MAY/JUNE 1978 VOL.8 NO.7 DOLLAR

Phonograph

record magazine





ELVIS COSTELLO

By Bobby Abrams








TOM PETTY perfected

ROCK CINEMA infected

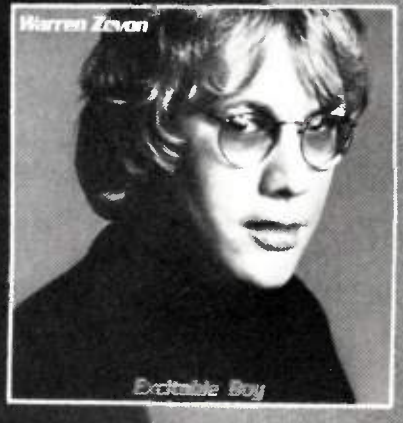
BEACH BOYS rejected

PATTI SMITH molested

One of the Best Rock & Roll Albums of the Seventies.

Warren Zevon. Excitable Boy.

"...blasts the bull's-eye into smithereens."
—Paul Nelson, Rolling Stone



Includes the hit single, "Werewolves Of London"

asylum

Produced by Jackson Browne & Waddy Wachtel Engineered by Greg Ladanyi

Phonograph record magazine
VOL 4 NO 7 DOLLAR
MAY/JUNE 1978

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Phonograph

Issue #85
May/June, 1978

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Post Office Box 2404
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BACK ISSUES: Write, "Catalog" Phonograph Record Magazine Post Office Box 2404 Hollywood, CA. 90028.
CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Allow four weeks in advance and include old as well as new address.

All Phonograph Record Magazine subscription orders, payments, inquiries, change of address notices and undelivered copies [*form 35790*] should be sent to Phonograph Record Magazine/Subscription Service Dept. Post Office Box 2404, Hollywood, CA 90028.
SUBSCRIPTION RATES: $10. per year.

Phonograph Record Magazine is published monthly -except July and August.

Application to mail at second-class postage rates is pending at Terminal Annex/Union Station Los Angeles, CA. 90052

Performances

SHAUN CASSIDY
Nassau Coliseum
Uniondale, New York

By MITCH COHEN

It's only a question of how many months remain until Shaun Cassidy ceases to matter. His days are surely numbered: *The Hardy Boys* will be off the air, his fans will find real boyfriends and younger models of admiration, the records will stop selling, and that will be that. Throughout the land, posters will be torn from bedroom walls. Cassidy knows all this. He's a level-headed kid from show-business stock, he's seen his half-brother rise and fall, and he casually admits his built-in obsolescene. "It's a dirty job," he says about his teen idoldom, "but somebody has to do it."

He does it just fine, thanks. From his entrance crashing through a translucent hoop, singing "That's Rock and Roll," to his extended "Da Doo Ron Ron" encore, Cassidy has mastered the essence of his trade, which is keeping the girls happy and screaming. His personality is bland and scrubbed enough not to alienate parents, and his sense of pop aesthetics is so clever that even hardened rock cynics may find themselves applauding his choice of material, if not his rendering thereof. Consider a set of Smokey Robinson, John Sebastian, Eric Carmen, Barry & Greenwich, Larry Williams, some palatable originals, all sung by a personable young man backed by a bunch of L.A. pros, punctuated by squeals and strobing flashes; there are many less enjoyable musical ways to spend a Sunday afternoon.

My arbiter on such subjects, a wise and sensitive lady in her twenties with the best pop antennae I know, thinks that Shaun Cassidy is cute, but that his stage moves are rather too studied and artificial. Her friend, another unabashed pop enthusiast, chides Shaun for not crediting his sources: it's not enough, says she, to sing "Do You Believe In Magic," "Be My Baby" and "You really Got A Hold On Me"; the mostly pre-teen audience should be told from whence such classics came, lest they be ignorant of pop history. Points well taken, and duly recorded. It is disconcerting when Cassidy's rear, in tight red pants, gets more reaction than his songs, and the influence of David is overly pronounced in both motion and intonation.

But I can't really complain much. "Hey Deanie" is a delightful song that would have been a Raspberries ready-made, Cassidy has a way with a limpid ballad, and some of his originals like "Teen Dream," "Born Late" and "Taxi Dancer" show composing promise. The band—producer Michael Lloyd is present on rhythm guitar to keep an eye on things—is polished, and Shaun does have a face that was made for the pages of *16*, which is a mag that counts more in this case than the one you're reading.

The main problem is that despite all the good intentions in the approach—any adolescent rock hero who credits The Beatles, Beach Boys and Spector as his inspiration is a gentleman with his rock & roll heart in the right place—and regardless of the skill and reasonableness with which the package is wrapped, Shaun Cassidy will most likely, unless his is an extraordinary case, mean as much as Davey Jones, Bobby Sherman, Fabian or Sajid Khan. Teenage girls can be cruel in the shifting of their loyalties. Shaun Cassidy puts on a fun show of its kind, and his records have gotten somewhat better since the anemic "Da Doo Ron Ron" (although his cover versions remain punchless, and I'd never play his albums for pleasure), and while he's in the limelight, our impressionable youths are in capable hands. •

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Photography as Communication

Norman Seeff

This is the second in a regular series of articles describing the methods and experience of the Norman Seeff photo-session.

* * *

In the first article I described some basic premises for working with people... If I'm doing a photograph session and I'm worried about how things are going to turn out instead of just getting into the process, my mind is going to be distracted and I'll be unable to 'do it' fully. It is important to know what your goal is and to be aiming at it, but you must also not *worry* about *it*. This is what I call the principal of *'Non-concern with Result'* (& concern with process).

There exists a series of very specific stages one goes through in the course of a session. The first stage is getting the subject to be comfortable with the camera and to trust me. The second stage is when the person lets go, becomes spontaneous. The ultimate aim is to reach a third stage of mutual inspiration in which both the subject and I create together, freely and spontaneously.

ESTABLISHING TRUST

The first step in Stage One is establishing trust. You can't establish trust by manipulating a person, you have to tell the truth. To be able to tell the truth you must be able to recognize your own reality—and communicate just that. People pick up if you're not telling the truth, usually not at the conscious level, rather it is a feeling they get outside the rational conscious mind. Therefore, all your signals must be consistent—the inner and the outer.

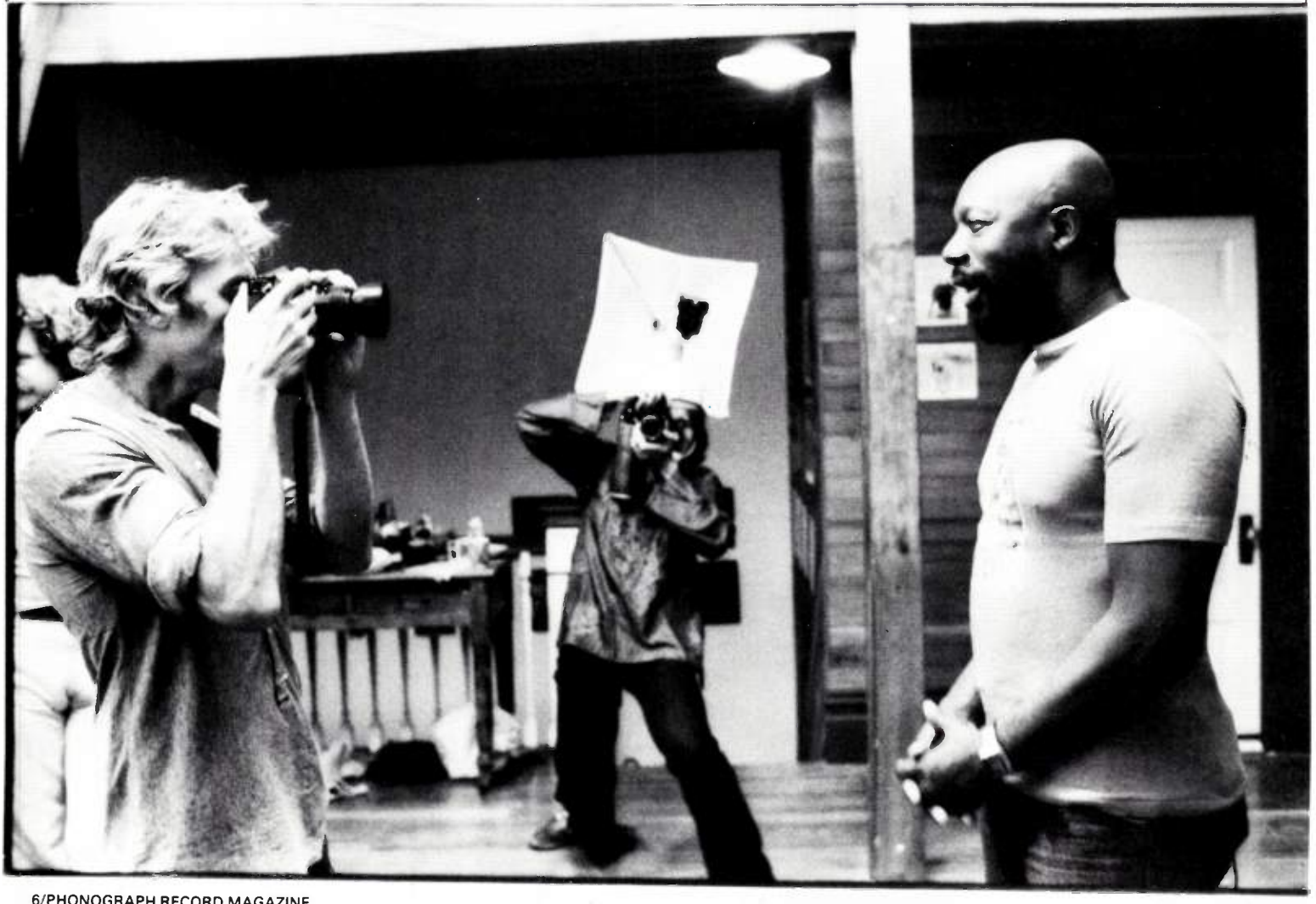
PRACTICAL TECHNIQUES

Part of our method is giving people practical techniques for handling the discomfort of relating to the camera. I say to people; 'Look, you and I are going to spend two hours together, it may be uncomfortable or you may feel self-conscious; just let that flow and it will pass' (the principal of *'resistance brings Persistence'*). I explain that it's quite appropriate to the situation and the oly way that we can trust each other is if we always make known what's going on with us—as it's happening. In other words, instead of beating yourself up, allow yourself to have those feelings. It takes strength and a real commitment to the truth to allow ones vulnerability to show—the usual result is a compassionate opening up of mutual respect.

Our system of working with people in the studio evolved practically with the experience of hundreds of sessions I began to be able to perceive a common cycle of events from the moment a person says hello until the moment they leave. All of the conceptual data is less important however, than what people are actually feeling and I like to make

Norman Seeff, Issac Hayes

KEITH WILLIAMSON



THE FUGITIVE SPIRIT OF ROCK 'N' ROLL

THE OUTLAWS
Bring It Back Alive

The Outlaws in-concert: furious energy and raw excitement. And now at last, the "Guitar Army" has been recorded live in a series of historic appearances. With inspired performances of great new songs and all their searing guitar classics, "Bring It Back Alive" is an album powered by the driving intensity that rock 'n' roll is all about.

The crowd wanted action, and that's what they got.

**THE OUTLAWS' "BRING IT BACK ALIVE."
A SCORCHING TWO-RECORD SET,
RECORDED LIVE.
ON ARISTA RECORDS AND TAPES.**

Produced by Allan Blazek for Pandora Productions, Ltd.

ARISTA

KEITH WILLIAMSON

Photography as Communication

Norman Seeff

this clear at the outset of a session.

The photosession is not merely a picture making process for me. I get involved in the communication and the relationship with the person. The technology we use is extremely simple and is efficiently handled by a number of assistants—so what's left is really only the artist and myself and two hours to be with each other. Therefore, I regard this whole process not only as photography, but as communication and a relationship with a common goal of getting the shot.

PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

You can't get into an intimate or personal communication immediately in the usual course of events with a stranger without going through the preliminary rituals. What I do is to collapse the *preparatory communication* like a concertina, into a shorter time without moving too fast and manipulating the subject or moving too slow and the session becoming boring. It is a real razor's edge situation, but if you are clear about your intentions of not trying to dominate, things will work out. So, I take the confronting aspects at a very definite and appropriate rate. The problem is, of course, achieving all this in two hours without invading a person's space.

When I work with someone, pushing through to personal communication more rapidly than in the usual course of events, certain emotional states must come to the surface, and one must be 'centered' and balanced emotionally to not become hooked into their trip. An open, light, humourous and nonjudgmental quality is required to support the subject through this stage. Also, communication takes place at two distinct levels; the conscious level (for example, exchanging word symbols) and then at the same time, we're picking up information such as body language signals and emotions at the experiential level—it is much more holistic, subconscious and intuitive and has the qualities of a sympathetic resonance to it like a tuning-fork will make another tuning-fork vibrate; you 'feel' what the other is feeling.

CONTRADICTORY SIGNALS

Contradictory signals mean that communication is going to be confused. If I feel nervous with someone, then I communicate just that—that's the principal of *'Communicating one's experience.'* If I do that then my body signals do not communicate one thing and my verbal communication another. When what one says verbally does not match what one is picking up as a feeling then these are contradictory signals and communication becomes suspicious and breaks down.

WORKING WITH THE INNER PERSON

We choose to work with the inner person, which is the essence of my technique. I don't arrange a picture by dealing with a person's outer surface, I don't say: 'turn your head this way;' 'let me put some make-up on over there;' 'let me light you from there, and now put that expression on...,' etc.—that's making a *picture*. Rather, what I do is work at the level of the inner-person. Inner experience dramatically changes the way people hold themselves; body language and the way they look at me. A feeling of inner inspiration will be captured in the picture—it is very subtle.

This seems very heavy but actually sessions are very light and enjoyable. They feel more like a party with lots of music and socializing—it doesn't feel as if anything complex is going on. But behind that is a real systematic way of working and a clarity about my ultimate goal, visually and personally. •

Before and after Science

Brian Eno

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CRAWDADDY

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Lester Bangs
VILLAGE VOICE

"...One of the most interesting and rewarding works of music I've heard in a long time."

Glenn O'Brien
INTERVIEW

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John Rockwell
NEW YORK TIMES

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DAVID JOHANSEN

Hustles the Bank of American Rock

by Ron Ross

David Johansen, a doll of sorts to this day, is undeniably a personality. David Bowie likes to show him new steps at parties; working girls send drinks to his table at clubs and compete to throw him freebies. Managers consistently commit their emotions and life savings to make him the 'next big thing'.

David Johansen for the last five years of his life has been given more than his share of shots at fame, fortune and an indefinite leave-of-absence from day-work. He's one of rock's most persistently stylish survivors, his personality is his ticket to ride. Just how much money he's earning at any given time isn't relevant to his value; he's a successful survivor because almost everyone exposed to David Johansen ends up liking him.

Turning charisma into cash is the challenge that David and those working girls share in common. In rock 'n' roll as in life, it's advantageous to have a reputation for flash. But too much, too soon only turns on the kinkier, less easily handled customer and scares the pliable, easily pleased sugar daddies. So though David Johansen and the much photographed New York Dolls may have created the Manhattan club scene almost singlehandedly five years ago, it has been Kiss and Aerosmith that the American rock public has chosen to pamper like platinum blondes.

Where David Johansen once came on so loaded, like a regular superstar before anyone west of the Village had ever heard of him, he's taken his time out of the spotlight to get a grip on his music. On the evidence of his first solo album for Steve Paul's Blue Sky Records, his personality has never been more powerful or amusing, and it's going to do more than all the photographs ever taken of him to feather his nest with the down of universal popularity.

David's latest mannish-boy growl makes his songs come more alive than ever before. His lyrics finally get equal billing with his closet for outrageousness, and his enthusiastically aggressive intensity is released through a new young band instead of in fights with the audience.

David is best remembered as a lean dirty blonde with curly bangs, nice legs in heels, a croak like a rolling stone hit him in the balls (playfully) and a knack for lines like; "Trash, come on, pick it up, don't throw your life away;" or "A new bad girl moved into my block, I gave her my key, I said don't bother to knock." The songs David wrote for the Dolls were as important a part of their originality and promise as their ability to make people act out and dance. Images painted in glaring cheap, plastic reds and purples, the futile, fast-lane, post-teen reality of junked-out poverty, topless dancing your way through college, and the pre-dawn search for a strange, warm bed.

Now, as then, David's songs are in the eye of that emotional hurricane where "Oh yeah!" and "Oh No!" are impossible to choose between—like; "I'm in love with you, Daddy, but not that much." As in the old days when a free

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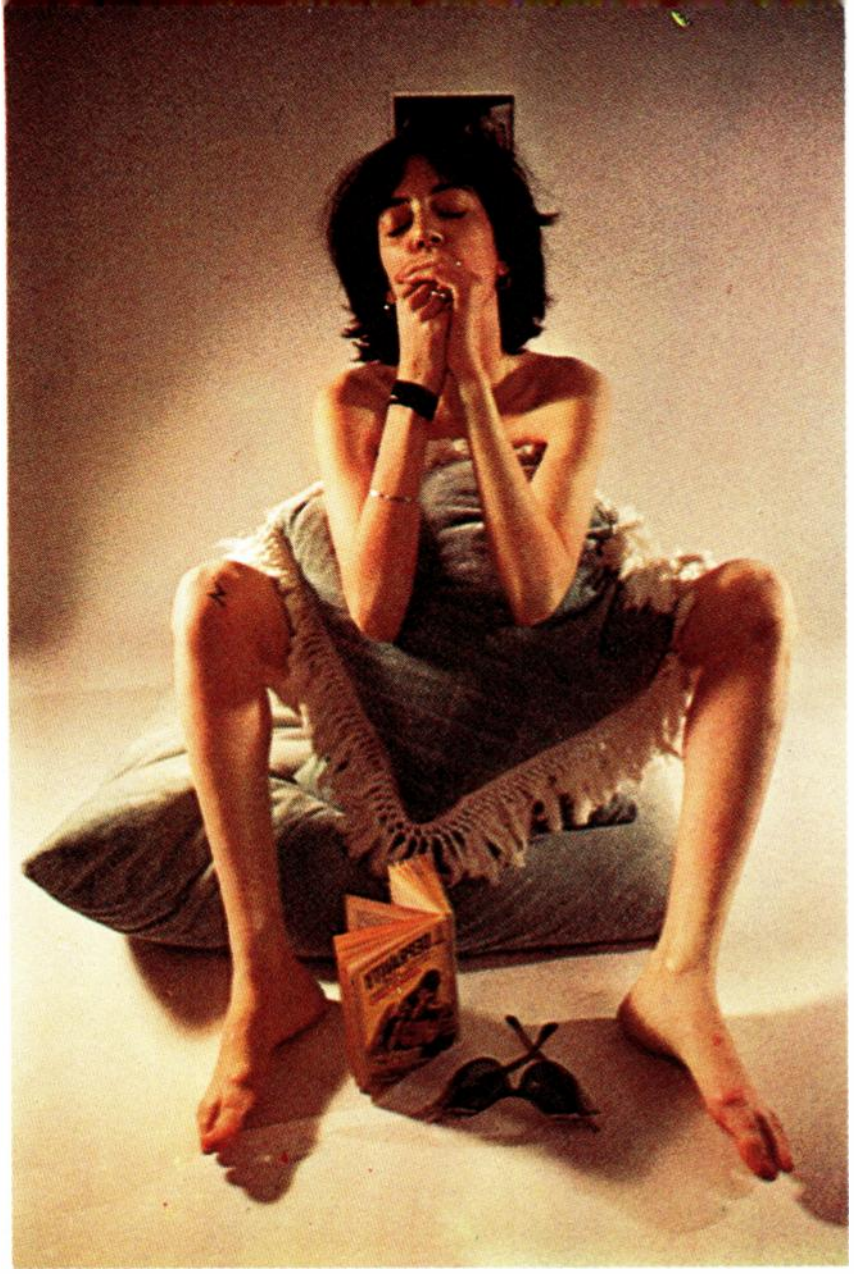
LEE BLACK CHILDERS



PATTI SMITH'S TOP 40 INSURRECTION

DEAR PATTI, START THE REVOLUTION WITHOUT ME—

By Lester Bangs

I hate Patti Smith. She's a pretentious wretch. But then I hate the *Village Voice,* which originally assigned me this piece, and can be pretty pretentious itself. I hate *all* the magazines I write for, don't you hate yourself for buying their dead formula hackwork?

In a recent suckup sheet sent out by Arista devoted to Clive Davis, Patti Smith contributed a poem that started out, "C(live)." She went on therein to write something about how "all art comes out of filth."

Life sure is complicated.

Reason I bring all this up is it seems to me we're all implicated. It's kinda like why put down embargos on South Africa when they're torturing people in Brazil, y'know what I mean? Maybe that's why there's not really a justice in this world, although Patti believes there is. She's got this song on her new album *Easter* (talk about justice! I could even accept that Jesus was a woman, but from New Jersey?), called "Rock 'n' Roll Nigger," wherein her and co-conspirator/cabalist Lenny Kaye (who used to be a real fun guy) go on about living "outside of society" (One Fifth Ave., to be precise), and cite "Jackson Pollock was a nigger, Jimi Hendrix was a nigger," etc.

Well, guess I'll have to admit it: I am not a nigger. I'm a pawn of the imperialist power structure, which I guess puts me more in the line of sucker. I'd like to see a justice in this world, but Clive Davis has this disconcerting habit of buying me lunches when I don't even work for him. (I *think.*) So I am literally biting the hand that feeds, but then Patti's got this rap on the other side of the album about "transformation of waste (Liyo, Norman O. Brown!)," and I sure can't see any better transformation of corporate expense account waste than keeping me stuffed and healthy so I can create all my own revolutionary masterpieces.

I can't put Patti down for doing the same thing; what I am saying is that she looks kinda silly yelling about how we should all "take arms/take aim," when we've almost got passage of a gun control bill in sight. I mean I sympathize with her intentions, it's her *methods* that bother me. I thought what the Sex Pistols did—break up in the throes of commercial ascension, just 'cause they looked at each other one day and said "Hey, this is no fun anymore, screw it"—was one of the most admirable things I've ever heard of. I don't expect Patti to make with the same tactics, I think it's real nice she got Bruce Springsteen to help her write a single that even I hope will be a hit, but if you really wanna buck the system, there are alternative monkey wrenches you can throw in. Maybe what I'm trying to say is I think she should make her *Metal Machine Music,* and *Radio Ethiopia* didn't even come close.

