it."

"But Kantner says (whining), 'You'd take too much away from the group if you went and did a movie,' and Skip (her husband) says, 'You won't be able to handle it, you're too nervous already.' So I didn't call George Lucas."

"I mean, Lucas would probably have gone, 'Who cares?' anyway. But I think if I'd been another man—if I'd been Marty Balin—I woulda said, 'I'm doing it, you guys go on without me.' But this was my first experience at acknowledging that, yes, I *am* told what to do by men, and I don't like it."

"But I say yes to men *and* women when I don't want to, 'cause if you say no to people then you gotta look at their stupid faces hanging down, and it's a big drag. So I go along. Essentially it's selfish. I would rather make things more peaceful for myself."

"I'm not particularly independent. I'm only outspoken."

The Airplane as a tribe were noted for defiant political stances. The Starship, though, seem more concerned with intergalactic travel and earthly love than with the wealth of nations; Grace herself has expressed the desire to

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MID-LIFE ROCK

Bruce Johnston, wearing a sport shirt imprinted with tumbling autumn leaves, in shorts that show tanned limbs and scabbed knee, his lip bleeding from a sunburn acquired the weekend before on the boat at Catalina, sits eating a vegetarian submarine sandwich on a bench in the park across the street from the Beverly Hills hotel. His brown hair betrays a touch of grey, acquired during his twenty years in the music business, after which he's reached a level which allows him to take all his meetings outdoors like this, to vow never again to have an office. The Grammy-winning composer of Barry Manilow's hit "I Write the Songs" describes his normal day's activities.

"I get up at eight in the morning, turn on my videotape recorder and check that morning's prices on Swiss francs, gold, silver, palladium and other things I'm interested in that hold their value more than the dollar. I eat, play the piano for a while, then get on the 'phone and call England, working my way back to New York. Then I go out and do errands. I might go to the beach. If I'm producing someone, I'll go to the studio. It's a nice life, it really is."

Bruce is 35 years old and as a teenager played piano and bass and sang on sessions with Richie Valens, Herb Alpert, Phil Spector, Jan and Dean and the rest of the young L.A. crowd. In the early '60's, Bruce and Terry Melcher produced and sang as a duo on a string of hits for Columbia records; then Bruce joined the Beach Boys for 6 years. Afterwards, he and Melcher formed an RCA custom label. Bruce ended his two-year fling as a record mogul when Manilow's version of his tune went to the top.

"I had no idea you could do this well just by writing a few songs. It's just amazing. I've probably written twenty songs in my entire life, and that's the truth. I have the smallest catalog in show business: a mini-catalog that makes maxi-profits. With three songs alone, I've gotten royalties on about 8 million albums and 3 million singles. I mean it's disgusting. I feel like a gentleman farmer. I feel like one of those guys who always rides on the President's plane; he's part of it, he's well paid, but he's not really *in* it, he's an observer. That's the story of my

IV. BRUCE JOHNSTON

career. I've sung and played on countless hit records, but they're not mine; all I did was go 'ooh' and 'aah.' The only thing I've ever *done* is to write one hit."

Bruce has gone through in



The Beach Boys, because how do you slide songs in when the master (Brian Wilson) is composing? So I started really late. You

in his 20 years in music have less to do with great personal transformations than with learning the business ropes, becoming more able to control his future within the career he chose so precociously.

"What's *changed* is you find out you can use your energy to control your life a little more, in terms of the deals you do. Understanding that the mysteries you thought yourself a victim of when you were younger aren't really mysteries. It's like going behind that little screen in the Wizard of Oz, and saying, 'Hey, *come on—I can do that.*'"

In a way, the changes are merely surface. The son of a business executive, Bruce began reading *Fortune* magazine at age seven; he's always had a sharp eye for doing deals. Even the switch from performer to writer was not as dramatic as it might seem. "I had always played at writing...I took an eight-year sabbatical from it in

know what it was? I started taking it *seriously* kind of late. I started taking it seriously because I realized I was taking Beach Boys bows that I didn't deserve. I needed to be recognized for something that was mine, not for joining somebody's else's thing."

Bruce sought that recognition in the fantasy world of pop music, where, as in the other California dream industry of movies, age is an irrelevant thing, a specter to be brushed impatiently aside.

Isn't it odd, Bruce is asked, for someone his age still to be involved with music that is purportedly aimed at people, say, half his age? And Bruce claims, "I never think of age. That's the first time it's ever come into my mind. I never thought about it before."

"Age doesn't really enter into it. I think the audience, once it's past the Donny Osmond thing, is reasonably

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PATTI DAHLSTROM

Dr. Funkenstein, eating an enormous fruit salad in a room of the

New Orleans Hyatt, a few miles away from the museum where King Tut is temporarily on display, is discoursing on cloning. "Oh, cloning can be used for good, but not at the present tempo of people's heads. The big S&M guy would clone him somebody he could whip! Or you'd have Hitler-type dudes clonin' for soldiers. No, they wouldn't be cool right now, they'd be like bionics is on teevee. The army'd get 'em first. They would still be people, but they'd be altered to where you wouldn't feel sorry for 'em. That could be done easy. But that concept has always been around. I think that's what mummies were for, that's why they had that heavy embalming fluid. Right. I think whoever told 'em to put all that stuff in the pyramids knew they would be cloning someday. All you need is a cell; be a natural thing for a mummy. Imagine, if they did that to King Tut now and he woke up here in New Orleans—blow his funk in' mind!"

The good Doctor is in "real life" George Clinton, a 36-year-old veteran of the record business and the overlord of a burgeoning music mini-empire that includes the groups Parliament, Funkadelics, Bootsy's Rubber Band, the Horny Horns, and the Brides of Dr. Funkenstein. He started back in 1954 with his original group, the Parliaments, a street-corner ensemble from Newark that found a temporary home in the Motown stable.

"We got our first hit record, and we was lookin' just like the Temptations—the suits, the ties, the pressed hair. Then when the record died down, so did we, and I realized you have to have somethin' to keep you going past that. We had to come up with somethin' different, an' that's when we decided to go funky. Go crazy on purpose."

The Funkadelics were born out of George's LSD experience and his determination to do things completely his way. Zappa was a definite inspiration to him. The Mothers' music was not to his taste, but George liked the idea of a group being able to make a living playing sounds that did not fit neatly into the mainstream. "The black stations said the music was too rock 'n' roll, and the white stations said, naw,

that's too black. We was in the middle of every form, an' we was nowhere. But we stuck with it."

When the name "Parliaments" was returned to them, the band toured under both identities, and George's schizophrenic "fantasy is reality" P. Funk Earth Tour trip was launched for real. It's an amazing show, as reminiscent of '60s avant-garde troupes like the Living Theatre as it is of white shock-rock bands like Kiss. Figures in grey robes and hoods, black angels in chiffon diapers and wings, horn players in suits, serpentine ladies, all dancing and singing Star Wars gospel around a pyramid as the smoking Mother Ship descends from the rafters—it would be hard to imagine a concept less likely to fit into the rigid Motown bag George escaped from. From Motown to Clonetown took a lot of work. Promoters had to be convinced to take a larger view than they were used to.

Audiences had to be educated into accepting Funkenstein theatrics. Radio programmers had to be psyched into playing slightly off-center discs.

"It was a little harder for us, 'cause blacks ain't too familiar with no props an' things interruptin' their funk. For somethin' as

dynamic as the spaceship to land—that funks up their whole concept of groovin' for a while.

