

DISCARD

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ROBERT CHRISTGAU

Any Old Way You Choose It

ROCK AND OTHER POP MUSIC,

1967-1973

EXPANDED EDITION



"Anatomy of a Love Festival" and the "Secular Music" columns were first published

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FOR CREIL AND JENNY MARCUS





My sister once told me that I wrote best when I was most eager to understand the opinions of others, and like so many of her insights, that one has now found a place in my writing. I talk to everyone about music, and I'm always picking up something new. A complete set of acknowledgments would include all my friends and more than a few of my enemies. What follows is the tip of the iceberg.

Friends and relations first. My long-gone high-school buddy, John Garvin, provided me with at least two years of obsessive discussion, not to mention access to his issues of Cash Box. My sister, Georgia, was buying rock albums before I was—it was she more than anyone who communicated rock's new impact to me in 1965. Russell Carley taught me everything he knows about blues, country music, dancing, and growing up poor and white in the South. Bob Stanley introduced me to pop art and pop music and the rock and roll celebrity process, especially its visual aspects. Perry Brandston functions as my token adolescent. Wesley Goodwin is always turning me on things I thought I already knew about. And that's enough.

I read a lot of rock criticism, and I absorb ideas from everyone, but I would like above all to thank my dear friend and cross-continental brother Greil Marcus, whose contribution to every stage of this book has been incalculable. After that, Richard Goldstein, my first ally and adversary, who not only shared enthusiasms but ended up giving me his job. Tom Smucker tosses me ideas he ought to be writing up himself. Vince Aletti is an inexhaustible fund of information and insight about soul music. Susan Lydon argues with me about Northern California and mass culture and inside-dopes me about musicians. Dave Marsh is a good writer, a good editor, and a good friend. Karin Berg sometimes seems to live for music and generously shares that life with me. And Lester Bangs, who I don't know very well, just writes a lot, for which I'm grateful.

Male writers have been stealing work from their female partners since long before Scott and Zelda, so I'd like to make that part of my debt as explicit as possible. All of my formative ideas about pop were at least as much Ellen Willis's as mine; they were developed over three and a half years of continual discussion with her. Her essay on Bob Dylan changed my whole perception of the relation between art and persona. Dominique Avery has musical instincts as sure as those of anyone I know, and her enthusiasm for rock and roll reintensified my own interest at a time when it might have flagged. Ellin Hirst understands the music in as much detail as any critic I know-a lot more than most. She read this entire book in manuscript and contributed to the essays on Smokey Robinson and the Rolling Stones while they were being written. Carola Dibbell has inspected every page of this book with me, sharpening my ideas and fussing over my language, winning fights. I don't know what I would have done without her—gone it alone, I guess, which is not a pleasant notion.

I would also like to thank my students at the California Institute of the Arts and Richmond College, especially Marcia Clendenen, Kevin McMahon, Terry Morgan, and Michael Shain; my editors, Byron Dobell and Don Erickson at *Esquire*, James Stoller and Diane Fisher at *The*

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R.C.



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WAY BACK YONDER in the '60s, I felt like I had put something over. With the willing connivance of *The Village Voice*, Newsday, Esquire, and The New York Times, I was publishing serious writing as journalism. This meant first of all that I was getting paid, albeit not much at the Voice (or the Times, which to this day fobs freelancers off with status). But what was even peachier was interacting with an audience shaping one of my own as I accessed the readerships of the periodicals I worked for. Getting paid was a day-job equivalent that saved an impecunious young bohemian from burning the midnight oil at both ends. For the work per se, however, interacting was even better, a point I never stopped harping on in my criticism: "School Day" wouldn't have happened if Chuck Berry hadn't targeted the teen market, and "Tulane" wouldn't have happened if the then-fortysomething reprobate hadn't become a doper darling. Since I was only a critic, I could think smaller, and since there was precious little informed rock coverage to compete with, I could afford to assume the best. So I tried to take my cues from the informal intelligence of the music I loved most and let anyone who didn't like it lump it. My payback to readers who stuck with me was knowledge and pleasure—writing that nailed nuances, kept things moving, and threw in a few laughs just for laughs. And, oh yeah, writing that did the quotidian work of journalism—that reported the news and got the story.

Since my criticism also argued that pop forms, a/k/a commercial constraints, were good for art, the way my own story turned out wouldn't have surprised me, and doesn't. I'm proud I was "serious"—proud I laid out ideas, tweaked language, extruded persona, and gave equal time to my natural enthusiasm and my natural skepticism. If I hadn't been serious, I wouldn't be looking back on these pieces today, and God knows neither would you. But as I go through them again, it's their journalistic factuality that stands out. Since we've now reached the point where the '60s are history—not just dead and gone, but an academic industry whose bibliography no one leaves alive—I'm gratified to find myself the author of a you-are-there sourcebook with some good ideas in it. Although rock was the cultural glue of the '60s by acclamation, few historians have the chops to write about it in any but the most received and general terms. In contrast, Anu Old Way You Choose It is proactive and specific—an on-thespot account of an art form, culture industry, and social formation in progress. The author is a sympathetic participantobserver who was never a fire-breathing ideologue or hapless cynic. The book is far more reportorial than he perceived at the time, and even when the writing seems naive, which is less than he feared, what it leaves out and what it chooses to mention say a great deal about just exactly how America was surprising its citizenry at the time.

If Any Old Way You Choose It was more reportorial than I knew, it was also more diaristic. Far from the meticulous observation championed by Tom Wolfe, the "New Journalism" with which rock criticism was associated was notorious for its subjectivity. So as soon as the culturati's counterattack on the counterculture revved up circa 1972, the first-person came under fire as one more dire consequence of the nonviolent toilet training that had wreaked so much havoc on the body politic. I've moved away from the device over the years, for many reasons—including increased confidence (I'm expert now in a way no one was then) and a realization that

critical authority is more politically and epistemologically justifiable than it once seemed (culturati do have their purchase on the truth, and anyway, it's suicidal not to fight them with their own weapons). But I still think the editorial "I" is a valuable tool, especially in criticism, so much of which is rationalized opinion. For me the idea was to identify the angle of distortion in the "objective" analysis any personal narrative carries with it. The trick is not to puff yourself up—to undercut the presumption of omniscience rather than bolster it, although since good criticism feeds off passionate beliefs, things can't and shouldn't always play out that way. That some readers are sure to assume you're an egomaniac, especially if your persona rubs them the wrong way, is an inevitability you have to roll-with.

For convenience's sake I've been referencing "the '60s" even though the preponderance of the pieces collected here were written in the '70s. That's because what most people mean by the '60s stretched into the next decade; the McGovern debacle is my preferred cutoff point, with the titanic yet ultimately inconsequential Watergate triumph the runner-up. Or put it another way: what most people mean by the '60s is—let's call a spade a spade—hippies. This book is about hippies and what pop music could and couldn't be for them, by which I don't and do mean us. I looked like a hippie—I dressed sloppy and wore my hair long (until 1980, actually). But I didn't feel like a hippie, and so I hope to remind both nonparticipants and rewriters of history that the counterculture wasn't merely heterogeneous, that comforting bromide, but split down the middle—or rather, down one side, for the political part was nowhere near as big as the hedonistic-toquasireligious apolitical part where true hippies could be found. Partly because I was brought up to take Christian virtues literally by parents who never thought less of or for themselves because they didn't have much money, but mostly because the left was where the ideas were, I was down with the politicos. I had numerous differences with the

Movement, most prominently my commitment to popular culture and its capitalist ways. But I also felt committed to radical social change.

Does this mean I was so foolish as to believe rock and roll was "revolutionary"? I'm happy to say that the 1970 essay "Rock 'n' Revolution" proves I wasn't. For my purposes, this was a relief. Though friends I loved urged otherwise, I could never think of myself as a revolutionary or of America as ripe for revolution. What I did think, however, was almost as palmy, and since it's only suggested in what follows, I'll try to lay it out here. Underlying all of the pieces I was writing at this time, even for Newsday on suburban Long Island, was the hope that audience could become community and the idea that at the very least it constituted a metaphor for community. And community is putting it mildly—commonality is more like what I had in mind. Revolutionary or not, I believed then what I believe now—that progressive transformation could only be effected by collective action, which presupposes collective consciousness. My mistake was taking this a slippery step further. What better to provide such magical stuff, I asked myself, than the glue of the '60s, with its power, as I put it as late as 1972 in "John Lennon's Realpolitik," to "broaden fellow-feeling, direct energy, and focus analysis"?

So at the start of the book there's Otis Redding's Monterey "love crowd," and at the end there's the New York Dolls lighting up the Mercer Arts Center—and scaring "the rich, classy men who own the big record companies." In between there's not only "Rock 'n' Revolution" but, shortly thereafter, "A Musical Weekend," about the dispiriting nonevent that was Monterey II, which next to the Chuck Berry is my favorite piece in the book. Nor was the audience metaphor altogether dependent on festivals, clubs, and other physical sites, crucial though they may be. I also meant to map the purely imaginary inner space shared by people of disparately similar backgrounds listening in private to the same music at the

same time. So I closed the book with my favorite singles of 1972, a year when I was driving out to Nassau County all the time. By 1974, with Gerald Ford the new boss and my job as *Voice* music editor a few blocks from my door, my radio time would shrivel to nothing as my musical appetites expanded to encompass the *Voice* bailiwick. First I rediscovered jazz. Then I sampled downtown minimalism. And before long I was hooked on the style I'd been waiting for, punk, which helped speed pop radio on its way toward epiphenomenality—no center even metaphorically anymore.

Punk is presaged not just in the Dolls piece (where, borrowing from my buddies at Creem magazine, I use the very word), but in the one right after "A Musical Weekend." "Rock Is Obsolescent (But So Are You)" unveils the term that has anchored my criticism for thirty years, a term that had popped out of my mouth after a couple of tokes at a Young Lords party a few months before: semipopular music. With very few exceptions-Joy of Cooking, perhaps Mott the Hoople, and of course the Dolls-Any Old Way You Choose It is not about semipopular music. It's about popular music. But as the metaphor of community disintegrates, we know in retrospect that semipopular music is on the way. And once semipopular music flowered into punk. I had no interest in resisting it. Many felt punk crystallized a community far realer than any the '60s threw up, because it was small enough to see and touch, and in its New York variant that community was literally my own-I live a short walk from CBGB. Even in its reactively antipolitical New York variant, I especially appreciated punk's politics, not least because—metaphorically again—they made room for class. Eventually punk would generate the major bohemia of the '80s, the alternative/indie circuit that's still generating counterculture today. But even before it became a lock cinch that it would never galvanize American youth the way the Beatles and Hendrix had, I knew my attraction was above all formal: I loved punk as music, as shortfasttough songs. I've never stopped believing that the

form has social content and political implications. Nevertheless, the provisional communitarianism that drove this book was headed for . . . not the junkyard, but a major overhaul.

By then, however, this paradigm/chimera had done the job of any animating myth-it engaged and shaped me as a writer, as a listener, and as a thinking, breathing subject. It was a truth, and whatever the folks at Penguin thought when they put psychedelically polarized portraits of John Lennon, Ioni Mitchell, and Alice Cooper on the cover, I designed this record of that truth to hold up as language and ideas. So I'm proud to conclude that it does and 'umble enough not to worry if its virtues have shifted with the years—especially since its journalistic acuity doesn't diminish its critical life. In their time-bound but thought-through subjectivity, the Beatles-Stones-Elvis takes trace iconic power as a living process. "Look at That Stupid Girl" stands as a seminal attempt at feminist rock criticism. The putdowns are choice and prophetic. The Tom Iones review is the best thing I've ever written in an hour. And as a special added attraction. I've appended three entries considered too outré for the first edition: a detailed (though condensed) Cheetah report on two adjoining Wilson Pickett concerts, a description of Jefferson Airplane roiling up the masses, and an appreciation of the deeply semipopular Captain Beefheart.

Any Old Way You Choose It views the '60s through the prism of music—a music widely hailed yet indifferently understood by legions of analysts, memoirists, and oral historians. They saw or remember symbolic insurrection, mass ecstasy, racial healing, mindless escape. But from inside—at least my inside—there was only a gradually stabilizing panoply of shifting possibilities. What started off as a kaleidoscope would eventually turn into something more like a ViewMaster, one of those 3-D slide toys with which we '50s kids used to peer at Bible scenes and pictures of African mammals. What started off intense or spaced-out or utopian or extreme would reveal its origins in the commonplace and the enter-

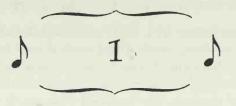
taining. Maybe the reason I could never call myself a revolutionary was that I spent so much time thinking about one of the main things my comrades (and many of our adversaries) found made life worth living. I felt how it did that, and though that helped me penetrate the ways in which it didn't, it also kept me cognizant that America would have to get a lot worse before revolution became anything more than a fantasy. In that sense, you could even say rock and roll was counterrevolutionary—because without any question it was something for America to be proud of.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU New York City June 2000



Any Old Way You Choose It





A Counter in Search of a Culture

As of Now, early 1973, it is clear that rock is neither the ultimate in cultural hallucinogens nor last year's rush. It is an established, pervasive social force, and it is still growing. Note that I refer not to "rock and roll," the pop-happy big beat that was disdained by nearly everyone except the kids who listened to it between 1955 and 1964, but to "rock," a term that signifies something like "all music deriving primarily from the energy and influence of the Beatles-and maybe Bob Dylan, and maybe you should stick pretensions in there someplace." Rock and roll is mine by birthright. I'm committed to it. In its self-conscious version it is still very much kicking. But rock, which subsumes rock and roll, is the subject of this book. In fact, maybe what distinguishes rock from rock and roll is that you write criticism about it. Although that was not the life I'd planned for myself when I began my column for Esquire in early 1967, it seems to be what I end up doing.

My disinclination was for criticism, not for rock, or rock and roll. Except for four years of college, where the apex of my career as a high aesthete coincided with a dearth of top-forty radio, I had been a rock and roll fan ever since the sainted Alan Freed arrived in New York in 1954. In high school my own fanaticism did not center around dancing, the Brooklyn Paramount, and autographed pictures on the wall. Instead, I was crazy for the radio and the trade magazines to which an even crazier friend subscribed. In college I turned to jazz and literature, and not even in that order of preference, but when I returned to New York in 1962, Phil Spector and early Motown were waiting for me.

Once again I became a fanatic, even compiling charts, just like in high school, yet somehow I didn't make the connection between rock and roll and the meager short stories with which I justified my evasion of a graduate degree. Then, early in 1963, I walked into the Green Gallery on West 57th Street. The show was eight or ten of Tom Wesselmann's Great American Nudes-sprawling flat-pink ladies surrounded by outsized magazine-ad images, with vistas from Better Homes and Gardens pasted behind each window and with miniature Mondrians and Mona Lisas on the walls. The paintings exhibit exhibit me, but what really turned me around was something I heard— Connie Francis singing "V-A-C-A-T-I-O-N." The music wasn't coming from a transistor Sony in the office, either. Into one of his paintings Wesselmann had built a real radio, and there in that art gallery it was tuned to WABC. What an epiphany.

Like all pop art, the Great American Nudes played with context, suggesting some kind of continuity—or even equation—between WABC and the Green Gallery, Connie Francis and Piet Mondrian. They were the beginning of my theory of pop. With help from the Beatles, whose tongue-in-cheek distance from their own celebrity recalled the characteristic light irony of pop art, my in-

choate antiart prejudices, which had germinated when I first saw through the secular theology of new-critical literary analysis in college, began to mature. I certainly didn't reject all art, and I didn't exactly decide that what is called high art is bullshit—I still don't believe that. But I did come to understand that popular art was not inferior to high art, and decided that popular art achieved a vitality of both integrity and outreach that high art had unfortunately abandoned. Popular art dealt with common realities and fantasies in forms that provided immediate pleasure—it was vital aesthetically, as work. And because it moved and was moved by the great audience, it was also vital culturally, as relationship.

The pop mentality was a natural for me, and not just because I loved rock and roll. Despite my well-deserved reputation as an oddball, I had always resisted the anti-American nay-saying of my oddball acquaintances. I felt like an American, with many of the materialistic vulgarities that implied. A passionate democrat, I identified with my own baseball-and-soda-pop past in Queens, and I liked the brand names and neologisms of American speech. But a more suspect kind of self-affirmation was also involved. I led a life most Americans would describe as bohemian—unconventional in appearance, irregular in employment, postliberal in politics, peripatetic, and arty. While I'm certain that this life-style justified itself—that its content made me happy-I also know that it was reactive—that its form made my parents unhappy. This is the usual pattern, but I took it a step further: I became an antibohemian bohemian. For me, as for most of my early co-theorists, pop was also reactive-to the insularity and elitism of radical avant-gardism. For whatever reason, my temperament is polemical. Show me an idea and I'll show you what's wrong with it, and six months later I'll show you what's wrong with my objections. I like to think that this convolutionism is balanced by my capacious enthusiasms and mitigated by my selfawareness. Looking over this book, however, I realize that one reason my analysis deals so obsessively in paradox is that it attempts to resolve my own polemic.

Pursuing my nascent theory of pop, I gave up fiction in 1964 to become a sportswriter, but it didn't work out that way. In late 1965, when I was working as a police reporter for the Newark Star-Ledger, a young woman in Clifton, New Jersey, died on the then-obscure macrobiotic diet. Suddenly, my bohemianism and my antibohemianism came together-I was outraged by the way the story was mangled in the straight press, but I was also outraged by the uselessness of the death itself. The resulting piece appeared in New York magazine and turned into a free-lance career. After working on several abortive reportage projects at Esquire, I asked to take over the dormant "Secular Music" column. My motive was partly careerist-the column was a foothold at Esquire, that citadel of the writerly new journalism to which I then aspired, and the subject could provide a base income for years to come. But it was also idealistic-I had things to say that no one else was saying, and I wanted to combat the most egregious shortcoming of the primitive rock criticism of that time, its inattention to black music.

I failed at the latter, I think. The black-white theme runs through this book, but I have never managed to bring it together, and my writing about black music aimed at the black audience, music I hold dear, seems partial, contradictory, sometimes racist. But the things that no one else was saying proved subject enough. Who could have predicted that pop would become so complicated? In my first column I assumed my customary stance: Rock and roll was good, and art, while not necessarily bad, was dangerous. Hooray Little Richard, boo Jefferson Airplane. And then *Esquire* sent me to the Monterey Pop Festival.

I was no stranger to hippies—I lived on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Yet as an antibohemian bohemian I found it difficult to take them seriously—all this macrobiotics, and astrology, and dope. So in a sense I learned about hippies from Newsweek and The Village Voice and Tom Wolfe's first Kesey articles, just like everyone else. Gradually, influenced by the persuasive utopianism of my then-partner, Ellen Willis, and the music (which is to say, the art) of what I thought of as the first hippie groups—the Mamas & the Papas, the Lovin' Spoonful, the Doors, and yes, Jefferson Airplane—I softened up. Monterey was so entrancing that it almost made me believe in the efficacy of love and flowers. I wrote about the love crowd as an observer, but in fact I was part of it. I was turned on by the hippies, too.

I conceived of hippies as pop bohemians. Their bright visual style had more to do with mod than with the traditional boho earth-tones. They tended to be younger than, say, the beats of eight or ten years before, and more committed to youth as an ideal. They were into the pleasure of flash immediacy. They were not antimachine or antimedia. And most important, they liked mass culture: What by then was called rock—popular culture created by the counterculture—embodied my own personal contradictions.

As it turned out, this formulation was only one-half or one-third true at best, and it disintegrated as the counter-culture became larger and more embattled. But I found that whether or not the new bohemians had come over to my way of thinking, I identified with them. In my gadfly polemicist sort of way, I felt committed to the life-style we shared and was ready to stick up for it. Pop no longer seemed like an all-purpose answer.

My pop impulse and my bohemian impulse united in my politics. Both impulses were pragmatic, suggesting complementary modes of self-preservation. Pop is really a

system for beating the system, both perceptually, by aesthetic reinterpretation, and physically, by selective consumption. And bohemianism had always sought to shed the system's outworn, wasteful usages and uncover the true self. What bothered me about the bohemian concept of selfhood was the way it renounced healthy acculturation as it sloughed off destructive habits and values; maybe alienation was an unavoidable side effect of mass society. but it seemed perverse to elevate it into a world-view. As I've said, the pop mentality countered this tendency, but gradually I realized that it engendered a similar insularity. Not only did it proceed from a level of affluence that was still a myth for much of this country and most of the rest of the world, but it implied its own kind of snobbery, directed not just at the high aesthetes who missed the point but at the vahoos who didn't apprehend the ironies of their own culture consumption. Meanwhile, selfpreservation was becoming more problematic with every race riot and fragmentation bomb. Since the massive inhumanity of America's ruling class made politics a necessity, I developed my own. Rejecting the elitism built into both modes of self-preservation, I melded the communitarian rhetoric of the counterculture and the populist possibilities of pop into a sort of improvised democratic radicalism that functioned more as a sensibility than a theory. It evolves so continually that I'd still be hard-pressed to define it, but it is at the core of my response to all art, and it always has been, even before I'd pinned it down. Let me make clear that this does not mean I perceive art politically. I do not pass art through some ideological sieve before declaring it fit for human consumption. On the contrary, I have always attempted (semiconsciously, through my sensibility) to restore to the aesthetic response the sort of cultural wholeness aesthetic historians assure us it once had-before the evil mass society broke in and ruined everything with its rude demands.

