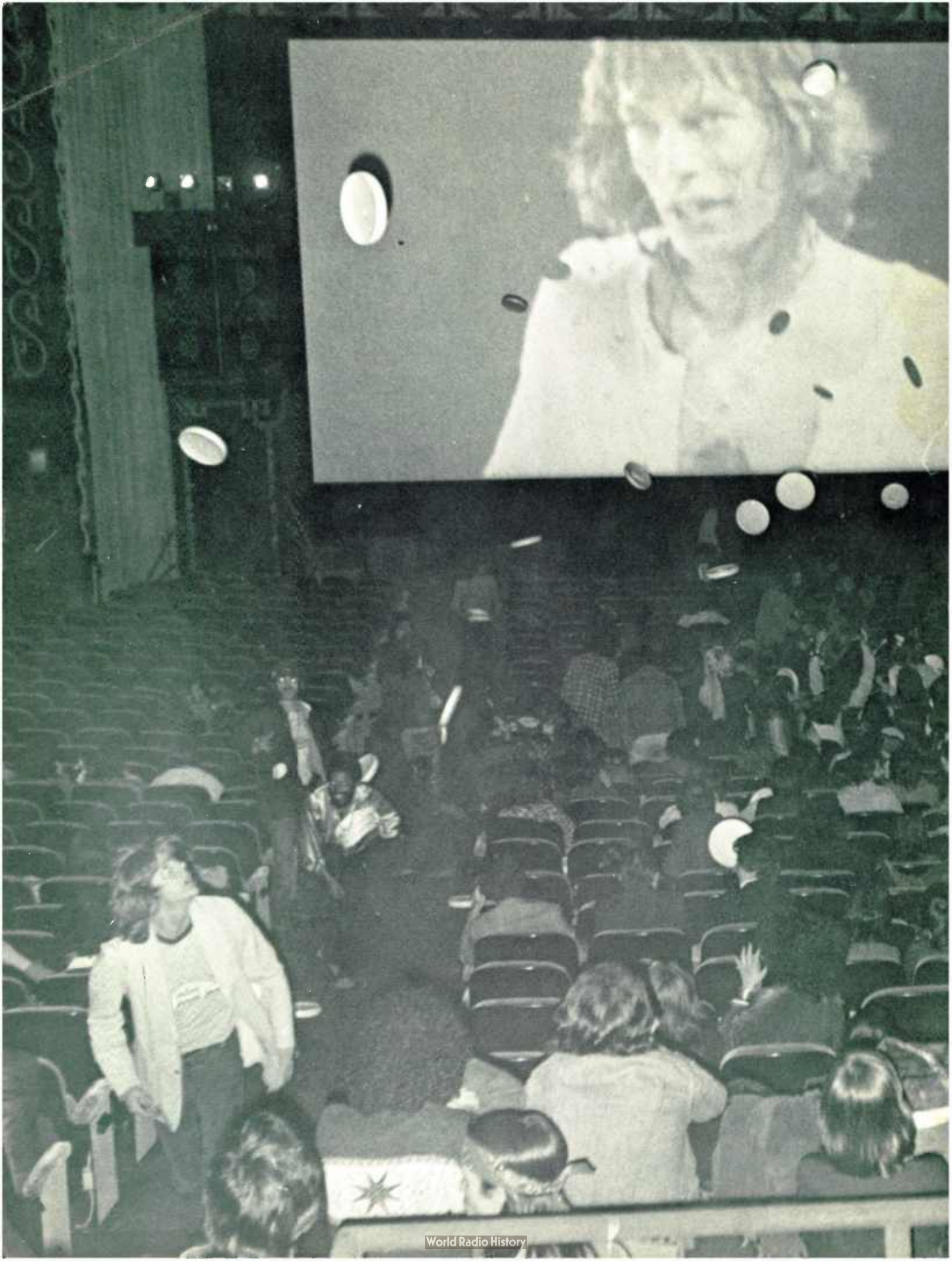
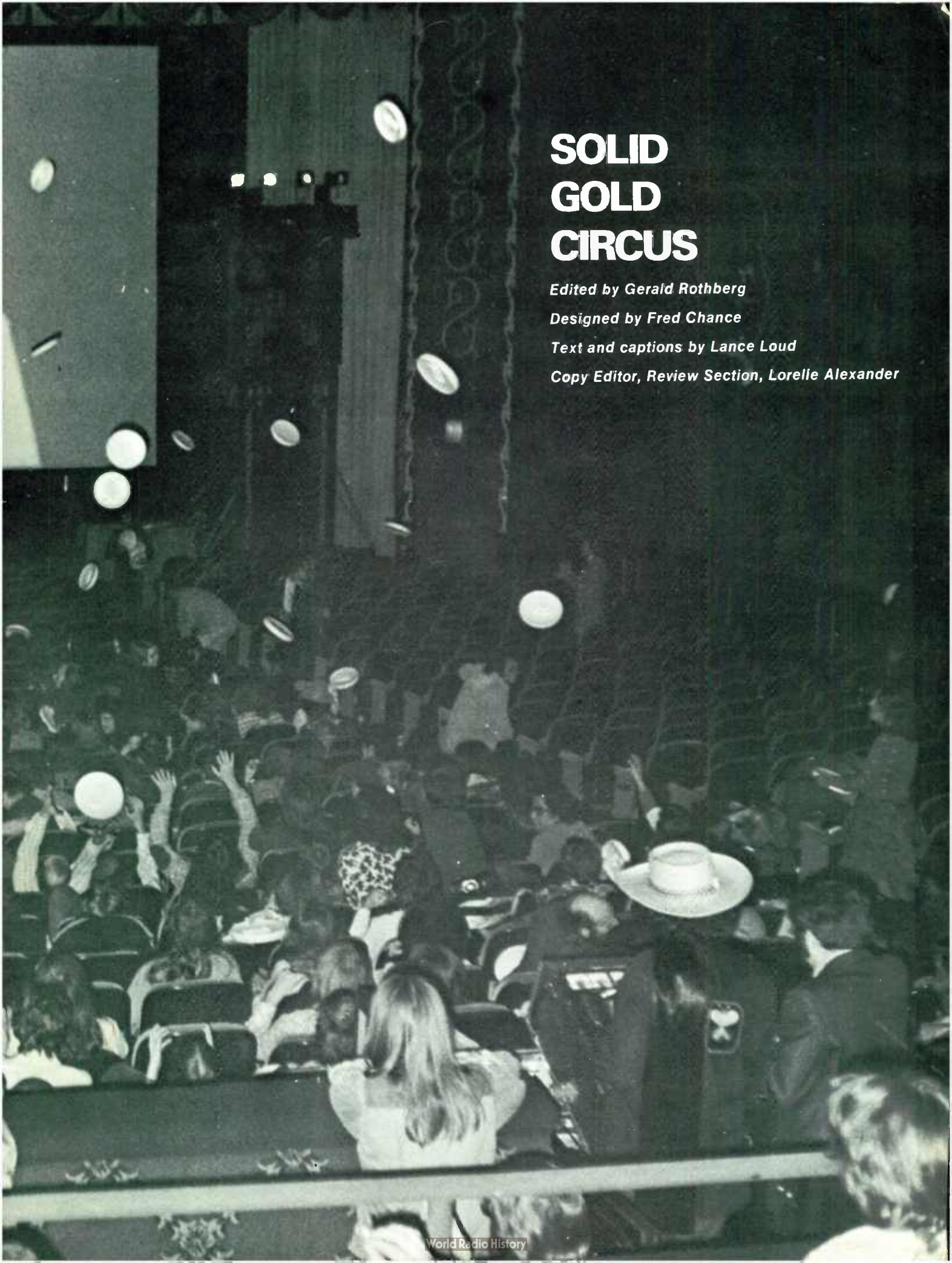
SOLID GOLD

CIRCUS

·100 BEST ROCK & ROLL ALBUMS OF THE YEAR!

·100 WILDEST ROCK & ROLL PHOTOS!





SOLID GOLD CIRCUS

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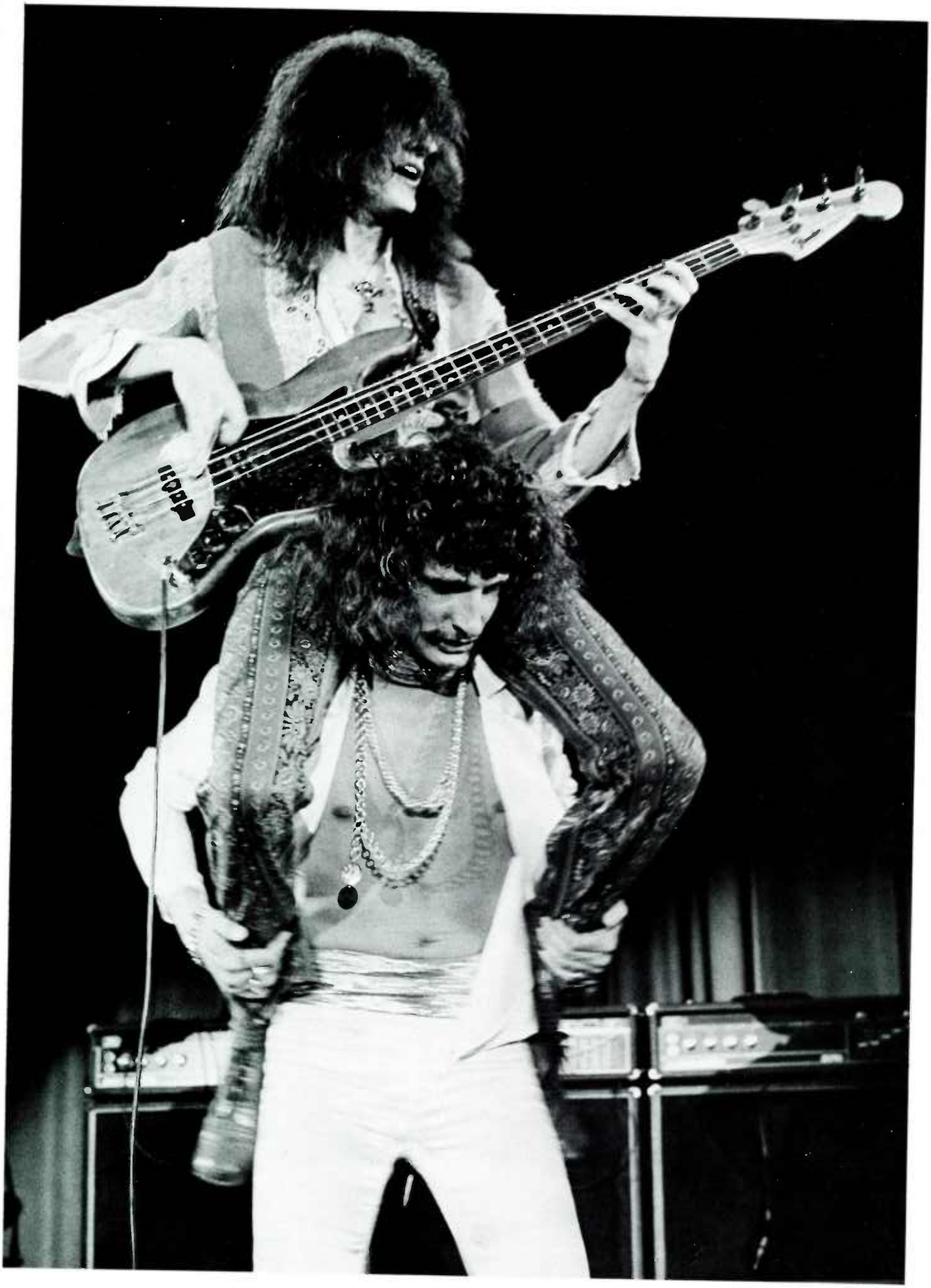
TWOSOMES

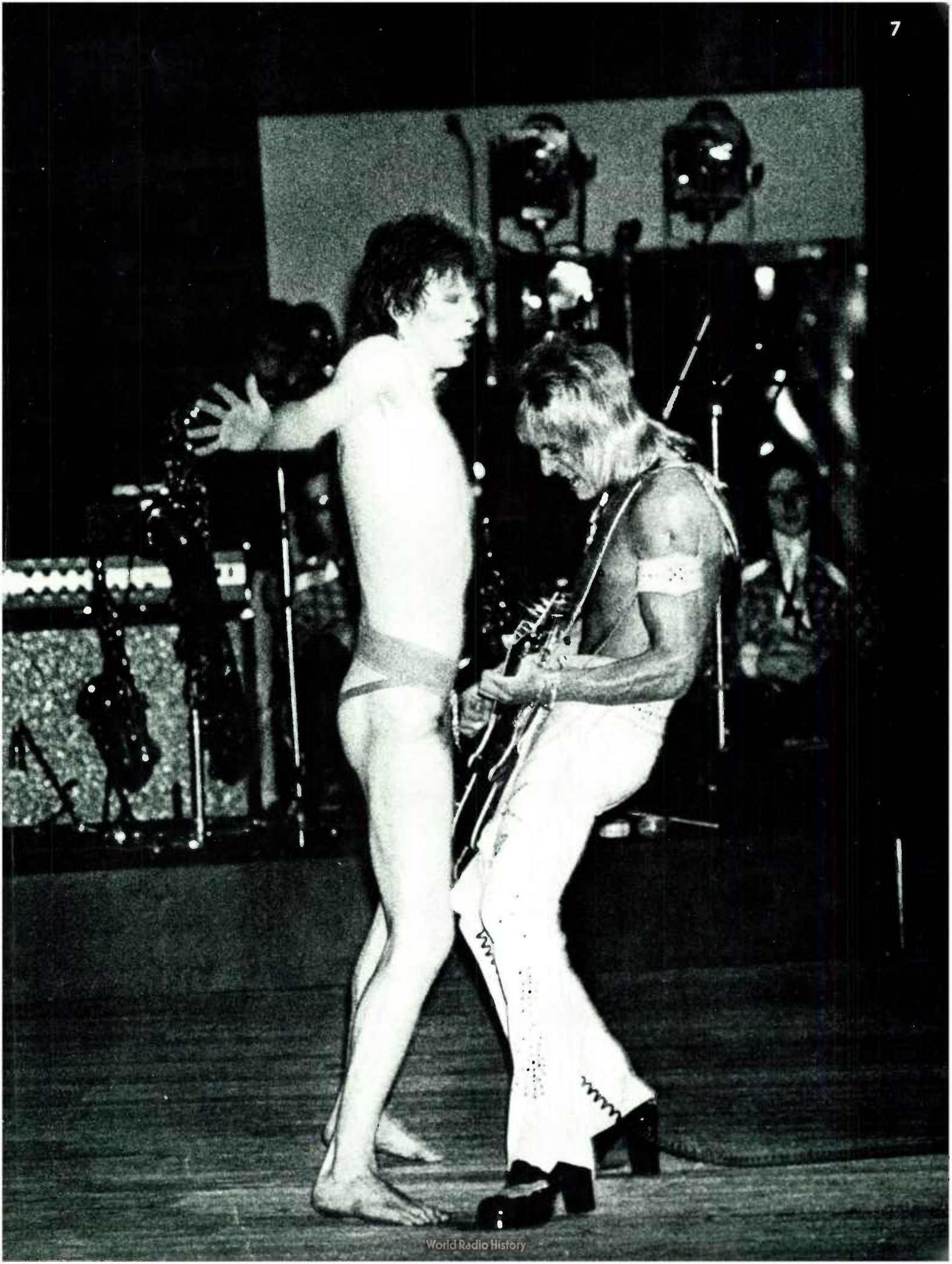
Made in heaven, matched onstage or perhaps at the party-afterwards, rock & rollers meet, mix and mate all the time. Some are the briefest of encounters, even quicker than a one night stand, like the hit-and-run kiss zapped onto Leslie West's porky lips by notorious Who drummer, Keith Moon. Other unitings are strictly artistic, like those creative moments shared between David Bowie and his ex-guitarist Mick Ronson, or that brief artistic union between The Coop et la Dali. Still other twosomes are made of the stuff with which the gooiest **do-wop** love stories are made of: Paul and Linda, and James and Carly. On the following pages several of these interstellar collisions are captured in their closest moments, though gender and romance may or may not have anything to do with it.

Following pages. Two couples who have successfully teamed up on-stage: Dave Byron allows himself to be mounted by co-Heepist, Ken Hensly.

A jockstrapping David Bowie gives heed to the yowling guitar work of Mick Ronson in the finale of one of their frenzied Ziggy shows.

Partytime with Elton John and Peter Townshend.





In transit, Paul and Linda as they make their way through a London airport.

On their way to some other rendevous Face Ron Wood and Michael Philip Jagger.

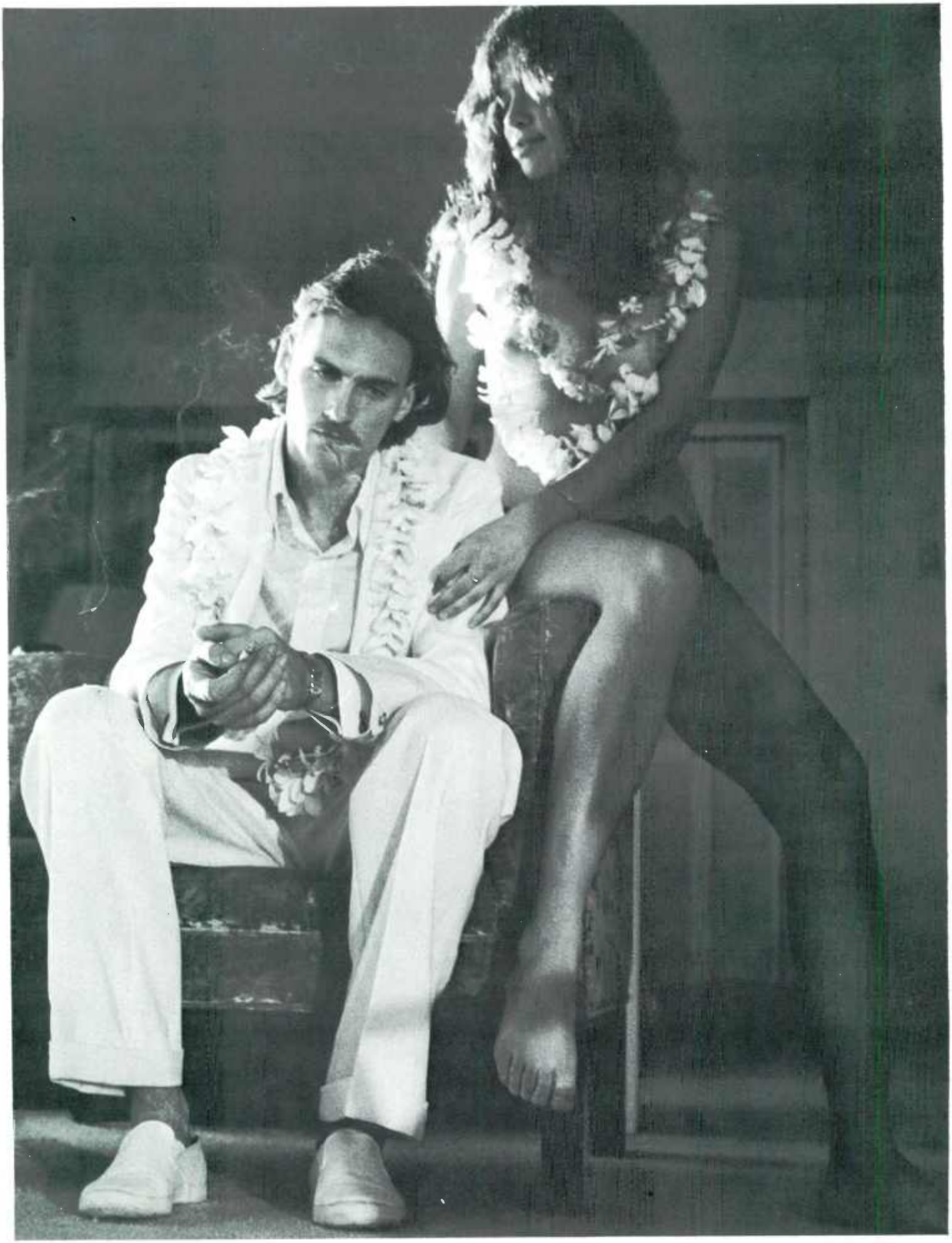
For art's sake was the reason this unlikely duo briefly united. Alice Cooper being exhibited by Salvador Dali.

Zeppelinite Robert Plant and one of his oldest pals, English folkster Roy Harper.

And then he kissed me. Keith Moon plants a big one on the big one. A moment later Keith "cheeses" for the camera while Leslie looks supremely satisfied.

Following pages. David Bowie and Angela. This twosome, though not in the rock spotlight for as long as such smoothies as Mick and Bianca, has worked hard and fast to become equally fashionable and talked about scenemakers.

James Taylor and Carly Simon the Lord and Lady of Folk/Pop, ever mixing trembling sincerity with full blooded passion.



Twosomes in love: Todd Rundgren and Bebe times two. But even when she gives a deep throated invitation to the photographer's lens, Bebe is still worth a double take.

Alice and Cindy.

Add one star to two others and what do you get? A supersession! Here, at David Bowie's post concert party after he had given up performing for the first time, David mingles with Mick Jagger and Lou Reed. Unfortunately, there were no microphones available to exchange riffs on.

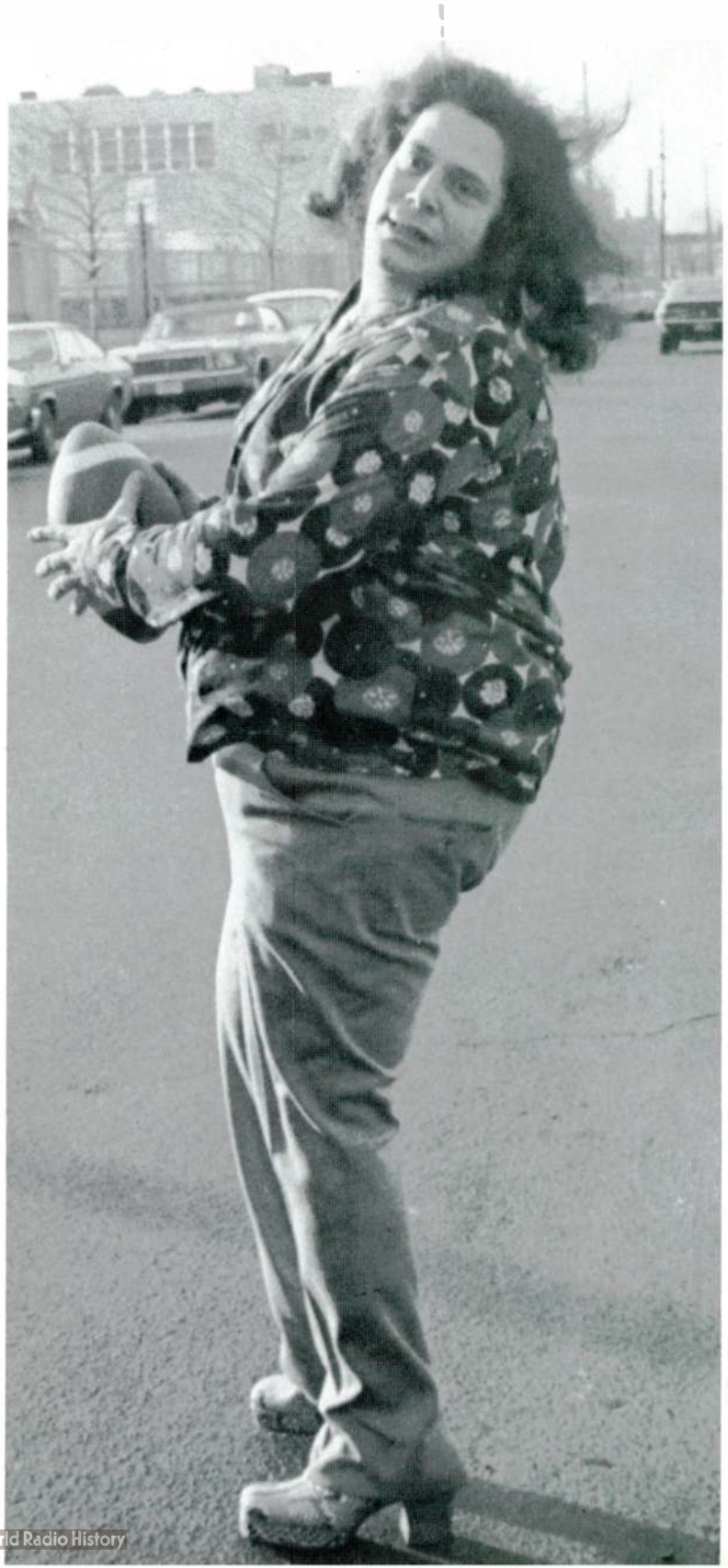
Suzi Quatro is a twosome only with her black leather, but it is a twosome that no one can break. With her band, she does a backsided salute to all the insome twosomes that have come before her, but this is only "Aloha." Remember Suzi, lovers never say Good-bye!

Opposite page. Elton John and Roderick Stewart (on his back) reveling in a bit of their nation's favorite pastime, soccer.

Mark Farner flying into his deadly Half Mothra Kung-Fu position.

SPORTS

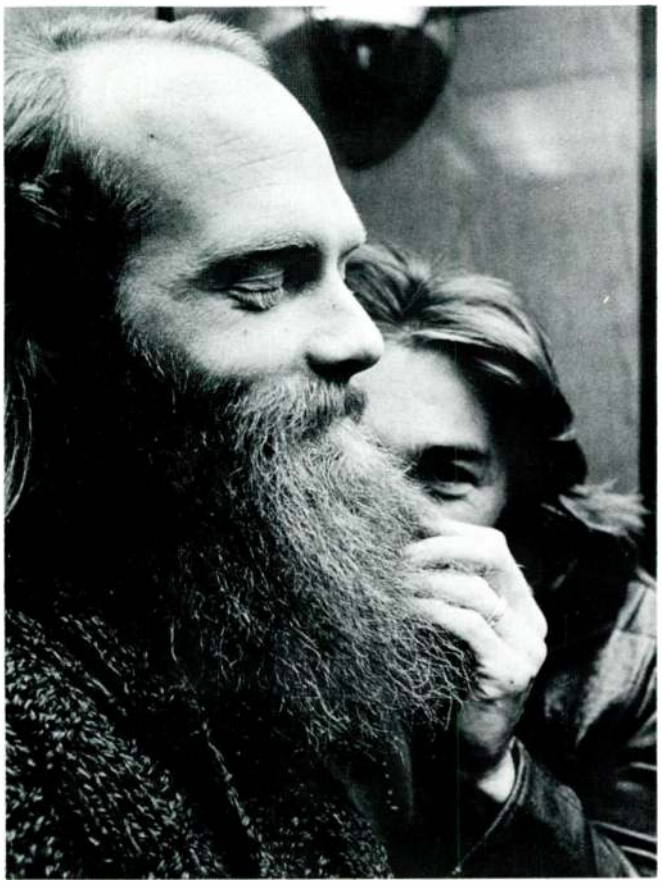
RockStars on the sports field? And you thought they only knew how to play around on guitar, drums or piano, with a little bit of squacking on the side. But no! Behind those guitar strings and tight flash clothes lurk a bunch of energetic athletic kids. Maybe for you out there beyond the footlights, Phys. Ed. isn't that much fun. But when you're a RockStar, you call the shots, when and where you feel like it. Who would dare tell you that you were a lousy player or that you have just fouled? Ever since the fab Beatles played a rousing little game of imaginary soccer in **A Hard Days Night** it was no longer considered corny or creepy for a Pop musician to pass, punt, or play in any sort of athletic fancy (as long as it didn't interfere with show time, of course). The next few pix stand as living proof that they are not only good sports on stage but on the athletic field as well.



Leslie West going hog wild with a football.

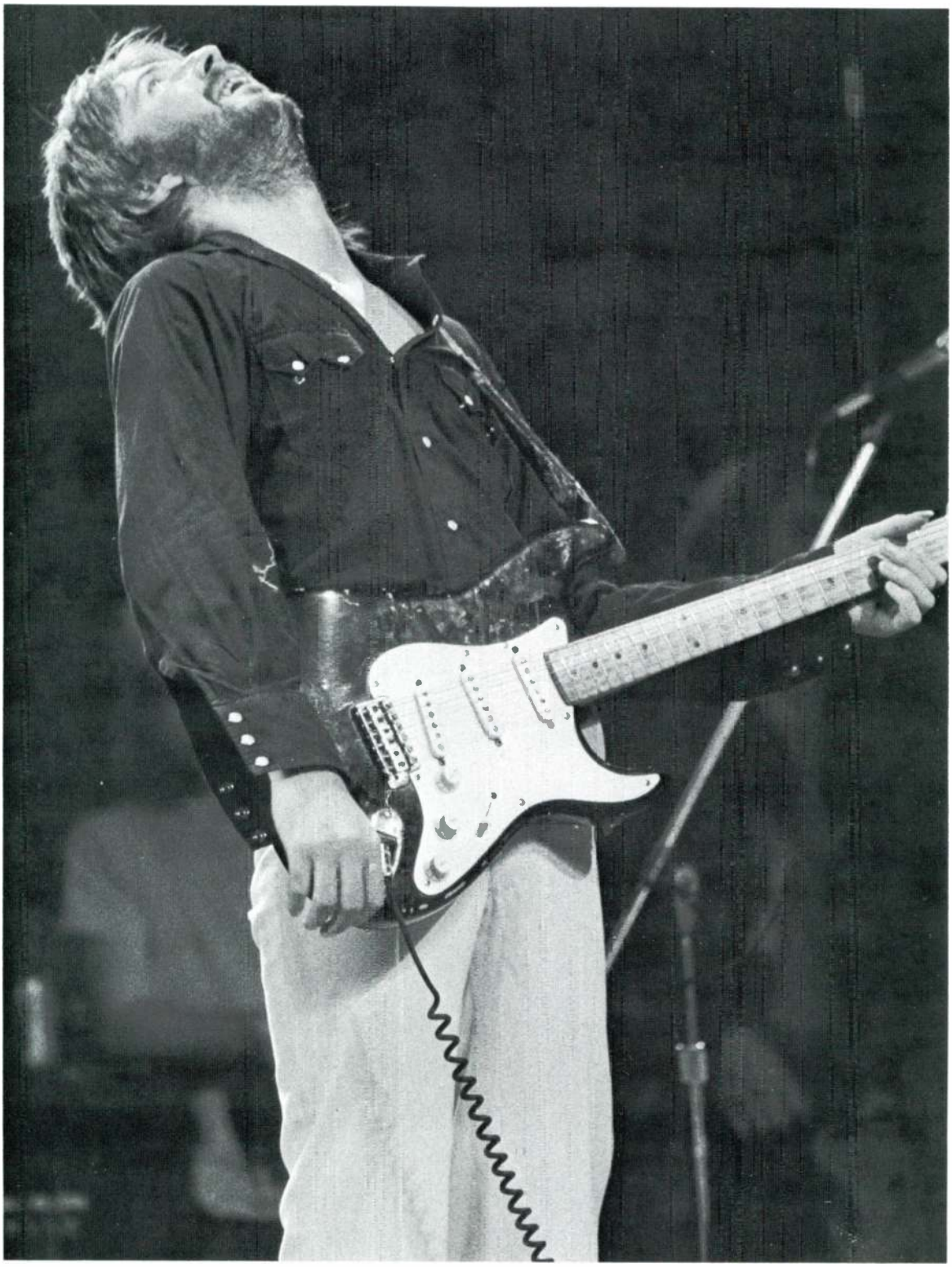
Ian Anderson, Jethro Tull's main-man, with wise man tufts dangling from his chin.

EARDS

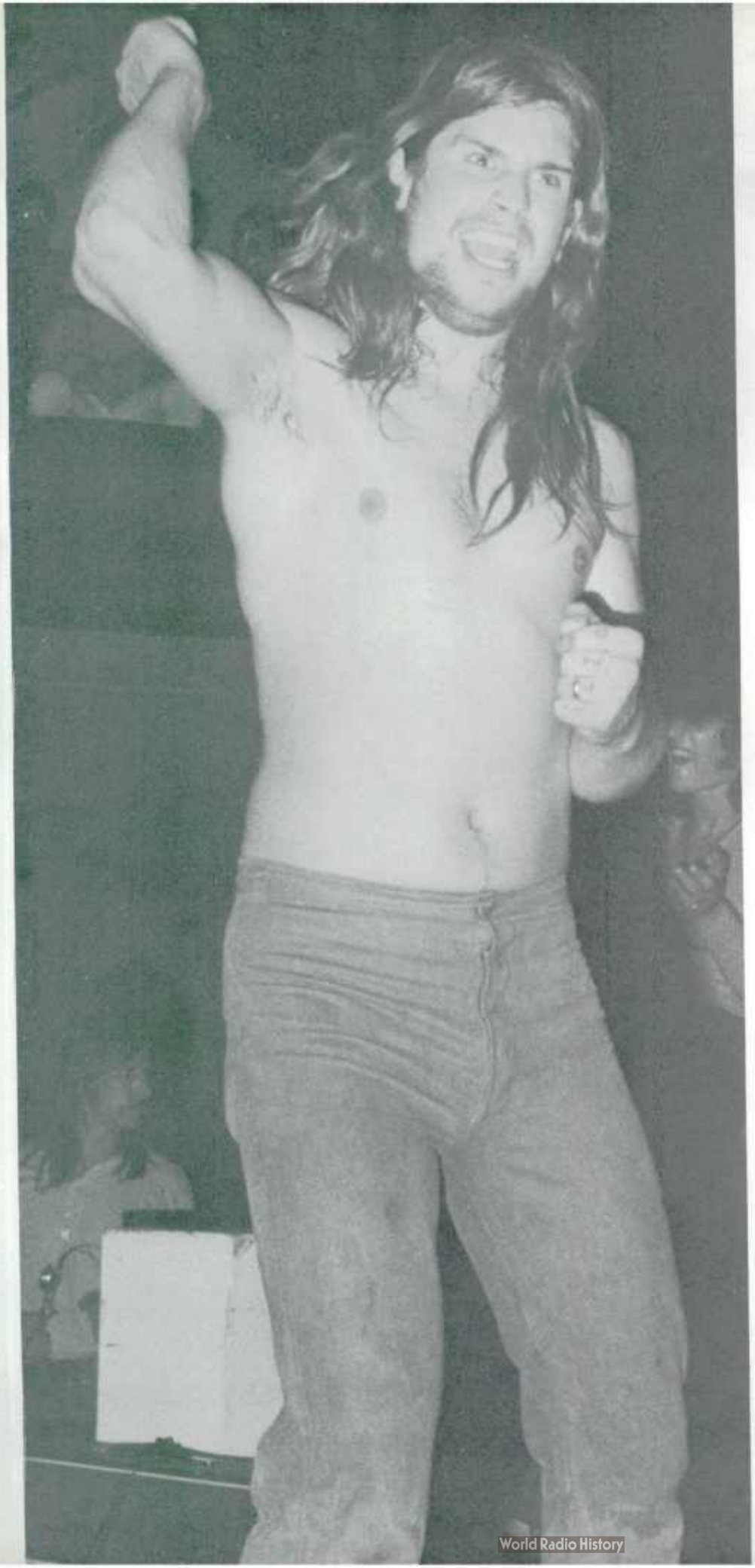


Who would kiss a guy with a beard? Next stop is hair on the shoulders. All that frizz and fluff a-sproutin' from some unsuspecting chin that is either too weak to stand on its own or is simply a disguise because the musician behind it is some mysterioso who enjoys any random outgrowth that comes between him and the outside world. Beards bring to mind many things, from sheer sex appeal to winsome religiosity. It is a sort of furry make-up which somehow reflects the person that lies somewhere underneath. On the next few pages, you will see from peach fuzz to the weeping willow aspects of chin, cheek and throat growth that these electrified muffdivers cultivate.

Transcendentally yours, Mike Love of the Beach Boys sports his beard as a religious outgrowth.



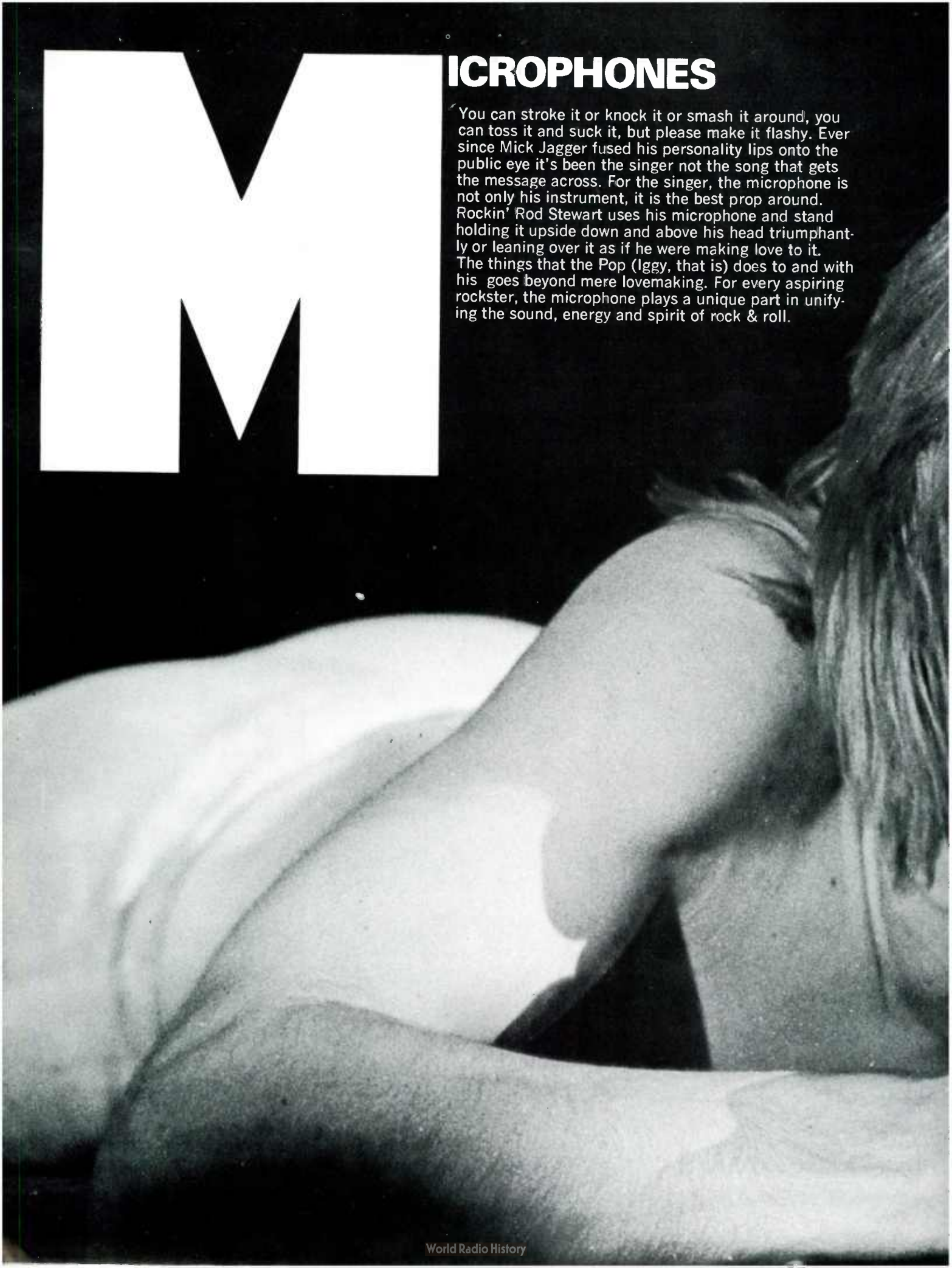
Eric Clapton's beard was grown not so much out of want as of disinterest with the physical look.

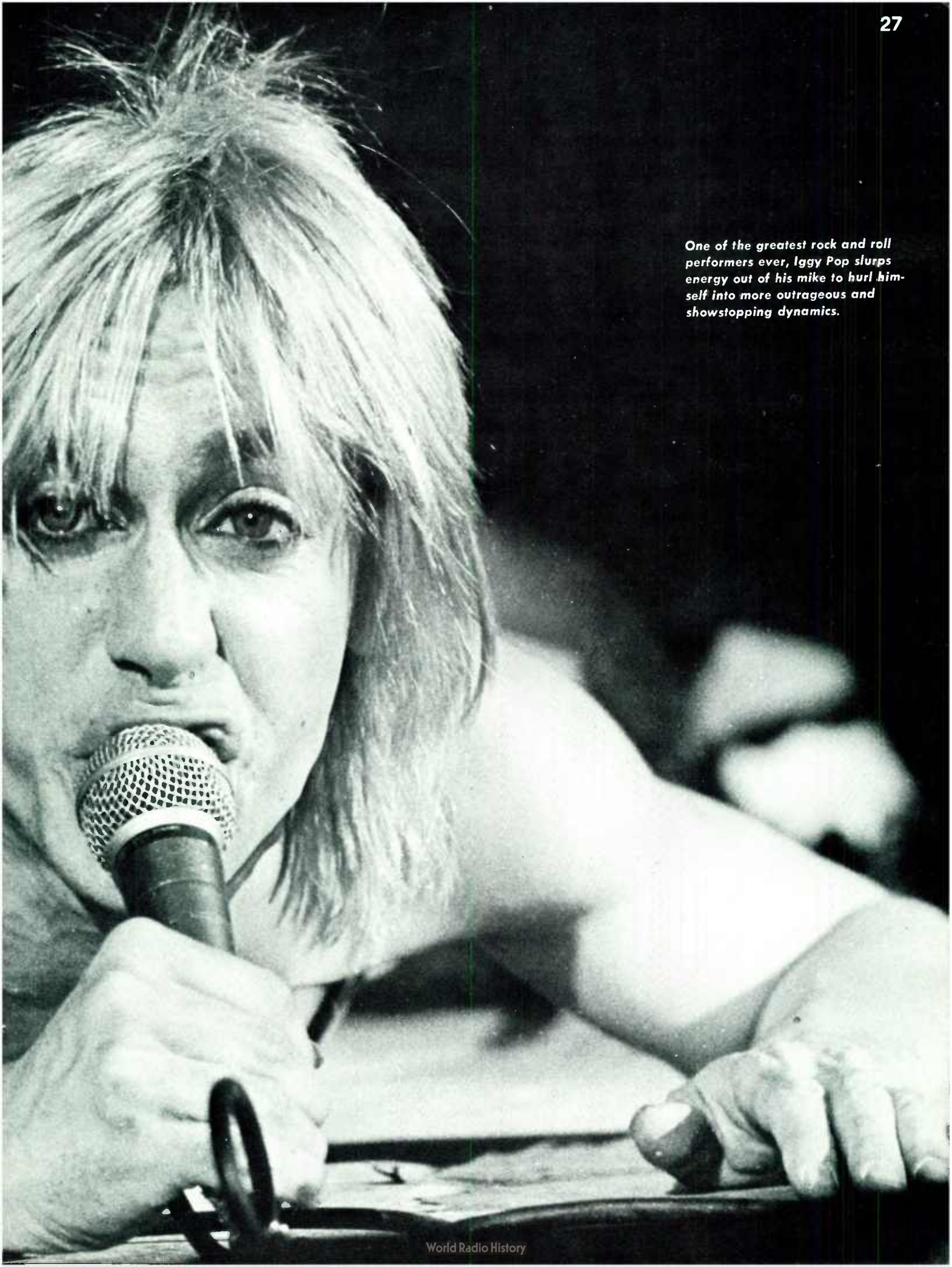


Prankish Ozzy Ozbourne, that "I-don't-care" boy of Black Sabbath, reveals that his band's not-stop touring has not only cultivated a sprinkling of carefree fur on his cheeks 'n' jowls but also has given his body that delightful middle-aged look. Flab-on, Ozzy!

MICROPHONES

You can stroke it or knock it or smash it around, you can toss it and suck it, but please make it flashy. Ever since Mick Jagger fused his personality lips onto the public eye it's been the singer not the song that gets the message across. For the singer, the microphone is not only his instrument, it is the best prop around. Rockin' Rod Stewart uses his microphone and stand holding it upside down and above his head triumphantly or leaning over it as if he were making love to it. The things that the Pop (Iggy, that is) does to and with his goes beyond mere lovemaking. For every aspiring rockster, the microphone plays a unique part in unifying the sound, energy and spirit of rock & roll.