"Most promoters just think of black groups as singing groups. They never booked no Led Zeppelin, no white groups with amps like we got. They say, 'Whyn't you leave some of them amps at home?' You gotta go through all that before you can even get a good show on for a black audience.

"Most of the groups don't even know they need it. When they sing that hit record an' the people holler, they figure they done their job. They don't realize 'till a year later when they don't have a hit and nobody comes to the concert, that they have no followers—and they never did. All those groups—a Brass Construction, a BT Express, Ohio Players—all the hit records they had? It doesn't matter! If that show ain't comin' across—you out of it."

George Clinton is a very smart man.



He has proven that a black group can have the same kind of "underground" success as Zappa's Mothers; at the same time he has had plenty of hits

Midlife Rock: Five Case Studies

by Tom Nolan

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I. FRANK ZAPPA

seen anything like it! Then in the same concert, when we started our *Freak-Out* medley—songs from our first album, ten years ago—these kids started singing along to *those*. They'd heard us on the radio and gone back and bought our earlier records. I mean those kids were in *diapers* when those first albums were released. I got a letter from an eleven-year-old in Portland whose favorite album is *Lumpy Gravy*, and that's been out of print for years."

The niche Zappa has carved for himself in the world of rock is enduring and impressive. Even those who can't stand his music admire him for his integrity, his outspokenness, and his singleminded determination to make the kind of art *he* wants to make. The devotion of his fans borders on monomania, and he has become known as a "catalog artist," one whose records sell steadily over the years.

Nevertheless, he has always had trouble raising money for projects, and his long-term relationship with Warner Bros. Records has ended in litigation.

"I always imagined I'd be making music," he says, "but I never kidded myself for a minute that if I wanted to make the kind of music I was interested in that I wasn't gonna have to work hard in order to do it. There are no patrons of the arts for unusual projects in the rock 'n' roll field. Nobody was handing me budgets. Every time I've done something unusual I've had to go and kick somebody's ass to get the money. But it was kind of hard to imagine ten years ago what the record business would turn into. Man, it really sucks.

"In the '60s, the record executives hadn't yet arrived at the Burbank school, where they all wear faded Levi jackets, grow beards, buy Porsches and hang three or four gold chains and a coke spoon around their necks. Then, they were still like accountants in narrow ties. So they hired these company hippies to hang around the office and look good. The hippies would buy the sandwiches, get the coffee, and be visible when a new act came into the office. The act would see a member of their peer group and feel safe and secure getting reamed by this record company. Well, the same guys who were getting the coffee in the '60s stuck around, and now they're in the A&R department. And instead of being the last bastion of creativity in the record business, they're worse than the guys with the narrow ties. They're

signing the worst people, making the worst decisions, and doling out huge amounts of money for things that are extremely mediocre.

"The whole motivation for making pop music has changed over the last ten years. When I first started there were a whole lotta people who just wanted to get out there and play. Now groups get formed because they wanna be stars, see if they can out-Led Zeppelin the Led Zeppelin in breaking up hotel rooms. A buncha guys get together and say, I look cute, you look cute, he looks cute—by the way do you know how to play any instruments? The role of the guy in the A&R department has changed from listening to music to being a fashion coordinator. Let's face it, it's always been tough for people who are not physically attractive; but today, it's dangerous. I guess the only way left to make it if you're not cute is to jam a big safety pin through your cheek."

Frank's acerbic judgements on his contemporaries' "product" are celebrated, and, no doubt, partly inspired by showmanship; but his disaffinity with almost any non-Zappa music seems genuine. The new jazz? "Bionic disco music. Bionic raga swill." Singer-songwriters? "Ah, the intensive care artists—those really sensitive people who earn a living through their Deep Personal Hurt? Despicable." Modern classical composers? "There's no one working in the so-called serious vein that I feel any rapport with, because invariably they don't know anything about rock 'n' roll." Rock per se? "A couple people are doing good things. Queen. Captain Beefheart. Black Sabbath. I like old rhythm and blues, before they stuck the violins on." Zappa actually fits very uncomfortably into the world of rock. He sees himself as a composer who happens to work within the rock framework, but all the trappings lifestyle leave him cold. He doesn't drink or take drugs. For all the famous musicians who profess to admire him, he rarely socializes. "I've always been on the fringe of all that. I never hung out with those people. I don't have any pop music friends who stop by the house for spectacular parties and all that crap. I just do my work."

Zappa stays in his house as much as possible, engaged in what he sees as far from "normal" activity. ("What I do is for the most part irrelevant to the mainstream of American life. It's sort of like being a mad scientist...") His isolation is complete, his universe intact and untouched. Changes occur, but they are the changes that come to any 37-year-old. Zappa cites marriage and fatherhood as the things that have most

affected him in recent years. He and Gail Zappa have three children: Ahmet, Moon and Dweezel.

"At first I thought I wouldn't enjoy being a father, but I was such a fool! I mean, I liked puppies and kittens and things, but when you have a real live little human being to piddle around with...I'm glad somebody still gets excited about swimming lessons, and whether or not first basemen's gloves are soft enough. I worry about things like inner-groove distortion at the time of mastering..."

He says he often writes pieces for the kids' amusement, like the one he's working on now: a symphonic number titled "The Three Stoogens." The chart for it is spread on the piano, in the composing corner of the workroom. Frank has boxes full of these non-rock orchestral works, compositions that are performed only on those rare occasions when he hires his own hall and musicians. "The copyist's bill alone for the concert I did at UCLA a few years ago was \$10,000. It's a real loser all the

way around. But that's part of a person's job, you know—to do something truly eccentric once in a while."

Given an opening, Frank leaps to put on a tape of that UCLA concert, then just as quickly whips out the written score so I can follow along, *read* the thing while I'm hearing it. Now he's happy, sharing his music with an audience of one. As he watches furtively for reaction to the avant-gardish surrealistic turn-of-the-century sounds plinking out of the workroom's giant speakers, Frank seems not so very different from his real idols, such self-consciously *moderne* composers as Erik Satie and Edgard Varese, revered eccentrics who tinkered in their private artistic domains to their dying days. You get the feeling that not until he's *fifty-six* will Frank have fully grown into the picture he has of himself; that twenty years from now, still at work in a room like this one, Zappa will somehow have become Satie's contemporary. •



DAVID ALEXANDER

II. PETER ASHER

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"I remember when I was in England, hanging out with the Beatles. There was a period when they were all going through this phase: what is it all for? The flavor of what they were saying was, we're rich and famous and got tons of women, but...we still don't feel great. I remember thinking, but that's impossible! If *that's* not it—what could it possibly be? And clearly, their point dawns on one. As one does begin to get all the things you thought you really wanted—the great car, the tons of money—you do start to realize, well this *isn't* exactly it. It's *nice*—it's better than the horrible old car—but it isn't quite the amazingly *great* feeling you thought it *would* be.

"In that sense my ambitions have changed, from just 'success' to trying to find things you really want to do, enjoy doing, and will be proud of having done. It's really just a difference of emphasis, but I see the same flavor of change in a lot of people I know. There's a certain point, in the thirtyish

area, where you start to go, well...is it having children? Is it learning something? Or—God preserve us—is it EST and all that stuff?

"I tend to sort of think that it isn't anything." Embarrassed little laugh. "Just sort of cruise along and do your best."