I always resisted the term "criticism" to describe secular music—I preferred "amateur sociology," or "journalism," or just "writing"—because the idea of criticism had been deracinated for me in college. As practiced by academics, it leeched life from works that had to survive, if they were to survive at all, not in some isolated specimen bottle but out in the commerce of the world, and it separated the critic—or anyway, the critic's student—from the pleasure that has always been the secret of art. What most surprised me about all the books I read after graduation was how much I enjoyed them.

But as the term "rock critic" became commonplace, I acceded. What the hell-I was a rock critic. I seemed to be writing about music all the time anyway, or at least that's what I thought I was doing. Since my strictly musical analysis tended to be brief and nontechnical and my discussion of lyrics not much fuller, there were those who disagreed. But my understanding was that criticism should invoke total aesthetic response. Academics pretended that the work or body of work was an absolute that existed in a vacuum for purposes of examination. I liked to emphasize that art was contingent. Ontological analysis had its place, but the richest and most useful kind of criticism respected the work as it was actually perceived, by people in general. My criticism bordered on journalism and sociology because I wrote about everything people responded to when they heard music—lyric and melody and rhythm and timbre first, of course, but also the context in which they heard it and whatever they knew about the artist's life and however they understood the artist's business associates to shape his/her career and whoever they expected his/her fans might be. My criticism was opinionated because that was the way everyday culture consumers responded to music—they didn't simply evaluate, they liked it or disliked it. Any critic who wrote about music as if he/she were no longer a fan—or who was no longer a fan—was shirking all the fun.

One complication of this almost willfully inexact kind of criticism was that it functioned as popular culture itself. As a journalist, I had to abide by my own theories. One of these had to do with the way an artist chose his/her audience. For reasons I've never entirely understoodthough I'm informed they had something to do with my failure to detach myself from my subject-my tour at Esquire was ending. As soon as I suspected the worst, I discovered that I still wanted to write rock criticism, a lot, and plotted shamelessly for a place on The Village Voice, the one outlet that would permit me comparable literacy and freedom. It was only when I was already ensconced in my new column, "Rock & Roll &," that I realized how decisively I had narrowed my audience. Unlike the upper-middle-class collegiates who presumably read Esquire, Voice readers—a good many of them shared my basic personal and political values. The purely pop phase of my critical career was over.

Viewed from one perspective, my *Esquire* writing seems dangerously artificial and stylized. Because I was interested in the column as a popular form, I tried painstakingly to balance each one. Because of the long lead time, I was always on the lookout for the fancy angle. Because I felt *Esquire*'s readers and editors equated credibility with a certain ironic "objectivity," I strove for the epigram, the paradox, the wise-ass remark. I did this partly because it jibed with my own notion of pop flash, but partly because I couldn't feign the more substantial kind of objectivity, and in that sense my *Esquire* writing wasn't artificial at all. For despite all my skepticism, it was true—I was not

detached from my subject. In the beginning, rock seemed to unfurl in front of me like some magic tapestry or endless circus poster, and sometimes all'I could do was marvel. In addition, *Esquire* made me feel like a spokesman for my own subculture, which whatever its deficiencies was obviously superior-to a subculture of shirt ads and Caribbean vacations. "Hooray for longhairs," I wrote in what proved to be my last column, and I meant it.

But once I got to the Voice, my polemical temperament asserted itself. Although it was safe to assume that both sets of readers shared certain soft-headed snob ideas about art, which meant I could continue my defiant celebration of AM radio and its attendant commercial strictures, it was no longer functional for me to defend hip culture. So at the same time that I was implicitly conceding my rapprochement with my own people, I began to find fault with them in print—especially with movement people, whose concerns were closest to my own. In addition, the Voice's tradition of personal journalism forced me into new kinds of self-criticism. Encouraged to indulge my own fannishness, I had to acknowledge the inevitable differences between a paying fan and a paid one. Granted analytical latitude, I began to investigate the aesthetic assumptions that I, like every other worker in my traditionless discipline, had been obliged to hammer out for myself at the beginning. Some of them were confirmed and elaborated, others deemed defective and scrapped or rebuilt.

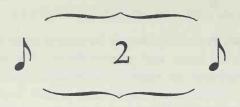
The creative freedom at the *Voice* was very good for me, because it enabled me to find my own voice. Not that the sharply honed critical shorthand of my *Esquire* writing wasn't me—just that it wasn't all of me. And since I believe that criticism that circumvents its own subjectivity also tends to circumvent its obligation to be useful—ultimately, after all, it's rationalized opinion, and the reader has to be able to compare his prejudices against those of the

critic—the development of a vivid persona seemed critical to my effectiveness. The same obligation to be useful also inspired the "Consumer Guide," a brief, letter-graded description of recent album product, which in tandem with my more indirect and abstruse think pieces epitomized my attitude toward the music—I thought that rock should both provide subtle stimulation and give 'em what they paid for.

I had been at the Voice almost three years when Newsday, the daily newspaper of Long Island, offered me a good-paying full-time job as a music critic. In many ways I was dubious—could I say what I had to say? could I write as much as a newspaperman is paid to write?—but I also sensed that I was due for a change. Money was part of it, for by then I was supporting myself not as a writer but as-oh, irony of ironies!-a college teacher. More important, though, were my doubts about the continued healthfulness of the Voice gig itself. The problem with creative freedom, as I have often pointed out, is that it tempts the creator to wallow in it, and I wondered periodically whether my comfortable relationship with my audience was good for my writing. By that time—the end of 1971-most of the movement sector of the counterculture had come to agree with my old complaints about its insularity. At movement meetings I had always been struck by the unnatural vehemence with which the very idea of the suburbs was greeted. Writing for suburbanites, I thought, might be just the challenge I needed.

After almost a year at *Newsday* I'm not satisfied that I've really reached my new audience, and I'm not always positive I want to—it can be frustrating. But newspaper work has revitalized my writing. Ideas I was once too lazy to explore have been forced out by deadline pressure, and a lot of cream has come off the top of my head. My proclivity for the involuted sentence and the logy paragraph

has been partly corrected—my writing is more direct now than it's ever been, and more concise. My editor, Joe Koenenn, permits me remarkable latitude, but inevitably I score at least as many misses as I do hits, and a certain intellectual density disappears from my writing as I deplete my store of unwritten pieces. Sometimes I think I'll quit or work out some kind of half-year deal—I want to do other things in the world than write rock criticism. But rock isn't dying, and neither am I, and I know I'll always come back to say my piece once more.



Secular Music

THE FOLLOWING MATERIAL was written for Esquire between January, 1967, and December, 1968. It is dated as it appeared in the magazine, between two and five months after it was written, and cut by about one-fourth. I wrote eight "Secular Music" columns for Esquire, but only six appear here—the pieces on soul and blues (columns number two and six) lack even historical interest now and have been deleted. Other sections have been excised or transferred, and the Monterey piece, which was not a column but a feature article, has also been edited. Except for the first column, which was necessarily naïve, I think this writing holds up pretty well. Because I considered it my duty to cover all the interesting popular music of those fabulous years, it offers an overview of the time when the whole concept of rock was taking shape, and a glimpse of its spirit. This really is pretty much what it was likeat least for me.

ANATOMY OF A LOVE FESTIVAL

"This is the love crowd, right?" One A.M. Sunday, the apogee of the Monterey International Pop Festival, and

Otis Redding surveyed his audience. They were free and white, but were they twenty-one? In any case, they were cheering again.

"We all love each other, right?"

There was a roar of assent. Redding grinned. He had them right *there*.

"Am I right?"

"Yeah!" the crowd yelled.

"Let me hear you say 'Yeah,' then!"

"Yeah!"

"All right," Redding said. Then, on some unheard but nevertheless precise beat, Redding began to . . . well, emote, part-singing, part-talking, part-moaning: "I've been [Steve Cropper lightly on guitar] loving you [pause] too long [lone shout from press section] to stop now," and the Mar-Keys started to blow, and the arena was in an uproar again. Superspade was flying high.

Redding had come to Monterey with misgivings. The summer before, he had played San Francisco's Fillmore Auditorium to appreciative but restrained applause. Redding, a veteran entertainer who is a demigod on the soul circuit, is used to better than that, and anyway, the festival was only paying expenses. But finally, between the honor, charity, and an untapped market, he came, the only mainstream black performer to do so, and his success was exemplary. Of demigods, at least, this audience demanded nothing-no build, no work, no show. All Otis had to do was trot his big self onto the stage and rock into his rather medium-sized hit, "Shake," and he had it made, wham bam thank-you-ma'am. The rest of his act-the dancing, the chuckling, the running around, the whole image of masculine ease on which his career is founded—was icing, They were just cheering him. The L.A. record exec in the velour turtleneck was up on his feet again, shouting "Heavy! Heavy!" Brian Jones felt the beginnings of tears

in his eyes. The cheap seats were standing. The love crowd was screaming its head off.

When Redding said "love crowd," he of course meant "hippies," but there are no hippies—they have disappeared in an avalanche of copy. Most of the originals who were living in the Haight in 1966, when the journalists started nosing around, have fled from the bus tour and the LSD-Burgers and the panhandling flower children who will be back in school next semester. Those who remain do not conform to the stereotype any more than those who have left. They seem to have their share of ego, though on a more sophisticated level than, say, the average Reagan supporter, and they think a lot about "the movement." There really is a movement, administered by the media and inspired in a fairly direct way by those hard-core bohemian remnants who are still talking. "The love crowd" is as good a name for it as any.

The love crowd is America's affair with bohemia. Like the hippies, those shadow folk who will necessarily partake in what follows, the love crowd flourishes wherever the living is easy, and almost by definition, it is white. In California—affluent, suburban, temperate, and home of the fabled Haight-it dominates the adolescent imagination, but it is by no means confined to the lost kids who have migrated to the center for a season and their more conservative counterparts back home. The love crowd is everyone who is turned on by the hippies, in person or through the media, not only real dropouts but also a lot of youngish liberals. It is college instructors who wear their hair kind of long and lawyers whose wives like to show off their four years of dance in the flicker of a strobe and all the people who read the Los Angeles Free Press or the Berkeley Barb. It's everyone who smokes pot, and in California that's a lot of everyone.

Pot is one of the two adhesives that bind the truly disaffiliated to the teenyboppers with ironed hair and the

aging-at-twenty-seven rebels. The other is music. The new pop is an avocational fascination of them all, from the graduate Beatlemaniacs to the mourners of John Hurt and John Coltrane. And so the Monterey International Pop Festival became the first powwow of the love crowd, the perfect pastorale, chocked with music and warm-hearted people. Its success was so unprecedented that it took everyone a little by surprise. You see, at the beginning nobody was really sure the love crowd was out there.

And by next summer it may have disappeared forever.

Appropriately enough, Monterey began with a man on the far fringes of the love crowd: Ben Shapiro, an enterprising young man about Hollywood who wishes there were a nicer word for packager. Last March, Shapiro and a well-heeled young scene-maker named Alan Pariser decided it would be nice to run a "music mart" for the serious creators and uncommitted experimenters in "mainstream" music. Because record manufacturers would back the event only in return for artistic control. Shapiro raised fifty thousand dollars seed money on his own. He started a profit corporation, obtained the state-owned Monterey Fairgrounds for June 16-18, and signed Ravi Shankar, who happened to be an old client. Shapiro and Pariser enlisted Derek Taylor, Los Angeles's hippest publicist, to help put the show together. Then Simon & Garfunkel hit town, it was time to firm things up, and representatives went to talk to John and Michelle Phillips, of the Mamas & the Papas.

A few years ago, John and Michelle were living on a slummy block in the East Village in New York City, making a decent living with a folk group called the Journeymen and thirsting for better things. Now they live in a Hollywood mansion once occupied by Jeanette MacDonald. Like all the supergroups, the Mamas & the Papas perform when they feel like it, an occasional concert or TV gig, and

their price is in five figures. Shapiro offered five thousand dollars. Phillips was not impressed.

Phillips is a quasi-bohemian in a position any bohemian would envy: He can screw the "establishment" and get away with it. There is so much money in rock that its big names have almost unlimited power, like the top movie stars, but people in rock are not much like movie stars. They are more like, you guessed it, hippies: fond of money, perhaps, but not enslaved by it; more loyal to their generation than to their business; careless of publicity; and libertarian about everything. The Shapiro-Pariser scheme was just hip show business. When Phillips and Paul Simon suggested a nonprofit festival run and financed by artists, and Taylor backed them, the others had to agree. A board of governors, including many top names-Paul McCartney, Mick Jagger, Brian Wilson-was formed, but it was obvious that the major movers would be Phillips and his producer, Lou Adler. Soon, Shapiro quit in a clash with Adler, who is not noted for his humility. Shapiro suspected him, reasonably enough, of lust for contacts and prestige. He also claimed that Adler wanted to transform the festival from a "significant musical event" into a conglomeration of top-forty acts.

That may have been what Adler wanted—indeed, there is a sense in which a pop festival should be just that—but it wasn't what happened. Instead, the bias of the festival turned out to be Californian and avant-garde. Teeny acts were not invited, and many groups from England and the East were either excluded or felt that way—the Young Rascals, for instance, were later heard complaining about "a clique among music people." An even more serious limitation was the paucity of black acts. Rock is basically Afro-American music; until the Beatles changed the world, 80 percent of the good stuff was black. But Redding was the only soul singer at Monterey. Lou Rawls and

Dionne Warwick, the two nightclubbiest singers in soul, both signed, but Warwick was later forced out by the hotel she was working in San Francisco. The Impressions agreed to come but didn't show. Chuck Berry refused, as always, to perform free. Smokey Robinson, of Motown Records, was on the board, but no Detroit artists appeared, Robinson's Miracles included. The rumor spread that this was "whitey's festival."

In a way, it was. The house band, made up of top studio musicians, was integrated, and so were ten of the thirty acts, a significant trend. But every attraction at Monterey appealed to the hip white audience—eyen Redding is without question the love crowd's favorite soul singer, far ahead of James Brown or Wilson Pickett. The festival was dominated by serious white rock music. Until recently, this music has been based in Los Angeles, where most of this country's good studio work is done. Now the excitement has moved to San Francisco, where there are hundreds of experimental bands, all geared to live performance. White rock performers seem uncomfortable with contemporary black music. Most of them like the best of it or think they do, but they don't want to imitate it. especially since they know how pallid their imitation is likely to be. So they hone their lyrics and develop their instrumental chops and experiment with their equipment and come to regard artists like Martha & the Vandellas, say, as some wondrous breed of porpoise, very talented, but somehow . . . different. And their audience concurs. This attitude is anything but condescending (sometimes it is almost reverent), but the black performer, who prefers his music to any other, is understandably disinclined to regard himself as a cultural oddity.

In any case the talent lineup was designed for the love crowd. Excitement began to grow, among the surfers on the Southland beaches and the lumpenhippies in the Haight and students and groupies and potheads everywhere. Rumors spread: Dylan and the Beatles would show; groups would jam together; proceeds would go to the sainted Diggers. Seats were not cheap (\$3.00 to \$6.50), but as long as the money was going back to the tribes, nobody cared.

Actually, it wasn't. Phillips was talking about drawing 100,000 kids, or 200,000. Ordinarily, events at the Fairgrounds are limited to arena ticket-holders—there are no grounds admissions. The arena holds 7,500 tops. That leaves a lot of flower children. The rumor about the Diggers got started, Taylor admits with his customary disarming candor, one day when he was short a release for the underground press. Taylor felt he had to say something about this problem of feeding the extra people, so he took some loose talk from around the office and transformed it into newspaper copy.

When Monterey Police Chief Frank Marinello, who was already unhappy about the festival, read that his city was going to be invaded by every penniless young nonconformist in California, he became much more unhappy. And Mayor Minnie Coyle nearly hit the roof. An amiable grandmother in her second term, she was particularly disturbed by this talk of Diggers in the papers. "If there are young people hungry, feed them," she said, like the good liberal she is. "But don't advertise free food for everyone who wants it. That encourages youngsters to leave home."

So on May 15 the festival flew to Monterey for lunch. Phillips—tall, balding, faintly Edwardian in his sparse beard—was very suave. Everyone received a copy of the Articles of Incorporation: ". . . charitable, literary and educational in nature and is particularly to initiate, sponsor, promote and carry out plans and cultural and artistic activities which will tend to further . . ." That didn't sound

like any hippie get-together. Papa John assured the burghers that festival profits would "not go to a hippie organization" and insisted that "the show is designed for those in the nineteen-to-thirty-five age group. We have omitted acts that draw the real young kids, and our publicity has solicited family groups. We haven't invited the sort of groups that inspire acting up on the part of the audience. If that happens, we'll pull them off the stage." In any case the town had no choice. Phillips agreed to advertise that no grounds admissions would be sold; the town agreed to find accommodations for the inevitable unbelievers who would show up anyway.

But if the burghers were fairly happy, the antiburghers (read: San Franciscans) were not. The Diggers were bristling over Taylor's misuse of their good name. Several of the underground groups were beginning to feel used. They wondered where all the money—including a \$400,000 film contract with A.B.C.—was going to end up. As June 16 approached, Dan Rifkin, manager of the Grateful Dead, and Chet Helms, of the Family Dog and the Aragon Ballroom, were feuding with Adler. Are you gonna let the people on the Fairgrounds, Lou? What do you mean, for a buck? Music should be for everyone, Lou; those prices are ridiculous. These bands are all rich; why do you have to pay expenses? And everything first class, Lou? Is that movie Pennebaker's shooting for A.B.C. gonna be distributed in theaters? The Dead have a booking Friday night in San Francisco, Lou, we can't make it Friday. Where are all those kids gonna crash, Lou?

The San Franciscans had the cards—the Angelenos needed them badly. "Be happy, be free; wear flowers, bring bells," the brochure read. In other words, act like hippies, mingle with hippies, and hear hippie music. With a few exceptions, the artists from Los Angeles didn't fit the description—they were established hit-makers. Some

of the San Francisco groups had never even recorded, which strangely enough was a kind of inducement. The whole setup was an implied bow to the "rock underground," which apparently existed only up north. In L.A., if you don't make it, you're just a flop.

But San Francisco did not appreciate the compliment. Dan Rifkin envisioned an enormous, secluded campground at Fort Ord-so the M.P.'s could protect everyone from the Highway Patrol—where all the real groups would hold an antifestival, and began to implement his plot. Meanwhile, Chief Marinello alerted six hundred National Guardsmen in training at Fort Ord to be prepared for trouble at the Fairgrounds. The staff in L.A., mostly volunteers, was working frantically. Hell's Angels and soldiers were reported excluded. Radio stations featured interviews with festival staff and performers, then advised listeners not to attend without tickets and accommodations. The Berkeley Barb swallowed the same shuck. The Beach Boys dropped out. The Byrds, who hadn't given a decent concert in a year, were practicing like mad, and many lesser acts seemed jumpy. The festival office in L.A. was even jumpier. Nobody knew whether it would come off, and just about everybody was worried.

It came off.

Crews began to set up amplification equipment and prepare the stage at the beginning of the week. On Thursday about twenty-five love people arrived, mostly by thumb, to work on the Fairgrounds in return for food, shelter, and admission to the arena. Other workers were recruited from Monterey Peninsula College, about a mile from the Fairgrounds. The college had also agreed to provide a camping area on its football field.

Next day the love crowd attacked in force. Traffic was jammed from midafternoon, not only with long-haired kids but with short-haired gawkers. Roads both north and

south were full of hitchhikers, and getting a ride was never easier. The brochure had gently suggested that blankets might be useful, and most of those from up north took the advice, but sun people never seem to understand about cold weather in June-one gang of kids on the beach in Santa Monica decided to drive up at the last minute in nothing but shirts and swimsuits and were not seen after Saturday. A small group of Hell's Angels roared in late Friday, and soldiers attended all concerts. Those invaders who weren't in costume-cowboys and Indians was the favorite masquerade—wore spectacularly new or spectacularly old clothing, usually the latter. Bells, tambourines, beards, painted and decaled faces, bare feet and bare thighs, were all in evidence. So was the smell of incense, and of course there were flowers. Longhairs outnumbered shorthairs, despite twelve hundred press people (Taylor accredited nearly everyone with a hustle), a lot of recording and radio professionals, and several thousand locals. (None of these groups bolstered the shorthair ranks as decisively as might have been expected.) Many of the celebrants looked under nineteen, and not many were over thirty. The few families were very new ones.