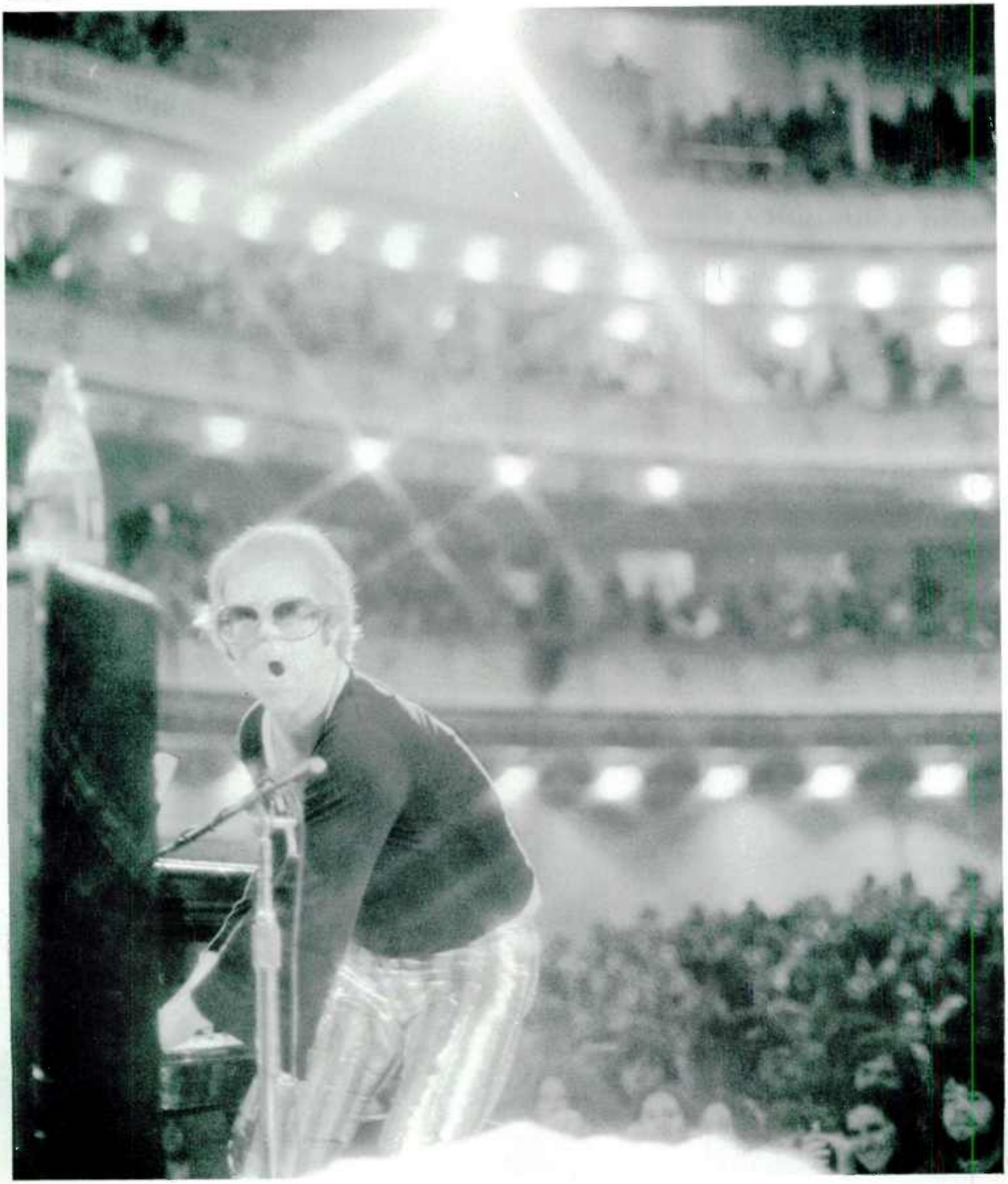




One of the greatest rock and roll performers ever, Iggy Pop slurps energy out of his mike to hurl himself into more outrageous and showstopping dynamics.

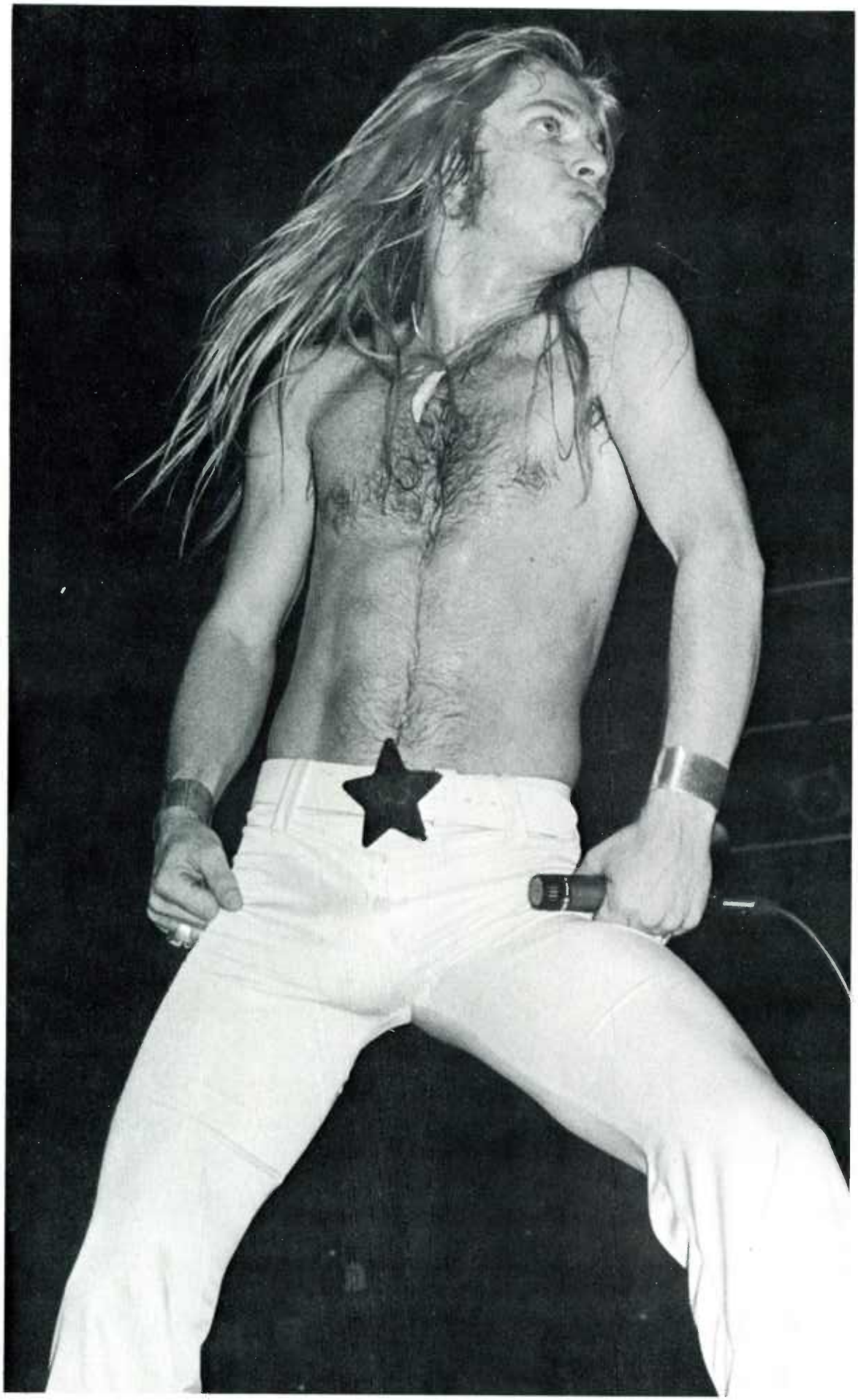
From cuddly sex kitten to rock & roll banshee, this boy has all systems under control. Four shots of Robert Plant, a classic in both appearance and performance.

Elton John, flashy, furious and fantastic.



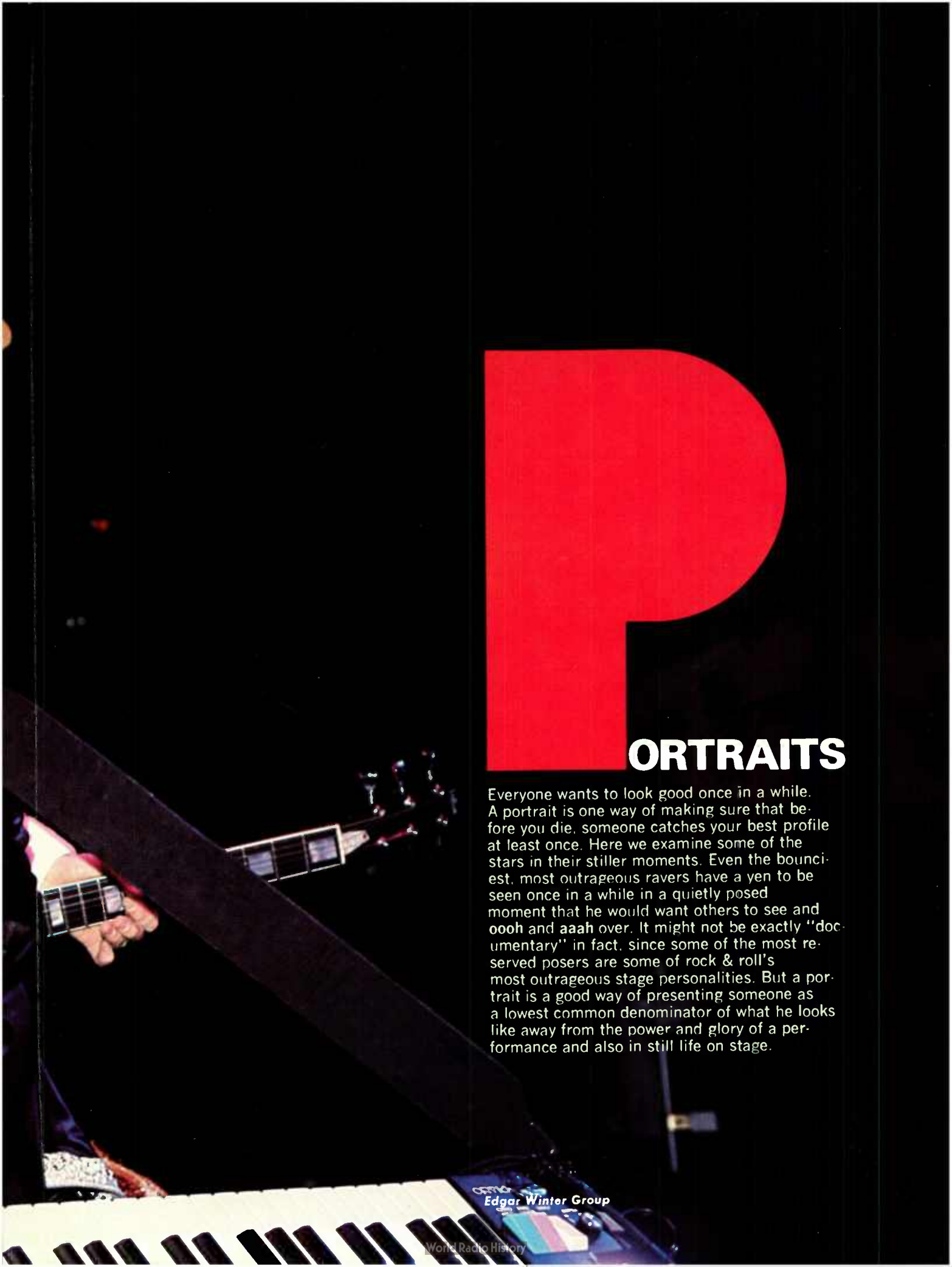
David-Bo and David-Jo, in cat fight position as they both go down on their microphones. Bowie sporting Cleopatra eye make-up and Johansen a real spitball of energy with pants at half mast.

No one has added more flash dimension to microphone use than these two Pop British belters, Rod Stewart of the Faces and Roger Daltrey of The Who.



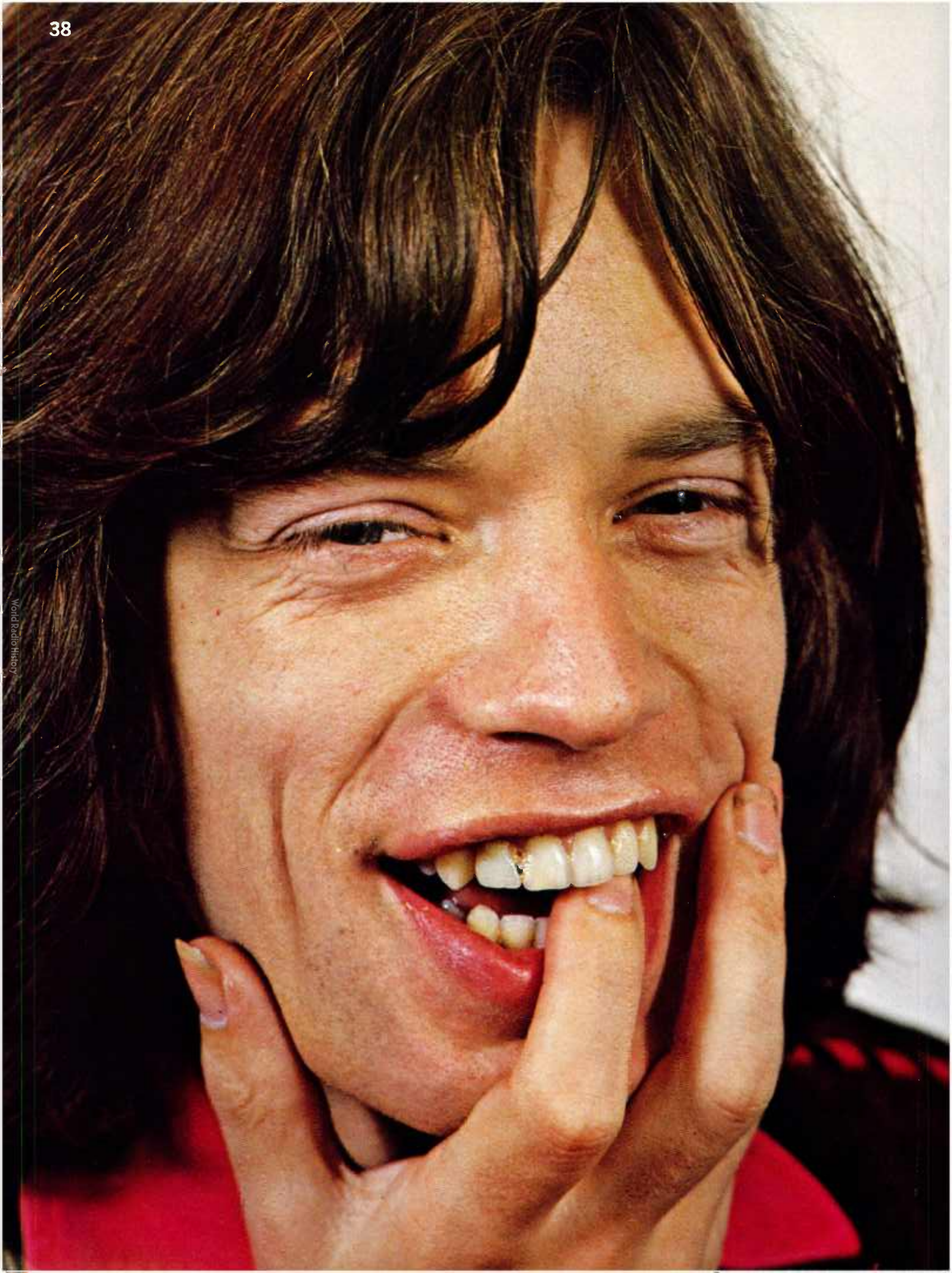
Jim Dandy. You either love him or hate him and when he applies his horse lips to the mike he sends his fans into grunting passion and all others groaning.

A slick chick by the name of Ruby Red who travels and performs with Black Oak, nets her audience. But one wonders if it is her vocals or hotpants that evokes the looks of inspiration in her audience.



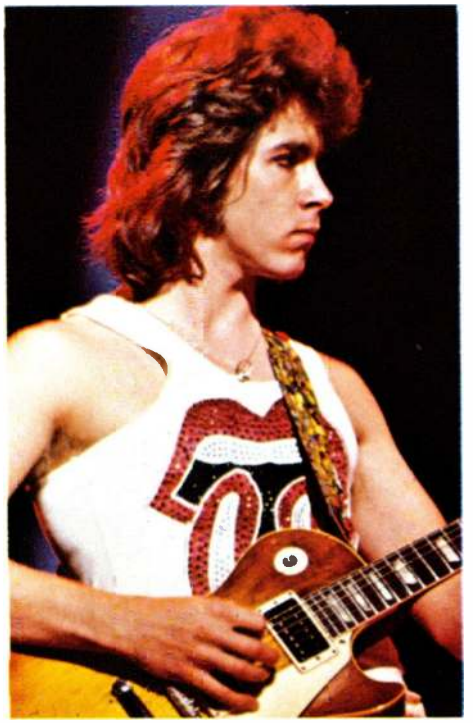
PORTRAITS

Everyone wants to look good once in a while. A portrait is one way of making sure that before you die, someone catches your best profile at least once. Here we examine some of the stars in their stiller moments. Even the bounciest, most outrageous ravers have a yen to be seen once in a while in a quietly posed moment that he would want others to see and **oooh** and **aaah** over. It might not be exactly "documentary" in fact, since some of the most reserved posers are some of rock & roll's most outrageous stage personalities. But a portrait is a good way of presenting someone as a lowest common denominator of what he looks like away from the power and glory of a performance and also in still life on stage.

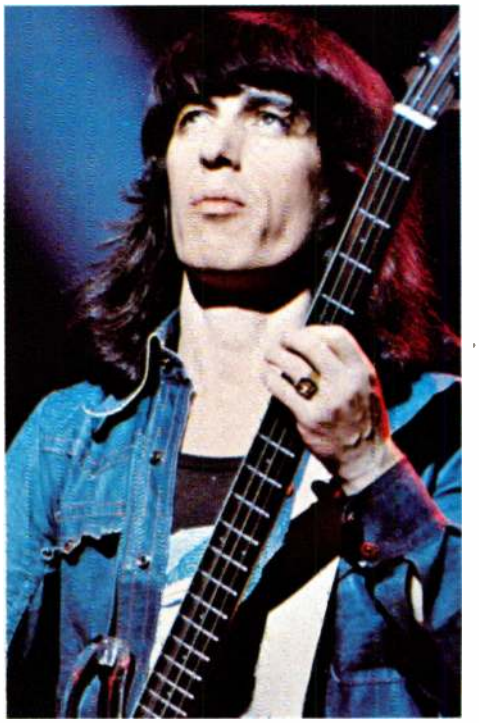


Keith Richard

Charlie Watts



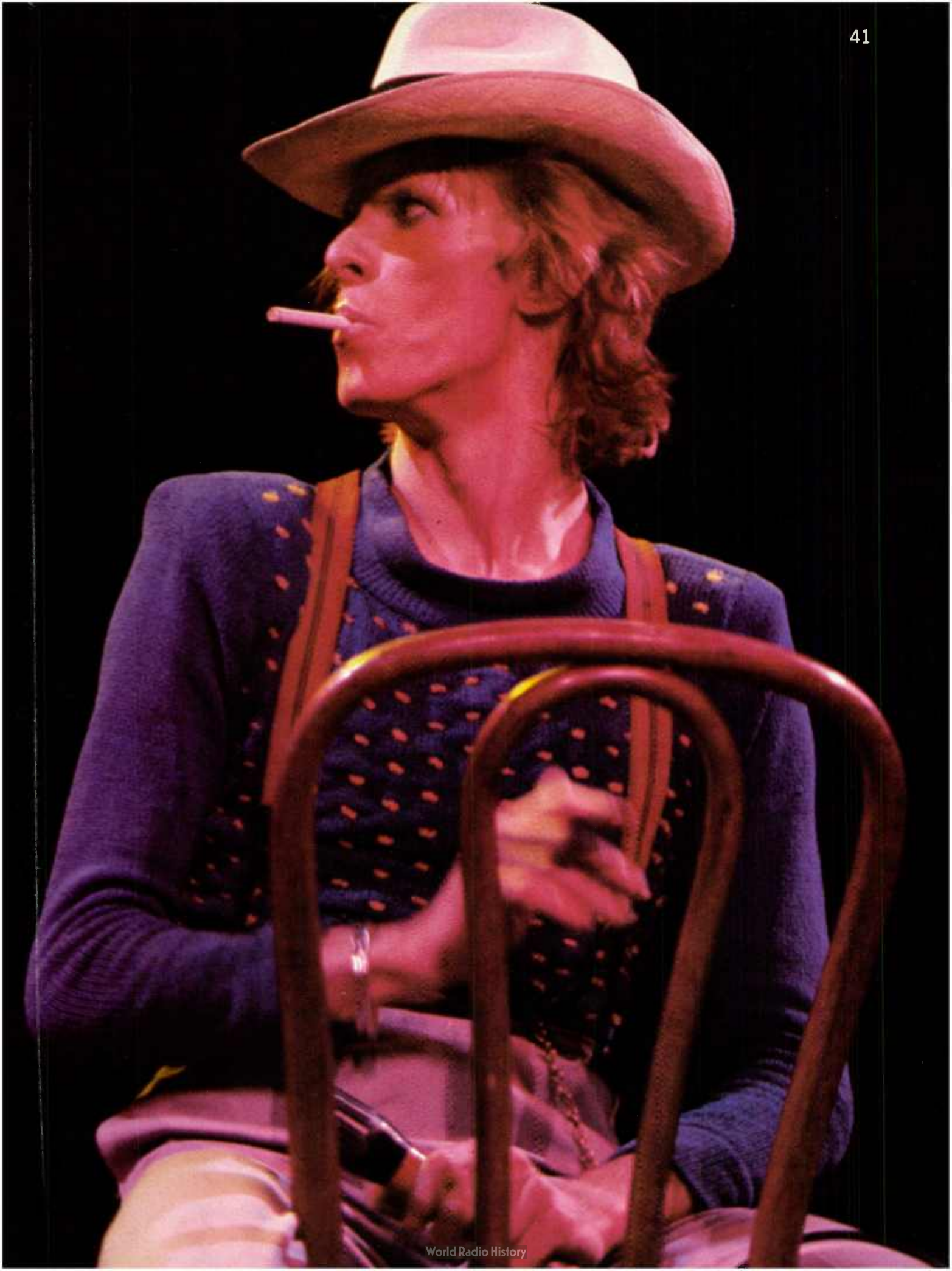
Mick Taylor

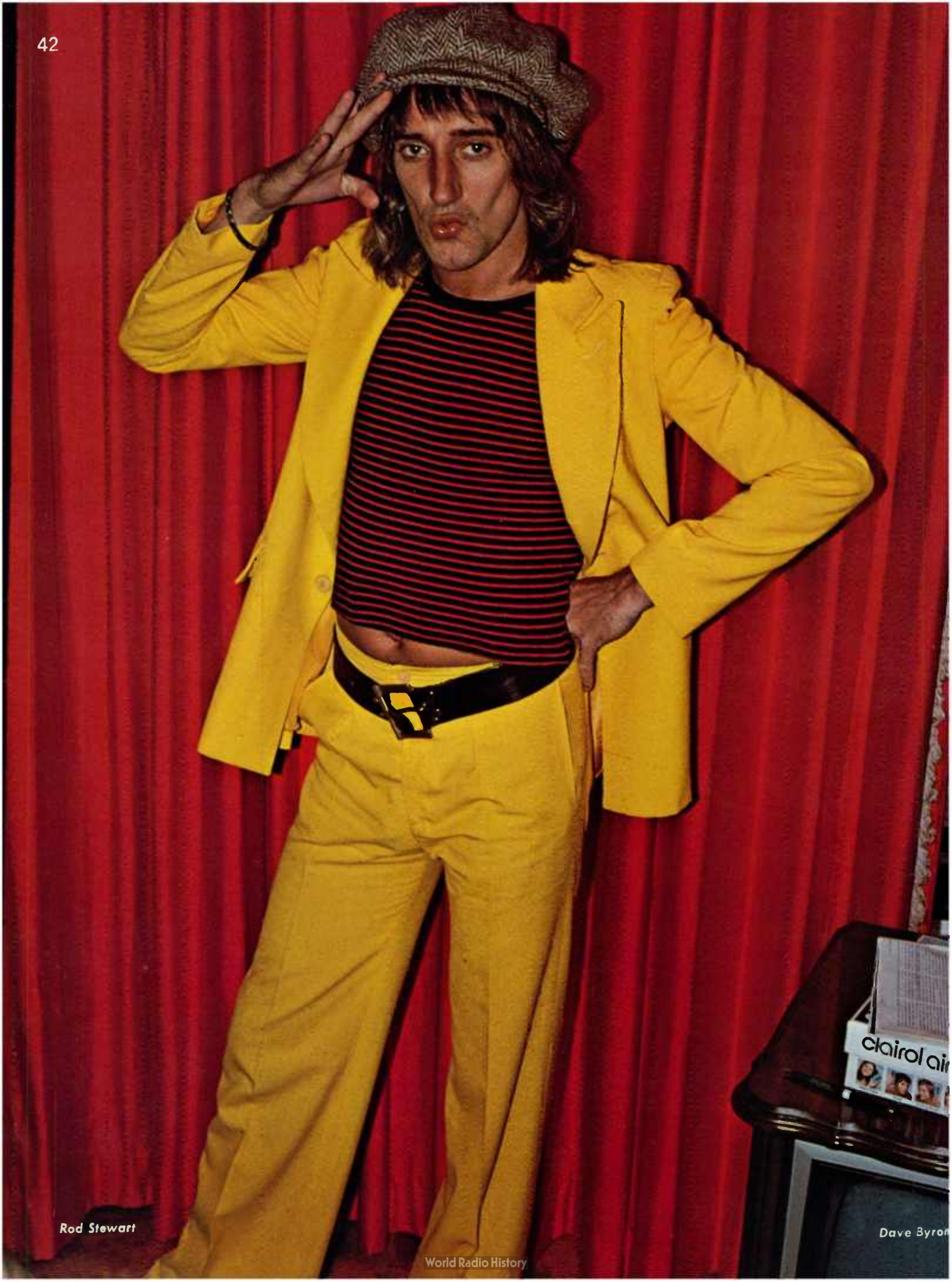


Bill Wyman

Robert Plant

David Bowie





Rod Stewart

Dave Byron

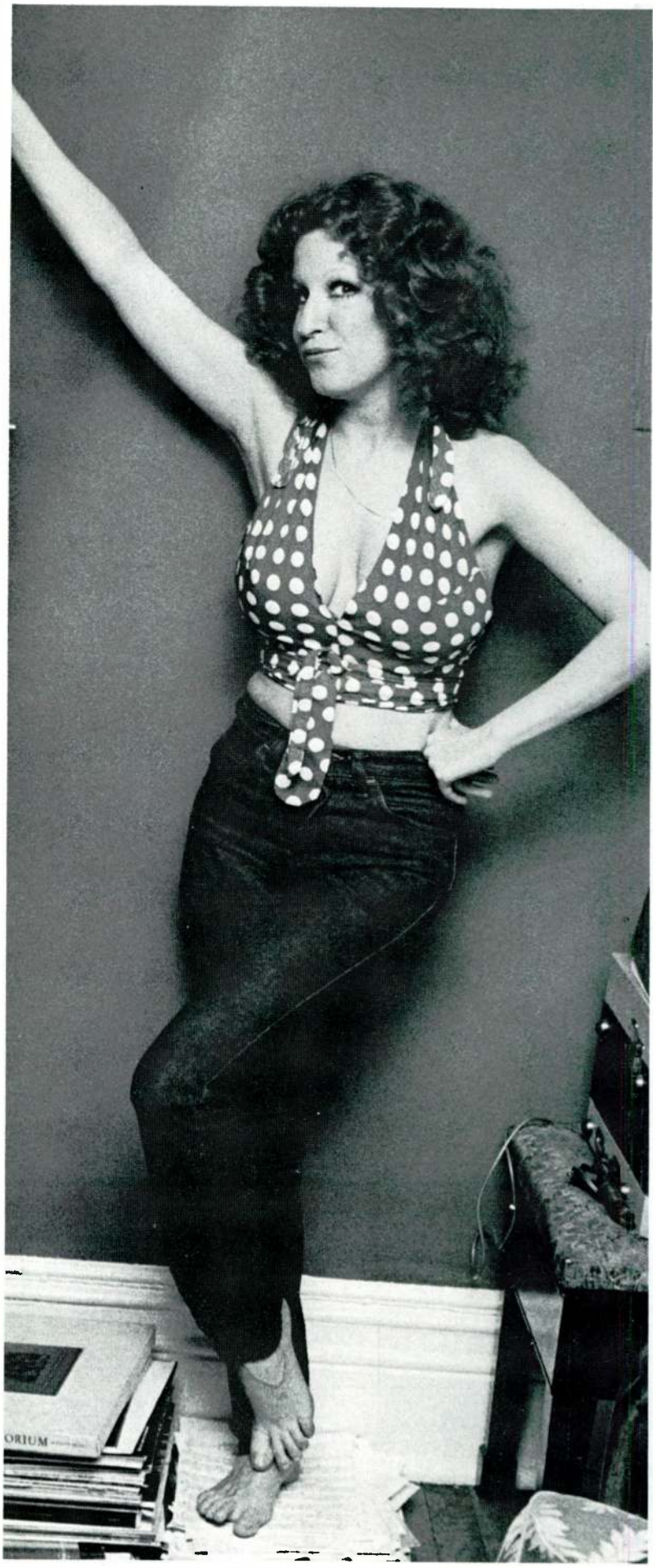
Keith Emerson of ELP—"Welcome my friends, to the show that never ends" is ELP's motto and it is perhaps truer than they think. Emerson's flitting fingers bang out a million notes per minute but sometimes his band's music runs the risk of ending up in a gigantic 'Zzzz'-chord.

Alice, bloody Alice

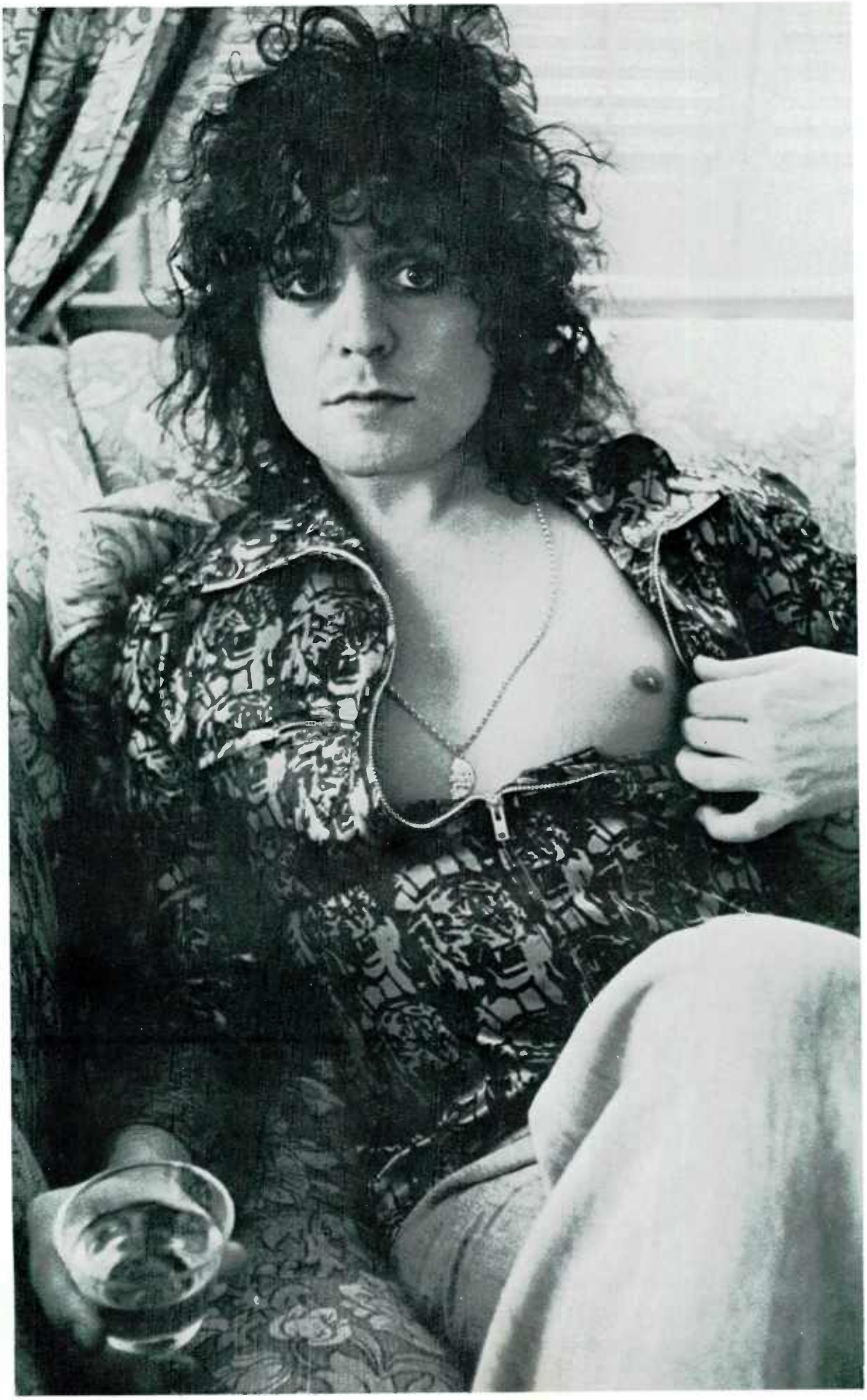
A bountiful Bette begins this little cavalcade of boob mongers, while Keith Moon is in the bee-line.

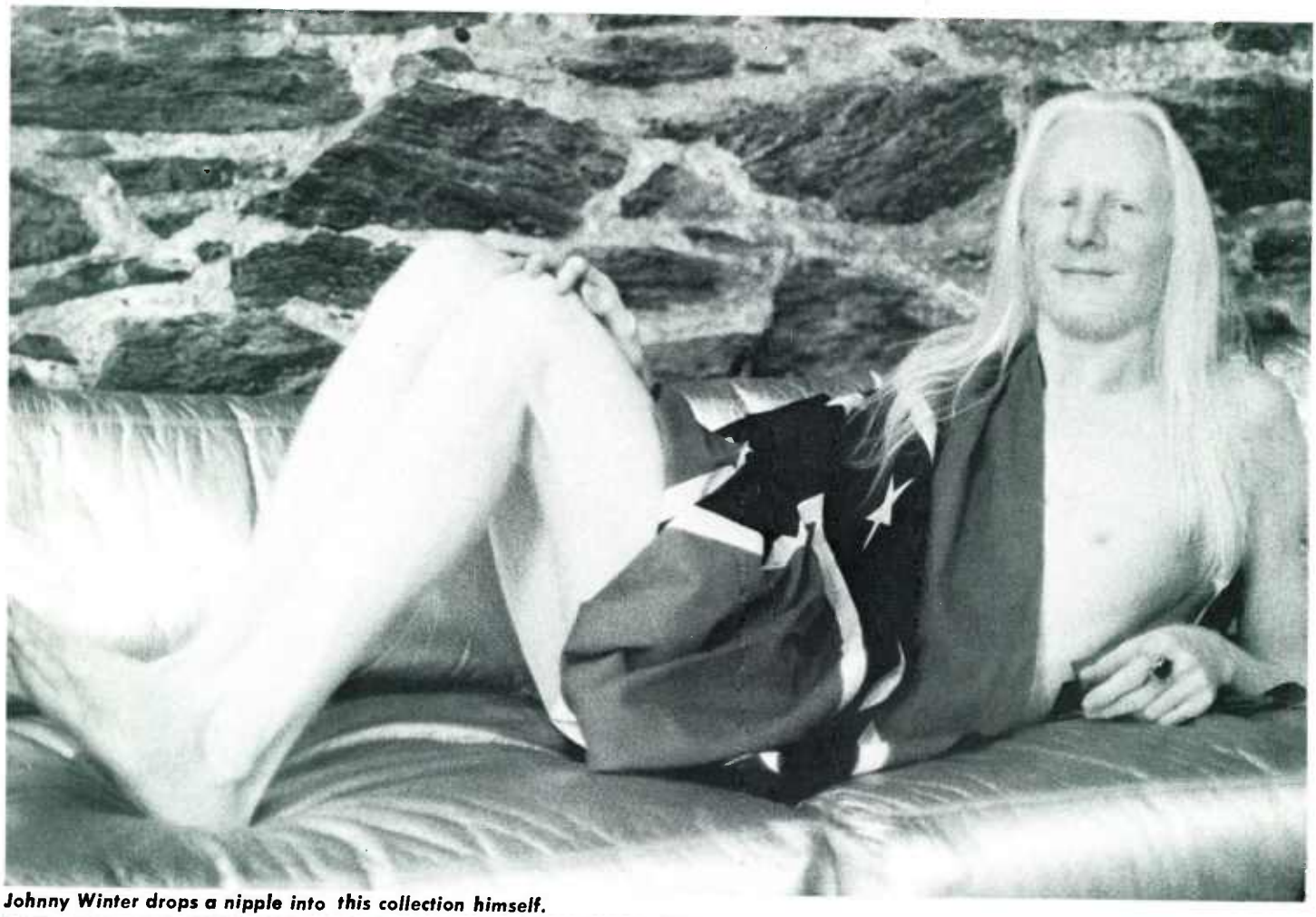
BUST LINERS

If ya got it, flaunt it, if ya don't, well, at least pretend that you do! From the fullest to the flattest, it seems like everybody has something to show and are more than willing to dish out a peek o' tit for the breast minded photographer. Let it be understood that though not all of the exposed are really **Playboy** material, they are all worth a gander.



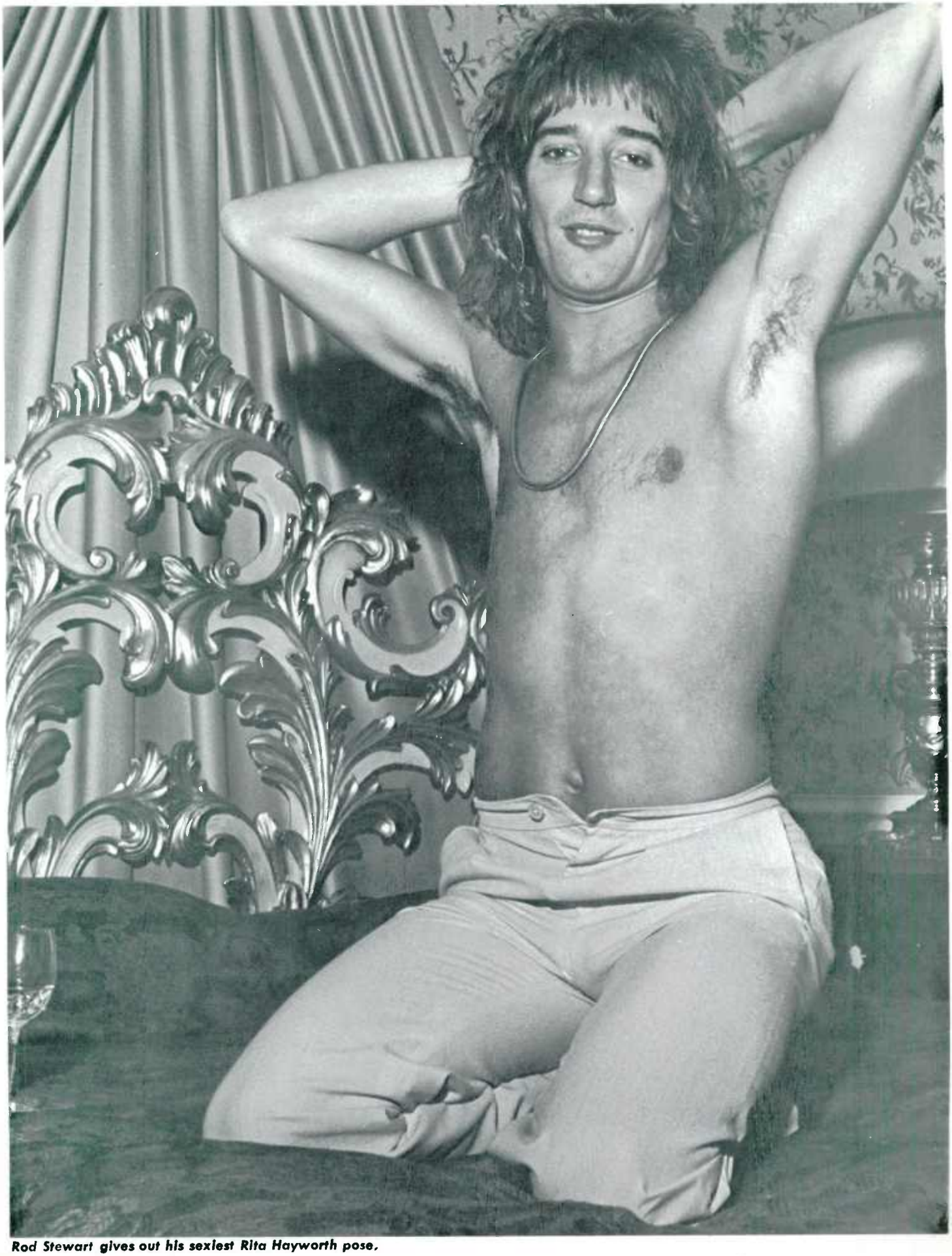
Opposite page. Marc Bolan exhibits his true sincerity in the form of one unfettered nipple.





Johnny Winter drops a nipple into this collection himself.

David-Jo and foxy Cyrinda present their collective bosoms for your inspection.



Rod Stewart gives out his sexiest Rita Hayworth pose.

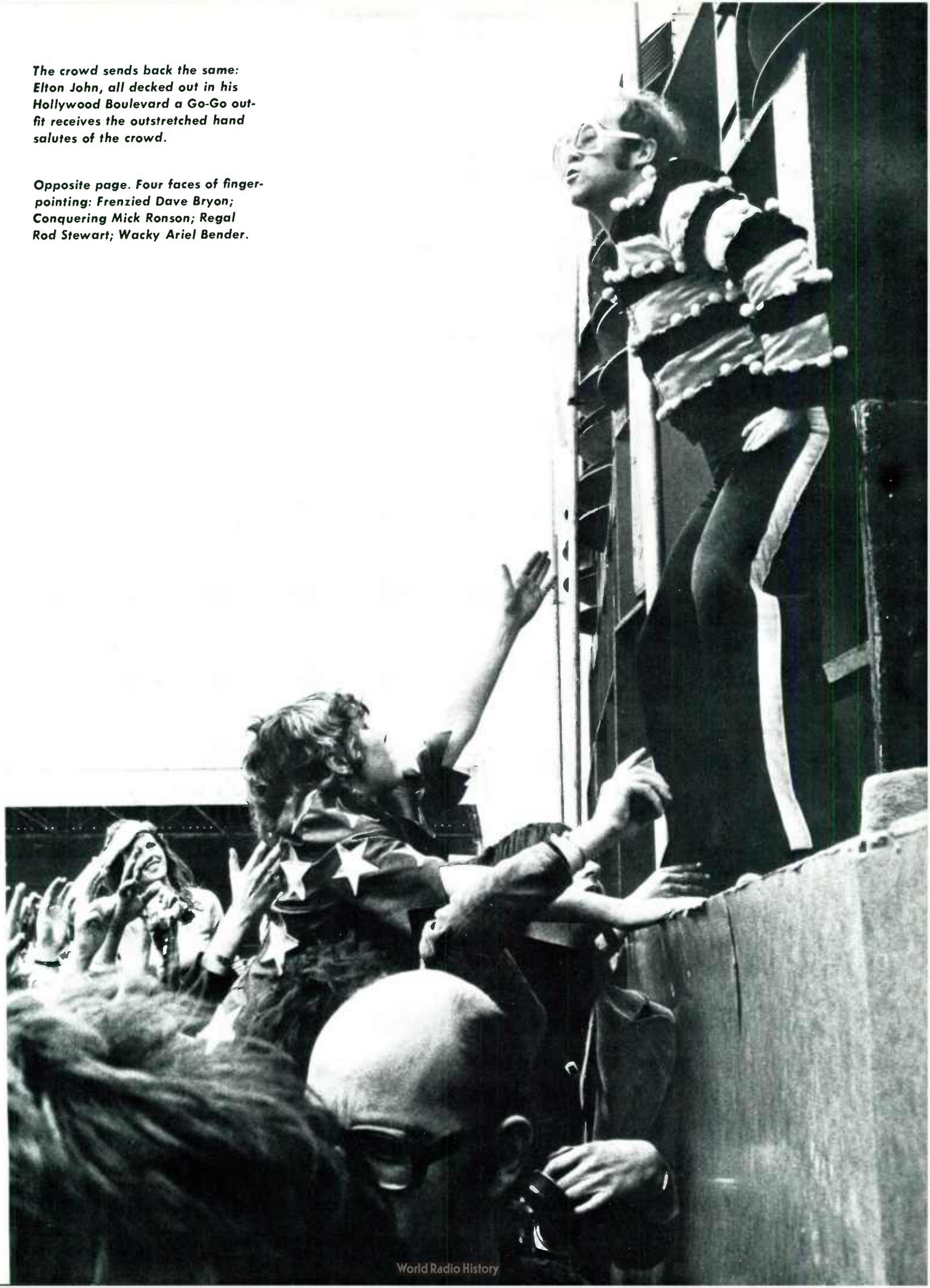
H AND JIVE

From hand clapping to finger snapping to pointing—with a menagerie of other hand signs cropping up in between, musicians are doin' that crazy hand jive all over rock & roll. Not only can hands be used to slap out the beat, they can be a means of visual punctuation to the words, music and feeling. David Johansen of the New York Dolls is the Lon Chaney of postures and hand talk, using his one million poses to intensify his natural sassiness. Others use them to intensify their music's message in ways all their own.

Flashy Freddy Mercury of Queen, raunches out with a bit of overbite and a hard-on finger.

The crowd sends back the same: Elton John, all decked out in his Hollywood Boulevard a Go-Go outfit receives the outstretched hand salutes of the crowd.

Opposite page. Four faces of finger-pointing: Frenzied Dave Bryon; Conquering Mick Ronson; Regal Rod Stewart; Wacky Ariel Bender.



Alice Cooper was a brave new image at one time, coming on with two fisted aggressiveness and S & M overtones that were strictly loony tune.

None other than David Johansen, selecting another stellar pose from his personal file.

Tina Turner. Her handjive is only part of an overall body language.

Lou Reed with the underground spirit of a Miss Subways 1968. He varnished his nails, however, to come above ground.