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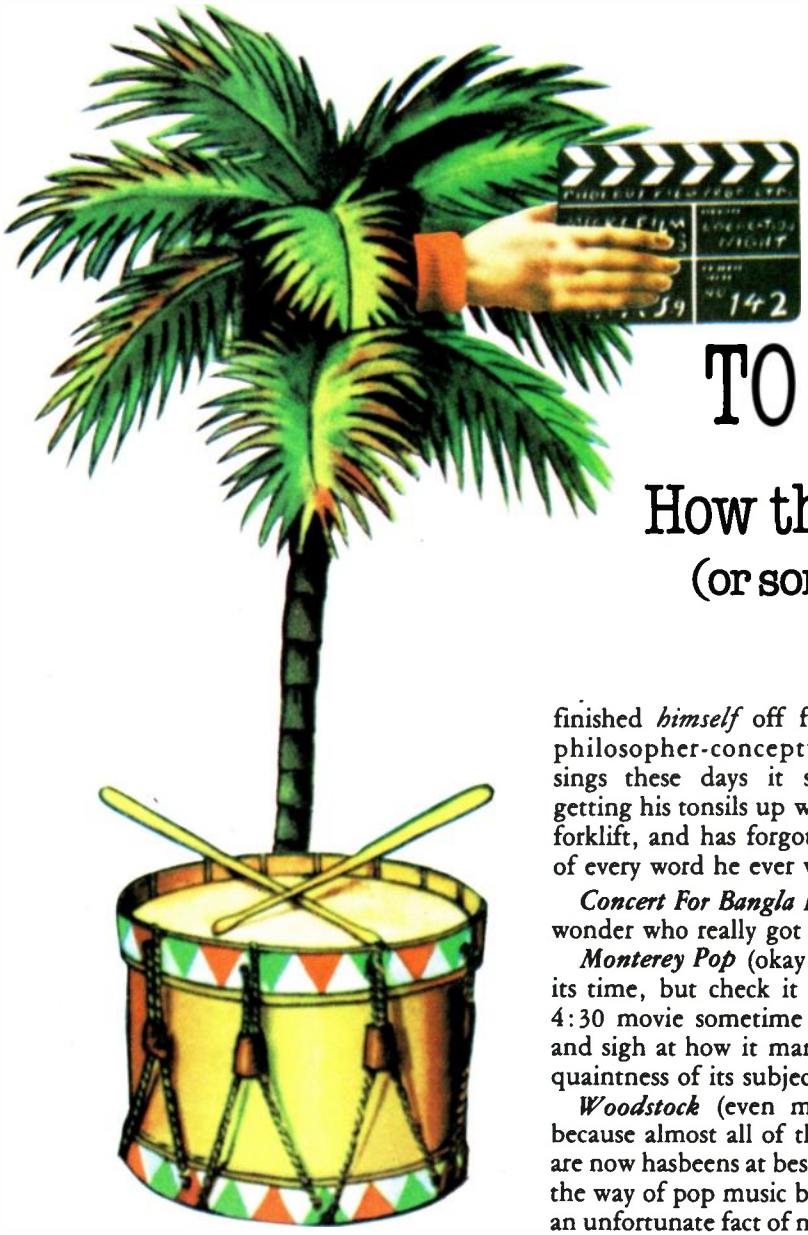

LESTER BANGS' INTRODUCTION TO ROCK CINEMA'78

How the Movies ate Rock'n Roll

(or sometimes suicide takes a little help from your friends)

Immutable axiom: all rock movies eat. If you doubt me, simply read the following list and you'll be forced to agree:

Let It Be (I walked out midway)

Mad Dogs & Englishmen (ditto)

Yessongs (linseed oil renders celluloid opaque)

The Emerson, Lake & Palmer movie (bet even they can't remember the title)

The Pink Floyd movie ("Careful With That Axe, Eugene," in the crater of a volcano which unfortunately was not living at the time)

Ladies & Gentlemen, the Rolling Stones (Mick Jagger should have sued himself blind for allowing the public to view so many merciless closeups of his narcissistic old sagjowled queenbitch posturings

The Song Remains The Same (diehard Led Zep fans can't even listen to the soundtrack *album*)

Renaldo & Clara (in which Bob Dylan finished *himself* off for good both as philosopher-conceptualist—when he sings these days it sounds like he's getting his tonsils up with a crane and a forklift, and has forgotten the meaning of every word he ever wrote)

Concert For Bangla Desh (I still wonder who really got the bread)

Monterey Pop (okay, magnificient in its time, but check it out on the ABC 4:30 movie sometime and you'll cluck and sigh at how it manages to rival the quaintness of its subject matter)

Woodstock (even more dated really because almost all of the Big Stars in it are now hasbeens at best which after all is the way of pop music but is nevertheless an unfortunate fact of nature that say the Marx Brothers or John Ford never had to contend with)

* * *

Pretty dismal, all right. The only good rock movie *ever* (excepting of course the TAMI and TNT shows, which didn't count because they were made before rock became self-conscious enough to institutionalize itself) was *Gimme Shelter,* which was a masterpiece of course, but the only reason it was any good in the first place was that it wasn't really a rock movie at all but the devastating though inadvertant documentation of the literal and symbolic fragmentation of a vast subculture before our very eyes.

The reasons why rock movies never work are simple:

A. Most (all?) of them are just pretentious ego-trips for the bands or songsters involved;

B. The only reason movie companies which as usual interlock corporately with music companies have ever been willing to underwrite such onanistic tedium-capsules in the first place is because they figure no matter how wretched and artily embarrassing it is it's gotta help move a few more disks.

C. There is an element of sweatsloshed grimy intimacy in face-to-guitar-strap audience-performer confrontation which does not translate very well onto film, for obvious reasons

So all rock movies are insulting to both of the media they exploit. In this sense 99% of rock movies qualify as nothing more than propoganda in support of worthless causes (if narcissism could ever actually be called a "cause"), numbingly solemn honorariums posing often as spontaneous celebrations cinema veritefied, *Triumph of the Will* (yeah, but guess whose) for the zitpocked lumpen, because that's just exactly what most of them think of you 'n' me, baby.

One thing Dylan and the rest probably forgot, however, if they ever bothered learning it in the first place was that it has been observed repeatedly by insiders and onlookers at that Warhol scene which prefigured all this that one of the main reasons Warhol and all his drones were so psychotically obsessed with the preservation of meaningless minutae of their dreary daily lives via filmic images and the unshakable omnipresent tape recorder, was that they felt death looming over them in some sense at all times. Plus age is the great enemy they barely ever dare to speak of, but it was and is their conviction they can somehow cheat age and death, simply through amassing these vast waste-mounds of young faces, young voices, young assurance recorded and preserved.

And, by a curious yet not uncommon twist of technological irony, their very addictive dependence upon all those cameras and tape recorders somehow renders them ultimately even more dead than they felt in the first place: if the (video/sound) tape recorders is your life support system and storage bank, it's perfectly natural that the tape recorder should finally come not only to represent but to *be* life.

What the new breed of rock movies are really saying is that the chickens have finally come home to roost for good. Because all of them are about what the music itself has been about at least since the advent of Kiss and Peter Frampton: the pacification of a generation which does not want to rebel against anything except the possibility of missing out on an upwardly mobile job opportunity. People have been telling you for years that they'll (no, not them, but somebody) be listening to *Sgt. Pepper* and maybe even *The Times They Are A-Changin'* a century from now, but who with the least modicum of common sense ever really believed it was true? We all know better, and things like *Beatlemania* are indicative of what pathetic extremes people will go to just for one flickering memory of what that first fix felt like.

That, of course, is just exactly what *American Hot Wax, I Wanna Hold Your Hand* and *FM* are about. They come tumbling after each other like stillborn eggs out of a diseased old hen, and make no mistake, they are merely the beginning of the onslaught of the Big Memorex Lie. •

THE LAST WALTZ
A Film By Martin Scorsese

By Lester Bangs

Starring the Band, Neil Young, Joni Mitchell, Bob Streetpoet, Eric Clapton, Ronnie Hawkins, Muddy Waters, Van Morrison, Neil Diamond, Doctor John, the Staple Singers, Emmylou Harris, Ron Wood, Ringo Starr, and probably a few hundred other people I've forgotten.

The Band have been dead just about as long as any supposedly still-kicking group you can think of. They were over the hill before they released their first album: that's why they looked so appropriate behind those cobwebby beards in the Matthew Brady tintypes gracing their LP covers, and hell that was 1968 which means *ten years ago*. Even in their prime they seemed so formal and no zagbop about the whole thing as to qualify almost more as museum pieces than musicians working the grind circuit.

One would then wonder why such a movin' pitcher shakermaker as Martin Scorcese would wanna dip his mitts in this wake up to the elbows. No name director ever even bothered with such feature-length folderol before, and certainly he must have had better things to do, like ballbusting ahead with *Son of Sam Gets a Mailorder Neutron Bomb* or some other epic of equivalently topical urban psyche-blight. These movie people do seem to have an odd fascination with rock or what by now should perhaps more accurately be called shale—*Cosmopolitan* claims Jack Nicholson grooves out to Kiss while smoking boo in his bungalow, and I saw Scorcese himself at the last Lou Reed show at New York City's Bottom Line.

But the Band? They wouldn't even be seen within a continental divide of Alice's Phoenix restaurant 'cepting mebbe one quick tourstop's hop for java, and in *The Last Waltz* they reminisce about what rubes they were when first they hit Scorcese's obsessively beloved Manhattan. The ultimate summation of what the Band's homeranges must look like through a New Yorker's jaundice-bleary telescope was handed me by Sterling Morrison of the Velvet Underground back in '69: "Yeah, the Band is fine if you wanna go back to some rural agrarian society and sit on the front porch every night...I mean, I can't understand this whole 'back to nature' thing—shit, I go lay on the beach at Coney Island and I get some nature..."

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I WANNA HOLD YOUR HAND

By Richard Cromelin

So staggered was your reviewer by the convulsions of the plot in *I Wanna Hold Your Hand,* so startled by the emergence and retirement of subplots, that he's clean forgotten the names of the characters involved. So he will rechristen them for purposes of discussion.

As for the leading lady, well, it's good to see Porky Pig get work again, even if it is in drag. The squat, homely creature he portrays is the most avid Beatlemaniac of the six imbeciles who motor into New York from Jersey with dreams of meeting the Beatles. Porky, a hyperactive youngster in severe need of medication, faints when Ed Sullivan introduces the band and misses the whole show. She can always go to *Beatlemania* in '78.

J.D.—for juvenile delinquent—is a Fonz type whose masculinity is threatened by the arrival of the English fairies. J.D., a real cut-up, is fond of spraying beer at his friends and shouting "I wanna hold your gland" from car windows. Besides these endearing qualities, J.D. is blessed with amazing powers of recovery, bouncing up like a pole-vaulter off the mat after absorbing a lightning bolt and a 30-foot fall.

The bearer of the gland J.D. would most like to hold is Beat Betty, the anti-Beatles intellectual with black stockings and Mary Travers hair. She abandons her placards—which state things like, "The Beatles undermine artistic integrity"—when she sees the Beatle-mob pelt the pigs with jelly babies to free an apprehended brother and realizes that this is not frivolity but the seed of revolution. I wish the police in my neighborhood were as docile.

For obvious reasons, we'll call the plain-Jane Beatle-stalker/photographer Linda Kodak. Tenacious and purposeful in her pursuit, she more than once displays awesome lapses of intelligence, but in the end shows that she has a good heart to go along with her faulty brain when she foregoes the Sullivan show to rescue the poor schmuck she's been mercilessly exploiting. He spends most of the movie driving and then waiting in the car. Call him Spud.

The most obsessive Beatlemaniac of all is a bespectacled twirp who collects Beatlebilia with fetishistic zeal and behaves like the favorite in a "Repulsive Imitation of Jerry Lewis Contest." Jerry Lewis, Jr. shreiks, flails and yammers like a spoiled monkey. In one scene he covers his face with Beatle talcum powder without any visible provocation.

The final member of the menagerie is a wholesome lass, initially more interested in her impending wedding to a Ken doll (thus, we dub her Barbie) than in the Fab Four. She reorders her priorities, though, when she stows away in a room-service cart headed for the lads' suite (shades of Lucy Ricardo and Cornel Wilde!) There, alone, she does what any ripening young girl would do, presumably with Paul's bass (details, wisely, are left to the imagination.) At the show, she apparently falls ill, for she's shown clutching her groin area in obvious agony. Lesson: don't mess with an instrument if you don't know where it's been.

Porky, J.D., Beat Betty, Linda Kodak, Spud, Jerry Lewis, Jr., and Barbie. If they were a litter of pets you'd have them drowned.

If for some reason—you gave birth to one of them, for example—you choose to follow this ingratiating lot through their zany capers, you'll witness: a lot of cars smashing into garbage cans and other cars; numerous instances of kids forechecking elderly guests into the hotel walls; jokes like, "This is a one-way street," "But I'm only going one way;" a gang of girl bikers that must have wandered in from the set of a John Waters movie; imitations of the Beatles' speaking voices intended to be realistic but in truth funnier than the Rutles.

The plot machinations make *The Maltese Falcon* look like *Love Story,* but most of the action seems to pivot on the rather whimsical security system devised by the police, hotel and Beatles organization. By their standards, it would be harder to get in to see Kingfish at the Sunset Marquis. Guards tend to drift away from their posts at regular intervals, are slow of foot and slower still of mind, and they tackle like the L.A. Rams in the playoffs.

From the intricacies of the storyline, some questions arise. Is it on good authority that the script has a Beatle say, "We sounded crappy" after rehearsal? If so, it's probably because they left their instruments at the hotel—fortunately for the unleashed Barbie. Further, how did Linda Kodak get into the empty theatre that afternoon to take pictures of the Beatle drumkit?

How did Spud, stoked with alcohol and nascent manhood, know to which room Ms. Kodak had gone to earn the $50 that would let her see the Beatles by servicing a lonely businessman? (This john likes to have mustard and ketchup daubed on his bald head during the home stretch, but Linda's already wormed out of it when Spud miraculously arrives to save her from a fate worse than barbeque sauce.)

The filmmakers are respectfully requested to reply before I go on to treat the movie's deeper sociological strains (Barbie's leaving the Ken doll, for instance, is either the first, halting step of the counterculture-to-be, or a statement that she can't be satisfied by anything less imposing than the peghead of a Rickenbacker).

One last question: why didn't the cops, abused well past the point of restraint, simply shoot the brats' heads off? Maybe they didn't do that in '63, but if I'd been on the job...

By Mitch Cohen

The bearded, crusading young program director of Q-SKY has stood up to the establishment by refusing to sell advertising time on the station to the U.S. Army. He's stormed out; the jocks have locked themselves in the building, and now the P.D., played by Michael Brandon, is out on a window ledge, addressing a crowd of hundreds of kids who want Q-SKY preserved. "We'll keep giving you the music you want," he tells them, as they overturn a police wagon, "and if we can't do it here, we'll do it someplace else!" And what is the music that Brandon is so vigiliantly upholding? Boston, Foreigner, Eagles, Steve Miller, Fleetwood Mac. Someplace else? How about any mildly progressive AM station in the U.S.? Is this a radio station worth fighting for?

Some of us are old enough to remember when FM rock radio was a genuine alternative. In 1967, you could hear music there that was available nowhere else. Rock was exploding, and FM was instrumental in igniting it. Now, with the exception of a few bold outposts scattered around the country, that once pioneering force has become an embarrassment called AOR (album-oriented radio) or, worse, "movin' easy music". You could virtually choke on Fleetwood Mac and Meat Loaf. The "air personalities" (nobody's a "disc jockey" anymore) on Q-SKY act as though it were ten years ago: they babble (or is it "rap"?) over the records, talk a lot about preserving the creative integrity of the station by cutting down commercials and battling with the new sales manager, and try to communicate on a one-to-one basis with their listeners. There is a potential movie in the tension between the remnants of the counterculture attitude among some radio people and the increasing homogenization of the medium.

It isn't *FM,* and it should have been. As it is, it owes enough to Joan Micklin Silver's *Between The Lines*—an observant, believable depiction of the growing pains of an underground newspaper—to make one wish it had the brains and sensitivity of Silver's comedy. Something obviously went wrong, wrong enough to have super-manager Irv Azoff (Eagles, Steely Dan, Bob Seger, Boz Scaggs), instrumental in developing the film, pull his name off the credits and disavow any association with *FM* as it appears on screen. There are some honorable intentions: writer Ezra Sacks and director John A. Alonzo (he also did *Sparkle*) strive for some authenticity in the Linda Ronstadt and Jimmy Buffet concert sequences and such standard rock and roll set pieces as an REO Speedwagon record-signing session at Tower Records and a dull on-the-air interview with Tom Petty (who still manages to look like a star: his hair alone should make his next album go platinum). But the movie just doesn't hold together. The characters are mostly stereotypical rather than vividly recognizable, the conflict is unrealistic, and the long climax is so absurd that any scintilla of credibility built up immediately crumbles.

FM, like *American Hot Wax* and *I Wanna Hold Your Hand,* shows the tremendous influence that the cinematic techniques of Robert Altman have had on the contemporary rock film: the plot rambles as the movie tries for a prismatic effect by examining a number of interrelated characters independently and as a group. But *Hot Wax* and *Hand* not only have the advantage of nostalgia, they have a genuine feeling for the attraction of rock and roll. They're fans' movies, with the giddy passion of fandom, and they understand how the music draws certain kinds of people into orbit. We have only a minimal idea why the jocks in *FM* do what they do; they're hardly connected to rock: they rarely seem to even be listening to what they're playing. By the evidence of the film, it's ego tripping that makes them broadcasters, the opportunity to clothe themselves in other identities.

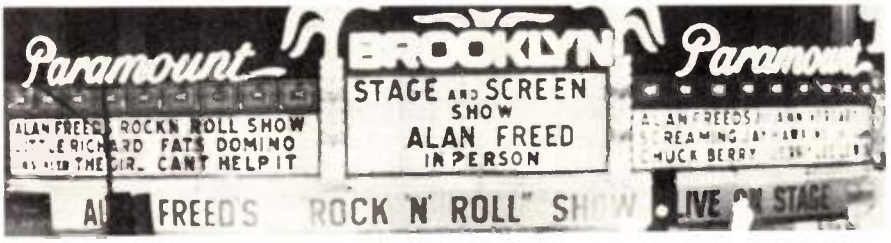
This is the kind of movie that depends on escalating improbabilities. Alonzo and Sacks would have us believe that one station could sponsor a Linda Ronstadt concert and that another could sneak into the hall and, behind the rival P.D.'s back, simulcast the show. There are some appealing people in *FM*—Alex Karras as a good ol' boy who's kicked off the staff, Roberta Wallach and Jay Fenichel as a young couple who work at Q-SKY, Martin Mull, who does essentially the same bit he does on *America 2-Night*—but the movie, aside from its conceptual flaws, is sexist (Mull has a particularly appalling scene, swiped from *M*A*S*H,* with a woman who looks like she wandered off a Russ Meyer set), anachronistic (the army-baiting is a holdover from the '60's, as is the final confrontation), and clumsily staged.

Azoff, while quoted in *The Los angeles Times* as calling the movie "not an authentic representation of the music business," is nonetheless proud of the music he lined up for the soundtrack, which by some coincidence is primarily made by Azoff-managed acts. Some of the music is effective: Steely Dan contribute a good title song, Ronstadt is in fine form (and voice—her "Love Me Tender" is a splendid Elvis tribute), and Buffett does a kicky reprise of "Livingston Saturday Night," first performed in the flaky western *Rancho Deluxe.* But when the background music isn't exactly that —aural wallpaper—it's tied obrusively to the on-screen goings-on, so as Brandon is speeding to work the station is playing "Life in the Fast Lane," and the martial-like "We Will Rock You" underscroes the climactic protest. As for the bulk of the songs—"More Than a Feeling," "Feels Like the First Time," "Fly Like an Eagle," "Lowdown"—they seem chosen more with a best-selling two-LP set (that is, naturally, getting heavy play on the new FM radio) in mind than with thoughts of a first-rate film score.

FM is frankly an exploitation film in the very sleaziest sense of the word.•

AMERICAN HOT WAX

By Sid Griffin



American Hot Wax is the story of Alan Freed, a New York City deejay and rock 'n roll entrepreneur who hosted a very popular rock 'n roll radio show called "Moondog Matinee" (hence the title of the Band's oldies LP) in the late fifties before payola and the United States government brought him down.

There is an interesting undercurrent to this film, that of America in the fifties watching for the first time as blacks and whites join together through the music as a powerful force. As authority recoils in horror, American youth realizes, with the music's help, that many of thier beliefs are nonsense.

Alan Freed is played by Tim McIntire of the group Funzone as a rock music lover, parent to thousands, concert promoter, catalyst of integration and payola figure. Freed was all this and more.

In the movie Freed is constantly portrayed in a positive light, integrating rock concerts, playing black artists over the air when safe rock 'n roll like Pat Boone and the Crewcuts were the standard of the day and giving his listeners a sense of purpose in the dreary fifties.

American Hot Wax tracks Freed from his career peak through the Paramount Theatre rock shots of 1959 that signaled his demise. Throughout the script Freed is depicted as a man hounded by the FBI and the IRS, the local fuzz and even irate Brooklyn parents.

McIntire is cast in the roll of rock martyr too often: Rock Drama vs. Authority Showdowns are terrific but this movie has so much of it they seem tired. When the IRS seize the gate receipts and the cops try to close a rock show of Freed's, he doesn't give in. He faces the police and demands incredulously; "Don't you guys know you can stop me, bur you *can't* stop rock 'n roll?" Naturally the theatre's clientele, who wouldn't be there if they weren't rock fans, cheer frantically behind such a call to arms, all shouting loudly and all at once like so many Rollers groupies on the make.

For all the romantization of the characters and their music, there are even a few sterling mements in 'Hot Wax'. One portrays Artie Moress (Moosie Drier), the twelve-year-old president of a Buddy Holly fan club being cajoled into starting a fan club for another singer by a record biz hot shot.

"Hey kid, do yourself a favor.I mean, Buddy Holly's *dead!*"

"Hey man, Buddy Holly lives," says Artie quietly, proudly, as he's ripping the hustler's calling card into pieces.

The film is given a stirring finale when Jerry Lee Lewis, in his age-old fight with Chuck Berry, refuses to appear since he cannot close the show. The FBI demands Freed tell the audience Lewis won't appear and give the fans back their money. At this stage it seems Freed and his credibility are in the dumper.

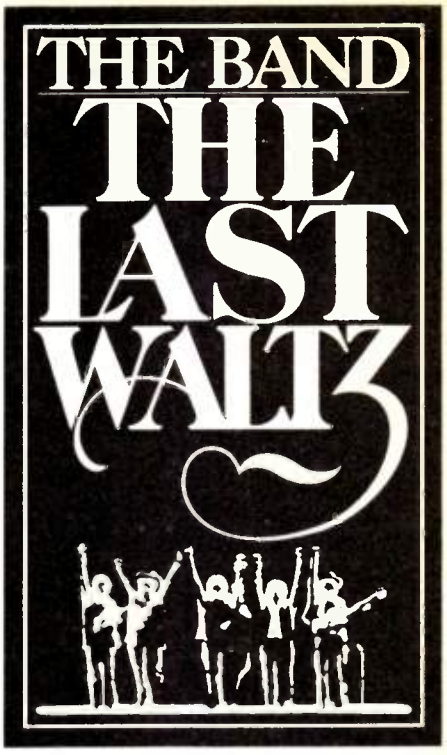
Suddenly the camera focuses close-up on a license plate—in blue and yellow the plate reads, *"Louisiana...Sportsman's Paradise."*

Jerry Lee jumps out of the car and yells; "Hey Alan, I'm here to rock and roll." Lewis hits the stage in a flash and the place falls apart.