As the crowd grew—there were at least thirty thousand by Friday, and estimates for the weekend ranged up to ninety thousand, with fifty thousand a conservative figure—the police became more and more nervous. In addition to his own men, Marinello had called in a hundred extras from surrounding towns. He dismissed suggestions that they exchange their guns for flowers, but by dusk there were quite a few beflowered cops. What can you do when a barefoot girl smiles and offers you a daisy? The rule of love was beginning to take hold.

The rule of love did not begin as a rule, although it has certainly become one, with many would-be hippies murdering their own impulses to keep the law. It began as a feeling—a feeling that it was possible to live freely

without hassling everyone. A capacity for generous selfeffacement is one of the many things about the hippies that turn the love crowd on. Now, ordinarily, the day-to-day exigencies of almost everyone—hippies included—demand egoism, and so even among the love crowd love is often theoretical. But Monterey was anything but a day-to-day situation. Except for the weather, which was damp and cool, it was totally benevolent. Those who came emptyhanded despite all the warnings-because they knew someone from somewhere or trusted their own ingenuity or just didn't believe what they heard on the radio-were vaguely aware that a lot of attention was on them, that they had the law-men and the plan-men worried. Once they shelled out grounds admission (a dollar, abandoned altogether by mid-Saturday), they had most of what they wanted. So they went on their best behavior, just to prove love could work, and they succeeded. All those who had come neutral or slightly apprehensive caught the mood, and the largest crowd in the history of the Monterey Peninsula became the best-behaved. Marinello started sending his reinforcements home on Saturday morning; before the last show had begun, a hundred of his three hundred men were gone. The rest had nothing to do but look at the funny people.

Of course, the police could have risked the fury of the love crowd and made marijuana arrests, but they didn't. Nor did they seize any of the thousands of acid tabs that were distributed free all weekend. There are even stories of policemen walking away from obvious turn-on sessions; in one the cop goes so far as to empty a vial into the bushes, shake his finger at the offender, and intone: "Be cool." Once the love crowd felt the vibrations, it abandoned paranoia. Love worked. But the grass helped, too.

The major turn-on, though, was the music—twenty-two hours of it. There is a lot of talk about the new rock

audience-critical, unhysterical, intelligent. The festival was predicated on such talk. But the issue is more complicated. The love crowd is an intelligent and mature audience, but it demands to be turned on—that is, its attitude toward intelligence and maturity is stubbornly emotional and childlike. It reveres enthusiasm. It is made up of teenagers who have no great desire to grow up and adults who have never completely renounced their adolescence. And like any kids, they know how to enjoy a good time; once the vibrations establish themselves, it's uncool to cause static. That doesn't mean the audience was totally uncritical. But often it responded as much to itself as

to what was happening onstage—autohype.

Friday evening's concert, dominated by what San Francisco calls plastic, was received with unmitigated enthusiasm—not just in the arena, but far, far back behind the cyclone fence, and even on the grassy midway, where celebrants examined the jewelry and lightworks and underground newspapers and listened over the P.A. But the Paupers, an unknown group forced onto the program by Albert Grossman, got something more than mere enthusiasm when bassist Dennis Gerrard, a stubby bullfrog with eves that seem to rise clear out of his head when he gets going, started fooling around with the feedback, gradually working into an unanticipated solo. After a couple of good stretches he got scattered applause, and when he appeared to finish, he was cheered enthusiastically. But Gerrard wasn't through yet. He turned to the amplifier, doubling the cord so he got shuddering interference on every note, and played some more, not so well this time but very intensely, perhaps even hoking it up consciously, and now, although the whole solo was turning into an exhibition, the place really broke up, unable to withstand the impulsion of its own excitement.

The love crowd also reacted very readily to preconceived symbols—the spade, the supergroup, the gurubut of course not exclusively. The biggest exception performed Saturday afternoon: Janis Joplin, of Big Brother & the Holding Co. Janis is a good old girl from Port Arthur, Texas, who may be the best rock singer since Ray Charles, with a voice two-thirds Willie Mae Thornton and one-third Kitty Wells, and a fantastic stage presence. Her left nipple erect under her knit pantsuit, looking hard enough to put out your eye, she rocked and stomped and threatened any moment to break the microphone, or swallow it. She got a reaction based solely on her sweet tough self.

That was about two o'clock of an afternoon devoted primarily to blues-based music. By five it was getting pretty hard to tell good blues from mediocre blues. I am told the Steve Miller Blues Band, which played seventh, was excellent, but although I was sitting twenty feet away, I remember nothing about them except that they were

followed by Mike Bloomfield's Electric Flag.

Chet Helms had been emceeing most of the day, but John Phillips introduced Bloomfield: "One of the two or three best guitarists in the world." I think that's excessive, but many don't. Bloomfield had been a legend since his early days with Paul Butterfield, and this was the first performance of his own band. There were cries of anticipation in the audience, most of which agreed with Phillips, and the rest of which believed him.

My head hurt, and I walked to midarena to watch. Singing lead was a great fat black man with an enormous pompadour and a big set of drums, Buddy Miles. Miles is a great shouter. Bloomfield's solos were fine, but the show disappeared from under him—when Miles just drummed for one tune, the audience screamed for him to return. After four and a half hours of blues, one more blues singer just knocked everyone out. Miles really didn't

seem to want an encore—perhaps the band's repertoire was too thin—but he was literally pushed back on from the wings. It was very exciting.

Now, Miles was good but no better than others. Since he closed the show, the extra applause was natural. But position wasn't the only reason he got it. He got it because he was with Bloomfield, who was so turned on he looked as if he were about to blow up like a balloon—the supergroup. Miles got it because he was, as the Los Angeles *Free Press* so delicately put it, "a raunchy black mound"—the spade. And he got it because the audience heard itself applauding, deduced that it was approaching hysteria, and slipped right over the line—autohype.

The next afternoon something similar happened with Ravi Shankar, who complimented his audience on their choice of incense, threw back their orchids, and geared his invention to what he knew would delight them. Such delight is the good kind of autohype, the obverse of showmanship, and only a very warm crowd can generate it. Of course, when someone who looked like Paul McCartney walked down the aisle toward the end of the concert, the whole house craned for a peek. A superstar tops a guru, anytime.

A mood of sanguine goofiness dominated the whole weekend. Everything was beautiful. Those who had money spent it on food and trinkets; corn on the cob and a metallic pinwheel were big sellers. But the Los Angeles Diggers were there with free fruit, so those without money didn't go very hungry. Sleep was the same. Motel beds were full, and floors were often occupied. One local designated his field a "Sleep-In" and charged a buck to park the night. The lazy just rolled out their gear at the Fair-

grounds. But the hip core of kids hiked over to the designated sleeping area at Monterey Peninsula College, where Dan Rifkin had set up his antifestival.

There were concerts at the football field Saturday afternoon, but the big crowd was that night, after Otis Redding had supposedly sent everyone to sleep. As I arrived, sometime after two, an anonymous group was testing the power on an improvised sound truck while the audience reclined nearby in sleeping bags and blankets. Some were dozing. A hundred feet away there was a ring of standees ten deep, and beyond that an expanse of sleeping bags stretching into the darkness. I waded through, stepping carefully, as one of the band members called for a B-flat harmonica. Cigarettes glowed here and there, and every once in a while I was hit with a whiff of pot. Couples who hadn't reached the age of consent slept in each other's arms. Someone was at the controls of the scoreboard, running an impromptu light show: 36-37-38-39.... There was giggling, murmuring. The musician blew into one instrument and called the donor back: "Hey, man, you sure this harp is B-flat?" The music began. It was mediocre. Everybody dug it anyway.

Sunday afternoon I decided to inspect the football field again. Traffic was heavy, so I hitchhiked. Four high-school kids from a small town in the Sacramento Valley picked me up. They wanted to know if I was holding any grass. The festival was great, only someone had stolen their blankets. They had been up at the football field until it started to rain, then slept sitting in the car. The greatest thing was about four in the morning, when a new singer came on. They had been half asleep and were far from the bandstand; for a moment they couldn't make out who it was. Then:

"It was Eric Burdon, man. I couldn't believe it, Eric

Burdon, it was like a dream. It was all foggy and looked like a dream, you know? I really dig Eric Burdon."

We reached the football field. It was completely abandoned—not a scrap, not a sleeping bag, not a soul. The kids told me most of the crowd had slept through the rain, then rose at eight or nine, wiped off the mud, and returned to the Fairgrounds. They took me to the road and turned for Pacific Grove. Some crazy chick had let them all take showers in her house that morning. Maybe she'd have some pills or something.

I walked back, making better time than the cars, my shaggy hair blowing in the breeze. An elderly couple in a Pontiac pulled over and honked. I saw no way to refuse the ride. The proprietary gleam in the husband's eye told me he thought he had a live one. He seemed disappointed when he learned I was only a reporter, then perked up as his wife asked questions. Who were they? Why did they? What had they?

I offered standard answer number three: essentially religious blah-blah, never had to cope with the material environment blah-blah, drugs both good and blah-blah-blah. They seemed disappointed when I had to get out.

"Tell me just one thing," the man said. "Do they believe in the one great God, Jehovah?"

I told him I didn't know.

Even before the last concert began, on Sunday, there was a sense of something ending. A few had already left, and many who had hitched coming were setting up transportation home. One of the ushers wore a sign that said "Oregon" along with his "Seat Power We Love You" hatband. (He got his ride.) Starting time was seven-thirty, and as usual, it was accurate. The Blues Project did a short set. Janis Joplin and Big Brother came back for a reprise.

The Group with No Name bored everyone into thinking them up: the Lead Balloon, Grundy's Kite Tree, the Bummer, Lou Adler's Lonely Hearts Club Band. David Crosby, of the Byrds, sat in with the Buffalo Springfield, the only such admixture of the festival. Then the Who came on.

Although it has never fired in the States, the Who is one of the finest groups in England, famous for a stage technique invented by leader Peter Townshend and eventually adapted by Michelangelo Antonioni for Blow-Up (with the Yardbirds-because, Townshend claims, his group was too difficult to manipulate). For over a year of steady performance in Europe, Townshend ended every show by smashing his guitar into the amplifiers while Keith Moon attacked his drums and Roger Daltrey hit things with the mike. Welcoming applause was rather light, but as always the group put on a good show. Moon is a spectacular drummer to watch, with a trick of bouncing one stick ten feet off the snare, then catching it on the beat. Townshend flailed his guitar as if he were sending semaphore signals. And Daltrey, wearing a fringed shawl that looked about fifty years old, did the group's best songs. But although they performed in a class just below the top of the festival, the audience wasn't with them.

Then they did "My Generation." The song is raucous, hard-driving, hostile, and it really caught the crowd. Somewhere among the refrains the destruction started. The rumor is that the Who is bored with the whole routine, but they were obviously up for this audience. As bassist John Entwistle kept the beat, Daltrey crashed his mike against the cymbals, and Townshend thrashed the amplifiers. A smoke bomb exploded. The audience was in pandemonium, and the stage crew, which had been magnificent all weekend, was worse. One hero tried to save a mike and nearly lost his head to Townshend's guitar. Lou Adler, frantic and furious, protected one bank of ampli-

fiers. The love crowd was on its feet, screaming and cheering. Backstage, Jimi Hendrix was heard to wonder how he

was going to top that.

But the task of following the Who fell to the Grateful Dead. Originally scheduled for Friday, seen lurking in the wings until Buddy Miles broke things up Saturday afternoon, the Dead finally made their appearance in a sunburst of San Francisco warm. "You know what foldin' chairs are for, don't you?" asked Bob Weir, his dirty-blond hair hanging down past his shoulder blades and over his face. "They're for foldin' up and dancin' on." As the group drifted into "Viola Lee Blues," the hangers-on in the wings started to dance, slowly gravitating toward the center of the stage, and some of the audience got up as well. But Adler's compulsive streak was really beginning to show, and before too long he helped the stagehands hustle the dancers off. The ushers did the same in the aisles. There was no real resistance, but the dancers were annoved, and the Dead looked as if they might leave the stage themselves. Then Peter Tork appeared.

Tork, the neurotic Monkee, had surprised everyone by emceeing part of Friday night and drawing a good many teeny shrieks. The surprise was not only the presence of Monkee fans amid the love crowd; it was also because Tork himself had written a little apology in the program, explaining that the group couldn't appear due to prior commitments. Yet both he and Micky Dolenz were around all weekend, doing their best to be likable. The Monkees want to be liked. Ever since their first album appeared with someone else playing the instruments, rock professionals have snickered at everything about them except their

money.

Tork's mission was to quash a small riot. All weekend there had been Beatle rumors: Their equipment was backstage; they were holed up in a motel; they were mingling incognito ("disguised as hippies," added Derek Taylor). Sgt. Pepper played in all the concession tents. The Beatles are kings of the love crowd, and everyone wanted desperately to catch a glimpse of them. Now some kids were trying to get in backstage and hunt. Who better than a second-hand Beatle to stop them?

"People," Tork said, "this is me again. I hate to cut things down like this, but, uh, there's a crowd of kids, and this is to whom I'm talking mostly, to whom, are you ready for that?—and, um, these kids are like crowding around over the walls and trying to break down doors and everything,

thinking the Beatles are here..."

Phil Lesh could no longer resist. Lesh, the Dead's bassist, is twenty-nine, classically trained, a Bay Area native, and there, right there, stood Los Angeles, this square, manufactured teen idol, the mouthpiece of safe and sane Adlerism, everything Lesh couldn't stand.

"This is the last concert; why not let them in anyway?"
"... and, um, last concert, all right, except that they're trying to break things down, crawling over ceilings and walls, and like, they think the Beatles are here and they're not, you, those of you, they can come in if they want."

"The Beatles aren't here, come in anyway," Lesh said. There were cheers. Tork laughed nervously and mumbled, "Uh, yeah, there's great things happening anyway."

"If the Beatles were here they'd probably want you to come."

"Yeah, except that, uh, just don't, you know, bring down ceilings and walls and everything, and, uh, carry on."

The cheering was for Lesh, and Tork knew it. As he limped off, crowds of non-ticket-holders pressed through rear gates and filled the empty field behind the stadium. The "Seat Power We Love You" college kids did not try to stop them, and the Dead did the carrying on, much enlivened. By the end of the set Weir and Jerry Garcia

were riffing back and forth in the best guitar-playing of the festival.

But their performance was quickly obscured by that of the Jimi Hendrix Experience. Hendrix is a black man from Seattle who was brought from Greenwich Village to England by ex-Animal Chas Chandler. A smart move— England, like all of Europe, thirsts for the Real Thing, as performers from Howlin' Wolf to Muhammad Ali have discovered. Hendrix, joined by two good English sidemen, came to Monterey recommended by the likes of Paul McCartney. He was terrible.

Hendrix is a psychedelic Uncle Tom. Don't believe me; believe Sam Silver of the East Village Other: "Jimi did a beautiful Spade routine." Hendrix earned that capital S. Dressed in English fop mod, with a ruffled orange shirt and red pants that outlined his semierection to the thirtieth row, Jimi really, as Silver phrased it, "Socked it to them." Grunting and groaning on the brink of sham orgasm, he made his way through five or six almost indistinguishable songs, occasionally flicking an anteater tongue at that great crotch in the sky. He also played what everyone seems to call "heavy" guitar; in this case that means he was loud. He was loud with his teeth and behind his back and between his legs, and just in case anyone still remembered the Who, Hendrix had a capper. With his back to the audience, Hendrix humped the amplifier and jacked the guitar around his midsection, then turned and sat astride his instrument so that its neck extended like a third leg. For a few tender moments he caressed the strings. Then, in a sacrifice that couldn't have satisfied him more than it did me, he squirted it with lighter fluid from a can held near his crotch and set the cursed thing afire. The audience scrambled for the chunks he tossed into the front rows. He had tailored a caricature to their mythic standards and didn't overdo it a shade. The destructiveness of

the Who is consistent theater, deriving directly from the group's defiant, lower-class stance. I suppose Hendrix's act can be understood as a consistently vulgar parody of rock theatrics, but I don't feel I have to like it. Anyway, he can't sing.

The Mamas & the Papas, who can, provided the anticlimax, a feathery landing back into the land of music, love, and flowers. Outfitted in royal robes, with Mama Cass fatter than ever in a shift and Phillips beaming like the great white father of his tribe, they bestowed their somewhat patronizing blessing on all of us. "Hasn't this been something?" Cass began. "Something we can be proud of. Everybody. We're gonna have this every year, you know. You can all stay if you want. I think I might."

Thirty minutes later a dozen stragglers were still on the Fairgrounds, jumping up and down, or dancing, to a dozen different rhythms, or none at all. Others banged on trash-can drums. A cop approached warily and asked them to cool it.

"How come?" one of the kids asked. "We're not hurting anyone."

Uh-oh, the cop thought. He offered some dreary facts of life—people sleeping, maintenance crew had to work, etc.—and the kid thought for a second. The cop, who was still a cop, looked as if he was afraid of trouble.

"I guess you're right," the kid said. Soon everyone was gone.

Mama Cass was right—yea verily, the festival was something for everyone to be proud of, even to the least teeny-bopper. The press was ecstatic, with the trades and the underground and the teen magazines and the big-city dailies concurring with *Newsweek*: "They landed at Monterey last week and built a city of sound, a hippie heaven of soul and rock blues and funk." But no one stopped to won-

der how soul and rock and blues and funk meshed with the "peace and acceptance" (Newsweek again) of Monterey. The new rock has no more peace and acceptance about it than the old. To the adolescent defiance of the fifties has been added not only whimsy and occasional loveliness but also social consciousness and the ironic grit of the blues. The big beat has been augmented by dissonance, total volume, and a science-fiction panoply of electronic effects.

But the paradox is on the surface. The music isn't peace itself; it is a means to peace. It is how the love crowd mediates with an unfriendly environment. And Monterey was the love crowd's simpleminded stab at a replacement, a little utopia to show the bad old world it might be done.

In Monterey, however, where the example should have had its strongest effect, a kind of posthallucinatory reaction set in. Mayor Minnie Coyle had faced the press Saturday afternoon and told us our music was a pleasant surprise and our crowd just wonderful. On Sunday Chief Marinello appeared and was even friendlier. He said he had "never encountered such peace-loving people" and planned to tour the Haight first chance. On Monday, after everyone had gone, Mayor Coyle announced that she had drafted a City Council resolution that would prevent more pop festivals. A week later, Chief Marinello of the "Flower Fuzz," inundated with thank-you letters, described his admirers as lawbreakers who had avoided capture and said he agreed with Mayor Coyle. And while the only businessmen who oppose the festival as a group are the bar owners, there is scattered opposition everywhere.

Townspeople who hope the love crowd returns—and there are many—are sure the proffered excuses, which revolved in a narrow ellipse around lack of space and lack of kulchuh, are only covers for the real problem, which is style. And they're right. Especially if the differ-

ence between marijuana and alcohol is granted to be mostly a matter of legality and taste, style is the whole problem. The festival wasn't merely love and good vibes; it was also good business—almost hip show business, in fact. Without organization-at once very tight and remarkably unautocratic, which is to say, intelligent-it would have been a shambles. The stage crew was the most efficient I've ever seen. The sound system was flawless. Head Lights, brought in to do the rear-projection light show, had prepared brilliantly. When it came time to distribute the \$200,000 proceeds, sentiments leaned not toward the Diggers (who had donated food) nor toward Monterey (which claimed \$4,000 in unpaid traffic-control expenses) but to some kind of ghetto education program. This from the dropout culture—an unspectacular end for all that lovely money.

But the love crowd doesn't want anything spectacular. It just wants peace, tolerance, and the chance to work things out for itself. If Monterey doesn't want the festival, well, the festival isn't so sure it wants Monterey either. Repeating yourself is just a big drag anyway. Entrepreneurs in the East are talking about holding their own festival, in New York or Boston. Phillips has considered London and Stockholm. And Victoria, Australia, has offered to pay for everything if the festival will come to Melbourne next year.

It won't be Monterey. The love crowd may never come together again. But something will happen, which is all that matters.

January, 1968

COLUMNS

June, 1967: Statement of policy, rock and roll, the Monkees, California, Sam & Dave

I ought to warn that I am one of the barbarians—I love rock and roll. Secular music, hell. I have been proselytized by Chuck Berry and Alan Freed, tempted by the Weavers and Thelonious Monk, regenerated by Phil Spector and the Shirelles, and transfigured by the Beatles and Dionne Warwick. I feel—and not with total justice, I'll admit—that rock and roll *is* popular music. Miles Davis and Cecil Taylor are fine. I like Ella Fitzgerald; I even like Barbra Streisand. But I love rock and roll.

Yet what I used to like and what I like now are, almost, two different things. The original pastiche, ushered into ascendancy by greedy broadcasters who wanted to break the hold of the American Society of Composers, Authors & Publishers on radio profits, was fairly simple: varying portions of rhythm-and-blues and country-western, augmented by some primitive electronics and infused with enough pap, especially in the lyrics, to make it palatable to white urban teen-agers. The resulting big beat was ersatz, repetitious, sometimes imbecilic; it was also danceable and sexual and at its best had a vitality the ASCAP pros couldn't even approximate. Inevitably, the music became more complex—orchestration was added, gimmicks invented, and audio and recording techniques refined. And then the Beatles came along.