"I know some peers who are happier than me, who seem to be entirely satisfied with everything that's going on. But I know an awful, awful lot of much more frustrated and less happy people. You never know how anyone's faring, least of all oneself. Every now and then the people you thought had everything under control all of a sudden go crazy, or their marriage breaks up, or they just drop it all. The frustration is that you don't exactly know what you'd like to be doing. At the same time, obviously I'm immensely happy, immensely lucky, and enjoy my work tremendously. I'm not frustrated with what I do...I'm really talking about a much more vague, cosmic frustration, when people start wondering what else they should or could or might be doing. And that's when they go and change their name to Rum Baba. And maybe that's *it*. I don't know." •

GRACE SLICK

write an AM hit. Slick "concedes" this change of direction with a bored whistle. "I don't know how long that will go on. The next record may be a nutcase album which nobody will understand and everybody will hate. It's just a matter of doing something other than what you've been doing, to see if you can. Or, I could say it stems from a totally hedonistic monetary desire on the part of everyone in the group. Or I could say..."

"It's a learning process. If you're in the business for a certain amount of years, you know more about it. You say, 'I've done that before and it doesn't work, why don't we aim for this'—technically, musically, or in a business way. There's more of a drive to be adults, or correct, or proper or something. I'm not sure I'm entirely crazy about it, but that's the way it goes. At the moment."

Grace now disavows any personal connection with the rabble-rousing lyrics she once sang. "I've never written a political song. My first political song will be on *this* album. I didn't write 'Volunteers' or 'Up Against the Wall Motherf---er' and I'm tired of answering for Paul and Marty. I was the asshole in the Airplane, jiving and putting on Hitler moustaches; but I wasn't 'Let's all storm the Capitol and smoke dope.' I don't care, dope doesn't work that well on me anyway. I can't say 'Up against the wall' *anybody*, 'cause I don't know who anybody is. Which cartel is running this country? Which conglomerate? It sure isn't Carter."

"I'm not in any movement, I don't carry any signs. If I feel like saying something, I'll say it in a lyric, but I'm not in any group—not the women's movement, not the hippies. I'm just who I am."

She has no idea what she may be doing five years from now. Research medicine is a field that fascinates her. She studied philosophy in college, and once wanted to be an ad illustrator. "Archeology is interesting... You name it, I'd do it, almost." What she continues to do now, though, is perform. It is a habit she has had all her life; rock is merely the medium through which she has been able to indulge it. "I do it whether or not I'm paid. If I've got my makeup on, I'm performing. Once I get up in the morning, I'm acting. Every six months I'll go through a whole number at the house, just dressing up in old clothes and putting on makeup for whoever happens to drop by. It's not a matter of wanting to, I always *did*, since I was three, playing the piano and singing for my parents. It's just amusing that people pay me to do something I do anyway. It's like being paid to eat dinner."

An observer might paraphrase her offhand remark by saying that, two years away from 40, winning approval

from other people by entertaining them is as essential to Grace Slick as food itself.

BRUCE JOHNSTON

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intelligent. If you're not too esoteric, if you're writing what you're thinking about and it touches people, it's not going to matter whether you're touching a 17-year-old or someone older—unless you're writing really corny songs, which will turn off the young people; but you try and cut through all that. I've been subconsciously aware of that need all along. I stay in touch, and it's kept me from sliding into writing things that would only get sung in Las Vegas. I'm not writing rock 'n' roll; I'm writing songs that will always exist alongside the prevailing trend.

"It's like you're at a dance, and they play three rockers in a row, and then they'll play a slow one, like 'Disney Girls' or 'I Write the Songs.' No matter what happens, I'm sure I'll always be able to zing a song through, because there's always a market for them."

Still, Bruce recognizes a sluggishness in current pop that is directly attributable to tired blood.

"I think the music's boring. And I'm part of that boredom. It's not unlike the '50s now, when all we heard on the radio were Frankie Laine, Rosemary Clooney, Guy Mitchell and those people. We may think we're hearing rock 'n' roll, but it's only MOR with rhythm. It's good—Linda Ronstadt is terrific—but it's so creamy, overproduced, and predictable. Everybody's overpaid. There are no street bands happening yet. I think we have to start locking people out of the business who are in the business, and bring the new ones up. Maybe one of these punk bands will spawn some 1980s-style Rolling Stones. I'm not saying go back to mono, but we need something urgent-sounding. I'll know what it is when I hear it. Maybe that won't be until someone else has produced it, gotten it on the radio and is about to make a million bucks off it."

Bruce's real passion these days seems reserved for the business side of the business. With the conviction of hard-earned experience, he lists some do's and don'ts for the *nouveau riche* of rock.

"You should assume that it's all going to be over in six months. In the music business, you have a short amount of time to make a lot of money. You have to become aware of investments, so you don't get stuck paying some huge overhead you can't afford. Accountants can give you every logical reason to put less money down and earn more with your cash, but I've never met an accountant yet who understood what it's like to play piano or guitar with an overhead in the back of your brain, maybe subtly forcing you to play or write the wrong chords.

When music's false, it shows. I remember the Beach Boys' business manager coming in and saying, you guys *must* finish this album by Thursday because we need to take the advance from the record company and make the prepayment on the interest. And the album went downhill from that moment. You have to keep people around you who are aware of what money is worth, who see a larger picture than the one seen by the average American business management mind.

"I've got all these idealistic things plugged into survival plugged into the nuts and bolts of making records. It's just the way I am, but it seems to work. I'm still making records, and I really enjoy it. I haven't gotten bored. I'm just trying to stay sane, and productive. I see what's on the horizon. I'll probably make a couple more albums,

"I'm designing a lifestyle right now to help me survive. I'm going to build a house in Brentwood. It's going to be designed as a kind of very comfortable survival house... if things should get rough. 'Cause I really think they are gonna get rough. We keep devaluing the dollar, and raising our prices—we're on a roller coaster right

GEORGE CLINTON

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throughout his career. Some of his ideas—about the music business, about art, about life itself—are revolutionary, especially in the context of the business spheres he works within. Will he be the first black artist since Sly to cross over to white audiences?

"We try to cross over. I think about it, but I rather have *them* cross over, so I don't have to sell out on the music. Which is what I have the most conflict with the record companies over. They want it! They want hit 45s. And I'm talkin' 'bout a career, and they two different things. Um hmmm."

Beyond the immediate changes George is trying to effect, there are larger issues involved. The idea that black groups are fated to disappear once their allotted string of hits runs out; the notion of the artist as a non-logical creature at the mercy of business people; the picture some artists have of themselves as superstar geniuses personally responsible for the success and adulation surrounding them—whole unnecessary gestalts are being challenged by Clinton's Ultimate Concepts.

I'm thrilled we doin' this, but if we stop today—cool. I can start tomorrow, start all over again. I got a built-in funk against that whole thing of bein' too happy/I ain't but givin' to be so sad. It's still to me the same as it was before we started. The trip is *here*, Ain't no beginning or end. Anywhere I get on is cool. So I don't feel like a lotta people, so afraid, you know, 'Oh, I can't start

now, and I don't care what the Democrats think they can accomplish with an oversupply of money and all these ridiculously liberal programs that they want to put together—it's just not gonna work. I guess I sound like a Republican, except the Republicans are too liberal for me. If our currency keeps losing value, at some point you're going to have police strikes, you're going to have deterioration of services like water supply, electricity...

"We have a lot of people who are, ah... very dissatisfied. And at some point we may have a hot August day, not very dissimilar from the Watts riots days, where people who are not really making it, who are paying high prices with really devalued dollars, just may get angry enough to... come over this way." Bruce gestures with his head towards the slopes of Sunset Boulevard. "The have-not people are gonna come over... here! They're gonna come over here and kinda... look around, and... loot. Just start getting a piece of the pie."