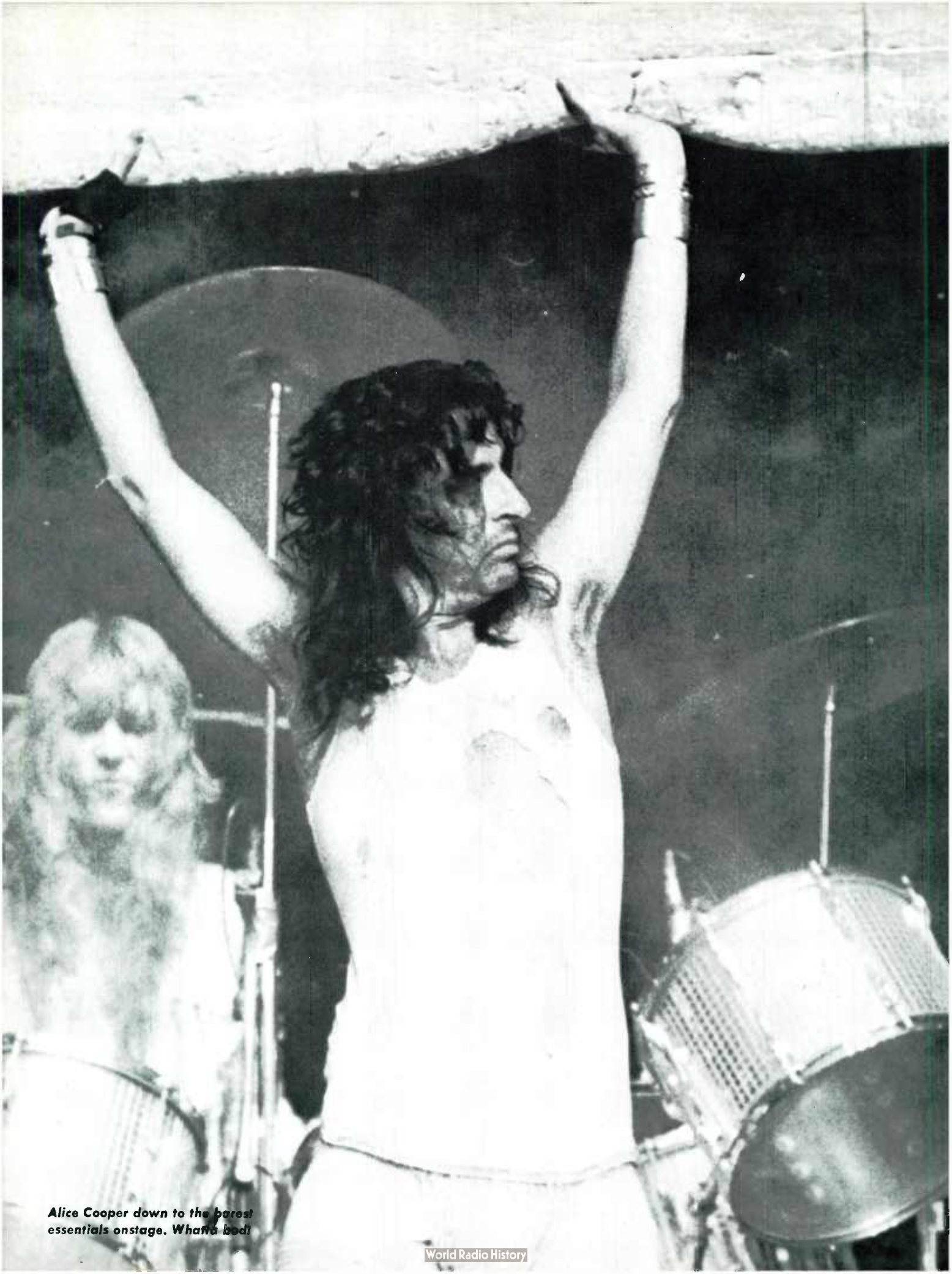
Opposite page. Neil Smith of Alice Cooper ends this section with an offering of one of the oldest known finger symbols still very much in use.

The brave Black Sabbathite displays his bizarre affliction: both hands have been frozen into the above condition since 1968.

CROTCH SHOTS

Within the last few pages of this book we have moved along down into that region below the belt. Here we will examine the rockers from a more pubic angle. Though these stars may not be exactly in the all together, between the jock straps, unzipped flies and crashing necklines, there is enough fantasy material in these fotos to start your imagination groping . . . for more!

Stars with one thing on their minds: Getting down to their own erotic zones and, as usual, fishing for compliments. We spy: J. Geils Band, Dan McCafferty of Nazareth, Don Brewer of Grand Funk, Rod Stewart of the Faces and Mick Box of Uriah Heep.



Alice Cooper down to the barest essentials onstage. Whatta bod!

Mick Jagger onstage and very unzipped, strikes a Mamie Van Doren pose.

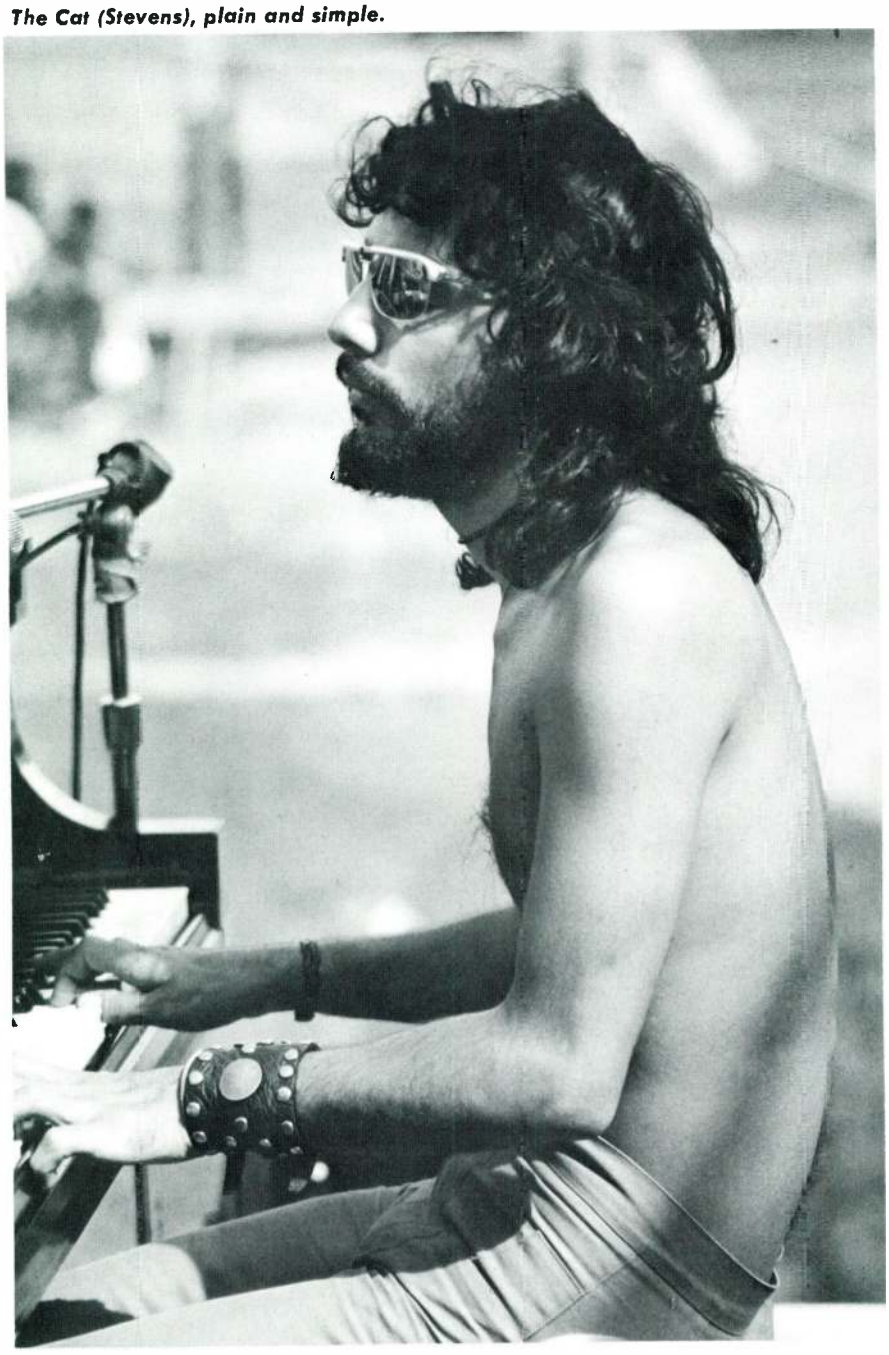
SWITCH HITTERS

After all, talent is an asset, so if you happen to be a musical whiz kid, why settle for just one instrument? There are so many to chose from and as music changes, you really have to expand your own horizons just to keep up and in style. Bisexuality is in, or so has been stated in **Newsweek**. Bi-instrumentality is in too, as it has always been for Edgar Winter. But you don't need to read it anywhere, because the next few pictures are worth a few million words on the subject.

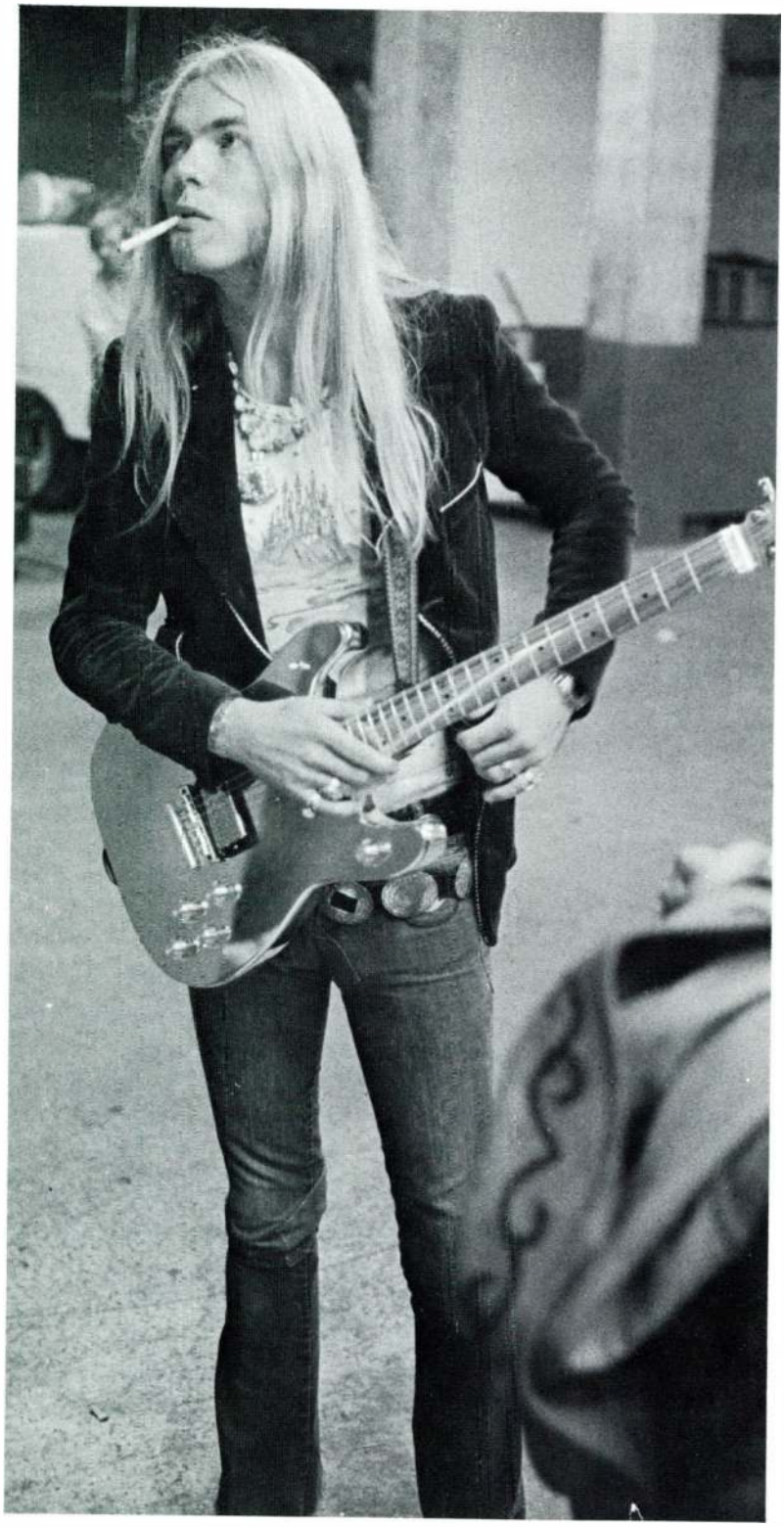
All-a-glitter, and having more fun, Edgar Winter plays a new breed of sax as well as a bit o' moog and electric piano.

Sly Stone, everybody loves this lover, unfortunately some find out too late that he's not the marrying kind. Here we see him with his two prime loves, keyboards and guitar.

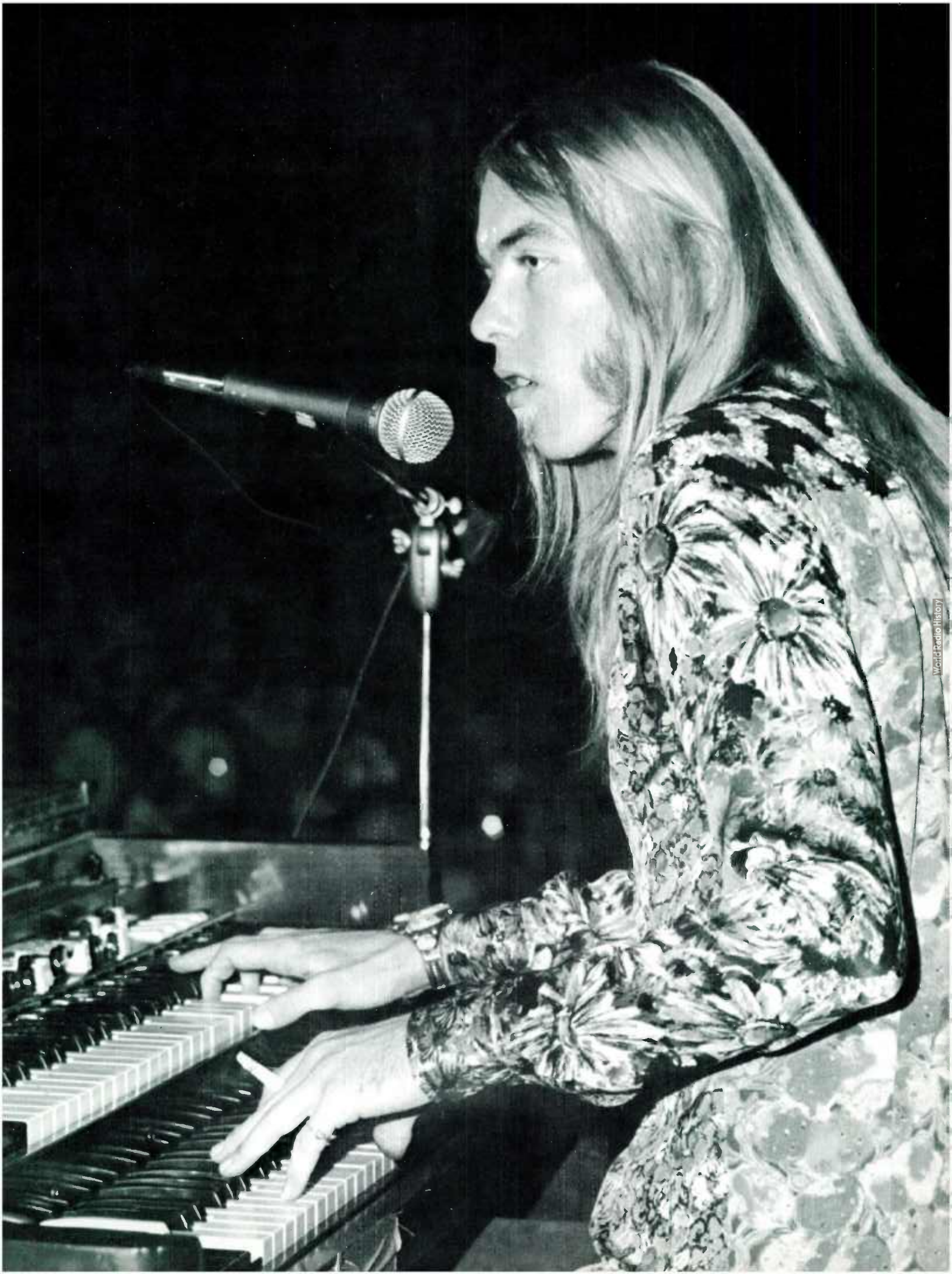
The Cat (Stevens), plain and simple.



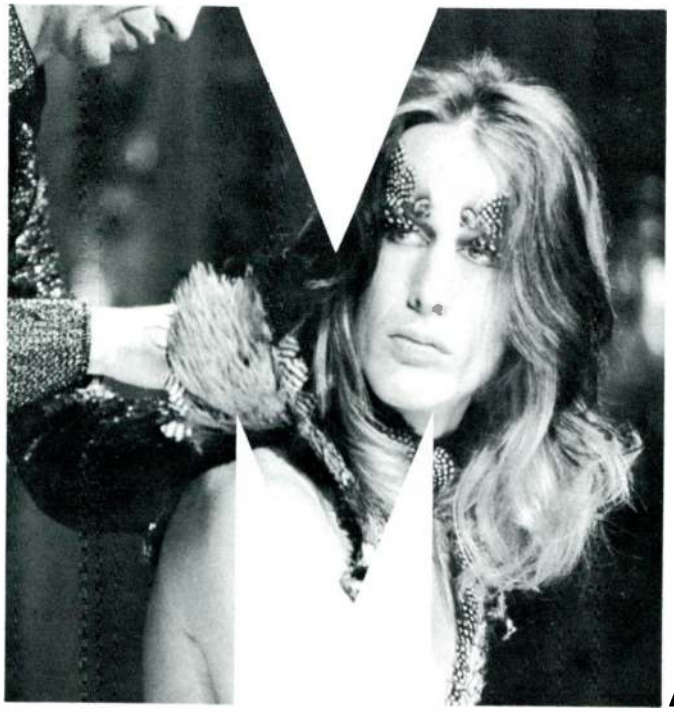
Paul Rodgers of Bad Company was originally hailed for his incredible rock & roll voice, but as these two photos show, his prowess is on the prowl in both the guitar and keyboard jungles as well.



Gregg Allman, with his brother and their band, brought America a new honor and distinction when they let loose their talents and music. Here Gregg waits backstage with his guitar and onstage accompanies his Southern country flavored vocals with his own expert keyboard work.



Kiss. Their make-up is their trademark. Someday people might even remember them for their music.



MAKE UP

No longer is rock & roll just the raw power, true grit and beer belly affair it began as. Now the technicians of beauty have touched the music with fashion wands . . . and poof, out springs a new, multi-colored style. From the sequin freckles that Mick Jagger wore around his eyes to the complete pie-in-the-face costume that is Kiss, the wearing of a touch of blush or a dab of mascara has established itself in the rock world. You don't have to be a fag to wear it! Former Roxy musician Eno has said that a live performance is a theatrical experience and make-up should be used as it is in any straight dramatic theatre production. Most people go along with this viewpoint nowadays. Although the use of make-up began as a fad, most of the extreme edges have been tastefully sheared off and what remains is a new, useful extension to the theatre of rock & roll, where make-up is an accessory the RockStar may chose to use.

Todd Rundgren in the process of being dyed and feathered for a concert appearance. Yes Todd, these fittings are a drag, but remember beauty knows no pain!

Freddy Mercury of Queen.

LONGPLAYER

The record reviews in this book have been specially selected from hundreds of reviews published during 1977 in Longplayers, a regular feature of Circus Magazine. The reviews, written by well-informed devotees of rock music, are about Solid Gold music or Solid Gold musicians—some pure, some tarnished, some unpolished, some undiscovered—but all influential in the world of rock. The reviews are listed alphabetically by performer. Where importance (or notoriety) warranted, more than one review of the same album appears. Multiple albums mentioned in one review are listed under the first album discussed.

The Gregg Allman Band

Playin' Up a Storm

(Capricorn)

Bedraggled by what must be a shitty self-concept, rejected by old cronies, and going through the throes of yet another marital debacle, Gregg Allman sits like a deposed duke, a continent away from his initial triumphs.

When he first walked into the Los Angeles recording studio where *Playin' Up a Storm* was waxed, Allman must have at least considered the cathartic potential in such a project. One could have imagined GA muttering something to the effect of "I'll show these motherfuckers." And, yes, on the purely visceral level, here was a chance for the world to hear some primal therapy as Allman wailed his travails while the band cooked.

So what *does* Gregg Allman prove on *Storm*? Working with a qualified band which includes drummer Bill Stewart, Fender bender Willie Weeks of George Harrison employ, session keyboard man Neil Larsen, and ex-Wet Willie guitarist Rick Hirsch, Allman has sketched a continuum of tortured liltingly slow vocals replete with formulaic, paced arrangements.

This man, whose pen has contributed much to rock & roll gothic, has produced no memorable rockers here, just morose tales of love and vengeance. With the exception of a Larsen-dominated groove on "Matthew's Arrival," the fast tracks are immediately forgettable. Not so the many dirges of the heart, presumably second nature for someone more familiar with Cupid's boomerang than arrow.

You may hate his guts, but admit it—Gregg Allman is a talented cat. "Bring It on Back" will never win any poetry contests, but its tormented paeans to the departed woman are enough to make you shake. Same with "Cryin' Shame," the album's best tune, with its powerful female chorus seconding Allman's affirmation that he truly misses the lady. (No, there are no Cher double entendres.)

The crew of sidemen are functional but don't light many fires. In that respect, this LP pales before all but the most mediocre Allman Brothers work. "Matthews Arrival," the closest thing to a jam, is no "Elizabeth Reed." Instead, it's tightly structured, with Weeks' filibustering bass accentuating Larsen's block-chording left hand. You know what's coming eight bars ahead; it will be tasty, maybe even strut a bit, but it won't build—or even perpetuate—any legends. Maybe on the road, the band will have more room to stretch out.

If you discern some wildly mixed emotions here, you're right. In many respects, this is a damn good album, far superior to Allman's only other studio effort, *Laid Back*. "One More Try," with its lines about "Going to California/Gonna give it one more try," rings with the peals of autobiographical allegory. Yet, as keepsake art, *Playin' Up a Storm* will endure more as a reflection of Gregg Allman's state of mind, circa, 1977, than it will as a superior example of the state of the art of rock & roll.

Russell Shaw

Asleep at the Wheel

The Wheel

(Capitol)

What with Waylon Jennings writing songs about Bob Wills and "progressive" country art-

ists talking about their roots in Western swing, this 11-member band may just be in the right place at the right time.

Although their lyrics are contemporary, most of their arrangements, instrumentation, and format stem from a tradition that goes back four decades to groups like the Texas Playboys and Spade Cooley. These were large bands, often with horns, that mixed country, jazz, and blues riffs with down-home lyrics to create a distinctively American form. They played good-timey, highly danceable music.

Asleep at the Wheel have been recording for a few years now (this is their fifth LP), but the band are hardly old-timers. Although all but one of the tunes here are original, Asleep do a good job of capturing the mood and feel of the older Texas dance-hall numbers.

While the music would have sounded right 20 years ago, the lyrics might not have—especially on songs like the zonked-out "Am I High?". Vocalist and songwriter Leroy Preston has a suitably laid-back singing style and a good sense of irony. The chorus to "Red Stick" goes: "In French, Baton Rouge might mean Red Stick/But to me it means broken heart." See, he met this little Cajun filly there, and. . . .

There's lots of nice fiddle and steel-guitar work, and some fine horn playing on the jazzy title cut. The rather bizarre "My Baby Thinks She's a Train" is a little more modern—the guitar sound is straight out of Sun's rockabilly days, and there's even some early-Elvis hiccups on the vocal fade-out.

More of the same from a group who make pleasant and listenable music in a style that they prove is a long way from dead or dated. Ahhh-hah!

Tony Glover

B

Joan Baez

Gulf Winds

(A&M)

Gulf Winds, Joan Baez's last album for A&M (she was recently signed to the new CBS label, Portrait) and her first composed entirely of original songs, is a brave failure—the pop-record equivalent of having oneself photographed versifying naked under kleig lights. But the self-image Baez presents is likeable, warts and all. If Baez remembers love affairs in the language of fairy tales, her willed foolishness is balanced by an adult's recognition of the impermanence of things.

Although it is easy for me to accept *Gulf Winds* as light, somewhat narcissistic autobiography, I can't admire so sloppily crafted an album. Baez's stylistic range is narrow. With the exception of the chromatic "Seabirds," this material represents a very limited extension of the traditional folk music that provided her with her original repertoire, and this folk-pop is not compelling. In trying to set words to long-lined melodic phrases derived from Joni Mitchell, Baez repeatedly stumbles. When she means to be subtly reflective, she sounds bluntly talkative. Her sense of poetic diction is often ludicrously schoolgirlish. And when she mixes the fantastic with the colloquial, the result can be hilarious. "You archangels, you have some nerve," she declares in "Kingdom of Childhood." and in "O Brother," a putdown of a misbehaving friend, Baez comes up with the funniest pop rhyme of the year: "I know you're surrounded by parasites and syncophants/ When I come to see you I dose up on coagulants." I must assume that the artist is at least partly aware of the element of self-parody in such lines.

Baez's weaknesses are only accentuated by David Kershenbaum's production, which amounts to little more than the provision of unarranged electric-acoustic backups. But, in an ironic way, this crudeness enhances the album's claim for our attention by underlying the star's obvious desire to be sincere at all costs.

Stephen Holden

The Band

Islands

(Capitol)

The Band may have slowed down, but they're far from finished. Even though you won't see 'em in person any more (how many times have ya heard that one?), they'll continue to communicate via records—and this here's the first. And if it's any consolation, the shape they're in's just fine! So what does it really matter if they never tour again? Virtually none of us fell in love with 'em because of their stage act. It was those records, that long and bountiful stream of consummate rock & roll masterwork. The honor their music has paid the American rock idiom has been undebatable, perhaps unchallengeable.

Through it all, of course, was their absolutely unique ability to evoke images—mythical, rural, exotic, sometimes brilliantly solipsistic. And with such idiosyncratic leanness. Their music always a Spartan metaphor for the lyrical message, the Band invented a style of regal economy copied but never equalled by musicians from Toronto to Auckland. *The Band* (more than *Music From Big Pink*) is one of the five greatest American music albums ever released. The Civil War daguerrotypes from that period segue intriguingly into the clockwork paranoia of the thoroughly contemporary *Stage Fright*. *Cahoots* has always been my personal favorite because of its adventure: the Band comes out of character for a moment, and it's great. *Northern Lights—Southern Cross*, a feisty roll LP if ever there was one, transports them from East to West (the L.A. move), just as "Acadian Driftwood," in a pointed symbolic cross-reference, takes that lost tribe from Canada down the Mississippi south to the New World of Louisiana (where Cajun was born!). The transition from roots recollection to some of the most muscular R&B in extremis displays the same promise as *Cahoots*—a rigorous refusal to be pigeonholed into folksy frozen frame.

If these records try, at times dangerously, to stare inside, asking a lot of discomforting questions rather than presuming to offer answers (typically humble), then *Islands* can be seen as a proud and romantic compromise—Robbie Robertson is more at home with his existential self than he's ever been. An easy album if anything, *Islands* is a story of love beyond the ruins. The protagonist of "Right As Rain" "spent a lifetime trying to reach beyond the rainbow. . .while the world outside (grew) more insane."

Funny how people think your life
is so complete
When it's really you who envies the
man on the street
I must have strayed from the path
wandering through the catacombs
Then you came along to guide my
restless spirit home
I can't tell you why, no, I wouldn't
try to explain
Here with you I feel no pain
True light blue, right as rain.

Garth Hudson's euphonious tenor sax—particularly the Kong-noble, King Curtis, cool-bop solo—is similarly cathartic. But when Levon Helm sings "It's all in the cards/It's all in the game," my mind starts to furiously consider whether Robertson's acquiescence to life is quite as beatific as the tune would lead us to believe. Then, there's the fade, and therein the royal rub, no resolution, to be continued. . . .

"Let the Night Fall" is an insanely traditional Band stroll, right down to Helm's trademarked disciplined drum staggers in largo tempo (the best engine behind a set of drums in the business!). It's this kinda track that gets me sentimental about 'em. In mock seriousness, Robertson likens himself to a wise old owl. If one weren't familiar with his stoically subtle sense of humor, this tune could be taken for jaded pomp. And check out J.R.'s jazzy guitar fills through the fade—shee-it! (Never lose sight of the fact that, beyond all of this blathering rhetoric about their genius, etc., the Band are, first and foremost, *players*. And that's how they got to where they are today. There are two classic oldies which add to *Islands'* lighthearted mood: a horn-sparked, funk-wailing, very modern version of "Ain't That a Lot of Love" (this cut is *all there!*) and the stupendously soulful, Helm-sung "Georgia on My Mind" (roll over, Tony Bennett!).

"Christmas Must Be Tonight" provides an aura of spiritual content. It is a pastorale as bucolic as they come ("How a little baby boy/ Bring the people such joy/Son of a carpenter"), with Robertson (through Helm) playing the role of one of the Three Wise Men. The neatest twist in this homey little affair is when Robertson decides to open the song with a Keith Richard phrase from the Rolling Stone's "Congratulations." I'd start to sound like too much of a rock critic even fer my taste if I were to infer something from that.

Naturally, there is hard-rock, equally noncryptic in character. Rick Danko's drunken locomotive about whores and fast-talkers, quite rightly titled "Street Walker," is definitively antiurban (rural chauvinist pig!). Tune sounds like it was tailored to fit Van Morrison's tubes, although I've always had a certain passion for Danko's web-footed vocals, watching him strain for notes completely within his range like Alfalfa at the Arbor day pageant. Besides some crazed, high-register piano noodlings by Richard Manuel, this funk mammoth captures a Robertson axe Jim Gordon sax dialogue which is unadulterated Duke Ellington. The Johnny Hodges/Shorty Baker interchanges from the 1947 chapter, to be exact. Amazing. Zest is not the word for it.

The rockin' "Knockin' Lost John" is Procol Harum's "Long Gone Geek" Revisited. Another in the long line of Band period pieces. This one the victim of a Great Depression poverty pocket, told in a semi-humorous atmosphere of clown-like Hudson accordion lines, Helm cowbell bonks, and Robertson mutant guitar storms (that's what they are literally—just listen to the final eight bars). "The Saga of Pepote Rouge" is timeless Band time-warp rag—chock fulla archetypes including the above-mentioned arriving upon the scene to save us all from hell and purgatory. This could not be serious, and therefore it is the Band making fun of even their mythical grand selves (which I wouldn't put past Robertson for a second).

Never the ones to break with tradition, the Band have cut yet another Band album. But, really, how could they not? Especially when it's as good as *Islands*. As for this LP's theme—well, there's nary a leitmotif in sight, except for the aforementioned Venus conquers all. (The title track, by the way, is a quirky and charming instrumental that sounds like Herbie Mann in front of the Baja Marimba Band, which is, after all, vacation music.) *Islands* is a holiday free from turmoil mostly, and, as for the queries raised earlier, I think it can be said that the prognosis is physical resolution. Maybe it's that California air, maybe it's partly a question of where can honest rock & roll vision go from age 35 onward?, maybe it's just laziness. Who cares?

The record closes with a track called "Livin' in a Dream," which praises love as the only reality through the confusion. It cross-references the album's opener with a line about "powder sky into blue" as the Band highsteps a lusty riff up to the heavens. I imagine that J.R.

Robertson might have intended this lyrical symmetry as some part of *Islands'* master plan. Which is really just to tell us that it's all gonna work out fine.

Bruce Malamut

Beach Boys

Beach Boys '69

(Capitol)

Rock & roll can be a crashing bore when it's taken too seriously. All too often, rock people —critics, audiences, and musicians alike—are so busy raving about how important the Electric Twinkie's new opus is going to be that they (We?) lose sight of the elements that made the music so appealing to begin with: the beat, the mutual exhilaration of live performance, the pure *fun* of it all. The Beach Boys are for such times. Sure, they can be "relevant," but their main concern is that everyone has a good time.

Beach Boys '69 is really *"Live" in London,* a very popular import item for the six years it's been available. Capitol made a bundle on the *Endless Summer* and *Spirit of America* compilations, which undoubtedly prompted the company to finally release *'69* domestically. In actual chronology, it's the second of the Beach Boys' three live LPs, combining the contagious *joie de vivre* of the first (*Concert*, 1964) with the more refined musicianship of the last (*In Concert,* 1974).

There are no surprises here, just a representative set of the big favorites ("Good Vibrations," "California Girls," "Wouldn't It Be Nice"), lesser faves ("God Only Knows," "Darlin' "), and, as always, a couple of great but obscure album tracks. One point of interest is the use of a large horn section to imitate or duplicate some of the vocals.

But what really makes *Beach Boys '69* a good *live* recording is the inclusion of all the crowd noise, the stage announcements, and especially Mike Love's patter with the audience. His comments can be pretty silly (before a flawless rendition of "Their Hearts Were Full of Spring," he says: "We do this one a cappella—which means nude"), but they're all so utterly unpretentious that you just have to smile. Even in England, a group as completely and naturally American as the Beach Boys don't have to work at making their audiences love them. All they have to do is be themselves.

Sam Graham

The Beach Boys

The Beach Boys Love You

(Reprise/Brother)

The Beach Boys present the most convincing argument in our entire culture for never growing up. I don't want to, you don't want to—we're all walking backward with our eyes peeled to the horizon for those memory mirages of how we once hopped and wailed (or in the Beach Boys' case, cavorted and wave-rocked) so free. I hate nostalgia myself, although I'm not immune to it. Every time I see that ad on TV with the greased-back guy and the rolled-jeans girl sitting on the hood of the car, I get more turned off to the whole concept of oldies—I like the way she chews her gum, but I don't think it's the healthiest life style in the world sitting around whirling stacks of scratchy singles on your dick and wallowing in how neat and clean it was cruising to school and trying to get to second base in the back seat at the drive-in. It's like, he who does not know history is condemned to repeat it; same goes for he who forgets his own. My high school was full of pimply pariahs, and as far as the back seat at the drive-in goes, I always thought that kind of priapism was a pain in the neighborhood of hernia. Growing up in the era the Beach Boys always celebrated and the current *Grease*/Fonzie nostalgia boom cashes in on was simply never knowing when you were gonna turn a corner and run into some pissed-off, repressed, frustrated, uptight asshole who'd wanna kick your ass just because he didn't like your looks.

The magic of the Beach Boys is that they're not really dealing in nostalgia, exactly—*they never grew out of high school in the first place.* Most of the best rockers are retards, and these human gods of the Pacific are no exception. They got collegiate for a while with psychedelia, TM, environmental conscience, and all that, but the psychedelia (as well as the whole concept of going through any kind of changes, maturational or otherwise) scared them so bad they went right back to being 16 and stayed there. (The TM merely had the suspended animation effect of submerging their brains in pudding, so it didn't matter.) Brian Wilson's traumas, near-autism, and reclusiveness are legend —he's a big infant, a classic case of oral fixation. The rest of the group were too much in love with their cars to regress that far, but they've still got spaces with their names painted in white in the Senior Parking Lot.

All of which I think is great. Because *The Beach Boys Love You* pulls off a feat that's eluded, say, Pete Townshend and Mick Jagger—it's almost more juvenile than their original stuff, it's not self-conscious, and it sounds right up-to-date. It's that joyous, rocking, soaring, roller-rink-in-the-sky sound that always made them the real American Music of the Spheres, and as far as I'm concerned, it might as well be their best album ever (although I've always been a *Beach Boys Party* man myself, so my perspective is probably a little askew).

It's no secret that most of the slightly creaky rock masters of the Sixties (sounds like the title of a vintage Dixieland collection) have been trying with mostly pathetic results to return to their roots or at least their old modus and subject matter. A diseased bunch of motherfuckers if ever there was one, but the miracle is that the Beach Boys have made that disease sound like the literal babyflesh pink of health, right down to a song where Brian tells his lady friend that he loves her like a baby, pulling off an outrageous chorus of "Pat, pat, pat' er on 'er butt/She's going to sleep, be quiet. . . ." Passivity, generally the essence of decadence, has never been more sanguinely celebrated.

Most of the songs, however, deal with the Beach Boys' more predominant vision of love: teenage and tentative. (If you're a teenager reading this, yes, it's true, back in mine and the Beach Boys' day, we weren't allowed to take acid until we graduated from high school and we just sat around feeling each other up all the time. These guys don't wanna get laid, and there's nothing of teenage lust rage in their vision; rather it's an Elysium of eternal flush in groin and body with the first *recognition* of the possibilities of girls and the flesh. "Goin' to school isn't my fondest desire," sings Mike Love in the very first song. "But sittin' in class she set my soul on fire/God please let us go on this way." I was swept right back to the 10th grade, when all the girls wore miniskirts and you spent the entire period ogling the goosebumps on their legs with stealthily peripheral vision. I'm not sure whether or not, when all is said and done, it beat see-through blouses, but I'm sure that, for the Beach Boys, there's no contest. Their girls even wear falsies, right here on this album in 1977.

Maybe it's just that unprickable and ingenuous wholesomeness that accounts not only for their charm but for their beauty—a beauty so awesome that listening to them at their best is like being in some vast dream cathedral decorated with a thousand gleaming American pop cultural icons (e.g., "Johnny Carson"). After heroin, Wayne County, *Hustler* magazine, the often brutal misogyny of much punk-rock, and all of the stuff like the new Pasolini film featuring naked, whip-slashed female bodies being shoved headfirst into giant steaming tubs of human shit, here come the Beach Boys "Honking Down the Highway," "Prayin' that she'll hold me tight/Hopin' that she'll see the light. . . /Takin' one little inch at a time/Until we're feelin' fine/I guess I got a way with girls." Right, boy, sneaking the fingers at the end of your right arm down her right bra strap to tease up li'l dappled aureole bumps around the nipple, while your left hand guides the wheel with a manly grip and your foot's flooring this jalopy up to the jet stream—I ask you, is that heaven or is that heaven? Damn straight (and I mean *straight*!), but beyond all the endless foreplay, the lines that best sum up the glory and significance of this album occur in a duet between Brian and his wife: "Take your time, don't worry about how you feel/Because you know we've got forever." *The Beach Boys Love You* is enough to make you believe and that's true for them and for all of us.

Lester Bangs

The Beatles

The Beatles at the Hollywood Bowl

(Capitol)

First of all, I was there. You may not have been, which gives me a natural advantage over you in front. Thirteen years ago, I was there, so I can probably make up any kinda lies I want and you'll believe me. But why should I when the truth is so much stranger than any parodic fantasy I could dream up. Buy this record (as you probably will), then pull out the inner sleeve. Look at the faces of those girls in the Beatles audience circa 1964-65. One has her hands clasped and swoons with eyes closed and head thrown back in an ecstasy at once religious and sexual—the kind that, before the Beatles, you could only obtain at a Holy Roller jamboree, and then you'd probably have to be black. Behind her, a girl is standing up on her tiptoes, her eyes and mouth wider than previous world's horizons, screaming at the top of her lungs—and this wasn't *Marat/Sade,* this was the *real* Living Theatre. Plus which these ritual public outbreaks of mob madness were *worldwide.*

Now take out the record inside the sleeve and play it, and wonder how what you're hearing could possibly have inspired what you're looking at. Reflection will lead you to the conclusion that you'll probably never know, but that if you were there, you were lucky. I don't know myself, and George Martin, the Beatles' producer and the annotator of this album doesn't either. They key line in his notes is: "It was not just the voice of the Beatles; it was expression of the young people of the world." He then goes on to admit that this record "may be a poor substitute for the reality of those times, but it is now all there is. In the multiplatinum, sophisticated world we live in today, it is difficult to appreciate the excitement of the Beatles breakthrough. My youngest daughter, Lucy, now nine years old, once asked me about them. 'You used to record them, didn't you Daddy?' she asked me. 'Were they as great as the Bay City Rollers?' 'Probably not,' I replied."

Right. The undertone of intense sadness in those words—because the Beatles can never be replaced, even by the Beatles separately —is fueled by the paradox that the Beatles can and have been replaced. I quote from *TV Guide,* May 21-27, 1977: "It was a big day in the short happy history of the Farrah Phenomenon. The early-morning hours were enlivened by a news item to the effect that two million copies of a Farrah Fawcett-Majors poster had been sold in less than four months. . . thus breaking poster-sales speed records previously held by Fonzie, Marilyn Monroe and the shark from *Jaws*. . . Nevertheless, the Farrah Phenomenon is in full swing, and no one knows how far it will go or how long it will last. The one acknowledged fact is that no one ever attained this kind of superstardom so fast."

You can see why the individual Beatles have been so screwed up and unproductive or uninspired during the past few years: being replaced as the ideal and love-object of the whole world by a sex kitten is bad enough, but

can you imagine being replaced by a *shark*? People will find something they can love en masse in one way or another, but, like Martin says, the real magic of those times was not that so many did love but the *quality* of their love, a certain ping in the heart which might not look like much if you weren't there but which resonated louder than any firecrackers the Bay City Rollers will ever set off, although their fans may scream with equal insistence. That ping cannot be recaptured because it didn't come out of a guitar, it came out of a vast mutual moment, which is why this record may be sort of fun but is ultimately useless even as nostalgia. The only clues left are not even in the music, but in the between-song banter. John says: "We'd like to do a song now from the first film we made. It was in black and—*'SCREEEEEEEEEEEM!'*—white." He regains his composure and seems to be laughing inwardly at some private meaning of the words he is saying: "Yeah, one was black an' white . . . an' one was cullod. . . ."

The magic of the Beatles was the meaning we all found in just such irrelevancies as that, rather than any music from this album to *Sergeant Pepper*. It was the code to a private, yet internationally shared, universe that could never be explained to any outsider *from generations on either side,* because it'd be like trying to tell a stranger about rock & roll. If that little bit of banter of John's means nothing to you — well, sorry, but you missed the Beatles. If, on the other hand, hearing him say it triggers vistas, then you and I have a secret we can share, a secret from all of the other people who have ever lived in human history, and that includes Jesus Christ.

Lester Bangs

The Beatles

The Beatles at the Hollywood Bowl

(Capitol)

I've been a functional hetero since puberty, but in fifth grade I kept a picture of Paul McCartney under my pillow. It was a garish color photo clipped out of a fanzine, and I regularly kissed it goodnight. In the most lavish compliment ever proffered, my friend Wendy from P.S. 6 assured me that I looked like Paul. I spent hours in front of the mirror practicing Paul's stiff-upper-lip grin and quizzical right eye-brow. My father told my mother: "He's going to have to start training his hair soon." I never did. The first time I heard "I Want to Hold Your Hand" was under the covers in my sister's bed. See, we shared one cheap transistor radio.

Sightseeing in London, I kept an eye peeled for the famous moptops. On returning to the States, I told my new friends that I was British. Some still believe this. Although I didn't know the term "cover version" then, there were too many of them on *The Beatles' Second Album*. I didn't understand the pun in the title, *In His Own Write*. I thought that Paul should have had a bigger role in *A Hard Day's Night*. Bigger than Ringo's, at least.

When I tried to buy *Something New*, the record dealer sold me the Merseybeat Strings. I remember the Vox amps on the sleeve of the "I Feel Fine" single. I remember strumming "Help!" on the guitar in the key of G and being stumped by the second chord (after G). It turned out to be B minor. I remember how Ed Sullivan always saved the Beatles for the last five minutes.

A girl on the subway said that *Rubber Soul* was a collection of the Beatles "soul" songs. I didn't know what "soul" was then. In the cover photo, the Beatles had matured and grown their hair. John's did a little flip. I didn't yet know the word "dissolute."

The clerk who sold me "Paperback Writer" smirkingly suggested that the Beatles "could fart and sell a million copies." I steamed off my *Yesterday . . . and Today* cover and found soggy cardboard. Someone said that a Yellow Submarine was a barbiturate capsule. I played "She Said She Said" for the rest of August until school started. I played "Eleanor Rigby" for my mother. A kid convinced me that John was singing, "Baby, you're a rich, fat Jew." Murray the K read lyrics to Sergeant Pepper over the radio, and my father objected: "That's not poetry." I thought "Hey Jude" was "Hey Jew."

Allison Steele premiered the White Album two long weeks before its release, and Eric taped it off his father's KLH. We learned how to play "Blackbird." I put on "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da" and circled around the livingroom rug until I'd worked up the nerve to call Debbi for a date. She wasn't home. I snuck into a once-in-lifetime screening of *Magical Mystery Tour* at Columbia University. Paul was really barefoot on *Abbey Road*. Goodnight, Paul.

Let It Be was a drag, especially "I Me Mine." When I took purple double-dome acid, the Beatles failed to materialize. There was a story in *The New Yorker* about a young, unglued marriage. The story was called "The Girl Who Sang with the Beatles." I never believed that the Beatles would reunite. I didn't care about the *Ringo* record that supposedly reunited them.

Because, all along, it had never been the Beatles whom I'd loved, it was the Nurk Twins. The Nurk Twins were sheer magic.

Wesley Strick

The Beatles

The Beatles at the Hollywood Bowl

(Capitol)

The screaming I didn't need to hear documented, because I heard it then. Some people remember shaking hands with Roosevelt or hearing the Kaiser fart, but in the late summer of 1964, I was gripping a low chain-link fence that ran along the turf at Suffolk Downs race track in Boston. And I was listening to those screams in living duodecaphonic sound.

And right there, across the turf, behind another fence, and high atop a platform in the infield, were the Beatles. They kicked about the stage with evident ardor, mouths open and hands strumming, but the mammouth PAs that flanked them produced very few noises louder than the endlessly rewinding peals that rose from the little sirens packed around me. I think that the end of the band's six-tiered wail on "Twist and Shout" was the first and last music I heard.

Pressed to the fence at the epicenter of the available sight lines (a post I had gained by getting there well before lead-in act Bobby Hebb appeared), I kept waiting to be crushed into Gainesburgers. But those same screaming girls (most boys maintained a Fonzian aloofness) formed a human accordion that spread the crowd's surges outward.

There were six mounted policemen patrolling the turf moat that lay between us and the Beatles. But a man—or at least a driven, stringy 16-year-old with an aluminum comb in his pocket—can outrace a horse in a short stretch, and one guy made his move when all of the horses were involved in a bizarre game of tag with people who had already hopped the fence. This guy skinned across the track, veered past a mount that pounded down on him, and jumped over a fence and two cops to crab-claw onto the stage. Totally winded, he bumbled through the band, laying hands on each, and gave himself up to a brusque collaring. The Beatles, in their dippy velveteen-trimmed suits, just kept rocking.

So this is what they played, huh? Very nice. I've always found John Lennon to be the most ballsy and believable Beatle, and his little sardonic inflections, when he speaks into the howl at the Bowl, show the kind of pained awareness that made him a specimen conscience for an era. Paul McCartney's bass playing and crooning, George Harrison's lead guitar work, and most of the harmonies are amazingly adept.

Still, after listening twice to a new import *(The Beatles Live at the Star Club, 1962)* I wonder if the German record isn't more interesting than *The Beatles at the Hollywood Bowl*. The sound on the import is awful, the band's playing shaky and busy, but as the boys whoop it up in that Hamburg cave, one has an itchy suffocating feeling of vertigo. What they're about to tumble into! If the Hollywood Bowl recording encapsulates the exuberance of puberty, the Star Club LP captures its dazzle and melodrama. Both of these albums show how it was—and how it could never be again. And they offer final proof that the idea of a Beatles reunion is just some swinish promoter's folly.