Both Jerry Lee and Chuck Berry turn in effective, if somewhat off-the-cuff performances here however, neither is as good as they're capable of. On the other hand, both did manage to surpass their staid public performances of recent times by a longshot.

The film ends with the concert footage of Berry, Lewis and other performers. 'Hot Wax's' finale is lifted directly from *American Graffiti's* variation on the Dragnet epilog sequence.

Alan Freed was hardly the patron saint of rock as *American Hot Wax* would have us believe—and Freed was never the king of payola: He was simply a man who found something in the music that his life never before gave him. Much like the rest of us.●



(Continued from Page13)

I live in New York now, which means I've learned to be snooty about what dire boredom must engulf anyone luckless enough to live anywhere in the resto of the country, so me 'n' a gang of my equally know-it-all peers took our separate but mutual cynicisms down the uptown subway and—Shock! Horror! Seven Rock Critics in multiple coronary due to massive theory collapse! The goddam movie was great, a tremendously satisfying and even *moving* experience on every level: musical, cinematic, even sociological, somehow.

The Last Waltz is a true ceremony for the horsemen, and though they may well've been just some of all the tired horses layin' in the sun for years now, their parting bow has a grace, a dignity, perhaps even something approaching a kind of *nobility* that only artists who've maintained integrity even in decline can claim. It's easy to forget that for all their sometime stodginess and protracted unto permanent vacations, one thing The Band never ever did was pander. They preferred towards the end to be dull when not taciturn . They are something as old-fashioned as their limitations: good men and true, whose work whatever its artistic success has always been honest, thoughtful, precise and blessed with a distinctly unmodern attention to the delicacies of craft. Kinda like a 300 year old Stradivarius in a Kiss equipment van, they just don't fit in the present time and place, and they know

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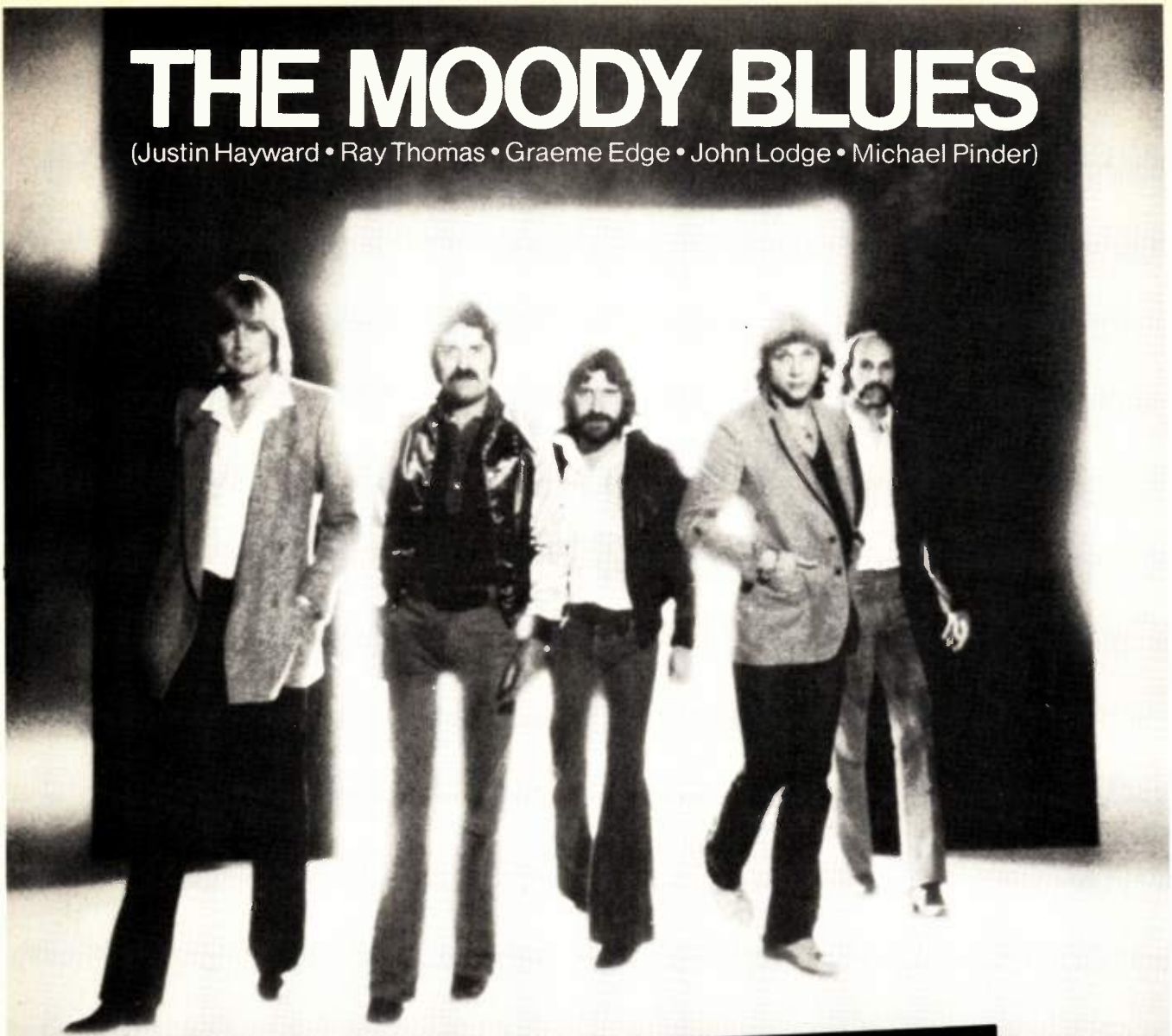
THE MOODY BLUES

(Justin Hayward • Ray Thomas • Graeme Edge • John Lodge • Michael Pinder)



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Produced by Tony Clarke

"An immutable dignity carries Robbie Robertson through even those usually airlessly banal wastes where every rockstar in the world is so obsequiously obliging..."

THE LAST WALTZ By Lester Bangs *continued from page 16*

it. So like any artists with guts or integrity they are saying goodbye, reiterating their most glorious episodes with all the proper pomp of the Gettysburg Address, and going home.

I imagine Scorcese was intuitive enough to have sensed all this beforehand, and if it was his art that we'd hoped might salvage a porcine albatross, it's that same art which frames the literally gorgeous playing of the Band and most of their guests so beautifully that the concert sequences, which are at least 80% of the movie, outdo even *Gimme Shelter's*. He brings to their stage and presence that quality which helped make *Taxi Driver* like a browned bloodstain that refused to wash out and was so omnipresent in *Mean Streets* that it threatened to engulf the action in a sort of pitlike blackness at times: he has a way of framing then filling a shot, sort of daubing in the emotional and literal coloration of a scene, drawing you into the shadowy

areas of setting and characterization until near-total identification is achieved. He did it with DeNiro (and DeNiro's *cab*) in *Taxi Driver,* and he does it here most especially with Robbie Robertson.

From Robert DeNiro to your average rock musician, especially the genus Superstar, is a comet's leap in terms of emotional sensitivity and human raw material. It's been and remains true that being a rock star is something that ironically enough shouldn't happen to a dog, and anybody who's spent even minimal time around the general run of them knows by bitter experience that almost all of them are in plain English at least a little subhuman. Not exactly encouraging realities for anyone who might aspire to make a movie which for once could reveal them as human beings. Making an audience sympathize with a mass murderer is nothing next to the chore of conveying the inner life of a mannikin. How'd *you* like the task of turning, say, David Bowie or Gregg Allman into people anybody could feel for?

Admittedly, Scorcese didn't have it nearly that hard here. Most rock stars work so hard at not being people that they end up succeeding most grotesquely. Even though Robbie Robertson's face, left with no beard to hide behind, does have a certain slightly unsettling, or say rather *unencouraging* masklike quality—at times the flesh 'round his eyes, which are sensitive but not that open to casual intrustions, looked almost rubbery, like a wax dummy's—he carries an aura of firmness, strength, gentle yet unflagging will, glimpses of grace under pressure in a thousand dimly unnerved past moments.

He's obviously been through a lot—you can see it before he ever opens his mouth—and the sum of that experience has lent him what can only be called movie-style charisma. I'm not saying he should go off and try to be the next Robert Redford—it's movie-*style* as opposed to -*star*—but whenever he's onscreen he brings a quietly intense presence that's close to riveting. When he talks about the Band's history—and he does most of the talking, for reasons I'll get to—it's obvious what's being said was an accumulation of experience and Robertson neither minces nor wastes words. An immutable dignity carries him through even those usually airlessly banal wastes where every rockstar in the world is so obsequiously obliging: just about the last thing he says in his intercut barside and armchair interviews with Scorcese (who curiously comes off sort of clumsly pushy and obnoxious, like some Barbara Walters with streetkid stayhunger and Arabically oily beard, fumbling through questions from the hoariest corncrop is that the road takes more out of you than anyone could ever measure or want to, and after sixteen years spent mostly on it he's tireder than all the jetlags in the world laid end to end.

From most musicians this sort of thing is self-serving, self-pitying drivel, but Robertson speaks in a way that consistently cuts through cliche to get at the bone truth on the other side of Everybody's Road Dues & So What: that the kid with the stage fright just may have turned out to be just another version of Daniel with the Sacred Harp, a parable which boiled down is that same old moral Little Richard slammed home with no seraphim attached: he got what he wanted but he lost what he had. To realize that and speak it is not to rap, but to gether in a final way the chances he took, the dreams he allowed himself, the triumphs and defeats with their oddly equivalent tolls, along with whatever regrets remain, to roll up the residues of old scores and debts that can now be settled only in the rolling and putting to rest.

The camera itself rests most intently on Robertson until you finally see what you were meant to see from the first: a man deciding what at bottom he must make of his life when the culmination of its major cycle compels him to face himself square-on, and tell what he's seen as simply and directly as possible.

Robertson is Canadian, but all those qualities I described represent the truest aspirations of the American consciousness talking, the very simplicity and directness nerely adding up to an archetype perfectly befitting the Band's constant identification with American myth and folklore across centuries. Ultimately the weary poet seems to blend into the pages of Studs Terkel's *Working,* into the fabric of American life as it is lived and understood in the day-to-day, so that somehow in assessing himself and a lifestyle diametrically removed from the 9-to-5 norm Robertson also makes us feel, though he probably would never suspect it, that we may in this moment have come to know ourselves a little better. The very moral beauty of it all is that one of the supreme mythmakers demythicizes his own function, sixteen years on the road revealed as a decade and a half behind just another counte, in just another sweat, with every living struggler's sense of the sweet futility bound up in the necessity and impossibility of completion.

If I go on like this somebody's gonna nominate Robertson's face for a commemorative postage stamp, but it's not all really *that* heavy. My favorite moment in the literal feast of music this movie provides occurs during Eric Clapton's segment, when in the middle of a typical staple Clapton gabardine blues vehicle, Robbie rips out a great gritslinging guitar solo capped by one smart high stinging note which he snaps up and flings off with relaxed ferocity, then calmly glances over at the faded face of the Limey bluespickin' god, laughing audibly through eyes whose challenge echoed off the back walls of the theatre:

continued on page 45

Left to right: Thomas Trask, Buz Verno, Frankie LaRocka, David Johansen, Johnny Rao

DAVID GAHR

DAVID JOHANSEN
Turning Charisma into cash

continued from page 10

fix was more available than a good kiss, now David comes "lookin' for sin and always winds up disciplined." What Johansen knows and writes about as well as any fifty-year-old blues singer is that if you play, you pay. The Dolls were fascinating because they tried so self-destructively to avoid this very conclusion.

There's something more manageable and managed about David Johansen's music now. The new band sounds punky & funky, but radio-playable chic, just like the material. This practiced, consciously acquired professionalism helps make "Donna," in particular, a really moving weeper. It has the same Shangri-la "ooohs" and "aaahs" that the Dolls would have thrown into the background through their noses but also a convincing teenage majesty that is truly musical instead of merely conceptual. The all-stops-out rockers, especially "Girls." "Not That Much," and "Cool Metro," churn like a silver train and David's bark makes an angry bulldog sound cute. What's missing is the vicious "take this life and shove it" side that made the Dolls seem dangerous when they weren't hilarious.

This isn't rock that justifies a phenomenon that's only coincidentally an act of music. It's an attitude and an end in itself. As such, it's closer to Elvis Costello or Bruce Springsteen in its self-sufficiency as a recorded re-creation of murder and merriment and rather different in its lack of "you suck" polemic from the Pistols and most other New Wave bands.

By emphasizing his voice and his songwriting, and not his novelty, his omnisexuality, or even his boyish charm, David Johansen's first solo album takes him farther off the street than ever before. But it also allows a new potential to shine through: David Johansen is more than a personality and erstwhile style-setter. He has it in him to be a leader. Just as he's pulled this new band together, David's newest songs show how much hard rock has left to say about confusion, cruisin' and loosin'.

Sometimes it seemed as if the Dolls were going to be happy snatching purses from audiences and record companies forever. David Johansen is set to knock over the Bank of American rock. The new songs are the best ammunition he's ever packed and then there's always that personality that screams "ain't nothin' but a party," from the moment he walks on stage. You do remember how David dances, don't you? You don't? Well... it's close; very, very close. ●

PATTI SMITH *Continued from Page 11*

Easter is a very nice album. Too damn nice if you think about it, but why bother really. Patti doesn't think much herself, and anyway records are to listen to. You can throw this one on anytime and it sounds just fine, Kiss-riffs in "Till Victory" and all. Patti is better than Kiss so why shouldn't she and Lenny steal from them, especially since they're revolutionaries.

Did you know Patti has this little factotum whose job it was to pick away at the typewriter while the Poet lay back and blabbered out her recent book *Babel?* I guess that's what she means by "Radio Ethiopia Field Marshall," all field marshalls needing adjutants and such. I don't even hold it against her that *Babel* was just a bunch of self-indulgent crap. I hope it's a big success, 'cause I got a whole bunch of self-indulgent crap of my own I'd like to sell to Random House or whoever, and even if I didn't I'd rather see tons of self-indulgent crap on the market than fifty more books of running. Just like I'd like to see this album sell a billion copies and Patti become a superstar, even though I know that eventuality will turn her into even more of a monster than she's already become. Better her than Styx, or that guy who wants to hold you till the fear in him subsides.

Horses was one of the greatest records I've ever heard. Like all true art, it drew you into recognizable situations and illuminated, poetically heightened them (as "We Three" does here), rather than just preaching at you and ranting that its creator was an Artist. (The late rock critic/musician Peter Laughner once said that all Patti's best songs were written to or about other people. Over the past couple of years she has become so narcissistic that she's solipsistic, which doesn't exactly make her part of the solution.)

Horses changed my life, but I've recognized that there was something almost supernatural about the powers it tapped, that no artist or audience can expect that kind of baptism in the firmamental flames every time. So I don't even feel bad about having to say that *Easter* is just a very good album, and now I even like *Radio Ethiopia* in a *High Times* slumming sorta sense. But something still sorta clutches at my heart when I hear Patti sing "Look around you...do you like the world around you?" No, I loathe what I see emerging with every particle of my being, and baby yes, I certainly do feel there's a war on which almost nobody wants to recognize, and even as I can look into the hideous technocorporate heart murdering face of the enemy I'm stumped as to tactics. But while like with hippies looking better in retrospect than today's dutiful deadwood children 'cause at least they were rebelling I can't help but admire you whatever you do in the face of McCartney-disco-fusion, still I think I've finally found a word for your tactic. It's called diversionary. ●

NICK TAGGART

John Van Hamersveld

MARK HANAVER

Roland Young

ALBUM ART:

By Colman Andrews

"Art," said Giacomo Puccini in one of his more impious moments, "is a kind of illness," and the way I figure it, the question here today is whether some strain of that illness has in fact infected that area of commercial design which involves the packaging of record albums, or whether it's just a case of rampant hypochondria.

The word "art," of course, like most words referring to things of quality, is sadly, vastly misused these days. You've got your art of archery, your art of cooking, your art of salesmanship. You've got your incompetent illiterates becoming "artists" the minute they scrawl their names on record company contracts...And now, of course, you've got your record album art, your cover art, your rock art.

Photographs and illustrations and elements of design, done on assignment from and under the direction of visual planners employed by large commercial enterprises, are now considered art enough to be exhibited in galleries and even in museums—sometimes in their virgin state and sometimes as they actually appear in the market place, with type and other kinds of information added to them. Shops sell plastic frames cut to record-jacket size so that the ordinary citizen can hang his or her favorite album covers, art-like, on the wall. Collectors are buying up original album artwork and hoarding it against the art-hungry future. And three "art books" devoted to the subject have recently been published. Symptoms of art's illness everywhere, non?

Ah, but look out, Maizie: Here comes the critical penicillin. The thing is that the misuse—or, at any rate, the overuse—of the word "art" has led to some grave confusion. Design is the solving of a problem, the arrangement of elements (usually predetermined) in the best possible way. Design is craft. Craft is not art, though sometimes, certainly, art and craft share the same bed. When we talk about record album art, or advertising art, or magazine illustration art, or whatever, I think we are usually using the word "art" as a metaphor for "craft," or "skill," or for "Nice work, Charlie!," and then—this happens all the time in language—we forget that we're using a metaphor and apply our predicates literally. Naughty old us.

Record covers are legitimate cultural objects these days, and a David Hockney lithograph is a legitimate cultural object. Where we make a mistake, I think, is in drawing in the bottom of the triangle: If "A" represents Legitimate Cultural Object, in other words, and "B" represents Record Cover, and "C" represents Hockney Lithograph, we can draw a line from "A" to "B" and one from "A" to "C", but when we try to put one there between "B" and "C," we're just Whistling Dixie.

Roland Young (who, as art director of A&M Records, knows as much about record album design as anyone) gives the game away when he admits of record covers that "At the beginning, you don't call it art. It's just a job. We just make these 12" by 12" squares, and they sometimes become art. Other people call it art. We're like those Egyptian painters who did a wall, just trying to tell some story of Egyptian life. People came along afterwards and admired what they had done and decided it was art. We have to let others judge what we're doing."

Young's idea is very Aquinan (as in Thomas Aquinas, who noted that "Art is simply a right method of doing things. The test of an artist does not lie in the will with which he goes to work, but in the excellence of the work he produces"), and, leaving aside the question of whether or not the craftsmen of ancient Egypt were really artists—I

Norman Seeff

KEITH WILLIAMSON

RICHARD BLAIR

Rock's New Competition

Dave McMacken

don't personally think they were, but then I'm an old curmedgeon in these matters—the only thing wrong with it is that the people who are coming along afterwards and deciding that record jackets are art are not people whose business is art but people whose business is business. Gallery owners, publishers, that sort of thing. Art critics, by and large, won't go near the stuff, usually on the grounds that its imperatives are commercial ones and that the creative impulse, such as it is, comes from the art directors and designers and not from the painters or photographers. (The "Holbein-Did-It-For-Money" argument, which says that even the greatest of the Old Masters painted on commission, and therefore had equally commercial imperatives, is specious: Restrictions of style or subject matter are one thing; separation of the head and heart from the hand—which is what happens when an artist works for an art director, or when an art director works for a creative supervisor of some sort—is another thing altogether.)

John van Hamersveld, whose designing and illustration credits, for record jackets and elsewise, are multitude, says bluntly, "The stuff you're talking about is editorial painting. All those guys who call it 'art' are just on a ride. People are looking for categories today, that's all. Sometimes art is involved, like when a classical painting is used on a classical music album cover, or when the Beatles, say, hire Peter Blake to do *Sgt. Pepper*. But most of the really successful packages, most of the great pieces of design, work because they're really good solutions, not because they're great paintings."

Dave McMacken, whose illustrations have graced such albums as *Moving Targets* by Flo and Eddie, *Over-nite Sensation* by the Mothers of Invention, and *Tom Cat* by Tom Scott and the L.A. Express, thinks album covers *should* be art. "There's no reason why the artist can't produce a fine painting for a record jacket—except that lots of times he has to produce the work on very short notice, which can be a problem. Album art is like icon art. You create a strong image that immediately affects people." But, he does admit, "No matter what, when you're doing this kind of work, you're always solving somebody else's problems."

Photographer and designer Norman Seeff, who was art director at United Artists Records for a time, is more concerned with the effect of the album cover than with what it's called. In his photography, he is deeply committed to the idea of the process of communication, first with the person or group creating the music to be packaged, and then with the music's potential customer. "People pick up more information than they realize from the very minor body language signals in the photographs," he says. "When the subject is feeling good, feeling relaxed, all kinds of things are communicated—that kind of subtle thing in the face, the way the eyes look different, even the way the hair falls. People respond very emotionally to photographs like that. The vibrations of the picture really affect the viewer."