Until 1964, rock and roll was divided along clear racial lines; only a few of the top performers, like Elvis Presley and Chuck Berry, came near to bridging the gap. The

Beatles, and a few other English groups, did the impossible—sang black music their own way and made it work as something original. Maybe this was genius, maybe just freedom from sociological hang-ups. Anyway, they were a revelation in America, inspiring hundreds of groups that were neither grease (Connie Francis, Fabian, et al.) nor soul (black). Many of the new rock performers are fringe bohemians; they regard their music as self-expression first, vocation second. What jazz was to the beats, rock is to the hippies. In a way, that is good. In a way, it is very bad.

Rock and roll has exfoliated so luxuriously that it is frequently unrecognizable. Try to dance to the Beach Boys' "Good Vibrations." Name a more "serious" song than Lennon-McCartney's "Strawberry Fields Forever" or P. F. Sloan's "Eve of Destruction." Not only has rock milked every tradition in American popular music—gospel, folk-pretty, folk-protest, big band, thirties' camp, and jazz, plus the previous phases of rock itself—but it has hoked itself with classical melodies, string quartets, counterpoint, atonality, raga, and all kinds of electronic trickery.

The problem is that as poetry, musical complexity, and psychedelic basso-profundity come into the music, its original values—simplicity, directness, charm—are often obscured or returned to the black performers, who tend to embrace them so self-consciously that they smother. So as always, there is a lot of good in rock and quite a bit of bad, and I am simply hooked. I listen to whatever the WMCA Good Guys want me to hear. My tastes are eclectic, my interest as much sociological as artistic, and if I do this long enough, I may find space for a word in favor of Miles Davis. He's pretty good.

Out of curiosity and nostalgia, I have been listening to greatest hits albums by three of the best rock performers of the fifties: Chuck Berry, the Coasters, and Little Richard. All are black, a good indication of what I remember most fondly from the period. I wondered how they would sound now, after my ear had become accustomed to all those intelligent lyrics and complicated arrangements. They sound just fine.

Berry has lasted best. Many of his songs, like "Maybellene" and "Brown-Eyed Handsome Man," now have the feel of folk poetry in a previously unexplored idiom, and even the more obviously commercial teen things are, at worst, excellent musically and, at best, successful evocations of a world he could have known only from a distance. "Roll Over Beethoven" has to be the best defense-of-ourmusic song ever written. The driving facility of Berry's guitar is still unduplicated, the clever clarity of his voice still a wonder. He is a classic.

So are the Coasters, but on a smaller scale. The Coasters were the creatures of the great composing-producing team Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, who wrote their songs, taught them their arrangements, produced their records, and maybe even tucked them into bed. Leiber and Stoller picked their medium well, for the Coasters had dramatic as well as musical ability, and the novelties they sang demanded dramatics. "Along Came Jones" (with that guttural "eh-eh" at the turn of each verse) and "Yakety Yak" wear well. But even the best novelty songs—"Searchin'" may be the best—can go a trace thin, and the thinness is too perceptible in a song like "That Is Rock & Roll" or in the cutie-pie arrangement of an ASCAP oldie like "Sweet Georgia Brown."

Little Richard was the one our parents hated. If we could enjoy that semiarticulate animal ("Tutti-frutti, all rooty" repeated five times, followed by "a-womp-bom-a-loo-mom, ba-lom-bam-boo"), next thing we'd be French kissing. Little Richard achieved frenzy with no apparent strain. The voices of Otis Redding and Wilson Pickett today have the same rough quality, undoubtedly the result of too much shouting, but when they let loose, there is a

sense of striving. None of that for Little Richard. Our parents were right about one thing, though—he is so harsh and loud it's sometimes difficult to listen to six cuts in a row.

The Monkees are four young men who star in an adolescent TV comedy of the same name and make records that rise to the top of the charts like jellyfish. They were chosen (from a hirsute field of 437) not for musical ability but for exuberance and irreverence, qualities salient in the chaps who were in those very successful Richard Lester movies. You remember.

You'd better, because the Monkees, conceived as a hair-cut on A Hard Day's Night and Help!, find themselves sole inheritors of the great Beatle tradition. The originals have abdicated, withdrawing from teeny idolatry into their music, which is popular but personal and exotic. Young fans, confused, miss those nice floppy Englishmen they fell for three years ago, and the Monkees provide a whole-some American substitute (with an Englishman added for remembrance). They're not too handsome, not too pretentious, and every week they do silly things for thirty minutes, not counting commercials. At the moment the kids seem to love them.

For similar reasons, serious rock fans hate them. They know the Monkees are together by happenstance, that they are not too irreverent, too precocious, too sexual—too anything. They know they are lousy singers and can hardly play their instruments. They note that Micky Dolenz was once "Circus Boy" and forget that Mike Nesmith has had a respectably bumpy folk-rock career. And they conclude that the music stinks.

It doesn't. It's not great, but it is good, better than much of what makes top ten—an important test if rock is truly a popular art. The group's second album, *More of the*

Monkees, is hard to criticize objectively. Do I hear that dishonest edge in a funny, raucous song like "Your Auntie Grizelda" because it's there or because I expect it to be? Who can tell? With a couple of horrible exceptions, the songs sound OK, testimony to the truth that good rock is largely a matter of production and publicity. "Mary," Mary," which Nesmith wrote and produced, is very successful. He is their clearest talent and a bit of a real rebel. One would hope that he and not Dolenz will dominate the group. Something may come of this yet.

But whatever it is, it won't be the Beatles.

San Francisco is touted as America's Liverpool. Reports of groups with wondrous names like the Loading Zone, the San Andreas Fault Finders, and (most prominently) the Grateful Dead keep filtering back east, but aside from the Sopwith Camel, which has (who have?) turned out entertaining but uninspired camp-rock, and Jefferson Airplane, they release no records. And if the Airplane is what makes Frisco Liverpool, the Beatles must be from London.

The Airplane makes competent, original folk-rock, and perhaps it's unfair to put it down. But the music is unexciting. At its worst it sounds like amplified Peter, Paul & Mary. Arrangements are very tight, sweet harmonies prevail, and none of the four singers has the strident kind of voice that is best for rock. The Airplane's second album, Surrealistic Pillow, just doesn't make it. The rhythms are skillful but rarely compelling, the melodies pretty but rarely memorable, the lyrics literate but rarely sharp. The Airplane is to, say, the Mamas & the Papas as Sonny Stitt is to Charlie Parker—great craft, but that's all.

My choice for our very own Liverpool is Los Angeles. L.A. has the best rock radio in the country, and Sunset Strip nurtures a breed of hippie more affluent, more into the material effluvia at the heart of pop, than the happy freaks of Haight-Ashbury. Out of L.A. have come promising groups like the Seeds, the Buffalo Springfield, the Mothers of Invention—and the Doors, and Love.

Love is an interracial septet that is trying lots of new things. One side of its second album, *Da Capo*, is a nineteen-minute piece, mostly instrumental, called "Revelation." It includes excellent guitar and harmonica work and great screaming by a lead singer (I don't know his name; the new style in record jackets is to reveal nothing) whose voice is more often too sweet for his material. It also includes some mediocre alto sax and (I shudder) a protracted drum solo. A brave stab at a target somewhere between rock and jazz, I think it fails, but it may prove prophetic. Despite a perfect rocker, "7 and 7 Is," the other side sounds cluttered and lacks sock, which may be the singer's fault.

As if presenting their credentials, the Doors open their first album with a great hard-rock original, "Break On Through," then do more esoteric stuff: a Willie Dixon blues, Weill-Brecht's "Alabama Song," and witty songs of their own like "Twentieth Century Fox." They also do a long, obscure dirge called "The End," which ought to be. Ugh. Vocalist Jim Morrison is flexible, though sometimes faint, and Ray Manzarek's big-band organ works in the four-man group.

I recommend the Doors, but I would do so less reservedly, and throw in Love and the Airplane, if I thought any of these talented, serious young men were playing rock that was pop. Rock has always come to its audience and led it—the Beatles, as always, are the perfect example, but so is Dylan and even Berry. Most hippie rock and roll musicians exhibit the same in-group pretentiousness that characterized the folk and jazz purists who were their

predecessors. I often like the music, but the attitude bugs me. I still remember when rock and roll was mostly fun.

Lest some suspect I am a fifties fogey, let me also give my imprimatur to the new album by Sam & Dave, Double Dynamite. Although one of their songs, "Hold On, I'm Comin'," made the 1966 Cash Box top hundred, the soul duo (what else do you call them?) remains virtually unknown in white markets. A pity. Their sound is crisp but not slick, and it rocks. Great stage performers, too.

December, 1967: Sgt. Pepper, the Monkees, the Candymen, Frank Zappa, miscellaneous

In case you've been in New Guinea or something, you ought to be told that the Beatles have a new album out. It is called Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, and even before its release on June 2 it was the subject of all kinds of published and unpublished rumors. Afterward, the information barrage was overwhelming. Capitol Records sent out an extraordinary feature, spiced with terms like "modals," "atonality," and-egad!-"bowels" and casting aspersions upon the "Tin Pan Alley-spawned lyrical cliché." There were stories in Life (in which Paul McCartney, to the surprise of no one and the shock of quite a few, revealed that he had sampled the dreaded lysergic acid diethylamide; he was seconded quickly by John and George, but Ringo, lovely Ringo, has remained silent), Time (in which George Martin, the group's producer, who has a degree in music and is thus permitted to be a genius. was singled out as the brains of the operation), and Newsweek (in which the former kings of rock and roll were

compared, unpejoratively and in order, to Alfred Lord Tennyson, Edith Sitwell, Charlie Chaplin, Donald Barthelme, Harold Pinter, and T. S. Eliot—and not to Elvis Presley or even Bob Dylan). The trades bristled with excited little pieces that always seemed to contain the word "artistic." And in *The New York Times* Richard Goldstein put the album down and was almost lynched.

Goldstein, who has had his own story in *Newsweek*, is the best-known critic of pop in the country. Like any rising star, he engendered the inevitable *ressentiment*, always masquerading, of course, as contempt for the phony, the sellout, etc. I often disagree with Goldstein, but a sellout he is not. He is unfailingly honest and about as malevolent as Winnie-the-Pooh. There are very few "pop critics" who can match him even occasionally for incisiveness, perspective, and wit. Goldstein was disappointed with *Sgt. Pepper*. After an initial moment of panic, I wasn't. In fact, I was exalted by it, although a little of that has worn off. Which is just the point. Goldstein may have been wrong, but he wasn't that wrong. *Sgt. Pepper* is not the world's most perfect work of art. But that is what the Beatles' fans have come to assume their idols must produce.

It all started in December, 1965, when they released Rubber Soul, an album that for innovation, tightness, and lyrical intelligence was about twice as good as anything they or anyone else (except maybe the Stones) had done previously. In June, 1966, Capitol followed with The Beatles—"Yesterday" . . . and Today, comprising both sides of three singles plus extra cuts from the English versions of Rubber Soul and Revolver. The Beatles (perhaps as a metaphor for this hodgepodge, which was not released in England) provided a cover that depicted Our Boys in bloody butcher aprons, surrounded by hunks of meat and dismembered doll. The powers yowled, the cover was replaced at a reported cost of \$250,000, and

then in August the American Revolver went on sale. That did it. Revolver was twice as good and four times as startling as Rubber Soul, with sound effects, Oriental drones, jazz bands, transcendentalist lyrics, all kinds of rhythmic and harmonic surprises, and a filter that made John Lennon sound like God singing through a foghorn.

Partly because the ten-month gap between Revolver and Sgt. Pepper was so unprecedented, the album was awaited in much the same spirit as installments of Dickens must have been a century ago. Everyone was a little edgy: Could they do it again? The answer: yes and no. Sgt. Pepper is a consolidation, more intricate than Revolver but not more substantial. Part of Goldstein's mistake, I think, has been to allow all the filters and reverbs and orchestral effects and overdubs to deafen him to the stuff underneath, which was pretty nice, and to fall victim to overanticipation. Although Goldstein still insists he was right, I attribute his review to a failure of nerve.

Plus, perhaps, a predilection for folk music. Sgt. Pepper, four months in gestation, is the epitome of studio rock, and Goldstein wasn't entirely wrong when he accused it of being "busy, hip and cluttered." It contains nothing as lovely as "In My Life" on Rubber Soul or "Here, There and Everywhere" on Revolver. But no one seems to care. The week after Goldstein's review appeared, Cash Box listed Sgt. Pepper as the best-selling album in the country, a position it has occupied all summer.

Meanwhile, Goldstein himself has become a storm center. The *Voice*, his home base, published a rebuttal by a guy named Tom Phillips, who works for the *Times*. (Now who's square?) Goldstein responded with a *Voice* defense of his review. (Title: "I Lost My Cool Through the New York Times.") Paul Williams, of *Crawdaddy*, complained that Goldstein "got hung up on his own integrity and attempted to judge what he admittedly [sic] did not under-

stand." (What have you done for rock this week?) And the *Times* was deluged with letters, many abusive and every last one in disagreement, the largest response to a music review in its history.

The letters are a fascinating testimony to what the Beatles mean to their fans. The correspondents are divided about equally between adolescents and young adults, with age often volunteered as a credential. Needless to say, Goldstein is frequently accused of being Old. (For the record, he is twenty-three. And I am twenty-five.) One common complaint was that Goldstein missed the acronymic implications of a lush little fantasy called "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds." (Singers on a trip with pretensions?) Even more common is the indignant avowal that George Harrison's "Within You Without You" did not, as Goldstein averred, "resurrect the very clichés the Beatles helped bury," and that "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds," as Sherry Brody, of Brooklyn, put it, "is not like other songs by stupid groups that say I love you and junk like that." (I hope I don't sound condescending. Miss Brody's letter is not only charming—she signs, "Please write back!" —but every bit as perceptive as many of its more ambitious competitors.) Of course, the clichés in "WYWY" to which Goldstein was referring were not "I love you and junk like that." They were "self-discovery" and "universal love," the kind of homilies that used to make the Beatles giggle, but that Harrison now seems to take seriously.

"WYWY" provided the most convenient launching pad for the textual analyses that almost everyone felt compelled to send off. One writer claimed that a book by William R. Shears (Ringo's persona on the record is "Billy Shears"), called *Here It Is*, is full of illuminating cross-references. A high-school freshman invoked the album as an example of "tmesis—the appearance of a poem to do credit to its words." Many saw the album as "an attack on middle-class

values." Some writers were sure the Beatles had arrived at their current synthesis because, to quote a Juilliard student, "they have refused to prostitute themselves for their fans." But others insisted that Sgt. Pepper was "for the people."

The genius of the Beatles can be found in those last two contradictory suggestions, because both are true. Few of their old fans could have anticipated their present course or wished for it. Yet the Beatles have continued to please more of the old-timers than anyone but they-and the oldtimers themselves—could have hoped. They really started the whole long-haired hippie business four years ago, and who knows whether they developed with it or it developed with them? All those pages of analysis are a gauge of how important the Beatles have become to ... us.

One song on Sgt. Pepper, "Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite," seems to me deliberately one-dimensional, nothing more than a description of a traveling circus. It fits beautifully into the album, which is a kind of long vaudeville show, but I feel almost certain it has no "meaning." Yet one girl, "age fifteen," writes that it presents "life as an eerie perverted circus." Is this sad? silly? horrifying? contemptible? From an adult it might be all four, but from a fifteen-year-old it is simply moving. A good Lennon-McCartney song is sufficiently cryptic to speak to the needs of whoever listens. If a fifteen-year-old finds life "an eerie perverted circus"-and for a fifteen-year-old that is an important perception—then that's what "Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite" can just as well be about. If you've just discovered universal love, you have reason to find "Within You Without You" "great poetry." It really doesn't matter; if you're wrong, you're right.

One of the nice things the Beatles do for those of us who love them is charge commonplace English with meaning. I want to hold your hand. It's getting better all the time. Yeah, yeah, yeah. "Fixing a Hole," to which I alluded just above, is full of just such suggestive phrases. I'll resist temptation and quote only five lines: "And it really doesn't matter if I'm wrong I'm right/ Where I belong I'm right/ Where I belong./ See the people standing there who disagree and never win/ And wonder why they don't get in my door." * This passage not only indicates the interesting things the Beatles are doing with rhyme, skewing their stanzas and dispensing almost completely with traditional song form. It also serves as a gnomic reminder of the limitations of criticism. Allow me to fall into its trap by providing my own paraphrase, viz.: "In matters of interpretation, the important thing is not whether you're 'wrong' or 'right' but whether you are faithful to your own peculiar stance in the world. Those who insist upon the absolute rectitude of their opinions will never attain my state of enlightenment."

Well, there it is; I've finally done it. Pompous, right? Sorry, I'm just not John Lennon. But like everyone else, I feel compelled to make Our Boys My Boys. The first thirty times I heard "Fixing a Hole," I just listened and enjoyed it, keeping time, singing along, confident that it was obscure beyond my power to investigate. Then I noticed that all the interpreters were shying away from that song, or making an obvious botch of it, and I couldn't resist the challenge. Now, after several false starts that had me convinced for a while, I think I've got it. It's not surprising that their ideas are so much like my own. That's what they're saying, isn't it?

For, just like Sherry Brody, I have my own Beatles. As far as I'm concerned, "Fixing a Hole" is not like other songs by stupid groups that say I am alienated and junk like that.

^{*&}quot;Fixing a Hole" by Lennon/McCartney copyright © 1967 Northern Songs Limited. Used by permission. All rights reserved. International copyright secured.

And I have other prejudices. I can't believe that the Beatles indulge in the simplistic kind of symbolism that turns a yellow submarine into a Nembutal or a banana—it is just a yellow submarine, damn it, an obvious elaboration of John's submarine fixation, first revealed in A Hard Day's Night. I think they want their meanings to be absorbed on an instinctual level, just as their new, complex music can be absorbed on a sensual level. I don't think they much care whether Sgt. Pepper is Great Art or some other moldy fig. And I think they are inordinately fond (in a rather recondite way) of what I call the real world. They want to turn us on, all right—to everything in that world and in ourselves.

What else could a journalist think?

It is time for a progress report on the Monkees, who took a big gamble by releasing an album and a single at about the same time as the big fellas from England. The album, *Headquarters*, has not done as well as *Sgt. Pepper*, but "Pleasant Valley Sunday" b/w "Words" is two-sided top ten, whereas "All You Need Is Love" is one-sided.

My original analysis of the group pitted Mike Nesmith (struggling singer, hence good) against Micky Dolenz (ex-child actor, hence bad). As it turns out, the real baddie seems to be the other ex-child actor, Davy Jones, a repulsive showbiz type, cute as a push button. The rest? Peter Tork is an anxiety-prone phony, Dolenz a likable oaf with a strong voice, and Nesmith still the most talented of the four, which may not be saying much. His "You Just May Be the One" and "Sunny Girlfriend" are by far the best songs on *Headquarters* and would sound good anywhere.

The Monkees began, if you'll remember, as poor vocalists and no musicians at all, but now, as a note on the album proclaims, they are Doing It Themselves. This

means they are venturing live performances. I saw them at Forest Hills, and they stank. That crisp studio sound was weak and ragged on stage, and their Act (they tell the press that the kids won't go for "four dots" anymore) was unbelievably corny. The kids screamed, of course, but the stadium was far from full, and the one lonely rush at the stage quickly stymied by a bored and overstaffed security force. Good signs.

The day when a group could walk into a record company singing last year's top ten and expect to get past the receptionist has passed. "You don't write your own mateerial!" today's receptionist is trained to sneer. "Whatsamatter, you think we're some commercial outfit? You're not creative. Get out."

This problem has been solved neatly by five musicians called the Candymen, who backed Roy Orbison for years before going on alone. For various good reasons they got to a club in New York with two original songs. So they opened their act with a letter-perfect version of "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band," followed by "With a Little Help from My Friends."

Followed by "Gimme Some Lovin'," almost as good as Stevie Winwood.

Followed by "Good Vibrations," which is more than the Beach Boys can do.

Followed by "Thunderball."

Their ambition is to step on stage some night and do all of *Sgt. Pepper* live, with every studio effect pat. They may succeed. Meanwhile, they are writing their own ma-teerial.

The Mothers of Invention pose the central question of contemporary art, namely: Are you putting me on? Everything about them is ugly. Presiding genius Frank Zappa seems to enjoy ugliness. His apparent motivation is dis-

taste for everything except modern classical music and the alienation effect. "He's really weird," one graduate teenybopper confided to me. "He doesn't even turn on." I guess that says it.