Fred Schruers

The Beatles

The Beatles at the Hollywood Bowl

(Capitol)

When all is said and done, *The Beatles at the Hollywood Bowl* might be a great record without ever having been a good one. Or vice versa. If it does nothing else, it reaffirms the primal powers of passion, simplicity, and wonder —qualities which are usually lost during the inevitable and necessary growth of individuals and genres.

But there's nothing like first love, is there?

We were all Jay Gatsbys then, but, although risks were taken, *everything worked*. You and Daisy were a three-chord rock & roll song to which nothing could be added; no improvements were possible. On this album, "Dizzy Miss Lizzie" is like that: as real and as perfect as the past.

And just as unattainable? Oh, I doubt that. Not unless we manage to dismiss every bit of magic that we've ever been given. I don't think that's possible in rock & roll. We're not that dumb yet, are we? Silly maybe—but there's quite a difference.

Paul Nelson

Be Bop Deluxe

Modern Music

(Harvest)

Guitarist-songwriter Bill Nelson pulls out all the stops for this Be Bop Deluxe album in the grandiose tradition of British art-rockers from Pink Floyd to King Crimson. The lush, *Abbey Road* production texture, doctored guitar filigrees, and swooningly metaphysical poesy are all part of a familiar program—and done with considerable expertise. Nelson is certainly talented enough, and while the self-conscious histrionics of his lyrics suffer an ambitious demise somewhere between Keith Reid and David Bowie, his guitar playing and musical strengths are formidable. "Orphans of Babylon" and "Kiss of Light" are hooked around beautiful melodies, and "Bring Back the Spark" is an excellent rocker with Nelson flashing those loping, sinewy electric leads that are fast becoming his trademark.

"Modern Music" frames a suite that takes up most of Side Two with a progression worthy of the Beatles' crowning moment in the studio, climaxing with Nelson's post-bop interpretation of *West Side Story*, "Dance of the Uncle Sam Humanoids." Then, after a rigorous "Down on Terminal Street," the LP closes with the contemplative "Make the Music Magic"—which is exactly what Be Bop Deluxe does.

John Swenson

Bee Gees

Here at Last . . . Bee Gees . . . Live

(RSO)

Andy Gibb

Flowing Rivers

(RSO)

Memory Lane can be a pretty depressing place—I don't want to hear Grace Slick drunkenly warble "The human race doesn't mean shit to a tree" 10 years from now at Caesar's

Palace. Yet the Bee Gees zip down ML with an affectionate sincerity on this live two-record set, which contains all of their hits since the eloquent 1967 sob-along, "New York Mining Disaster 1941." Like the Hollies, the Brothers Gibb (Barry, Robin, and Maurice) don't so much recall the past as relive it—a crucial difference. "To Love Somebody," "Massachusetts," and "Holiday"—parts of a side-long medley—sound as fresh and vital as the studio originals. These Australian boys have always been the kings of wholesome, romantic schmaltz, and it's comforting to know that their vocals—nasal, breathy, harmonious, soulful—can still rise above such lyrics as "Now I've found/That the world is round."

Aside from confirming their importance as a singles band, *Here at Last . . . Bee Gees . . . Live,* recorded last year at the Forum in Los Angeles, underlines the group's flexibility. Given keen musical support by guitarist Alan Kendall, two keyboardists, and a sixpiece horn section, the Bee Gees move comfortably from their early pop-rock to the disco pledges and R&B balladry which sparked their revival in the summer of 1975. A few problems crop up, though: the audience obnoxiously and continuously cream their jeans, "You Should Be Dancing" drags a bit, and two songs from *Main Course* ("Nights on Broadway" and "Edge of the Universe") suffer without the textural beauty of that Arif Mardin-produced LP. But the band's vivacious professionalism obscures most of the flaws. As a live album, *Here at Last . . . Bee Gees . . . Live* holds up surprisingly well and justifies the Bee Gees' continuance as a pop institution (even if their recent output isn't as memorable as their old stuff).

Hate to say it, but this likeability doesn't run in the family. Barry, Robin, and Maurice's younger brother, Andy, might look like a teen dream on the back cover—Bobby Sherman teeth, wet bangs, exposed hairy chest—but his debut LP, *Flowing Rivers*, is limp, featherweight pop. Unlike fellow popsters Leo Sayer, Andrew Gold, and, ah, the Bee Gees, Andy Gibb's voice isn't resonant enough, emotionally or technically, to make his innocent lyrics credible. Only "Too Many Looks in Your Eyes," a song whose instantly catchy melody and sweet harmonies make me suspend my disbelief, suggests that the youngster could develop into a respectable Top-40 contender.

Perhaps things might not have been so bland if brother/executive producer Barry had performed one of those Richard Perry cosmetic jobs. Anyway, *Flowing Rivers* is definitely recommended for those who believe in the power of placebos.

Mitchell Schneider

Dickey Betts

Dickey Betts & Great Southern

(Arista)

The soul and spirit of the original Allman Brothers Band are alive and well, living in this album. The dual lead-guitar lines of Duane Allman and Dickey Betts were one of the main ingredients of the Allman sound, and that sound is revived here. Great Southern, Betts' new band, even has the same instrumentation: two drummers, keyboards, bass, and two lead guitars. Led by Betts' melodically driving guitar playing, this group reminds you that Duane didn't do it all in those glorious days of yore when the excitement, power, and density of the Allman Brothers were legend.

The no-bullshit, straight-ahead groove of Great Southern is captured in the opening riff of "Out to Get Me." Betts is on slide guitar here, sweetly biting. Guest harpman Topper Price gets in some nice licks, while Betts and guitarist Dangerous Dan Toler add occasional harmony fills.

"Run Gypsy Run" could easily be a single. It's got the necessary infectious riff, smoking guitar work, and a catchy chorus. A song about the road, of course, with an especially poignant verse about the ladies you may meet: "The one that holds you tight is different every night/And in the heat of love you can't even remember her name." There's a sense of urgency in this song, and Betts' generally laconic voice has just the right touch of being driven, in more ways than one.

"The Way Love Goes" is a quietly bitter song of experience: "Is that the way love goes?/The storm is over and there's nothing left to say." A song filled with melancholy and resignation which never quite conceals the pain of loss when love does not work.

Another singles contender is the bouncy "Nothing You Can Do." Mickey Thomas provides some excellent harmony vocals.

Although Betts was being considered for the title role in a movie about Singing Brakeman Jimmie Rodgers, "California Blues" isn't the Rodgers tune. Instead, it's an uptempo lament about getting the hell out of Los Angeles. Again, nice slide work here.

The longest track is "Bougainvillea," a slow, floating love ballad that evokes a small-town summertime feel. Lots of sunlight and drifting shadows here. This is the only song on the album with an extended instrumental section. It goes through several changes in intensity and rhythm, stroking several moods.

Perhaps no really new ground is broken on this LP, but it's nice to hear some welcome older elements return in new guises. Dickey Betts brings lyricism and mellowness to the often burning intensity of his band's rhythmic feel; the balance between driving and dreaming is nicely kept. There is also some tough and soaring rock & roll. It'll be interesting to see what track Great Southern rides down next.

Tony Glover

Billion Dollar Babies

Battle Axe

(Polydor)

For anyone who hasn't been enthralled with Alice Cooper's recent excursions into the realm of Bette Midler-style production, may we humbly present Billion Dollar Babies, a fairly lobotomized crew of demento rockers composed of former Cooper cronies and a few new faces. Back for a stab at rock fame are Alice alumni Dennis Dunaway, Michael Bruce, and Neal Smith who, together with Bob Dolin and Mike Marconi, succeed in recreating the frenzied rock & roll sound, if not the manic thrust, of classic Alice Cooper.

Michael Bruce's slam-bang rhythm-guitar chords at one time *defined* the style of Cooper past. His work on early Alice albums was as synonymous with the hard-charging, crazy music as was Cooper's deranged singing. On Billion Dollar Babies' debut disc, Bruce and his buddies resurrect that mind-numbing noise in a big way, picking up where Alice left off before disbanding his troupe a few years ago.

"Too Young" is the logical answer to "I'm Eighteen," with the Babies whining, "I'm X-rated, jail-baited," over a barrage of power chords. Lyrically, the song matches its predecessor in every way, presenting another fistful of teenage trauma with a back beat you can't ignore: "Even if I'm dressed up/My folks think I'm messed up/They don't know me/They don't even try." Take that, Dear Abby!

"Rock 'n' Roll Radio" is pretty perverse as well, paying a sledge-hammer tribute to the world of AM shlock ("It's the number-one record all over the nation/It's bigger than King Kong"), and "Shine Your Love" offers an insightful look into leaden rock hookdom.

In the midst of their metallic assault on your eardrums, Babies take time to dispel the nasty rumor that the reason for the parting of the ways with Cooper was that they couldn't play their instruments well enough to keep pace with his stardom. "Ego Mania," a torrid instrumental, blasts that theory to smithereens, as do some of the more inventive portions of "Battle Axe,' a tale of musical massacre in a game of rock rollerball that should please even the most die-hard Alice Cooper fan.

In fact, the only side of the booming Babies that might displease old Alice addicts is their lyrical outlook on life, which is, by anyone's standards, pretty normal. About a third of the album finds the guys singing about ordinary, run-of-the-mill romances ("I Miss You," "Rock Me Slowly," "Dance With Me") or even ordinary, run-of-the-mill near-romances. ("Love Is Rather Blind"). Aside from this distressingly calm twinge, Billion Dollar Babies' first LP is a pretty enjoyable jump into neuron-blown nirvana.

So, while Alice is crooning a tune in his new detective garb, any of his fans who feel left out might give a listen to *Battle Axe*. It's nothing new. It even smacks of face-lifting. But, hell, any band that would even consider a rock & roll version of rollerball has to be taken seriously.

Ed Naha

Blue Oyster Cult

Spectres

(Columbia)

The Blue Oyster Cult continue to nurture the carefully accreted, dense-but-hook-filled rock that they introduced on last year's *Agents of Fortune*. On *Spectres,* there are two first-rate ballads, "Goin' Through the Motions" and "Death Valley Nights," and part of their excellence derives from the spiky humor that is inserted whenever these guys seem to sense that they're getting soft.

But the most straightforward rave-up, "R.U. Ready 2 Rock," is a tedious bit of contempt that suggests that the band and their long-time producers, Murray Krugman and Sandy Pearlman (this time assisted by David Lucas as well), are already getting cocky about their new-found accessibility.

The big winner on *Spectres* is Allen Lanier's gloriously rushed and witty "Searchin' for Celine," in which Celine is Allen's baby, and she's . . . y'know *lost*. Lanier's juggling of the passionate and the obscure gets better each time. He wrote "True Confessions," *Agents of Fortune's* best song, and one wishes that he wrote more, but "Searchin' For Celine" is his only contribution here. The rest of *Spectres* is extremely proficient but finally unexciting. The commercial breakthrough of *Agents of Fortune* apparently hasn't provoked any further inspirations.

Ken Tucker

David Bowie

Low

(RCA)

The original title was *New Songs for Night and Day*, which approximates David Bowie's formalistic intentions for *Low*. There is no title I can think of that would describe the lyrical content accurately. *Low* is neatly halved: Side One is seven fragmentary short songs; Side Two is mostly instrumental and somewhat arbitrarily broken into four songs.

This record is comprised of atmospherics—musical pieces which create an environment of sound rather than image. That is, the songs produce a definite "feel." The tendency will be to dismiss the LP as background music, to accuse Bowie of a short-sighted attempt at pop ambiance. But ambiance better describes the overall effect a barroom has on it's drinkers.

Low deals heavily in aural metaphors. Sounds bring images to mind more than the lyrics do. "Always Crashing in the Same Car" has a smooth, rainy-nighttime feel, more evocative than explicit. Ricky Gardener's guitar makes travelling music and Eno, on "guitar treatments" and synthesizer, has a knack for saying something well without words.

Eno, of course, is the clue left out. He appears through the courteous concurrence of art and outer space, and without him, this wouldn't be a record at all. On nearly all of the cuts, his polished anti-lyrical musical sense pervades the LP's contents. Eno is the master of background sound; Bowie the supreme pos-

tulator of the mundane—*and* arranger of good rock & roll. Together they've invented futuristic work songs and busy music.

Most of Side Two is easy-listening space music, ideal for working conditions here on Earth and probably elsewhere. Although practically without words, the songs do not lack a language. "Weeping Wall" is full of visual feedback, sounds that bump and turn, noises which seem to have a physical direction and creep along the wall. Alfred Bester wrote a science-fiction novel called *The Stars My Destination* in which people could suffer a scrambling of senses. Colors were felt (red objects were too hot to touch); sound was a visual explosion (too bright to see without pain). Effects couldn't be calculated, and little words had big meanings. Although I don't contend that Bowie has traded similarly, many elements are switched. Words are minor sounds. Clangs and sax notes seem to have dire proportions.

"Warszawa" and "Subterraneans" are probably excellent soundtrack to a fictional documentary, *Daily Life on Mars* (?), beginning with man's first tentative steps on land and concluding with a coda to the benign neglect of space. "Subterraneans" ends Side Two. Its most profound emission is a phased series of colossally soft heart beat sounds.

Lyrics like *Low*'s can't be counted on to carry much weight. "Sound and Vision" repeats the lines, "Waiting for sound and vision/Don't you wonder sometime about sound and vision," confined to a nearly cha-cha rhythm and a clear melody. What is strikingly noticeable is a constant, intermittent "psssssssh . . . ," a radiator breath sighing against a soft " do do do do do . . . . " My instinct is to categorize the song as contemplative—a kind of at-home dance song. It's also one of the best-sung songs on the album.

Side One has most of the lyrics. Fragments of stories and states of mind slip around crinkly sharp rock & roll. "Speed of Life," the instrumental intro that opens the record, is punchy and mechanical and sounds as if Bowie is about to break in with words.

Frankly, much of the music has a very familiar ring, like Sixties British rock and bits of stiffened phases of Bowie. The *Station to Station* band has been retained, although Ricky Gardener has replaced Earl Slick, and Bowie blows a meek sax. The words are often irrelevant and nonsensical or at least linearly unusable. "What in the World" is a progressive show tune, with Iggy Pop joining Bowie on vocals: " . . . Wait until the crowd goes . . . you never leave your room . . . deep inside of me . . . what in the world can I do . . . looking through the gloom . . . for your love . . . for your love . . . . " Vaguely disco, nearly coherent, you can almost dance to it. Like most of the cuts, it's an attempt at a working definition of minimalism—developing a structure that requires little and imposes even less. Mostly, it implies and reflects. All of the songs make me think, although not necessarily about what the artist is saying.

In that sense, Bowie has created work songs in a fairly traditional manner. Simple lyrics which gain energy through their repetition of a single image or message are useful motivational instruments. Organize your life around steady, solid, mono-directional musical pieces. Vacuum your floors flawlessly to any of the first seven songs. Read books and write letters while listening to Side Two or write your own lyrics.

David Bowie has never been a fool. He always seems to know in which direction the world turns. When we needed Ziggy Stardust, he was around. When the world called for Disco Springsteen, *Young Americans* emerged. Throughout his career, Bowie has invented vehicles for himself and restated his themes with an admirable display of variety and wit. If this record is a little dull, I think it's because the artist has made a serious attempt at common art. But, unlike Eno (whose work suffers from soulless aridity), Bowie is a rock & roller whose soul pulses throughout his work. And not since his earliest years has he been so experimental.

Bowie is often called schizophrenic because of his many cultural/pop changes of image and persuasion. But really, Space Control to Major Tom is as dominant now as ever, just revised to suit the present. *Low* is another state of *now*. "Always Crashing in the Same Car" is as it reads. No matter what the variety of experience or differences in time or place, Bowie's always crashing in the same car. Although his outer appearances change and differ, his ego appears intact. Bowie is calculated and endurable. His ability to synthesize material and trends and create a fitting context is remarkable, and *Low* is no exception to the rule.

(This album's John Lennon reference may be found in "Breaking Glass," the shortest song. It bears a strong resemblance to the wonderful raver, "Meat City.")

Robert Smith

David Bowie

"Heroes"

(RCA Victor)

You have to remember that David Bowie is essentially an actor by trade and temperament. (That's why the title is in quotes: because it's his role this week. Also, because it's ironic.) As an actor, Bowie can emote and project a mile a minute, but he needs someone else to provide him with a screenplay. In that respect, his collaboration with Eno, splendid though it has been, seems querulous in execution. Neither of them really calls the shots; they just swap strategies back and forth until they've assembled a piece of music. Which, usually, comes out more like a piece of pie than an *objet d'art*—that's the nature of the process.

It seems that Bowie's interest in heroes is intended solely to cut them down. I've often felt that his purpose was to destroy the validity of celebrity, to illustrate rigorously that stars deserve no more adulation than does the man on the street. "Fame" was a two-pronged attack: not only did the lyrics warn of the dangers of glamour, but, placed in an album of anonymous funk, they exposed utter cheapness on all levels. Don't respect me, Bowie seemed to be saying, when you could do this just as well.

But his faded "heroes" here suffer worse, because he has grown much more acerbic. "Sons of the Silent Age" converts the ingratiating schlockmeister sound of the Beatles—Lennon and McCartney in alternate verses—into musical sandpaper. "Joe the Lion" illustrates the cancerous growth of the senseless violence and nihilism of Mott the Hoople and their countless bastard offspring of the grotesque New Wave. The "heroes" of the title track are all of rock's romancers, from Phil Spector to Bryan Ferry, who've provided Bowie with so many roles in the past, but bore him now.

If this is the first time that I've really been conscious of David Bowie as an assault, maybe it's because his arsenal is so much more impressive than it used to be. He's now mastered the messy production with which he lathered the Iggy Pop albums (both of which were recorded after *Low*), and he can deploy it Zappa-like in songs such as "Beauty and the Beast." He makes the most of his mechanical sidemen (Carlos Alomar particularly) as his very own rhythm machine. His elite corps, Eno and Robert Fripp, infiltrate any enemy terrain and break down all resistance. Bowie's always admired strategy, but now he's mastered it.

"Heroes" might not break as much new ground as *Low*, but it should stick with you longer. If he heads much further in this direction, Bowie's next role will be the grim reaper of the avant-garde.

Michael Bloom

Jackson Browne

The Pretender

(Asylum)

Three people haunt almost every word and note of Jackson Browne's *The Pretender*: his wife, Phyllis, who committed suicide last spring; his three-year-old son, Ethan; and his father, Clyde, who left his family when Browne was a child. In one sense, *The Pretender* can be seen as Browne's attempt to come to terms with his own family—a family shattered by death and separation, renewed by the birth of his son. "Daddy's Tune" and "The Only Child" are for his father and son. "Here Come Those Tears Again," written with his mother-in-law, and "Linda Paloma" are clearly intended for Phyllis. But it would be a mistake to view the album as functioning solely as autobiography. That assumption can only lead to the worst kind of psychological speculation. (Is "Your Bright Baby Blues," most of which was written five years ago, about Phyllis?) Moreover, such perspective limits the album's scope and undercuts its accomplishment. Instead of being about Phyllis and Ethan, *The Pretender* is about death and birth, about understanding the past and claiming the future—mostly, it's about redefining romanticism in the face of disillusionment and tragedy.

The romantic tradition in America has taken many forms. Its most popular 20th-century genres, the tough-guy novel and the Western, produced the detective and the cowboy as its primary heroes. The two come together under the guise of the outsider: the person who lives by his own moral and professional code, who, in rejecting the prevailing standards is condemned to live in solitude, yet is driven in his search for absolutes (be it truth or love). Browne has taken those ideas and applied them to post-World War II America. He wants it all—the independence of a loner and the comfort of a shared life; the freedom of existing on society's periphery and the security of working within it. Browne is, at once, a romantic and a cynic, an optimist and a skeptic. It is the tragedy of his search—a tragedy that Browne recognizes—that those impulses will never be resolved. At best, they will be kept in balance. *The Pretender* can be seen, then, as cyclical (and, therefore, never ending) internal dialogue between all these forces. The final irony of *The Pretender* is that it is even ambivalent about its own ambivalence—for Browne also understands that seeing two sides can be both an act of courage and an act of cowardice.

Browne's duality powers this album. Like a series of Chinese boxes, each song reveals another of Browne's obsessions. "The Only Child" is surely directed toward his son, but it also concerns Browne's own separation from his father and wife. ("They're just looking for another/Lonely child.") Conversely, while "Daddy's Tune" is a song of reconciliation with his father, it could just as well express Ethan's feelings years from now. ("Daddy what was I supposed to do?") In "Your Bright Baby Blues," Browne is speaking of himself as well as his lover when he sings, "You watch yourself from the sidelines/Like your life is a game you don't mind playing." More importantly, "The Fuse" (the opening song) and "The Pretender" (the closing cut) can be seen as flip sides of one another. In the first, Browne foresees a world that can change its course of insanity; in the second, he is content to be a "happy idiot." As Browne continues to see himself and the world in apocalyptic terms (the logical result of searching for absolutes), his songs have taken on a religious tone. He doesn't condemn The Pretender, but asks us to say a prayer for him.

The Pretender is not the culmination, but an extension of Browne's previous work. Almost every song has a counterpart in the earlier albums. The title cut, the most important and ambitious song on the LP, belongs in the line of "Rock Me on the Water," "For Everyman," and "After the Deluge," all of which stake out Browne's position in relation to society. Each declares his defiance of categorization and grand schemes. Rather, his is a search for solace within himself or with those around him—whether in "the kindness of my baby's eye" or "the light in your lover's eyes." Per-

haps for Browne, the search itself provides its own solace.

What makes *The Pretender* Browne's best album is that not only has he focused his vision, but for the first time, he is in complete command of the music. While the LP offers nothing as transcendent as David Lindley's fiddle break during "For a Dancer," the production is sturdy and confident. Producer Jon Landau brings his knowledge of R&B to the fore. The drums punch, the solos are concise, and the mix is crisp. Nor does Browne's extraordinary ear for melody fail him. The title tune has all the majesty of a classic anthem. Browne also experiments with form. "Here Come Those Tears Again" moves like an R&B ballad; "Linda Paloma" is set as a Mexican love song. Unlike previous albums, *The Pretender* is not burdened with obvious dross such as "Take It Easy" and "Red Neck Friend." Even Browne's singing has an assurance and expressiveness absent in his earlier work. What Landau has accomplished is to throw Browne's lyrical ideas into musical relief and to extend his stylistic range beyond the limiting confines of Southern California rock.

Critic Janet Maslin once wrote that Browne "is a purebred '70s intelligence . . . the first singer and songwriter to recognize that the battles Dylan fought are either over or too ambivalent." She was right. Browne is a purebred '70s intelligence. But she was also wrong. He is fighting those battles everyday. We all are.

Kit Rachlis

Eric Carmen

Boats Against the Current

(Arista)

Eric Carmen takes such a feverish and ambitious plunge into the steamy waters of romanticism with *Boats Against the Current* that I can't help but regard the album with both critical embarrassment and a certain sense of respect and awe. After all, how many contemporary rock & roll artists would challenge F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (the last line of that American classic is: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past") and expect no less than a draw? Maybe Elliott Murphy, but he hasn't done it yet.

Since it's right there in the LP's title, it's hard not to make too much of the *Gatsby* comparison. The second-to-the-last paragraph of Fitzgerald's masterpiece reads:

> "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eludes us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther . . . And one fine morning—"

These are the first four lines of the chorus of "Boats Against the Current": "But tomorrow/ We'll run a little bit faster/Tomorrow/We're gonna find what we're after at last." And so on.

Not to run an analogy into the ground, but the first line of the album's second song, "Marathon Man," is "Twenty years with my brain in a book." Small doubt as to what book. "Nowhere to Hide," "Love Is All That Matters," and "Run Away"—three songs held together by the hero's haunted remembrance of a girl at a high school dance—set up Carmen's Daisy Buchanan, about whom he muses: "Can the future be foretold/In a faded photograph" . . . "Prisoner of illusion" . . . "I recall the desperate vow I made/I must find a way somehow to win her heart."

Both Carmen and Gatsby need to earn money to win high society's rich and golden girl; Gatsby gets his by becoming a sort of gangster, Carmen by being a rock & roll star ("Marathon Man")—a neat parallel. In the end, both pay the full price for living with one dream too long, but Gatsby—and this is the crucial difference—has moved from experience to innocence, while Carmen apparently goes either the opposite way or both ways at once, somehow lacking that beautiful but ominous zeal to strive on toward impossible perfection. Maybe.

One could go on and on with this. The important thing is, does Eric Carmen make it work? Well, yes and no—mostly no. Fortunately or unfortunately, Carmen has more—or less—on his mind than recreating Scott Fitzgerald in song, so the album is an uneven mixture of themes and styles. It starts out strongly—"Boats Against the Current" is clearly the best song that Carmen has ever written—but soon meanders into a curious tribute to/imitation of Rod Stewart and the Faces ("Take It or Leave It") and some stray quotes from the Beach Boys ("She Did It"). While I find the Stewart take-off/rip-off both uncanny and affectionate, others have called it either too canny or just plain pointless, and I can see what they mean. More seriously, except for the title track, "Marathon Man," and "Take It or Leave It," most of the songs here are totally forgettable.

Stylistically, Carmen sets his cyclical tale of hope and despair against a hothouse background of soaring strings, Rachmaninoff piano, blasting drums, and singing so overwrought and emotional that the whole record seems to be covered with a lush sweat. Since he wrote, arranged, and produced the LP practically all by himself, Carmen must take the blame for the swollen melodrama and sobbing sameness of sound that hammers incessantly at the listener's attention span and threatens to sink far more than *Boats Against the Current*. Fitzgerald's romanticism was every bit as hot as Carmen's, but it was also precise and controlled, not maudlin, mushy, and racing toward operatic oblivion.

I don't know why I like Eric Carmen, but I do. Those who rap him for leaving the rock & roll of the Raspberries for the rock/pop MOR of his solo albums somehow miss the point, I think. With Carmen, the question isn't the Raspberries, it's Barry Manilow. If the Seventies are the age of the bland hero (Peter Frampton is a perfect example), Carmen is at least as interesting an MOR outlaw as were the Raspberries rock & roll revolutionaries. Someone who writes, "Well I guess I have to laugh/Sippin' on a scotch and soda/A shadow in the corner booth /So philosophic and drunk on grown-up truth," can't be all bad.

It's true that Carmen sometimes indulges in too much exhaustive and exhausting self-analysis (Gatsby's love object wasn't, after all, himself), but so what if part of his story is that he can't wait to make it and then tell us all that the fantasy was more glamorous? Who hasn't told us that by now? It's practically the story of our lives. In its own way, *Boats Against the Current* somewhat effectively retells the tale of another Middle American, F. Scott Fitzgerald, about whom was written: "He stood outside the ballroom, a little Midwestern boy, with his nose to the glass, wondering how much the tickets cost and who paid for the music."

Look at the cover photograph of Eric Carmen. That says it all.

Paul Nelson

The Cate Brothers

In One Eye and Out the Other

(Asylum)

While they merely flirted with R&B on their sleeper debut album, the Cate Brothers here start embracing it with full force. Their saving grace is the fact that they don't fall blindly into a full-scale infatuation with funk, which is why they are Cates and not Breckers.

"In One Eye and Out the Other" is surely this LP's single shot ala "Union Man," but it transcends the soul-shout chorus on Ernie Cate's vocal bridges, which are gritty slices of the hickory-bark sound they defined on the first record. "Can't Stop" and "Give It All to You" remind one strongly of Al Green, including the fact that both songs possess all the class of Green at his best.

Perhaps surprisingly, the Cate Brothers also harken up images of the Band. Sly rockabilly guitar, clockwork rhythm, and rough vocals which flow like cream are elements both groups share, but the comparison should not be pushed too far. The Cates may be coming from the same direction, but their vision of where they are going is decidedly different.

What the Cate Brothers have achieved is first-class, authentic American rock & roll with a ton of soul to boot. Their rough grain gives them a credibility as hearty rockers that many other white soul emulators (Orleans, say), lack, and their technical veneer serves only to enhance their natural qualities. Add to that their ability to create songs that are both original and appealing, and the resulet is one of the better new bands to emerge in the past year or so.

Rob Patterson

Chicago

Chicago XI

(Columbia)

For guys who once sang about revolution, they've accommodated quite nicely. Chicago are, first of all, a business: nearly a dozen publishing firms, real estate, studio investments, lawyers, stock portfolios—and an album every nine months or so.

Eight fat-cat capitalists strum, beat, and blow into the corporate microphones. It has been over a decade since those feverish lab jams at Roosevent and DePaul Universities. Yet even while the last drop of inspiration is fast becoming a matter of ancient history, Chicago have, if only through their innocuous sense of test-tube formality, created some new songs that are mildly interesting.

"Policeman" is kind of cute. Describing an aging cop who lives with his cat and nobody else (and who puts his life on the line every day to boot), keyboardist Robert Lamm has done as good a job of police PR as anyone since the clowns on *Adam-12*. All of this from a man who endorsed the 1968 street demonstrations in his home city, and who had something considerably different to say about the police then.

Lamm's jaded politics do surface, however. "Vote for Me" lambasts Presidents who don't keep their promises. The song has some well-turned phrases, but, once again, for the umpteenth time, there's no goddamn *playing*. Little four-bar, marching-band Sousaisms and garage-quartet-variety, Terry Kath guitar rides, yes, but nothing of any chops-proving substance. Indeed, except for the surrealistic and string-laden "The Inner Struggles of a Man," just about everything musical on *Chicago XI* is immediately forgettable.

Russell Shaw

Eric Clapton

Slowhand

(RSO)

Just when we'd nearly been *Layla*'d to death by that great album, Eric Clapton spared us and became the white Bob Marley. And when we'd been beaten blue with armchair reggae, Clapton switched styles again and persuaded Bob Dylan and various members of the Band to back him. What, we wondered, could come next?

The title of what's come next, *Slowhand,* hints at encores of Yardbirds songs and seems to promise a Clapton reading of the Otis Rush glossary of licks. The actual LP presents no such throwback. *Slowhand* reeks of Southern marshes, magnolias, and J.J. Cale 8-tracks jutting from dusty dashboard decks. Eric Clapton has become a romantic, a veritable Swamp Fox of would-be Southern rockers.

To play this new role, Clapton has jettisoned Dylan and the Band, returned to England, and reinstated the group which helped him on the Miami-based *There's One in Every Crowd*. His guitar playing and vocals on the new record are strong—he's obviously been practicing. But Yvonne Elliman and Marcy Levy's frequent harmony singing sounds too languid and perhaps too melodic for this kind of album. When the band rocks out with "Mean Old Frisco," these ladies have to sing with some power and forget the post-debutante, don't-I-look-cute-on-the-sleeve nonsense. The people in this chorus don't sound like blues singers, they sound like party-goers—and the only Delta that they know is an airline.

Between drinks, though, the musicians underscore Clapton's endless folk boogie so well that several tracks are worth more than a casual listen. Although *Slowhand* successfully mixes originals and cover versions, the two new songs really stand out. "The Core" boasts some real cry-of-the-banshee organ lines from the deft hands of Dick Sims, while "Peaches and Diesel" is a fluid Dominos-styled instrumental that pours evenly from overdubbed guitars. Both of these songs are played with an engaging brand of offhand precision.

Clapton's immortality quotient may rally and dip from year to year. But, with *Slowhand*, he has begun to settle into a complete musical personality by greatly reducing his round-robin dabbling. His new profile may not dazzle the public with its originality, but it's ideally suited to the diminishing intensity of Seventies rock. The mint-julep uniformity of *Slowhand*, if maintained against further temptations to change styles once again, might just manage to turn the legend of Eric Clapton into something filled with the fresh breath of new life.

Richard Hogan

Alice Cooper

Lace and Whiskey

(Warner Bros.)

What's green, red, and moaning in the corner? Alice Cooper eating razor blades.

That's, of course, a reworking of a dead-baby joke, once the source of Alice Cooper's joyfully repellent visions. Yeah, Alice was a guy you really could relate to. The type who'd order a side of MSG in a health-food restaurant, or walk into a Pathmark and head straight for the pantyhose. Alice single-handedly changed social values, too. Like I now can walk through my neighborhood with smeared mascara, cha-cha heels, and a rattlesnake entwined around my hairy legs without getting mauled by the North Bronx greasers—all aspiring Rockys who, I remember, lined up enthusiastically for Alice's shows at Madison Square Garden.

To some, Alice was unredeemingly silly, but what the hell, I knew better. His silliness was steered by conviction, fanatical excess, and sheer audacity. Okay, kids, out of the straitjackets and into the streets. "School's Out" and "Elected"—the most driven anthems of nonsense ever to hit the Top 40—were Alvin & the Chipmunks in the back of the bus sniffin' glue, and they sounded just great. All right, so maybe *Welcome to My Nightmare* as a television special rotted (trying to capture Alice on a Magnavox was like trying to squeeze an iguana into a jar), but the LP's catchy hymns of abandon ("Escape"), necrophilia ("Cold Ethyl"), and fascism ("Department of Youth") were hilariously irresistable. Sort of like hearing farts from the back of the classroom.

Tumors, however, budded on *Alice Cooper Goes to Hell*—the overworked concept and altogether forgettable material suggested creative bankruptcy—and, unfortunately, they're fully grown on *Lace and Whiskey*. The best we could hope for was a Kunta Kinte parody. Early reports from Alice indicated that he was to portray a Forties detective, and, true, he does—in the album's packaging. But in the grooves, we find, among other unrelated things, a retraction from one of rock's heroes of dementia:

In all that music
I hate those lyrics . . .
and I swear to you
I never wrote that song.

Has to be a joke, I figured (these Sybil-inspired lyrics from the lushly produced MOR ballad, "I Never Wrote Those Songs"), despite what Cooper has been telling interviewers about his identity crisis with the character, "Alice." Yet *Lace and Whiskey* begs to be taken seriously, and, in fact, avoids Alice's comically macabre posturings. "My God" is his entry into the art-rock sweepstakes, complete with the California Boys' Choir and a Strawbs-type intro. "(No More) Love at Your Convenience," heftily decked out in *Roots* vocals, is Alice's first disco attempt. "King of the Silver Screen," clearly influenced by *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, evinces Cooper's fondness for campy nostalgia. And "You and Me," another slick MOR ballad apparently designed for the Barry Manilow/varicose-veins set, spells out Alice's earthiness: "You and me ain't no movie star/What we are is what we are." Of the three heavy-metal rockers, only one approaches Alice's runaway mania—"Road Rats" is double-fisted rock & roll, boosted by Steve Hunter and Dick Wagner's searing guitar work.

Lace and Whiskey rings false, not only because its ideas probably originated from Alice's urinary tract (too much beer, I suppose), but because its conservatism is unfeeling. Honest, you might as well listen to the bubbly Abba or, for that matter, a blissed-out Wayne Newton. Even Alice's snarls on "Road Rats" are cautious and reserved—he sounds less cool than out of it. And his parody of a Hollywood starlet ("King of the Silver Screen") is oddly limp.

There is also something very awkward about this record. It's probably the fact that Alice, who could care less, is badly upstaged by Bob Ezrin's extravagant (read, predictable) production and the session musicians he's played with since *Nightmare*. On "It's Hot Tonight," Cooper sings dispassionately beside rip-roaring chords and prowling rhythm, and "(No More) Love at Your Convenience" is carried entirely by the exuberant soul sisters. Finally, it hits you: Here's an album that Alice worked on between holes on the golf course.

As a pop-culture hero, Alice Cooper has decided—as David Bowie, Mick Jagger, Genghis Khan, and God did,—to conquer new territory. I wish him luck on his upcoming movies (*Sextette*, *Breakfast of Champions*), but I also wish that he'd stop wasting our time and his on vinyl. Alice used to be fun. He made the tacky and the disgusting, uh, *glamorous*. No Iggy Pop desperation. No David Bowie doomsday. Just fun. "*Lace and Whiskey* expands my style," Alice seems to be saying. Not true: this album only dilutes it.

Mitchell Schneider

Crosby, Stills & Nash

CSN

(Atlantic)

Since their formation eight years ago, Crosby, Stills & Nash have stood for two ideas: the fruition of utopian, communal ideals and the primacy of polished technique in the creation of art. The first concept was democratic, even communistic; the second turned into elitism at a certain point—an extreme which the group nearly always achieved. These concepts inevitably collided, which made for uneven results. (The band's results were even more uneven when Neil Young was a member, since Young's perspective was filled with isolationism to the point of anarchy. Young also made the best music, although it was the least polished: he had to go, of course.)

On *CSN*, elitism kicks communalism in the seat of the pants. These three guys are upper-middle-class professionals but they're also vulgarians, and kicking things in the pants and wearing T-shirts makes them feel at one with the people.

On their first album cover, the boys sat on a comfortably dusty porch—you felt as though you could walk right over and jaw with them a while. On the cover of *CSN*, they are sprawled out on an immaculate sailboat of some kind, and if you want to converse, you'd better be able to walk on a hell of a lot of water in order to climb aboard. Which is just what Crosby, Stills & Nash want: no visitors, unless you're somebody big, like them. Like, say, Christ. The Latter is indeed on the minds of at least two of these three: He is impugned on Nash's repulsive "Cathedral" (wherein a stoned Graham traces his narcissism along the walls of Winchester), and His name is either taken in vain or evoked in prayer on Stills' "I Give You Give Blind" (I don't understand the Christ usage; I don't understand the title).

At least one intention that Crosby, Stills & Nash had in making this LP has been realized: they have taken up precisely where their eight-year-old debut record left off. This intention, however well realized, is also the album's greatest flaw. The finished harmonies, the modest and predominantly acoustic instrumentation, the abstruse but achingly-felt lyrics (Crosby especially seems to feel that sincerity is nine-tenths of the art; it ain't, Dave)—all of this stuff was first popularized by Crosby, Stills & Nash, and the group appears confident that their original audience, plus a mass of virgins, will be receptive to their return. Whether that's true or not, *CSN* is an insular album, arrogant in its detachment.

Stills' songs are easily the LP's best. These songs, taken with the ones he wrote for the recent Stills-Young Band album, offer proof of his revitalization, at least as a writer. (But when I saw him on his solo acoustic tour some months ago, he was his usual rude, untidy self.) Stills' compositions on *CSN* have the most energy and drive, and they are the only ones that seem to be set in 1977. (Nash's are located in unpleasant hash dreams; Crosby's apparently in his navel.) "Dark Star" and "Run from Tears," highlighted by Stills' ringing guitar chords and gruff delivery, are both punchy and thoughtful, and the choral harmonies on the former are the only ones that manage to evoke the thrill of the author's "Suite: Judy Blue Eyes" period.

Part of the success of the first Crosby, Stills & Nash record was that its introspection invited identification with its audience. *CSN*, however, is an album that is essentially concerned with the isolation of said artists. As such, it reflects tired but stubborn ideas, and carefully crafted but pedantic music.

Ken Tucker

The Doobie Brothers

Livin' on the Fault Line

(Warner Bros.)

In the early Seventies, the Doobie Brothers were synonymous with boogie. Not that "Long Train Runnin' " and "Listen to the Music" were intrinsically bad—beneath the chordal thump rested a few thoughts—but as a cultural phenomenon, the band was quickly placed in the quaalude-rock category, as self-styled sophisticates turned up their noses.

A couple of albums back, however, the trend was reversed. A player of royal lineage was wedded to this family of commoners, and, miraculously, the pedestrian licks and cursory attempts at meaningful substance were replaced by a definite sense of taste and pacing.

While the new ingredient, former Steeley Dan guitarist Jeff Baxter, isn't the dominant musical or songwriting force in the new

Doobies, his arrival, on *Takin' It to the Streets*, helped turn the ambiance around. The group itself is several tads tighter, eschewing familiar stamps for a more complex approach that employs a liberal amount of echo, strategic pauses, overdubs, and a generally more spacy pose.

With *Livin' on the Fault Line*, the Doobie Brothers have matured even further. Partial credit must also go to producer Ted Templeman, a fluent trafficker in the language of subtlety. Stretching the modest chops of the band to the most effective limits, he has shaped a majority of the mostly self-scribed tunes into dreamy, yet catchy entities.

One should not frown at such a declaration of musical modesty, for, in truth, the Doobies are no Little Feat. There is, however, strength in their playing that the resourceful Templeman exploits to the very fullest. The hypnotizing keyboard effects of Mike MacDonald during "You Belong to Me" and the conga-dominated, lyrically impressionistic "Chinatown" are two readily apparent examples. The latter sounds like "It Keeps You Running."

Templeman must also be praised for importing two skilled session players. Norton Buffalo, fresh from the Steve Miller tour, inundates "There's a Light" with chromatic harp playing that brings to mind jazz great Toots Thielmans, while Vic Feldman makes the title track cook with a dexterous and rhythmic vibraphone solo.

It may be that those who Boone's Farmed their way through antediluvian Doobie Brothers albums and concerts may still view this band as typical of indulgent adolescent experiences. Happily, though, the Doobies have grown up, too.

Russell Shaw

The Eagles

Hotel California

(Asylum)

Listen, I'm willing to believe these guys are trying. I'm just glad I'm not buying. Don't you become one of their statistics, either. *Hotel California* is weary, it's loaded with sermons about Hollywood's rat race, and its gloom is not particularly attractive.

The title cut is a second-rate mystery nightmare worthy of a Satan-cult episode on *Kraft Suspense Theatre*. (Bob Dylan and Raymond Chandler are spookier.) Vaguely reggaetoned, it has none of the magic-shadow lyrics of "One of These Nights" ("Someone to be kind to in between the dark and the light"). In fact, not one track on this album approaches the jump-and-snap tension of that great hit.

"New Kid in Town" is a pleasant enough song about the pressures and fickleness of quick stardom (what mortals these fools be), while "Life in the Fast Lane" is an astoundingly dull attempt to get down about the wear and tear of Hollywood ambition. Gold stars, however, to the guy who came up with the phrases, "she was terminally pretty" and "they pay heavenly bills." and "Wasted Time"? I'll say. Just what the world needs—another sensitive dirge from L.A.

A "Wasted" reprise opens Side Two, this time the movie-slurp orchestral version. "Victim of Love"? Personally, I like the way Leopold von Sacher-Masoch handled this theme better, but the song's dreary funk does brighten with some lush, powerful chord changes in the chorus until it's almost good Bad Company. Ultimately, though, it's so heavy it sinks.

If Harry Chapin had tried to imitate Neil Young being sensitive, you'd have "Pretty Maids All in a Row"—which, unhappily, we have here. It's not until the next-to-last cut on the LP, "Try and Love Again" by the underestimated Randy Meisner, that we have a song of any real urgency. Aided by some ringing guitar resonance, it's the only cut with any "lift" to it. "The Last Resort" is—you guessed it—another epic weeper about disillusionment in the Golden State. Pithy, ithn't it?

How many times can you indict your life style before you're finally guilty? C'mon, fellas, stop feeling sorry for the victims of Hollywood fame and fortune—you know you love it. If not, you could move out. Fast. Because we hear rumblings that the situation is kind of "shaky" out there. Listen, at the count of three, everybody in western Arizona and Nevada, stomp your feet real hard. *One . . . two . . .* but, God, please save the Beverly Hills Hotel.

Stephen Demorest

Electric Light Orchestra

A New World Record

(United Artists)

Ever notice that Jeff Lynne has almost no chin?

Now that has nothing to do with ELO's new record, but it's the only thing I can think of to say about them that's even vaguely new. Their so-called classical-rock fusion—mixing cellos, bombast, and songs that are "just good rock & roll, meeaannn"—has been trumpeted ad nauseum from Bangor to Baja. *A New World Record* won't add anything to that. It's a good example of the above-average but hardly extraordinary tunes, competent musicianship, and symphonic undercurrents on which Lynne, Bev Bevan, and the rest have built their solid reputation. ELO fans will lap it up.

Actually, some telling remarks have already been made by drummer Bevan. He's been quoted as saying that the sound the band once sought was achieved with *Face the Music*, and now they're simply refining that sound. Lynne has peaked as a song-writer. He's starting to repeat himself—his chord patterns and melodies (never particularly original to begin with) sound familiar—but he can still come up with a good tune, like "Telephone Line" or "Mission (A World Record)." His strong suit is interpretation, weaving together Fifties and early Sixties rock influences and Beatles-Bee Gees vocal arrangements without sounding out of date. And the symphonic embellishments are skillfully integrated, notwithstanding an occasional tendency toward pseudo-Wagnerian excess. These two elements—Lynne's writing and the well-arranged orchestral effects—combine to give *A New World Record* a sense of overall unity and continuing logic that helps to disguise its lack of originality. It's a case of a man being successful by working within his limitations.

The updated version of "Do Ya," Lynne's classic contribution to the Move, is pointless. Good song, great lyrics ("I've seen old men crying at their own gravesides/I've seen pigs all sitting watching picture slides"), but "Do Ya" can never sound better than it did in the early Seventies in its relentlessly leadfooted, starkly produced original version. By indulging himself this way, perhaps Lynne is admitting he doesn't have much new to offer.

Sam Graham

Emerson, Lake & Palmer

Works, Volume I

(Atlantic)

A brief summary of Emerson, Lake & Palmer's promised and actual output since *Brain Salad Surgery* might put this gigantic disappointment into some perspective. There was *Welcome Back, My Friends . . .*, a three-LP, in-concert set released just before the last tour ended and the three players allegedly began to work on solo projects. (Incidentally, a close listening to the live album revealed that Keith Emerson really was a sloppy player.) Of these projects, an Emerson single, "Honky Tonk Train Blues" b/w "Barrelhouse Shakedown," appeared: computer fingerings of early jazz styles. There was also Greg Lake's holiday 45, "I Believe in Father Christmas," a sappy song that went deservedly nowhere. Last summer, rumors of the imminent release of a new ELP two-record set blossomed, Atlantic Records holding the watering can.

What finally crawled out, nearly a year after expectation, was *Works, Volume I:* a side of Emerson, a side of Lake, a side of Palmer, and a side for which no one apparently wanted to take individual responsibility. To say the least, this LP was not worth the three-year wait. Overblown with classical pretensions and deflated by shoddy production and outmoded concepts, *Works* is, without question, the worst studio album that ELP have ever done. That it took over three years to make simply doesn't make sense. It sounds like a rush job thrown out there to meet a deadline or to follow up a hit.