That is ultimately the point about record jackets, I think: They have to communicate something to the people who see them lined up in bins or hung in wall displays—and communicate it quickly. In the era of 78-rpm "albums" and in the early days of lps, record stores all had listening booths and demo copies of the records, so that the potential customer could hear the music before he bought it. Today, in most cases, the cover of a record is its only selling point. What gets put on the front of a record album has to relate intelligently to, and

"Cover Art must relate intelligently to the music and artist–often it must do so in an abstract, intuitive way"

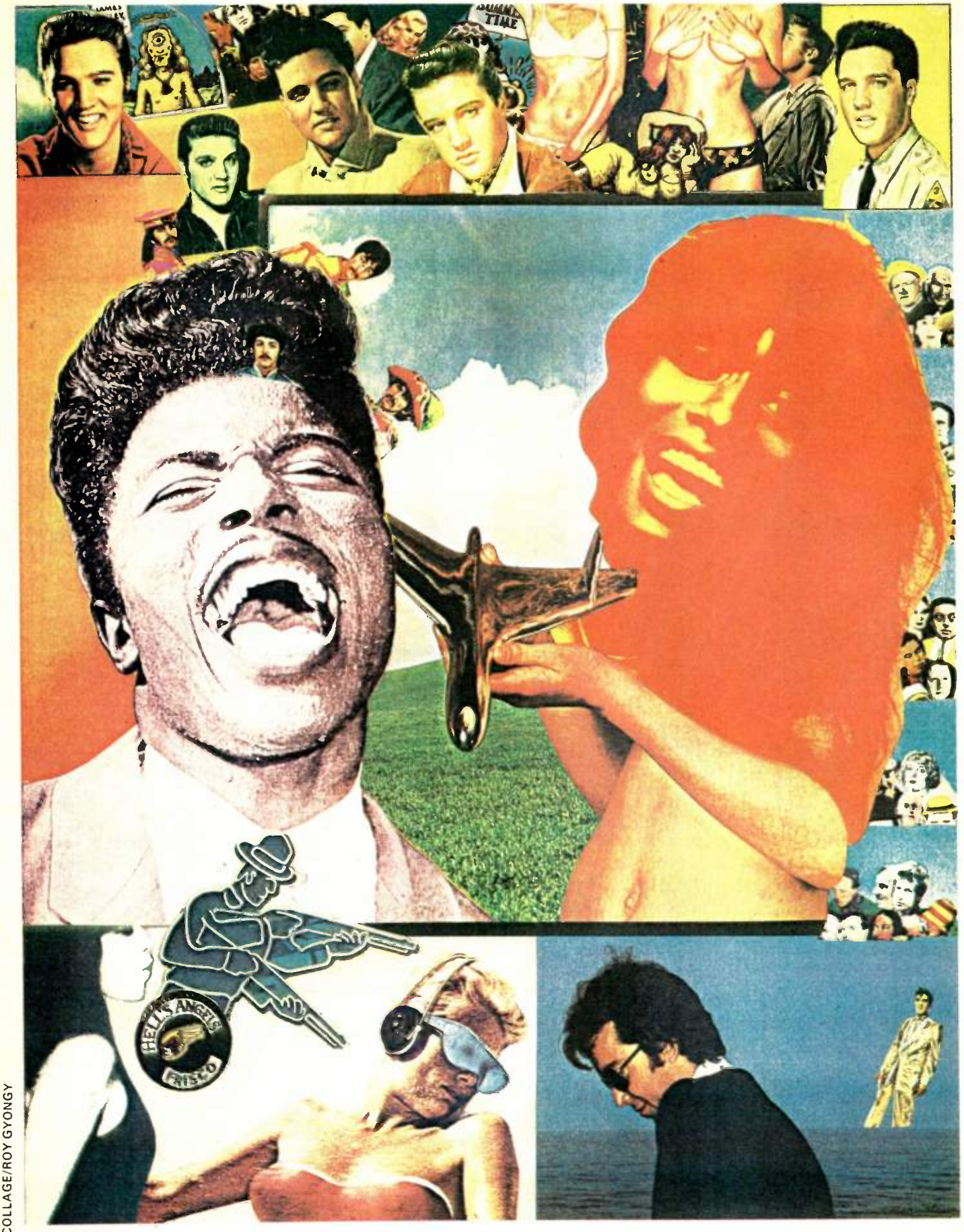
developed form of creative endeavor (music), and it often has to do so in an abstract, intuitive way.

In any case, it must be said that those three "art books" about record jacket design mentioned above—all large-format paperbacks—contain a good deal of exciting visual material. *The Album Cover Album*, edited by Hipgnosis and Roger Dean, and introduced by Dominy Hamilton (A&W Visual Library, $10.95) is the best of them. It is nicely arranged and nicely put together (though, ironically, the print sections fore and aft are abysmally designed), with plenty of good historical material and a wealth of recent work, arranged according to category and conceptual principle. I'm personally particularly pleased with the plentitude of jazz album covers included here—not because I like the music so much, but because it is an area in which a great deal of very good visual work has been done, and yet an area often neglected in collections of album covers. (It is nice to be reminded, among other things, how clean and efficient a commercial artist Andy Warhol was in his Blue Note album-cover sketches, and how brilliant Reid Miles was in his highly emotional all-type cover for Jackie McLean's *Right Now!*) reproduction is quite good, too.

Phonographics by Brad Benedict and Linda Barton (Collier Books, $9.95) has been described by one illustrator as "the Willardson/Palomby Book of Pictures," because so much of the work is by or in the general style of those two fine illustrators, Dave Willardson and Peter Palomby. The book's range is narrow, and it suffers somewhat from that. There are some curious editorial choices here, to: for instance, along with Moshe Brakha's stunning cover photo for Boz Scaggs' *Silk Degrees*, why show the inner sleeve photo instead of the narrativelyrelated back-cover photo? And somebody's going to do some pretty fast talking to convince me that the illegible Mick Haggerty/Rod Dyer, Inc. cover for the High Rollers' *Jambalaya* or the similarly incomprehensible Freddie King *Larger Than Life* cover art-directed by Bob Defrin and Abie Sussman are good pieces of design—much less works of art. Also, the book could have gotten larger picture area with the same amount of paper by using a square format like the other two books do. And somebody inked the plates a bit too heavily on the red, at least on my copy.

Rock Art, edited by Dennis Saleh (Comma Books, $8.95) makes some attempt at historical perspective (even including a bootleg jacket), and offers some rather brave choic es (the Frank Bez/Ed Thrasher cover for *Ry Cooder*; B. Wilson's cover for *Abandoned Luncheonette* by Hall and Oates). Reproduction is uneven, tending toward the faded, but the overall feeling of the work presented is a good one.

My own appalling lack of modesty, incidentally, compels me to mention that the *first* book ever devoted to this subject, to the best of my knowledge, was *Record Covers,* published in 1974 by the Graphis Press in Zurich (and edited by Walter Herdeg), for which I wrote about half of the text. It deals with record jacket design and illustration simply as design and illustration, and I don't think either record jackets or fine art are any worse off for that fact. •



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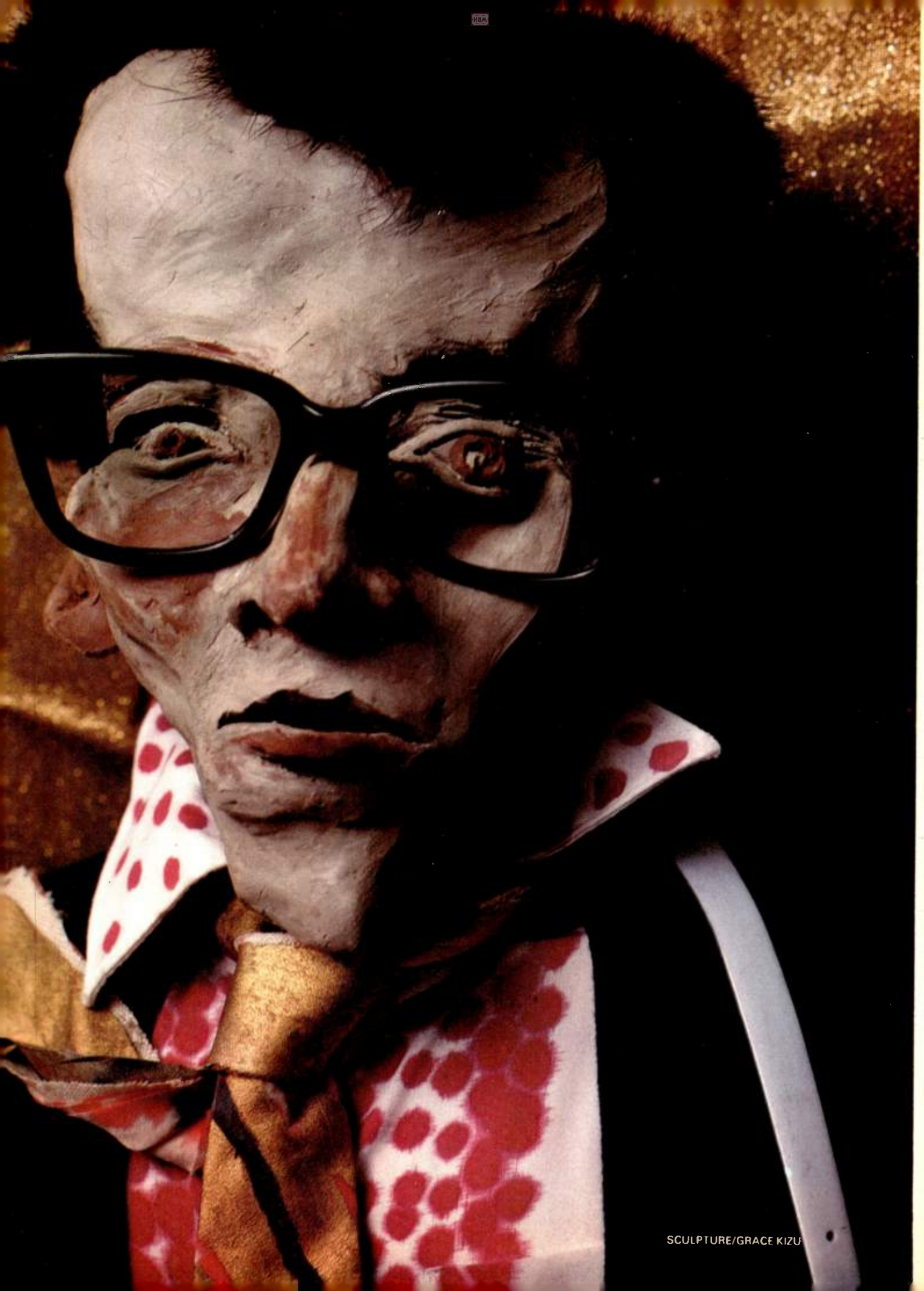


SCULPTURE/GRACE KIZU

ELVIS COSTELLO

By Bobby Abrams

Rock's Angry Man (he never smiles)

•ITEM—You're humpin some broad—have been for awhile. Suddenly, she starts making demands on you, trivial things but constant. Hitting her is no solution, but then America has always been a violent country.

•ITEM—There's this chick where you work that you've been wanting to ask out for months. Finally, you screw-up enough courage to speak to her—She turns you down flat. You point your finger, squeeze the trigger and boom! she's blown away.

•ITEM—In the subway, sitting opposite is the most beautiful fox you've ever seen. She sits primly, with her legs tight together. She might as well be filing her nails for all she knows you exist. So why not. Grab her and lay her out on the floor—there's some action. It feels much better this way.

•ITEM—You carry this book around with you, see, and everytime someone does you dirt, gives you grief, their name is entered. When you seize the power, you will have your own private gestapo to enforce punishment for these heinous crimes.

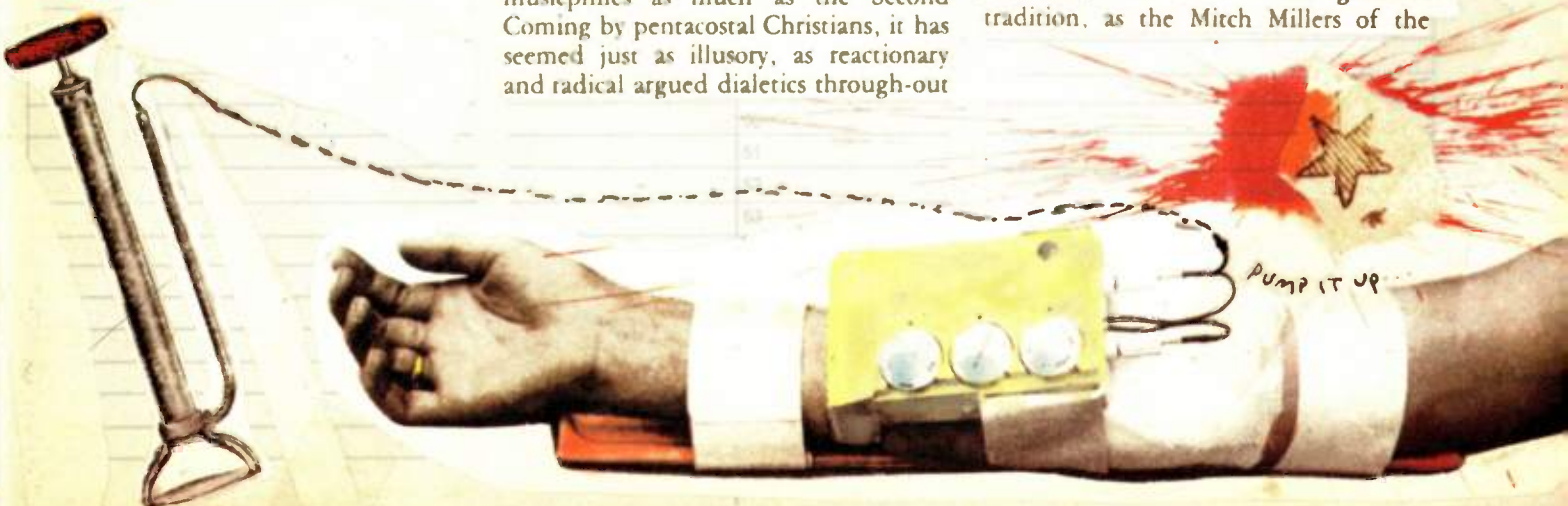
•ITEM—You walk into your bedroom and there's your old lady makin' it with your best friend. You'd really like to tear them to pieces, rip the skin off their bones, slice them up in a bloody mess, stomp on them, kick the crap out of them, but you're far too civilized for such enraged behavior. Instead, you decide to be adult about it.

GEORGINIA KARYDELLAS

This is the world of Elvis Costello. His vision is populated with these images, thoughts, experiences, emotions. Violence, repression, vengeance, retaliation, guilt, impotence. Getting laid, not getting laid. Anger over position in the world (at the bottom of the heap). Classic rock and roll sentiments, expressed in a totally new manner. Costello in this short time has already established himself as one of the alltime great rock wordsmiths.

It seems obvious now, in retrospect, that 1977 witnessed the emergence of that most eagerly awaited event: The Next Big Thing. Hoped for by messianic musicphiles as much as the Second Coming by pentacostal Christians, it has seemed just as illusory, as reactionary and radical argued dialetics through-out the entirety of the seventies—trying to explain or justify false contenders to a road begun with the rock and roll revolution epitomized by the King, through its revitalization by the British Invasion, symbolized by the Fabulous Four. Rock and roll is always the currency of these ideological debates, but the common denominator is how successfully the music defeats the ambient complacency of improved technical anesthetics.

Elvis Costello's "Radio, Radio" would seem to best describe the existing status quo; "They're trying to anesthetize the way you feel/Radio is such a sad salvation." So then in the grandest tradition, as the Mitch Millers of the



SCULPTURE/GRACE KIZU

fifties gave way to Elvis and Chuck Berry, as the insipid sounds of artifically created Philadelphia rock and the Twist gave way to the pounding groin-oriented sounds of the Beatles and Stones, so too now is the sigma sound of recycled banality now giving way to thoroughbreds like the Sex Pistols and especially Elvis Costello.

August, 1977 saw the release of two very remarkable albums, related more in time and space than in thematic unity or musical approach, yet both promised to turn the world around: The Sex Pistols threatened to submerge all else in the wake of the group's massive media overkill, but due to a series of mismanagement mistakes, it is quite possible that Johnny Rotten and company may wind up mere footnotes in the eventual recounting of all this as history.

So it seemed, by after-the-fact deduction, that punk rock was about political revolution and its major theme was despicable social conditions, and these were the themes of the leading groups, like the Pistols, the Jam, the Clash. Even this may have been surmounted perhaps if the Pistols had made a few concessions to the facts of American commercial life. But no, they had to do a minimal tour, ignoring the cities where they could have sold five thousand tickets like New York and Los Angeles, turning down a *Saturday Night Live* appearance, not releasing a single that could garner airplay. After all, even the conservative old farts wanted to jump on the bandwagon; all they wanted was a little cooperation.

Almost by default then, attention was focused on this other brash English upstart, Elvis Costello, whose album on Stiff was almost as hot a seller as the imported Virgin copy of The Pistols' *Bollocks*. So typically, Elvis did all those things that the Pistols wouldn't; he appeared on *Saturday Night Live* as their replacement, singing an unscripted and particularly cutting rendition of "Radio, Radio;" he toured 36 markets in 42 days; but most of all, he made music that American audiences could relate to with no reservations.

"Well, I used to be disgusted
Now I try to be amused"

"The reason I don't talk about the past is that I feel it's boring." Fat chance, when Elvis' lyrics are so deeply mired in past hurts, past rejections, past vulnerabilities. He's put it more succintly on other occasions. "You weren't there when it was happening, why are you interested now? Piss-off!" Americans like that sort of thing, it helps us to define heroic actions in trivial terms.

One reason for this reluctance to talk about the past is that he seems to be the kind of person who grows up to be a David Berkowitz or a Richard Speck...Elvis Costello is in fact really one Declan Patrick McManus—born in 1955, the only child of a jazz trumpeter who one day hit the road for good. His family started off in the London area, then moved on to Liverpool for Dec's formative years, where he was raised a Catholic—"I had to either be Catholic or Jewish, now didn't I"—and married when he was young. He supported himself as a computer operator in Whitton near Twickenham, working for Elizabeth Arden ("working all day in a vanity factory"). He has one child, sex unknown, privacy extremely guarded.

"I suppose I've been writing for seven or eight years now, since I learned to play lead guitar—but that doesn't mean the songs were any good. You just start writing for a bit of fun and then you find it means something. I started taking my songs around about three or four years ago after I moved back to London from Liverpool. From then on I tried to get various things going without much success. [*Continued on page 36*]

NICK LOWE — Elvis's Musical Medium

By Mitch Cohen

Can a diligent, erratic pop professional with a sense of humor about himself and the music business become a rock star? Possibly, although that doesn't necessarily mean it's a good idea. Since the dissolution of Brinsley Schwarz, an entertaining but limited band that has since been overrated in the light of subsequent achievements, Nick Lowe has piled up some fairly staggering credits as a producer-sideman and made some relatively minor singles (except for the wholly rousing "Heart of the City") and EP's that boded not overly well for a solo performing career. That's O.K. If he'd only produced *My Aim Is True* and *Howlin' Wind,* contributed mightily to *Get It*, and popped up in multiple roles on the two Stiff samplers, that would have been more than enough. But then he showed up on stage at an Elvis Costello press party and cut the honored guest with a version of "Heart Of The City," and now he puts out an album (yeah, a Nick Lowe *album*), that is pop at its smartest, cruelest, catchiest.

It's almost too much to deal with. Recognition does seem to be imminent, as "(I Love The Sound Of) Breaking Glass" hits the U.K. top ten, *Pure Pop For Now People* dominates U.S. playlists, and Lowe opens the bill for Elvis Costello and Mink DeVille coast-to-coast with a band (Rockpile, featuring Dave Edmunds) that is said to be giving Mr. Costello and Mr. DeVille some trepedatious nights.

Nick Lowe as an act seems like a good idea after all, but it sure didn't at first. Brinsley Schwarz made their American debut at the bottom of a Fillmore East triple header under Quicksilver Messenger Service and the seldom-seen Van Morrison, then moondancing his way up rock's pantheon. We didn't wanna know from no group called Schwarz, but they did all right. Nobody rushed out to buy their subsequent Capitol albums, though, which weren't bad at all. Their following LPs, those released here on United Artists and those that only made their way to the United States via canny importers, were even better. Some rock revisionists would have us believe that the Brinsleys were upholding all that was righteous and wise about rock and roll whilst all around them was mellowing towards extinction. Not entirely true: *Silver Pistol* and *Nervous On The Road,* two really good albums issued domestically on United Artists (who, after the failure of said LP's, henceforth declined to make the group's work available in the U.S.), owed considerably to the likes of The Band, Crosby, Stills & Nash and even the countrified Dead. Nothing terribly wrong with that, mind you, as Lowe, ever the craftsman, can adapt his songwriting prowess to most any genre (that is a major strength, and a minor weakness), it's just that their snappier pub-rocky pop bent didn't come to the fore until later, on *Please Don't Ever Change, Original Golden Greats* and *New Favourites,* and then it was too late (but not for you: get them, that's the only imperative you'll see in this piece).

*****

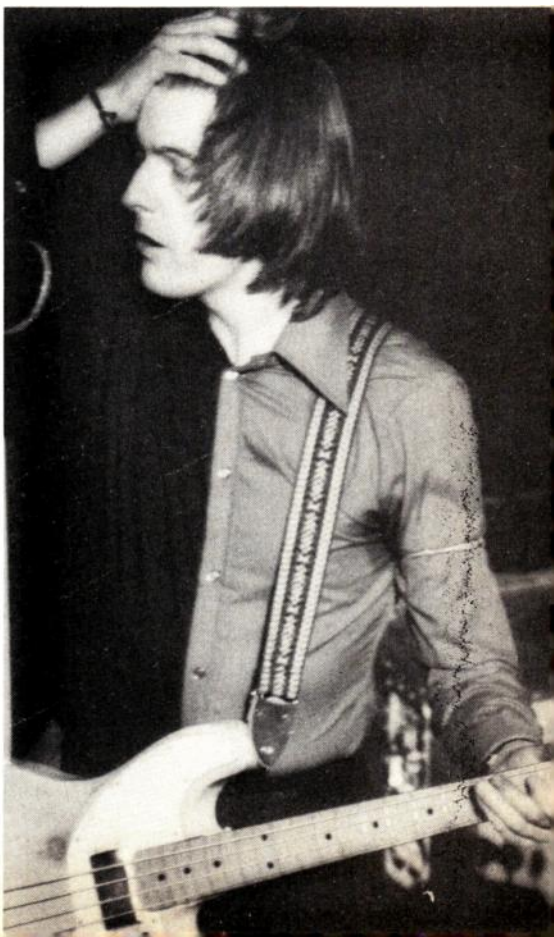
The Brinsleys packed it up in 1975, and Lowe has since been a restless popster, lending a hand to a multiplicity of projects, some worthy, some innocuous, some both. Some of this work has been nothing short of marvelous: one thinks, especially, of the Lowe-penned "I Knew The Bride" as sung by Dave Edmunds, *the* Everly-Chuck Berry hybrid about the woes of seeing a frisky bopper become a Mrs.; "Heart of the City" b/w "So It Goes," the very first single on Stiff Records, both sides of which are on *Pure Pop* (called *Jesus Of Cool* in England on Radar Records; the U.S. version on Columbia is titled worse but programmed better); "(I've Been Taking) The Truth Drug," the B-side of a dynamite single that sounds like a Standells outtake from *Nuggets.* And then, of course, there was his tenure as resident Stiff jack-of-all trades, his association with Dr. Feelgood, Graham Parker on the first LP and the live bootleg, and *This Year's Model.*

There've also been, however, some discouraging lowes: a plodding remake of Goffin's & King's "Halfway To Paradise"; an EP, *Bowi,* that had only the sick joke of "Marie Provost" to recommend it; the silly masquerades as The Disco Brothers ("Let's Go To The Disco" and "Everybody Dance") and The Tartan Horde ("Bay City Rollers We Love You" isn't nearly as much fun as "Rollers Show"); the dubious production of Parker's *Stick To Me* and The Damned.

Pure Pop For Now People tips the scales, one hopes permanently. It shows an extraordinary understanding of the mechanics of pop as well as of the machinations of the business behind it.