Visually, the Mothers are reminiscent of the Fugs, old enough so all that hair looks more skanky than cute. Musically, they are the Fugs in reverse. The Fugs are poets who perceived the inherent sexuality of rock and decided to go bardic. The Mothers are musicians who learned during long hours in studios and crummy dance-halls that rock was crude and often deracinated. They parody every popular music from thirties-croon to Supremes (no Supremes fan could entirely survive the sight of three hairy freaks prancing from mike to mike in a perfectly hideous and hilarious version of "Baby Love"), and their music is the antithesis of soul: wooden beat, trite riffs, inane lyrics. Vocalist Ray Collins can destroy any style, and the musicianship behind him is alway precisely awful.

The Mothers are very good on stage, but their records do not bear repeated listening. Both Freak Out!, a double record that is a great bargain at stereo price, and Absolutely Free, conceived as two short oratorios, give the flavor of a Mothers performance. But musical parody can satisfy for just so long, and Zappa's tastes in social satire are less than subtle-the "plastic people" he is always sniping at are an unoriginal and rather stationary target. And when he moves into the aleatory-Varèse-jazz-rock composition that seems to be his only true love, he does

not impress my admittedly untrained ear.

I don't mean to be captious, though. See the Mothers if you can. Zappa is very funny, and reed man Bunk Gardner a great talent, much better than Archie Shepp, whom Gardner professes to admire—along with Herman's Hermits. And if you can't see them, buy a record—the Zappadesigned jacket of Absolutely Free is almost worth the price. Absolutely Free is better integrated; Freak Out! has more music. Your choice.

I want to register a mea culpa on Jefferson Airplane. After repeated forced hearings it is clear my put-down was a bad mistake. The Airplane is one of the bestintense, original, yes, soulful. The success of the Airplane's "Somebody to Love" and of the Doors' "Light My Fire" is heartening. America, you are still out there. . . . On the other hand. I will be disheartened if one of the five singles recently released by Moby Grape-"Omaha" and "Changes" are the best-does not become an enormous hit. The Grape ranks now with the Airplane and the Doors among the new California groups and has the potential to be the best in the country. . . . Camp triumph of the year is "Albert, Albert" by the Bugs ("Albert, Albert, what the heck/ You are just a pain in the neck"). The flip is "Strangler in the Night," by "Albert De Salvo," No, I will not tell you how to get it.

May, 1968: Dylan-Beatles-Stones-Donovan-Who, Dionne Warwick and Dusty Springfield, John Fred, California

The thing about Phil Ochs is that he's unquestionably a nice guy. He's so sincere, you know? It's impossible to dislike someone who can annotate his own record with eight poems by Mao Tse-tung and the inscription: "Is This the enemy?" Too bad his voice shows an effective range of about half an octave, almost no dramatic quality, and a built-in vibrato that makes it sound warped; too bad his guitar playing would not suffer much if his right hand were webbed. Very bad indeed that he has learned so little from Mao Tse-tung's poetry, which is terse and un-

derstated, but instead has adapted Mao's political theory not to politics, where it at least holds its own, but to music. Phil Ochs is a musical Red Guard. Revolution in the (cultural) revolution—his musical leaps forward are doing him in.

Ochs has always made a joke of his admiration for his old friend Bob Dylan, but it's no joke: Dylan is a dangerous man to admire. He has a genius's full quota of excesses, and even in his folky period Ochs displayed every one: indifferent melodies, hypertrophic images, philosophical crudity, etc., etc. Then Ochs discovered the Beatles, who he said "set a level of pure musical sound that is a tantalizing carrot to many an American group." And then, dutifully, he bit.

Not only did he fail to get the carrot, but he helped pull the wagon into a bad rut. Pleasures of the Harbor, his most recent and most popular LP, epitomizes the decadence that has infected pop since Sgt. Pepper. Cluttered with gaudy musical settings that inspire nostalgia for the threechord strum, it is "artistic" but never artful. The lyrics, socially conscious at a level one convolution beyond that of the rich liberal who hates himself because he hates himself for being a rich liberal, can most tastefully be left undiscussed. And to compound all this the record is 52:13 long, with one side containing three eight-minute . . . works. Popular songs rarely run over four minutes for a reason: Without a narrative (as in a ballad) or a great singer (like Mick Jagger) or a sophisticated but available structure (as in Jim & Jean's version of Ochs's own "Crucifixion") it becomes geometrically more difficult to sustain interest at about that time. Not impossible, mind you-those attempts that succeed (like "A Quick One While He's Away" or "Like a Rolling Stone") are marvelous indeed. But those that fail, like "Pleasures of the Harbor" and all the rest, are enervating bores. Good intentions are never enough.

This is all brought into rich relief by Bob Dylan's long-awaited *John Wesley Harding*, which will doubtless stand as the funniest album of the year. Even if it failed as music (it doesn't), it would succeed as strategy, and that would be enough. Pop music does not exist in the future. Immediacy is its most salient virtue. And at the moment there couldn't be a more salutary record than *John Wesley Harding*.

Dylan had not been heard from since May, 1966, when he presented his work at its most involuted, neurotic, and pop—and exhilarating—in *Blonde on Blonde*. Then he racked himself up in a motorcycle accident, went into hiding, and inspired a legend. But while he was away, the music in which he has been a prime mover continued to evolve—and mutate. Art and Social Commentary were absorbed, almost painlessly, by the world's schlockiest business, so that the trade journal *Record World* could review a new single as "a highly commercial rock allegory of perishing society." Apparently, society itself would perish before the record industry.

All this was made possible by the charismatic rebelliousness of the brightest pop stars. For them, terms like "highly commercial" were irrelevant; they were highly commercial, however they chose to manifest themselves, and the industry could just hangdog along. The luminaries had a double goal: to find their own thing and to make sure it was heavier than anyone else's. A Heavy Thing. Thus, the Beach Boys arrived at something unique and almost perfect, Smiley Smile, but because it was so slight, it was outshone by the Doors' muscular but misshapen Strange Days, and in eight months the Doors came from nowhere to reign as America's heaviest group.

Dylan, of course, does not operate on such a modest level of competition. His only rivals are the Beatles and the Stones. In his absence the Beatles redefined the contest as (a) conceptual and (b) musical. Everything had to be placed in an abstract framework—even cover art was the pop star's responsibility—and while good lyrics were important, new music was even more important. For lesser talents, these preconditions usually insured that "heavy" meant "overburdened." No one was sure how they'd affect Dylan.

It should be added that Dylan does not necessarily relish combat. His retreat emphasized what was already clear: He would rather do his thing in private. The spotlight puts him off. Only the odd happenstance that he is an entertainer, forced by the nature of his thing to compete for public acclaim, induces him to fight at all.

So he fought and won, by redefining the rules of war. His battle cry was the album's title, as kinky as "Greensleeves," and his standard the jacket, done in gray and featuring a Polaroid snapshot of the artist and some friends in the woods. Turn it over, and there are the song titles, six to a side, just like Lawrence Welk. There are notes by Dylan, not as willful as usual, but still the first written comment on a major album in several years. And then the credits—three musicians all told, drums and acoustic bass and (for two songs only) steel guitar, plus Dylan on acoustic guitar, harmonica, and (twice) piano. Psychedelic!

The title song opens the record, introduced by a few passes at the guitar that sound no different from what Dylan was doing at nineteen—a little more subdued, perhaps. Then bass and drums enter; they provide a beat, but they also remind us that the record was not resurrected from the 1963 reject can. Such a reminder is necessary, for on first hearing, John Wesley Harding sounds monotonous, old-fashioned, and very folky.

In fact it is all that and represents a startling artistic advance anyway. Instead of plunging forward, Dylan

looked back. Instead of grafting, he pruned. Dylan's work has always been marked by derelictions of taste that have become almost an endearing trademark. He has never hesitated to fill the meter with a useless word or to wrench tone in the service of rhyme. Much of his best work is simply too long, like *Clarissa* or Satyajit Ray's *Apu Trilogy*. Despite all the talk about "poetry," Dylan has always been a word-crazy dramatist; his "images" are mostly situations, full of incongruities and awkward in syntax and diction. Even his best stanzas seem ready to burst like waterlogged beanbags. But on the new album Dylan has learned the value of understatement.

Only one of the new songs, a ballad, runs more than five minutes, and nine of the remaining eleven are under the two-hundred-second mark so dear to radio programmers. They have only three stanzas. Diction is spare, traditional (almost all the songs function as parodies), and abstract. Everything is so careful that a well-placed detail or linguistic self-indulgence carries the weight that a whole stanza used to, so the familiar sense of unreality prevails, reinforced by the fact that many of the songs seem to end in the middle. The Dylan flavor is unquestionably there. But it has been achieved for the first time with no waste of materials.

This is also the most impersonal record Dylan has ever made. Persona has always been important in his work, but this time the "I," when it appears, is almost anonymous. And although the songs seem obscure, they are often quite straightforward: Whatever other levels are also present, "I Pity the Poor Immigrant" is still really about working-class protofascists, Tom Paine is really a character in "As I Went Out One Morning," and, in "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight," that big old moon really does shine like a spoon. But the directness of attack is so uncharacteristic that it undercuts itself, becoming a source of mystery and surprise—imag-

ine, a Dylan album that is most admirable for its straightforwardness.

When John Wesley Harding was in the stores for a week, it had already sold 250,000 copies—Dylan's fastest-moving album on mystique alone. Let's hope everyone listens, too. Let's hope that songwriters, instead of deciding that folk (which this is not) is in again, will learn to concentrate on line before they attempt oratorios, and that the fans will finally be weaned from some of our more excessive poetasters.

Dylan seems finally to have found his own ground. Almost alone among the pop stars, he no longer comes on like a questing adolescent. Politically, he is neither the true believer nor the dropout. His country accent has never been less self-conscious or more effective. The piano and steel guitar work better than four sitars and a Moog synthesizer. Only the harmonica is occasionally intrusive, and I'm sure we'll all forgive him that—after all, he probably planned it that way.

This is not a better record than Sgt. Pepper, but it should have better effect. It is mature work that still shows room for rich development. If only it were so easy to say that of the Beatles.

Ah, the Beatles. They also have a new album, Magical Mystery Tour, and let's blame it on Capitol Records and the Maharishi, shall we? Six of the eleven songs have already been released as singles, so it should prove a boon to those of you—too many, I'm afraid—who don't own a forty-five spindle. Of the five new ones, three are disappointing. The title tune is perfunctory, and the instrumental, "Flying," just a cut above Paul Mauriat, not bad but not Our Boys. In between is "The Fool on the Hill," which shows signs of becoming a favorite of the Simon & Garfunkel crowd and the transcendental meditators, who

deserve it. A callow rendering of the outcast-visionary theme, it may be the worst song the Beatles have ever recorded. Paul should know better by now. Yet the album is still worth buying—for all the singles, which are good music, after all; for the tender camp of "Your Mother Should Know"; and especially for George Harrison's hypnotic "Blue Jay Way," an adaptation of Oriental modes in which everything works, lyrics included.

A reservation and a warning. This music was written for the Beatles' forthcoming TV special and may sound better once we see what goes with it. But if Paul McCartney's work on the film clip of "Hello Goodbye" is any indication, we would be wise not to hope for too much. We can't expect them to do everything. Can we?

Last fall we were all in a tizzy over the imminent visitation of sub-Beatles I and II-the Rolling Stones and Donovan. The problem was work permits, always a ticklish question because of union requirements and compounded because both the Stones and Donovan had been in drug trouble in England. Keith Richard was sentenced to an incredible one year for allowing marijuana to be smoked in his home; nothing has been done about the conviction, but it stands. Mick Jagger received three months for possession of pep pills he obtained in Italy, even though his own doctor approved their use, and the conviction held, although sentence was suspended. Donovan had been arrested for possession of marijuana, but charges were dropped—reportedly because he was busted in the company of another pop big shot, and how much bigger can you get? In any case, no one was startled, though everyone was suitably outraged, when Dirty Mick was refused his permit. Donovan had not been here since his arrest in the summer of 1966, and his reputation as an

antisocial tough was not expected to help. Then—surprise!—he slipped through.

I was traveling at the time of Donovan's concert tour and never got to see him, but the reports were interesting. His father, Mr. Leitch, a jovial, bankerish Scot, handled the introduction and lit the incense. Then son Don himself appeared in white robes, scattering flowers. A reverential hush would greet his performances, which elaborated the jazz feeling that had always been present in his vocal style. He inspired no riots.

Myself, I have always been suspicious of Donovan. He is a subtle singer and has written many fine songs, but something in his photographs, something sullen and stupid about the mouth, has always turned me off. The appearance of his Big Concept album confirmed all my suspicions and aroused some new ones about why he was allowed into the country. The album is a two-record set, about an hour of music. Title: A Gift from a Flower to a Garden. Donovan, of course, is the Flower-someday he will gaze too long at the mirror and turn into one. Those consumers with \$9.99 plus tax comprise the Garden. Where the Gift comes in I don't know. On the lavender-and-blue box are two color photographs of "the Author." In one he is holding a peacock-feather fan and looking as tough and sanguine as a fish's belly; in the other he is holding hands with ... why, it's the Maharishi! Isn't that sweet?

Inside is another color photo—the Author with lily pads—all the lyrics ("Nothing to censor here, sir!"), and an "art portfolio" of the songs from For Little Ones, billed as a children's record, though it isn't all that easy to distinguish from Wear Your Love Like Heaven, which Donovan describes as "music for my age group, an age group which is gently entering marriage." That's from the dedication, called, "Oh, what a Dawn Youth is Rising to," the

simpering of which could only be properly conveyed by massive quotation. Here's the key: "I call upon every youth to stop the use of all drugs and banish them into the dark and dismal places. For they are crippling our blessed growth."

What happened to Donovan, assuming he's sincere, is that he thought he could satisfy all his inchoate yearnings through chemistry. Then he discovered that watching your own head takes a lot of time and doesn't really satisfy the yearnings, so he exercised his logical faculty and came up with "Drugs are Evil." No wonder the powers that be let him back in. Kids who would never take that jive from a narc may just believe their Don.

Yet, strangely, the new records aren't bad. Donovan has undertaken the same sort of pruning operation as his old exemplar Dylan, albeit for more simpleminded reasons. His archaic fetish is much less annoying now, and while the tang is gone—none of the mystery of "The Fat Angel" or the compassion of "Young Girl Blues" or the cynicism of "Season of the Witch" or even the sheer exuberance of "There Is a Mountain"—nothing grates anymore either. A little sickly sweet is all—For Little Ones should amuse anyone who has never ever watched the Saturday-morning cartoons more than the Saturday-morning cartoons do. The singing is much better than the material, the engineering intelligent (great overdubbing on the best song, "Mad John's Escape"), and if Donovan's strength of mind can be summed up in one insipid line-"Oh, gosh, life is really too much"—we can still hope that by the time his generation harshly enters divorce he'll be ready to please our brains as well as our lazy ears.

But before we give up on pretentious pop, we should listen to the concept LP by the banished Stones. The title -Their Satanic Majesties Request-establishes their untarnished arrogance immediately. Like all their work, this album has its parodic side—the 3-D double-fold cover, for example—but as always, the intonations of Jagger's voice are decisive, and as always, they imply a critical distance from the material. (When Jagger sings, "She comes in colors," you have every right to infer a psychedelic orgasm; when Donovan sings, "and come if you can," you know it's only for tea.) Don't let the lovely new soft sound fool you—this is hard stuff, all about distance, really, in time and space and spirit. Despite the obligatory production job (a few of the effects distract, but most work) the songs are as good as ever, hummable even. And wonder of wonders, the major innovation—the group improvisation that occupies five-minute chunks of both sides—is reasonably successful.

Yet the album might be better. The Stones, with their ad-libbing and street noises, are clearly more interested in the music of chance than the Beatles. Such interests are doomed almost by definition to partial failure. If only they could look back and prune—but their work has been so tight that the attempt would have to end in self-parody. The Stones have no need of that.

I miss the radio. Only a year ago, WMCA in New York was my link to pop music and hence the world; now that labels concentrate almost entirely on albums, so that the Vanilla Fudge and Jimi Hendrix make top ten without ever having a hit single, it just doesn't mean as much to me. I've always regarded rock and roll as propaganda, a way of turning on the kids, so I'm disturbed that so many of its best people are giving up on the huge market in favor of the more dependable limited one.

Peter Townshend, of the Who, misses the radio, too, but for different reasons. Ever since Harold Wilson served socialism by shutting down the pirate stations, there has been only one rock outlet in Britain—B.B.C.'s Channel One, beloved of the Petula Clark fans. Now Townshend has come up with an album—not so much a concept album

as an anticoncept album—that is a tribute to the departed Radio London, a reminder of where it all began. The Who Sell Out has sound effects, all right, but most of them go with station breaks and singing commercials. The songs are softer—Roger Daltrey's hard lead is often subsumed in falsetto harmonies, and the finale, "Rael," is as close to mysticism as the down-to-earth Townshend has ever come. "Tattoo" is soft, too, but has that homely Townshend feeling. It's the best song he's ever written, worth the price of the album, which establishes the Who as the third best not just in Britain but the world.

Beyond such mundane concerns is Dionne Warwick's Golden Hits Part One, her first consistent album, as essential to your collection as Sgt. Pepper. If that's something you don't need to be told, you might try Dusty Springfield's The Look of Love. Most of it is up to the high level of the title song and the other, smaller hit, "What's It Gonna Be?" She even salvages a très smelly torch job by Rod McKuen and Jacques Brel, winners of this year's Kahlil Gibran Sounding Brass and Tinkling Cymbal Award for Hip Cliché Density. Why doesn't the Maharishi go after them, anyway?

Those of you who can't admit to yourselves that, actually, you kinda like "Judy in Disguise" ought to buy John Fred's album, *Agnes English*. It's the kind of LP that could happen only at a company like Paula Records (Shreveport, Louisiana). Fred—his surname—has assimilated everyone from the Beatles to Percy Sledge in his own way. The album has about half-a-dozen first-rate cuts (mostly written by Fred, who also coproduced), and you can dance to it at parties. Try that with Richie Havens.

Finally, three California awards. Comedown of the Year: Country Joe & the Fish, I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die.

Comeup of the Year: Buffalo Springfield, Buffalo Springfield Again. High Record of the Year: Van Dyke Parks, Song Cycle.

June, 1968: jazz and rock, California, folk music, Billy & Judy, Revlon

I don't know anything about music, which ought to be a damaging admission but isn't, or I wouldn't be making it. The fact is that pop writers in general shy away from such arcana as key signature and beats to the measure. (Those few who don't run in fear from the English language instead.) I used to confide my worries about this to friends in the record industry, who reassured me. They didn't know anything about music either. The technical stuff didn't matter. You just gotta dig it.

Well, I do dig it, but I'm not sure that's enough. These days, I often suspect that the rock musicians who pride themselves on just such musical sophistication are engaged in a dangerous self-contradiction. The innovations of the rock avant-garde, as it is called, sound suspiciously like middlebrow subterfuges borrowed from classical music and jazz and elevated by an ignorant audience that applauds the novel whether it is bogus or not. Granted, my suspicions ignore legitimate questions of context whether those borrowings don't have renewed validity for an unsophisticated audience, and whether the pop-rock framework doesn't hybridize them in a truly new way. But most of the classical devotees who think about rock at all would rather it retain its folk vitality and stop dabbling. Those who approve of the new filigrees do so, once again, because of context. Performed by kids who have just discovered them, old modes don't sound so outmoded.

Jazz people, more directly threatened by this rival blues-

based music, are not so olympian. Charlie Byrd harrumphs about "juvenile music," and Lionel Hampton complains of "dozens of press agents yelling 'rah-rah.' "Just like other old men, old jazzmen can't stand these freaky kids. They resent their unpredictable musicianship and—of course—their money. But their distaste is not universal. Among creative younger jazz players not involved in the more recondite avant-gardism—John Handy, Charles Lloyd, Gary Burton, Don Ellis—there is respect for the seriousness, the vitality, and even the musicality of the best rock. And naturally there is talk of a jazz-rock merger.

These jazzmen want a new audience. When I was in college, five or ten years ago, jazz clubs were filled with college kids. I know—I was there myself—and I know what I liked about jazz. It had balls. Melodic improvisation must have had something to do with it. Swing, too. But my favorites—Parker, Monk, Davis, Coltrane, Coleman—got to me with dissonance and rhythmic tension, with passion and irony. They were physically involving. I liked raucous horns and piano and had no use for guitar or vibes, which I associated with the mostly white cool school, one step up from cocktail tinkle. Even classy improvisers like the Modern Jazz Quartet and Paul Desmond, not to mention demi-commercialists like Herbie Mann and Charlie Byrd and the nascent soul-jazz movement, fell under my all-purpose pejorative: trivial.

Technical competence was extraneous, and it still is. Take Bill Evans's Further Conversations with Myself. Evans, we are informed by the lady who wrote the notes, is a master of "inspired craftsmanship," and I'm sure he is, although the same lady did once warn me that Sgt. Pepper was "a little"—and I swear she wrinkled her nose—"outsyoutsy." Anyway, all I get from Evans here is lamentable

attenuation of feeling. I'm not qualified to appreciate his subtle skills. Nor are most of his fans. Even if they are too hip for Mantovani, they buy Evans because he's pleasant. On the popular level this record really is trivial, and what's worse, doesn't admit it.