I doubt that anyone seriously believes that Keith Emerson's "Piano Concerto No. 1" will take its place in classical repertoire, least of all the composer, who was unwilling or incapable of doing the orchestration himself. The work consists of a goodly number of Emersonian cliches, interlarded with *Carmina Burana*-style block chords and rough borrowings from all over ther the Romantic period. Perhaps the construction of the piece is technically correct—the composer has proven many times that his erudition is far superior to mine—but I can't make out any thematic coherence in any of the three movements, and I see no reason for its existence except bombast.

Greg Lake's five songs are aided and abetted by his old King Crimson mate, Peter Sinfield, now fallen on hard times. The lyrics tend toward intricate sick jokes (let us not forget that "brain salad surgery" is an involuted euphemism for "blow me") and rhymes so forced that even the saccharine background vocalists have trouble following them. Lake's pretty-boy voice, however, just mows them down, as it does the simplistic melodies that are surprisingly hard to hum or ever remember.

Carl Palmer's contributions have no consistency, not even his accustomed show-off, drag-race drumming: his solo on the remake of "Tank" is so perfunctory that it hardly deserves to be called a solo. Other contributions include a Prokofiev segment (hint: classical music is not Music Minus One for drummers), some blooze jamming with Emerson and Joe Walsh, and some blanded-out soul/funk rubbish. Palmer's drumming was never too much more than surf music at double or triple speed. His claim to fame before ELP was lighting his cymbals on fire with Arthur Brown.

Of the collective work, a remake of Aaron Copeland's "Fanfare for the Common Man" introduces the only interesting rhythm scheme in the whole record, and then belabors it for nine minutes. I wonder how it would sound as a disco mix. It occurs to me that the patronizing shibboleth of the art-rock bands—i.e., "We're teaching the kids to listen to better music"—has no validity in a world where people are dancing the bump to reprocessed Beethoven. In their technical notes, the group claim to have used the mammoth Yamaha GX-1 synthesizer for this number—a machine so huge and imposing that only two are supposed to have been made—but I counted one effect that couldn't have been duplicated on a MiniMoog.

Which brings us to "Pirates," a 13-minute, heavily orchestrated sea chantey that I believe has its roots in the smutty ballads sung by the British Navy. (Why orchestration, I ask myself, when Emerson used to do the same thing, and better, himself with synthesizer hardware? Laziness?) The song is about lust for money. It is over-wrought, slapdash, one-dimensional, trite, muddy, and boring. It reminds me very much of its creators today.

Michael Bloom

Faces

Snakes and Ladders

(Warner Bros.)

This is a hard album to write about. I keep jumping up out of my chair and howling, throwing in a few birdman passes for good measure at appropriate moments of abandon—Ron Wood's opening chord on "You Can Make Me Dance, Sing or Anything," Stewart's vocal punctuations in the coda of "Around the Plynth."

The Faces did more for sloppy rock & roll than any band since the Kinks. Listen to the less-than-three-minute example of splendid live oblivion, "Had Me a Real Good Time." Wood's slogging, imprecise fuzz rhythm guitar floats over the rest of the rhythm section, while Stewart lectures the audience:

Stood on the table with my glass of gin
And came straight to the point
I'll be sad to go
So while I'm here I'll have me a real good time

This is followed by "Stay With Me," the macho rocker anthem that capsules this band's self-generating myth. The lurid tales of nymphomaniac groupies who terrorized these Limeys into trashing an endless string of Holiday Inns are based on real events, and the Faces virtually defined their stature by the post-gig mayhem they could create by just showing up someplace.

What this band is finally about is sheer fun. They existed to play onstage, not in the studio. Rod Stewart became a studio singer on his solo albums, and while he clung stubbornly to the notion of being just one of the boys in the band, it was only a matter of time before his solo success made the Faces obsolete.

Since the Faces didn't really make good records, this set works best as a complete guide. The only thing I miss is the incredible version of "Wicked Messenger" from the first LP, which is so well represented already (three cuts) that I can only suggest you buy it after you've finished with this one.

John Swenson

Firefall

Luna Sea

(Atlantic)

Firefall are what the Eagles would be like if the latter would give up all of this hand-on-brow, Madame Bovary shit, put their pseudo-existential malaise on terminal hold, and just soak up the California sun like all of the other multi-millionaires out West. On their second LP, *Luna Sea*, Firefall literally revel in California complacency, relating stories of lost or rekindled love with such vague distancing that one need never suffer the joys or pains inherent in the lyrics.

On just a lyrical level, *Luna Sea* is a virtual hymn to ineloquence (at one point, chief writer Larry Burnett actually admits that "I'm no man of letters"). The music keeps up its end of the emotional vacuum by processing out all of the rough elements, thereby yielding pure Eagles/CSN product in the snooze-along mold. Most offensive on this score is "So Long," a straight-forward "fuck-off" song made to sound "sensitive" by the imposition of a lovely acoustic melody. This is a similar trick to one that the Eagles often pull, feigning sensitivity in their woe-is-me voices while spouting the type of narcissistic macho dogma that is almost impossible to forgive.

An equally ludicrous deception comes in "Someday Soon." Here, Rick Roberts attempts to convey the need to escape the burning chaos of his professional life through a melody that would seem more suited to a Pepsi commercial.

Thankfully, none of the lyrics match the misogynous nadir of the first album's "Cinderella," on which Burnett cruelly tells a girl he got pregnant to take her screaming brat and vamoose. But we do have to deal with "Just Think," a throwaway jam filled with such prize-winning, Edwin Newman-like phrases as "What about the situation/In which it gets revealed."

Still, this band is obviously bound for AM glory, and their only real concern is to churn out catchy melodies, which they certainly have in abundance. God knows, there's a large enough audience out there among the type of people who put white sani-sheets on public toilets to keep Firefall basking in the L.A. sun for years to come.

Jim Farber

Fleetwood Mac

Rumours

(Warner Bros.)

You could look it up. After 10 years and a like number of frequently boring albums (some great stuff in there, too), these penguin fanciers were starting to look like small beer. Meanwhile Stevie Nicks was waiting tables, while her partner Lindsey Buckingham worked scams from home. It was L.A., and it was the tar pits.

Well, in what's become the *auteur* theory on Mick Fleetwood, it was getting time for a new voice-guitar module. Let Lindsey Buckingham tell it in that pithy, laconic way an interview in *Guitar Player* magazine always inspires: "About two weeks before we ended up cutting *Fleetwood Mac*, Mick was looking for a studio to use. Someone haphazardly turned him on to this place in the San Fernando Valley called Sound City. So he talked to (engineer) Keith Olsen out there, and Keith put on 'Frozen Love' from the *Buckingham/Nicks* album to show him what the studio was like and what his work sounded like. He wasn't trying to showcase us, because Bob Welch was already in the band at that time. A week later, Welch decided to leave the group, and Mick just acted intuitively and called up Keith to get in touch with us. We rehearsed for about two weeks and then just cut the LP."

The used-car capital of the world! They drove that cream puff right out of the lot and onto the charts, apparently forever. I played the shit out of my copy, too. Then, got a little tired of it. (My copy of the 1970's *Kiln House* looks like somebody held a roach race with figure skates on it, but I still play the record all the time.)

But before we get into silly disquisitions about why "Go Your Own Way" is a great single off an entirely up-to-snuff new album, let's rip off another one of those *Guitar Player* quotes, the kind that put you right in the blind cosmic hum of the brood chamber of the rock & roll ant farm: "Then I got an Ampeg 4-track and started using the Sony 2-track for slap echo and effects like that with the preamp output of the deck into an amp. It's just an amazing fuzz device. Since then I've taken the guts out of the preamp and put them in a little box, and that's what I use on-stage and in the studio. I also use a Roland Space Echo and a Cry Baby wah-wah sometimes. My strings are Ernie Ball Regular Slinky . . . ."

What? Is that what's getting under my skin in "Go Your Own Way"? You gotta remember that the formation of this group broke up three happy couples: that fact might bear on the title of this single, which opens with a Ventures strum that lifts out of the dashboard and says, "Hush your mout'." Then comes a trebly, ringing acoustic guitar line. "Loving you/Isn't the right thing to do," twangs Buckingham in his best Danny Kirwan, heart broke dither, as Fleetwood's drums spring in to help: "How can I/Ever change things that I feel?"

As Buckingham finishes the verse, Christine McVie and Stevie Nicks haul in for a full-voiced chorus, and the next stanza is underscored by a tense, curling tale of feedback. If you aren't hooked by now, you better check your pulse. Just in time, too, because from the bridge on, they let Buckingham nudge the refrain aside and take the song out.

Given the vigor of that cut, plus "Second Hand News" and the previous album's shoving "Monday Morning" (not to mention the exuberant finger-picking of "Never Going Back Again"), Lindsey Buckingham shows up as a saltier cowboy than most any of those other canyon-roaming L.A. smog-eaters.

Not to sell Fleetwood and the McVies short—they're steady punchers—the band was also lucky to bring in Stevie Nicks' talents. The mesh was very smooth: folding 'Rhiannon" into a loping backbeat, she let a few lines catch in her throat, then warded off coyness by belting the odd phrase through her cheekbones, while lazy Byrds progressions linked the verses hypnotically together.

Stevie's "Crystal," sung by Buckingham both on *Buckingham/Nicks* and *Fleetwood Mac* in a timbre oddly like Christine McVie's, turned, in a span of three years, from a picker's minuet into an organ dirge. And the vocal that Nicks rode so hard in 1973 faded back. All of her vocals on the first group album were nice but a little cakey, so it's good to hear the power come back on this new disc.

Both "Dreams" and "Gold Dust Woman" (the latter is about groupies) offer confident, nearly seamless singing. "Gold Dust Woman," with its breathiness and whip-crack phrasing, owes no small debt to Bonnie Raitt's style. And Ken Emerson has pointed out that Nicks employs Melanie- and Lulu-like trills. "Dreams" shows all that, but Stevie Nicks gains appeal through her slack elecution. That insolently foxy upper lip flutters the tone like a mute in a trumpet.

Nicks' "I Don't Want to Know" is folk harmony over Merseybeat, complete with handclaps. The next step back in time is skiffle. Then maybe we can start the whole adventure, with Christine McVie in Chicken Shack, all over again.

Christine McVie's "Oh Daddy" and "Songbird," like "Warm Ways" on the previous LP, are riskily close to the solemn bleating on the so-called *Legendary Christine Perfect Album*. Her chief virtue on slow songs is simple honesty, but it takes the gentle propulsion of "Over My Head," "Say You Love Me," and "Sugar Daddy" (or her new, cranked-up "Don't Stop") to make McVie a real asset.

Since this album's a product of California, I subjected it, finally, to the rock perfessor's test for non-verbal epistemological coherence. It sank like a bad egg in a glass of Jim Beam.

And that's despite the, uh, cosmic circumstances of the group's chemical collaboration on "The Chain." The harmonies just pelt out over a determinedly walloping drum. Sounds like fervor for its own sake, but, like the Welsh witch howls that close the record, the song might lead you to think that Fleetwood Mac aspire to a station higher than that of a singles band. Fine—but as things stand, I'm happy to take my dose over the airwaves for another year or so.

Fred Schruers

Dan Fogelberg

Netherlands

(Full Moon/Epic)

Dan Fogelberg uses the exacting studio techniques perfected by Crosby, Stills & Nash to create something like the rock equivalent of impressionist painting. A superb technician and multi-instrumentalist, he builds an aural pallete that equates painterly atmospheres with extreme emotional states. Fogelberg's fourth album, *Netherlands* exploits this penchant for atmosphere further than any of its predecessors. A virtual symphony of romantic

self-examination, it is alternately touching, naive, and pretentious.

Fogelberg's breathless, pleading vocals are consistently touching. And the production on two songs—"Dancing Shoes," a wistful, balletic reflection, and "Loose Ends," a driving rock lament in ¾ time—is masterful. But in the title cut and in "False Faces," Fogelberg extends his loftiness into bombast as he embraces a trite mountain-climbing metaphor for spiritual awakening and pities his own artist-in-exile idea of himself—both to the accompaniment of what sounds like the score from a bad Western movie.

While I find Fogelberg's unabashed vulnerability refreshing in this age of the "cruel dude," I'm disappointed that he still hasn't stifled his usual impulse to Say Everything in sophomorically gushy "poetry." He should try to speak plainly in his own voice. By turning real conflict and real despair over the loss of a woman into an "elevated" metaphorical struggle, Dan Fogelberg nearly succeeds in undermining his own best intentions on *Netherlands*.

Stephen Holden

Foghat

Foghat Live

(Bearsville)

William Shatner Live. Mr. Whipple Live. Mothra Comes Alive. Only a keen machete in the most ruthless hands could cut a swath through the jungle of live albums and emerge undamaged. But in this wilderness of vinyl undergrowth is a sunny clearing occupied by *Foghat Live*. The LP is no bandwagon-jumper. Indeed, it could serve as an object lesson to shiftless rockers who dub studio vocals over in-concert backing tracks and tag the outcome "live."

Stripped on record of their absurd silver sneakers and glowing stage props, Foghat had to play well to prove themselves more than a Muddy Waters-inspired band with shag cuts and big amps. Here, they've distilled two recent performances which needed no more touching up than some editing. The result: an album so brash that it makes Kiss sound like a folk act.

In hard-rock, there's a tendency to single out a personality within a band. Such spotlighting is no boon to ensemble playing, and self-important soloists can undermine group unity. No ego clashes disturb the music of Foghat. The two guitarists are both assertive without undercutting each other—Rod Price always gives Dave Peverett breathing space, and lead guitarist Peverett rarely eclipses Price. The rhythm section of Roger Earl and Craig MacGregor plays with the rapport of Siamese twins.

Good fellowship carries built-in dangers, too. A band not on its toes can boogie compatibly into oblivion or collapse in unison from metal fatigue. No chance of either here. Foghat's pace is barrelhouse, its power flow nonstop. The audience gets no chance to drift. Terse spoken introductions, cleverly addressed to the crowd, are really cues for the drummer to crash into the next song.

The strengths of a good "live" album can also be its drawbacks. The location echo on *Foghat Live* turns the best damped playback room into an aircraft shelter. Except for "Home in My Hand," which is strongly sung, Peverett's thin voice tends to float too near the rafters. The guitars have the immediacy of nearby gunfire, but don't sound as crisp as they did on the studio-made *Fool for the City*.

But the group's interaction more than makes up for the disc's metallic mercilessness. Price and Peverett mimic absent keyboards with their Les Pauls. The bass line is much more distinct than on Foghat's last two records. New arrangements showcase unabrasive solo talents. Peverett takes a trim guitar break on the Joe Turner tune, "Honey Hush," and the song is performed in a manner that gives Earl a welcome excuse to loosen up the relentless 4/4 beat and show what he can do with his drum kit. Price's rude slide-guitar style and fondness for feedback fuse perfectly into the general clangor. And producer Nick Jameson manages to weave some continuity into this paste-and-scissors dovetail of two shows.

A whole Foghat concert could fill four sides, but only raving feebs clamor for double live sets. This band's sins of omission are forgivable next to some of the excesses of their platinum peers.

Richard Hogan

Foreigner

Foreigner

(Atlantic)

Ever since minimalism became the message, it's become harder and harder to find a rock band who can actually play their instruments. One-in-25 is my professional estimate. A band who can write hooks (as in big-money singles and airplay) is one-in-50. And a band with presence and style—well, at this point, you're a fool to miss out on the action. Which is my subtle way of telling you about Foreigner, a neophyte, cross-cultural six-piece group who should find their way onto your turntable at your earliest convenience.

Foreigner have all the ingredients for a superior, mature, and gutsy hard-rock/teknotronik/jazz(y) punch. Musically, there's enough here to entertain the more discerning sophists in the audience, while the band's rock dynamism will keep the juveniles off the streets. Ian McDonald, who played that classic sonic scream of a horn of King Crimson's "21st Century Schizoid Man," had been doing a lot of session work over the years and eventually landed in New York for keeps. Mick Jones, another transplanted Anglo who (with McDonald) co-founded and co-produces Foreigner, similarly found his way to the Big Apple via the session route. Jones, who'd gigged with everyone from Spooky Tooth to Peter Frampton to George Harrison, had this theory that he could take his well-travelled guitar and seasoned writing out of the studio and organize a rock band who could not only play, but also create hit tunes. Having moved to America with the Spookys when they made their Connecticut retreat, Jones began writing with Mike Patto during the final incarnation of that beloved and excessive Brit act. With Spooky Tooth, he began to crank out some mighty attractive lead lines, an ability which has not been lost on Foreigner, Jones having written the bulk of the material for their maiden outing. There are 10 tracks on the album, and none of 'em a slouch—no mean achievement in itself. But the fact that there are a few adrenaline-pump monster singles here is really what gets the ol' juices going.

Much like the Doobie Brothers or Steely Dan, Foreigner's appeal stems from their expert musicianship and arranging, qualities which could have just as easily been attached to something more progressive. But it was time for the spotlight move, and the band agreed that accessibility would be their direction. The result is miniatures like their current chart bullet, "Feels Like the First Time," or "Long, Long Way from Home," with hooks so hard-to-beat that I've nary been able to wedge this LP from my phonograph since its arrival. When Al Greenwood's organ line affixes itself to the rhythm section's indomitable 4-on-4 engine on the glorious chorus of the former tune, I'm tellin' ya, it's rock & roll heaven. "Long Way," which opens Side Two—any qualified rock writer will tell ya that it's Side Two, Track One which either makes or breaks a new act—is equally addictive: the momentum is unassailable. Whom Foreigner really remind me of are Audience, an old Anglo act whom I thought were the greatest thing since onion soup, but who never managed to cut the commercial mustard. Their trademark was a wailing tenor sax above a spartan and inertial drums/bass battery that, when it was hot, was dangerous. Check out McDonald's bloozy sax honks below singer Lou Gramm's "I'm looking out for the two of us" (his vocal phrasing recalls Howard Werth's, too), and you'll see what I mean.

And Jezuz Christ, what rock fury when Foreigner climb inside the mainstream! "At War With the World," "Cold As Ice," and "I Need You" (all by the Jones/Gramm writing team) are ominous, purplishly passionate teen anthems.

This group's dynamic throb is a threat to all punk bands throughout the land, the total gestalt spearheaded by Mick Jones' interzonal guitar banner (with mucho gusto and swagger). But how can 16-year-old punk acts expect to compete with some of the most talented vets in the biz? McDonald and Jones had a goal to be musicologically rich enough to appeal to the literati while, at the same time, selling to the kids. *Foreigner* proves that they've won.

Bruce Malamut

Peter Frampton

I'm In You

(A&M)

With *I'm in You*, Peter Frampton has completed the pop-star circuit. He's gone from the all-the-talent's-in-his-face teen idol with the Herd to the maturing songwriter/genius guitarist/co-leader of Humble Pie to the journeyman rocker leading Frampton's Camel, and now he's back to the all-the-talent's-in-his-face teen idol. Actually, you can measure his increased success by how much appeal has moved south from the facial area.

Obviously, Frampton is the new global-rock sex symbol. Not kitsch like Elton John and Alice Cooper, not punk-sensitive like Bruce Springsteen, not macho-slob like the metal monsters from Grand Funk Railroad to Kiss. Peter Frampton is the nice kid down the block turned suave adult without losing pretty-boy charm. An unbeatable package.

Really, it couldn't have happened to a nicer guy. Somebody's gotta be the new sex symbol, and Frampton is intelligent enough to know what's expected of him. His ageless grace is better box office than half a dozen face-lifts—and he isn't even Hollywood.

Only one problem—of course, a minor one the way these things usually work out, but naturally one that will elicit the charge that the critics all jealously jump off the bandwagon as soon as the masses seize a performer. See, Peter Frampton has actually been a pretty good guitarist and singer/songwriter in the past, and, well, he kinda sounds really lousy on this record. At the risk of seeming spiteful, I might suggest that *I'm in You* is far and away the worst piece of wax he's ever implanted his golden visage upon.

Which is not to say that the album is a total loss. In fact, it would make a pretty good EP (Extended Play—equal in size to a single but packed with twice the amount of music) because there are four or five decent songs here. But when you compare them to what he's done in the past and consider that nothing here can hold a candle to certain of his great songs (like, say, "The Light"), you have to wonder what success has done to this guy.

You start off with the title track, the big hit, and its aural thinness and facile lyrics make it perfect, inoffensive pop muzak, a nice sales kicker but not much musically. Then comes the aimless "(Putting My) Heart on the Line," a pretty worthless rehash of Frampton's oft-exploited easy-rocking lilt. The solo section has the artist fooling with that ridiculous mouth-guitar distortion technique. "St. Thomas (Don't You Know How I Feel)" is better, almost approximating his excellent ballad, "Baby I Love Your Way," and featuring the best archetypal Frampton guitar solo on the LP.

What comes next is the album's only certifiably great song, "Won't You Be My Friend." Frampton writes in his notes that the song was "inspired by and dedicated to our favorite group 'Little Feat.' " Little Feat's Ritchie Hayward sits in for some rock-steady skin accom-

paniment, and the result is a sailing taste of real rock & roll feeling, with Frampton doing his best Lowell George imitation. This is the one moment of vindication on a disappointing record—and the truest indication of how much Frampton left behind his spotlight ploy.

Side Two is more of the same: the crooning drone of "You Don't Have to Worry," replete with ludicrous sobs; the medium-speed rocker, "Tried to Love," which sounds somewhat like a Rolling Stones tune played slowly; the mostly acoustic "Rocky's Hot Club," strictly filler to which Stevie Wonder adds some harmonica. The merciful end to this ordeal comes in the shape of a soul medley, "(I'm a) Road Runner" and "Signed, Sealed, Delivered (I'm Yours)," that proves that Frampton's reasons for quitting Humble Pie were less musical (Steve Marriot's version of "Road Runner" was far superior to this listless clinker) than financial. These last are tremendous songs, and, in the context of Frampton's weaker material, they sound spectacular, but they add nothing to previous interpretations.

I'm in You consolidates Peter Frampton's position in show business. His good nature takes care of the rest. But he'll never make a better record than *Wind of Change*.

John Swenson

Peter Gabriel

Peter Gabriel

(Atco)

Peter Gabriel's recurrent vision of the apocalypse, up to now expressed in his work with Genesis, was as ostentatious as it was majestic. This shortcoming arose in part from the obligation felt by the group to continue the image that their audience (and they, too) had come to expect from them. While this attitude is often conducive to popularity, it generally impedes artistic progress. Such was the case with Peter Gabriel, who, in 1975, left the confines of Genesis to develop more personally viable expressions. *Peter Gabriel* is his first public statement of that refusal to compromise. For this reason, if none other, it is an interesting album for those concerned with the State of the Art.

On first hearing, one acquainted with Genesis cannot help making comparisons, especially instrumentally. But, ultimately, this is a record that begs, or rather, demands, to be viewed solely on its own terms.

Those terms are not always facile or comfortable. One must work, intellectually and viscerally, through Gabriel's lyrics and music. Both demand discretion: no clear-cut distinctions of form can be made when listening to his work—everything is multi-faceted. Ugliness is presented in the guise of beauty and vice versa; seriousness is mixed with irony; musical phrases transform now subtly, now blatantly, from one style to another—nothing is as it seems. What begins as a fairly direct rock song convolutes into something more tenuous, more symbolic. The danger in this is that those listeners who expect an obviously stable presentation of their kind of music could well be put off by such a flux. In other words, it makes for good art—not necessarily good sales. But I sincerely doubt that this is an album made to sell, producer Bob Ezrin notwithstanding. Granted, the songs "Modern Love," "Slowburn," and "Down the Dolce Vita" utilize an accessible hard-rock framework (and most resemble Ezrin's past production techniques), but, even of these, the latter two drastically change form at midpoint.

Such songs as "Excuse Me" and "Moribund the Burgermeister" are more avant-garde and thus more difficult to tag stylistically. One expects single-minded listeners to skip over these cuts before they're understood or appreciated. Then, there is, of course, Peter Gabriel's vocalizing, which can be quite dramatic and just as easily misunderstood. While an appreciation of the theatrically effusive quality of his voice may be an acquired taste, I think that it is worth the effort invested.

Not merely content with making statements or entertainment, Gabriel "uses" vocal styles as he "uses" musical genres and textures —to create an effect, often an amusing one. This is obvious in "Waiting for the Big One" where he parodies Randy Newman parodying "the Blues," at the same time poking fun at his own cynicism. A barbershop quartet begins "Excuse Me," a humorous Twenties burlesque.

What isn't so light is still enjoyable. Half of "Humdrum" is a catchy surrealistic tango. "Solsbury Hill," playful British folk music, feels quite refreshing. In "Moribund," Gabriel undercuts the mordant melodrama of plague songs by treating the subject slyly. Like the other cuts, it surprises. One keeps finding a purposefulness that develops throughout repeated listenings.

The pinnacle of the album is "Here Comes the Flood." If there is a focal point to be found, it is in this song. This elegy of the apocalypse capsulizes Gabriel's themes and music in one succinct, crystal statement. Weaving through a soft, but not fragile melody, the work crests to a dramatic chorus and wanes to a conclusion. "Here Comes the Flood" is the obverse of Jackson Browne's "After the Deluge"—where Browne is a participant in the demise, Gabriel is a detached observer. Although he may be decadent and pessimistic, Peter Gabriel is not nihilistic. This quality sets him (and Browne) apart from so many contemporary hard-rock performers. Gabriel envisions the end and heralds our descent "Down the Dolce Vita," but he never seeks to lead us there. Such an attitude leaves us a chance for survival.

Raymond Orkwis

Geils

Monkey Island

(Atlantic)

When the established rock & roller's life looks like one long air-cushioned ride from hotel to stage to the next town down the beltway, and the only repressive forces to rebel against are persistent fans and misplaced room reservations, the fact that the J. Geils Band choose to confront the rut of middle-level success head-on makes them irresistibly into heroes. How can you knock a group that cares enough to change? Pegged as a show band impossible to capture on record, Geils retreated into the studio for months last year and applied themselves to production as well as performances. They had been increasingly dismissed as good-time hacks reworking the same old R&B riffs, but *Monkey Island* explores new sources and allows fears and darker sensibilities to show.

For all that, *Monkey Island* is a fragmented album. Peter Wolf's and Seth Justman's freer, more confessional lyrics sometimes confuse overstatement—like "the agony" or "the misery" of "Wreckage"—with openness. At other times, they deliberately discourage the personal connections that "Wreckage" and "I'm Falling" invite: "Somebody" and "Monkey Island" for instance, adopt the hypersignificant tone of a parable without ever making the meaning clear. "You're the Only One" is a good start in a new direction—soft rock redeemed by rough harmonies—while "I'm Not Rough" is a welcome reminder of the old days. Geils' rendition of the Louis Armstrong song is both playful and passionate: they are commentators as well as curators. But the big numbers are a jumble of styles. The title cut begins with a neo-Latin instrumental, turns moderately funky on the verse, and goes hymn-like and choral on the refrain. The massive guitar coda to "Wreckage" is downright majestic—and stands apart from the song. In all, the LP is more intriguing in its intention than its execution.

Ironically, that's what rescues *Monkey Island* from obscurity. As showmen, there's one thing Geils have always known: It's not just what you sing and play—it's who the audience thinks is playing and singing. Geils emerged as stylists in the late Sixties when sincerity was all the rage, and their respect for the formalities of blues and R&B made their detachment seem a kind of heroism. Now that there are more stylists than styles, Wolf and Justman have chosen the perfect psychological moment to turn vulnerable and earnest. The fact that they fumble the attempt only calls attention to the risk they're running. By demonstrating how difficult it is to change, Geils show how brave they are to try. Peter Wolf may sing about missing his cue (in "I'm Falling"), but his timing hasn't failed him yet.

Ariel Swartley

Genesis

Wind & Wuthering

(Atco)

Contrary to the band's own statements, the appeal of Genesis has never been strictly musical. Rather, Genesis tell good stories. They once did so with an incredible single-mindedness—five heads working as one, where each player's contribution either couldn't be separated from the whole or faded into insignificance. The tales that Genesis spun carried the archetypal relevance of primal myths and traveled directly from ear to heart: no listener could misread the pure bitterness of "The Knife," the lonely omniscience of "Watcher of the Skies," the religious ecstasy of "Supper's Ready."

Then, Peter Gabriel left, and the group's cohesiveness was destroyed. Whether his resignation caused the fissures or whether he fled to avoid being swamped in anti-creative karma, Gabriel suddenly made Genesis a rudderless ship, blown by four unharmonious winds. Tony Banks now tries to hold the original course with increasingly dense keyboard orchestrations and parables. Bassist Michael Rutherford pushes in a simpler, more conventional direction. Drummer and singer Phil Collins contributes wit and madness bordering on idiocy. Guitarist Steve Hackett, when he asserts himself at all, works in a slashing attack that's almost punkish.

This is not to say that *Wind & Wuthering* lacks the musical signature of Genesis. But the stories have been set down with too little community and too much compromise. Mostly they don't work. "Eleventh Earl of Mar" at first sounds teriffic—all of the dynamics of an earthquake, with some grand organ and bass work—but soon some of the riffs resemble spare parts. The lyrics, drawn from tales of the 18th-century Jacobite Rebellion, never quite make sense either as history or as metaphor. They seem to recount a child's perspective of the war, but there's a lot of counterproductive stage setting and window dressing.

"One for the Vine" is credited to Banks alone ("Mar" being a cooperative effort), but it suffers from many of the same problems: an unresolved theme, lyrics that too often impede the narrative flow, musical effects that confuse the story. "Vine" strives for an awesome statement about the relationship between religion and power (something only hinted at in "Can-Utility and the Coastliners" and other early compositions) and the responsibility of the shaman as leader, but the ultimate horror of its conclusion is far too muted.

Banks' "All in a Mouse's Night" is a good cartoon, with some lovely keyboard and guitar arranging, until it grinds into another inappropriate coda. Hackett's "Blood on the Rooftops" (no real violence—it's about television) seem fairly typical of his present sulky condition:

moody classical guitars and a tortuous melody. Rutherford's "Your Own Special Way" is awfully trite and appears primed to become the band's first hit single in America.

In the last year or so, there have been four solo projects by members or ex-members of Genesis: Hackett's Tarot fantasia, *Voyage of the Acolyte*; Collins' Brand X and their *Unorthodox Behaviour*; original guitarist Anthony Phillips' *The Geese and the Ghost*, produced by Rutherford; and Peter Gabriel's cryptic masterpiece. Every one of these albums is better than *Wind & Wuthering*. Four heads are better than one when they work as one, but these heads aren't—they're squabbling.

Michael Bloom

The Grateful Dead

Terrapin Station

(Arista)

Arista boss Clive Davis has wanted the Grateful Dead in his stable ever since the former's Columbia days. Now that he's finally got them, he also has a pretty good idea of what he wants them to do: slick things up and modernize the hippie stuff for today's sophisticated radio playlists. The Dead themselves have been trying to go commercial for a few years now, but thus far it's been a slow trot through quicksand. The band has always been an end in itself, fairly impervious to outside tampering.

Terrapin Station changes all of that. It is a commercial record in all of the ways that the Dead have never before managed. In fact, it's so commercial that it hardly even sounds like the Grateful Dead. The first side is composed of five controlled cuts, each very carefully produced with the nation's deejays in mind. "Estimated Prophet" hooks just a hint of the band's boogie trademark circa "The Other One," but otherwise is a thoroughly modern fusion, right down to the Tom Scott reed-blowing at the end. "Dancin' in the Streets," one of the songs that the group has continued to play since their wildest freak-out days a full decade ago, is dredged up here with a modified disco arrangement, further proof of the Dead's willingness to meet industry demands on their own terms. "Passenger," an attempt to emulate the Rolling Stones, comes off pretty well mostly because of Bob Weir's and Donna Godchaux's singing, which sounds better than it ever has. "Samson and Delilah" is a chunky and infectious bit of choogaloo, with some neat propulsion from the Bill Kreutzann/Mickey Hart dueling percussion section.

"Sunrise," which ends Side One, is the most uncharacteristic song on the record. A lush romantic ballad with an overbearing string arrangement by Paul Buckmaster, the whole thing sounds uncomfortably like Renaissance, which is not exactly what you'd expect from these guys.

The title track is a seven-part suite that takes up all of Side Two. Although the theme is obscure, the music is tight and richly melodic. Buckmaster's orchestra arrangements fit the band's playing perfectly, climaxing with the exciting "Terrapin Flyer," a long instrumental passage in which the percussionists spray a tense underlay for call-and-response dialogue between the orchestra and Jerry Garcia's lightning-fast guitar fills.

Terrapin Station is a good album, but it will disappoint many of the group's long-term fans. Because it's the first Grateful Dead LP in a long time that doesn't sound like an extension of their live performances, it expands but does not dissolve the dilemma of the greatest cult band in rock history.

John Swenson

Al Green

Have A Good Time

(Hi-London)

Al Green is curiously categorized as "soul," while other black performers, like Earth, Wind & Fire, make the trade papers as crossover R&B. The distinction is not so much irrelevant industry talk as indication of how we interpret his music. Al Green is preeminently a Southern, religious singer. His vocal style, while variously described as romantic, sensual, and liquid, is essentially church-like. That "Jesus Is Waiting," from *Call Me*, is one of his most erotic songs, is no accident of faith. The realms of crossover do not fully include secular Southern Black church music, regardless of the proficient borrowings from Northern and white styles.

The general listening public is less conscious of musicial categories. Green has sold nearly 40 million records (eight gold and three platinum singles , seven gold and four platinum albums), and not to black audiences alone. His wide appeal has largely to do with his uncanny ability to sing stirringly deep love songs, tap wells of emotion with a variety of voice and inflection, and instill a subdued, driving force to even the quiet songs. Stevie Wonder is the obvious correlation—at least onstage—of a very public performer singing very privately.

Have A Good Time has more guitar than usual, even some relatively sharp twang for Al Green. Much of the material is overtly less religious, but sounds as hopefully pious as anything before this album. "Keep Me Cryin' " (the single), "I Tried to Tell Myself," "Nothing Takes the Place of You" and "Happy" are more traditional Green R&B stylizations, with his voice pouring around notes and corners.

Al Green has always been supplemented by one of the best backup ensembles. The Memphis Collective, headed by Willie Mitchell, includes superbly subtle horns and sensitively coordinated strings. The rhythm section, even with the passing of Al Jackson, is light and powerful.

Overall, *Have A Good Time* is better than a couple of his latest records, and more easily assimilable to pop audiences, but few changes here are so striking as to attract any large new following. For Al Green fans, I suspect this one will be judged excellent.

Robert Smith

Daryl Hall and John Oates

Beauty on a Back Street

(RCA Victor)

Right now, Daryl Hall and John Oates would be the last to admit it, but they were probably inspired by *Black Like Me*—that classic book of investigative journalism in which the author changed his skin color from white to black for his travels throughout the South—and that's not meant as a slur. Because the blacker Hall and Oates sound, the better they are. On songs like "She's Gone," "Cammellia," and "Rich Girl," the duo's silky, authentically soulful (as opposed to paleface) harmonies wrapped themselves around each other with inspiration as they weaved in and out of the gorgeous string-and-horn arrangements.

Hall and Oates were white America's answer to the Spinners—"I enjoyed being the token white man," Daryl Hall once told me, referring to his days as a sessionman with producer Thom Bell on the old Cameo-Parkway label—and the duo's animated melodies kept many of us in white R&B heaven. In fact, "When the Morning Comes" (from 1972's *Abandoned Luncheonette*), which amazingly juggled R&B, country-rock, and electronic sounds, convinced me that these two guys could conceivably carry soul and rock to places it had never been.

The only thing was, Hall and Oates always wanted to be rock & rollers. But, given the tough, extreme *War Babies* and the second sides of their silver album and *Bigger Than Both of Us*, their rock & roll sounded distant, forced, and often spunkless. Like *War Babies*, *Beauty on a Back Street* pretty much abandons R&B for straight-ahead rock & roll and meandering art-rock. Unfortunately, by altering their style, Hall and Oates have foolishly thrown out what distinguished them in the first place: their keenly interwoven harmonies, elastic falsettos, and irresistible hooks.

One reason that the new songs don't click is because Daryl Hall and John Oates are reaching for something that's foreign to them: "You Must Be Good for Something," with its raw chording and Hall's frantic lead vocals, might have energy, but it certainly lacks the necessary drive. Admittedly, several things about *Beauty on a Back Street* are encouraging—the snazzy lead guitar playing, some of the arrangements—but, too often, Hall and Oates sound merely uncomfortable. Except for "Love Hurts, Love Heals" and "Why Do Lovers Break Each Other's Heart?," everytime that something natural crops up—Hall's falsetto or Oates' boyish, charming singing on his I-feel-so-uninspired entry, "The Emptyness"—it's annoyingly suppressed to make way for the instrumentation.

Worse yet are Hall and Oates' narcissism and obnoxious pretentiousness. These two are the type of guys who, on a hot and humid day, would stare fondly at their reflections in the water rather than jump in. No matter how hard they want us to believe that Side Two—with its synthesizer noodling, artsy strings, Sparks-type vocal acrobatics, Oriental colorings, and cosmic lyrics—is adventurous, we remain unconvinced, and the side simply registers as a convenient mismash of badly dated tricks.

If the R&B songs on Hall and Oates' last record weren't as catchy as their older stuff and failed to live up to the sheer inventiveness of *Abandoned Luncheonette*, they at least surpassed anything here. Listening to *Beauty on a Back Street* (which doesn't romanticize the streets, by the way: it reflects upon Christian Dior, K Mart, the Rainbow Room, Ra, and Isis) is like wandering into someone else's awful fantasy and having the door slammed shut behind you. Interested?

Mitchell Schneider

Emmylou Harris

Luxury Liner

(Warner Bros.)

Because of her careful selection of material, Emmylou Harris on *Luxury Liner* finally accomplishes what she failed to do on her first two Warner Brothers albums: locate the continuity between rural traditional country music, vintage Nashville, and Gram Parsons' fatalistic country-rock—and define it qualitatively. One reason she succeeds is by refusing to "go pop," as she did on one or two cuts each from the earlier LPs. Not that *Luxury Liner* isn't pop-influenced. Pop influence is one of its points, as Harris seeks to validate country music and style for a pop audience. (She has already done the reverse for country audiences.)

Luxury Liner is perhaps the quintessential example of the "new" country, produced (as were Harris' last two albums) at great expense by Brian Ahern, one of the top producers in the pop-to-country, crossover field. An aural perfectionist who shows off the finest Nashville sessionmen as virtuoso studio stars, Ahern also uses a pop drum sound and pop orchestrations in his productions.

The connections that Emmylou Harris makes between different musical styles are solid and convincing. In her version, Chuck Berry's "(You Never Can Tell) C'est la Vie" emerges as vital a novelty of modern Americana as Hank Williams' "Jambalaya." Harris' passionate but cleanly-phrased renderings of "When I Stop

Dreaming" and "Making Believe" bring out the classic simplicity of two standards that deserve the label. And her interpretation of Gram Parson's "She" represents the first time that Harris has matched in intensity the original version of one of Parsons' major songs.

Emmylou Harris has also chosen fine songs by three of the best "progressive" country writers—Susanna Clark, Townes Van Zandt, and Rodney Crowell. What they have in common with Harris and Parsons is their ability to plumb the bleak mysticism below the surface of much country music without sacrificing either earthiness or anecdotal humor. The material's high level of quality drives Harris to new heights as a singer. Whereas before, her ability to summon pathos seemed almost too surefire, it now (particularly on "She" and Crowell's "You're Supposed to Be Feeling Good") cuts far more deeply. While the sweetness and ethereality that are built into Harris' voice still prevent her from going the last lap on songs that require an aggressive delivery, her interpretative instincts here almost transcend that limitation.

Before *Luxury Liner*, I thought of Emmylou Harris' albums as touchingly lovely elegies to the memory of Gram Parsons. But *Luxury Liner* does much more than mourn an idea. It carries that idea forward—and develops it almost to perfection.

Stephen Holden

Heart

Little Queen

(Portrait)

"Sad faces painted over with those magazine smiles" is a phrase from the hit title song, "Dreamboat Annie," on Heart's first LP, and the line sounds like an autobiographical tidbit from the two cover girls who front this Canadian success story. It's also the kind of line that shows you that their story is not all knockers and naivete. Despite the slightly mawkish calculations of their new album's cover art, this bunch really does have *heart*: streaks of wholesome vindictiveness and pugnacity shine through their often labored arrangements and sometimes sophomoric lyrics.

Which is to say that these two women can occasionally kick ass. "You lying so low in the weeds/Bet you gonna ambush me," peals Ann Wilson over the chain-saw guitars of "Barracuda." And that ain't all she knows: "You'd have me down, down, down, down on my knees/Now wouldn't you, Barracuda?"

Unfortunately and characteristically, the words and music soon turn so abstruse that the song ultimately becomes a kind of failed Led Zeppelin number. (Yes, Wilson does sound a bit like Robert Plant on a bed of hot coals.) But "Barracuda" is abruptly chopped off and replaced by the largely acoustic "Love Alive," a compact, coherent ballad which seems almost sincere enough to escape being called ersatz Fleetwood Mac. (Yes again—ghosts of other blue-chip groups do indeed rattle their chains insistently in Heart's songs.)

When Heart *do* pursue their own rather rococo vision, as in "Dream of the Archer" or the first album's "Song of the Sea," the air gets a little thin. One would think that the long stint of touring they've done would compress their attack into something somewhat more unique. Too often, they gild the flowers that Renaissance have already plucked.

And that's a shame, especially when they can have such *moments*. You can hear the magic on such early songs as "Crazy on You." Never really explicit and rarely piercing, "Crazy on You" sports both power chords and yowling right alongside the sweeter stuff—it's the best peice of rock dynamics that Heart have yet managed.

Besides some crafty ballad singing on "Cry to Me," and the aforementioned "Barracuda," *Little Queen's* only real charge is a tidy rocker called "Kick It Out." The whole cut bats along nicely, but Ann Wilson's nippy enunciation of "Kick it Out!" on the refrain is so frigging *cute* that it's damn near pornographic. Such samples of freshness and verve make one want to catch this band onstage. Yes, I believe I can tell from here that Heart could make you forgive a whole lot. Look out for them in the stretch.

Fred Schruers

Janis Ian

Miracle Row

(Columbia)

Janis Ian is the female Paul Simon: intelligent, very proficient at craft, and almost slick enough to make one believe there is a major artist suffering sensitively and oh-so-smoothly in those expensive grooves. There isn't (no sin that), but Ian's and Simon's brittle, high-quality angst, while always serviceable, fools a lot a people (including this reviewer, some might say). While Simon is clearly superior to Ian, both artists, in the four in the morning of their souls, would die to become their spiritual father, Bob Dylan. Since they can't, they deny wanting to be, and color-coordinate their unhappiness instead. The result is nice, professional music, but it gets to be a drag after a while. One feels like opening a window to let in some air. Should gloom, however genuine, sound so gorgeous and fashionable?

Ian has apparently been listening to Kurt Weill lately, since both "Will You Dance?" and especially "Party Lights" show his influence. On the whole, however, *Miracle Row* is so tasteful and precious that those of us who can still get excited about something so crude as another human being may feel excluded.

Paul Nelson

Jefferson Airplane

Flight Log 1966-1976

(Grunt))

If Marty Balin wants to play the petulant left-handed gun—to claim that he has always been the throbbing, greasy heart of the Jefferson Airplane—then this four-sided *Flight Log* backs him up. It opens with Balin delicately leading the original Airplane female Signe Anderson through an ersatz Elizabethan ballad called "Come Up the Years" (1966), and closes with our hero, like some latter-day Mitch Ryder, exhorting and transporting a 1976 Winterland audience with "Please Come Back."

Grace Slick shines, too, as we follow her crisp, incantatory vocals from the ice palace of "White Rabbit" (1967) through the steely maternalism of "Pretty As You Feel" (1971) and "Milk Train" (1972) to the Molly Bloom hip swats of "¿Come Again? Toucan" (1973). This last song is taken from Slick's underrated—hell, unnoticed—solo album, *Manhole*.

With this *Log* in hand, you come to realize that such guys as the speedskating Jack Casady and Jorma Kaukonen, as well as their successors, Pete Sears and Craig Chaquico, are readily replaceable tail- and door-gunners. This is not to deny Casady and Kaukonen their role in the reverberant majesty of the Airplane's *Surrealistic Pillow (1967)*, nor Sears and Chaquico their role in the Starship's vibrant *Red Octopus* (1975)—it's just to say that they, along with barmy navigator Paul Kantner, are the crew, while Balin and Slick sneer at each other in the pilots' cabin.

It was Kantner's taste for cosmo-political posturing that engendered both of the memorable cuts taken from *Volunteers* for this compilation. "Wooden Ships," a Kantner-Stephen Stills-David Crosby collaboration, has a creaking, post-holocaust dolefulness that still works today. But the Kantner-Balin "Volunteers," which the latter co-wrote with an eye to his own chance to do some loud auctioneering, is the sort of song that leads guys in literary magazines to lick their fingers over what they see as the decomposing entrails of rock "culture." "Got to revolution!" quotes one scoffing savant in *The New York Review of Books:* "(Rock & roll) music rang like a call to insurrection."

But, he goes on to say, the music was really just a call for stoned hedonists to sit transfixed by waves of sound. Because he hears no grandiose, "Volunteers"-style anthems today, this literary gent busies himself shoveling dirt over the corpse of rock & roll.

But just look: that damn corpse is fidgety. It shakes a leg (or something), and a toe pokes out of the dirt. Of course, the Airplane, with such bombast as "We are all outlaws in the eyes of America," did not institute a new social order, but they did let loose an energy that emancipated, ruffled, and set tickling the imaginations of the citizens who were there to listen. The Airplane's music today, hedonistic though it may happily be, is not wimpy, introverted, or post-liberal; it still assumes a community of people who are willing to take lessons from the whole "peace-and-love" baggage of the Sixties.

Well. I wouldn't have gotten so overwrought about this literary guy if he wasn't going after the beer money us rock & roll reviewers make in the gloom of night at the typewriter.

So how does *Flight Log* rate as a piece of product? You get an extravagant amount of textured cardboard, two fact-filled and four-colored record sleeves, a 12-page booklet on the history of the band, and 21 songs. Of these 21 songs, a third or more will be dispensable, unless you're a Kantner or Hot Tuna fan. At 11 bucks, that makes this LP an item for collectors. For you hedonists who just want something to smoke dope or jump rope to, the money might be better spent on *Surrealistic Pillow* or *Red Octopus*. Over and out.