Like his sometime collaborator Dave Edmunds, Lowe has a keen appreciation of history, and excellent taste in rock models; because he isn't as painstakingly imitative of other records' atmospheres, he may even surpass Edmunds: as thoroughly enjoyable as *Get It* is, *Pure Pop* is richer, funnier, and more original in its borrowings from early English invasion and esoteric sources. One responds immediately to Lowe's master of idiom, his eccentricity, his willingness to break away when he senses complacency (he hooked up with Stiff on a whim, and helped launch the innovative label, then left, getting the brand new Radar company off the ground), his cool. Lowe seems detached, creating out of the ability and the sheer pleasure in doing so rather than out of cathartic impulse. He knows that if you love the sound of breaking glass, you're smart if you carry a rock in your pocket.•

GEORGINA KARVALLAS



How the Elvis Phenomenon happened despite Record Biz indifference

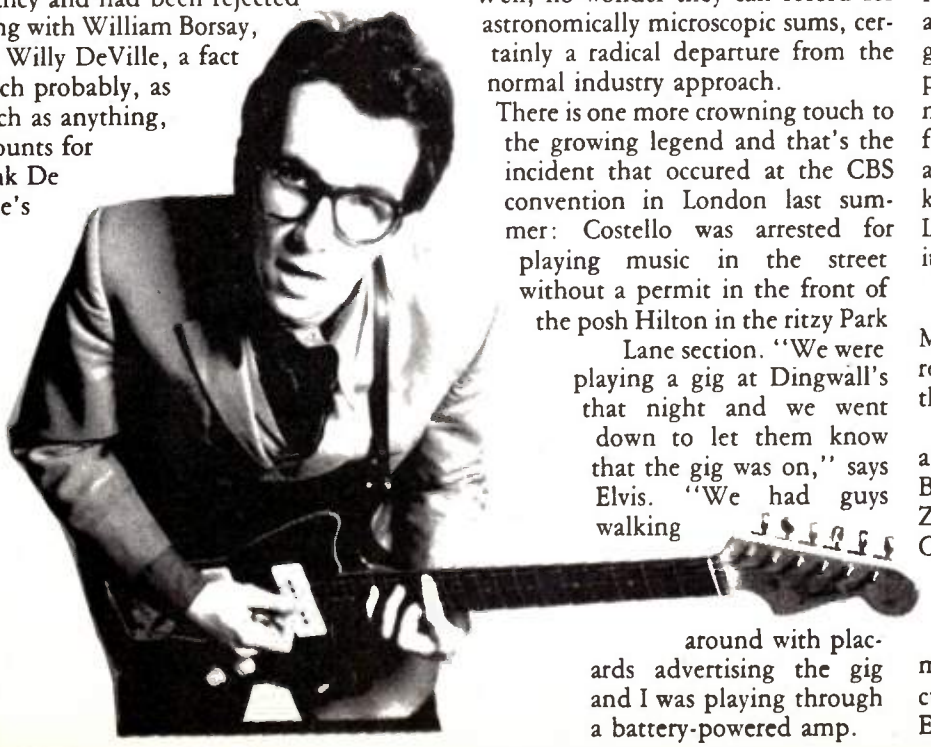
The story diverges here and it is interesting to check out the two different versions. As Elvis tells it: "About a year before I signed with Stiff, I was actually taking tapes around to all the other labels and not getting very far with anybody.

"The reason I wasn't signed was down to lack of imagination on the part of the people at most of the other labels. They can't hear something unless it's put on a plate for them. But I never lost faith...I wasn't going up to these people meekly and saying; 'Look, with your help and a bit of polishing up, and with all your expertise and knowledge of the world of music we might have a moderate sucess on our hands.'

"I went in thinking: 'You're a bunch of f--king idiots who don't know what you're doing. I'm bringing you a lot of good songs, why don't you go ahead and f--king well record them?' They didn't seem to understand that kind of approach."

On the other hand, most people who had heard D.P. Costello and Flip City, (as they were known in the beginning) a bluegrass group that held sway at the Marquee Club, agreed that they were awful, and that includes current producer Nick Lowe.

In response to an ad in a British trade announcing that Stiff was soliciting material, Costello brought a new tape by. He had already tried Stiff in its infancy and had been rejected along with William Borsay, aka Willy DeVille, a fact which probably, as much as anything, accounts for Mink De Ville's inclusion on this current tour. Dave Robinson and Jake Riviera were quite impressed by the tape and suggested a demo.



Coincidentally, producer Nick Lowe dropped by at the same time. Equally impressed, he quickly agreed to do the sessions. "I believe it was one of the first (tapes) they received. They just reacted to one of the songs and said 'Yeah, we'll make a single,' which was the policy of Stiff in the early days.

"We went in just to cut one or two sides. We cut "Mystery Dance" which sounded real hot, and then we did "Less than Zero" and "Radio Sweetheart" and Elvis just had twenty more good songs, so we just went ahead and cut the album. We did it in 2 days of recording and 3 days of mixing and it cost $3,000. Some groups spend more money in the studio chopping up their coke.

"One of the tunes that got me really excited was 'Alison,' I just wept when I heard it. That record is exactly how they played it; there's just that vocal harmony on the chorus. As it is, they sang it at the same time, they pleayed it at the same time, something that's hardly ever done these days. Elvis does it occasionally but if he's got to keep a rhythm going it's a bit hard for him, but generally I try to get him to do it at the same time. They just stand around in a circle and do it. It's easy, it's set up just like they're on stage."

Well, no wonder they can record for astronomically microscopic sums, certainly a radical departure from the normal industry approach.

There is one more crowning touch to the growing legend and that's the incident that occured at the CBS convention in London last summer: Costello was arrested for playing music in the street without a permit in the front of the posh Hilton in the ritzy Park Lane section. "We were playing a gig at Dingwall's that night and we went down to let them know that the gig was on," says Elvis. "We had guys walking around with placards advertising the gig and I was playing through a battery-powered amp. They came out on the pavement and quite a big crowd gathered very quickly, including quite a few of the big guys at CBS. All these guys were actually standing there and applauding, but the Hilton didn't see the humor in the situation and called the police. The police didn't see the humor in the situation and arrested me. It wasn't a big deal. It was just a crazy stunt."

Shortly thereafter, CBS concluded its deal with manager and Stiff Records co-founder Jake Riviera for both Elvis' and producer Nick Lowe's services as artists, recording with Dave Edmunds' band Rockpile.

My Aim Is True. What an amazingly great fantastic album, the best debut album since *The Doors*. It's assultive with its intelligent lyrics, cryptic compressions, frontline misogynism, extraordinary bitterness. It is vital and powerful, like all classic rock and roll. Elvis is a descendant of the British tradition of the angryman, full of the alienation of modern Britian. Costello is consumed by primal emotions: rage, jealousy, guilt, rejection, revenge, humiliation, disgust, retaliation, paranoia, sexual frustration. His songs are refreshingly old-fashioned in their basic themes. This is Chuck Berry with a broader world view, the side of the Beach Boys where you don't grow up in the sunlight and warmth of Southern California, but in a broken home in dark and dour England. He zeroes in on the hurt and rejection that finds its best release in the sheer explosiveness of rock and roll. In a much-quoted statement given to Nick Kent, Costello boldly proclaims: "The only two things that matter to me, the only motivation points for me writing all these songs are revenge and guilt. Those are the only emotions I know about, that I know I can feel. Love? I dunno what it means, really, and it doesn't exist in my songs."

Elvis further elucidated for *Time* Magazine; "Many of my songs involve revenge and guilt. The stronger feelings, the ones you are left with at night."

Costello's influences seem to include all the masters: the original Elvis, Chuck Berry, the Beatles, Dylan, Stones, Kinks, Zombies, Who, Gene Vincent, Eddie Cochran, the Troggs, ? and the Mysterions, Count Five, Jefferson Airplane, the Rascals—in short all the great bar bands, because ultimately that's what the Attractions (his current band) is. Consciously, though, Elvis admits to only three predominate

influences: George Jones, Gram Parsons and Dusty Springfield. Of Springsteen, to whom he is ignorantly compared, he stridently replies: "His stuff about being on the streets is trite and unbelievable." Of course it's true. Pretty Boy Springsteen never needed rock and roll to get laid; from the militancy of Costello's misogynism, even rock and roll may not be enough.

He is obsessed by women and society. Of the latter, the most powerful statement seems to be "Less Than Zero," El's first single. "Briefly, 'Less Than Zero' is about Mosley's being allowed on TV during the evening. I really don't feel like itemizing these things though, because there's no point writing songs if I have to explain them."

Oswald Mosley was the British wartime Nazi leader and it is as mindboggling to Costello, as it should be to any other sensitive human being, that this creep with his current day neo-Nazi policies should be allowed on TV. "They think I have no respect/But everything means less than zero." Certainly in a world that is capable of such blindness and stupidity. Ironically, the studio where the material was recorded, Pathways, is the old headquarters of the National Front, the party Mosley leads. Another ironic twist is the conviction by Americans that the third verse is about Lee Harvey Oswald. In light of the predominance of this latter view, Costello rewrote the opening of the song for his American audiences, and it's quite a wry comment. "Welcome to the Working Week" opens the album and its sentiments too, are straightforward:

Welcome to the working week
Oh I know it don't thrill you
I hope it don't kill you
You gotta do it
Til you're through it
So you better get to it

But it's not this political stuff that's causing all the fuss...it's all those songs about broads, about doing in the ones that did him in, and that's just about every one of them sisters. We might as well start with the song that gives this album its title, "Alison."

Poignant, tender, tart, the type of song that makes grown men cry. Which is quite ironic since this is the most violent of the Costello songs. People have been writing songs about lost lovers since the dawn of time, and songs of revenge and killing about as long but what makes the song seem so unique is it's cold, dispassionate approach to the killing. With the singing of "my aim is true," the violent undercurrent of this elpee is underscored. The psychopathology of "Alison" dissolves into the pathetic, abused victim of a real ball-busting bitch (seemingly the only women who interest Costello) of "Miracle Man";

"And I'm doing
everything
Just trying to
please her
Even crawling
round on all fours
I thought by now
it was going to be easy
But she still seems
to want for more

The highlight of *My Aim Is True* is one song not done at the original sessions, nor is it found on the import version of the album. Released as a single in England, CBS added it to the U.S. release. Where the other tracks were recorded with Clover (occasionally with Nick Lowe on bass and backup vocals), formerly a Marin County bluegrass band signed to Stiff, "Watching the Detectives" utilizes the Rumour, and utilizes them well, for it is perhaps the best reggae song by a non-Jamaican act.

One of the moves that I admire in Elvis is his ability to tell complex stories within the context of a two-or-three minute song.'Detectives' is a bizarre, absurdist, Kafkaesque version of Raymond Chandler filtered through that very special vision which is Elvis, a paranoid vision which demands constant love and attention, and decries death for anything less than perfection.

Another song that is important to an understanding of Costello's cosmology is "Mystery Dance." This is the rock and roll move, with its opening and echo chamber sound straight out of "Jailhouse Rock" by the first Elvis, and its hot guitar licks derived from Chuck Berry and Eddie Cochran (John McPhie is playing that screaming guitar). But no matter that this song is a smoker, the words are still the main attraction as Elvis explores life vis-a-vis the "Mystery Dance." And when impotency and sexual dysfunction give way to masturbation, we have the best song on this theme, easily supplanting the Who's "Happy Jack" and "Pictures of Lily."

ILLUSTRATION/DAVE McMACKEN

"I hate anything with extended solos or bands that are concerned with any kind of instrumental virtuosity. I can listen to maybe 15 seconds of someone like The Crusaders, say, before I get very bored. Everyone keeps telling me how marvelous they are. But I get bored.

"There are going to be no soloists in my band. The songs are the most important thing. I want the songs to mean something to people. I like and write short songs. It's a discipline. There's no disguise. You can't cover up songs by dragging them through banks of synthesizers and choirs of angels. They have to stand up on their own with none of that nonsense. People seem to have forgotten that."

The most striking difference between *My Aim Is True* and *This Year's Model*—Elvis' second album released here in April—is the tightness and musical virtuosity of the backup band, plus the magnificence of Nick Lowe's flawless production. The use of Clover on the first album was only because they were available, and the lack of credits was due to the archaic realities of the musician's union and the UK Immigration authorities. [*Continued next page*)

"I need to plow in more emotions for my own sanity— I could flip-out!"

For his present touring band, Elvis put together one hell of a unit in the Attractions, consisting of:

Drummer Pete Thomas, formerly of Chilli Willi and the Red Hot Peppers, a group also managed by Jake Riviera. After Chilli broke up, Pete came to America as drummer for seminal folkie John Stewart. In response to the excitement of the new wave, he returned to England and this gig followed shortly.

Bassist Bruce Thomas, a former Quiver then Sutherland Brothers/Quiver bassist, he became disillusioned with the Sutherlands connection and split in a none too amicable fashion. He'd heard "Less than Zero" when he spotted an ad in the trades placed by Stiff looking for musicians. When he called up, Costello himself asked what other bands Bruce was into. He replied: "Graham Parker and Steely Dan." Elvis immediately said "Forget it." Someone else who knew Thomas's reputation insisted on arranging an audition, and it worked out.

Keyboardist Steve Naive, who has never played in a band before and wants to be as big as the Bay City Rollers.

* * *

Costello himself talks about the differences between the two albums: "Actually, I see the *Aim* songs as just 'a collection', really. On *Model,* in the beginning, I was into creating something more complete—not a concept album but something more interlinked. I see this album as being generally more oblique lyrically than *Aim.* The imagery is generally far more fragmented, very much in a non-linear fashion. So, I just can't carry on doing y'know, 'more revenge.' It'd be like the Clash singing 'White Riot '78."

The obvious standout number, destined to be an instant classic for EC followers is "Radio, Radio"; so obvious is this as an ultimate anthem to ugly radio that CBS insisted it be included in the domestic version of *Model.* What's really great and sublimely humorous is the fact that song is so infectious at the outset, this *is* the cut that radio stations will be playing.

Unfortunately, the second best song on this years' model is not included on the American version, a situation due more to the strange nature of Costello's CBS contract than to domestic A&R ignorance at that company. "(I Don't Want To Go To ' is quite simply the hottest keyboard number in rock and roll since the demise of the Doors. Elvis himself is devastating on lead guitar, in a dueling interchange with Steve Naive.

Question: Where does the album title come from? The connection to "This Year's Girl" is obvious, but the chorus of "Chelsea" is about "last year's model." Critics have termed "This Year's Girl" misogynist, though it's much more subdued and muted on both the album and this song in particular but Elvis says the critics are crazy to pursue that line of deduction. "It's ridiculous," Elvis snaps in an annoyed tone, "This Year's Girl," if anything, is like a female "Miracle Man" in that they both deal with inadequacy—with humor, I believe. Like, "This Year's Girl" is not one girl—it's a song for and about all the girls who desperately follow this year's trends: the Biba girls or Fiorucci or whatever. And I'm not castigating them personally for swallowing that myth. In fact, it's almost compassionate in a way. If it's an attack, it's an attack on the idea, or the notion."

One must conclude that *Model* is a tremendous step forward for Costello in terms of musical development and thematic maturity. His personal demons are beginning to take on a more universal nature, less internalized, less private, while his vision remains as insightful and incisive as ever. If *Aim* was the best debut album of the decade, then *Model* must be the best follow-up album. So then the inevitable question: what possible direction from here?

"God knows! I could completely flip out and do a *Radio Ethiopia.* I want to plow in more emotions, not because people have drawn this one-dimensional picture of me but just for my own sanity, really."

* * *

When I had seen Elvis last November, it was under difficult conditions. He was playing to an in-crowd record industry audience, which had just been bored to death by Backstage Pass. Costello himself was suffering from a sore throat and some opening night jitters. Further, nearly half the material performed that night was totally unfamiliar. I suspected all would be different this tour. So it was.

Coming out on stage in his iridescent sharkskin jacket, or plain blue blazer, obtained in a local thrift store, looking like a latter-day Buddy Holly, clutching his Fender guitar for dear life, he is nothing if not the most intense performer since Dylan or Morrison. Could he be a reincarnated Syd Barrett? The pacing of his stage show is merely frantic; he sings as if his very life depends on his performance. Which it does:

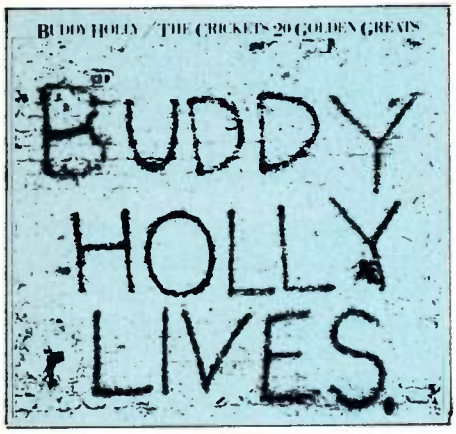
"What I do is a matter of life and death to me. I don't choose to explain it of course. I'm doing it, and I'll keep on doing it until somebody stops me forcibly. It's like 'yeah, it's only rock and roll' but, at the same time, rock and roll as such is my life. It's all I do, so these songs are me.

"Watching The Detectives" is of course the highlight for the audience fortunate enough to have caught Elvis this trip. In Chicago, they played the song for nearly ten minutes, featuring searing guitar work by Elvis throughout. But everything is great: "Pump It Up," "Chelsea," "The Beat," "Miracle Man," "You Belong To Me" (especially amphetimized and sounding a lot like "Psychotic Reaction"), "Mystery Dance" (always saved as one of the encore numbers). "Less Than Zero" in its new Americanized form, of course "Alison" which always raises the intensity of his concerts, "No Action," show opener "Waiting for The End of the World" with its newly extended bridge. "Radio, Radio" was also a tremendous crowd pleaser but EC omitted it from his repetoire in Madison.

So it seemed there should be riots. The man has released two of the greatest albums of alltime, is a real hot performer fronting a hot band, and he's getting the big push at CBS. The people who are into him are really into him—that much could be ascertained from the rabid fans in both Madison and Chicago but the excitement hasn't spread yet. The first album has sold slightly less than the Sex Pistols, though it has gotten by far the better chart position, reflecting the extensive, however delayed, radio play it's received.

It will take time for Elvis Costello to achieve the super-star rank he so richly deserves but then its always taken some amount of time for rock's few truly original and inspired talents to break through to the masses...It did with the Stones, with Dylan, even the Doors... and so it goes, so it goes, so it goes...where it's gonna stop, no one knows. •

Phonograph Record Reviews



20 GOLDEN GREATS
Buddy Holly & The Crickets
MCA 3040

By IAN DOVE

To die well seems to be the best revenge. I have the distinct feeling that had not the Late Great Buddy died in that small plane, he'd right now be complaining in some Rock Revival Show that all they wanted to do was listen to his oldies, not his new songs of Relevance and Innervision. As it was he died before Peggy Sue even got pregnant... Buddy Holly, of course, is well and truly dead unlike, say, Jim Reeves, who died in a similar accident and whose demise has yet to be officially recorded in his RCA Records biography. (Country music deejays occasionally like to tell listeners that good ole Jim just called the station and RCA is forever adding and subtracting backgrounds to their Reeves tapes. It's not beyond possibility for a Disco Jim album...)

Buddy Holly has been better served in this respect—producer Norman Petty has added backing to naked tape but generally kept things in perspective. Not so those social commentators, your hothouse rock critics, picking over Holly's product and equating fairly neat music hooks into artform, teenpang lyric into poetry, Peggy Sue into Lolita and making Charles Hardin Holley (1936-59) into a seminal force that inspired everyone from Dylan to Johnpaulgeorge-andringo. In England, before and after death, people knew what he was—a Pop Star, perhaps Icon. And that was fine: as Ian Whitcomb puts it, "Pop had, and should have, little to do with music but a lot to do with youth society."

So be it, the imitators and fans, in Holly hornrims, liked him to jump around to, but didn't really attach much significance to him as trend figure.

The British singer, Brian Poole, long since forgotten, putting down his Holly specs and picking up his Beatle wig, said in 1961, "He was just the fashion-as the music changed, we'd change."

But Holly, of course, died. And as the number of people claiming to have been bumped off that last fatal flight reaches 747 proportions, as the movie "The Buddy Holly Story" is released, as 1950s-60s nostalgia crests, naturally MCA presents us with the 20 Golden Greats from the Late Great (three, not in any compilation before!) And once again the surroundings will serve to inflate the music, which actually does wear well, although for the life of me I don't hear the alleged synthesis of Tex-Mex-Rock-Roll-Country in his music. And his xeroxes of Diddley and Chuck don't catch much fire put up against the originals. The lack of polish of the 1957 "That'll Be The Day" works in its favor but his version of Anka's "It Doesn't Matter Anymore" with strings and his voice sounding a little more wimpy seems to point where Holly's head was heading at that time, 1959. •

MEET ME AT THE CRUX
Dirk Hamilton
Elektra 6E-125

By COLMAN ANDREWS

If that crafty devil Zevon hadn't gotten here first, I'd be able to say that this was the best rock (as opposed to rock-and-roll) album of the year. And the amazing thing is that it has all the elements of the passe—Springsteenian street talk mixed with Dylanesque psuedo-reference, folk-rock vocal intonations (and even folk-rock guitar riffs in a few places), hard-kicking but neatly-phrased arrangements in the Johnny Bristol mode...This stuff ought to sound like old clothes. But *it doesn't*. It sounds fresh and lively and even—this is the neatest trick of all—fiercely original.

The best reference point here, I guess, is Van Morrison (in his "Into the Mystic" style), or maybe Boz Scaggs in his Van Morrison period. The band (Don Evans, lead guitar; James Rolleston, bass; Darrell "Big Dog" Verdusco, drums; Hamilton himself on acoustic guitar and vocals) is tight and cohesive, always there when it's needed and never there when you look again. (Jai Winding and, on one track, Bill Payne, are added on keyboards.) Hamilton's voice is good, strong, big, rough-edged without being raspy, smooth without being soapy. Again the Morrison/Scaggs reference applies. The songs, all written by Hamilton, are the damnedest thing. Little gems of lyric stand out vividly ("The table's gettin' tired of holdin' up my elbows/as I'm watchin' your behind...", or "And when I was hungry/He gave me a fishing pole...".

The songs mostly seem to have that wondrous quality of forward motion—lyric direction, in which the words are always moving towards becoming something further—more painful, more ridiculous, wilder and woolier. (These comments don't particularly apply to two of the songs—"Billboard on the Moon" and "Tell a Vision Time": The first is a little bit too Jonathan-King for its own good; the latter is a nice try—"Hey Punk of Progress/Raised to the hum of The Electric Governess..."—but this one *is* passe.)

About the only lesson I can draw from all this is that quality (or talent, or "It," or whatever else it is that Dirk Hamilton so obviously has) covers up a multitude of scenes. •

TITLE UNKNOWN
The Beach Boys
Label Unassigned

By GREG SHAW

Here it is summer again, and if this is *PRM* it must be time for a surfing revival. Seems like every year about this time, kids remember how nicely those beach sounds go with the pursuit of fun in the sun, and somehow the Beach Boys are always there to make sure nobody forgets how it's supposed to be done. This year is no exception, although a lot has changed since the days of '72-'75 when it seemed each time that "this year

for sure'' our boys would get it together for the successful re-emergence none of us wanted to believe they didn't have in them.