Rock can be trivial, too, but whereas trivial jazz is decadent, trivial rock is fun. Rock's emotional content is out front, with none of the clever ennui that came to typify jazz singing after Billie Holiday. And it is kinetic. Jazz has lost its grab. Old masters like Monk and Davis seem to repeat themselves; what was once vibrant and compelling has become martini music for Yale '56's, their necks shaved right to the occiput. The jazz that sellslike Wes Montgomery's A Day in the Life—caters to the prejudices of tasty chic just as the Monkees cater to teenyboppers. Only the avant-garde that stretches to the left of Ornette Coleman justifies itself. And it is so insularized it can't expect popular support and doesn't get it. The most attentive popular audience listens to rock.

Jazz artists who pursue this audience honestly—like Gary Burton and Charles Lloyd—do so not by changing their music or interpreting rock tunes. Their adaptation is cosmetic; they wear their hair long and play the Fillmore and the Café Au Go Go. Rock titles on a jazz record are almost certain proof of gold-digging. The classic exploiter is Bud Shank, whose Magical Mystery systematically eviscerates songs by the Association (no easy task), Dionne Warwick, and of course the Beatles; the one exception, a big one, is Steve Marcus, who makes his money in Woody Herman's Herd, on Tomorrow Never Knows. Marcus solos with a competent post-Coltrane sax style, building slowly off the melody into chaos, an approach exactly suited to the rock songs on this record. I especially like "Eight Miles

High" and "Mellow Yellow," in which a floozy tenor saxophone holds doggedly to the right notes as the rest of the music disintegrates around it. The rhythm section is loud and rock-steady, and there is marvelous guitar by an unidentified sideman I'm certain is Larry Coryell.

Coryell is the white hope of jazz-rock. Jazz guitarists seem to live in perpetual fear of being mistaken for bigbeat twangers like Duane Eddy. Even Wes Montgomery does not exploit his instrument; with no reverb and no real volume, the effect is like that of a piano played exclusively in the upper registers. In this context Coryell was a revelation—a guitarist of unmatched facility and melodic inventiveness who wasn't afraid to wail, and in what was essentially a rock band. The band, the Free Spirits, made one LP, Out of Sight and Sound, and, well, the singing was poor, and the songs-by Coryell, I'm afraid-weren't so hot. Then he joined with Gary Burton, a young vibraharp player of equal facility. I heard them live in March, 1967, and couldn't believe it—I kept looking for the saxophonist, but it was only Coryell, doing something with his amplifier. Then, this January, I caught him with the group again, and alas, he had turned into a jazz guitarist, better even than Montgomery, doing rhythmic stuff that was completely beyond me, but with that fatal, involuted delicacy. The hope of jazz-rock ruined by vibes vibes.

Merger from the rock side is something else. The Byrds were inspired by John Coltrane to compose "Eight Miles High," Paul McCartney loves Albert Ayler, and suspiciously large contingents of rock guitarists do obeisance to the jazz giants—Wes Montgomery, Charlie Christian, Django Reinhardt, and also Coryell. Many white musicians are using jazzy brass. And the hip fashion in live rock is long, not to say endless, improvisations.

Despite their volume and rhythmic intensity, these invariably put me to sleep with a headache. Rock has its

handful of good improvisers, but the vast majority are just noisemakers. This applies specifically to Eric Clapton, a master of the blues riff and the brief solo who shows little sense of melody, pace, or structure when he goes long. Unfortunately, the audience loves this stuff even when it is nine-tenths mannered showmanship, but even more unfortunately, many of the musicians are serious. Rock has always benefited from its tight format, bearing the same relationship to jazz as pop painting bears to abstract expressionism. But the musicians want freedom now-most often, the freedom to experience how dangerous a little knowledge can be. It's willful to oppose change but not willful to hope that the eclecticism at the heart of rock be controlled organically—that it come from the body and the heart as well as the mind and the will to status. That's why we liked rock and roll in the first place.

In early 1967, when we were hearing rumblings from San Francisco but couldn't tell whether it was an earth-quake or just the new subway, I made a prediction: The real music would come from Los Angeles. Big deal. I might as well have predicted that the real cars would come from Detroit. San Francisco's to-thine-own-self-betrue music and the long-haired businessmen from the Southland have combined to take over the music industry from New York. The New Hollywood, they call it, and talk about dynasties that will rival those of the cinemoguls.

I was dubious about San Francisco music before I heard it because I believe commercial strictures are good for pop, forcing artists to concentrate on their audiences instead of themselves—but the San Francisco groups did care about their audiences. They were the hippest in the country, and the quality of that first wave of records—by Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, Moby Grape, Country Joe, even the Sopwith Camel—was astonishing.

The only exception was Big Brother & the Holding Co., stuck with a schlocky (New York) label. The follow-up, however, has not been so impressive. Country Joe's second album was a vacuous disappointment, and the Airplane succumbed to artiness, going back for more overdubs after hearing "I Am the Walrus" and in general acting petulant. After Bathing at Baxter's was a good record but not as good as they or their acolytes thought. The only follow-up record that makes it completely is Moby Grape's Wow. The group's first record, overpromoted and underproduced, was dismissed as a hype by people who should have been listening. Hopefully this one, which includes a free disc of improvisations called "Grape Jam," will make up for it. The Grape can jam but on records tries to maintain a tight sound, much like L.A.'s Buffalo Springfield, whose Buffalo Springfield Again I consider the best American LP of last year.

The still-burgeoning San Francisco scene is simple compared to the welter of Los Angeles, where everybody seems to get recorded. It becomes hard to distinguish between the honest commercial group (the Sunshine Company) and the trashy one (the Love Generation), the legitimately refurbished image (Del Shannon's The Further Adventures of Charles Westover) and the insulting phony (Tommy Roe's Phantasy). But it is clear that what goes on aboveground in the industry itself is more interesting than what there is of an "underground." Only Captain Beefheart and His Magic Band, who released a strange little masterpiece called Safe as Milk before commencing to feud with their record company, seem unequivocally subterranean. A group called Steppenwolf has dug in about halfway, however, and I recommend its first album to anyone who cares passionately about hard rock. Although there is an unfortunate monotony in the group's vocals, the material is excellent, and they like to move.

At the other musical extreme is Van Dyke Parks, whose Song Cycle is what happened when an emergent classical composer was exposed to a recording studio. Parks, who has been a producer and arranger and studio musician, has turned into Charles Ives with a twelve-track console. I have serious reservations about his precious, overwrought lyrics and the reedy way he sings them, but the music on this album is wonderful. One instrumental track, "Donovan's Colours" (also available as a single if you can find it), is literally like nothing you've ever heard, with multiple overdubbing, tape distortions, echo, and God knows what else—music that never could have been created without the record industry. Caution: It does not rock.

The work of the 5th Dimension is also a testimony to the good things that can come out of a studio. Collaborating closely with boy-genius composer Jim Webb, the group is into a nightclubby kind of showbiz music that is not my thing at all. But even though their second LP, The Magic Garden, is slick and melodramatic, it does things with that weary form; "Paper Cup" says far more about alienation than Paul Simon's "I Am a Rock" ever did.

I recommend both *The Magic Garden* and *Song Cycle* to anyone who doesn't like rock but is even less impressed by the rest of what's happening in "popular music." But for those whose tastes are like mine, three Los Angeles albums are musts. All are by groups that have recorded before, and all prove that if a group's music is good, it can get better without any self-conscious, Airplane-style attempts at Artistic Advancement. The third album by Love, *Forever Changes*, is a vast improvement. Arthur Lee has stopped trying to imitate Mick Jagger with his soft voice, and the lyrics, while still obscure, now have

an interesting surface as well. The Notorious Byrd Brothers is simply the best album the Byrds have ever recorded. Gone are the weak—usually folky—tracks that have always flawed their work. Then there is the Beach Boys' Wild Honey. Love and the Byrds have to a certain extent elaborated their original styles, but the Beach Boys have retrogressed. That's fine. I have always felt that affection for early surfing music is a sure test of whether you really like rock and roll or are merely an arriviste. Every bit as much as the very peculiar Smiley Smile, Wild Honey epitomizes Brian Wilson. One little nonrock song, "I'd Love Just Once to See You," expresses perfectly his quiet, thoughtful, sentimental artistic personality. Sexual assertiveness is not the only thing that makes good music.

It's hard to believe that so much good can come out of one place. Let's hope it keeps up.

Warning: The folkies are coming up for air; beware of them, for in their hearts they hate rock and roll. I knew it when I observed Janis Ian watch the Candymen do one-half of their incredible live version of "Good Vibrations." "They're just an imitation," she sniffed, and walked out.

Beware.

Case in point: Miss Ian, whose second album proves that it is far better for five brilliant musicians to imitate the Beach Boys in fun than for one seventeen-year-old high-school dropout to imitate Edith Piaf in dead earnest. An abomination.

Another case in point: Richie Havens, the world's first black schlemiel, who has received a standing ovation (from a white audience, of course) for *forgetting* the words and changes of "With a Little Help from My Friends."

Exception: Leonard Cohen, whose first album demon-

strates what "poetic" lyrics should sound like. Cohen is a poet by profession, a somewhat old-fashioned one, and although his lyrics aren't perfect, they are always enhanced by his singing. His voice has been called monotonous, but it is also the most miraculous vehicle for intimacy the new pop has yet produced.

Another exception: Joni Mitchell, who contributed two songs to Judy Collins's overrated-as-usual *Wildflowers*. They are so good they salvage the album for me, and I can't stand Judy Collins. Mitchell is now recording. I can

hardly wait.

Soul record of the month: Sterybook Children, by Billy Vera and Judy Clay. Now that integration is beginning to seem like a sentimental chimera, the industry has come up with an integrated romantic duo. Very timely. This adds to the poignancy of what is already a very poignant record, full of lovers' weltschmerz and songs that sound as if they were written in 1958. That's a compliment.

We're Only in It for the Money, the triumphant new album by the Mothers of Invention, sounds like the world's longest Revlon Natural Wonder commercial. That's also a compliment.

November, 1968: country-western, minstrels, Jeff and Janis, additions and corrections

Marvin Rainwater or no Marvin Rainwater, I assume it is emblematic of something when Buffy Sainte-Marie, a Cree Indian—in fact, if I am not being unkind, a professional Cree Indian, in the same honest sense that Dick Gregory, say, is a professional Afro-American—goes to

Nashville, Tennessee (read: Music City, U.S.A.), to record an album of her own country-western songs. C&w is, after all, the white man's music. Yet the jacket is right in front of me, graced with a color photograph of Buffy, her characteristic ebon hair and uncharacteristic alabaster teeth gleaming with equal luster, her right eye hidden by a gray slouch hat that presumably goes with the title. Which is: I'm Gonna Be a Country Girl Again. Now, I believe Buffy when she insists that this effort is nothing more calculating or (ugh) commercial than a longdistance friendship with Chet Atkins, Nashville's elder gittar man. But not everyone can be expected to concur, especially down in Music City, where the record is doubtless taken as one more proof that good country music has taken over. I wouldn't be surprised if someone tried to marry her off to Marvin Rainwater-or Charley Pride.

In New York this interpretation is subject to shrewd modifications on the order of: "Country music is happening, baby!" The industry is trend-hungry, and the best-hyped new thing of the year is America's rediscovery—like Sainte-Marie's "Again," the prefix is of dubious specificity—of c&w. The phenomenon, such as it is, is overdue. I began waiting for it almost three years ago, when I learned that country music dominated the jukebox at Max's Kansas City. A couple of years later I gave up, and sometime after that Bob Dylan released John Wesley Harding, which I take as signaling, if not actually causing, the present boomlet. For despite the hoopla, the revival is small as yet, nothing more than an inevitable accommodation.

In this decade, especially since the Beatles, country music has been the victim of xenophobia. Theoretically, a hip college kid might prefer country culture (although c&w has long since left the country, it still expresses rural values) to that of his parents. When faced with the actual

choice—usually while driving across Nebraska—he plays Perry Como (or nothing) in preference to Merle Haggard or Tammy Wynette. When rock and roll was achieving status in the midsixties, little was made of its debt to c&w, even though the Stones dug Gene Pitney, and Chuck Berry himself was a fan of Kitty Wells. Instead, blues roots were emphasized. But as Ray Charles made clear when he began recording country music almost seven years ago, c&w and r&b have much in common.

Both c&w and r&b began as a manifestation of an insular racial (and economic) group from the South who used music to affirm cherished verities in the wake of seismic geographical and cultural movement. Joe Tex, whose soul songs are published by one of the largest c&w firms, Tree, recently tried to reify that spiritual kinship with an album called (naturally) *Soul Country*. A great idea, if done for love; unfortunately, other considerations appear to have interfered, and the result, though not without its amenities, is Tex's poorest LP.

It does, however, illustrate some affinities. For Tex, country music is a refuge for the rugged, and beleaguered, individualist—trucker, cowboy, outlaw—("Green Green Grass of Home"), for traditional family values ("Set Me Free"), and for simple decency ("Skip a Rope"). It is direct and adult. This traditional honesty, combined with c&w's unique musical virtues—all that dexterous banjo, fiddle, and guitar—accounts for the current wave. C&w seems unspoiled. It has the feel of mass-cult folk music, just like rock and roll before its promotion into rock, or r&b before its elevation into soul. Its voice is distinctly casual, replacing blues with lament, and joyful noise with wacky high-spiritedness.

But note that Tex's record closes with Bobby Goldsboro's "Honey," the classiest schlock of the year and the epitome of what is called modern country. Having changed with its audience like any popular music, c&w is not a very encouraging gauge of what happened to all the dust-bowlers who emigrated in the thirties or the Southerners who moved away after the war. It is closer to easy-listening than to bluegrass or blues. For this reason, the line between high camp and great country music is often thin or nonexistent—"Green Green Grass of Home," an almost antinomic good-bad song, was performed at the Newport Folk Festival this year by Joan Baez. This is sometimes a problem in black music, too, but in black music the problem is usually obviated by the beat. And the beat is where c&w, with its hincty two-four, shows its true color.

Since my basic commitment is to rock, I tend to distrust music that doesn't have a beat. I detect in the limpid ballads of Buffy Sainte-Marie a penchant for prettiness that is little more than Guy Lombardo bleh in youth drag. At their respective nadirs, traditional pop and acoustic folk and modern country are equally insipid. Luckily, intelligence and feeling keep folk from hitting its low too often. But what a temptation the rural romanticism of country music must be to those artists who, from Joanie on down, still believe that if only we can somehow simplify everything, life will be lovely again. That seems to be Buffy's idea, and so she has put together a tuneful pastorale that praises the love of a good man, rabbits in the pen, and so forth. Except for the tasteful-to-brilliant work of a predictably professional complement of Nashville sidemen and a new version of "Where Have the Buffalo Gone?," I'm Gonna Be a Country Girl Again is assimilated music at its emptiest.

I am no c&w aficionado, but I am a fan of a few special country artists—Hank Williams, Roger Miller, Buck Owens, Flatt & Scruggs, Jeannie Seely, Jerry Lee Lewis—and I think Johnny Cash's *Live at Folsom Prison* is one of the best LP's of the year. Yet even though several of those performers (Miller and Cash especially) are quite self-

conscious, I don't judge them the same way I judge Buffy Sainte-Marie. They all get automatic points for innocence. If the object of this attitude were blues, I might deplore it as folkie condescension, but there it is. I'm Gonna Be a Country Girl Again is a not-bad collection of country songs, but—possibly because it is devoid of endearing crudities—more is necessary, and similar strictures apply to all the others—from Irrelevant Ian and Slick Sylvia to just plain greedy Frankie Laine—who happen to find time in their schedules, this year, for that Nashville album they have always wanted to do.

I like countrified music best, predictably enough, when an original rock song is written for a hard country arrangement ("Ain't No Use" on Moby Grape, "I Am a Child" on Buffalo Springfield Again) or when country elements are incorporated into a total style (as on Buffalo Springfield's beautiful farewell album, Last Time Around, or the much ballyhooed Music from Big Pink). But not always. Next to fuzz-tone, country is gimmick of the year, and while unlike fuzz-tone it doesn't seem to encourage utter tastelessness, it guarantees nothing.

When all this was just beginning, I received an unprepossessing LP called Safe at Home, by the International Submarine Band. The cover depicted a typical rock group, four smiling longhairs, but inside was skillful country music. Presiding was a native of Waycross, Georgia, named Gram Parsons, who selected five country tunes, one Arthur Crudup blues arranged for steel guitar and four original compositions that fit both Parsons and the album; in one he even managed to sing about getting stoned with no strain. The album was an assertion of continuity from Arthur Crudup to Gram Parsons, with country music and all its simple virtues square in the center. In retrospect it seems a good record and a brilliant conception. Yet at the time I listened twice and filed it in the closet.

The album's very subtle defects have become clear to

me only after prolonged enjoyment of the Byrds' Sweetheart of the Rodeo. But then, so have its virtues, because Sweetheart of the Rodeo is Safe at Home done perfectly. Parsons is on this record himself, as a Byrd; as sidemen, so are several of his friends. But the reality of the Byrds predominates. The record opens and closes with twin talismans of modernity, Dylan songs from the period of seclusion between Blonde on Blonde and John Wesley Harding, and those harmonies are unmistakable.

Safe at Home failed because Parsons, with his deep respect for country music, played it too straight. He needed the canted approach of the Byrds, who combine respect with critical distance. The key is a Louvin Brothers waltz on Sweetheart called "The Christian Life," which ends: "I like the Christian life." The mournful, drawling harmonies partake inevitably of camp, but the best kind of camp, suffused with tenderness—a condescending tenderness, I suppose, but what else does the song deserve? Whether they are hoedowning gleefully through Woody Guthrie's "Pretty Boy Floyd" or laying down the refrain of Dylan's "Nothing Was Delivered" ("Take care of your health and get plenty of rest," certainly the ultimate country advice), the Byrds are celebrating values so sublimely simple that we must suspect they are attainable only on record. But we know they admit the same suspicions. This record, by a group that is waning in popularity, exhibits the kind of intelligence that makes me hope the finest artists will be producing good records long after the rock boom and the country boom have been swallowed by the music monolith. That's all I care about anyway.

Today's minstrel does his traveling in a cardboard jacket. Like Woody Guthrie (and Ricky Nelson) he doesn't boast what Ray Conniff would call a musical voice—all he has to do is project a version of himself through his larynx.

Bob Dylan and Mick Jagger may make this sound easy, but it isn't, and over the past month I have listened to records by singer-songwriters who prove it. In roughly descending order: Townes Van Zandt, Patrick Sky, Eric Andersen, Jake Holmes, David Ackles, Dino Valente. It is significant that all these guys would probably play unaccompanied acoustic guitar if they weren't scared witless by the Beatles. "Witless" is the word, although not the only one, for the minstrels and their producers seem to have very few musical ideas; either they contrive derivative, irrelevant rock arrangements or heap on the irony with fake ragtime, Sousa marches, and so forth. Their vocal limitations, I would guess, are related to what is really a disdain for music. As for their songs—well, never mind.

And then there is Randy Newman, whose debut album is one of the year's gems. Newman's songs (which have been recorded by Judy Collins, Eric Burdon, Liza Minnelli, and best by Alan Price on an obscure album called This Price Is Right) are quintessentially pop, but highly advanced pop. Two of Newman's uncles compose movie music, and we can only assume that he has long since digested all available clichés. His songs rely on no special verbal facility but on an oblique interplay of themes that are well-worn or even silly, but succinctly understood, and on his voice, which is a cross between a "grumpy mumble" (Michael Thomas's phrase) and a deliberate drawl. Imagine such a voice proposing ("I like your mother,/ I like your brother,/ I like you,/ And you like me too" *) and then describing the marriage on through death. Or presenting a fat boy at a circus sideshow. Or mourning a cowboy. Or just lamenting a ruined love affair. Add intermittent quasi-symphonic accompaniment (arranged by Newman, whose musical training is extensive) that neither

^{*&}quot;Love Story (You and Me)" by Randy Newman copyright © 1967 January Music, Used by permission.

reinforces nor works against the theme but somehow, like that voice, does both at once, or one after the other, or something.

Then give up and try to hear the record. I don't care if you've never heard of him. He's a genius, and every folkie in the world has something to learn from him.

Jefferson Airplane's fourth album, Crown of Creation, and the first physically respectable effort by Big Brother & the Holding Co., Cheap Thrills (censored title: Sex, Dope and Cheap Thrills), are both available. Buy them. The Airplane record contains a revolutionary love song (written by David Crosby) called "Triad" that will test—and, I am sure, crack like a stick—the backbone of the so-called progressive rock stations. It has no beat at all, but it will never be covered by Jerry Vale. Good. As for Big Brother, this album not only gets Janis's voice down, it also does justice to her always-underrated and ever-improving musicians. Thank God for the band. If Janis had to put out like Janis for an hour a set, she would have dropped dead a year ago.