"I really expect that to happen here one day. People think I'm silly to say all these things. I'd love to be wrong, but I think I'm right. It's gonna get kinda weird in the next twenty years." ●

all over—I can. I just got on a vibe. I'll ride the vibe long as I can, but I'm not gonna say the vibe is *me*. 'Cause I'm only one person. I just wanna dance, eat, stay out the rain. Don't wanna be no guru! It's not me bein' the central leader of this group that's important—it's the Funk. No matter who's there, leadin' it, everybody got to respect the Funk, you know, and live according to that. Then we ain't got nothin' to worry about.

"We gettin' to be the Hip Thang now. We don't want to be *the* Hip Thang, 'cause if we too much the hip thang the novelty wear off. We want 'em always be guessin' it is cool to play us—as opposed to bein' the coolest thing of all to do. Tryin' to have both things goin' on simultaneously, the conformist and the nonconformist, both ideas onstage at the same time. So when people see somethin' they think is crazy, they ain't got to freak. 'Ain't nothin' but a party.'

"Life is like that: they's gonna be some of it you expect and some you don't. People like to be comfortable an' git only the good part. We try to say, naw, they's a *lot* of it. They's some you ain't gonna like, but if you have the right attitude, *all* of it is cool. It happen! So it must be meant to happen. 'Cause you know—what the funk!"

Finally I ask George if he doesn't feel strange, at this stage of his life, to be still making music for people half his age?

"The music is for *all* people," he replies. "The young kids happen to be into it right now. But you findin' out that with one name or another, we'll have all the markets covered." ●

Vicious Dirt, Rumors and Scandals Hollywood ← Rodney Bingenheimer

At the top of each year there are two celebrations with which locals must deal: that common New Year holiday and—of course—*Rodney's Birthday*.

This year 'The Prince of Punk' was treated to a jet-set feast in Vegas by none other than Queen. After dinner and show at the Aladdin, them queens arranged for an extra special 'champagne affair' for the exalted one which included an ad-libbed silly-fied Queen variation on "Happy Birthday Sweet Sixteen."

The Nevada feed was cut a taste short that all could jet back to L.A. in time for, uh-huh, still another dinner/party—this time the fete fronted by Elektra/Asylum in Queen's honor. (Queen's LA reception was at a *tres chic* art gallery appropriately positioned smack-dab in the middle of the interior decorator part of West Hollywood). Needless to mention, we were gasping with perpetual fright at each of the eight courses as they appeared before us. Having already stuffed our guts to the brim twice before with all that free Vegas food, the thought of another bite had nearly everyone on the brink...

After Queen's Forum gigs in LA, the hot scene was a very private after hour's party at The Forum Club where once again the champagne flowed like so much spent bath water.

Enjoying same were: ALICE COOPER and his Missis, dear BRITT EKLUND, MARLENE and CARMINE APPICE, Zombie Records' PAM TURBOV and it goes without saying ROGER, BRIAN, JOHN and PETE (Queen). FREDDIE slipped out early of course.

Roger and Pete took time out to do my radio show while in L.A. Afterwards, we all went to The Rainbow where we hob-nobbed with LIZ & RICK DERRINGER, ANGEL, AXIS, BACKSTAGE PASS, (welcome back Holly) EMPIRE and THE RUNAWAYS. After the proper socializing, the caravan proceeded to the WHISKY (where else to view punk locals THE QUICK and THE SKULLS.

There we joined Brian, Roger and John. It was one big party as we all "pogoed" to The Quick's version of "Somewhere Over The Rainbow." Brian was the first upstairs to exchange addresses with The Quick and to discuss the record biz.

Bringing in the new year and wave to LA, we finally got a taste of them SEX PISTOLS in Southern California late in January. Those *bad boys* maintained their nasty reputation as SID VICIOUS was punched square in the face by—who else—a beautiful young lady. Sid's comment at time of impact; "...Now that's my kinda woman."

The Pistols' seven-day tour ended at BILL GRAHAM's Winterland in San Francisco where *all* of L.A.'s punk rockers gathered, including Britt Eklund(???). After the Bay Area date, the Pistols were back for more LA street scene excess. While no Los Angeles date was logged this time around, ROTTEN said he plans a return to the coast sometime this spring to correct the situation. (This group will not break up as rumoured, incidentally.)

The recent Runaways tour ended with The Ramones and 'the prince of punk' hosting a show at the Santa Monica Civic. After the show, Sire/Warners took over the Santa

Monica Pier for a post gig party which was open to all cumers and featured merry-go-rounds, games, food, drinks and girls on rollerskates that gave change to everyone who wanted to play. Reenacting childhood dreams and future fantasies were: PETER ASHER, JOHN REID, THE DICKIES, CHIP TRICKSTER's ROBIN ZANDER, BUN E. CARLOS and, well you know...

Party Time— "New Wave" label ZOMBIE RECORDS threw their first social affair to introduce newly signed acts: THE SUNSET BOMBERS and THE HEATERS. After a 45-minute wait in the pouring rain, partygoers were allowed entrance and once inside Zombie unleashed cocktails, hor d'oeuvres and hard punk-green T-Shirts to a most receptive and apparently famished, standing—and dressing—room only crowd. Semi-stars spotted stuffing shrimp and sangria: AL STEWART, RITCHIE BLACKMORE, THE FAST, Power Pop King NICK GILDER, DETECTIVE, THE ZIPPERS, THE QUICK, and SPARKS.

THE HEATERS and THE SUNSET BOMBERS are currently in the studio recording their first LPs for Zombie. Both are produced by Jack (Stack-a-Track) and SCOTT SHANNON. The Bombers have a single on release now in advance of the LP—its Reg Presley's old Troggs classic "I Can't Control Myself."

While on Zombie, ex-Runaways bass player JACKIE FOX has put aside her frets and taken a day job doing promotion for the stiffies at LA's #1 Punk outlet.



[l to r] Pete Brown, Roger Taylor [Queen] and Rodney, honorary Queen, but just for a day.

Pipeline ←

Mark Shipper

If the new albums which have already come out this year are any indication, 1978 is going to be one of the greatest years ever for pop music. The new music of '78 has more going for it than just infectious sounds—the lyrics, too, have been at such a consistently high level that it's now possible not only to enjoy the music, but to learn valuable things about life from it, as well.

Let's review a few of the albums that promise to make the year a memorable one:

With their *Aja* album still riding high atop the charts, the last thing I expected was a new LP from those painstaking, plodding, perfectionist pop poets, Donald Becker and Walter Fagen, better known to millions as Steely Dan. So you can imagine my surprise when the mailman brought me their new album.

On the new Steely Dan LP, *2 Guys 2 Cool 2 Take* (ABC), Becker and Fagen—for the first time—come to grips with themselves and their image. Although the title cut is an uncharacteristically banal one-chord riff, the lyrics say plenty:

*I'm too bored
My Sweet Lord
With your great reward
To even bother
Changing chords*

*So leave us alone
Give us a break
Apathy is the path for me
We're two guys too cool to take.*

Here's an interesting experiment you can conduct the next time you find yourself on a college campus: ask 100 girls who their favorite recording artist is. (Note: ask them one at a time!) The results may surprise you. At least 10% will say it's Fleetwood Mac, 4 to 5% will name Seals & Crofts, 2% will go for Neil Diamond, and if any of them like John Denver, that's their problem. But fully 80% will tell you it's Jackson Browne. "He's tough, but he's sensitive," they'll say. Others will tell you merely that "he understands."