It's time now to start admitting that maybe they don't. Maybe it's enough that they made 20 or more great albums, and gave us all those incredible songs. Maybe they'd feel a lot less pressured if people didn't expect another ''I Get Around.'' Maybe if they feel they've done enough, that they've earned the right to do nothing but bask around in Hawaii and record lazy remakes of their favorite 50's tunes, there's nothing wrong with that.

I was prepared to detest this album. I've heard all the stories, about how first Warner Bros. and then Capitol rejected it as unsuitable for release, how it sounded like out-takes from the last album, which itself was little more than out-takes from the album before. Yeah, I was prepared for the worst, so naturally when I finally got hold of the tape, I didn't find it all that bad.

It does have its dire moments. At times it sounds like a Mike Love solo album, like on 2 or 3 incredibly dopey pseudo-disco tracks. Other times it goes so soft it resembles mush. No doubt the A&R wizards at the record companies were correct in deciding the total package wasn't quite worth however many millions their contracts would require them to fork over for the right to release it. But we don't have to concern ourselves with any of that. All that really matters is that here are some more Beach Boys songs, and for anybody who's a fan, that has value enough.

And there is a lot here that the fans will (would) appreciate. ''Listen to the Rain'' has a gentle, floating feeling you can't help but respond to, as does ''Hey Little Tomboy''. If nothing else, the Beach Boys can always use textures of sound to transport you to a world that's purely elemental—water and air are theirs to conjure, and that's one touch they haven't lost, however weak the songs themselves may be.

To me, it's encouraging to note that the oldies here (''Peggy Sue'', ''Soul Deep'' and a leaden ''Come Go With Me'') are the most disappointing tracks on the album. Of the originals, several rank with the best the group has come up with in the last few years. ''She's Got Rhythm'' is a strong, jaunty little tune, the remake of their old hit ''Hawaii'' is a fairly successful updating, and retains the flavor of the original, ''Come Out Tonight'' sounds so good that I had to go back and hear it again when it ended, and the *coup de grace*, ''Sweet Sunday Love'' is one of Brian's best-ever tributes to the Phil Spector sound. It's massive, viscous [*sic*], emotionally potent, completely successful in what it sets out to do.

None of these songs may be hits, but how many years has it been since the Beach Boys could count on getting hits with their best songs? That isn't really the point anymore. The Beach Boys are a national heritage, without whom (you fill in the blank). As long as they're able to drift along, nursing their tans, imbibing their wheat germ, and tossing out a desultory album like this every year or two, I can find no fault. They're worth having around, and if nothing else they haven't let themselves become the kind of travesty other groups of their vintage have devolved into. There's nothing to dislike about the Beach Boys, and little to dislike about this album. Let's have it out. and never mind the bollocks. •

BEFORE AND AFTER SCIENCE
Brian Eno
Island ILPS-9478

By COLMAN ANDREWS

Before and After Science is the latest outpost in the inexorable upward march of Anglo-Saxon art-rock/wimp-rock/dada-rock. And it is wonderful.

All the jagged edges are taken out of this music. Everything seems to curve inward. The texture is thick and milky and even-tempered. (I have a fantasy that, when this record was being mixed, the engineers tried not to let the VU meter move more than half a degree in either direction.) There is a terrific amount of music going on here—often extremely sophisticated stuff—but it's done so evasively, so obscurely, so self-effacingly, that it's sometimes hard to recognize. Talk about the creative muddle.

Eno's songs are strange, deceptive ones, seeming at first to be one thing but whipping around almost invisibly into something quite different. (There are two instrumentals here—a Glassy pastorale called ''Through Hollow Lands'' and a track called ''Energy Fools the Magician,'' which sounds like an excerpt from Claus Ogerman's *Gate of Dreams* played underwater, on a wobbly tape head.)

The lyrics Eno writes have an almost mocking complexity, and they're full of rhymes that have a blind, dogged energy, a don't-give-a-damn energy, reminiscent of *Blonde on Blonde*. ''Backwater,'' for instance, includes lines like, ''There was a senator from Ecuador/Who talked about a meteor that crashed on a hill in the south of Peru And was found by a conquistador who took it to the emperor/And he passed it on to a Turkish guru,'' and, even better, ''If you study the logistics and heuristics of the mystics/You'll discover that their minds rarely move in a straight line...'' (And here I was thinking that ''Like the mystics and statistics say it will'' was a good rhyme...)

Some of the tracks seem like deliberate reinterpretations of earlier rock traditions. ''King's Lead Hat,'' for instance, is soft-edged hard-rocked by Eno, Andy Fraser, Paul Randolph, Phil Manzanera, and Robert Fripp, and seems almost like a capsule history of '50's R&R regurgitated through a late '70's yawn. ''Splish splash/I was rakin' in the cash,'' sings Eno at one point; and one of the solos is a '50's guitar phrase caught in a tape loop.

Eno forces the art-rock issue by noting that a boxed set of ''oracle cards'' called ''Oblique Strategies,'' created by him and by artist Peter Schmidt, ''were used extensively in the making of this record''; by sub-titling the lp ''Fourteen Pictures,'' meaning ten songs and four of Schmidt's offset prints, nice ones, which are pictured on the album jacket but which one must send away for ($1.75 for four); and by the listing, on ''Kurt's Rejoinder,'' of Kurt Schwitters—the German dadaist who died in 1948—as one of the voices.

Well, OK. I figure that when a fellow can produce good stuff like this, he can be as obscure as he wants to be. ''All the fun,'' like Robert Frost once said, ''is saying things that almost but don't quite formulate.'' •

is america ready for

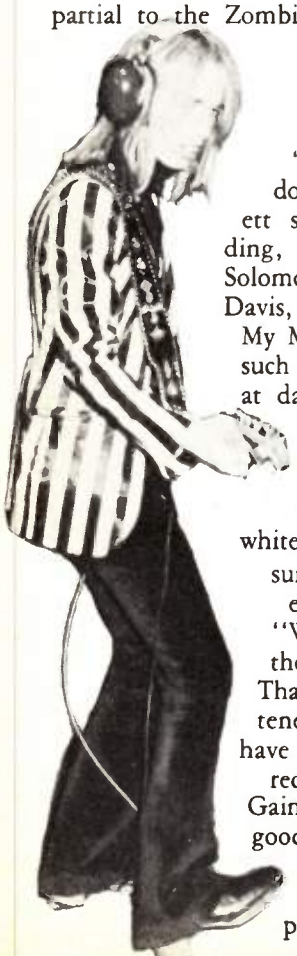
TOM PETTY & the HEARTBREAKERS

???

By Ken Barnes

Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers are one of the rare acts capable of pulling off the ultimate transcendence trick: Of all aritsts in any way associated—however reluctantly—with the New Wave only Petty and Elvis Costello (and maybe Mink DeVille) appear to have escaped its pernicious negative-image hold. Petty, whose leather-jacketed, sneering pose on his first album cover had most pundits popping him into the punk pack upon his fall 1976 debut, negotiated his escape through a combination of hard work, deeper-than-usual rock roots, a shrewd image campaign for press and radio, and considerderable luck.

The roots stem from growing up in Gainesville, Florida, and Petty describes as "more British-influenced" than most places, where the Allman brothers could be seen in a Beatles copy band, and where Petty and the future Heartbreakers listened to the Beatles, Stones, Kinks and the rest of the British invaders on the radio ("we were always real partial to the Zombies"). But Petty's first bands were influenced by another powerful musical current. "We were also doing Wilson Pickett songs, Otis Redding, Percy Sledge... Solomon Burke, Tyrone Davis, "Can I Change My Mind"—it was all such great stuff to play at dances. We didn't have a horn section, we just had guitars, so it turned into white-boy rock." Petty sums up his influences this way: "We simply liked the AM radio. That's what we listened to—we didn't have no money to buy records."



Gainesville was also a good place to play, with the University of Florida providing a vast built-in audience. Petty's first significant band, Mudcrutch, "used to play gigs before they ever landed a recording contract. That deal, with Shelter (distributed by MCA at the time), produced one collecter's-item single, "Wild Eyes," and spelled the end of Mudcrutch as a performing band. "Once we got a record deal we never did anything," says Petty, and the band, which included at various times two other present Heartbreakers, broke up quickly.

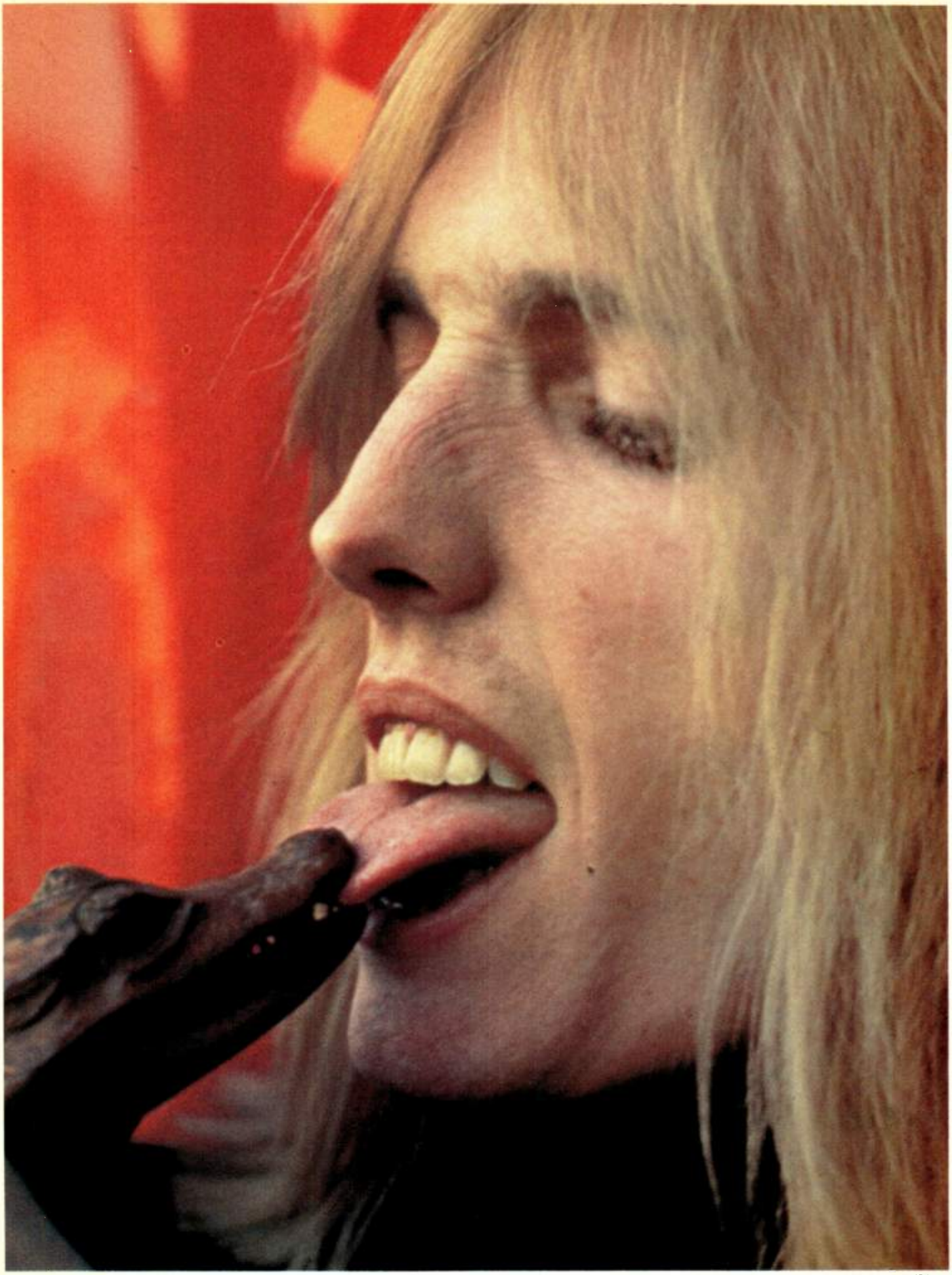
Petty chose to stay with Shelter, and signed a solo contract and publishing deal which gave him a weekly stipend which kept him going while he "fooled around" with the solo album project "for a year...couple of years, I don't know how long. I never got anything I liked.". In 1976 he ran into the Heartbreakers at a recording studio. "There was a whole bunch of Gainsville musicians there. I didn't even know they were all in town. Benmont (Tench, the band's keyboard player) was doing some demos for a solo album, and he had actually got the band together." It was love at first earful, and the transplanted Floridians (Petty, Tench, bassist Ron Blair, drummer Stan Lynch and guitarist Mike Campbell) decided to band together. "I was the only one in the band with a record label, so we decided to call it Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers," Petty relates. At first the new band tried to complete Petty's long-dormant solo LP project, but as work progressed, Petty "tried to make it a group project." They ended up using none of the songs Petty had put together for his solo album; he wrote all new songs in a 15-day period.

The first album, leather-jacketed cover and all, came out, along with a single, the sinuous "Breakdown," and only minimal response was forthcoming. The second single was a 70's classic—"American Girl," executed in a perfect Byrds folk-rock style (and later covered by Roger McGuinn in a distinctly inferior version)—but it too had little impact. However, the band's airplay on album-oriented rock (AOR) stations increased steadily. At this point in 1977, good breaks and good planning took hold. Petty and the band went to England to open for Nils Lofgren, and pandemonium and instant British stardom resulted. "It was crazy—it started right off the airplane and it never stopped till we were back on the airplane, me and Ron with bronchitis, totally burned out."

The powerful British press ("The press is the AM radio in England," says Petty) and the Lofgren crowds went for the band in a big way, and two weeks after their arrival a headlining tour was booked. They spent three months in England and Europe, got two singles on the charts, and received a healthy dose of rock & roll stardom which turned their following American concert performances into definitive displays of rock & roll excitement.

"Breakdown" was rereleased. "By the time the single came out the second time," Petty reflects, "we were all sure it was going to happen because the gigs were going great. People were manic. We could feel it from the kids, there was something going on."

Meanwhile, the band's AOR radio image stock was soaring, thanks to a couple of well-planned record company ploys. ABC (which had taken over Shelter's distribution) pressed up an "Official Live Leg" LP containing four live tracks (two not on the album). As an early representative of a now-trendy practice, the "'Leg" became a sought-after collector's item and a much-played AOR artifact (even though Petty himself says it left a "bad taste" in the group's mouth for reasons of recording quality). At the same time, during tours, Petty and the Heartbreakers visited AOR radio stations all over the country, with what seemed like tireless perseverance. Petty says, "I don't think it was that conscious. We just did anything we could do to promote the group. If we were on the road playing a gig and someone asked us if we wanted to come over to the radio station and talk on the air, we said, 'Sure!'"



PETTY on PUNK:

There's about two good bands--the rest of it is a jackoff.

NONETHELESS, ABC promotion reps, including master planner Jon Scott, who Petty says "saved our lives because he convinced the record company that we were a viable thing," were always present, and hordes of pictures found their way to the trade papers. The end result was an invaluable rapport with AOR programmers and air personalities, who found that the band was not a pack of surly, incommunicative punk rockers who were above visiting radio stations but a bunch of friendly, articulate rock & rollers. Petty's music became highly acceptable as an airplay item, and the group had successfully reached both Top 40 and AOR radio and escaped the vast radio prejudice against most New Wave (or most classic three-minute rock and roll) music.

Petty and the Heartbreakers do not see themselves as punk rockers at all, although Petty will admit a strong empathy with the new rock & roll crusade. "I support that thing. I feel it's the only hope rock & roll has. I just didn't think it was any great stroke of genius. First of all, to be blunt, it was bad music when it started. In the beginning, I got real irritated—I was in England when that was going on, and I'd say, 'there's two good bands and the rest of it is more of a jackoff than the dinosaurs they're mad about, 'cause those guys were at least spending a lot of money to bring a quality show to people, and these guys are ripping you off on a trend and you're buying it!' I let my hair grow real long because we didn't want to be part of it. Now I cut my hair off. It's all over, so it's irrelevant."

Summing up his punk post-mortem, Petty says, "A lot of it seemed like a ripoff to me, a poser's outing. But if it did nothing else, it had thousands of really young kids forming bands with a rock mentality, so that along guarantees another ten years of rock & roll." He's guarded about present trends in music, "I see it's getting better but it's not right. When it's right," he says, echoing a beer commercial, "I'll know it."

Petty seems to be doing his level best to make it right as far as his own music is concerned. The new album, *You're Gonna Get It,* appears over a year and a half after the first, and was the object of much soul-searching. Petty prepared for it by listening, interestingly, to the Everly Brothers. "Before I made this album I listened to only the Everly Brothers on that last tour. I always loved their harmonies but I never really heard all their records. The band thought I was getting weird." The album, which Petty terms a real "band album," underwent many changes as a number of song candidates were dropped. "I'm real conscious that everything sounds good and still works together—that's the trick. It almost drove me crazy for awhile when I had to reject songs like 'Surrender' (a folk-rocky live performance standout) 'cause they didn't fit into the program. We also recorded 'Don't Bring Me Down' (the Animals tune). It came out real nice but it didn't fit into the album either. I think it'll be a B-side sometime. Everybody and his brother's putting remakes on the radio—that's almost passe to bring out a remake now." Petty also feared a remake would attract too much radio attention away from his originals. He also tried to fit in some live material, but it also failed to fit the program.

The ten songs that eventually did fit the program last a mere 28 minutes, but the rock & roll quality is overpowering. Petty & the Heartbreakers have a rare ability to fuse seemingly incompatible elements of the Byrds (an airy, jangling folk-rock feel) and the Stones (powerful rock & roll menace), and they display that valuable attribute in full force on *You're Gonna Get It.* "When The Time Comes," the stunning "Listen To Her Hearts," and "Magnolia" (the best Byrds-style song since..."American Girl") lean toward the folk-rock axis, while "You're Gonna Get It" and "Too Much Ain't Enough" established an electric rock & roll tension, instantly spellbinding. Though any album with five tracks as strong as these qualifies as a blockbuster, there is one further cut that in a commercial vein tops them all. "I Need To Know" has the overwhelming, electrifying initial impact on me that "Don't Fear The Reaper" by Blue Oyster Cult and "Go Your Own Way" by Fleetwood Mac did—It's a breathtaking song with one of those choruses you start singing along with involuntarily the first time you hear it...It's an instant classic and should become a smash single.

All should go well for Petty and the Heartbreakers this time around. Radio (AOR especially) is primed and waiting eagerly for the new album, the band is ready to tour, TV and other promotion gambits have been readied, and Petty is poised to make the breakthrough to ultimate stardom. He still seems a little dazed by the possibilities, but is quick to bestow credit on his fans. "It's one of the few times when the kids...or the fans, whether they were jocks or writers or kids on the street, made a band happen, with no help from nobody. It's really weird. We're not by nature really humble or gratful people," he laughs, "but you can't help getting overwhelmed by it sometimes." •

MAY/JUNE ISSUE 43

SOUL & JAZZ

B.B. King & Bobby Blue Bland in Newark, N.J.

The Estranged Etta James

by Colman Andrews

ROY GYONG

My Incredible 24 Year Career

By ETTA JAMES

As Told to Colman Andrews

Everybody gets mixed up about me having something to do with Earl "Fatha" Hines when I was getting started. It wasn't "Fatha" Hines—It was Professor James Earl Hines, who was a gospel conductor at the really famous Baptist church here in L.A., St. Paul Baptist Church. He was my voice teacher. And then there's another thing, which is that "Fatha" Hines had a chick singing with him that was called Ida James, and a lot of people get us mixed up. You know, guys have walked up to me like 80 years old and said, Oh, girl, my you're really looking good, how do you keep yourself looking so good? ...and I say I *know* you've got to be talking about Ida James.

The first time I performed professionally was with Johnny Otis, right here in L.A., and up and down the coast. Then Johnny and me had a big falling out. See, I recorded "Roll with Me, Henry" with Johnny in 1954, the last part of '54, like November, and we went on the road right after that. Then we had a falling out about that record, you know, with him putting his name on it and I'm saying he didn't have nothing to do with it, and being tied up in court for four years, and me being a minor and him taking me on the road without legal guardianship and all. So we fell out for about ten years.

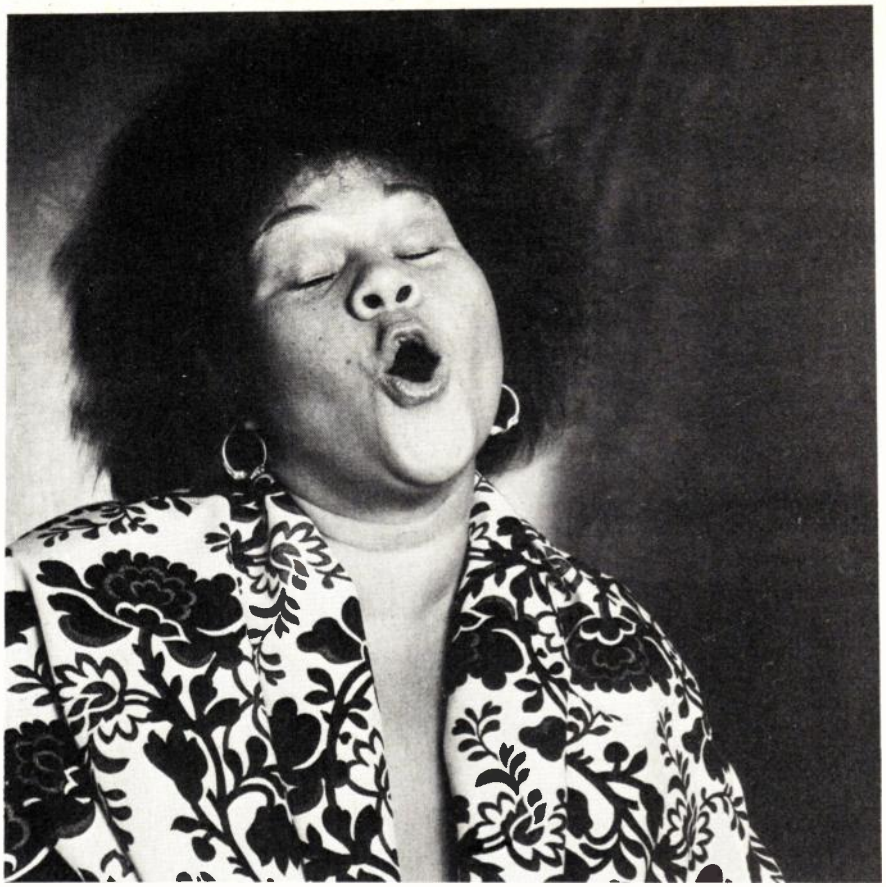
Isn't that something? I mean, it's so stupid to fall out...And he lives three

BRUCE OSBORN

doors away from me now. We made friends again here six-seven months ago, and now he fell out with me *again*. I came over and saw his studio, the studio he built, and he said, Etta, what we need to do is to get together in the studio..., and I was in the flux then of leaving Chess and getting with Warner Brothers, and he wanted me to record some old "Harlem Nocturne," some nostalgia stuff, "Etta James with the Johnny Otis Big Band." Now, I should have told him, Hey, Johnny, look, I want to do this other thing first and when I see that I can't go that way, then I'll do your thing. But I didn't tell him that, and I didn't go back over there, and now he won't speak to me again. I just did a TV show with him, though—a history of the blues thing. It's really going to be something big. Because, you know, Johnny was a great *man* here on the West Coast. He represented the West Coast for rock-and-roll, just like Dick Clark did for the East Coast...