On the basis of two albums and one live performance I would call Ten Years After the most exciting group to emerge since Big Brother, and Alvin Lee the most fluent rock guitarist this side of Jerry Garcia. . . . If you dig improvised guitar, especially in soul jazz, Mel Brown's The Wizard is a recommended LP. . . . After listening more than I wanted to the third Doors LP, Waiting for the Sun, I have finally admitted to myself that despite "Hello I Love You" I don't really like them very much. Anybody out there getting the same idea? . . . The aging Rascals make flawed albums, but their singles have always enlivened the AM, and Time Peace, a compilation of hits, is highly recommended. Some corporate saint has even elim-

inated the coda from "It's Wonderful," so there's not a bad thing on the album.

April, 1969: kiddie music, singles and albums, middle-class soul, Biff Rose, miscellaneous, Stones and Beatles

The old complaint that mass culture is designed for eleven-year-olds is, of course, a shameful canard. The key age has traditionally been more like fourteen. This makes sense for the entertainment industry—the fourteen-year-old is almost a full consumer, and because he no longer thinks of himself as a child, it is possible to treat him, willy-nilly, as an adult—and I suppose it is deplorable, but it behooves me, as *Esquire*'s token youth cultist, to explain why. The trouble with mass cult is not that it must appeal to high-school sophomores but that it must also appeal to their parents. Better one or the other. Left to themselves, the fourteens are as worthy a target as the thirty-fours—sometimes worthier—and in the end it is less pernicious to cater (as comic books do) than to level (as does television).

Less pernicious, perhaps, but also less respectable. The people who program television are generally regarded with relative charity by those who regard such things—just fools who provide other fools with what they deserve. In contrast, those who make it their business to furnish diversion for the young (excluding professional educators, of course) have commonly been classed with white slavers and other seducers of the innocent.

Until recently, this stereotype was applied with special gusto to denizens of the Brill Building, the record barons who conspire to foist their mindless caterwaul on the unsuspecting hope of America. In actuality, the conspiracy always involved more guesswork than calculation. The small-label operatives who made rock and roll possible were no better at manipulating teen-agers than any other representative group of parents. Even when they dealt in payola they were only insuring (or trying to insure) that a specific release would hit; its unsubsidized alternative probably wouldn't have sounded much different. And it is significant that Brian Epstein, who perpetrated the greatest hype of them all, turned out to be promoting genius. There was exploitation of a sort, of course; in the classic pattern an alliance of producer, songwriter, and businessman would parley hunches about what the little bastards wanted into hit singles, and when the hunch happened to be embodied by a performer, he could be counted on to obey orders.

But times have changed: The fourteen-year-olds are richer (they buy albums) and more demanding (they buy art). Today the performers have their hunches, which they call their style or thing and invest with an almost lugubrious intensity of belief. Such faith is necessary, for the adolescent fan will accept only what he senses the performers believe in. With a few exceptions-such as the Bosstown sound, the commercial and artistic disaster that resulted when MGM Records signed four or five groups from Boston and tried to pass them off as the avatars of an East Coast rock underground—the businessmen can work only with what they're given. But they are not without consolation, for the old pattern has reappeared, aimed at a newly discovered audience, the microboppers. The eleven-year-olds and their young admirers have become the staunchest bloc of singles-buyers, and the record industry is paying heed.

The money-music potential of subteens became apparent with the Beatles, whose androgynous sweetness, unlike the automatic sexuality of most earlier pop idols, inspired

fierce devotion among the very young. Peter Noone, of Herman's Hermits, simulated this quality, and so did the Monkees, who also drew core support from grade-schoolers, and who are—or were—the most conspicuous industry-related success of the post-Beatle era. Crucial to that success was weekly television exposure. When N.B.C. dropped the show last spring, the hits (finally) stopped coming. Those of us who still listen to AM radio were appalled, then, to learn that Don Kirschner, the song-publishing tycoon who invented the Monkees, planned to do it all over again with a group called the Archies. Since the Monkees were real human beings who ended up making a lot of trouble for their creator, this group would include an additional safety feature: It would not exist.

That's right, there are no Archies, just disposable studio voices. The group members are characters from the Archie comic books who now populate an animated cartoon series -wholesome, two-dimensional teen-agers who in their up-to-date way form the rock band of the record industry's fantasy, their demeanor controlled by one group of technicians, their music by another, all parts guaranteed replaceable. With the two-to-elevens as a surefire base, Kirschner figured he could build a Monkee-sized audience for danceable tunes by Jeff Barry, who has been turning them out for almost a decade. I listened dutifully to the resulting album, and though it revealed a certain mechanical bias—the Monkees without soul—I had to agree that the songs were catchy and skillful: after repeated listenings, like you get on the radio, I was humming one or two. The only problem was that the single "Bang-Shang-a-Lang" flopped inexplicably, Oh, with a massive push from RCA Victor it sold six hundred thousand, not bad at all, but Billboard never even ranked it top ten. Early indications are that the whole scheme has somehow backfired, The second single didn't even make top forty.

This cheerful news bears out one of my most cherished suspicions—that no one in this society, right down to the six-year-olds, can be manipulated quite as baldly as the would-be manipulators and their well-meaning critics believe. People have real needs, needs that change, and idiot guidelines about perky melodies don't in themselves do justice to those needs. By some combination of alchemy and analysis, Kirschner and Barry psyched out one subsub-generation, and they did come up with some good music. Now they seem to have lost the touch.

But the game does go on. The current champions are Jerry Kasenetz and Jeff Katz, who have invented something called bubble-gum music. The name comes from the 1910 Fruitgum Co., which recorded the model bubble-gum record, "Simon Says," a nonsense song based on the game. It was very popular with eight-year-olds. Teen agers who consider themselves hip are apparently upset about bubble-gum music, which is trivial and commercial and gives rock a bad name. Perhaps I can admit to enjoying a lot of it myself because my heart isn't quite so close to the action, and neither is my age.

The basic Kasenetz-Katz sound extrapolates from Herman's Hermits and the Monkees. The lead singer of the 1910 Fruitgum Co. actually approximates a whine, an intonation that excites understandable sympathy among eight-year-olds but can be expected to grate on the rest of us, and does—the group is the most unbearable in recent memory. This is not true, however, of Kasenetz-Katz's Ohio Express; I know because I have discovered others with the same secret vice. The Ohio Express has the Silly Putty malleability of the old-style "produced" groups. Its first hit, "Beg, Borrow and Steal," was loud rock in the dumbest "Louie Louie" tradition. But the lead voice on the second hit, "Yummy, Yummy, Yummy," can best be described as a parody of a simper, as far from

"Louie, Louie" as Shirley Temple is from Big Maybelle. It was so insipid that someone had to be kidding. In fact, someone was, and I think that's why the little kids bought it.

Children delight in foolishness. If Jefferson Airplane sounds like a poetic name to your older sister, it can still sound silly to you-and the 1910 Fruitgum Co., God knows, sounds even sillier. It is quite possible, for one properly attuned, to devise a whole aesthetic of silliness, and by the standards of such an aesthetic Kasenetz-Katz can be said to have steadily advanced their vision. They have fielded a group called the Rock & Roll Dubble Bubble Trading Co. of Philadelphia 19141 and assembled all their groups for a concert—at Carnegie Hall. Their writers seem to treasure innuendo: "1, 2, 3 Red Light" concerns that great old teen subject, Going Too Far, while "Chewy Chewy," about a gum-loving sweetie, lends itself to all kinds of oral interpretation. At least two of their bubblegum creations-"Chewy Chewy" and "Quick Joey Small" -are camp masterpieces, nothing less.

It should go without saying that the albums that contain kiddie hits are worthless. This is a singles aesthetic, compact and artificial, nowhere near rich enough to spread over an album. In a time of FM stations that play only LP cuts, it is unfashionable to dig singles, but if anything can convince me of the continuing health of the music, it is the sudden burst of great ones, some by name album artists (Cream's "Sunshine of Your Love," Jimi Hendrix's "All Along the Watchtower," Canned Heat's "Going Up the Country"), others by faceless groups you could miss altogether without a car radio (Friend and Lover's "Reach Out of the Darkness," the Status Quo's "Pictures of Matchstick Men," the Equals' "Baby Come Back"). I always listen to albums by such groups in the forlorn hope that one

of them will have more than one good trick ready for me, but none of them ever seems to.

The only exception has been John Fred and His Playboy Band, whose third album—John has been around down South for a while—I have been hyping for the past year. New there is a fourth, *Permanently Stated*, which I also love. It is one of those rare albums that lives up to its affectations; even when he is gauche, John Fred is gauche with a kind of ebullience more sophisticated performers work years to duplicate. I don't expect anyone to actually buy the record or anything, but at least I've said my piece.

A record I do hope you'll buy is Super Hits, by the Box Tops, who epitomize everything that is best about produced groups and single records. The group's only asset is lead singer Alex Chilton, but with that one asset, producers Dan Penn and Spooner Oldham have achieved the highest kind of rock and roll, a music of such immediate appeal that I regard it as a litmus elimination for phony "rock" fans. Each new instrument, each pause, works to build tension and qualify meaning, yet final control seems to fall not to critical intelligence but to some crazy kind of rapacious commercial instinct, an instinct that might seem pretentious if it weren't so busy being delighted with itself-Phil Spector with economy, sort of. If I sound delirious, it's because I have just listened to Super Hits after two weeks of Stones and Beatles, and it still knocks me out. Don't yawp to me about art, anybody-this is what it's all for.

One reason the idea of soul has been embraced so readily by white people is that they can imagine themselves partaking of it. The same cannot be said, after all, of black power. According to experts, it really is possible for a white person to have soul. The trouble with thinking so is that the next step is to assume it comes naturally. It is because they make it look easy that Diana Ross & the Supremes, as they are now billed, are permitted to sing Rodgers & Hart at the Copacabana. It doesn't matter that their versions are vapid. Maybe it even helps support the illusion.

Diana Ross, for her part, has good reasons for singing Rodgers & Hart, as long as folks buy. She prefers the relatively big money and easy hours of the white clubs to any version of the soul-circuit grind. Despite the rhetoric, almost every soul performer covets a similar security, and in order to get it they seem perfectly willing to don whiteface and sing standards. That the chance of success is slim, especially for men, only renders the result more pathetic. A perfect example is Iackie Wilson, a soul star for more than a decade who has been making albums like his current I Get the Sweetest Feeling for almost as long. One side is first-rate natural-flow soul, the rocking shouters that are Wilson's specialty. The other side features songs like "Who Can I Turn To?" and "People." Even if Wilson showed some intelligence as an interpreter, his sweet tenor, combined with string-and-tinkle arrangements, would probably make his renditions sound treacly. As it is, they are treacly.

An instructive contrast is *James Brown Sings Out of Sight*, which collects the best of what Brown recorded for Smash Records. The selection is excellent, combining old hits, ancient r&b classics, and an imaginative choice of standards, including "Nature Boy," "Come Rain or Come Shine," and—incredibly—"I Love You, Porgy" ("Love," not "Loves," you notice). Strings are present in such quantity that they somehow move beyond syrup into hubris,

which after all is Brown's calling. His rough, almost tuneless intensity literally reincarnates these songs, which is what singers are supposed to do, isn't it?

As instructive as this record, however, is the fact that Brown no longer trafficks in such material. He has entered an assertively black stage. His biggest recent hit was entitled "Say It Loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud." For Hank Ballard, the old finger-popper, he wrote a hit record with the refrain "How you gonna get respect if you haven't cut your process yet?" Since Brown is a millionaire, he can afford to be uppity. Anyway, far from abandoning the white race, he is actively pursuing it. As an instance, he entertained the honkies at Richard Nixon's inaugural.

I was watching Johnny Carson one night when up stepped Biff Rose, whose album, The Thorn in Mrs. Rose's Side, I had listened to with mixed amusement and confusion. Rose, who is essentially a comedian, can write some pretty fatuous lyrics, but it's hard to tell whether he takes them seriously. Anyway, he did his number and ambled over to the catbird seat, where he waved to his mother, rapped, and made mincemeat out of Johnny Cool. The nicest part was when Carson read from his album notes: "I'm bound and determined to be cliché free"—a little paradox, get it? Rose explained, and when Carson finally got it, he sat there for fifteen blessed seconds without a word or a moue: a triumph of hip aplomb for Rose. Hurray for longhairs.

While I'm dispensing kudos, a few more. Better New Groups of the Month: Linn County, Mother Earth, Rhinoceros, the Pentangle. Superfailure of the Month: Revelation: Revolution '69, by the Lovin' Spoonful, which now consists of Joe Butler and some guys who might just as

well march to a different drummer. Fat Superfailure of the Month: Buddy Miles. Pearl among Swine: "Country Woman," on P. F. Sloan's *Measure of Pleasure*. Resuscitation of the Month: "Endless Sleep," on the Blues Project's *Planned Obsolescence*.

I think the new Stones album is unflawed and lacking something. I think the new Beatles album is flawed and great anyway.

3

Consumer Guide (1)

Unless you are very rich and very freaky, your relationship to rock is nothing like mine. By profession, I am surfeited with records and live music. Virtually every rock LP produced in this country is mailed to me automatically, and I am asked to go to more concerts than I can bear. I own about 90 percent of the worthwhile rock albums released since the start of the Beatles era, and occasionally I play every one of them, although I haven't heard half the LP's in my collection in six months. All this has a double-edged effect. On the one hand, I am impatient with music that is derivative and see through cheap gimmicks easily. On the other, I can afford to revel in marginal differentiation, delighting in odd and minor talents that might not be worth the money of someone who has to pay for his music.

Rock writers in general are so sick of the mediocrity and the bad hype that they simply don't listen to most of the records they receive. I try to, but my methods are necessarily somewhat mechanical. Even if I spent sixteen hours a day listening to music—I would estimate the actual figure, by the way, at around eight—I couldn't give each group the time each group believes its record deserves. So I tend to make a lot of snap judgments, sometimes based

on decidedly extramusical criteria (like what label it's on, or what the group looks like), and since I believe that rock is supposed to grab you, I demand that groups I haven't heard of—and most of those I have—do just that.

I divide my life between two apartments. One is equipped with an excellent stereo system, the other with a pretty good portable. In the first I store records I really like—the permanent collection. In the other I store records I kind of like or think I kind of like or think I should hold on to-the reference collection. After I lug the day's haul home from the post office, I divide it immediately into three categories: Maybe, Conceivable, and Forget it. Maybes are placed near the good sound system; the rest are transported to the second apartment and placed in either a sell pile or a listen pile. Maybes I have usually been hyped on somehow (some of them are really Certains) or else look interesting. Records from the relatively dependable labels-Warner Bros., Atlantic, Columbia, Stax—are usually Maybes. The Forget It category includes movie soundtracks, third-rate country artists, most straight pop and soul jazz. Conceivables are everything in between. I play every rock record I receive at least once.

That does not mean that I try to get into every one. Except with records I have been actively anticipating, I work chronologically and with dispatch, sometimes piling records on the changer ten at a time as I read, write, make phone calls, or fart around. If the record makes me want to listen more carefully, good. Usually it doesn't. Sometimes I can tell a record is a Forget It after one cut or one side. More often, it will play through and then find itself in one of the second-listen piles. Eventually, at least half the rock records I receive are discarded altogether. Others are kept but never really apprehended, just singled out as having some good quality and forgotten. Others, of course, become part of my life. That's what it's all for.

Even though music is my greatest pleasure, the pleasure

is often casual. I rarely listen carefully to lyrics or follow a solo note for note unless I'm reviewing something at length or I'm stoned. When I'm stoned, I rarely play records I don't already love. (Stoned or unstoned, I listen constantly to the Stones, less constantly to Otis Redding, and less constantly than that to everything else. Newer acquisitions, naturally, get disproportionate attention.) I suspect that many rock fans would say (though I'm not sure I agree) that they dig the music more than I do because every record they buy has its day or week of glory. Nevertheless, I feel a certain obligation to pass along my findings. Some people, I know, actually buy records because they like the group's name or admire the jacket. This is bad practice. I can't think of three records in the permanent collection that didn't involve some sort of tip-off: news in the trades, other reviews, advice from friends, hype from one of the few industry people I trust, or familiarity with personnel. So I have devised a rating system and will occasionally run one of these Consumer Guides—the rating plus whatever information seems pertinent. Results are not guaranteed-I change my mind a lot, and I've missed good things in my time. I will make no attempt to be systematic or current-records have a way of getting lost in the second-listen piles.

Although any rating system is absurd—always based on short-term judgments and incapable of implying ambivalence, although the comments can mitigate that—there is no reasonable alternative. Look, it's fairly simple. A means I like it a lot, B means I like it some or admire it a lot, C means I like it a little or admire it some, D means I don't like it or admire it a little, and E means shit. What more can I say? I do plan to charge notches (B minus to C plus, etc.) for various derelictions. I believe that record jackets should not fall apart. This means that when an album is packed Unipak, that chintzy half double-fold

with the badly glued opening, I will note it and charge a notch. And I believe that long-playing records should play for a long time. I take that to mean thirty minutes twelve songs at two and a half minutes per-so I will charge records that run shorter a notch. CBS is the only label impolite enough to omit times. Since CBS is the pioneer of the eleven- and ten-cut album (arty cousin of the eleven-ounce beer can), I think this is deplorably sneaky, but I can't quite bring myself to charge a notch for it. Why don't you all write and complain? And if you have a record you want rated or any other suggestions, write me. This is your column. Keep it clean.

Hoyt Axton: My Griffin Is Gone (Columbia). Hoyt Axton, who can't sing, has written two good songs, "The Pusher" and "On the Natural." The latter is on this record, produced by Alex Hassilev, who can't produce. D plus.

Blind Faith (Atco). Perhaps because I expected such miracles from the beginning, I was never turned around by Cream or Traffic, but neither group ever put out a record that didn't contain a track or two I loved—"I Feel Free" or "Paper Sun" or "Politician" or "Feelin' Alright." There is nothing here that makes me feel that way: I'm almost sure that when I'm through writing this, I'll put the album away and only play it for guests. Unless I want to hear Clapton—he is at his best here because he is kept in check by the excesses of Winwood, who is rapidly turning into the greatest wasted talent in the music. There. I said it, and I'm glad. B.

Mel Brown: Blues for We (Impulse). Bad album by an excellent guitarist. Instead of dealing up obvious goop in the manner of Shorty Rogers and Harvey Mandel it almost functions as a parody of eclecticism: black soul, white soul, Lennon-McCartney, bubble gum, trad jazz, blues,

avant-garde jazz. Time: 27:08. D plus.

Canned Heat: *Hallelujah* (Liberty). The best Canned Heat album solely because four of its eleven cuts are by Alan Wilson, a great freak voice who writes songs to match. As usual, it is dominated by Bob "Rastus" Hite, who must have been responsible for *Rolling Stone*'s suggestion that the next Canned Heat album be called *Yassuh Boss*. He is most offensive on one of those "introducing the band" jams ("Henry shoah does have the feelin', yeah") and on another exercise in solipsism called "Canned Heat." Still, Wilson's talent is too peculiar to fill an album. I wonder what should be done with him. B minus.

Crosby, Stills & Nash (Atlantic). This album is perfect, but that is not necessarily a compliment. Only Crosby's vocal on "Long Time Gone" saves it from a special castrati award. Pray for Neil Young. B plus.

Sweet Linda Divine (Columbia). Linda Tillery is a somewhat excessive black girl with a razor in her larynx who did a pretty good record with the Loading Zone. Now Al Kooper, wearing his producer suit, has gotten hold of her and indulged her excesses as if they were his own. It was five years between *Highway 61 Revisited* and "You Can't Always Get What You Want." Was it really worth the wait? D plus.

Wild Man Fischer: An Evening with Wild Man Fischer (Bizarre). I want to concur with all the good reviews: a fascinating document. But remember—it's a document, not music, recommended only to those with a serious interest in the rock subculture. Great term-paper subject. Frank Zappa provides two object lessons in the relationship of production to original material. B.

Kim Fowley: Outrageous (Imperial). Fowley is such a gargantuan shuck that he ought to be preserved in a time capsule. This is a follow-up to his flower record of a couple of years ago, complete with revolutionary liner notes

("Guerrilla warfare has begun. The streets belong to the people. Let's tune in to find out what went wrong today.") that for some reason—they'd sell a few, no?—are concealed within the double-fold. E.

Lotti Golden: Môtor-Cycle (Atlantic). I don't like this myself, but I also don't like Laura Nyro. If you do, you might glance at the lyrics on the jacket and find out if

you're interested. D plus.

The Guess Who: Wheatfield Soul (RCA Victor). This Winnipeg group has hit big with a white-soul ballad, "These Eyes," that most of you probably hate. I love it. Nothing else on the LP is up to its standard, but except for one bummer cut (which, of course, runs over ten minutes on the "These Eyes" side) it is well played, well sung, well arranged, and personal without being pushy. Not to be confused with B minus.