Fred Schruers

Waylon Jennings

Waylon Live

(RCA Victor)

Waylon Live was recorded two years ago, at two different concerts, and seems pushed out to momentarily slake an increasing thirst for Jennings material. But it's a fortuitous bit of corporate greed: this is a damn good record.

After hearing Jennings in concert, I realize that this artist becomes a bit self-conscious in the studio, slightly more mannered and all too respectful of the stud poesy of his songwriting. On *Waylon Live*, he's backed by a solid, basic, six-man band, and, for my dough, the versions here of "Rainy Day Woman," "This Time," and "Me and Paul" are better than the original recordings.

The album's only annoyance is the perpetual state of hysteria with which the crowd seems to be afflicted. Said state escalates to rapid demonic possession each time mention is made of that Baron Corvo of Outlawdom, Willie Nelson—and he is invoked frequently.

Ken Tucker

Bruce Johnston

Going Public

(Columbia)

Former Beach Boy Bruce Johnston's first album oozes the fake sweetness and light of an ad for baby powder. While the phased vocals and shimmering electric keyboards that dominate the production recall Beach Boys' albums made during Johnston's tenure *(Sunflower, Surf's Up)*, the recycled sound strikes me as both sterile and arty. Johnston's pinched, nasal singing is a poor substitute for the blossoming harmonies of the Beach Boys. Instead of using the studio adventurously, Johnston and producer Gary Usher have cynically cast *Going Public* on the wavelength that has the most sure-fire nostalgic associations.

Although much of the material is familiar, very little survives Johnston's sanitization. Only "Disney Girls," his sole lasting contribution to the Beach Boys' legacy, transcends this stilted approach. In Johnston's version of "I Write the Songs," he sounds like a ghost trapped in a storm sewer. This "ethereal" approach doesn't redeem the song from kitsch any more than Barry Manilow's Cadillac-like commercial rendition did.

In fairness, Johnston is a shrewd craftsman with an impressive melodic talent. But his vision is desperately limited. Away from the Beach Boys, he reveals himself to be just another pop huckster who'll do anything for an extra buck. The insufferable "Rock and Roll Survivor" shows him being hostile to the very rock tradition that he rips off. But the nadir is an execrable disco version of "Pipeline." Bruce Johnston's *Going Public* is the equivalent of going artistically broke and crying all the way to the bank.

Stephen Holden

The Kinks

Sleepwalker

(Arista)

Perhaps with *Sleepwalker*, the Kinks' time has come at last. Not that the group hasn't been successful in the past—several hit singles, the last of which was "Lola" in 1970; respectable sales on some 20 LPs—but think about this: In 1964, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and the Kinks all released their first albums; the Beatles and the Stones,of course, were soon deservedly lionized into permanent pantheon status, but somehow, 13 years later, the Kinks are still cursed with practically the same cult reputation they started with and fully developed in the mid-Sixties. Since the early Seventies, in fact, sales of the band's records have probably gone down, and even Ray Davies' generally sturdy critical reputation began to slip a bit with the nearly interminable series of concept albums which finished the Kinks at RCA Victor.

There ain't no justice, sez I. Throughout the last decade, Ray Davies and the Kinks have come awfully close, both in quantity and quality, to matching the work of either the Beatles or the Rolling Stones (or the late-starting Who, for that matter). Personally, I'd rather listen to *Face to Face* or *The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society* than to *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, et al., although *Exile on Main Street* and *Who's Next* can admittedly trump any card in the Kinks' deck. Still, my point is that this band shouldn't be struggling; Ray Davies deserves as much aesthetic and commercial recognition as any songwriter in rock & roll, and it's about time he starts getting it.

Now the group has joined forces with Clive Davis at Arista, and, no matter what one may think of either Davis or Davies, I believe that the chemistry's right. Recently, Ray Davies, who is nothing if not likably shy and terminally troubled, told me that he feels that total artistic freedom has often curiously held him back. "I like people to be involved in my work," he said. "I love to bounce ideas off people." Davis, a long-term Kinks fan, has an enviable (insidious?) reputation for close participation (meddling?) in the art of his acts, sometimes for their own good. So far, both maestro and mogul seem happy, and no wonder.

Because *Sleepwalker*, culled from some 20 available songs, is a truly wonderful album. It's not flashy—no "Well Respected Man," no "Sunny Afternoon," no "Waterloo Sunset," no "Lola," no "Celluloid Heroes"—but it's incredibly solid, and almost every song soon takes on a life of its own and begins to grow in sweet and haunting ways. ("Brother" and especially "Stormy Sky" are particularly good examples.) One could argue—and even be right in a minor way, I suppose—that the emotions expressed in "Brother" are hopelessly sentimental, but I don't think that one could argue that Davies doesn't manage to make them work anyway simply because he so obviously needs to believe in them to survive. It's called character, and not many people have it to this extent. Similarly, in "Stormy Sky"—which is about a possible romantic disaster: the impending end of something—it is just this trait of quietly desperate, unforgettably poignant, near-foolhardy optimism that makes the approach of probable calamity scarcely less certain but surely less damaging in the long run. (In the short run, all of us mess it up, Davies seems to be saying, but life goes on.) Even if the relationship crashes, the couple's protective love for each other shines through, and you know that one won't kill the other if or when they separate—somehow, they'll *share* the tragedy.

Although Davies didn't intend *Sleepwalker* to be a concept album, his inherent sense of structure nevertheless prevails to a really fortunate degree. Instead of a lengthy series of confused dialectics, we get a set of quick vignettes about a person or persons to whom terrible things happen—and yet, as Malcolm Lowry once wrote concerning total dispair, "cheerfulness keeps breaking in." While I'm not much of an admirer of *Preservation Act 1*, *Preservation Act 2*, *Soap Opera*, or *Schoolboys in Disgrace*—Davies' full-blown dramas have always seemed to me to sacrifice musical interest for a resoundingly non-mythic and peculiarly stillborn story line—I do think that no one can create more memorable or completely believable characters in a short space of time than this artist. And *Sleepwalker* is comprised of nine reasonably brief songs about quirky, three-dimensional people who walk right off the phonograph and into your living room. That most of the people are probably Davies himself is a moot point because the man, by nature, is an autobiographical writer who works best when framing his material around his life.

Thus, *Sleepwalker* begins with the evocation of a hopeful child's quest
("Life on the Road")

Ever since I was a child
I left to wander wild
Through the bright city lights
And find myself a life I could call my own

and ends with the image of "a truly broken man" ("Full Moon") who, when thinking about the suicide of a friend whose woman has just betrayed him, appears to be contemplating suicide himself while arguing the inevitable "Somehow people fight back/Even if the future looks black" ("Life Goes On"). The trouble is that all of the singer's pro-life statements sound like they're more about death:

No use running around looking scared
'Cuz life will get you when you're unaware
One day it's gonna come so you'd better accept it
Life will hit you when you least expect it.

Of course, both "Full Moon" and "Life Goes On" are just as funny as they are harrowing, and the fact that Ray Davies can concoct such heady mixtures of comedy and tragedy makes him, in my book, the kind of rock & roll genius who can *almost* be compared with, say, Charlie Chaplin or, at the very least, to the Robert Altman of such films as *The Long Goodbye*. Although the hero of *Sleepwalker* nearly goes under in the miasma of the music business ("Life on the Road," "Mr. Big Man," "Juke Box Music"), various leeches ("Mr. Big Man," "Sleepwalker"), a bad marriage ("Sleepless Night," "Stormy Sky"), and himself ("Full Moon"), like Chaplin's Little Tramp filtered through the jealous nightmares of Ingmar Bergman, he is resilient enough to survive and even manage an embarrassed, beatific grin as circumstances nearly cave in his skull. He knows that he's crazy, and can even laugh about it at times

Haven't you noticed a kind of madness in my eyes?
It's only me, dear, in my midnight disguise
Pay no attention if I crawl across the room
It's just another full moon

but he also realizes that he *needs* that craziness to function and create, even if it may frighten him terribly:

If your hand starts shaking when night starts to fall
If you're scared of the moonlight and the shadows on the wall
If the face in the mirror isn't you at all
It's just another full moon.

I suspect that Ray Davies doesn't always know whether he's a magician or a murderer, that he is capable of being either, and that both acts often tempt him. A rare blend of uncommon common sense and a sensitivity so acute that everyday living must be painful were it not so amusing (and vice versa), he is the exception to almost every rule: an artist and a human being who tells the truth and who refuses to cheat, no matter what the cost to him personally.

If you don't think that's unusual, then you don't know a damn thing about rock & roll. Or life, for that matter.

Paul Nelson

Kiss

Rock and Roll Over

(Casablanca)

It took me a long time to write this review because my feelings about *Rock and Roll Over* change from day to day. On Monday, I think it's as good a fast rock & roll record as anyone has released lately. On Tuesday, I'm wondering how I could have been so deluded: the album's a shallow piece of gunk. Wednesday finds me searching out particular cuts, arguing with myself that "Ladies Room," "Mr. Speed," and "Baby Driver" are tremendously smart, eminently catchy songs. Thursday, the mind sneers: "What is wrong with you these days, Tucker? Put on that Arlo Guthrie LP and stop being ridiculous." By Friday, I'm wondering if it would be all that expensive to make a Kiss costume for myself—after all, I used to put on my own make-up when I acted in high-school plays. Saturday, I'll read an old *New Yorker* piece by Ellen Willis about, say, Dylan or the Rolling Stones and will marvel that I can actually be taking this Kiss krap so seriously. Sunday, I'll read a recent piece by Robert Duncan that will convince me that Kiss's sort of calculated spontaneity is exactly what rock has been lacking since middle-period Mick Jagger.

I'm sure there are others of you out there who feel like this: the world *cannot*, I think, be divided only into Kiss-lovers and Kiss-haters—that would be dull and unbearable. Thus, I propose you join my Ambivalent Kiss Army, or the AKA. I encourage AKA members to take no stand on Kiss. Buy their records, or just listen to them on the radio. Be scornful of

them to your non-rock-fan friends but then attend their concerts and cheer wildly. *Vive l'ambivalence!* Stick your tongue out! Put it back in!

Ken Tucker

Kiss

Love Gun

(Casablanca)

On the basis of lyrics like "Shock me/Make me feel better/Shock me/Put on your black leather," one might assume that Kiss *(a)* regularly frequent the infamous Anvil, a Manhattan club where men do some awfully perverse things; *(b)* worship underground drag-rocker Wayne County, whose live performance of "Toilet Bowl Love" features the singer rapturously jabbing his crotch with a plunger; and *(c)* applauded *The Last House on the Left*, that years-old B-movie in which some girls get slashed up after going to a rock & roll concert.

But, of course, Kiss would never go that far. Forgetting that they probably buy their costumes at Woolworth's Halloween close-out sales, Kiss sweetly harmonize those aforementioned lyrics from *Love Gun* with a gleeful innocence that is right out of two Sixties tunes, the Ohio Express' "Yummy, Yummy, Yummy" and the 1910 Fruitgum Company's "1-2-3 Red Light." No matter how hard Kiss try to be menacing—the power chords, the fast rhythms, the sometimes hoarse vocals, the often self-elevating lyrics—they only wind up sounding as dangerous as the dark side of Marie Osmond. And the real embarrassment came during "Flaming Youth" from *Destroyer:* "Flaming youth will set the world on fire/Flaming youth our flag is flying higher," Kiss merrily harmonized, as though submitting to their parents—totally unlike Elliott Murphy, who, on "Drive All Night" from *Just a Story From America,* powerfully snarled, "And if they stop us and ask where you goin'/We'll tell them we're going *through*."

Love Gun is mostly about stealing love, selling love, demanding love, and, finally, in the cover version of the Crystals' "Then He Kissed Me," surrendering to love. Like Black Oak Arkansas' *Rated X,* some songs here mix teen dreams with eroticism: "You pulled the trigger of my love gun," for example. But where Jim Dandy's viciously misogynous lyrics and obnoxious growls suggest a potential rapist, Kiss suggests a seventh-grade student beating his pork while making crank phone calls: "I got love for sale/And my love will not fail you." Sure, Kiss have conviction in their silliness—just remember, the Bay City Rollers do, too—but they never match Alice Cooper at his most driven ("School's Out"), even when they proclaim "I'm a hooligan/Won't go to school again/. . . Can't even spell my name."

Anyway, some good news about the new album: While previous Kiss LPs proved that the band was as heroic as the Kiss Army (whoever *they* are) insisted—or as annoying as their detractors claimed—*Love Gun* somewhat weakens the latter's case. At times, Kiss and Eddie Kramer's co-production keenly merges some of *Destroyer's* production values with *Rock And Roll Over's* straight-ahead approach. "Then She Kissed Me" threads the Animals' "It's My Life" riff into the wall-of-sound architecture. "Tomorrow and Tonight" cleverly invites determined soul sisters to Kiss' heavy-metal party. "Christine Sixteen," probably inspired by Mott the Hoople, benefits from its rousing piano work and, midway through the song, combines a spoken narrative with teenland harmonies.

Elsewhere, though, Kiss don't fare as well. Their guitar playing, vocals, and lyrics simply aren't distinctive enough to carry them through songs that adhere pretty closely to older, better material. And, besides, Starz' *Violation* beats Kiss at their own game. Although *Destroyer* was mostly a failed attempt at presenting Kiss as an "art" band—producer Bob Ezrin got carried away with the knobs and buttons—one song, "Sweet Pain," came very close to a modern-day Dave Clark Five sound. And that's something Kiss might further explore in the future.

Onstage, *Love Gun* (the polar opposite of a sex pistol) will probably derive some power from Kiss' wowie-zowie theatrics. But, considering the result will be mindless surface excitement designed for an audience who believe fire-breathing can stop bed-wetting, is there really any point in fusing comic-book violence with rock & roll?

Mitchell Schneider

Led Zeppelin

The Song Remains the Same

(Swan Song)

Led Zep is for ageless kids. Both *The Song Remains the Same* soundtrack and movie prove that. A whole 27 minutes of "Dazed and Confused" is just too trying for anyone whose senses aren't piqued just watching Jimmy Page sweat. In this archetypal Zeppelin tune, Page takes a good five minutes to bow his guitar strings just for the sake of producing what sounds like perfect background music for a scary movie. (It's also interesting to note the beginnings of "Achilles Last Stand," in one of the song's *many* jams.) Sure, all of this is excess, but it's exactly the stuff that nurtured Zep's heavy metal baby into the rambunctious heavy metal kid he, she, and/or it is today.

Then, there's the movie which, in the words of a friend, "looks like a training ground for symbolist poets." Flaxen-locked Robert Plant performs a series of chivalrous acrobatics centered around a phallic sword or the Holy Grail. The ultimate Freudian conclusion to this comes at the moment when the singer's eyes and smile engage those of a woman who is no less than the female version of himself. Romantics don't analyze this stuff to the point where the myth is debunked—and kids are the ultimate romantics. Their imaginations take precedence over experience simply because, for them, the former is more developed than the latter.

Lest anyone think this is all taken too seriously, *The Song Remains the Same* is fun both as film and record. Ultimately, the movie is more fun than the album. Like all soundtracks, the LP lacks the necessary associations with real (real?) life that the movie provides. This means that the movie plus a good memory of the movie are mandatory for a full appreciation of the soundtrack. Still, some discrepancies exist. Three of the film's best songs, "Black Dog," "Since I've Been Loving You," and "Heartbreaker," don't appear on the album, and vice versa with "Celebration Day."

Without a studio and the advantage of overdubbed guitars, Jimmy Page is still able to fill in all the melodic and rhythmic spaces that most bands need two guitarists to handle. His playing is full, haphazard, and streaked with just enough speed and accuracy to make the record primarily a Page talent showcase. John Paul Jones's role is equally distributed between playing bass and electric piano, and John Bonham's drum technique is as musically strategic to the group's sound as the "Moby Dick" race-car scene is to the momentum of the movie.

Robert Plant's voice is less controlled than in the studio. He doesn't hit the high note at the conclusion of "Stairway to Heaven" and his rendition of "Rock and Roll" is more bland than the original. But the duels between Plant's voice and Page's guitar, along with Plant's between-song-and-verse banter, prove to be the energetic and charismatic transcendents of his vocal shortcomings. He introduces "Stairway to Heaven" as "a song of hope," and when he asks, "Does anybody remember laughter?" his question is more appropriate in 1976 than it was in 1973.

The best thing about both the movie and the album is the way they feel: *live.* They incite and provoke as much energy as was created the moment they were made. And that's a *lot* of energy. This is Led Zeppelin for the sake of Led Zeppelin, which is always for the sake of heavy metal and kids of that persuasion. Although the song remains the same, it sounds as good now as it did then—and there's no sign of it letting up. This kid is *glad!*

Kristeen Nicholson

Nils Lofgren

The Best of Grin Featuring Nils Lofgren

(Epic)

Notice that they didn't try to title this *The Best of Nils Lofgren.* There's more ace material on the kid's 1975 *Nils Lofgren* album alone than on this questionable, not-quite-hits compilation from his early Seventies LPs with the Grin outfit. Tenderfeet, be advised: buy his recent stuff before you get this souvenir of a busted legend.

Essentially, this disc offers a fair retrospective of a genuine talent that never caught on, except with critics, a few neighbors in the artist's native District of Columbia area, and fringe Neil Young fans who adopted Lofgren after his stint with Crazy Horse.

Nils Lofgren's failure to punch through to stardom is puzzling because he's always had the touch—a true rocker's instinct one can't learn or fake. He favors a rolling country-rock, as on "Love or Else" and the classic "White Lies," and has a wonderful melodic flair which he embellishes with sweet vocal harmonies. His lyrics are predominantly about love, and often, as in "Like Rain," they're carried off with an affectingly earnest natural poetry: "Love ya like rain, darlin', always fallin'. . . Wander like clouds when it comes to lovin'." And the bruised voice can be charming, especially since it comes from a seemingly perfect tender-punk stance—strong on guitar savvy, but soft on heart.

While Lofgren shares Neil Young's rough-hewn, country-rock instincts, he's never had the gift of slashing to the center of human myths that makes Young the giant he is. Comparatively, Lofgren's sound is that of a well-meaning nephew from the East Coast, hungry to be a lover,-not-a-fighter, but curiously unable to sniff out the battles that confirm kingdoms. He's the feisty bantam who seems never fated to rule among the cocks of the walk.

Side Two of this disc is the vulnerable spot where the hits are misses. "Heavy Chevy" is a leaden attempt at a picaresque tale that winds up sounding merely imitative. The choral "We All Sung Together" is cloyingly sweet. "Sad Letter" is a moderately interesting tune, nothing special.

Nils Lofgren certainly deserves some measure of honor among keepers of the rock & roll flame. (Didn't he fly scarfs from his guitar neck before Steven Tyler began garrotting his mike stand?) Despite its merits, however, this album gives a good indication of why this talented also-ran didn't click with Grin: he didn't distinguish himself sufficiently. But let's not give up on him yet.

Stephen Demorest

Nils Lofgren

I Came to Dance

(A&M)

Nils got a haircut. Check the sleek black cover of Lofgren's latest—he looks like a troublemaker. A certified Travis Bickle time-bomb, Nils is shorn and ready for action. His back-cover likeness is really no-nonsense; the swarthy, skeletal Italo-Swede comes on like an ex-con bantamweight contender. Athletic in a fiesty, below-the-belt way.

Haircut aside, the *I Came to Dance* album art

is heavy with imagery: Nils sports a silver Stratocaster kerchief clip. On the back, a gloved phantom hands him a chestnut Strat with Fender shoulder strap. The gloved ring finger is decorated with a serpentine coke spoon. Lofgren's rock-classic Capezios look soft and sweet like marzipan; with his quilted kimono, Nils seems a smug Rocky Balboa poised to go the distance. In the confering of the ceremonial axe, the message is clear: Nils is next. But who is the invisible benefactor, the electric minstrel spook? Jimi Hendrix, I presume?

The explicit but resonant tokens deployed in the packaging reflect the positive calculation in the grooves of *I Came To Dance*—call it figurative precision. With his streamlined butch haircut and abundance of unabashed homage, Nils plays the jock-rock Patti Smith: rock star as super fan. Which could be the last refuge of the cult hero. Or, more likely, the truest expression of the myth-involved celebrity-self.

That Lofgren feels professionally stymied is no secret. The kid knows he's good. And *I Came To Dance* is Lofgren's 1977 bid for mainstream recognition—his third solo effort (not counting A&M's unreleased "authorized bootleg," *Back It Up!!*) since the demise of Grin in 1974. Nils' policy of Presumption in a Pinch failed him on last year's *Cry Tough,* but the affectionate insolence succeeds mightily this time.

It's an old stance: four out of nine tunes are dedicated to the notion that Rock Saves, a notion that's been *au courant* ever since Chuck Berry fathered Johnny B. Goode. In "Happy Ending Kids," Nils lionizes his own Johnny: "Your boy's got soul, yes he's easy, he's in control." Here, Lofgren plays the chagrined music-store manager who watches the Happy Ending Kid—an outlaw innocent— swipe a Strat (what else?): "I had to go over and disturb him/I wore out the seat of his pants/Put the axe in his trembling hands, said try to make me dance." Before the song ends, you know that the kid is Nils—or a fabled rear-screen projection of same. On the title cut, Lofgren recites:

My manager kept telling me if I wanna be great
I'd better wise up and sing my songs straight
I said listen here fool, in order to survive
I have to be my dirty self, I won't play no jive.

This is hard-line, rock-reductionist rhetoric, formal next to Patti Smith's "Rock and roll is what I'm born to be," but equally populist, emblem-obsessed, and self-aware.

Indeed, the songs not specifically concerned with rock & roll read like a rock & roller's code of ethics. "To Be a Dreamer" tells us: "Life's not what the world would have it seem/The call of the wild makes you a believer." Lofgren's myriad mini-epics of flight and punishment reflect a romantic's compulsive failure to connect ("Still get confused on just how to relate/I'm headed South to pay close attention") in the face of a boogified fatalism: "Pull, no matter the load . . ."

Finally Nils covers "Happy," which is a pop curiousity because it's the closest we've come to Keith Richard confessional. Lofgren appropriates the song with patented slide, vocal whine, and an "innocent" lyric misreading: "Always burned a hole in my pants" becomes "Always had a hard in my pants." It's a goofy obeisance, since Nils is projecting again. (This from the kid who wrote the refrain, "Keith don't go, don't take my fun," and subtitled the song "Ode to the Glimmer Twin," in case you misunderstood.) With this scrambled "Happy," Lofgren's reverence is an inadvertent revelation: the kid is star-tripping at the mirror for our merriment. He's the late-Seventies Johnny B. Goode with the mythic Strat attitude. Right now, Nils Lofgren is entrenched in Fender iconography, but someday soon his name is gonna be in lights.

Wesley Strick

Lynyrd Skynyrd

Street Survivors

(MCA)

When my time comes and I'm on my own
You ain't gonna find me in no old folks home.
—Ronnie Van-Zant and Steve Gaines, "You Got That Right," *Street Survivors.*

At this point, we have two basic choices: a sentimental eyelid-leaking eulogy, based on this writer's long acquaintance with Van-Zant and Gaines, or objective, state-of-the-band reportage, devoid of all emotion, rich in dispassionate description.

Despite opting for the latter course, an image flashes: bored, jaded Van-Zant stalking wearily about the stage during the recording of *One More from the Road,* his innate professionalism clashing with the tedious responsibilities of singing "Sweet Home Alabama" for the 663rd time. This may be as cutting as the switchblade of a South Bronx junkie, but that album sucked. Tom Dowd, the man who helped propel Rod Stewart toward the semblance of a second career, buried Leon Wilkeson's bass and Artimus Pyle's drums so deep in the mix that all that was heard was Van-Zant's Stelazine growl and the barely connected guitar lines of Steve Gaines, Allen Collins, and Gary Rossington. To make matters worse, Pyle occasionally played in time.

Now comes *Street Survivors.* God help me if I am suffering from Crocemania, but now that Ronnie is dead, I'm finally beginning to realize what a good singer he was. Not in the classic, Jaggeresque sense of rhythm-section whipsnapper, but in the projection of a snide, sneakily wry demeanor—a scowl of the larynx. For example, "What's Your Name," one of the few truly honest groupie songs ever to be recorded, attracts via its utterly hedonistic recruitment of the female, its skip-stop leap to nine A.M. the next morning, and the singer's promise that "When I come back here next year/I want to see you again." The punch is the final line: "What's your name?" The lady might have felt like shit.

Surprises? Several, including the soft, mean growl of Steve Gaines. Also killed in the crash, Gaines was finally hitting stride as a picker and a scribe. He joined Skynyrd at the time of the live LP, but, due to the fact that that disaster contained mostly rehashes, his creative input was minimal. Here, he writes and sings two powerful rockers, "I Know a Little" (another sarcastic amalgam) and "Ain't No Good Life." He also co-wrote the tigerishly tender "I Never Dreamed" and the defiant "You Got That Right" with Van-Zant.

The clincher, however, is "That Smell." A Van-Zant/Allen Collins work, its morbidity, drawing reference from a near-fatal Gary Rossington auto crash, invites the most detailed, pain-wracked scrutiny. The chorus, which includes the wails of the late Cassie Gains, is as foreboding as a nimbus at 2000 feet.

Premonitions? Who the fuck knows—or cares? All that can be said is that *Street Survivors* represents a zenith which, after five albums of erratic quality, was finally in sight.

Russell Shaw

The Steve Miller Band

Book of Dreams

(Capitol)

For Steve Miller, the Sixties never really ended. His time-warp utopianism, a charming anachronism, has lately been reinforced by his 1976 platinum seller, *Fly Like an Eagle*—Miller knows how to play what pays. The commercial resurgance began with 1973's *The Joker*—and I've got a theory. Ever since 1973, he's surrounded himself with a real band again (something he hasn't done since the old Fillmore days of 1968, and he's developed and capitalized on an Image. Basically, it's nothing more than the original shtick of the late Sixties—the ole Space Cowboy, the Gangster of Love, Maurice, etc.—a sublime fictive character who combines sensitivo love poetry and old-fashioned macho) with far-out explorations of the ozone.

He's a chameleon all right, and his motives are difficult to deduce. I'm not even that sure he knows. It may just be simply cresting the gilded wave—and more power to him! Although I've got to admit that, as an age-old Steve Miller fan (dating back a decade now), I get a little irritated by latter-day rebirths of stuff that he's already done. I'm sure that he must think about it, too. Moreover, it's my guess that he considered departing the whole scene about two years ago (after *The Joker's* success) for this very reason. But the newly acquired farm in Oregon requires cash flow, this facet being high on the totem of his current priorities. So it's no surprise therefore that he went ahead with *Fly Like an Eagle* and *Book of Dreams* (both cut during the same sessions) on account of his current account. And I can't denounce this mercenary move, even though it has required the bionic cloning of a well-established image and a well-sunk groove. It's a marriage of convenience, and it's okay as long as he can continue to get off by just playing, which he has positively done.

Book of Dreams consolidates the hints of image resurrection implied on *Fly Like an Eagle.* The cosmogonic cover art and general presentation have become high ritual (unlike on those of *Eagle,* which I saw as merely tentative stabs at capitalizing on the old grail). A great part of it comes down to Miller's All-American stance, clean and squeaky after all of these years. Unjaded as always. Once he toyed with being a revolutionary and a pimp, but mostly it was lip service because when he got down to it, yes, kids, it was *da blooze.* Psychedelic boogie music. Like watching Dennis Wilson copulate with Tina Turner. (This seeming irony has in fact developed into his image of recent date.) Hey, that's fine, but I still sincerely feel that Miller is capable of a further extension into all kinds of unknown reaches, such as the electro-aural experimentation with which he's always dabbled.

Spacey little segues are placebos for total indulgence into space tapeology. Like *Book of Dream's* minute-short intro, "Threshold," and "Electro Lux Imbroglio" from Side Two: totally instrumental, computerized, synthetic space *musique concrete.* Ironically, this takes us back to the beginning. Miller's first album was clearly a space-cum-B.B. King collage, and *Sailor's* whole first side was devoted to such experimentation ("Song for Our Ancestors"). But now there's the ranch to consider, and tangerine dreams will probably not float the life style. Maybe this is why *Book of Dreams* is such a tentative album. There are 12 tracks on the record, and that does say a lot.

But when it works, you can easily overlook the lack of conviction, the self-in. "Swingtown" meets both worlds head-on with traditional Steve Miller dynamism. It's got the kind of presence that made him famous. The rock-steady, rhythm-section/guitar-pulse magic that introduces the song utilizes an unshakable hook, and Miller's Townshend-like thunderbolts are a jolting *coup de grace.* "Swingtown" is a breath-taking voyage in the grand manner of Miller's aural doktorism. When the old washing-waves treatment of the fade rolls across the speakers, you just zero right back into "Song For Our Ancestors"—and Gary Mallaber's hard-assed drum chop is stone *kicking!*

The song's lyrics equal notorious Utopia-compulsion. This is Beach Boys-plus-space side of Millerology, with which all of his early fans are more than familiar. And it works here. But when it *don't* work, Steve Miller looks like a goddamn blissed-out fool. "Wish Upon a Star" is embarrassing space-cadet crap. Mickey Mouse cosmic indigestion (meeska-mooska-mouskateer!).

Then there's the blooze delux and the blooz redux. "Sacrifice" and "The Stake" are from the old-style, Buddy Guy-gone-Pluto mold, but they're disposable, even if they are good. We've been here before and dug yer mother's cooking, so why fork over six more bills for the new album? Maybe it's the new audience who don't remember, maybe this is what Miller assumes, maybe the kids don't even know. At any rate, it's a squeeze play and carries all the risks inherent in trying to sneak it home.

One thing the tykes *do* know for certain is THE NEW STEVE MILLER HITS (what keeps the cows mooin' and the back 40 mowed)! "Jet Airliner" buttresses Miller's current agricultural image. Although he didn't write it, his playing and singing turn it into an infectious Milleresque float-rocker. "Jungle Love" is a delightful and boppy funk-goof, replete with some mind-twisting, blue-jass vocal phrasing. The LP closes with a pair of blast-back, 12-string, "Quicksilver Girl" Millerisms called "My Own Space" and "Babes in the Wood." Where, after all, would this artist be without his sensuous dreamscapes and those twinkling acoustic axes like Tinkerbelle blessing Disneyland with a wave from her magic silvertone wand?

And that's just the problem. Where would Miller be without his obligatory float-rockers, Tinkerbelles, two raunch hits per disc, fizzadelic blooz, space segues, and the rest of the etceteras? Us old-time fans who realize that Stevie "Gittar" Miller is capable of so much more than the refried boogie he's been grinding out for the last five albums—well, we just tend to give him less rope now that we did during the years when we figured him for advancement. It's a sad but inescapable conclusion. Miller has clowned us for long enough, having played upon an image which even he probably has little to do with anymore. But that's show biz (look at the Rolling Stones). Me, I wanna see action, not just these previous convictions from the, uh, Gangster of Love. It's time for Steve Miller to shit or get off the pot.

Bruce Malamut

The Moody Blues

Caught Live + 5

(London)

The Graeme Edge Band

Paradise Ballroom

(London)

John Lodge

Natural Avenue

(London)

When I was in high school, I used to play in all sorts of local rock bands—strictly garage stuff, but because my ear was better than anyone else's in the neighborhood, our jukebox copies sounded more authentic than most. We sailed through Stones and Who and Byrds songs (we even did a Zappa number), but the sound of the Moody Blues always eluded us, and I couldn't figure out why.

Listening to *Caught Live + 5*, I now know the story. It should have been obvious all along: The Moodys were the first of the ultra-produced pop legends, with a zillion guitar overdubs and all sorts of orchestral noises on every one of their favorite tracks. For them to reproduce all of that in concert would have taken a platoon of guitarists and pianists. Needless to say, since they brought none of the above onstage with them, their live sound was as full of holes as any garage band's.

They did possess one quality that no garage band had, though: their ultimately serene and mellifluous aah's. This was the heart of the Moody Blues' appeal: their aah's and ooh's transmitted more pure sybaritic delight than a school of whales lolling at low tide or harem night in any Arabian court. Even when they did it onstage, that sound bypassed the brain's intellectual circuitry and nestled up in the pleasure center like a kitten in one's lap.

Only two of the five dead dogs tacked onto *Caught Live + 5* are worth a second listen, and, predictably, they're both by Justin Hayward. Hayward has always been the master of the joyous moan because his voice is the warmest and his compositions the least preachy. This double set is for hardcore fans only.

Paradise Ballroom is the latest documentation of an ongoing con game by guitarist Adrian Gurvitz, who may be the stupidest man in rock but who always manages to rope some drummer into taking him in for a few albums. When Ginger Baker, his last employer, wised up, Gurvitz made a beeline for ex-Moody Graeme Edge, who is himself much dumber than Baker. Don't touch this turkey with a 10-foot pole.

Natural Avenue is something in the nature of a sellout. Not quite MOR, not quite funky, only somewhat over-produced, it ends up such a horrid compromise of half-measures that there hardly seems room for ex-Moody John Lodge's personality at all.

The story is that the Moody Blues have recently reformed. Maybe that won't entirely put a stop to this bullshit, but it should localize it into one record at a time instead of five.

Michael Bloom

Van Morrison

A Period of Transition

(Warner Bros.)

A Period of Transition is an album I respect but don't much want to listen to, ultimately because it raises the question of whether rock & roll can go toe to toe with maturity and endure. This is a question that scares me. Van Morrison's visionary blues, his soul poetics, and his passionate eclecticism once made some of the best music rock had to offer—a breathtaking fusion of form and feeling. He used the popular song as a vehicle for private mysticism, and, in the process, made that mysticism public, even universal. But despite their sophistication and clarity, his new songs fail to live up to expectations. And because Morrison is one of the best, and because these songs are the result of an extended period of retreat and supposed renewal, the failure seems more significant than most.

Van Morrison has always made great music out of rapprochement. In *Veedon Palace*, he brought abstruse Gaelic dreams down to gut level with his Curtis Mayfield vocals. *Moondance* and *Tupelo Honey* both charged near-sentimental melodies with earthy instrumentation and a relentless beat. Morrison's latest title refers as much to the state of rock in the Seventies as it does to the artist's recent past or future perfect. *A Period of Transition* is his attempt to swing with the times, to come to terms with the attenuated cool of funk and jazz-rock, dispassionate riffing, and the bloodless pulse. Economy is in the air, and from the hypnotic groove of "It Fills You Up" to the hook turned professional in "The Eternal Kansas City," the singer is making a little go a long way.

But what's depressing about *A Period of Transition* is that rapprochement seems too much like capitulation: in the process of becoming more accessible, Morrison has begun to sound like everybody else. The flat brassy horns turn his messages of reassurance into something closer to resignation. And the most affirmative lyrics ("Heavy Connection," for instance) concentrate on the past, as though to deny the effects of time. There are still moments when Morrison soars—his repeated "baby, baby" at the end of "Heavy Connection" turns a single word into a dictionary. The startling rush of his phrasing when he mentions farmer's daughters makes the moment as dizzy and joyous as a roll in the hay. But most of the flamboyant eruptions that marked Morrison's singing, his melodies, and his arrangements have been civilized, trapped under glass. The volcano becomes a coffeepot.

Conservation is not the album's only sign of maturity: *A Period of Transition's* appeal is intellectual as well. Gospel and blues sources, the theatricality of the female chorus in "The Eternal Kansas City," the "Joshua Fit the Battle" quote in "You Gotta Make It Through the World"—all are used purposefully to create a Gershwin-esque portrait of American music. Such conscious patchwork is at once impressive and a dry contrast to Morrison's former impetuous grabs at whatever would serve his immediate self-expressive need. He has acquired that historical perspective advertised as one of the attractions of adulthood.

But Van Morrison's reluctance to rage is not necessarily an omen for all aging rockers. For what finally dulls his brave experiments is not the lessening of intensity, or even the less-than-heartfelt conviction with which he delivers his lines. What's missing is a sense of self as separate from the self-myth. That crucial separation is the basis for constructive self-parody. Although such a separation is as much a mark of maturity as any other, it's also what gives *Black and Blue* or *Blood on the Tracks* their triumphant humor and real power. Without it, Morrison's notes on survival are grimmer than they need be—yet.

Ariel Swartley

Mott the Hoople

Greatest Hits

(Columbia)

There is no true irony in rock & roll. Irony uses sarcasm to invert the meaning of a commonly accepted symbol, and sarcasm is such an ingrained attitude in rock & roll expression that it is rendered useless as a weapon for surprise. No band illustrates this principle better than Mott the Hoople, perhaps the most effective British second-string heavy-metal combo in history. This group had enough understanding of rock & roll absurdity to introduce themselves to the world with an instrumental version of "You Really Got Me," followed by dirge-like high-opera renditions of Doug Sahm's "At the Crossroads" and Sonny Bono's "Laugh at Me," with some guy (Ian Hunter) singing this crazy-solemn parody of Bob Dylan. Such an equation—Kinks+Sahm+Bono=Metal Dylan—is certainly informed by an ironic reaction to the individual elements of said equation, but doesn't invert their meanings, it *amplifies* them. Bob Dylan, even in his earliest stages, was a rock & roll singer, and Ian Hunter brought this to everyone's attention by illustrating just how adaptable a style the Minnesotan had.

For their first few albums, Mott the Hoople were literally ironic (as in "of, like, or containing iron") as the newest band in the sonic-attack tradition established by the Who. Even their song titles were programatically futuristic—"Thunderbuck Ram," "Walkin' with a Mountain," "No Wheels to Ride," "The Wheel of the Quivering Meat Conception," "Death May Be Your Santa Claus," and, of course, "Threads of Iron." When the group failed to make an effective translation of British rocker energy to audiences from this country, they folded, only to be brought back to life by David Bowie, who promptly wrote them a hit single ("All the Young Dudes") and produced their most successful LP (*All the Young Dudes*), tailoring them to a ready-made audience as a Bowie offshoot. The band rode the trend for a while with the obligatory glitter outfits and queen references until Hunter finally quit in

disgust with this image. The last two Mott the Hoople records show a group with great pop ideas and a crumbling identity struggling to come up with a commercial production formula. Hunter's songs became autocritical confessions of his failure to live up to his own heroic expectations. This sentimental period of Hunter's writing is brilliantly self-indulgent, directly in the tradition of Hunter's greatest writing influence, Ray Davies.

So this album, comprised mostly of songs from those last two LPs, is at least ironically titled: *Greatest Hits* contains no hits outside of "All the Young Dudes"—what's here are not even the best songs available for a Columbia repackaging. "Honaloochie Boogie" and "Hymn for the Dudes" are unnecessary, and the record would have been a lot stronger if "Sweet Jane" and "One of the Boys" were included. But there are two previously unavailable Mott the Hoople cuts, and the LP at least condenses the last two albums down to one record of essential material. The two additions show the band still working out ideas to the bitter end—"Foxy Foxy" has a Phil Spectorish density unlike anything they had previously recorded, and "Saturday Gigs" is not totally without interest.

"All the Way from Memphis," one of Ian Hunter's better pieces of rock criticism, is a good opening for *Greatest Hits* but the LP should have begun with the singer's last gasp as a Hoople, the great and incredibly sad "Golden Age of Rock 'n' Roll." "Ballad of Mott" is Hunter's central confession, in which his mask of arrogance is stripped away to reveal an aging rocker who understands how impossible it is to live up to the heroic responsibility of being a paradigm for a generation. And where is the magnificent "I Wish I Was Your Mother"?

This record should have ended with the beautifully resigned "Sea Diver," Hunter's most elegaic song. "I wish I could escape this iron veil," he cries before coming to his final realization:

Ride on my son.
Ride
Until you fail.

John Swenson

Elliott Murphy

Just a Story from America

(Columbia)

Just a Story from America proves Elliott Murphy does have a sense of humor. That's not to say there aren't times you'd like to wring the philosopher of the suburbs by his precious sensibilities. Murphy's agonies have always been refined, and his rage against Amerika burns in a breast furnished by Bloomingdale's. Nevertheless, Murphy's frustration is real. Although his unattainable rich girls and obtrusive literary references don't arouse instant sympathy, he both hates and is haunted by the trappings of wealth and privilege. His is the cross of the conscientious middle-class. And one of the reasons *Just a Story from America* is the best of his recent albums is that now Murphy seems more comfortable with his origins, less quick to pose as an alien or fallen angel.

In fact, the opening song, "Drive All Night," says it out loud: "I never liked where we came from/and I tried to fight . . . But if you'll be my reflection/We'll let our memories die/And we can drive all night." This is Levittown's answer to Bruce Springsteen—a hymn of release complete with dynamite and a rumble of drums across the speakers. But Murphy's teenagers are no highway heroes. They sneak into the wrong house by mistake—it's a development, after all. And when they finally get hold of Daddy's keys, the car which they take to Thunder Road is a classy Coupe de Ville.

For Murphy, the self-conscious romantic, darkness has always equalled freedom, only now he's talking in images instead of philosophy: "And if the sun starts to catch us/We'll paint the windows black/And we can drive all night." Jackson Browne makes love with sunglasses on (in "The Pretender"); Elliott Murphy sees American with his eyes closed. Cynic and romantic are different sides of the same coin, and Murphy's work is best when he doesn't try to define himself as simply one or the other.

This is true of "Anastasia," the album's showpiece, exquisitely decked out with a boys choir and strings. Here, Murphy has found the apotheosis of all his society girls in the daughter of the Tsar. He both condemns and defends the Revolution that robbed and maybe killed her: "I'm not saying we were wrong to fight/But I know we were wrong to despise/Just the joy in a little girl's eyes."

Just a Story from America is richer melodically and more rhythmically varied than Murphy's previous records. But, despite the clearer focus in his writing and the more powerful imagery, the singer's ambivalence still gets in the way of many of his songs. For all his readiness to mythologize rock & roll (in "Rock Ballad" and "Think Too Hard"), he sounds slightly ashamed of taking it so seriously. And, for all his talk about release, he seldom lets himself go. "Darlin' (And She Called Me)," a simple rocker full of assurance and happy sensuality, is weakened by awkward references to Errol Flynn and *Gone With the Wind*. Flesh and blood turn to celluloid; punchy verses become clogged with words. Not even the snappy guitars can set Elliott Murphy free.

Ariel Swartley

Ted Nugent

Cat Scratch Fever

(Epic)

The Great Unwashed continues his assault on the lobes. Ted Nugent's campaign to bring rock & roll music to the masses takes on Crusade proportions when you consider how long he's been stomping through the leaky-roof circuit in search of impressionable minds to warp. His attack is nothing subtle—a gut-crunching E-guitar buzz bomb, militaristically eager to rip snarling noises from amplifiers. It works.

But while he's been smoking through the corn country all of these years, Nugent has learned a few tricks. And his recent stride for the roses has seen the mongrel (whoops, confusing him with that other Midwest campaigner, Bob Seger) employ some techniques that could almost be described as strategic.

Cat Scratch Fever, you see, uses outright literary (sic) clips from Alice Cooper and lots of tasteful metal borrowings from the Jeff Beck book of rude guitar sounds. Otherwise, the "Rice Pudding"/"Plynth," post-Zeppelin, revisionist British metallurgy sounds pretty normal, well-carved, etc. Makes perfect sense in the old ass-shaking dimensions.

But the strategies don't end there. "Live It Up"—a perfect affirmation of being/non-being, good/bad, Meltzerian rock dichotomy —moves from the "Magic Bus"-style chord patterns of the Who to "Not Fade Away" boogie vamp, and eventually winds down to a conventional, Alvin Lee-type, fast-fingers routine. But the "Magic Bus"/"Not Fade Away" equation is an important critical moment. One other band (at least) has noticed the complete identification of these two items: a local Bronx turn-of-the-decade bar band known as Bloodbath Review (appropriate misnomer), whose second lead guitarist, Walter Luhr, now resides in Britain with the Heartbreakers. The important thing about matching "Magic Bus" with "Not Fade Away" (also applicable are "Who Do You Love" and "Mona") is that such a move breaks down the mythical British-versus-West Coast ideological split by proving that both musics are ESSENTIALLY THE SAME THING.

Here's the formula: "Magic Bus"/"Not Fade Away" equals the Who/the Grateful Dead.

Or: "Who Do You Love"/"Mona" equals the Quicksiver Messenger Service/the Rolling Stones.

Or, conversely, you can mix the equation any way that you want. The point is that Nugent is thinking big—and he's on to something. "Home Bound" is a restructuring of elements from "Beck's Bolero" into a completely different shape while using the exact same sounds. A pretty good trick if you can do it—and Nugent can.

All of this may lead you to believe that Ted Nugent has run out of ideas and is stealing shamelessly in his old age. Not so. He's been stealing shamelessly ever since the Amboy Dukes, and so have many of his more illustrious peers. Rock & roll is meant to be stolen. Practically every good rock & roll song in history came from somewhere else, so Nugent is just getting more efficient as he ages.

Good. Maybe, by his next record, he'll be able to do something with "Street Fighting Man." If so, the Eagles had better watch out.

John Swenson

Ted Nugent

Free-for-All

(Epic)

Idi Amin, Grand Kleagle of the topographic boil of Uganda, has said, in response to world press canards that he's a mere throwback: "I am a bulldozer." General Amin knows whereof he speaks, having been more or less personally responsible for the massacre of human beings numbering in the literal thousands, the bodies no sooner divested of their late owners than fed to crocodiles in the rivers around his garden capitol, Kampala. In other words, even Hunter Thompson quails at calling him a pussy. Among the roster of his greatest hits:

- getting tired of a wife, accusing her of adultery, and having her executed way before sunup;
- organizing and implementing a national armed services affectionately known as the Suicide Squads, who revolutionized militarism by eliminating the middlemen by eliminating *each other* just for drill;
- giving Ugandan military and police free reign of the country; i.e., they can torture and/or kill anybody they want to without having to answer to even Idi, ergo the Hippie Plague CLEANED UP before its first spores dropped;
- shutting down the Blue Oyster Cult and all other tobacco-diminutive pretenders to the grail of blood by not only declaring his idolization of Hitler but setting up actual concentration camps all over the place so you don't even hafta be Jewish or anything else but look vaguely like a spy to get thrown into. (How to recognize a spy, according to Big Daddy Amin, among other surefire tipoffs: "A spy may be spotted in the day or in the night, but never in the afternoon . . . . In afternoon, they sleep to be fit for their criminal deeds at night or in the morning," which automatically condemns all rock & roll bands; plus "A spy is very often a man who has a lot of money, a good wife, and a black dog. Sometimes spies are bald and to hide it, they wear a hat . . .'). Not only that, here is his answer to the everpressing problem of camp K-rations, foodstuffs in general being in as short shrift in Uganda as anteaters at the North Magnetic Pole: "Just kill 'em and let the bastards eat each other!"