Still others will think you're trying to pick them up. Browne's new album, *Storms In The Dorms* (Asylum) is obviously aimed directly at his rapidly-growing coed constituency. Even the heart-on-his-sleeve Browne has rarely been as candid as in the album's title track:

*There's storms in the dorms
Tears where cheers used to be
College girls get so happy
When they identify with me.*

*There's storms in the dorms
Psychic scars that won't go away
And now, I can't find my broken heart
It was last seen racing up the chart.*

That other campus fave, Neil Diamond, is back with *1% Inspiration, 99% Perspiration* (Columbia), easily his best since he ran out of things to write about several years ago. The album's highlight is an exercise in contrived intensity called "Desiree." It's sort of Neil's personal "Summer Of '42," and it's very reminiscent of the movie in that it's terrible, too.

*And on the eighth of June
I wrote my love a tune
And on the tenth of June
I played it in her bedroom
She said "the lyrics stink"
Then headed for the bathroom sink
And 'twas into a Dixie Cup
That my sweet Desiree threw up.*

If Neil Diamond has little to say, Johnny Rotten is a different story altogether. The lead singer of the Sex Pistols has a lot on his mind and it's all on their first album, *Never Mind The Bull Lox, Where's The Cream Cheese?* (Warner Bros.) The Sex Pistols are angry. At a society that doesn't understand them ("Pretty Vacant"), at fascistic British Colonialism ("Anarchy In The U.K.") and at the Queen, who seldom shaves either her legs or under her arms. It's the topic of their most controversial song—already banned in England—"God Shave The Queen":

*God shave the Queen!
She's got hair everywhere!
Sombdoy must've poured Afro-Sheen
Into her bottle of Nair!*

One artist who I've always admired is Paul Simon. As important a voice as he was in the 60's, he's grown even more valuable in the 70's as our foremost chronicler of life among the idle rich in New York's social circle. Simon's "social conscience" has never been more active than it is on his latest, *Bridge Over At Barbara Walters'* (Columbia). The title song deals unflinchingly with the weekly card game that draws the elite of New York's in-crowd to Barbara's Park Avenue apartment every Tuesday night. Other highlights include an adaptation of Jackson Browne's "These Days" ("These days it's hard to find good help," Simon sings and you'll have to hold back the tears).

In 1975 he was the world's biggest rock star. In 1976 he released his masterpiece, *Blue Moves* only to watch it meet with overwhelming indifference from radio programmers and the public. Stung, he used the year of 1977 to nurse his wounds and prepare the album that would again catapult him to the highest echelons of superstardom. Now that album is here. *Transplant* (MCA) is the record every true Elton John fan knew he had in him. To attempt to describe an album as powerful as this one would be like attempting to describe the breathtaking sunsets off the coast of Maui in Hawaii. Which I can do, but I don't feel like it. Suffice it to say that new songs like "Yul Brenner Watch Out, Yul Brenner Not Cry" and "Go Back Kojack And Do It Again" are fully the equal of Elton's unforgettable early classics, although I can't remember the names of any of them at the moment. ●





ALISON STEELE



ALISON STEELE
Monday-Friday, 10:00pm-2:00am

Alison is the senior staff member at WNEW-FM, having started at the station in June, 1966

Her background is as diversified as the music she plays. She has done many television shows as a news reporter, interviewer, mistress of ceremonies, and has produced many radio and TV shows as well as appearing in several movies.

A voluptuous, blue-eyed red-head, Alison is known as the "Nitebird", and in addition to taking her listeners on nightly flights into the best possible musical environment, she also brings her unique philosophy of life to her audience with her unusual poetry presentations.

Alison is currently heard around the country on three syndicated radio shows. As a pop culture correspondent for television news, she is seen on 75 TV stations regularly.

WNEW-FM

102.7

METROMEDIA STEREO



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should be so far apart. That rock fans should think classical music is tiresome and overblown (and be absolutely right!); that classical fans should think rock music is unnecessarily crude (and be absolutely right!). But it wasn't this way in the early 19th century! There was no distinction then between music that was entertaining and music that was...what...inspirational. Popular and classical were the same thing...

Why make distinctions between styles? A good Beatles song—hell, a good anybody's song, a good *Ramones* song—can be stood right next to a good piece from the classical repertoire without any qualitative difference...How to describe what he so vaguely has in mind...He stalks to the keyboard and tears off a passage from Stravinsky's *Persephone*, which is not an opera, exactly, not a symphony, strictly...It's this...*form*, with all these wonderful *songs*...

You can say what it wouldn't be. It wouldn't be the Bee Gees standing in front of the New York Philharmonic while the band played some pedestrian-simple string arrangement. It wouldn't be Frank Zappa mouthing dirty lyrics over Varese, no, and it wouldn't be Warren writing some Hamlet rock opera with the Prince of Denmark holding a Fender Telecaster instead of a sword...It would be some whole *new* thing, something maybe like what Hunter Thompson or Vonnegut have done with the novel form. Warren insists that there still exist formal possibilities in music, just as in literature; that there still is room for development, experimentation, innovation...new forms! Invented by...people like Warren, say. Warren, with his goofy haphazard noneducation in classical music. Warren, who understands the relation between

passages in Stravinsky and the heart of a primo Jeff Beck solo. Warren, who could take his very personal knowledge and create something totally unique, something only *he* could make.

Hey, let's get this going while the symphony still *exists*! The sad realization that the symphony—with its capacity to sound like nothing else in the world, like *anything* in the world, infinitely more interesting than anything electronics could ever approach—that the symphony could dissolve before our very jaded eyes...What earthly reason is there anymore for anyone to want to learn the bassoon, when you could play the guitar through one of those synthesizers and make a bassoon-like sound...Clarinets would be like dinosaurs, oboes would be in the Smithsonian...There must be a way...Some kind of balance between the notion that you have no right to demand more than three minutes (maybe six) of anyone's time because of the pace at which we all live our lives today; and the knowledge that not so long ago people used to put on their starched shirts and fancy clothes and go sit for three hours while a hundred people performed for them in a very disciplined but still impassioned manner...

Well...Anyway...That's a dream of Warren's. Dreams are what you get into once you get past wondering what it would be like to make your own album, or have your songs performed, or have journalists ask you what you're thinking. You get into personal dreams, life dreams...which are hard to put into words, by their very nature. Yet we mustn't lose them. "Lose your dreams and you will lose your mind...Ain't life unkind."

But enough of that...The fact of the matter is, Warren has just released this very...bizarre, wonderful album. *New*

West calls him the best new singer-songwriter in seven years. Those interviewers are coming to call. Both phones here in the Los Feliz house are ringing off the hook. Everybody wants to know about those oddball characters that spring out of Warren's forehead. Roland, the Thompson gunner. The werewolves of London. El excitable hombre. This spooky sideshow of grotesques, these playful psychotics—what does it all *mean*?

It's an extension, really, of the first album's decadence. An awareness of the ring of violence surrounding that decadence. The violence on the fringe. The violence at the core. Willy on the plate...

Yes. Warren will confess to a certain...uneasiness about having included 'Willy on the plate' as his sleeve photo: a meanlooking Smith and Wesson .44 magnum laying across a dinner plate. A dandy image, but...disturbing. Irresponsible, even?

It grew out of a private joke, a dare musicians on the road sometimes make. You know, this band of rock 'n' rollers, after nine months of touring, exasperated, frustrated, disoriented, and...terminally bored...Why bother being rude to the waitress in Denny's anymore. Why not just stand up and put your dick in the plate. Hey, which one of you guys is gonna f-ck his food, huh? Who has the guts to do Willy on the plate? And Warren made this connection in his mind, this substitute image...Smith and Willy...too entertaining to resist...