After I was with Johnny, like in the early '60s, I was on these shows called the Top Ten Revue, and that would mean they'd take the top ten R&B records, and put them all together and package them and send them on the road. We'd have Little Richard, Little Willie John, the Midnighters, the Five Royals, the Five Keys, Bill Doggett...Sam Cooke would be there, and he was very sweet, a very nice person. I mean, he had his little thing, but he was a very religious-type person and he never bothered anybody. And Lavern Baker. Somebody said she packed it up and moved to the Bahamas. I just heard that. She married Slappy White, you know, who was with Redd Foxx on that show, and Lavern I think had money, because she was a gambler. She was a rugged chick. She would have played Harriet Tubman just great. She could gamble like a man. I mean, on these tours, she must have beat Fats Domino out of a hundred thousand dollars—shooting craps! They'd shoot craps between shows, and she'd be down there on her knees, Hey seven, seven, clicking her fingers, and she'd pull off $2000. like it wasn't *nothing*.

James Brown? Well, I'm very truthful, so I have to say I can't *stand* him. He's just a very ignorant, very illiterate little monkey man. And he hates me. I don't know why, but he's hated me since we first met each other about 1955, and he's just been an asshole ever since. He's one person that I would tell him to his face, I would say it on Johnny Carson or Merv Griffin or anyplace. I don't know



BRUCE OSBORN

"The whole industry knew about my drug scene, and who wants to be bothered with a junkie?"

anybody you could talk to, unless they were lying, who'd tell you James Brown was a hell of a guy.

Leonard Chess was like a teacher to me. He taught me what was going on and I had a lot of great experiences from him. At this point, today, though, I would say that Jerry Wexler—who just produced my LP—is the most important person in my career. He has been so dedicated. He's really busting his balls for me. He just grabbed me, grabbed me out of a pit, and pulled me up to say, Hey listen, I've got faith in you. But I don't think Jerry would have been bothered with me if I hadn't got my shit together. The whole industry, you see, knew about my drug scene, and who wants to be bothered with a junkie? Drugs really changed my career. The music changed, sure, but if you've got your head on right, you can change with it. I had all those ballads and stuff going, and all of a sudden the music went into *bam* hard stuff, Woodstock, *bam bam*, hard rock and Jimi Hendrix and all, and I didn't know where to go—because I was null and void. If I'd have been together, I could have flowed with the thing, and I would have been right in there on the thing with Janis Joplin and bits like that.

About five years ago, I went away—*forced*, quite naturally, because I don't think there's *any* drug addicts that just volunteer and say, Well, I've got to go clean up my act. So with a little *boosting*, I just went away and did it. And I haven't had any problems since.

continued on next page

I've got my own rehabilitation center now, and we're going to try to open up a residential halfway house, a theatre academy, and a drug abuse program, so we can say, Hey, you, you young kid over there, come on over here and let's try some of this, let's see what you got going, let's see which way we can point your best things.

I don't domuchof nothing anymore. I even stopped smoking. Now I got to lose weight. And the food is the most fun part. I'd give up *all* that shit for some food. And I'm just wondering, why can't the Lord say, Etta, you've been such a good girl, you made it and all, you're doing all right, you're trying to sing and you're making all your appointments and all, so I'll tell you what: You quit dope, you quit cigarettes and all, so now *I'm gonna let you eat.* Eat all you want, Etta, and you can still maintain 150 pounds for the rest of your life...But I know I'm really going to have to make it happen myself, just like I did the other stuff. God helped me do that.

Anyway, now I got with Jerry. At first, though, he couldn't really get involved, because I was still with Chess and he could have really got into trouble at the time. So I called Mo Ostin myself. I was up in Santa Barbara having a good time, right, laying back, and I said, You know what? I hear Warner Brothers wants me, so I'm just going to call them up and speak to the president or the chairman of the board or whatever. So I called up, and I said, I'm calling station-to-station for Mr. Mo Ostin, and they said, Who's calling? and I said, Etta James and she says, Oh? Etta James? Well, I'll tell you what, he's in a meeting right now (and I said, here it goes now), he's in a meeting and if you can give me your number, I'll have him call you back. So I said, yeah OK, it's blah-blah-blah. And I'll be damned— fifteen minutes later he calls me back! Now, I don't know what to say, because I've got the man on the phone. But something just says, you better go for what you know, girl, go for your best shot. So I said to him, Listen, I know what I'm doing is wrong, calling you and talking to you at this moment, because I'm still locked down with that other record company, but I want *so bad* to be with your record company, and I understand *you* want *me*. And he says, well, I'll tell you what, I'm not at liberty to say anything to you about that, but all I can say is that we're interested, and from this point on I won't be talking to you, but someone else'll call you. Sure enough, on Sunday I got a call from someone named Paul Marshall—one of those really influential guys, you know,

BRUCE OSBORN

"I pictured Rod Stewart a tiny little guy... a shrimp in platform shoes... I figured he was a gay kid."

who says, Hey, goil, I want youse ta hang low for about a week. Now I've never seen this guy but I love him. And he says, "I want youse ta maybe go ta Big Bear or something and stay dere about a week and we'll take care of you." So I went away, and a week later, boy, I got these big letters and things, and they had said, Hey, Cut Her Loose. We Said It. *So Do It*. And the other guys said, OK, Etta, you are now released. Oh, I was the *happiest* person!

So then Jerry Wexler sent me 48 songs on cassettes to listen to. He said he wanted me to give him a yes, maybe, or no, on all 48. I sent back 32 yes's. Ho took those 32 and got them down to 16, and made me learn them and we ended up doing ten. The song I like the most from the album is "Sugar on the Floor." Kiki Dee wrote that. It's a beautiful tune, but the reason why I'm so attached to it is because it was so hard to understand—and to tell the truth, I still don't understand it. I related "Sugar on the Floor" to being like, I've really been misused, I'm a good person, I'm sweet, I'm loving, and here I am wasted on the floor. But to try to understand that song at first...What did she *mean*, "There's no easy way to learn to fly"? Mary *Poppins* or somthing. Peter *Pan*. What's the deal? And then after I got it, I got real, real insecure about it, and when I get insecure about a song you can hear it in my voice and it adds a little sweetness to it. You know what I mean: I don't get that OH HEY, LISTEN TO ME, kind of thing, and it's nice.

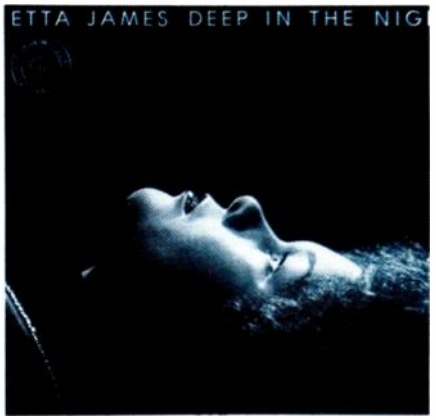
"Strange Man" is a gospel song. It gets to show the people that it's all the same music—it's just whatever you're talking about. And Jerry was just telling me on the phone that he thinks maybe we should do a gospel album. And I said, Oh great, you know, but then I started thinking, and I said, Oh my goodness, if he turns me into a new Mahalia Jackson...I would dig the part of not having to pay any taxes and making a lot of money, but then I don't want Jesse Jackson on my case every time, and the other thing is that I like to party, and I can see these people saying, say listen you guys, put out the cigarettes and don't bring the drinks back here, because you know Etta's a *gospel* singer now...

Then, naturally, I like "Blind Girl" a lot, because I wrote it, and I've been doing it for about 25,000 years. When they first told me Rod Stewart had done it, I didn't listen to much white music, so I said, Rod Stewart?—Who is Rod Stewart? And we were doing a show at the Troubadour and the guys in the band—they were white guys—they said, Now Etta, don't forget to say that Rod Stewart did this song, so I got up there and I said, 'Ladies and gentlemen, this is a song I wrote and Rod Steiger recorded it....And the band say, Oh *no!* Not Rod *Steiger!* Rod *Stewart!* But finally I started listening to Rod Stewart, and I liked him, and so I wanted to meet him. I pictured him one way, you know, like a tiny, little guy, a little shrimp in platform shoes—"Short People," right? —and another thing I thought was, I figured he was a gay kid. So I was at Cherokee Recording Studios, and somebody says, Rod Stewart's coming. And he walks in with this *beautiful* woman. She was from South America somewhere, her skin was so brown, and her hair was long and blond, and she had this fur jacket and she had these tight jeans rolled up and these high boots, flashing around and looking better than Farrah Fawcett and throwing her hair around. And I said, What's happening here? And Rod Stewart was this big buffy cat, all muscles, real macho, rugged, this fine chick hanging on his arm...So I introduced myself to him, and he just blushed and said "How do you do?," you know the way they talk funny. You know, it's funny how they can sing just like us, and then they talk all funny so you can't understand them. I don't know what he was saying to me. He could have been saying anything. I don't know how they can sing so straight and talk like that. Those people are almost like leprechauns to me...

Some of the material on the album is kind of unusual for me, but it's the world's greatest stuff, and it was a great experience to do it. I know Jerry's just going to come off the wall. He might bring me a Tchaikovsky tune the next time! But basically, I'm contemporary and can go into any bag.

I'd like to do a country album, too. I love Country-and-Western music. You wouldn't believe it—a rock-and-roll, R&B, blues, soul singer—but when I ride down the highway, I've got those Country-and-Westerns on. I'm just like one of those Mack truck drivers, you know, riding with the radio on real loud listening to country tunes. And I'd like to do that gospel album. And I'd like to do a hard rock album, a real funk album. Like Otis Redding meets "Star Wars," that kind of thing.

Right now, with *this* album, I'm telling you, I've had more telephone calls in the last two days than I've had in the last four years. People that haven't even *spoken* to me for years. And people are going by my house and peeking... I've got to move. I'm going to move way out in the country somewhere. Someplace where I can go around barefoot.•



DEEP IN THE NIGHT
Etta James
Warners BSK 3156
By LITA ELISCU

Before Aretha Franklin, even before Tina Turner, there was Etta James. Big and brown, "Peaches" had the face of a teen angel and the voice and figure of a soulful Valkyrie. The voice was used to belt out lyrics both raunchy and fierce, definitely sexual in innuendo and focus: The kind of lyrics white kids never got to hear on the radios of the late 1950's and early 1960's. Etta James' biggest hit, "Roll With Me, Henry," was retitled "The Wallflower" for commercial airplay and made the Top Ten charts in 1957. Still, the version most people remember is the sanitized and white Georgia Gibbs' cover, "Dance With Me, Henry."

In the ensuing years, Etta James' career took several spins. While the other R&B performers managed to leap on the rock and roll money rocket, she did not. She had several hits while signed to Chess Records, but real fame eluded her. Drugs did not help. She began to play live gigs again, but no new records were out.

Now, all that has changed. Her lawyers managed to get her out of a stifling label contract and she signed with Warner's. Not so coincidentally, Jerry Wexler has joined Warner's.

Jerry Wexler, of course, had joined Atlantic in 1954 as a staff producer. The list of R&B hits he produced or has been associated with stand as solid history of the genre. From "C.C. Rider" through Aretha's "Natural Woman," Mr. Wexler has always been respected for his love and understanding of the music and musicians. The years he spent at Atlantic, together with Ahmet Ertegun, were some of the most exciting and creative for music, whether R&B, rock and roll, rock, country, or straight pop.

Now, Jerry and Etta together have created a lovely record. In another field, another gritty woman said, "Long after fashion is gone, style remains." Chanel could have been talking about Etta James, a pure stylist. The album features no special effects, electronic or otherwise; no decibel-levels of new note. The music here spans several generations of taste: the Hank Williams' hit, "Lovesick Blues" through Joplin's "Piece of My Heart" and an Eagles hit, "Take It To The Limit." Cornell Dupree's guitar work laces and tickles, highlighting and embroidering in most perfect fashion. The rest of the musicians are equally important, including Richard Tee on piano and organ, Chuck Rainey on bass and Keith Johnson on electric piano.

Mr. Wexler has designed this album as a showcase for Etta James, however, and she is the touchstone for each song. Songs about woman's pain, and woman's strength. About loving and being left. And going on. Soulful songs. The voice is still tough and gritty bitter whiskey touched with honey. Some of the early blues-shouting power is gone; still this is a singer, a gifted individual voice. In a market place crowded with soundalikes and nearly-theres, I sincerely hope that people will take the time to listen to Etta James. •

Performances

B.B. KING / ALBERT KING
Symphony Hall
Newark, N.J.

By AARON FUCHS

Long after the last blues records have been removed from the racks of rock record stores, Bobby Bland & B.B. King maintain their commercial appeal to the middle-aged, working-class black audience who made them stars in the first place. And on Saturday night, March 18, over six thousand tickets were bought at Symphony Hall in Newark for the King/Bland state-of-the-art blues show, one which provided a virtual haven from the bleak, inner city outside.

When we got there, the opening act, Z.Z. Hill, was into the third number of his set; a lean, hard-edged version of the Temptations' "Ain't Too Proud To Beg." Hill is more appropriate for this show than a blues-for-hippies player like Albert King. Very much a peer of Bland, Hill comes from Texas, and works out of a deep-southern, gospel-soul-blues bag, and is a long-tenured and hard-slogging veteran of this circuit. Gratifyingly he's got more corporate muscle behind him than in his last ten years of recording and he drew from his excellent new Columbia album, *Let's Make A Deal* for the highlights of his set: "This Time They Told The Truth" a phenomenally heart-wrenching ballad about a man leaving his family for his lover, and "Love Is So Good When You're Stealing It," which also mines the love-triangle theme that is so favored here. "Love" was an r&b hit for Hill, and he stretched out his live rendition of it with a preaching-styled rap, asking who, in the audience, preferred their stolen love side-to-side style, from the back, or 69 style. He capped the rap and the set with a single chorus of a classic in the genre"Steal Away" and exited to an ovation.

But if as a blues love-man, Hill is the pretender, than Bobby Blue Bland is the king. After a quick opening "Theme from Shaft" by his band, Bland, elegantly suited in white, entered the stage to the collective sighing of the women in the audience. Though his sexual posture draws sides, his finely crafted vocal style is transcendent. It also assumed a quality of timelessness—as did his set. Except for his opening number, Charlie Pride's "Today I Started Loving You Again" and his recently self-penned "Soul of the Man," his set could have matched the one described by Charle. Keil in his book *Urban Blues* which was published in 1966. But longevity here made for glove-fitting intimacy, and Bland's rendition of his keynote tunes, the haunting "I'll Take Good Care Of You" and the classic medley of "The Feeling Is Gone/Stormy Monday/Drifting Blues" made for the highlights of his brief but compelling set.

After an intermission, and an opening rendition of "Honky Tonk" by his band, B.B. King took the stage, easily commanding the biggest ovation of the night. He started his set with the old Louis Jordan/Ray Charles tune, "Let The Good Times Roll," galvanizing the crowd with personalized lyrics, "hey, everybody, *B. B. King* is in town" and by the song's end people were singing along as if this 20-year-old tune was topping the charts now. King paced his set nicely, building sweeping clap-along grooves for his more contemporary material like "Why I Sing the Blues" and "The Thrill Is Gone," while sobering the mood for his signature ballads, "Sweet Sixteen" and "How Blue Can You Get." Here especially, the energy of the crowd, having leveled to a crackling hum, could have come direct and unchanged from the grooves of King's *Live At the Regal* album, recorded in 1964.

During the intermission that preceded King's set, a local r&b radio personality—whose self-congratulatory tone indicated that public office was on his mind—made an impassioned speech about how blacks only get the mayoralty of cities like Newark when they are already beyond repair. And though he was met with more indifference than support, he provided an urgent reminder of the undismissable conditions from which the blues continue to spring, and that for all the experimentation B.B. King may undertake inside the studio and all the media adulation he may receive outside it, it is this vast network of ghettoes, of which Newark is but one point, that still comprise most of the path that he must travel. To his lasting credit he travels it resolutely. •

Pipeline ←
Mark Shipper

I have a confession to make: despite the fact that I am indisputedly America's foremost authority on contemporary pop music, it's been literally *months* since I've listened to any new albums. To tell you the truth, I have been completely out of touch with the pop scene.

I'm not proud of it, believe me, but you readers have come to expect nothing less than total honesty from this column and I just can't decieve you. The reason is, I have this book that just came out (*Paperback Writer,* Grosset & Dunlap, $5.95) and I've been so involved reading galley proofs, setting up promotion plans, etc., that I just haven't had the time. Oh, I know you're thinking "Okay, now he's gonna spend the whole column plugging his book" but you're dead wrong. The last thing I'd *ever* do is use this forum for my own personal gain. I have far too much integrity for that, as longtime readers know.

Anyway, what I've done these past few days is go out and buy all the hit albums I could get my hands on. I want to use this installment of *Pipeline* to sort of "catch up" on these albums which somehow have managed to become hits even without my endorsement. It may be that you already own some of the records we're about to discuss. If this is the case, it's your problem.

I guess the biggest success-story in the record business these past few months is the phenomenal success of the *Saturday Night Fever* (RSO) soundtrack album. As of this writing, it has already surpassed Peter Frampton's double live album as the top-selling LP of all time. And justifiably so, I might add. Once you get past the music of those warbling wimps, the Bee Gees (surely they are today's version of Alvin & The Chipmunks) it's a non-stop cooker all the way. The Trammps have never been in better form than on "Disco Inferno" and who would've thought that Walter Murphy could've surpassed his 1976 masterpiece, "A Fifth Of Beethoven" the way he has on *Saturday Night Fever?*

Of course, the album really belongs to that brilliant, innovative aggregation from Hialeah, Florida known collectively as K.C. & The Sunshine Band. Let's not mince words: their "Boogie Shoes" is not only a work of genius, it's a record with a message, one that perfectly captures and reflects back to life as we're living it today. When K.C. sings "I WANNA PUT ON *MY MY MY MY MY* Boogie Shoes," at first you think it's a statement about possessiveness and the infatuation with material things which runs so rampant among those of our generation. They're *his* Boogie Shoes, it seems to imply, and we can't wear them. But you're wrong (as you're liable to be any time you're arrogant enough to even *question* the genius of KC & his crew). Sure, he wants to put on his his his his Boogie Shoes, but why? "...Just to Boogie with you." You see? Just as we had the song's protaganist pegged as a typical selfish turd, we see that in actuality, the main reason he wanted to wear the Boogie Shoes was so that he might Boogie better with *us!* So it just goes to show the danger inherent when mortals like ourselves question the work of out-and-out visionaries like these guys. I'm so awed by them that if there was a way to release a soundtrack album of a book (like the one I just wrote which is available in book and record stores everywhere) I'd choose them to do the music...

Which is a lot more than I can say for most of the other artists who are dominating the charts. I mean it's no wonder Billy Joel is *The Stranger* (Columbia) after releasing an album like this one. Would you want to know him? And "Just The Way You Are" is exactly the kind of song that Merv Griffin, Mike Douglas, and every other big-band era "singer" is gonna be inflicting on us interminably for the rest of our lives. And for this, we're supposed to all become Billy Joel fans? Let him go co-host *The Mike Douglas Show* and leave us just the way we were, please...A lot of critics have said that it took a slow mind to make *Slowhand* (RSO) and I think that's a pretty cruel thing to say about an artist like Eric Clapton who, although he's burned-out and washed-up, was still responsible for giving us a lot of pleasure back in the '60s. I just think it wouldn't hurt these critics to soften their harsh, vicious criticism of aging has-beens like the legendary ex-Cream guitarist. In fact, if my new book *Paperbook Writer,* had been about Eric instead of the Beatles, you can be sure that although no publisher would have wanted anything to do with it, it would've been a good book anyway...

Even Now (Arista), after he's taken the same dumb, trite theme (his eternally broken heart) and re-worked it again and again, people are *still* buying Barry Manilow albums! I mean, does it really surprise anybody that Barry's always getting his heart broken? If you're a female, how long would you put up with his maudlin, soppy crap before you snuck out the bedroom window in the middle of the night?

...If there's one thing I like about the group Kansas, it's their clever album titles like *Point Of Know Return* (Kirshner/Epic). But then, I've always been into wordplay of this sort. However, if there's one thing *you* like about Kansas, I'd be shocked. That song of theirs from a few months ago, "Carry On My Wayward Son," always sounded to me like it was recorded before the group ever showed up at the studio. Really, if machines could play rock & roll, this is what it would sound like...Meanwhile, those of you who think Canadians don't know how to rock should check out *Endless Wire* (WB), Gordon Lightfoot's latest. You'll see that you're right...*Eddie Money* (Columbia) makes great music but his lyrics must be written by the same guy who is Bob Welch's voice coach. I hate it when great-sounding records are bogged down with trite, hackneyed lyrics. "Baby Hold On" is a good example of a song that is fine musically but sounds like it was written by a five-year-old at lunchtime on the school playground. *continued*

AM America

Ken Barnes

Top 40 radio appears to be making Patti Smith's "Because The Night" [*Arista 0318*] a hit. Patti would have placed in the Top 5 of anyone's 'Least-Likely-To-Succeed-On-Mass-Appeal-Radio' chart, but somehow Top 40—that format music media pundits love to revile for "closed-mindedness—have been quite receptive to this single from one of the most avant-garde artists of the New Wave. This is the kind of unpredictable phenomenon that should keep rock & rollers from totally abandoning the format. Of course, "Night" is easily the most controlled and commercial record Patti's ever cut, but it loses no excitement in the process. If there's a moral here, maybe it's that a brilliant, passionate rock & roll record can *still* be too strong for radio to ignore (once in a while).

Speaking of classy singles, who outside the most narrow-minded rock-noise claque could deny the atmospheric pop power of Gerry Rafferty's "Baker Street" [*UA 1192*]. The melody is catchy as anyone who followed Rafferty through Stealers Wheel knows it'd have to be, but the real strength lies in the instrumental passages, guitar and especially the riveting sax. Al Stewart's *Year Of The Cat* blazed the trail for this sort of exquisite acoustic/electric guitar/sax interplay on Top 40 and Rafferty's record takes it all much further. "Baker Street" is the kind of record Phil Spector by all rights should be making today. A consumately-arranged record (finicky collectors' note: the single comes in three different timings, and store copies feature a non-LP B side.