In the opposite corner, Ted Nugent. His greatest hits:

- "Journey to the Center of Your Mind";
- "Baby Please Don't Go" (stolen lock, stock, and trundle, excepting mid-song gitsolo to fill out the minnits, from Van Morrison's Them);
- *Marriage on the Rocks/Rock Bottom* (late Sixties LP on the Polydor label noted by col-

lectors who couldn't muster busfare to make it from Claremont and North Tad to the International Rock & Roll Trader Vic's Rubdown Convention at the McAlpin Hotel of Jerry Brown fame, October 1975, as the vinyl repository of "The Inexhaustible Quest of the Cosmic Cabbage");

• thinking he was better than Jimi Hendrix when he couldn't even grow a full Van Dyke.

The choice is YOURS, sports fans: would you rather be snuffed by a true-class CHAMP and get legendarily fed to pirate crocs, or by a mere goat-bearded bow 'n' arrowsprit from the hardly evocative wilds of Michigan? Myself, I'd rather step in front of the crosstown bus, but I'm merely posing this pulverization, so I'm exempt. Proof of the latter smugsmirk is that owing to reviews of previous items in his *oeuvre*, Ted has threatened more than once to smithereen me, yet here I swatdash again, and to what end? Seems to me a fettle deathwish'd be better Maslow'd by appeal direct to Red Line Kampala (Amin's personal Gary Gilmore line, for those who are tired of waiting for Gene Simmons to turn them into Buddhist monks protesting the dismal state of the postwar economy: 2241). I quote from an ACTUAL ARTICLE published by me late as '74, straight from Ted's yap: "Duane Allman was an asshole for getting so stoned he couldn't control his motorcycle. Fuck him." "If Iggy Pop was here right now, I'd crush his skull." "Hendrix alive was the greatest, but he died about a year later, and don't tell me it wasn't drugs. Too bad the fucker kicked off." And "Cactus was one of the most phenomenal bands I've ever witnessed."

Which actually, after all the foofaraw, explains my quandary. Ted won't be kind enough to make good his boasts and kill me and all of his other fans off BECAUSE HE'S NOT A MUSICIAN, HE'S A ROCK CRITIC. Aka wimp with onan hands helping the ants into his pants. Not only that, he stole the Cactus line from my review of their second album (*Creem*, 1970).

On the other hand, his new album is quite good. Better than most other current heavy-metal product, in point of fact. The reason it is so:

• Ted has lived longer than Ace Frehley; and Glenn Buxton is dead;

• Mark Farner raises rootabagas to pass the time between ecology and Barry Manilow; and

• the almost very first vocalized words on this record are the absolute best on any album released this year—to wit: "When in doubt, I whip it out!"

P.S. If you buy this record and still don't think it's worth the money, send it to me and you can have all of my Slade albums, plus my copy of *Black Pearl Live*. If you crawl for them.

Lester Bangs

Nuggets

Original Artyfacts from the First Psychedelic Era 1965-1968

(Sire)

There's no way you can take rock & roll too seriously after listening to this stuff. Compiled by Lenny Kaye (yes, he's also lead guitarist for the Patti Smith Group), this sampler of 27 hits from the psychedelic years 1965 -1968 is a fascinating, thorough, and totally ridiculous souvenir of rock's adolescent growing pains.

The "first" psychedelic era, as demonstrated by this release, was still concerned with compact hit singles; although every group seemed to have discovered the organ, spacey and extended guitar solos were still a figment of Jimi Hendrix's imagination. With a sense of history goading them on, garage and bar bands were determined to leave their marks on popular culture—and some marks they were: quirky and awkward arrangements, pretentious "significant" lyrics, obnoxious mid-song diatribes. Some of the results have a peculiar, vehement charm, while others are so awful that they're hilarious in retrospect.

Fame in those days was a fleeting thing. The stars were young, inexperienced, relatively propertyless—hardly stars at all. National tours and television exposure were comparatively rare, and regional hits broke nationwide only occasionally. Thus, Kaye's collection spotlights hometown heroes from several corners of America: New England's Barbarians and Remains, New York City's Vagrants and Blues Magoos, Chicago's Shadows of Knight and Cryan Shames, Texas' Mouse and Thirteenth Floor Elevators, California's Seeds and Leaves.

Kaye has side-stepped many of the obvious "K-Tel" choices (no Strawberry Alarm Clock), mixing the canonized with the obscure. Several times, he opts for one of a group's lesser-known songs if he thinks that it's noteworthy. As a result, in addition to your forgotten faves, there are bound to be a few gems here that you were once curious about, but long ago abandoned hope of finding.

Another bonus is that Lenny Kaye is possibly the dean of liner-note writers, and every cut here is accompanied by a chunky, flavorful paragraphy of essential trivia and ephemera. Just read the introduction on the rear sleeve—you'll be hooked.

The only complaints I have with this package are its omissions (what, no Mandrake Memorial?), but that's just greed. Kaye promises another such compilation soon— *Artyfacts from the Last Psychedelic Era*? Meanwhile, as you enjoy having this good laugh on the past, just remember: today is tomorrow's yesterday, yesterday's tomorrow, and, uh, like that.

Stephen Demorest

Phil Ochs

Chords of Fame

(A&M)

This double-album collection, out just a half-year after its maker's suicide, spells out the brave, sad story of a singer whose audience defected. Phil Ochs probably knew it would happen—many of his songs are seeded with a skeptical, wary view of liberalism—but he couldn't learn to face it. "The thing that hurt him the most was the nebulousness of the times," says Phil's brother, Michael, 33 from his office in California. "He was watching the Carter-Ford race and talked about it every month. But there was no perspective, no place to write from. That's what drove him to it. He didn't want to go back out on the road and do the same old shit."

So Phil Ochs, 35 and dry of inspiration, hung himself in April, 1976. Given the discouragement so evident on the cover of his *Rehearsals for Retirement*—a tombstone that read "Phil Ochs (American) Born: El Paso, Texas 1940; Died: Chicago, Illinois 1968—it seems that he lived his last few years only by a strength of will.

Like many, I was the kind of indolent Ochs fan who didn't bother to check up on him after he stopped writing and releasing songs. So I was surprised, while listening to this collection, to discover an indispensable memoir of the Sixties. Experiencing Ochs' thin, warm voice unroll his singsong melodies over some very perfunctory guitar chording, I realized how firmly his stamp was planted on that era's politics and moods.

To this casual but affectionate follower, all of the best material is included. There are adamant protest songs ("I Ain't Marchin' Anymore," "Santo Domingo," "I'm Going to Say It Now"); reflective, cynical purges ("Is There Anybody Here?," "Love Me, I'm a Liberal," "When I'm Gone," "Outside of a Small Circle of Friends"); and lonely, drifting ballads ("There But for Fortune," "Changes," "Pleasures of the Harbor").

The comprehensiveness of *Chords of Fame* came about through an unusual spate of generosity from the record industry. Michael Ochs, finding Phil's 13-year-old daughter Meegan with no nest egg, went to "the one guy I knew I could count on—A&M's Jerry Moss. He got me the right lawyers—all the proceeds from this album are going to Phil's daughter." According to Ochs, Elecktra exec Joe Smith was "just as nice," seeing to the release of his company's rights to many of the songs.

Michael picked and sequenced the songs, chose the photographs, and enlisted Ed Sanders for the liner notes. The pictures evoke the history of Phil Ochs: Virginia military-school cadet, puppy-hopeful collegian, 1962 Greenwich Village folkie, enemy of LBJ in the wake of his beloved JFK's death, prancing-Elvis apparition in a gold-lame suit, wounded father grimacing into a winter sun. All share the bright, stricken look that shows the singer's fatal sensitivity.

"What Phil's good for still stands," claims Michael Ochs. Listening to this set, I think that you'll miss him—and ponder the spirit we lost when we left him behind.

Fred Schruers

The O'Jays

Message in the Music

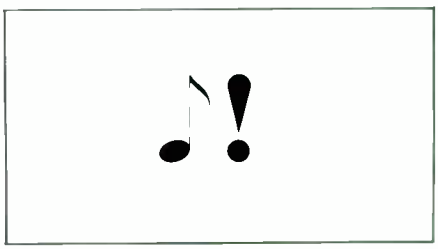
(Philadelphia International)

With *Message in the Music*, the great, Philadelphia-based songwriter-producers Kenneth Gamble and Leon Huff launch a full-blown religious dance music that fuses spiritual and erotic chant in the luxuriant aural style that is their trademark. Working with their label's most popular group, Gamble and Huff attempt to amplify the theme of the title literally in blunt, ministerial call-and-response. Underscored with echo and punctuated with spacious orchestration, the album's eight cuts portray divine love as a romantic communion that is as appropriately celebrated in dance and in love-making as in any other way.

High points are "A Prayer" and "Desire Me," songs that begin as tropically lush devotional ballads only to metamorphose into dance music. The most impressive cut, "Desire Me," condenses R&B styles ranging from jazz-band and doowap to gospel-disco in a rich kaleidoscope of motifs as an erotic supplication is transformed into a spiritual one. Less exalted but more instantly danceable are "Message in the Music," "Darlin' Darlin' Baby," and "Let Life Flow."

In contrast to the often plaintively rural gospel style of R&B that predominated in the Sixties, Gamble and Huff's new gospel-disco unblushingly peddles religion in the sensuous sound equivalent of a Hollywood wardrobe. Gamble and Huff are not just selling religion, but recasting the whole of black experience as an ecstatic, charismatic populist faith. While it is simplistic and often comes close to sounding unnervingly slick, *Message in the Music* is also dazzling. What the O'Jays lack in vocal distinctiveness, they make up for in power and technical precision. And MFSB remains the most polished R&B orchestra in existence. Could it be that God is indeed alive and well and living in Philadelphia?

Stephen Holden



Graham Parker

Heat Treatment

(Mercury)

The thrill of Graham Parker is that he presents us with a new face: a battered one, pale and pockmarked, a face that has spent too much time in dark bars and seedy rooms, subsisting on chocolate bars and Cokes. Inherent in the music he makes with his band, the Rumour, is a working-class stance: this is what we do; we aren't fancy about it, but we do it well. The music is fast R&B and traditional rock & roll; an electric blues is salted in now and then. Graham Parker's *Heat Treatment*, his second American album, is one of the best records of the year.

Until now, I haven't mentioned that Parker and his band are English because the fact is irrelevant—Parker writes all the songs, and he's making American music. To talk about this artist as a product of British pub rock is to distance the listener unnecessarily: Graham Parker is creating music that is as gorgeously familiar and comfortable as any rock music you'll ever hear. I gravitate toward the fast material on *Heat Treatment*—the title song, "Back Door Love," and "Hotel Chambermaid" especially. On his best ballads ("Black Honey," "Fool's Gold"), the singer approaches a loose, stream-of-angst mood similar to that of Van Morrison; I find these songs less accessible, albeit moving on another level. But after seeing Parker in concert, I think of him as just about the best, most satisfying rocker around nowadays—and that's what I like to listen to on his records.

There is what is known as an official bootleg floating around the industry—a live Rumour album, by all reports extraordinary. Mercury didn't send me a copy, so I'll just have to wait with you for it to be released. Which is okay with me because one of the best things Graham Parker accomplishes is a restoration of the communality among rock fans that dissipated in the Sixties: he makes us feel like rallying around him just because he's *ours*—and his music is so good we want to be among other people who share our enjoyment.

Ken Tucker

The Alan Parsons Project

I Robot

(Arista)

The Alan Parsons Project got critically slashed up for last year's *Tales of Mystery & Imagination*—and with good reason, too. Setting various Edgar Allan Poe stories to music wasn't quite as risk-taking an endeavor as the album's condescending stateliness wanted us to believe—hitchhikers, not artists, take risks, Andy Warhol once scribbled, and I agree. Instead, the LP was just kitsch aspiring to be "art." Although *I Robot* malfunctions as a concept album, it wisely eschews *Tales'* lofty approach for something more, uh, fashionable: "The Story of the rise of the machine and the decline of man . . . because man created robot in his own image." A pretty nifty statement, no doubt, but the new record's narrative is sketchy (unlike, say, ELO's *Eldorado*), and Eric Woolfson's Orwell-inspired lyrics are annoyingly vague, not open-ended. And, anyway, Kraftwerk or Munich's Silver Convention (aka the Lobotomies) could easily summarize *I Robot's* limited vision in two minutes flat with their endless machine repetitions.

Yet *I Robot* escapes its conceptual trappings. This is fun space music with a bottom. It's crisp, melodic, rhythmic, and even funky at times. As manned by Parsons, the technocratic producer/engineer who's worked with artists like the Beatles (*Abbey Road*), Pink Floyd (*Dark Side of the Moon*), and Al Stewart (*Year of the Cat*), the sound is lush and varied. There's lotsa synthesizers, orchestrations, airy vocal choirs, and some fine guest vocals by such stylistically unrelated singers as Allan Clarke and Steve Harley. And, with every listening, the arrangements take on a clever vividness. Throughout, Parsons smartly uses his tools and knobs to dramatize themes of 1984 dominance ("The Voice"), disorder ("Breakdown"), and powerlessness ("Day After Day").

Although *I Robot* might be fraudulent—for all its paranoia about machines, this advanced recording couldn't have been made without them—it'll still make a dandy Christmas gift for all of my friends at IBM.

Mitchell Schneider

Pink Floyd

Animals

(Columbia)

Pink Floyd are a commie hoax, the Commissioner could hear his father say, a rightist front. The sly devils, they snuck up through the grass roots, the nature of their fandom populist, egalitarian . . . stoned. But as soon as they reach the top, they turn like mad dogs on rock's monolithic mud flats, goof on it, spit at it, curse it to hell. And this the same monistic arena culture which provided them with their haughty laugh. The laugh all the way to the bank. The three-day rock holiday camps, playing the great Mud Fields world-over, the Meditations on the State meetings —all of it!

Up to their old supercilious tricks, a publicity stunt no doubt, the State gets the Warren Commission to reopen the case of the SYD BARRETT ASSASSINATION THEORY. The Floyd, hot 'n' heavy to sell, scored the enterprise with the gusto of a hangman going for the rope. Seems that the Global Intelligence Agency had granted Barrett political asylum somewhere in the New Hebrides, agreeing to repatriate him back to England on the sole condition that he'd been thoroughly voided of his previous publicly proclaimed images of an "Alien Control Force." Frankly, he was taken away to feed him food for his thoughts. Which never worked because Barrett was immune to contemporary brainwashing techniques. But never would he dare let them know it! So, anyway, the State recommends a "test" to see how cool this vacation has kept him. They want him to go through with this cock-and-bull publicity stunt and *say that it was his idea.* What comedy! This idea appealed to him, so he climbed inside an inflatable pig to symbolize something about explaining the Darwinian roots for a new aesthetic in cynicism. Hopeless. Roger Waters stole the show, shouting, "You fools—all of you condemned to your wretched dreary little (metaphysically meaningless) lives." Like pigs to the slaughter. I just wanna know from what summit do the Floyd speak—I mean, what gives them the right? After all, it's like Jimmy Carter says, they're just the servants, not the bosses, so why don't they lay back like Gregg Allman or the Dead, both of whom had no trouble turning the ideological corner? They had felt like a mere and passive cog in the cosmic train for so many years that when it became necessary to adopt the State Ways, they obliged obediently.

But not the Floyd, no, not with this negativism, complained the Director of Tonal Affairs. The dimpled bureaucrat decided something had to be done about the insurrectionary stance they'd taken lately. It's one thing, he thought aloud, to hop merrily along with the rest of us lemmings, but it's another to call the plays from the sideline. It's the State's function to call the plays, he reasoned, and, for their cosmic immorality, the Floyd should be punished for life (made to eat a mousse of pig, sheep, and dog guano like they're feedin' ya on *Animals*, howaboudit!). Alla this jazz about "Gotta stay awake, gotta try and shake off this creeping malaise." And the constant state of existential fog, "glancing up through the rain." It's almost like 20th-century, North American beat poetry! And now that the State has spent so much on training the kids, and what with their lifescopes extended bionically, gotta be extra careful about the electric music being condoned. Nowadays, more than ever. And lines like, "Who was broken by trained personnel/Who was fitted with collar and chain" just did not wash with the Administration. "No, this is no bad dream"—Christ, this is getting treacherously close to cracking the guise of brainwash. Pigs gurgling and oinking in the background—this is *funny*? It is evil, sarcastic, and mean. But, worst of all, it reminds the kids that they're not free.

And Tonal Affairs had trusted the Floyd for their somnambulistic buzz for so long that they'd come to think of it as guaranteed. This swing to actual social comment (I needn't remind you how long ago this artistic purpose had been quashed) came as no less than a shock. To put Central Ban on their case seemed to the bureaucrat such a waste—like having to say goodbye to an old friend—but it appeared to be the only alternative. Worst of all, he mused, was the irony that *Animals* contained the most inspiring music that the band had performed in years. Maybe since *Meddle.* He knew that the kids could be programmed to overlook this, but his conscience just couldn't reconcile letting it slip through Screening. Much as he lusted to. Not only would he be fired, he'd surely be exterminated. He considered making a tape before having it destroyed, so that he could licentiously listen to it at home (risking a fate worse than death). He appreciated that to have the Floyd liquidated under the circumstances was nothing if not hypocritical, but it was what he had to do. And a man must do what he's gotta do.

Bruce Malamut

Queen

A Day at the Races

(Elektra)

Okay, so they're effete, flaky, fey. And proud. So what? This (sort-of) sequel (self-produced) to *A Night at the Opera* reeks of arch naivete. Freddie Mercury warbles with lunatic ebullience. There's cracked innocence and frisky excess here.

And *just* enough rock & roll to keep the kids horny. A crunge of pseudo-Celtic metal called "White Man." A daffy, dumb-dumb, Hooploid "Tie Your Mother Down." Perfect for the stage show.

Enough already. Mercury's got four new ones. As always, his constructions provide Queen's flashiest and most dubious moments. At last, the singer has achieved vocal chops of breathless effervescence. Which means he sounds like Marilyn Monroe in *Bus Stop* or Sarah Bernhardt with emphysema.

Mercury's production effects have a crude, Busby Berkely opulence. Freddie Mercury is to rock & roll what Carmen Miranda was to tropical fruit. His "You Take My Breath Away" is either exquisitely lovelorn or monumentally vapid, depending on the humidity. Who cares? It's all moisture and barometric pressure.

"The Millionaire Waltz," *A Day at the Races'* would-be "Bohemian Rhapsody," moves swiftly from the intricate to the awkward. Soon, it

collapses under the weight of an unsound conceit, auto-annihilating like the best of Western culture.

The single, "Somebody to Love," rollicks in ¾ time, propelled by a drolly exuberant choral arrangement. "Good Old-Fashioned Lover Boy" apes Paul McCartney's cutesy music-hall camp: references range from the sublime "Martha My Dear" to the ridiculous, vaudevillian "Honeypie." For hardcore cultists, there's a two-bar "Rock-a-bye Baby" steal. A spirited and impeccable Freddie Valentino send-up.

Brian May adorns throughout with lovely crypto-classical, chicken-squawk guitar. His songwriting gifts are conventional, but not inconsiderable. "Teo Torriate (Let Us Cling Together)" is a precious, Nipponese-inflected "Auld Lang Syne." May's "Long Away" is *Races*' strongest and least tricked-up track. It's a haunting Beatles/Byrds amalgam, all shimmering electric 12-strings and aching harmony. Never smart-ass or strictly for laughs, "Long Away"—unlike most of *Races*—feels real.

But, hey. Let's not fault Mercury's fabrications for shrewd indulgence. Ostentation is the man's strategy, and Queen albums beg to be judged by their pomp. Grandeur is the other side of pretension. And Freddie Mercury is abrasive—but oh so knowing. These Limey lads are effete, flaky, and fey, but they're not blasé. With *A Day at the Races*, they've deserted art-rock entirely. They're silly now. And wondrously shameless. Rule Britannia!

Wesley Strick

Queen

News of the World

(Elektra)

I believe that no major band has the finesse of Queen, and *News of the World* proves it. Simply a diverse assortment of songs adroitly paced, it conveys both the grandeur of their most important work and a sense of breathing room that they've never had before. Who else could turn up the juice and explore their own backwaters at the same time?

Freddie Mercury gives us a respite from the coy caberet style that dragged out the last couple of records. His is a dramatic personality, a voice with real teeth. His four-in-the-morning, self-pity ballad, "My Melancholy Blues," is still stylized, but there's room for nuance. "Get Down, Make Love" is a more conventional violence in a less conventional rock mold, with venom derived from the Rolling Stones and Steely Dan. Brian May's guitar solo, using a harmonizer (still no synthetics, but he is rapidly encroaching on serious electronic terrain), heads straight for the stratosphere.

May's masterwork here is "It's Late," the most moving three-chord wonder since those of the Who. Abandoning the guitar chorales and other production stunts, he purveys chunky chords and a few offbeats into a triptych history of a stormy love affair. Mercury sings it something like a mighty tree being chopped down. One of the LP's surprises, however, is May's own sweetly understated vocal on his "All Dead, All Dead" (the ladies have not been kind to him on this record).

Even the group's lesser members do some nifty work. Drummer Roger Taylor is heard on speed-demon rhythm guitar, bass, and vocals, as well as drums. His "Sheer Heart Attack" distills all of the throb from the 1974 album of the same name, featuring the new LP's most *outre* lyric: "It was the D.N.A. . . . that made me this way." John Deacon's Mexicali "Who Needs You" gets uncommonly feathery as he and May out-flamenco each other nicely. Deacon also impresses for once as a bassist. Usually too pedestrian, he gives a nice spontaneous lope to May's one-take blues, "Sleeping on the Sidewalk."

And, of course, there's the double-sided single. "We Will Rock You," Brian May's experiment in ritual passion, pulses through you with raw rock & roll conviction. Freddie Mercury's companion piece plays psychological jujitsu: "We Are the Champions" elevates an identical sense of confidence and power from the tribal level to the most elitist. Lovely tune, too. I'm still not sure that Queen have the right to make such championship claims, but, on the other hand, I can't think of anyone I would rather trust with the boast.

The only thing that I don't get about *News of the World* is what in tarnation these guys are doing being snuffed out by a robot. Does the rock machine still give them qualms? I should think that by now, with talents like this, they'd be sitting on top of the world.

Michael Bloom

The Rolling Stones

Love You Live

(Rolling Stones Records)

Did you ever have a dream about the Rolling Stones? (Doesn't have to be erotic.) If so, have you had any lately? Maybe a vision of Keith Richard not quite facing down a customs man at the airport? Maybe a society lady in a hotel corridor? ("Ah-lo, Margaret," palavers Mick after a roll-steady version of "Little Red Rooster" on the El Mocambo side of this record.) Anyhow, this band, while perdurably overripe, refuses to mold.

A few years back, they were gonna make a film out of a class trash paperback called *Only Lovers Left Alive*. Look out, punks—it could have been the B-movie version of *A Clockwork Orange*. And then, such fainting ballads of love's senescence as "Angie" and ". . . Ooohhh, Daddy, you're a fool to cry . . ." Don't worry, though. If you've decided that it's only rock & roll, but you like it, the Stones are gonna ask and answer your next question, too: If you can't rock me, somebody will.

Still, somebody isn't having Stones dreams lately, and it shows. In those little backward leapfroggings down the sales charts. In every glossy chest-and-chin shot of the aggressively available Jagger and Richard. The Stones have finally been brought to earth, brought to pandering to the media. Their assault on Toronto was so brave and bumptious, such a fine media scam. Give them a wall to piss on, a habit to flaunt, and a royal member of cafe society to pull around by the nose, and the international media will gasp and scratch. It's as if the Stones finally said, "Could we please have a spotlight? Those punks who've been running us down keep copping our moves."

So. The perennially tied-for-greatest-rock-band-in-the-global village records and remixes four sides—18 songs. In Paris, they are introduced as a carnival act and play to each other. Ron Wood shows up as the steadiest but most anonymous of the three guitarists who have traded live Stones leads with Keith Richard. Overall, the Stones play with a slightly delirious verve, and Charlie Watts is great tonight—listen to him force the band from "Brown Sugar" into "Jumping Jack Flash" with his strip-show cymbal/bass ride.

Mick Jagger sounds choked, charged, and bellicose. It's wonderful to hear him shed his thin-blooded manorial pomp with a few yawps as his guitarists tickle him into a whole side of field-hand raunch at the El Mocambo. In a year when Muddy Waters has come back to do a wonderful remake of "Mannish Boy," it takes true grit for Jagger to essay the song. He comes off as an especially bright student of the blues, because he has his own strut. When Jagger met Richard years ago, there were plenty of pickers but not many singers, and Jagger had the brass to burlesque black style because he loved it so much. Well, hooray for him because he's still doing it. (Richard's one lead vocal, on "Happy," is just like the one that I heard him do in a hall in Brussels—he just *smears* it across the beat with a heavy assist from Jagger. "Tune the marimbas to *that*, if you can," growls the latter afterward.)

(Or something like that—goddamn guy's enunciation is real slipshod.) This is a party record, but Sides Two and Four are the intellectual ones. If you want to think about "some little jerk in the FBI" while you're drinking your swill and bopping against the kitchen sink, go directly to these sides.

You get white boys' coarseness and bluster on the bluesier numbers. On "You Gotta Move," it sounds as if Richard's lead guitar is mixed way above Wood's second, and izzat Billy Preston and Wood singing the Everyman's accompanying vocal? The piano is ordinary, but, despite it all, the mood is there.

In sum, *Love You Live* is not comprised of studio work that glistens and squeals as it is carefully compacted. These songs are loose, flirtatious audience movers. And when so many groups are bragging that they're "entertainment" or posing with such wooden New Wave faces, it's nice to hear a band that's so ready to kick ass. I think that it might have been Bill Wyman's hedgehopping bass that made Mick Jagger jump so high when he sang "Starfucker" (okay, "Star Star") in Brussels, and, on this record, that song is the triumphant explosion of all of the Chuck Berry licks that you've never heard. I like the way that the Stones beat up and throw away "You Can't Always Get What You Want"—it was always too portentous for me, anyway. And Charlie Watts has speeded up the drum accents on "Sympathy for the Devil" so that it cooks like something brand new. This band is still fertile, and any notion of rock & roll that condescends to the Rolling Stones is trying to choke a dangerous feisty rooster.

Fred Schruers

Linda Rondstadt

Simple Dreams

(Asylum)

Linda Ronstadt is one of those artists who seem to defy any meaningful critical analysis—and perhaps it's just as well. Beyond rhapsodizing about the wonders of her extraordinary voice and her equally remarkable good looks, what more can one say? That she chooses her highly interesting and eclectic repertoire with a greater degree of intelligence than she sings it is either damning with faint praise or praising with faint damnation. Whichever, her artistic range is apparently wide enough to spur mass adulation, yet narrow enough to be spurned by many rock & roll and country music purists. Is she our most underrated overrated pop star or the most overrated underrated?

If you're expecting any answers here, forget it. To me, her records usually sound better six months after they've been released than they do when I first play them (a good sign), but I like them without ever loving them (a bad sign). Others may complain about her incessant reliance on torch songs and material so melancholy that it makes Leonard Cohen sound cheerful, but I find her infinitely more convincing wearing a broken heart than sporting a snappy smile. While Ronstadt is at her absolute worst trying to interpret ironical lyrics (e.g., her treatment of songs by Randy Newman and Warren Zevon), she generally makes her greatest music by playing to the hilt the incredible irony inherent in material which would have us believe that one of the prettiest women in rock & roll is always bemoaning the fact that she doesn't have a man. Perhaps she is simply building up our hopes, but I don't think so. It sounds more universal than that.

Simple Dreams is a relatively unadorned and sparsely produced Ronstadt album—certainly

not her best and probably not her worst. Like most of her recent LPs, it's slightly formulaic, but with a few surprises. Of the latter, Ronstadt's cover version of the Rolling Stones' "Tumbling Dice" probably seemed like a good idea on paper, actually works well as a novelty number onstage, but sounds just plain silly on record, particularly since the song's climactic ending is all but thrown away. The album's other oldies, Buddy Holly's "It's So Easy" and Roy Orbison's "Blue Bayou," are pleasant (the former) but uninspired (the latter).

To say that I have greatly mixed feelings about Linda Ronstadt's popularizing the songs of Warren Zevon is certainly an understatement. Personally, I wouldn't trade a single track from Zevon's brilliant 1976 debut album for the whole of Ronstadt's o*euvre,* but Zevon needs money and exposure, and Ronstadt is giving him both. In that light, perhaps one shouldn't mind that she totally fails to understand either the tough tenderness or the brutal comedy of "Carmelita" and "Poor Poor Pitiful Me." (On *Hasten Down the Wind,* she similarly mauled the title song, also by Zevon.) Indeed, about the only thing that Zevon aficionados can gain from Ronstadt's misguided rendering of "Carmelita" is the restoration of one line that was inexplicably altered on *Warren Zevon*: "I pawned my Smith-Corona" now reads "I pawned my Smith & Wesson."

Simple Dreams is not without its triumphs, however. Ronstadt's performance of J.D. Souther's excellent "Simple Man, Simple Dreams" is both passionate and moving, and so is her treatment of rock & roll guitarist Waddy Wachtel's surprisingly touching and introspective "Maybe I'm Right." Give her a good melody and a sob in her voice and she's fine. Best of all is "I Never Will Marry," one of those archetypally beautiful American folk songs that further refine simplicity into pure good, here lovingly sung by Ronstadt and Dolly Parton to the accompaniment of just two guitars and a dobro. (Strangely enough, the LP's other folk song, the equally mythic "Old Paint," is a complete botch, as is Ronstadt's spare rendition of Eric Kaz's dull "Sorrow Lives Here.")

Where Ronstadt will go from *Simple Dreams* makes for interesting speculation. With Andrew Gold, formerly a strong influence, now out of the picture, and Peter Asher apparently relinquishing his insistence upon elaborately produced albums, the move would seem to be one toward spontaneity and unembellishment. Whether or not Linda Ronstadt can carry the ball by herself remains in doubt. *Simple Dreams*, a half-step in that direction, is at least—but only—half-successful.

Paul Nelson

Linda Ronstadt

Greatest Hits

(Asylum)

A Retrospective

(Capitol)

It has been both a blessing and a curse to Linda Ronstadt to be known first for her high decibel count and stressful effect on fabrics and femoral arteries. (Her "erogenous promontories" were on some *Time* Magazine Humbert Humbert's list of Ronstadtian assets.) She has been called more of a belter than an interpreter of songs, but despite a few misreadings or poor choices (Randy Newman's "Sail Away" and her idol Dolly Parton's "I Will Always Love You," for example), Ronstadt has usually been able to do justice, in her stentorian way, to the subtleties of the compositions that she so carefully selects.

The orchestrally lush but never treacly arrangements on her most recent LP, *Hasten Down the Wind,* were both the stamp and guarantor of her ascension to certified stardom. But the words, interestingly, were typified by her friend Karla Bonoff's messages of longing and loneliness. Emotionally, the album's 10 cuts were a consistent suite of puffy-eyed laments. This lack of romance was really as fulsomely romantic as a Gothic stumble along a dark strand. And it worked —she delivered a winter's worth of intelligent torch songs to the record-buying public. Live, she opened her show with the first words from Bonoff's "Lose Again": "Save me." She also had the brass and perspicacity to close with a jolly, bolting version of the Rolling Stones' "Tumbling Dice."

So the time is right for these two anthologies, both of which offer considerable pleasure to Ronstadt fans. But before we get down to splitting hairs, the Capitol package, if it's really a twofer-the-price-of-one, is a better buy.

Both albums have the two songs that Ronstadt was known for early in her career —1967's "Different Drum" and 1970's "Long, Long Time." Further, both contain "You're No Good," "Silver Threads and Golden Needles," "When Will I Be Loved," and "It Doesn't Matter Anymore."

Now then. If you're judicious, get a pencil. The Asylum set's remaining tracks are the two best songs from the bleak *Don't Cry Now* LP, the so-so covers of "Heat Wave" and "Tracks of My Tears" from *Prisoner in Disguise*, and "That'll Be the Day" from the latest record. Total: 12 cuts.

But the Capitol compilation has a total of 22 songs, including four from Stone Poney days (sweet folk ballads) and a tasty but ultimately inadequate sampling of material from her four unjustly neglected Capitol albums. These albums—with songs like Fred Neil's "The Dolphins," Mel Tillis' "Mental Revenge," John D. Loudermilk's "Break My Mind," and Wayne Raney's "We Need a Lot More of Jesus (And a Lot Less Rock and Roll)," none of which appear on *A Retrospective*—show a Linda Ronstadt possessed of a force for which she has only recently gotten credit—and of a wit which success has all but plowed under. Gains and losses, losses and gains—it's still the same old story.

Fred Schruers

Santana

Festival

(Columbia)

Devadip Carlos Santana's sincerity as a musician is beyond question, but his judgment as a bandleader is another story. Although limited, Santana's talent has been amply demonstrated in the past, but the man's lack of self-confidence and a degree of commercial uncertainty have gotten in the way of his musical conception.

Santana's problems stem back to *Welcome*, the album that should have capped his already successful career. At a time when fusion music was almost completely dominated by the strategy of John McLaughlin's Mahavishnu Orchestra, Santana had arrived at an astoundingly vital jazz-rock formula that expanded his group's original South American character (actually hybrid Puerto Rican, but the mix is close enough for this discussion) into some heady jazz blowing. The band was acclaimed everywhere, but American record companies have this nasty habit of not supporting any jazz groups that sound like they're working to the left of Ten Years After.

Santana's career was practically destroyed by this callous treatment of his major work, and he retreated into the comforting world of devotion to his guru. But a recent association with Bill Graham has restored his enthusiasm —at a price, of course. The price is the rejection of his musical aspirations in favor of some product that might restore his record company's faith in his commerciality.

Festival finds Carlos Santana caught in the middle, working in several extremely tasteful Brazilian modes, then unaccountably throwing in a total Earth, Wind & Fire cop. EW&F are fine, but when Santana is forced to sound like them because Columbia has sold more EW&F records than Santana records, there is something drastically wrong.

Anyone who saw Santana's band play before the Latin audience at Roseland with Tito Puente knows what I'm talking about when I say that the commercial strategy presently developed for him is a mockery of the man's abilities. The greatest proof that his handlers aren't interested enough in his artistic progress is that they've suppressed *Lotus*, an incredible three-record set recorded live in Japan with Santana's bravest orchestra.

Festival is a pleasant but unspectacular album. Santana's music is worth listening to even when he's not at his best. But if you want to hear him at his best, buy an import copy of *Lotus.*

John Swenson

Saturday Night Live

NBC's Saturday Night Live

(Arista)

Humor being a more subjective affair than ever, I waited to see *Saturday Night Live* with no expectations whatever. If it turned out to be good, I was ready to embrace it just like I embraced *Mary Hartman*'s first season; if it was bad, I figured I hadn't missed anything by living in Detroit, where the show wasn't aired for the first several months of its existence.

My sense of humor is probably askew anyway because I seem to consistently prize idiot humor above all else—my all-time favorite comedy album is *I'm Gon' Blow Yo' Ass Off, Sister Pitch-a-Pussy,* a collection of old jokes recycled with jive gusto (examples "Motha*fuck*a . . . bitch! . . . *shee*it . . . mah big dick!" etc.) by a Watts comedian named Dynamite. I like it better than Richard Pryor, though it's not nearly as witty—I prize it for its *sound*. I love Lenny Bruce's sound, too, but he almost never makes me laugh, probably because he seldom loses the cutting edge of pure hatred. Most other comedy albums put me to sleep.

Especially hip comedy albums. Many of them (Cheech and Chong, for instance) remind me of more old jokes recycled without the sound or spirit of a Dynamite. Others (Firesign Theatre preeminent) are so convoluted I'd even bother smoking dope to try to follow them except that I think that puns are an even lower form of humor than peepeedoodoo jokes, so low I've gotta pass.

Now that I've seen *Saturday Night Live*, I have to wonder in spite of all resolutions just what all the shouting was about. Some of my best friends swear by it, and I never saw it when Chevy Chase was on, but, as presently constituted, it seems smug. I never laugh; in fact, I get the impression that the Not Ready For Prime Time Players have concluded that just about any skit they come up with, no matter how witless, is cool ergo funny. The live audience obviously fancies itself in on the joke, laughing indiscriminately. Meanwhile, the routines onstage are strictly sophomoric, and conceited about it. On top of all that, the performers themselves keep you hoping in vain that some solid writing will come along and save their necks—not a one has any real timing, charisma, or enough personality to carry their sloppiness. They're as amateurish as their material, and aforesaid smugness keeps them from being likeable even in their lameness. (The best one is John Belushi, and, at his best, he's just a poor man's Peter Boyle.) Meanwhile, they seem to thrive on sick (as in nauseating) jokes that they must think are outrageously cute; e.g., featuring Belushi's spazzmo Joe Cocker impression on the same stage as the original Cocker in the pathetic flesh. When they featured Brian Wilson, who is even more pathetic, playing solo piano and singing "Good Vibrations" sans harmonies and

not hitting a single note, Nancy asked me, "Is this supposed to be funny?" Given the context, it was hard to tell.

This album lets me and any other latecomers in on everything we might have thought it was our loss to miss in the putative salad days of *Saturday Night Live* which supposedly ended with Chevy Chase's departure. Neither as dense as Firesign Theatre, nor as moronic as Cheech and Chong, it's solid middlebrow collegiate humor—somewhere in the range of *Tunnelvision*. If your idea of great satire is a precisely vocalized imitation of a Compoz commercial where product and punchline is speed, maybe this is the record for you. I'd rather watch *Gilligan's Island* reruns any day.

P.S. If this review seems humorless, blame it on the album.

Lester Bangs

Leo Sayer

Endless Flight

(Warner Bros.)

The individual romantic styles of Leo Sayer and producer Richary Perry coalesce beautifully on *Endless Flight*. On his previous records, Sayer has shown a tendency toward the whine; impassioned as it may have been, it often made the melody irrelevant or merely eccentric. Perry, of course, is a deft manipulator of the odd or aimless voice. He surrounds Sayer with the best, or at least the most visible, California musicians—the creme de la tan: Andrew Gold, Jeff Porcaro, Bill Payne, and others. Perry has encouraged Sayer's songwriting collaboration with pop masters like Barry Mann, Cynthia Weil, and, on a slicker level, Vini Poncia.

The result is a gorgeous pop album, smooth and as dreamy as Sayer's cloudfalling cover. Its inital track, "Hold on to My Love," is as infectious and tough-happy a song as anyone has recorded this year. The hit single, "You Make Me Feel Like Dancing," is indeed a hooked wonder and deserves its popularity; it also introduces the most interesting thing Richard Perry is doing throughout *Endless Flight*: by keeping Sayer in a high register, the singer more often than not sounds like a very good *female* vocalist. The themes of most of the songs reinforce a traditionally feminine popular music posture: the narrator is too open and thus is easily wounded in love, abandoned by the loved one, left feeling helpless—it's a passive image that is never vitiated by a tough-guy tantrum or a "To hell with you, baby" tag line. This is all fascinating, and, whether it's consciously done or not (Perry does seem to work best either with women or with "sensitive" men like Nilsson), everyone pulls it off.

Endless Flight is immediate in its enjoyment, but no mere throwaway: quality catchy stuff.

Ken Tucker

Bob Seger & the Silver Bullet Band

Night Moves

(Capitol)

Bob Seger's *Night Moves* is already one of my favorite albums of the year, and I haven't even been listening to it for more than a week. This comes as a big surprise to me because I've always taken Seger for granted. Certainly it's been easy to say I've liked him, but it's always been that casual kind of approval usually accorded to marginal figures who please without impressing.

Seger is an anomaly—a key figure in Detroit's white-punk axis who transcended the nihilist demands of heavy metal for a smoother style that could be melded easily with those of Nashville or Muscle Shoals sessioners. But even when he's moonlighting, Seger maintains the gutbucket rasp of a true rock & roller, so much so that I find myself wondering how I could have overlooked him all these years. *Night Moves* is so good that it seems as if Seger has stepped into a great musical sensibility virtually overnight, or at least since the easy-listening metal drone of *Live Bullet*, but the new record compels me to go back and listen again to my Seger collection—and, yes, it has been there all the time.

Detroit bands have never been known for a lack of self-promotional ability, but it looks like that's been Seger's problem all along. After all, he's practically a culture hero in his Michigan homeland—had he been from New Jersey or Queens, New York's rock press would have canonized him years ago.

These are the kind of speculations that a great new album drives me to these days. Not that *Night Moves* hits me with the emotional impact of *The Who Sell Out* or *Beggar's Banquet* or *Gasoline Alley*—my reaction to these records was definitely a function of how I saw myself at the time, and very little can match their impact these days. *Night Moves* doesn't affect me like that—it's too derivative (but not in the sense that it shows its influences, because all great rock & roll has been influenced by something). This LP is *emotionally* derivative, which leads me to suspect that someone who didn't grow up listening to *The Who Sell Out, Beggar's Banquet,* or *Gasoline Alley* would find it as much of a revelation now as I found those records then.

Seger has been compared somewhat problematiclaly with Van Morrison and more successfully with Rod Stewart. But his voice isn't sweet, and he certainly lacks Stewart's glibness—and I think this ends up working to his advantage. Seger has conviction and lots of it. Singing doesn't come naturally to him—he practically fights his way through each song—and as a result, he gets the most out of his medium. This kind of compression, this hunger for aesthetic success because commercial success never came easy, underlies some of the greatest moments rock & roll has inspired. I think *Night Moves* may prove to be one of those moments in at least this limited way—Seger has overcome a basic problem of rock & roll morphology by outmaneuvering his influences. *Night Moves* may be a better Rod Stewart record than Stewart himself could make today. You could bring Stewart in to sing "Rock and Roll Never Forgets," and it would be a perfect Faces classic, with all the unpretentious abandon that characterized that band's best performances. The title tune and "Sunburst" recall those *Gasoline Alley* acoustic guitar/keyboard textures, a rich sound that prompted Bart Tesla to assert that the key to success for Seventies rock bands from England was to learn how to record a Rod Stewart album.

Analyzing Seger in terms of Sixties British rockers is not at all inappropriate. If some of these songs are informed by Stewart, he in turn was informed by the Rolling Stones who in turn were informed by Chuck Berry. The feedback is all-encompassing and has little to do with geographic distinctions because the form itself is not what's being transferred but rather its *emotional content,* and every time *that* changes hands meaningfully, enrichment occurs. Which is, after all, what Seger is talking about in this record, and maybe part of the reason I respond to it:

Well now sweet sixteens turned thirty-one
Feel a little tired feeling under the gun
Well all Chuck's children are out there
playing his licks
Get into your kicks
Come back baby
Rock 'n' Roll never forgets
Said you can come back baby
Rock 'n' Roll never forgets.

John Swenson

Phoebe Snow

It Looks Like Snow

(Columbia)

When Phoebe Snow first came onto the scene a couple of years ago, she unveiled a unique instrument—her voice, one of the most instantly recognizable in all of music. The qualities it had then have since matured, and, surrounded as she is these days by ersatz cowgirl crooners and porn stars turned discoettes, she stands out even more distinctly.

Unfortunately, that doesn't automatically make her a great recording artist. Her first album (on Shelter) *did* verge on greatness, but the two for Columbia (*It Looks Like Snow* follows *Second Childhood*) have been disappointments. The reasons are apparent and also slightly unsettling.

The Shelter LP was set apart by its very starkness as it conveyed its feeling of darkly-colored introspection. Production and arrangements played a large part in the creation of that mood; the former was less slick and spendid than now, while the latter matched the singer with players like Zoot Sims and Teddy Wilson in smoky settings perfectly suited to her material and sentiments. As Phoebe Snow has moved into the Big time, her records have become glossier, surrendering some of the vital edge of the first one. She also seems to be trying too hard to be all things to all people. Pop-funk/reggae tokenism does not become her, and the quasi-Ohio Players asides on "Shakey Ground" are just plain silly.

More important than any technical changes is the obvious personal development she's undergone. Snow was unhappy two years ago, as she has freely admitted. Her guitar playing, writing, and especially her singing revealed the fragile depths of her melancholy, and some indescribable link was forged between artist and listener that went beyond a mere appreciation of her gifts. Since then, her life has turned around. She's got her man and her baby, she's moved from New York to L.A., and she's obviously triumphantly happy. Naturally, the music reflects that (which doesn't at all mean that all the songs are joyous rave-ups), but it has become less compelling as a result. Now when she sings a blues ("In My Girlish Days") or a love song with tinges of insecurity (the Beatles "Don't Let Me Down"), she's singing from outside the subject, and it's not quite convincing. Her voice is wondrous, but somehow it is more impressive technically than emotionally.

It's a dilemma. Any reasonable person wants to be happy, but will happiness lessen her music? The fact is that some artists, from Beethoven to Van Gogh to Lennon, do their best work when they are the most troubled. It's too early to tell about Phoebe Snow (three records aren't a life's work, after all), but one hopes that she isn't one of them, and that she can make good records when she's feeling all right. She is much too valuable a talent to be inconsequential.

Sam Graham

David Soul

Playing to an Audience of One

(Private Stock)

Make that none, David. I just heard the record.

Paul Nelson

Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes

This Time It's for Real

(Epic)

Certain traditions should not be allowed to tarnish, and the tradition of bar bands is one of the populist heirlooms that should go on glowing forever, if only to keep us in touch with each other. Nothing can inspire such allegiance as a band that has been adopted as a favorite—a band to which you can dance and drink and one whose members are plucked from the neighborhood candy store. Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes are defenders of that tradition, staunch carriers of the R&B torch, and, as such, they deserve more than a share of affection and loyalty. They may never

get it outside the inner cities unless they turn to CB-radio music. Thank God they haven't tried—some things are better off pure, if poor.

This second Southside record is called *This Time It's for Real*, and I think the guy means it. It's much better than the debut LP—reasons in a minute—and considerably meatier than the current crop of crapola now available in the summer's drought. One of the reasons this record is an improvement is that the first album (which consisted of a decent bunch of cover tunes, Ronnie Spector and Lee Dorsey as guests, and a proliferation of well-heeled nostalgia) indicated a flowering presence: Southside's crooning. You somehow knew, though, that the singer needed the immediacy of a thousand mobile bodies to get him off. The LP was no major blockbuster—sales in the millions were fairytale stuff. So Southside and his producer /songwriter Steve Van Zandt had little to lose by going out on a limb and doing a bit of trendsetting in white R&B. Result: going out on a limb puts you further away from the source, but gives you some detachment and makes for richer musical variations. Freedom's just another word, and so forth.