Once the photo was done, a new fascination had taken root. He thought maybe the least he could do in the direction of life imitating art was to buy himself a pistol. Understand, Warren grew up this typical '60s idealist. If anybody was gonna shoot anybody, it wasn't gonna be him. If he got shot himself, he'd just take the bullet, he



AARON RAPOPORT

wouldn't have to swallow the karma. But then, that was 11 years ago, 11 years since the summer of love. Maybe...maybe he ought to see what it was like from the Other Side. Maybe it was time to join the statistics of American gun owners. He bought this...Ruger Blackhawk .44 magnum...and he took it home and looked at it...and puked...Repulsive, hideous object...He was ashamed of what he'd done. Tried to make it some sort of joke. Answered the door sometimes holding the magnum and wearing that giant plaster duck mask from Mexico...But still...If he could flirt with such behavior—he of the full bookshelves, Kafka, Sontag, Le Carre, Barthelme, Rilke—one shudders to contemplate the implications for society as a whole. All those Others out there, their consciences unshackled by a peacenik past...

And that's the point, really, that's what Warren's driving at in those awful and amusing tunes he writes. Take 'Lawyers, Guns and Money'—something he dashed off in a light moment in a bar in Hawaii, an amusing anecdote he at first considered it...Then its full import began to sink in. Eventually it summed up the album for him. This jerko caught between a rock and a hard place, screaming to his parent over the longdistance cable from Central America; hey, get me outa here! It's the '70s equivalent of Chuck Berry's 'Dear Dad,' remember? 'Dear Dad, don't get mad, what I'm askin' for, is by the next semester can I get another car!' Well now the kid needs something with a bit more...horsepower...Lawyers, guns and money! The shit has hit the fan! And power is the only defense against the ravages of a crazed society...

It's not that Warren finds violence amusing...exactly...More like the

triviality with which mortality is treated, the Kojak mentality of popular art. He's got this fantasy: Starsky and Hutch as the angels of death! Blonde, goodnatured, wisecracking guys in perfectly beatup leather jackets—the new order of seraphim, replacing the somber white-robed specters of old. You're talking death as the underlying theme of all contemporary art—and look how they treat it...One has to laugh...sort of...

So while it's foolish to ignore the reality of dying...it's just as silly to be morose about it, no? Better to laugh about something than not. Laughing ennobles death. Humor's the last thing to lose before drawing that last breath...preferably with some stupid quip on your lips...

The appeal to Warren of all the detective novels on his shelf is that the detective story is up front about death! You get death out of the way right at the beginning, and then you spend the rest of the book *explaining* it. And on the last page, you understand why

everybody died! Order from chaos...

And then it gets into a kind of elegant balance. Ross MacDonald has it. He's never let Warren down yet. That nice balance between blood-and-guts and humanitarianism...with just the acceptable amount of formal poetry. What an ideal...

Warren can't see sticking with that violence theme. The possibilities are alarming. That's the scary part. Deep down, he's afraid it

it all reflects some darker tendency in the culture as a whole, some move towards a...remilitarization of all of us. He's got this queasy feeling...call it a creeping intuition...that the 'logical' reaction to this mindlessly violent culture surrounding us...Jesus, he must sound like some kind of closet brownshirt...is that everyone *else*—those who aren't out stabbing or strangling or shooting—everyone else will be hunkering down in their homes with these extremely large calibre weapons...the sort that can blow a fridge in two, that can take out a baby grand—the sort you don't even need to learn to aim...Just point the sucker in the compass direction of your...Intruder...

There are signs, if you care to see them. Consider punk rock. Yes, the Ramones...Entertaining...Humorists in the grand American tradition, thinks Warren. And yet...if there's any philosophical undercurrent to punk rock besides 'screw your parents' and 'let's make good rock 'n' roll again without 24 tracks,' maybe it's something rather...fascist.

But what's that outside. Some sort of sleazy gypsy cab pulling into Warren's drive. Frightened looking driver huddling over the wheel, as this...character pays him off from a huge wad of greenbacks and climbs out of the cab...slowly...this huge man, two metres tall, wearing a green ribbed wool jersey with epaulets, frayed and

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BRUCE OSBORN

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unraveling from twenty years' wear...jaunty blue kerchief 'round his neck...clipped moustache...and perched on his closecropped head, a black beret of the Irish Republican Army...Gonzo...So there he is...So there he is...

Warren goes out to meet him, and into the house they jaunt. And the tall man sees someone standing in the living room, and the tall man jumps half a foot, making vague slapping gestures around his midriff, where a gunbelt might once have hung. "Sorry, mate. Wasn't expecting to see anyone in here." Then, with a grin: "Been in the trade too long." *The trade!*

Lindy! Everything one could have hoped for!

He's sitting there on the sofa, 'relaxed' over a can of Olympia beer, but he looks like he could bolt any moment. He's reassuring Warren that he changed cabs on the way, made sure don't you know that he wasn't followed—*followed!*—from wherever it is he's come. The airport...Tahoe...he's not telling...

What he is telling is an involved story about fitting a ship in the Isle of Wight with sheet metal plating, sailing it to Nassau to sell it to the Bahamas government for \$25,000 so Nassau can protect their American tourists from being preyed upon by Cuban pirates. Lordy... "You shoulda seen us. You shoulda seen us. Flyin' the old tricolor don't you know, the Irish flag, welcome certainly in any port, and the American coast guard scoping in on us with their binoculars you can be very certain, on the lookout for

marijuana—well, you can imagine seen' *this* thing come sailin' your way! Got to be the most evil-lookin' boat ever made! Bulletproof glass we put up in there by the wheel, an' that steel plating an' all. And they didn't dare touch us, because of the flag ya know. It was beautiful! Beautiful! Yes, it was very nice indeed, that." All the while his speech doing a dance of dialects, blarney Irish to Oxford English to a sort of bland Kansas drawl...what's going on here...and Zevon watching him, this slight smile of affection playing on his lips. Lindy! Errol Flynn playing Fernandel...

"They're playin' your songs on the German shortwave, they are. The German shortwave, in the middle of the ocean, we hear Linda Ronstadt singing 'Poor Poor Pitiful Me'. You must be doin' somethin' right, Warren, I'll tell ye."

So the stories begin, memories of those times in the Dubliner...rosied up a bit for public consumption...The famous door story, of the time when Lindy and a bunch of boyos liberated this massive five hundred pound door from the chateau across the way...monstrous carved thing with brass fittings... 'Salvaged' it, let's say... And someone called the *Guardia civil*, and there all the boyos were trying to teeter the thing off the back balcony, and Warren on the ground below, holding the bottom, screaming he won't let go, because of this Alan Ladd 'Fire Down Below' vision he has of himself being cut in half by it...Ah, the good old days!

The time Warren, hair down to his ass, came strolling into the dockyard of some dangerous port to inquire after the whereabouts of Lindy's vessel...at the same time our man himself is sailing into harbor with a load of contraband rice krispies...diapers...soap... "But no drugs. We didn't mess with the drugs, you know."

Lindy raises a finger suddenly, and pronounces: "The five Ps: Proper planning prevents piss poor performance." He stands, stoops over the table, begins to gather up filled ashtrays and empty beer cans. "Once a barkeep, always a barkeep," he chuckles.

In a moment he's back, and the talk turns political. It's 'your man Carter' and 'your man Begin'...European phrasings, and that obsession with

current events and nationalism that is nurtured by living in a country that drags centuries of history and tradition on its back, where television has not replaced conversation and the veterans of foreign wars come floating through in search of further employment. "Ah, now, that thing's gonna blow up right soon, that Libya. There's nobody here that's knowin' what's really goin' on down there. Your man Carter has not a clue."