RSO, the hottest label going thanks largely to the four brothers Gibb, has another hit with John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John's *Grease* preview, "You're The One I Want" [*RSO 891*], a pleasantly bouncy and rather amusing record. When I first played it I thought to myself, "Olivia's sure got an impressive new raw edge to her voice—she must be a closet rocker—but when does Travolta come in?" Then I discovered that Travolta sings the opening verse. Actually, Olivia does sing with considerably more verve than usual, and Travolta at least sounds better than he did on his transcendantly hilarious vocal debut, "Let Her In."

In the superstar division, the chock-horror news of the year is Elton John's comeback single "Ego" [*MCA 40892*], which is exhibiting all the attributes of a high-fallout hundred-megatron bomb. Everyone in the radio/record business I've talked to loathes the record with a surprising passion; it is over-complex, difficult to follow, and lyrically both obscure and somewhat pointless in choice of subject matter, but it's not *that* bad by any means. Although trade charts like *Cash Box* and *Billboard* show the single climbing with a bullet (albeit slowly), charts more attuned to actual radio airplay have shown a pattern of instant adds to radio playlist when it first came out, followed by an almost unprecedented trend of stations dropping it after one or two weeks of airplay. It's not a development calculated to boost Elton's ego.

Jefferson Starship is starting to run their Marty Balin romantic ballad syndrome into the ground, as both 1976's "With Your Love" and the current "Count On Me" [*RCA/Grunt 11196*] are dangerously thin and quickly cloying. A better Starship record is Journey's attractive "Wheel In The Sky" [*Columbia 10700*], on which their new lead singer is a dead ringer for the gifted but erratic Mr. Balin in spots. This is one of those "progressive pop" records, clever adaptations of progressive rock elements to a palatably concise Top 40 form; Boston, Kansas, Styx, Foreigner, and lately Genesis are among the bands making this formula work, and I'll wager it'll be a much more pervasive trend than the touted "power pop" could ever hope to be.

I should briefly mention some notable "power pop" singles, even though none seem to stand any real chance of being hits (they still have trouble fitting either Top 40 or album-oriented radio formats). The Paley Brothers' "You're The Best" [*Sire 1021*] is pleasantly Rubinoos-like in places, though there are better tracks on the LP ("Tell Me Tonight" for one). The Pezband 's "Stop Wait A Minute" [*Passport 7913*] is very Raspberries-like (though the singing isn't quite up to Carmen standards) and highly recommended. The Dictators' mystic, stately "Sleepin' With The TV On" [*Asylum 45470*] is a single now, and a nice collectors souvenir, while the Dwight Twilley Band 's "Looking For The Magic" [*Arista 0311*] is achingly pretty but disappeared without a trace when released a few months ago, another bitter disappointed for this gifted duo.

Phil Seymour
Dwight Twilley

Probably my favorite pure pop single at the moment is Walter Egan's "Magnet And Steel" [*Columbia 10719*], from his endearing *Not Shy* album. Guitar lines and melody are reminiscent of those awkward, appealing early 60's teen ballads like "A Thousand Stars," with Egans's pleasantly gritty singing and full Fleetwood Mac back-up vocals adding a 70's pop cushion to create one of the great irresistible marshmallow pop singles of the year (and don't miss the neat Duane Eddy-type guitar solo in the middle, either).

Cover battles, when two or more artists release the same song simultaneously, are usually dreaded by record companies, since often the different versions will cut into each other's sales and prevent a clear-cut smash from emerging. RCA had nothing to worry about in the recent three-cornered "It's A Heartache" battle, though, as their original by gravel-voiced British singer Bonnie Tyler [*RCA 11249*] obliterated competing covers by Ronnie Spector [*Alston 3738*] and Juice Newton [*Capitol 4552*]. Deservedly, too—Tyler's female-Rod-Stewart-styled vocal treatment is the strongest of the three, while the production (great drums) is suitably Spectorish. As such, it should have been a natural for Ronnie, but her version just doesn't have the punch or (strangely) the vocal conviction. Juice Newton's more gimmicky, modern arrangement was left at the starting gate, although it's quite listenable, too.

There's also a "He's So Fine" cover battle (known as "doolang Chiffons"). TV's Kristy and Jimmy McNichol [*RCA 11271*] have the benefit of the original Chiffons producers (two of the Tokens), and their record is pretty straightforward with all doolangs intact, though scrubbed clean for pre-teen consumption. It's appealing, though no match for the original (for anyone over 15). Jane Oliver [*Columbia 10724*] quickly dispenses with some perfunctory doolangs and moves into a radically slowed-down torch arrangement, which unlike most chanteuse-style treatments is not a "torcher" to listen to. As with James Taylor's "Handy Man," I find myself rather fascinated with this (although I eventually got very tired of Taylor and watched that approach reach its nadir with Art Garfunkel's dismal "Wonderful World"). Oliver's is a very intriguing record, worth hearing, and we'll see who wins the battle (meanwhile giving thanks that George Harrison isn't involved).

"Almost Summer" [*MCA 40891*] is by Celebration, not the Beach Boys, but it's really Mike Love on lead vocals performing a song he wrote with Brian Wilson and Al Jardine, and sounding even more nasal than he did on "Rock & Roll Music," if that's possible. The song is deliberately teen-slanted for the movie of the same name, but it's just a little overdone for me, especially since "Little Deuce Coupe". was 15 years ago. It is enjoyable, though. Jan Berry is back with an updated version of "Sidewalk Surfin' " called "Skateboard Surfin' USA" [*A&M 2020*], which doesn't improve it much (it reminds me of a record after Jan's accident in 1966 when Dean Torrence took the "Little Old Lady From Pasadena" track and overdubbed "Tijuana" over the original city and put it out again. Unfortunately, you could still hear the background vocalists singing "Pasadena" buried beneath the overdubs). However, Jan shows off his best singing in years on the pleasant MOR-styled flip, "How-How I Love Her," and that's good to hear.

Finally, we're seeing an interesting trend toward novely records, and high quality ones at that. Warren Zevon 's "Werewolves Of London" [*Asylum 45472*] is the acknowledged leader of the pack, a legitimate hit thanks to its infectious howl, and a novelty you can actually stand to hear for more than a week's worth of airplay. The lyrics are truly post-surreal (as opposed to Kellogg's). Steve Martin's just released his crass commercialization of the Tutankhamen craze, "King Tut" [*Warner Bros. 8577*], and while it has thin stretches and loses in translation from video to vinyl, it's got some great lines, a terrific picture sleeve and could be the 70's discofied answer to "Alley Oop."

Althia & Donna's "Uptown Top Ranking [*Sire 1019*] was the number one in England early this year despite the fact that virtually no one could understand a word of its thick Jamaican patois. The reggae beat is very bubblegummy, and I find the record completely irresistible in its singsong fashion alalyses. Tammy Wynette takes a turn for the spiritual with her "I'd Like To See Jesus (On The Midnight Special)" (And I'd Like To See the Wolfman Bring Him On) the next line goes, which makes Bobby Bare's "Dropkick Me Jesus (Through The Goalposts Of Life)" seem like the height of fundamentalist orthodoxy. It's a nice plug for Wolfman, but as a venue for the long-rumored Jesus comeback, I'm not sure the *Midnight Special* is ideal, and though Tammy can get Him in a country hit with no trouble, there's a lot of doubt in industry circles as to whether Jesus can "cross" over.

And last (and possibly least) as far as novelties go, a young Belgian named Plastic Bertrand has a throbbing punk rocker shrouded in Beach Boys falsettos, sung entirely in French, and called "*Ca Plane Pour Moi*" [*Sire 1020*], and stranger than all that, it's a hit in several cities and just may pull through to become the novelty hit sleeper of the year. And to complicate matters further, there's an English single by someone with the even more improbably and audacious name of Elton Motello which features the same song (the B-sides, both called "Pogo Pogo," sound identical, vocals and all, except one's in French and the other's in English). Elton calls his A-side "Jet Boy Jet Girl" [*Lightning 508*], though, and he loses the Beach Boys harmonies but adds a decidedly vicious set of psychosexual decadence-themed lyrics (a different lyric than Plastic's translates to, they tell me).

Tune in next issue when these and other equally inconsequential questions will in all probability be forgotten, but a lot of interesting new singles will be discussed ●

Pipeline—from pg. 43

And now, I'm proud to announce a new feature of *Pipeline* called "I Actually Like."

I ACTUALLY LIKE the new Walter Egan album, *Not Shy* (Columbia). Next to Fleetwood Mac's Lindsey Buckingham (who produced *Not Shy*) I'd have to say I liked the whole album. Behind his back, however, I'll tell you that only the first three songs on side one are killers. But they really are.

Also worth listening to is *The Rutles* (WB) which, although it's filled with lame parodies of Beatle songs, will put you in the mood for this new book about the Beatles, *Paperback Writer*, which I wrote and which is finally available and which a lot of people think is both funny and great. I'd say more about it, but that would constitute "plugging," and I've just got way too much integrity for that...See you next month! ●

continued from page 18

"The Last Waltz" *By Lester Bangs*

"Top *that,* muther, if you're so hot!"

Hell, I don't even usually like that kind of stuff. Especially in Superstar Jams.

The real question is why, and of course the answer lies in the Band themselves, that although they have made bad albums and lived moribundity to a curious sort of hilt, they never really got caught up in that superstar whirlpool. Maybe because they did start as "public figures" so late in the game, maybe just because they did spend so much time out in Woodstock wasting their bodies, minds and best years in dissolute repose, maybe precisely because the bastards have always been so damn *lazy* they created an atmosphere here in which not even Eric Clapton could feel threatened. Or maybe because there's something deeply contemplative, almost religious about much of their best work, that rather than celebrityhood their religion was that late last mass faith: America.

Most of the things they've celebrated and described in their songs no longer exist except perhaps in the most rundown forms and out of the way places, but it was out of nothing but love that they sought to preserve them. So intense did this identification become that the Band ended up being walking Americana themselves.

I remember reading how Eric Clapton, paralyzed by combined chemical and big-time rockbiz horrors in the middle of a Cream tour, clung to a prerelease tape of *Music From Big Pink* like it was his only possible lifeline, his only remaining connection to real music as opposed to money jungle jive, a reminder of unfinished business of his own. I imagine all those feelings and the possession of that one tape made him feel simultaneously guilty and hopeful, a distinctly American mood if ever there was one.

In a sense everybody who came to Winterland that Thanksgiving to play with the Band had failed, with the possible exception of Neil Young, and you wonder how much of skin-of-the-teeth escape was smart and how much was lucky. Joni Mitchell I don't count because for reasons I'll try to explain later she just never seemed as alive as the rest of these people in the first place, never seemed to risk as much or even find a capacity for seeing how much might be at stake, which was and is so much that in such a situation you must know in front that you're doomed to ultimate failure. But being born was itself one of the biggest chances ever faced by anybody, and once you start you know you might as well keep on pushing till the car breaks down, then try to hitch or walk the rest of the way, because there really is no reason at all for us to be here except the struggle or bring that sense of motion to its peak and keep it there or failing that, as you will, just keep going.

That's what Americans have always done, dumb as mules with that carrot and stick: just kept going. You can lose yourself in that motion so easy, but pirates were born to dance, and it may finally be that we're all just so nervous at base that we can only feel comfortable or close to apprehending our God and Devils when we're moving so frenetically that we can pretend we're distracted.

This brazen affront to everything else but our own big bluff brags and chest-puffings has been the source of all the evil we've done, as well as our one major claim to awesomeness approaching our dreams; meanwhile the rest of the world does seem to look on agape, somehow actually buying our ridiculous, roosterlike act. We just don't know what to do with those specks of God which have somehow found their way into us, we are embarrassed and rendered helpless, so our history has so often been a history of brief siezures of brilliance beyond all measurable talent that flare out just as suddenly as they erupted.

This endlessly recurrent pattern is our tragedy, our heartbreak, the biography of our national art. A nation of adolescents who have had one great glimpse of the Infinite each like a birthright. Out of all these tormenting contradictions comes the sum of what we are. These contradictions and that maddened awe are what the Band at their best have always tapped. The prophesy remains self-fulfilling: having come so breathlessly close to the source, the final Truth about ourselves, they came away with nowhere to go but home to sleep, or sleep it off. They're just line the rest of us. Only, this time, bigger.

To achieve such dimensions, of course, one must run the risk of ending up a cinder. To look upon the living frame and into the eyes of one of those artists who has in terrible paradox both claimed the achievement and become the cinder is one of the most frightening things in the world.

Levon Helm has a pair of the most beautiful and terrifying eyes I've ever seen, eyes that shriek through crazily silent wizened smiles, white points of light pincushioning broken opal irises long since given up the striving to deflect a pain so prolonged and unendurable it leads inexorably to madness followed by a pathetic premature sort of...not disintegration so much as *evaporation.* You sense that the person before you has seen things you don't even want to know exist, and if he's a burnt-out case at least his spiritual-into-physical leprosy was most tragic than willful.

Which is something you somehow doubt could be said for Rick Danko, who looks like nothing so much as Hugh Hefner as a cocaine idiot, spastically jerking through the scraped-to-the-bare-bone motions of having a whoopup partified good time. You wind up guessing he's a textbook casualty of the Rock Star syndrome who sort of deserves the void he's inherited because he believed every syllable of that shit they always told him about how groovy it was all *supposed* to be, and the reason he believed it was because he was stupid and perhaps emotionally or materially greedy enough to want to.

Richard Manuel is just an idiot, by all appearances, too blitzed down the years to be greedy or much of anything else in fact but pathetic, like some wino with green teeth with black holes in them, hair and matching upwhorled beard that squirrels could nest in, the air of a kerosene-poisoned flophouse bum who through some security slip stumbled in a side door and down the corridors of the gilt-flake kennels where tycoons drunk on fortunes raised from human merchandise keep and pamper artistes of daisy-chain reknown and must-invite lists. The absolute necessity of perversion to the maintenance of such an atmosphere ensures by common enough ironic twist that he'll never be found out, least of all by himself. Gone decades past questions of any sort, he drools and scratches by the patrons' tables, slopping up dogdishes of the finest wines in the world with the same imbecilic glee he gave to cracking a fresh poorboy of Thunderbird. In the middle of a private party thrown for Bryan Ferry by Andy Warhol at Regine's he trots out another side entrance as blearily, cheerily unmindful as he arrived, content to roll with a princess or a ditch. There is tragedy implicit in his snagglegummed village idiot jabberwocky, but somehow you still don't care. He will either end up shambling, coveralled down some side-road in a Faulkner Snopes tale, or the nearest hamlet's dogpound.

Garth Hudson, for some reason, is pretty close to the Invisible Man of this movie. About the only time we ever see him is in silhouetted profiles at the piano, and when he's talked about it's only in passing anecdotes by the others. We do learn that as the music school grad of the group, he was constrained in

the early days to demand that the others "pay" him for "lessons," only because that seemed the only way to justify being in a rock band to his family. Maybe all good chamber musicians belong out of sight: in their chambers, doing the only thing they know how to do which was th only reason they were born.

I don't mean to be cruel, or shoot off cheap cracks. But as much as a musical document, the movie is or tries to be a portrait of five lives, and what they say in any given moment—Danko giggling dopily about what happens "when you have too much fun," Manuel leering vacantly that the reason they did it all in the first place was the pussy "...and, uh, the music a'course..."—only underscores what the tight editing forces you to look square into the abysmal face of: lives largely wasted, incandescent creativity often reduced to snot-drooling wretchedness, senility descending before middle age. Only Robertson and the obscured Hudson emerge from the final maw of all the erosions with their skins and sanity, much less dignity, halfway intact. Some viewers will merely reveal in the majesties of the music and laugh with neither mirth nor sympathy at these poor feeble old burnouts, while others may wonder whether this might be Scorcese's ultimate message behind all the concertizing celebration: *Look, you assholes, just sit there and eat a good long look till your skin and stomach crawl, because THIS is what rock n roll really ultimately looks like whether you want to admit it or not.*

Though none of them are interviewed, the contrast between creator and creation keeps popping up, like sandpaper on a scabbed wound, through the motley parade of guest performances. Van Morrison is transcendent, singing "Caravan" with all the passion he gave to anything he ever did, looser onstage than I've seen him in years though still a painfull coiled gutspring, that same inscrutably bitter and totally closed up little genius somewhere between a Borstal pug and a mystic saint. He seems too stubborn to ever go down for the Skid Row count like Manuel, but just the same you can see and feel him battering his hard little skull with insane futility against those cathedral doors that will never open. We all clapped and cheered when he finished.

Neil Young looks as much like a crazy crow as ever, neither enhanced nor diminished by the erratic course of his career and lifestyle. I've come to respect him more than I ever thought I could since I began to understand his gameplan for dodging the jaws of stardom. He sang "Helpless," a song I've never liked much and when he got to the line "Blue, blue mirror behind the stars" a chill swept my entire body, whether from the Hank Williams-like purity of the words finally hitting home or his delivery I'm not sure. In his own erratic dopey way, he's a warrior, one of the few warriors with what is sentimentally referred to as "the System" that I can think of who has kept up, hell, stepped up his resistance when times got grimmer than thin in the mid-Seventies. He's sat on the lip of the abyss with a line and a fishing pole so often you sometimes begin to think he's Opie of Mayberry matriculated through jimson weed, indestructible by his innocence, always ready with one more embarrassingly half-articulate, whole-moonstruck aphorism.

Joni Mitchell, by contrast, seems unalive, preserved—well, actually Neil is not exactly a model of spontaneous vivacity—but she is so set in her persona that it seems to have seeped into the bones of her face, which looks so professionally fragile, so willingly steeped in artifice that she could be made of porcelain. Perhaps the fact that L.A. seems to agree with her in a way that doesn't even usually dissipate what artistry she undeniably has is more telling than any assessment I could make; a deal struck with a new cool Jerry Brown of a Devil. She sang "Coyote," a song about how her love affair with a ranchhand is doomed to the heartbreak of categorical byebye because tumbleweeds don't mix with Dolbys. One thing you can say is that she definitely does not blend with the proceedings, in no sense seems to have given herself over to the spirit of the occasion, as almost all the others found it in themselves to do for once. She's got her own little exquisitely circumscribed world, it seems, and since it's not our world and doesn't presume to pass judgment on or rearrange the furniture in the latter, she has every right to be left well enough alone.

Muddy Waters rocks the whole joint into a ditch he plows from Delta to Chicago and then looks down laughing at it and everything it represents: "Mannish Boy." Actually, that's a romantic lie, the truth is that the old guy's just always glad to be getting more work at rates commensurate with his stature for once. Scorcese holds one camera on him without moving for seven solid minutes, and every time his weathered jackhammer tongue pounds home the beat you're thrown back in your chair. It would be tempting to speculate sarcastically on the choice of material: "I am the only true man here, I'm twice as old as anybody else gonna be on this stage tonight and got twice as much whamjuice pound for pound, sure is hilarious watchin' big white babies drop dead the shy side of 40."

God steps back from his bemused perch a pace, hawks one phlegm-nebula over Uranus arcing into a spittoon on the other side of doubt, goes back to playing audience with a wry exhalation that Muddy never sees. Having been convinced from an early age that he is it. "MAN!"

Neil Diamond is more than just comic relief. In his smoked shades and leisure suit, bellowing portentous Korn Kurls in a voice whose pomposity is so cocksure it's charming, he brings a little touch of Vegas which turns out to be vital, bringing an affair which might have become so celestially enraptured with its own Heaviness that it could have drifted off into space.

Eric Clapton has fun as do we watching Robbie cut him. Man, talk about grey eminences. Paul Butterfield tries to jog in Muddy's shadow but misses by a reed. Ron Wood shows up and does absolutely nothing as usual ever since he left the Faces. Ditto for Ringo, who should trade retirement-positions with John Lennon; he's become real easy to hate, one of the more conclusive proofs that the Beatles really are dead for all time. Dr. John looks like one of those fuzzy little toy critters you pull a string and out comes a tinny replication of what once was real old New Orleans R&B. Emmylou Harris is mercifully brief, and the Staples turn to cold cuts in a sandwich that's tasteless but digestible. It's not Mavis' fault nobody told her what the words to "The Weight" mean—*nobody* knows what they mean, that's their charm.

Finally there is his muskrat lovelessness, Bob Dylan, unkempt and unshaven as usual (he probably smells bad too), a lampshade hat fit for Bella Abzug pulled down over his rankysanky lox this time, so you also can't see his burning blue Artist's Eyes, too bad, although you can hear him sing several songs in that same miserable sodden arhythmic doggedly plodding yet unconcerned yowl he's hung from like a scarecrow for what must amount to several years now. Actually he did seem to try harder than in the "Hard Rain" TV special or *Renaldo & Clara,* but it's neither sarcasm nor cheap shot when I say that most of his set was the undisputed low point musically of the whole movie. Emmylou Harris included. Dylan sings "I Shall Be

THE LAST WALTZ

"Scorsese lets you know as gently as possible—the Band won't be back."

Released'' like he was reading the chemical count off the back of a box of dry cereal. There must be something somewhere in the universe he cares about besides his own ego, but I bet not even Joan Baez knows what it is.

Unlike the Band, Dylan obviously does not know when or how to bow out with grace and tenderness. He stood a few rounds with God once himself, for which we must eternally reserve some retroactive reverence measurable now in dollops, but he also then made the mistake of concluding he *was* God, a most ill-timed misapprehension inasmuch as his putative godhood directly coincided with a sudden predilection for rhyme schemes uniformly stolen chapter and verse from the ''sky's blue/love you'' primer. F--k off forever, you pretentious little turd. I know how much you really stole from Bobby Neuwirth, not to mention how many others. You're still the slime you were from the beginning, it's just that more people (almost everybody, in fact) can see it now. Good. (It felt strangely good to many of us when, in the big-assembled-cast groupsing on ''I Shall Be Released,'' Dylan tried to signal to Levon Helm with a downward wave of his guitar that he thought it time the song should end, and Levon stared right through him, thrashing on through his own sweet time.)

The film ends with the Band performing an instrumental that the movie was titled after. It's so delicate, its figures and filigree so lovingly hesitant and measured down to the last resinnous teardrop from the fiddler's bow, that what started elegiac and almost daintily wistful ends up near-ethereal. As the Band play this so powerfully understated farewell, the camera moves back as slowly and hesitantly as the song moves ahead, until at the end we're tucked between the rafters at the back of the hall, observing those five men from a distance far greater than mark it and strike it could measure. The way the movie and the music play off each other at this point creates an effect of the most benign, loving distance, almost as if the musicians were slowly rising through the curling smokelike trails of their swan song into celestial haze. The deep browns and greens of Scorcese's camera have turned to a soft white light. He lets you know, as gently as possible, that it's a naildriven fact they won't be back. But when it was all over every one of us knew for sure that we had been Somewhere.●

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