On this new record, Southside is accompanied by the Drifters and the Five Satins. To say that these groups add fillip and depth to the Jukes' big-band sound is an understatement. "Check Mr. Popeye" (the Drifters) and "First Night" (Five Satins) remind me of make-out-in-the-dugout evenings, hully gully, Bristol stomp, Impressions-style street-corner harmonies. Not the worst things I can recall from my thwarted, libidinous youth. And I suppose it's some sort of triumph on Van Zandt's part that he can author brand new songs that seem dust-laden and worn with age. Steve Van Zandt is so steeped in the romance of nostalgia that at times he defeats his own ambitions and creates cliches where none should exist. He seems myopically unaware of the present—it is as if the psychedelic Sixties and the sober Seventies never touched his inner life at all. But there is a reverence here to be applauded. Van Zandt's production seems an act of love, passion drenched in memory. He's coddled this record the way an archaeologist coddles a 750,000-year-old skull. Southside, too, has a pedigreed soul on all of his ancient vocals. He is especially strong on the ballads, with the Miami Horns lifting him to heights beyond those of any earthly hangout heavens.

It's worth noting that blacks in droves have abandoned the Stax/Motown soul music of the early Sixties for disco and jazz, while white boys like Southside Johnny, Graham Parker, and Van Morrison died for the likes of Jerry Butler and Otis Redding. Although Southside's first LP suffered from a certain self-conscious imitation, this new record creates a larger space in which to revere the past and, at the same time, accelerate it beyond the confines of tradition. Monster cuts include "When You Dance," a Springsteen /Van Zandt composition full of wonderlust and authentic jungle effects, bearing no resemblance whatsoever to Hannibal and the Headhunters. I assume that the jungle is a Springsteen metaphor; here it's carried to its most obvious resolution, the use of actual jungle noises and percussive embellishments connoting lush foliage and mosquitos. The other goody is "Love on the Wrong Side of Town," with a wonderful tenor solo and Southside's most damaging vocal work. Special cheers go to Richie Rosenberg, a porcine trombone player with enough energy to propel the horn section and a few rockets into outer space, and the rest of the Miami Horns for juicing up an ordinary rhythm section without drowning Southside in a sea of brass.

The flip side of creating a larger space for the otherwise narrow confines of R&B is that the Jukes occasionally get lost in symphonic folds. Sometimes their sound is too big for their vision, or the arrangements have a hollow ring to them. That other Asbury phenomenon, Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band, is like a tight suit, always bursting at the seams but nevertheless managing to contain all of that vibrant and outgoing flesh. The Jukes would not be stupid to follow the E Street band's unsparingly clean footsteps.

There is an annoying non sequitur circling my mind which I might as well let loose: the connection between the Southside/Springsteen ethos and Martin Scorsese, another creative force who generally bares his roots and sources of inspiration in every project on which he puts his name. Scorsese's roots are closely connected with the Italianate sensibilities of Asbury-ana, but there is a hair split somewhere. While Clarence Clemons, E Street saxist and larger-than-life mythic figure, appeared prominently in Scorsese's *New York, New York* as a hip-before-his-time trumpet player, Southside got stuck in *Between the Lines*, a mildly amusing and generous film about the late Sixties, when idealism and integrity could cost you a job. Southside imparted the background appropriately enough—he was the flavor of the times, not the substance. If there's one overriding problem with the Asbury Jukes, it has to do with this cinematic equivalent: background, non-effulgence, flavor and aroma in lieu of substance. Still, I want this record to sell. Somebody's gotta preserve those 750,000-year-old chords, and Southside Johnny's done the best digging to date.

Susan Shapiro

Phil Spector

Phil Spector's Greatest Hits

(Warner Bros./Spector)

Popular fiction has it that the Beatles emerged in 1963 to rescue us from our senescent pop tradition. But American pop music in the early Sixties was at its high point in both black and white expression: the two poles were the Motown sound and the Phil Spector sound. Motown's formula was precise—the rhythm section dictated the impact of every Motown 45 released during their golden age. The vocal groups, songwriting, and arrangements all had to be up to par, but the records got their zing from those endlessly pumping dance rhythms, the truest expression of the disco sensibility that has been so thinly carried forward into the Seventies.

Spector's formula was not so simple. The metallic reverberations of his productions elicited the description, "walls of sound," while John Coltrane's vertical harmonic restructuring of jazz improvisation was dubbed "sheets of sound." in both cases, though, the triumph was really one of technique over theory. Spector tried to get the most out of the studio by using it as a technological instrument, and the density of his records comes from the inevitable outcome of mixing six guitars, four pianos, an orchestra, a choir and a lot of percussion effects, the latter mixed right up front with the vocals while everything else chugged along in the background. All of this had to be done with great care because it would normally have come out sounding like garbage. Spector used the most advanced studio facilities available and aimed for the perfect, ambient car-radio buzz, which is why these records are magical—an epic production for every three-minute hit single.

Phil Spector's productions embody the myth of the Fifties, the nostalgia recycled as *American Graffiti* and *Happy Days*. It is truly myth because *it never really happened*, but it filled a need. "James Dean I wasn't aware of," a 27-year-old friend of mine once said. "I mean I knew who he was and all, but he didn't get through to me. "He's A Rebel' got through."

Nothing more needs to be said. Anyone who cares about rock & roll should buy a copy of this album.

John Swenson

Star Wars

London Symphony Orchestra

(20th Century)

It is only fitting that *Star Wars*, the majestic film that has launched a new age of cinematic fantasy, be represented on record by an equally regal two-album soundtrack package (replete with poster and copious liner notes). Composed and conducted by John (*Jaws*) Williams and performed by the London Symphony Orchestra, the score to this swashbuckling space opera will send any fan of futurism into spasms of delight with its knee-deep waves of dense instrumentation. All of the characters from the film are on board and represented by their various themes for this musical trip. In fact, the plot itself is unraveled musically via the passages selected, ranging from the main title to "The Last Battle" and "The Throne Room." Williams' exalted sense of orchestration rekindles the movie's sense of spectacle perfectly. This is the type of listening experience that forces you to tie a sheet around your shoulders as you jump around the living-room furniture for a few hours. Turn up the volume! Swordfight the family cat! Wrestle your goldfish to the ground! *Star Wars* is a must for closet heroes.

Ed Naha

Steely Dan

Aja

(ABC)

On *Aja*, Walter Becker and Donald Fagen have slipped into a steely donnishness. Every one of *Aja*'s seven long cuts is austere and erudite. And, as you might guess from that description, the album is not much fun. The only reason to bring up fun, of course, is to remind ourselves that these *are* the guys who masterminded such supple pop-rock as "Reelin' in the Years" and "Rikki Don't Lose That Number."

But Steely Dan—now pared down to a pair, Becker and Fagen, and constantly shifting sidemen—have lost the desire to make that kind of music. Their last album, *The Royal Scam*, nudged their melodies toward jazziness, while their lyrical concerns froze into the quite ellipses that were most compelling on *Katy Lied*. On *Aja*, one now finds an apparently forthright tune, "Peg," that includes disco-like rhythms and oppressively "catchy" lyrics. This is a trashing of the commercial impulses that Becker and Fagen once cultivated with brainy pride on *Can't Buy a Thrill* and *Countdown to Ectasy*.

Even in the pursuit of an appropriate jazz aesthetic—an effort to strike a suitable dissonant balance between carefully charted sprawl and improvisatory concision—Becker and Fagen never achieve the thrilling tension that they made seem effortless on *Pretzel Logic* (which, now more than ever, seems to be their most satisfying and audacious LP). The descent from *Pretzel Logic*'s Duke Ellington embrace, "East St. Louis Toodle-Oo," to *Aja*'s Wayne Shorter sax solo on the title cut is a steep one. Shorter's solo, by itself, is effective in its politely oblivious way, but Steely Dan's insertion of it into the center of their wearily oblique dirge is depressing, even infuriating.

Aja is crippled by its creators' arrogance. Becker and Fagen have often been arrogant in entertaining and stylish ways. Donald Fagen's vocals have always assumed the sneer to be the normal position for the lips, but more often than not, he managed to twist his mouth into an inclusive smile and to enjoin the audience to smirk along at whatever he was railing against. Walter Becker's guitar work mimics a dentist's drill in pitch and intensity. The reward to the listener who accustoms himself to this guitar style is the extraordinary number of novel licks that Becker can play.

But now a lot of this creative arrogance is directed at the audience. *Aja* abounds in authentic Danisms—the perky organ fills in "Black Cow" the whimsically obtuse chorus to "Josie," the shimmering but pointless climax within "I Got the News." But these once-useful trademark tricks are now employed as curt signposts to indicate whence the improvisation

emanates and whither the jazz is leading. It is as if Becker and Fagen, their patience infinite, know that we, slack-jawed AM-heads that we are, must be guided gently through their amazing new revelations. This is condescending.

For such a meticulously made album, *Aja* yields little more than its makers' seriousness of purpose. In short, *Aja* is boring.

Ken Tucker

Rod Stewart

A Shot of Rhythm and Blues
(Private Stock)

Rod Stewart
The Best of Rod Stewart, Vol. 2
(Mercury)

Faces
Snakes and Ladders—The Best of Faces
(Warner Bros.)

As his original output grows slighter (in both senses) with each successive album, the case for Rod Stewart as supreme interpreter of other peoples' songs rather than composer in his own right grows stronger. The most memorable moments on the overrated *A Night on the Town* occurred in "The First Cut Is the Deepest" (I would never have believed *anyone* could make Cat Stevens palatable, much less this moving, for me). "The Killing of Georgie," although containing some nice turns of phrase, was noteworthy more for its uncommonly humane and sensitive treatment of a subject most often exploited by rockers than for its musical interest, which bore a more than passing resemblance to "Walk on the Wild Side" and grew thin pretty quick. As for the great Solo Albums versus Faces controversy, in many ways I've always found that I preferred the three or four good cuts on any given Faces record for the sloppy power of the playing, even though I knew that, given any legitimate standards, Stewart's own albums were better.

In the light of that—and now that you know my prejudices—here we are presented with three recaps of Rod Stewart product. Given my predilection for the messiness of the Faces and offhand jukejam rock & roll in general, I should like *A Shot of Rhythm and Blues,* recorded when Rod was singing lead with Long John Baldry's band in the mid-Sixties. I certainly don't think that it's as bad as most reviewers have made it out to be. Extreme Stewart fans will probably find some enjoyment here because their man sings with energy, if not any special conviction. But I can't see myself returning to it because the band tracks are mostly very sluggish, and the whole, like so many other albums of this type (cf., the Immediate *History of British R&B* series), is just not as much fun as it should be.

The Mercury record is another fine collection of gems from the solo albums—and good evidence in support of my belief that Rod's not the writer we always imagined him to be. Less originals, and while it's true that more than half of the songs present are of the "Maggie May"s and "You Wear It Well"s style, they were snapped up for *The Best of Rod Stewart, Vol. 1,* and that I whoop with joy when I hear "Italian Girls," "Lost Paraguayos," and "True Blue"—still, things like "Man of Constant Sorrow" and "Blind Prayer" can only really be called originals by the most generous of definitions, and the three songs mentioned previously are beloved more for their high humor than for any particular profundity.

It's that great, grainy, infinitely tender voice that goes straight for the heart and stays there. And if he doesn't blow it out, it's that voice that will save Rod Stewart and ensure his status as an international pop resource for years to come. Stewart's last three solo LPs suggest that his compositional inspiration is drying up—perhaps, as his recent interviews suggest, because of the increasing distance his personal life puts him from the people and places that constitute his roots and the wellsprings of his subject matter. He certainly doesn't look very happy on the cover of *A Night on the Town,* and he probably won't ever be one of the lads again. But neither will many of the rest of us in his audience, and if we want to remember what it was like, we'll have *Snakes and Ladders*, because it's all there. I'd like to see him bring his humor and perception of same in sexual situations to the social stratum he now occupies, but if that's beyond his powers (or, more likely, his personality), then that's all right, too. Jackie Wilson isn't remembered for what he wrote.

Lester Bangs

Barbra Streisand

Streisand Superman
(Columbia)

By now, Barbra Streisand has become a popular-music institution with a survival value equal only to Frank Sinatra's. The success of *A Star Is Born*, her pet project and the biggest artistic shuck of her career, only proves that Streisand knows her public better than the professional taste-makers. She's become big enough to turn an egomaniacal home movie into a commercial coup. Coming on the heels of the film's unlistenable but immensely popular soundtrack LP, *Streisand Superman* is the fastest-selling Streisand album ever. Which suggests that, via the cinema, she's finally reached the younger audience that has eluded her for years.

With the exception of "Don't Believe What You Read," a self-indulgent diatribe against the press, *Streisand Superman* is as supremely confident as *A Star Is Born* was clumsy. Streisand's gift—one that Liza Minelli, Bette Midler, Jane Olivor, and a host of theatrically-bent chanteuses vainly try to capture—is to elevate the old-fashioned romantic cliches of pop to a near-operatic pitch, then to sustain that pitch with a combination of pyrotechnical skill and sheer chutzpah. While Streisand is a deft enough "interpreter" of song lyrics in the literary sense, her skills along this line have less to do with her appeal than does the elemental force of her personality. The egotism and indomitable will power she wields are both inescapable and compelling. Streisand is comparable to Bruce Springsteen, and to Sylvester Stallone playing Rocky Balboa, in the way that she makes every gesture a movement in a battle for self-transcendence. And because she wins the battle far more often than she loses it, she embodies our highest ideals of worldly achievement, replete with all of the glamorous accouterments.

Ricnie Snyder's title song for the new album recognizes and celebrates Streisand's power with an irresistible, manic exuberance. "My Heart Belongs to Me" reiterates the theme in tear-jerking, end-of-a-love-affair language. If the surface of "Baby Me Baby" is kittenish come-on, underneath that surface is a royal command for some action. Streisand sings "Love Comes from Unexpected Places," the American Song Festival winner, as a pop aria, pulling every dramatic trick in the book and making them all work. She turns Billy Joel's "New York State of Mind" into a passionate and believable paean to the city that gave birth to all of that drive. Indeed, throughout *Streisand Superman*, Streisand is in excellent voice.

Although I often find the materialistic vision that Barbra Streisand projects vulgar, superficial, and even profoundly false, she certainly remains the quintessence of the word "star" in both its most glorious and most maddening implications. But I wonder: Is it possible for any art to be "profoundly" false?

Stephen Holden

Taj Mahal

Music Fuh Ya'
(Musica Para Tu)
(Warner Bros.)

Although Taj Mahal has never really attracted heavy critical or commercial attention, he remains a fascinating, enjoyable, and absolutely first-rate talent. *Music Fuh Ya' (Musica Para Tu),* his first album for Warner Brothers, continues his explorations of black music—mostly heady "folk" mixtures of country blues and the Caribbean and reggae genres—and is as tellingly idiosyncratic, deeply personal, unique, and slyly wise as most of the best of this artist's early work.

Anyone who admires the music of Ry Cooder owes it to himself to listen carefully to this record; it's similar to and on a par with any of Cooder's—and a whole lot looser and more natural (at one point, Mahal sings: "This next verse is unrehearsed," and pulls it off perfectly). I'm especially taken with "Freight Train" (both for the artist's performance and for his warm spoken message to the song's creator, Elizabeth Cotton), "Baby, You're My Destiny," and "Truck Driver's Two-Step," but there's not a bad cut on the entire LP.

It's so nice to hear an album by someone who is genuinely gifted and who obviously still gives a shit about his music and how he presents it. *Music Fuh Ya'* is the real thing because Taj Mahal *cares*—and that makes all the difference in the world.

Paul Nelson

Talking Heads

Talking Heads: 77
(Sire)

Confronting *Talking Heads: 77* for the first time seems like either sitting in on a psychoanalyst's session for the computer from *2001* or reading five accounts of the same grisly murder (preferably of the MAN KILLS CHILD AND EATS IT variety) and then gradually realizing that the killer is you. As you might expect from a band who used to be called the Artistics back when they hung out at that infamous puppy shelter, the Rhode Island School of Design, the lyrical Rorschach tests contained on this debut album encompass both of these ideas along with a large dish of unexplainables on the side.

On "First Week/Last Week. . . Carefree," we can begin to see the R2D2 overload elements, involving such Kraftwerk circuit-breaking phrases as "This report's incomplete," but what's equally important here are chief writer David Byrne's expressions of Sartre-like detachment, revealed in lines like "Made a reference to me (that's myself)." Byrne lapses even further into mind-bleaching computer lingo in "Tentative Decisions," yet here his IBM-meets-LSD verse manages to get beyond itself, first by admitting its R.D. Laing-inspired complexity ("And it's a hard logic to follow, and the girls get lost/And the boys say they're concerned. . ./Concerned with decisiveness") and then by indicting the listener ("I'm gonna give the problem to you"). It's a suffocating imposition on the audience—as is all of the group's music, if only by its heady nature—but one that makes key songs like "Don't Worry About the Government" seem even more personally compelling. Here, Byrne outlines the absurdities of "natural" boundaries on people, and gives the necessary depth to the themes of isolation that connect the LP's main con-

cepts of the hopeless entanglement of love and violence.

Still, the isolation theme does yield several moderate reprieves, including "New Feeling" and parts of "Happy Day," even though the latter does house one of the record's iciest lines ("I want to talk like I read, before I decide what to do), making the happy day appear more like mere escapism for the selfaware. Taken more broadly, whenever there is an attempt on *Talking Heads: 77* to end the solitude, whenever there is love for another involved, then violence and evil seem sure to follow. Even on the relatively tame "Pulled Up," Byrne juxtaposes pleasant images of rebirth with "a shadow on the living-room wall/Dark and savage with a profile so sharp." Other songs isolate the evil more completely, like the *Taxi-Driver*-inspired "Psycho Killer" or "No Compassion," on which the singer seems to have overdosed on the tabloid journalism of our lives.

Everything comes together, though, on "Uh-oh, Love Comes to Town," on which love meets violence in the ultimate paradox—love being "simple as 1-2-3" (very Jackson 5) while also remaining an arty riddle. But all of this is not just your usual cliche about the mysteries of love. There is fear involved here, fear of losing the computer-like serenity of "Don't Worry About the Government," fear of the violence of the emotions that leads Byrne to say (in "Who Is It?"): "Watch out now baby/. . . If you don't love me/I don't know what I'm going to do." The singer's intonation here makes it chillingly clear that all sorts of mutilation might be performed on both the seeker and the sought if things don't work out.

All of this mystery, violence, and simultaneously desired and feared dehumanization is delivered with nailbiting accuracy in the band's eerie, sing-song music (with disco, Top-40, and even some subtle Hebraic influences) and on David Byrne's inside-the-cuckoo's-nest vocals. On the beginning of "Pulled Up," Byrne literally sounds like he's both drooling and singing, and his hyperkinetic delivery of "Psycho Killer" could be the work of someone not adverse to feeding razor blades to smiling infants. There are no vocal harmonies on the LP, yet this only reemphasizes the singer's wrenching solitude. Musically, there is a refreshing crispness throughout, and each instrument is stunningly distinct. "New Feeling" is a musical shocker, with guitars that convey a sense of derangement not captured by humans since *Supermarket Sweepstakes* went off the air.

What's really important about *Talking Heads: 77* is that it communicates many basic and raw punk themes without the use of cheapo, Blue Oyster Cult-style stun chords or overt and sadomasochistic Nazi apparel. (The band prefers the collegiate, Scarsdale look.) What Talking Heads have really done here is to take themes of universal angst and redefine them both as mutating, gray-matter concepts and unique musical realities. In the end, a very personal feeling of fear arises (despite the group's great sense of humor)—a fear of one's own actions, one's own imagination, and, mostly, one's own desires.

Jim Farber

James Taylor

JT

(Columbia)

First of all, you don't initial just any endeavor—those twin capitals are too definitive to squander on run-of-the-mill product. And label changes—made leisurely amid much competitive bidding—are supposed to revitalize sagging careers. Such corporate switcheroos can make all the difference (e.g., Aretha to Atlantic) or no difference at all (Dylan's two-album flirtation with Asylum). James Taylor's Columbia debut simply chalks up another second-wind triumph in line with 1975's remarkable *Gorilla* and last year's likable *In the Pocket*.

JT opens on a deceptive note of exuberance with "Your Smiling Face," a rewrite of *In The Pocket's* best cut, Bobby Womack's "Woman's Gotta Have It." Despite its sense of deja vu, the new song loses nothing. The happy self-loathing of the line, "Isn't it amazing a man like me/Can feel this way," is pure James Taylor, albeit just this side of parody. True, Taylor's R&B can sound queasily anemic, but the singer hits a note so improbably out-of-range here that the mere attempt is ecstatic. If "Your Smiling Face" is *JT*'s immediate delight, an engagingly downbeat reading of Otis Blackwell's "Handy Man" runs a close second.

The rest of the LP is divided between rueful acoustic ballads and novelty numbers that effectively break up the bouts of romantic despair. Taylor's a cappella "Traffic Jam" is a disarmingly graceful goof, while the instant ache of "Looking for Love on Broadway" is this artist's stock in trade.

When he sang "Deep greens and blues are the colors I choose" in 1972, Taylor was the interior decorator of our acid-blanched egos. Today, with the leering "I Was Only Telling a Lie," he's just another dirty old man. James Taylor has taken a classic Seventies trip— from reluctant spokesman to private eccentric. On the evidence of *JT*'s lyrics, Taylor has been "enjoying the passage of time." And if that's not the secret of life, as proclaimed, it could be the key to survival.

Wesley Strick

Television

Marquee Moon

(Elektra)

Remember how the hype on groups like the early Stones and the Pretty Things used to always be that they were such vile carrion that you wouldn't even let 'em in your house? It got so bad that when the Shadows of Knight released their second album, they thought to include a reassuring liner note to moms to the effect that even though their music was wild 'n' wooly, they'd still be nice as pie if you let 'em squat in the parlor.

Now those moms' kids have grown up as time goes by, but there is finally another group in the grand tradition: Television is a band you would not want in your house. The reason you wouldn't want 'em there is that they are so sullenly *dull* you could mistake your living room for a Greyhound bus station at 3 A.M. Life style is what it's all about these days, and Television are up front about it: they haven't got one! I've hung out a little with their leader, Tom Verlaine, and he smirks once in a while, but in general the majority of whatever interest his presence can muster derives from the palpable scent of raw, although impacted, neurosis. Unfortunately, it's of the sheathed-weirdo genre rather than the exposed-twitching-nerve variety which, as we all know, is the only way to tell if somebody's alive or not. So he's useless—and so is his band, unless you like to take Valium so you can watch TV (no pun).

Fortunately, however, the old art-life dichotomy still derives, so you don't have to be around Tom Verlaine, and neither do I. We can play his record instead—and we should. Because a great record it is. I always thought Dylan was an asshole in *Don't Look Back*, and, in trying to copy that pose, Patti Smith has reduced her grand gift to a parody in record time. In many ways, Tom Verlaine is a parody of Patti, and all of these people just make themselves somewhat lfectlessly snotty, superstar routine, thinking that's the ticket to whatever glories they're gut-denying themselves. But who cfectlessly snotty, superstar routine, thinking that's the tidket to whatever glories they're gut-denying themselves. But who cfectlessly snotty, superstar routine, thinking that's the ticket to whatever glories they're gut-denying themselves. But who cares, because it's in the grooves, as Don Kirshner always said, and wasn't he right?

The grooves of Television's first album are the most interesting of the year so far. The group has been compared to the Velvet Underground and the Stooges, and I thought citifried Grateful Dead when I saw them live, but none of that really holds re this LP. I could dredge up things like Autosalvage and early Mad River—the guitar work has the same clanging core atonality as the former, and Verlaine's the worst singer since the latter's lead—but it wouldn't convey what intelligence this band brings to an ensemble sound that at first comes off almost comically thorny, then lodges itself in your brain and keeps dragging you back for another abrasion after all the records by sound-alike mediocrities have faded. The scene and musicians whom Television are not entirely reluctantly recruited as crest of, are often thought of as anti-emotional, certainly anti-body, and much of the CBGB circuit and attendant flailing is. But in Television's flail is the compulsively insistent nerve-end that their demeanor denies, a twitch in the neighborhood of, but not sounding like, the Velvet Underground. It's tortured, but not in the predictable ways. When I start listening to the lyrics, I trust I'll get some answers, but the vocals are so stridently lame and the guitar work so good that the words can cool a while.

Unlike the previously pressed "Little Johnny Jewel" (and thank whoever kept that song off here), this record plays like lives depended on it. and That's in a pure sense, meaning that just when you though self-consciousness was a given for rock & roll, along come Television who are so self-conscious they're unconscious—and that's no joke. More like a joy, like how long has it been since you've heard a new band who were paying more attention to their music qua music (as opposed to image, and the two do separate with this group, except for the fact that both of them are paranoid) than honing their cools to the nub? Television's seething desperation to get their sound across way outdistances their attempts to project the proper posture of monolithic stultification (c.f., the Lou Reed-school way Verlaine sez "This case is *closed*" at the end of "Prove It"). You're not supposed to want at this point, but they do, and I think it embarrasses them. And I think it's something beyond the usual fame trip, or money/sex/latitude, or even recognition as Artists by community of self-pinned same—I think they want something bigger they can't sneer off or blue-print, and that inchoate hunger is their fingerprint on the haunch of greatness.

I didn't expect to like this album but I do for all the same reasons: i.e., it's not pretentious, it has a gritty churn that'll get in your blood like specks of gravel or the rust that comes to neon. Also, because it's not gonna get radio play or sell because it doesn't sound like Boston. And in these hard times when people are actually making hit records that sing, Whoopee, I got a job at the carwash, it's rare indeed to find someone trying with all his might to do something different, whatever the consequences. So thrash on and bless you, Verlaine, even if you are a creep and never think about jumping a little bit onstage like this guy Richard Hell in the news. Now *there's* the image of a rock & roll prince, later for stars (that's for you, Patti).

Lester Bangs

Robin Trower

Long Misty Days

(Chrysalis)

Robin Trower has become the focal point or perhaps secular high priest in that greatest necrophilic necromancy, Hendrix worship. Jimi Hendrix, of course, knew when his time to die had come—his prescience on that matter is one of the most compelling aspects of the guitarist's enduring legend. Trower claimed a mystical consanguinity with Hendrix from the start—his desire to quit the formalistic neoclassical rigors of Procol Harum and their clearly defined guitar-as-part-of-the-arrangement style for the less demanding and more lucrative power-trio format was not an economic or even an artistic decision, according to Trower, but a divine program, a

manifest destiny to continue on in the tradition of shaman lead guitarist. The story goes that Trower was blind to the Hendrix presence until, shortly before Hendrix died, a double bill of Hendrix/Procol Harum enabled Trower to be mystically transported to the interior dream world of the Hendrix aura.

Many critics have argued that Trower's solo work is a cipher, a useless duplication of the Hendrix machinery, and much less compelling that Trower's singular and highly influential ensemble work with Procol Harum. But it is not accendental that more budding young rock guitarists cop from Trower now than from any other influence, for Trower has picked up the mantle not only from Hendrix but Clapton as well, since the latter has thrown aside the guitar-hero image. Pete Townshend, Jeff Beck, and Jimmy Page have all been too interested in the formal and aesthetic problems the successful rock guitarist faces as group leader.

The need for guitar heroes is one of the few predictable rock formulas, and Trower has filled the void serviceably. His latest solo album, *Long Misty Days,* continues the extremely conservative strategy that all of his solo albums have employed: a slogging power-trio wash of phased guitars and Hendrix wah-wah rhythms over underwater leads. This formula tends to be somewhat boring over a long period of time, but Trower is a competent enough structuralist to squeeze every semantic drop from it. Guitar as technological sound sculpture is the idea, natch, and while some might argue that that's giving Trower more credit than he's worth, he does manage to pull it off here (especially on Side Two), and that has to count for something. Post-romantic encumbrances like lyrics and singing are left to the bassist, who continues to improve in the standard-British-blues-belter tradition. The basely repetitive "Messin' the Blues" shows Trower and band to be every bit as much the beer-drenched boogie *auteurs as any of their Limey peers, or even such revisionists as Erin's own Rory Gallagher.*

John Swenson

The Dwight Twilley Band

Twilley Don't Mind

(Arista)

It's tempting to believe that the Tulsa-based Dwight Twilley Band *must* do it with mirrors. The strong element of hocus-pocus in their sound—plus their apparent reluctance to leave the studio womb—make me wonder: Is this magic for real?

Sincerely, a truly dazzling debut album, proved that Twilley could invest the conventions of the second phase of the first British invasion with naive Southwestern savoir-faire. While *Twilley Don't Mind* makes the same case nearly as credibly, my delight is just slightly dissipated the second time around. Huge talents like Dwight Twilley have to start taking big chances sometime because it's too easy to substitute perfection for inspiration, too easy to play unacknowledged superstar instead of honest rock & roll.

On the strength of Side One, Twilley's trying. Each track is a model of harmonic vitality and ingenious production, particularly in the use of the rhythm guitar. The passionate fills on "Looking for the Magic," the *Revolver*-era raga on "Here She Comes," the fuzz-tone punctuation on "Trying to Find My Baby"— all are pulled off with incredible finesse. I love the way that the electronic delay advances from cliche to full-blown eccentricity on the "Looking for the Magic" vocal, and I love the animal urgency of the "Hurt, hurt" chant at the fade. Finally, one unexpected image of loss—"Because a photograph is like an hourglass sometime" —makes me shiver.

On "That I Remember," the circular refrain, "I remember that I remember,"—subtly conveys the ache of erotic obsession. And the lines, "Six o'clock in the morning/Finished recording," startle because they smack of Seventies careerism in the midst of reinvented Sixties pop.

Commemorative steals are everywhere: ooh's that surge to the front of the mix like every 1967 band from Moby Grape to the Monkees; the "break my heart" bit from "Rock and Roll 47" that quotes "Back in the U.S.S.R.," itself a parody of rock plagiarism —even the word "know" is Anglicized into a coquettish meow. Of course, Dwight and Phil (Seymour) keep coming off the seventh in parallel thirds all the way, like Don and Phil, or John and Paul.

Melodically, the first five songs on *Twilley Don't Mind* are more forthright than anything on *Sincerely*, which means that there's nothing so vaporous as "Baby Let's Cruise." Conversely, no song crawls under your skin like "You Were So Warm," and none approaches the languid mystery of "Sincerely." Still, Side One of *Twilley Don't Mind* ranks among the best album halves that I've heard in ages. Unhappily, Side Two—only four songs long—is irksomely incomplete.

It opens very strongly with "Twilley Don't Mind," a cheeky turn at making Twilley a household word. This is classic, even reductive, rock that reminds us that Dwight Twilley is, in fact, a great American oddball name. Definitely a neat (mark my word) conceit.

"Sleeping" is all double-tracked choirboy vocals floating over multi-layered acoustic guitar—perhaps the boys were thinking of Pete Townshend's "Sensation." Anyhow, the bridge is unconvincing, and the "sleeping" motif seems detached. Where John Lennon created sensual fun ("I'm Only Sleeping") and masterly angst ("I'm So Tired") from neurotic fatigue, Dwight Twilley comes off narcissistic, even complacent. At a suspicious 6:06, "Sleeping" sounds like two songs grafted together. Somewhere in the middle of this track, Side Two starts sagging.

With the last two songs, *Twilley Don't Mind* falls off alarmingly. "Chance to Get Away" is passable *Beatles VI*, a formal exercise in wringing yet another song out of the I-relative minor-IV-V chord progression. This miss underscores the danger in Twilley's o*euvre*: flip it over, and it comes up cutesy. The sci-fi "Invasion," which simmers but won't boil, could be a warm-up for 1975's "I'm on Fire." Then suddenly this delicious platter is spun out, just like that. Breaks my heart.

Lately, I've been using the Dwight Twilley records to seduce a bunch of sweet young things. Simply because it's 25 percent bigger, I'm recommending *Sincerely* for Twilley virgins.

Oh, fuck. Buy 'em both, and meet me on the rock & roll freeway.

Wesley Strick

Dennis Wilson

Pacific Ocean Blue

(Caribou)

Dennis Wilson's first solo album, self-produced with Gregg Jakobson, possesses the same thudding, murk-with-a-beat sound that has anchored the last two Beach Boys collections. On the latter records, that thick aura was appropriate as an effective metaphor for Brian Wilson's state of mind. Dennis, however, has always presented himself as the most chipper Beach Boy, not to mention the most athletic and most conventionally intelligent (eccentric intelligence runs through the Wilson family like blood). This is the key to *Pacific Ocean Blue*'s success: what could have been anticipated as being a glib, instinctive work is actually quite a moving exposure of a team player's idiosyncrasies. There is still a good bit of the chipper ("Friday Night," "What's Wrong"), but there is also regret ("Farewell My Friend"), romance ("Rainbows"), and a bemused quality that is especially interesting. "River Song" expresses a dislike for big cities that is genuinely thoughtful, not just another rural smirk. When Wilson sings, "Breaks my heart to see the city/Wonder why it ain't pretty," banality is transcended, and an entire area of objective reflexiveness that is not often tapped in rock & roll is brought into play.

Another resemblance that *Pacific Ocean Blue* bears to Brian's recent work is the brevity of Dennis' compositions. There are 12 songs here, and their concision helps to minimize the dull spots and to make the best stuff all the more pungent. Dennis Wilson's flaws are predictable—occasional overdoses of sentimentality, coyness, and willful infantilism —but a lot of these are mended by his singing, which is loopy, hoarse, and a lot more like Harry Nilsson than one may have previously realized.

Ken Tucker

Steve Winwood

Steve Winwood

(Island)

Steve Winwood started out as a 16-year-old prodigy singing lead for an unimportant, now defunct group. Even then, he was recognized as the most promising white soul singer of his generation; a true disciple of Ray Charles, predating Joe Cocker, Rod Stewart, et al. He went on to realize his potential with Traffic, brilliantly collaborating with Dave Mason, Jim Capaldi, and Chris Wood. As the most spectacular musician in that spectacular band, Winwood played wonderfully emotive keyboards and guitar, sang in a chillingly understated blues voice, and had a hand in writing most of the group's best songs.

Winwood continued to drive Traffic after Mason left for a successful solo career, but, after a few years, the band became soporific and eventually skidded to a halt. Since then, the singer's refusal to release an album under his own name (he once went so far as to have a United Artists greatest hits package, *Winwood*, recalled) has been both a mystery and a major disappointment to his fans. The fact that he's contributed enthusiastically to several recent projects with non-stars Stomu Yamashta and Remi Kabaka suggests that Winwood probably made a conscious decision to avoid the limelight. Perhaps his experience with the much-hyped and short-lived Blind Faith was enough to convince him that a temporary financial sacrifice would be a fair exchange for some solid control over his own destiny.

The wait has been worth it. *Steve Winwood* is better than any Traffic album since *The Low Spark of High Heeled Boys,* maybe better than any since *John Barleycorn Must Die.* Several of his songs are lengthy because they take the time to create moods which Winwood uses as settings for his haunting, plaintive voice. Despite the exquisite playing and presence of Jim Capaldi, Steve Winwood's singing is the important thing here. You can tell that he really means it.

Winwood really cuts his way through "Time Is Running Out," an urgent funk vamp which features the artist's multi-tracked instrumental forays on electric piano, clavinette, organ, synthesizer, and electric guitar. The effect is dazzling, and the song is a real treat for those who admire Winwood's playing as much as his singing.

The rest of the songs are ballads on which Winwood gets a chance to build majestic vocal peaks. "Let Me Make Something In Your Life" is a real classic, the singer reaching such an emotional level that his voice comes perilously close to cracking. The resolution here is breathtaking. "Vacant Chair," written with ex-Bonzo Dog Viv Stanshell, is an incredibly moving lament to a lost friend. The song is decidedly spiritual, sad yet joyous: an accep-

tance of fate through a silly little prayer that floats through the air like a breath of wind.

John Swenson

The Yardbirds

Great Hits

(Epic)

Favorites

(Epic)

The Yardbirds happened over 10 years ago, and their work then helped rock & roll mature from its adolescent, jiffy-pop stage into what it is today. They took the three-minute single and invested it with all of their frenzy, despair, and outreach. They brought the guitar to its modern-day preeminence as the voice of rock & roll. But it's not enough just to say that the Yardbirds were here first, and then expect an audience which has since digested all of the cumulative advances of the music to jump up and buy something that, to them, will probably sound primitive or quaint. Just because Aerosmith, Fleetwood Mac, and countless others, remember the band fondly enough to record their hits is no real reason why you should like them.

I find, however, that the Yardbirds had a knack for hooks and kinetics that eludes so many of their more sophisticated descendants. In their own crude way, they arrived at guitar phrasings that extracted every ounce of tension and poignancy from the simplest riffs. (I do have to assert the historic importance of the Yardbirds' guitarists. At various times, Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, and Jimmy Page played lead for them, all but inventing the modern guitar vocabulary in the process.) Atmosphere they had in plenty: an air of cool that you could cut with a chain saw, and a sense that they could do anything in the world. Shot through with blues feelings of heartache and slow rage, the Yardbirds were brats, but precocious enough to make impetuousness work for them. (Beck is still trafficking in brattiness, and so, in their own way, are the British and American punk-rock bands. Almost everything else in modern rock is too slick—especially Aerosmith, Kiss, etc.

Great Hits is a reasonable singles collection, of which my favorites are "Shapes of Things" (recorded by both Jeff Beck and David Bowie), "Heart Full of Soul" (written by Graham Gouldman, now of 10cc), and the perennial "Train Kept A-Rollin'." *Favorites* resurrects mostly album tracks and blues songs that the band really liked to play. These songs are 10 years old, have been collector's items for years, and still sound good enough to be distributed again today.

As a historian, I'm slightly disturbed by the absence of "Happenings Ten Years' Time Ago" or anything from *Little Games*. These were the Yardbirds' excursions into psychedelia, as well as Jimmy Page's first steps toward his next band, Led Zeppelin.

Michael Bloom

Yes

Going for the One

(Atlantic)

Future generations won't think of Yes as progressive, but as gloriously idiosyncratic. They evolved their own way of working together, affording each member ultimate freedom to perform within his competence and pushing him to utmost. The nature of the process had them defining their songs by perimeters, always approaching from the outside. The climax of this technique was *Close to the Edge,* where five unbridled imaginations, all riffing at once, converged synergetically into brilliant, inimitable masses of song.

Lately, however, the structure has been abused. Some players left, and their replacements weren't hooked up right; some players started breaking the contract in fits of ego. Several tried to reclaim their individualities by cutting solo albums, but that didn't suggest a solution.

Going for the One is such a diverse and disorderly affair that the only sense I can make of it is as a series of diagnostic tests to point out the prowess and weakness of the Yes machine. Everything but the kitchen sink shows up somewhere: simple riffs to complicate, complex passages to elucidate, delicate textures to perpetuate, ponderous beats to ameliorate. There are hoary old sounds to revive and new possibilities to absorb. And even some direct stylistic cops from others who've solved the same problem in a different way—for example, I'd swear that "Turn of the Century" was a Genesis composition. Yes' success with all of this is as mixed as everything else: there are sublime moments and horrible gaffes.

I'll attempt some analysis of the results, in terms of both personnel and methodologies. Steve Howe, whose guitar wizardry once made everything possible, now makes it all most difficult—he thinks he's better than he really is. He concocts a clever anchor riff in "Awaken," the album's topographic production number, but his solos can be awfully megalomanic, like the ghastly rock & roll noise he plays on the title track. Rick Wakeman apparently doesn't understand what happened in his absence; he seems content here to arpeggiate anything anybody tells him to. Alan White is learning—his handling of the 11/8 time in "Awaken" is nearly brilliant—but he's still a plodder at heart.

Jon Anderson and Chris Squire, who invented this band between them, appear to be squabbling. Squire's solo album was easily the best of the five, but here his "Parallels" is so poor that it must indicate massive frustration. He's an intellectual player, and can't get a frame of reference from Anderson, whose scatter-shot nirvana musings could phase him out of a group situation entirely.

The technique developed in the songs include Squire's and Anderson's methods—both tried-and-true systems—and an attempt at pure luck, which worked out the worst ("Going for the One"). "Parallels" features several different possible breakdowns of a large verse, and would have been terrific had not the basic theme been rubbish, because the harmonies and modulations are great ideas all. Anderson works the opposite way, starting with a three-note fragment and expanding it kaleidoscopically ("Turn of the Century"). The melody is unfailingly elegant, the bones of it so simple and accommodating that all of the impromptu counterpoints that the band provides work out wonderfully.

"Wonderous Stories" harkens back to "Your Move." Howe strums on the vachalia, and everyone else noodles politely to let the harmony vocals carry the tune. It's pretty, but they could do it in their sleep. "Awaken" has three basic motifs: a misty intro doubling as a coda, an angular invocation, and a main body of immense heroics. The most important thing here is to make sure that the transitions are correct and that the mood flows appropriately. Yes have done enough works on this scale to manage such trifling problems with ease.

So much data, so much variety, leads me to despair of ever completing my analysis, especially since I find that I don't like the record nearly as much as *Close to the Edge* or *Fish Out of Water*. One thing is evident, however: this is not the work of a stable group. I'll give you better-than-even odds that someone resigns before the end of the current tour. Even if I'm wrong, they desperately need a change in their working habits. If they don't find one, they'll have to dissolve.

Michael Bloom

Neil Young

American Stars 'n Bars

(Reprise)

By now, Neil Young has his distemper under firm control. He can let it loose to produce sprawling, screeching jeremiads that include both to-the-bone introspection and clever, even artful, couplets. Of Young's later work, *On the Beach, Tonight's the Night* and about half of *Zuma* are dominated by this *modus operandi.* Conversely, he can keep his violent zaniness on a tight leash and swiftly construct a simple, tight song with country music as its brick and rock & roll as its mortar. The rest of *Zuma*, his compositions on the Stills-Young Band album, and *American Stars 'n Bars* represent this more conventionally structured material.

Which is not to say that *American Stars 'n Bars* is in any way conventional. The richness of its jaggedly precise music and nonchalantly sentimental/bizarre lyrics lift it away from the music that anyone else is making today.

Young occasionally falters. At 7:11 "Will to Love," one of two long songs on *American Stars 'n Bars*, is much too coy verbally and tedious melodically. "Like a Hurricane," 8:14 of received romancing and passionate guitar playing is interesting mainly for its imagery. For all of his self-emphasized artlessness, there are might few hard-rock lyricists who would bother to carry out a metaphor as neatly as Young does in this song. By dint of their length and tone, "Will to Love" and "Like a Hurricane" would seem to be Young's most personal work here, but for me it is the hard country music of Side One that makes the album both aesthetically successful and the artist's most commercially pleasing collection since the sore thumb of his career, *Harvest*.

Above all, *American Stars 'n Bars* is a mending of the wounds displayed most prominently on *Tonight's the Night*. Throughout the first side, Young is just another guy on a barstool yowling to be heard and playing lead guitar as if he were riding out a mean, melancholy drunk. That's certainly what "The Old Country Waltz," "Saddle Up the Palomino," and "Hey Babe" are about. "Hold Back the Tears" and "Bite the Bullet" are about that and more: the strength to be drawn from a strident, often violently imposed stoicism. "Hold Back the Tears" is couched in the form of an old Lefty Frizzell weeper, with Young's whine managing to sound excruciatingly moving and intentionally unconvincing: he's crying buckets as he rings out the title.

"Bite the Bullet" is the toughest song on *American Stars 'n Bars*, and the one in which lyrics and melody are most perfectly matched. Instead of his usual oblique approach to his amorous desires—for all the rocker in him, this artist is nearly always chastely polite and romantic when he wants to impress or seduce a woman (something he doesn't want to do very often, however)—Young here celebrates a "walking love machine" and says he'd "like to make her scream." This passion is rendered by the slamming melody, in which the phrase "Bite the bullet" is the singer's way of keeping himself psyched up and persistent in the conquest of this amazing desired one (who is, by the way, a "barhall queen" in Charlotte, North Carolina).

Neil Young has always drawn a lot of his imagery from Western movies, and while he sketches out his narratives with the quick, elliptical precision of a Sam Peckinpah, his moodiness and harsh world view are even closer to the series of terse Westerns that Anthony Mann made with James Stewart in the late Fifties and early Sixties. In Mann's films, there is neither the quiet celebration that bubbles through John Ford's best work nor the implicit joy in guileless companionship that suffuses the masculine sagas of Howard Hawks.

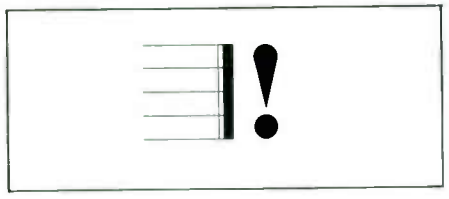
Mann is a bratty cynic, and so is Neil Young. This quality, which could be annoying and offensive (as it certainly is to many of Young's early, now disaffected, fans), is thoroughly redeemed by the overwhelming power of the music it inspires. Songs like "Lookout Joe," "Revolution Blues," "Yonder Stands the Sinner," and "Bite the Bullet" are the compositions of an obnoxious genius, a spoiled misanthrope who does things his own way or not at all.

Neil Young is the only major rock figure who profits by self-indulgence. The more extreme, the more personal, the louder and more whiny he gets, the better the music he makes. He doesn't like a clean, polished sound, and instinctively knows that such a sound does not become him—this despite the fact (or maybe *because* of the fact, so perverse can he be) that *Harvest*, his biggest seller, is his smoothest, most polished LP.

While *American Stars 'n Bars is* Young's tidiest record since *Harvest* (he is calmer and less self-obsessed than on the intervening albums), it nonetheless reveals the muscle that the artist has developed over the past few years of studied musical hostility. Even gentle and atypical songs like "Star of Bethlehem" and "The Old Country Waltz" are stronger because of Young's new and totally instinctive firmness of declaration: the music gains a much-needed tension (the melodies of both are weak) from the disparity between the quiet emotions portrayed and the nicely fuzzed vocals and guitar work.

American Stars 'n Bars is yet another step forward in Neil Young's musical evolution, one that is shaping up as possibly the most interesting and involving in rock & roll in the Seventies.

Ken Tucker



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