And the marriages, and the wives and children. And the rapport between these two—real and attractive. "Jars," the drinks are called, and jar after jar is raised, and the possibility of leaving the domicile in search of a proper jar joint is raised, yet a proper establishment cannot be thought of whose provincial nature would not provoke humor in our distinguished visitor, so a call is made for more supplies instead. A case of Oly...some of the good Russian wodka...and when the boy from the liquor store knocks at the door, Lindy reaches over and shoves the Ruger Blackhawk under the sofa cushion. Glances at someone who's watching him. Grins.

But here's Howard Burke, Warren's road manager, he who served with the American armed forces in Spain. Well! Welcome aboard, mate, and hoist a jar! Things start slipping into higher gear. And the time has come, the time for Warren to play 'Roland' for Lindy, the first time he'll have heard it. Lindy gave him the lyrics almost word for word. There's a picture hanging on Warren's kitchen wall, [shown on page 27] of the night 'Roland' was composed; he and Lindy sitting in the bar, Lindy, instant James Joyce untutored songwriter, doing something only he can do, possessed by the demon spirit of rhyme; Zevon, guitar in arms, staring past him in drunken rapture, as Lindy pounds out the meter: "Our man, our man, you see, our man—ten years later! But he still...he still keeps up the fight! Ah—and it's—it's *time time time!* For another...*peaceful war!* Haha!" Punctuating it with these maniacal Sterling Hayden grunts: huh! ah! ah! ah hah!

And now Lindy's hearing the tape, the end result...He loves it, naturally. Who couldn't. And who else could have written it, this 'true story' with only the names changed to protect the composers! Who but our man Lindy could have come up with this

epic... Certainly not some poor dork sitting in the back of the Rainbow Bar and Grill on Sunset Boulevard, sipping the old tequila drinks from four years ago... no way! Rock steady!

And it all slips into yet a higher gear... That's Jorge Calderon and friend at the door... Christ, all the collaborators are showing up tonight, a regular gathering of Spanish Civil War vets. A cassette of Jackson Browne and Warren singing 'Staggerlee' in some hotel room is playing on the deck. And is that the liquor store boy making a *second* delivery... Is that Warren at the piano, taking requests for Irish infanticide ballads and 'Tenderness on the Block'... Is that someone wearing a giant duck mask... Has everything slipped out of surrealism into something altogether other, something spinning off into space from Los Feliz... achieving just the right balance, as our man would have it, between action and repose... violence and poetry... life and art... humor and dreams...

And Lindy takes out his enormous wad of money and hurls it into the air... dozens of twenty dollar bills floating softly... like Gatsby with his shirts... He's grinning shyly... And Warren murmurs to himself... "What a party! What friends! It's like dying on the moon." •



EXCITABLE BOY

Warren Zevon

By COLMAN ANDREWS

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and "Lawyers, Guns and Money."

The former (with John McVie and Mick Fleetwood in the band has a big, generous, open-armed rhythm motif, and lyrics full of surrealistic mock-metaphor. "Better stay away from him" Zevon sings at one point, "He'll

rip your lungs out, Jim/I'd like to meet his tailor." That's one of the more straightforward sequences.

"Lawyers, Guns and Money" is sort of the polar opposite of, say, "Margarettaville"—the plaint of the scrapping activist, not the passive raconteur—the snake in the corner, not the lizard in the lounge. Again, the music gladly takes the listener in, thereby heightening the sense of serio-comic desperation the song exhudes.

"Johnny Strikes up the Band" is an upbeat, vaguely Springsteenian rocker. If the album has a single on it, this is it.

The title song is funny in the way that those old EC horror comics of the '50's were funny. As *Mad* used to have it, "Humor in a jugular vein." Still, there's something engagingly, and appropriately, boyish about the song—particularly apparent in the proto-bubble-gum background vocals by Warnes, Ronstadt and Wachtel, and in the ingenuous ease with which Zevon throws off lines like "He raped her and killed her, then he took her home."

"Roland the Headless Thompson Gunner" is an heroic ballad with Irish overtones about a Norwegian mercenary who is assassinated by the CIA, but whose headless ghost still roams the world in search of, well, a little action. (The words here are apparently mostly by Zevon's friend, David Lindell, who apparently mostly knows whereof he speaks.)

"Accidentally Like a Martyr" is a simple, appealing, lost-love ballad by Zevon, with an especially ambitious, and naggingly successful, quadruple rhyme based on "mad," "shadow," "random," and "abandoned."

"Nighttime in the Switching Yard" is the album's obligatory disco track. (If this had been recorded last year, it would have been done with a reggae beat.) It's hard to figure what it's doing here at all, with its almost non-existent lyrics and its rather uncomfortable-sounding rhythm track (which resembles that on Joan Baez' "Time Rag")—though it is apparently a distillation of a longer, more serious, more intriguing story-song.

"Veracruz" is an extremely well done historico-romantic south-of-the-border ballad—reminiscent of, but better than, Tom Jans' "Distant Cannon Fire." It is literary in the best sense, using slightly oblique references as commonplace ("I heard Woodrow Wilson's guns," etc.) and sketching

hints of storylines with the lightest possible touch.

"Tenderness on the Block," co-written by Zevon and Jackson Browne, is a little bit obvious, and a little bit condescending—guys in their early 30's shouldn't undertake to lecture guys in their 40's or 50's about how to raise their teenage daughters, because both the guys in their 40's or 50's and the teenage daughters know more about life than guys in their early 30's do—but it has the usual Browne-knows sensitive appeal, and Zevon sings it with reassuring distance.

Zevon changes gears frequently, dramatically, even excitably. He covers all the bases, and with a casualness that seems almost naive—as if he doesn't realize quite what he's doing, but figures that it's working so far...

Warren Zevon may be as fried on cocaine, burritos, and Perrier as the next laddie of the canyons, or he may not be. But what it *sounds* like he's fried on is looking out the window at the trees too long, and reading too many books (hardcovers!), and getting too much good old-fashioned Rapid Eye Movement slumber—the kind where you dream real dreams and *know* they're dreams.

Or maybe he's just a good singer/songwriter with a perfervid imagination. •



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liked so much what we did on *Low* that we knew we had it in us to do another album—and now, even, a third one—*Fame*.

I'm pretty self-satisfied with my own individuality these days. I don't think I have to exert myself too much to explain that I'm not part of rock-and-roll. I just *use* rock-and-roll, and I had to be very exaggerated from the beginning to defy people to put me into a category. I wanted to have room to work in. I wanted to be able to work in any sphere or medium. I needed breathing space. I have my own identity. •



7. THE WIND HARP (UA)

Somewhere on this hill up in New England somebody stuck up this giant harp. Breezes come by and fan the strings. That's God's music, buddy, and knowing what a flair for the hook God has shown over the years, not to mention being a consistent chart-topper, United Artists Records were more than happy to tape his act with the Wind Harp and even release it as a two-record set (I mean, hell, you gotta give God at least as much space as a live heavy metal band). Later his celestial musings on this by now probably somewhat rusty instrument were, as usual, appropriated by the Devil, turning up on the soundtrack for *The Exorcist*.

8. DAWN AT NEW HOPE, PA. (Atlantic)

Atlantic Records and Syntonic Research, Inc.'s *Environments* series. I have nothing against these records in principle—a friend claims that playing the surf noises on the first record absorbs the traffic noises and crime-of-violence shrieks penetrating apartment walls in New York City, thus obviously reducing the tortures of the damned (meaning apartment dwellers, not crime victims). But I began to suspect they might be running short of inspiration, if not long on scam, when they followed Volume 2's "Dawn at New Hope, Pennsylvania" with volume 3's "Dusk at New Hope, Pennsylvania." Still, David Peel completists will want to pick up Volume 3, because he makes a cameo appearance in side one's "Be-In (A Psychoacoustic Experience)," recorded at Sheep Meadow in Central Park April 6, 1969.



9. CALIFORNIA 99 (ABC)

Released late in 1971 and subjected to an in-depth analysis by yours truly upon that occasion in the pages of this very magazine, this was truly the ultimate rock opera concept album. I know, I know, I hear you clamoring *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* or Camel's *Snow Goose* or *The Naked Carmen*. But *California 99*, whose plot was far too complex to attempt to recap here, was the only science fiction concept rock opera in history to also include Jimmy Witherspoon singing "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down," which makes it a document spanning over a century of American history even if you can't find it in bargain bins anymore.



10. SENATOR SAM-Sam J. Ervin (Columbia)

This wasn't the only record to come out of Watergate, of course—we must not overlook Orson Welles' *The Begatting of the President* or the J.B.'s "You Can Have Watergate Just Gimme Some Bucks and I'll Be Straight." But, as critic Billy Altman pointed out in his *Creem* magazine review when it came out (when do you think, bozo?), it comes from a hallowed tradition: Senator Everett Dirksen's "Gallant Men," Senator Bobby's "Wild Thing," and John Wayne's *America, Why I Love Her*, featuring "The Hyphen," about how all hyphenated Americans (Mexican-, Afro-, etc.) were right up there with white folks. But Senator Sam was a true national hero, and in many ways this was his *Self Portrait*, as he recited his covers of "Bridge Over Troubled Water," "If I Had a Hammer" and "The First Amendment." (Which also reminds me of another great celebrity record: *Telly* on MCA, where the chromedome cop recited songs like Bread's "If,"—which in turn reminds me of Ted Knight's *Hi Guys!*, which I have heard about and seen a picture of the cover but never actually heard so I don't know whether he sings or recites or what label it's on...) Sam was 77 years old when this record was cut, but when he got down to the serious business of reciting self-penned folk-funnies like "Zeke and the Snake" he didn't sound a day over 76.

Honorable mention for also-rans: Les Crane's *Desiderata*, Kreskin's *World of ESP*, *Godfrey Daniel*, *Disco Duck* (one of the only RSO albums not to feature Eric Clapton—I think they had to bar him from the sessions), Lou Reed's *Berlin*, the Carpenters in outer space, Klaatu, the Orphic Egg series on London, the Goldiggers on RCA, Kim Fowley's continuing efforts in behalf of mankind, Tangerine Dream and various solo

Just to show you that what I'm talking about in this article isn't just a product of Seventies decadence, I combed my archives and came up with the following, all released in the Fifties and Sixties:

✓ *Stereo Sounds* by jets, railroads, ships, surf and trap drums (Rondo-lette). This late-fifties item is my all time favorite sound effects record. Not because I'd ever actually listen to it, but for the liner notes: "Because of the great separation of sound as shown in stereo recording, it is necessary to make records of sound effects. Normally, one does not think of these records for the home, but how else is one to show off the wonderful stereophonic set except by having the train come into the room from one side, whistling its approach, pass through the room and go out the other side." What's more, "With the modern age, the jets have come into being and the whine of the jet is something with which we must become familiar. To have a jet enter the room from one side and leave through the other is an experience."

✓ *The Dream World of Dion McGregor* (Decca). Subtitled "He Talks in His Sleep," because that's exactly what he supposedly did, the notes on this late Fifties or early Sixties item claim that McGregor's somnolent harangues came out in the form of actual stories, which drove his roommate to insomnia and a tape recorder, which led to a record contract. While it could be maintained that something very similar happened in the solo career of Lou Reed, this record remains a unique if unlistenable document: this guy snoring for punctuation while he drones out completely incoherent sagas with titles like "The Mustard Battle" and traffic grinds and honks on First Ave. below because, as liner attests, he likes to sleep with the windows open.

✓ *Moldy Goldies: Colonel Jubilation B. Johnston and His Mystic Knights Band and Street Singers Attack the Hits* (Columbia). Dylan's *Blonde on Blonde* producer and band have some fun after Bob crashed. Actually this is a good album, get it outa here.

✓ *These Are the Hits You Silly Savage* by Teddy & Dartel (Mira). This Mike Curb production, appearing concurrently with the Bantams, featured lisping renditions of "Wild Thing," "These Boots Are Made For Walking," "Strangers in the Night," "Hanky Panky," "Hold On, I'm Comin'," etc. I am not kidding when I say their singing sounds identical to Wayne County's. Liner notes: "This trip is a wholesome gas for healthy, fun-freaking, cool purple-passion people eaters!"

✓ *Beware! The Bantams* (Warner Brothers). Circa 1966 and obviously years ahead of their time in more ways than one, this power trio were nine, ten and twelve years old respectively. I saw them on TV once, and they played their own instruments too, or held them in their hands. Their "Twist and Shout" must have been better than somebody's version, and the liner notes point out that Fritz Bantam is "the Paul McCartney of the lollipop set" and that "As Aristotle was once inspired by Plato, The Bantams were inspired by those four older men, The Beatles."

✓ *Deuces, "T's," Roadsters & Drums* by Hal Blaine (The Drummer Man) and the Young Cougars (RCA). Produced by Lee Hazelwood at the height of the surf/car craze, this record was one of the most incredible combinations of talents in recording history: besides Blaine, who has bongocongoes for everybody in the world, there's instrumental compos by Hazelwood, arrangements by David Gates of later Bread fame, and a different guest artist varooming through every cut: Challenger II ("powered by four Pontiac engines"), Nashville Coupe ("660 cubic inch Chrysler engine, two 471 GMC blowers, a set of four specially built fuel injectors"), Mr. Eliminator ("A '27 Ford roadster powered by a 305 cubic inch Chevy fully equipped with a 471 GMC blower and a Hillborn fuel injector"), etc. Guest artists recorded live, of course.

spinoffs, the *Get Off* antidrug radio station albums, *The Roto Rooter Goodtime Christmas Band*, Magma who invented their own language, Steven Grossman who came out of the closet on Mercury for nothing because gays were supposed to play hard rock that year, Jonathan King's *Bubble Rock is Here to Stay*, Brady Bunch album featuring "American Pie," Jobriath, *The Sensuous Woman* by "J" on Atlantic, and David Bromberg, beloved of his mother.



DENNIS ELSAS



Dennis Elsas began his broadcast career at Queens College, where he helped start the campus radio station. After graduation he taught both elementary and high school and also held a part-time DJ job at a suburban station.

In 1971, he joined WNEW-FM as the summer relief man. Six months later he became the station's Music Director and stayed busy on-the-air with weekend shows and extensive fill-in work. He moved into the 6-10pm slot in May, 1976.

"The freedom to program all kinds of music and vary its mode of presentation is what makes WNEW-FM special," Dennis explains. "There is a constant challenge to be creative, simultaneously keeping the communicator and the listener interested, entertained and involved."

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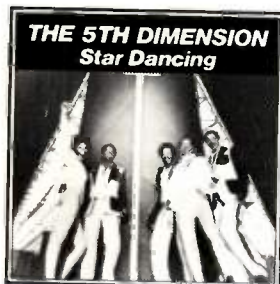
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