The Guess Who (MGM). This compilation of old cuts is recommended only to Guess Who scholars. They sure have come a ways. An original, "Stop Teasing Me," distinguishes itself as the most perfect early-Beatles copy this side of "Lies" by the Knickerbockers. D.

Jethro Tull: *This Was* (Reprise). Ringleader Ian Anderson has come up with a unique concept that combines the worst of Roland Kirk, Arthur Brown, and your local highschool blues band. I find his success very depressing. C minus,

The Knowbody Else (Hip). A classic white Southern rock band. Despite the terrible group name and the terrible label name (Stax subsidiary) and the terrible cover art, they really make it. Lead singer James Mangrum is a cross between Dr. John and Captain Beefheart; the arrangements are spare and evocative, the songs simple but never banal. Very nice. B.

Joni Mitchell: Clouds (Reprise). Without David Crosby's production—this is basically a voice-and-acoustic

record—Joni's voice sounds malnourished, which it is. Three excellent songs, but two of them, "Both Sides Now" and "Chelsea Morning," have been done better elsewhere, The other one is called "Roses Blue." C.

NRBQ (Columbia). Ever since Mike Jahn called this group the best since the Beatles (something like that) it has been the victim of antihype. Four or five cuts here are really compelling, and although the rest is marred by a kind of cute funkiness, it is original, and it grows on you. Dig their version of Sun Ra's "Rocket Number 9." A minus.

Otis Redding: Love Man (Atco). Although the tender passages aren't quite up to his best, this is Redding's best LP since Immortal. Dig especially the scatting on "I'm a Changed Man." A.

The Rock and Roll Revival: *The Greatest Oldies Done Hear and Now* (Dunhill). Sha-na-nyeh. E.

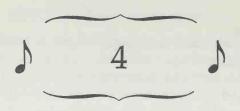
George Stavis: *Labyrinths* (Vanguard). I don't know much about Oriental-influenced banjo music, but I know what I like. B plus.

The Stooges (Elektra). Stupid-rock at its best—the side of the Velvet Underground that never developed. John Cale produced. B plus.

Zager & Evans: 2525 (Exordium and Terminus) (RCA Victor). Zager & Evans make Simon & Garfunkel sound like Marx & Engels. The only reason this is not an E is that the title song sold a million copies. That means they have to be doing something right. D minus.

ADDITIONAL CONSUMER NEWS: The folks at Buddah, the baddies who gave us bubble-gum music (hiss! boo!), have bought most of the precious Vee-Jay catalog (not including the Four Seasons, sadly enough) and are reissuing hit selections by the likes of Jimmy Reed, John Lee Hooker, and Jerry Butler (hooray! yay!). The Reed is a gem; all of his best stuff has been unavailable for years.

... The pendulum has swung back. At an hour or two a day, WMCA once again offers the best music in New York City, despite Henry Mancini and the Winstons. The station has changed program directors and is expanding back toward its old sixty-five play-list. Frankie Crocker really is an incredible deejay, too. Beautiful singles on the air from the Stones (the flip, "You Can't Always Get What You Want," is my choice for political song of the year; when Jagger did it on TV, I thought I caught a verse about demonstrations that isn't on the record), the Box Tops ("Soul Deep"-album expected), Donovan (with Jeff Beck-shit plus shit equals fertilizer), Creedence Clearwater (two-sided hit-"Commotion" and "Green River"), Sonny Charles & the Checkmates ("Black Pearl," one of the all-time Phil Spector extravaganzas), and the Plastic Ono Band ("Give Peace a Chance" is a much different sentiment on the radio than in the pages of Rolling Stone, where folks should know better). Even WMCA's bad stuff isn't that bad, and if you listen long enough, you may get to hear the Happenings singing "Hare Krishna." If that isn't a trip. . . . Reader Dana Dolan informs me that The TAMI Show, the great 1965 rock and roll movie, has not disappeared or disintegrated but could in fact be found on a double feature with Monterey Pop in San Francisco not long ago. They always get there first. Why doesn't someone in New York try that bill?...One stanza of Frank Sinatra's version of "Mrs. Robinson" (on the aptly titled My Way album) goes like this: "The PTA, Mrs. Robinson, won't OK the way you do your thing/ Ding ding ding/ And you'll get yours, Mrs. Robinson, foolin' with the young stuff like you do/ Boo hoo hoo."



Rock & Roll &

Despite the latitude I've enjoyed at both Esquire and Newsday, I don't think I would have felt comfortable writing any of these five pieces anywhere except The Village Voice, where my aim was to extend my theory and my persona simultaneously—hence the column title, with that second ampersand trailing off into wherever. I hope these pieces indicate the way the two intermesh. If they're a little depressing, taken together, that's because they came out of a depressing time. Always the skeptic, I never really expected even a revolution in style, but the optimism of my co-culturists was infectious and the let-downs were major. Times don't seem any better now—they seem much worse, actually—but at least I'm resigned to them again.

ROCK 'N' REVOLUTION

A riddle for you.

Q.: Why is rock like the revolution?
A.: Because they're both groovy.

Now, I am aware that this is not the standard argument. Rock and roll, as we all know, was instrumental in opening up the generation gap and fertilizing the largely sexual energy that has flowered into the youth life-style, and this life-style, as we all know, is going to revolutionize the world. Well, not exactly. A noted commentator on such subjects, Karl Marx, once observed: "A revolution involves a change in structure; a change in style is not a revolution." In that sense—rejecting any optimistic projections about how small changes in style can transform structures incrementally—rock is clearly not revolutionary at all. The other kind of revolution—the kind that permits Columbia Records to call its artists The Revolutionaries—is a revolution in style. It can make nice changes for people, yes. But all that means is that it's groovy.

The fact that a small minority of young politicos actually understands this only proves how drastically the politics of generation has outstripped its own origins. Without doubt, the way rock and roll intensified youth consciousness was a political phenomenon—that is, it affected the power people had over their lives. In fact, there was probably a time when rock could be called, without too much hyperbole, the most socially productive force in the Western world. It educated kids to ways of living that their approved education glossed over, and it provided a bond for the young and the youthful. But even though something of the sort is still happening, the formal precocity of rock—the rapidity with which it expanded and too frequently exhausted itself—distorted its political usefulness. As the best performers elaborated their music, they narrowed their audience, and too often the gospel of sexual liberation and generational identity became a smug ritual, with the wider audiences left to the lifeless myths of the schlockmeisters the rock artistes deplored.

Anyway, the new youth gospel was greeted with unan-

ticipated hostility by the old capitalists, who still had most of the power, and there was precipitous escalation, most of it rhetorical, on both sides. Suddenly, sexual liberation and generational identity (together with expanded consciousness, a last-minute attraction) were understood by both sides as facets of an inevitable social upheaval. It was all the same big revolution. But was that what Danny & the Juniors meant when they told us rock and roll was here to stay?

This all happened very fast. Politically, it was facilitated by a vanguard of real revolutionaries, traditionally political in outlook but with strong youth ties, who tried to structure and define the anarchistic unrest of the heads, turning it away from that confusion of style and structure which Marx deplored. In the intoxication endemic to youth politics, both the politicos and the heads tended to overestimate the dedication and numerical strength of their troops. Launching their movement from a position of moral superiority that seemed compelling in an environment of liberal tolerance, the youth leaders made the old elitist assumptions and waited for the movement's constituency—with a healthy push from the culture and especially the music—to organize itself.

In the wake of People's Park, many activists in the Bay Area, an especially intoxicating stronghold, believe this has actually happened. People's Park represents an excellent departure from the abstract politics of the past few years because it is an issue with broad, concrete, and self-evident appeal that embodies a radical concept, the inhumanity of institutionalized private property. In other words, it combines the groovy revolution with the structural one. It is significant that rock groups are working for People's Park (Bill Graham sponsored a bail benefit at which the Airplane, the Dead, and Creedence Clear-

water appeared) when they don't move for the Panthers or the Chicago Seven.

It ought to be remembered that musicians have never tried to be in the political vanguard—whatever their metaphorical proclivities, artists usually like peace and quiet as much as, if not more than, anyone else. The musicians never called for revolution in the first place, only certain of their fans. It took about eighteen months—from early 1967 to late 1969—for the idea of "revolution" to evolve from an illusion of humorless politniks to a hip password that, like everything hip, was promulgated free (both vitiated and made more dangerous) by magazines, networks, and even advertising agencies. The hype, as we in the music biz call it, imbued the movement with an apparent strength that intensified its infatuation with itself. There are still many would-be revolutionaries who talk about full-scale wish-fulfillment by 1975.

That is extremely unlikely at best. After all, People's Park also has a rather decisive negative side. As of now, the people (a term that for once is relatively accurate) haven't even gained their park, much less established their principle, and the relative lack of concern east of the Sierra Madres has been appalling. White Americans haven't suffered such terrorism—arbitrary gunfire, torture, martial law—since the worst labor battles of the thirties. Why hasn't there been more outrage, more solidarity? Can it happen here (and in Iowa? Florida? Vermont?) only when an equally concrete issue is created?

I'm afraid there may be another answer. I'm afraid that many people—not only the grown-ups, whose apprehension seems to increase geometrically with every new atrocity, but also almost all the kids—are very chary of the revolution. The reason is simple: Real revolutions are unpleasant, not groovy. You can get killed and everything.

And so caution is more than justified, especially in the face of overwhelming odds. The most important drawback to the revolution of 1975, after all, is that the other side wins. All revolutions are unpleasant, but the ones you lose are really for shit.

But it also seems to me that it is cowardly to worry too much about such details—if it happens, it happens, and everyone chooses sides. All of John Lennon's rationalizations are correct. Violence does lead to more violence, and the tedium and rigidity of effective politics are antihuman. But Lennon would never have achieved enlightenment if thousands of his forebears hadn't suffered drudgery far worse than protest marches and cared enough about certain ideals (and realities) to risk death for them. (Three hundred years ago, a snot like Lennon would have had his hands cut off by the time he was thirteen-although, come to think of it, his sense of exactly how far he can go is so uncanny that he might well have survived and prospered. But what about Ringo?) It really does get better all the time—a little better—but that doesn't mean that it's perfect, or that it's going to continue. If Lenin didn't make a utopia, neither did Gandhi. (John and Yoko have suggested that people in India starve because they're afraid to migrate. That's literally what they said.) Anyone who is serious about changing things ought to be willing to prove it by taking risks. Right now, that means engaging in what I would call prerevolutionary politics, politics that test the system's vaunted flexibility. It means finding out now whether imperialism, racism, sexism, the destruction of the ecosystem, and the robotization of human life (not to mention trivial problems like military slave labor, starvation, and organized crime) can really be ended without overthrowing the state. It means accepting the labor of organizing now and remembering that violence may be necessary later, not as catharsis but as tactic. And it means being ready to give up your comforts if things turn out to be as bad as they seem.

It does not mean that every musician should give himself to the movement. Art and politics rarely mix, and good music is always good for the world, which is finally what politics is about. A revealing musical iconography has developed around People's Park. After John Lennon rang to remind everyone to keep it nonviolent and to muse a bit about moving the action away from Berkeley because the waters were troubled there—thus firming up his newfound status as a pompous shit—"Don't-Let Me Down" was used as an anthem by some of the Memorial Day marchers. The Dylan picture from Nashville Skyline was reproduced without comment in emergency newspapers published in Berkeley during the crisis. To an extent, this is self-indulgent fantasy—all the good guys are really with us. To an extent, it is a calculated marshaling of potent symbols, much the way the park itself was marshaled. But it also had its own validity. These politicos genuinely loved music. They recognized that John Lennon knew something about commitment even if his politics were fatuous, that Bob Dylan had achieved a kind of serenity that all of us might someday like to emulate. Perhaps the best demonstration of this approach to music is three lines of a long agitprop poem by a veteran Bay Area activist called "Berkeley, May 15-17, 1969": "O my God they're shooting! Hardly anyone is blinded. Many people die./ Many women are born, and men seeing for once as clearly as women./ Keep running. Breathe even. Listen to the Band when you can."

In the worst of times music is a promise that times are meant to be better. Ultimately, its most important political purpose is to keep us human under fire. John Lennon and Bob Dylan, both of whom seem to sing their best when they are thinking their worst ("The Ballad of John and Yoko," "I Threw It All Away"), are often better at keeping us human than trusty propagandists like Phil Ochs—I wish I could add another name, but singing propagandists are rare these days.

Still, we don't just respond to music-we respond to what we know about it. Rock is good in itself, but it is also good because of what it does for people. We have always loved it for political reasons; the praise of vitality, after all, is a populist judgment. And at this moment in history politics are an index of vitality. It is puritanical to expect musicians, or anyone, to hew to the proper line. But it is reasonable to request that they not go out of their way to oppose it. Both Dylan and Lennon have, and it takes much of the pleasure out of their music for me. After shrugging off the Maharishi, John is bidding to take his place. If only his bed-ins would turn Nixon around a bit-Trudeau, even-his foolishness might seem sainted. As it is, they merely provide one more excuse for a lot of good kids to cop out. Dylan's apostasy is more subtle. He has a political past, so his opposition doesn't have to be explicit to be deeply felt. It may be that country music is beyond politics, although it does serve rural culture as a buffer against the incursions of new (especially black and urban, but also young) ways of doing things, and although it obviously flourishes among populist conservatives. In any case, Dylan's embrace of country music, especially considering his always acute attention to stance, is political indeed. A year and a half ago, remember, Dylan released his most political album in years, John Wesley Harding; he also put in a rare public appearance at a Woody Guthrie memorial. Now, after Nashville Skyline, he guests for Johnny Cash, an enthusiastic Nixon supporter.

I know much of this is going to be misconstrued, so let me try to be more explicit. I am not putting down Johnny Cash's music because he likes Nixon, or Dylan's because he likes Cash, nor am I suggesting that Dylan endorses Cash's politics by participating in his music. I'm not even dismissing Cash's politics. There are good reasons for conservatism, and I suspect Cash is sensitive to most of them; Dylan certainly is. That does not mean, however, that either is right. I enjoy and admire and learn from their celebrations of individualism and the simple life, but I remain aware of their limitations. In the case of Dylan, and Lennon, the limitations become really distressing because I know each is capable of much more. Furthermore, I think my reservations are aesthetic. What I really don't like is softheartedness. "Revolution" is as artistically indefensible as, oh, "Love Can Make You Happy," and for many of the same reasons.

For similar reasons, I like the MC-5. I like them even though I think their political position is rather dumb, based on an arrantly sexist analysis. The new pop has managed to discard a lot of myths, but because male supremacy is rarely perceived as the political issue it is, because it is on the contrary often taken as folk wisdom, most popular music works to reinforce the existing system of male-female relations. The 5, however, go much further than that. Rob Tyner mock-rapes random girls as a standard part of his act. John Sinclair claims that the groupies who journey to Ann Arbor to fuck the 5 act as energy carriers, disseminating the revolution (and the crabs?) all the way from Lansing to Grosse Pointe-implying, of course, that these females have no revolutionary energy of their own. It is even possible to take the group's incessant revolutionary rhetoric—a rhetoric that as usual obscures real problems and alienates those who are to be organized—as an expression of machismo. But for the next few years the password for hip politics (which means rock politics) seems likely to be revolution-now. Since the 5 are courageous enough to push in that direction, I want to relate to them-

I think people who reject the 5-even if they object in

though it helps that I also like their music.

terms of the music, which emphasizes the violent, low-life aspects of rock that the art-subtlety-taste crowd would just as soon ignore—do so for political reasons. "They're trying to shove the revolution down everyone's throats," one kid has complained to me. Of course, he's right. The 5's methods have been very crude. If they don't respond to real needs within their apparent constituency by managing to change themselves (and their music) to achieve the popularity they want, then they will have failed, artistically and politically.

For that is the final irony of rock 'n' revolution. The political value of rock is a function of how many people it reaches, yet as rock becomes more political, it reaches fewer people. Almost everyone knows this, but no one knows what to do about it. John Lennon has scored a lot of points off the "snobs" who run the radical movement in this country—God knows he's right about that, anyway—and his methods, which have their similarity to Jerry Rubin's, demonstrate that he is serious. The Left does need new methods, new styles. Only it's not clear that the Lennon-Rubin methods are effective, either. In fact, all that really seems clear is that no matter how much you want to change things, it sure is hard to do.

July, 1969

IN MEMORY OF THE DAVE CLARK FIVE

This column is dedicated to the Dave Clark Five primarily because the Dave Clark Five, a totally unpretentious yet much-despised group that was ascendant during my favorite period in rock & roll &, 1964 through 1966, once recorded a hit called "Bits and Pieces," a wonderfully

serviceable rock throwaway, raucous and meaningless, perfect for shouting into the night. This column will collect bits and pieces of observation that interest me. Its unstructured quality will reflect the fact that my life is also in bits and pieces at the moment, and even music can't pull it together. I am writing because it's been quite a while, and it always makes me feel better to say hello to you folks out there in newspaper-land. I am also writing because I have made a pact with myself: I have sworn to write a real column for every Consumer Guide I concoct. There's lots of powerful good and powerful mediocre records out there for me to rate, and that will always get me off my ass.

My form has to be the travel diary. Over the past two months I have spent a lot of time driving and flying around the country. Such transience, especially when accompanied by other kinds of stress, gives music an exacerbated importance, somewhat distorted because my exposure becomes at once more selective and more intensive in the absence of the usual flow of new releases, press information, publications, and industry gossip. I gain new perspectives. Two years ago I was driving across the desert in a drive-away with no radio—no radio, the desert, can you dig it? At around sunset, somewhere in New Mexico-Grants, I believe-we picked up a hitchhiker. He was about eighteen, and he had grown up about two miles from me in Queens. One day in September he had just stuck out his thumb at the Whitestone Bridge. One ride had taken him to Columbus, Ohio, where he stayed a month and stuck out his thumb again. That ride took him to Grants. He had been waiting fifteen minutes when we picked him up. He was wearing light clothing, and all he carried in his pack was some socks and underwear and—get ready—a portable stereo. Plus some records, of course. He tried to balance the stereo on the seat, but it

was too bumpy, so he decided to cradle it in his two hands, cushioning it against the shock in midair. We listened to both sides of the first Grateful Dead album before his arms gave out. And it was that kid's unspoiled faith in the benignness of the universe, as we cut through the desert night, that transformed the Grateful Dead for me forever.

Which tale should properly segue into

ON THE ROAD, MID-SEPTEMBER. The truism holds that you can't really dig rock unless you know something about dope. Mostly as an index of my determined lack of enlightenment, I offer a countertruism. I don't think you can really dig rock & roll & unless you have some feeling for automobiles. This is not, perish the thought, to downgrade dope, but rather to remind everyone that the roots of rock have almost as much to do with driving as with sex and dancing. In the fifties all those things were intertwined into the adolescent experience. Not only did Chuck Berry write songs about driving; he also wrote songs that were good to drive to, that made you want to bang the steering wheel as you bopped around. And then there is the story of the great fifties producer (his identity changes with the story) who would not approve a mix until he played it back through the Motorola speakers he kept in his studio.

I write all this as a loyal New Yorker who didn't learn to drive until 1964. My feeling for automobiles is not of the bopping-around make-out-at-the-drive-in variety. By 1964, however, I had also logged thirty-five thousand hitchhiking miles, and shortly thereafter I became a newspaper reporter, driving fifty miles a day through the wilds of Essex County, New Jersey, with nothing between me and ennui but baseball and rock and roll. And so I care deeply about the way the car radio serves to shore you up against loneliness, distance, and boredom and keep you in touch

with the outside world. A good deal of my affection for the AM band is a tribute to the way it maintains artificial energy levels. A speed trip, as my disapproving coculturists might have it. And must there always be something wrong with that?

In any case, there I was in September, preparing to transport my soul to Colorado for a year. I had just acquired my fifth car since 1964 and discovered to my chagrin that the radio didn't work. Got it fixed Thursday to leave Saturday. On Friday night, during the last of moving, it conked out again. The plan had been to catch Crosby-Stills-Nash-Young late at the Fillmore and then pack all my stuff, including seven hundred albums and my good stereo, into the car for a dawn send-off. CSNY were great, thank Y, the best live act I've seen in months, and they played until after three, but that wasn't why I put off my departure for another nine hours. Uh-uh. I wanted to get the radio fixed.

Around three P.M. I take off, radio sound, moving from the Met game to WMCA to WABC, which depresses me as always, then on to a station in Allentown presided over by a resident maniac named, I think Super-Lou. Submarinerace watching lives. Nighttime. WLS Chicago. WCFL Chicago. WBZ Boston, Ernest Tubb in Nashville, Loretta Lynn tells the gals that if they want their man to act like a man, they'd better show him that they're a woman, and poses the age-old question: "Should a man do the dishes?" Static conceals her answer. Porter Wagoner tells how a figure in white robes once dissuaded him from shooting down an enemy soldier. WCFL is playing lots of oldies: the Shirelles, Rosie & the Originals, "Lipstick on Your Collar." I am sustained by the new Beatles album, "Suspicious Minds," and, yes, "Sugar Sugar." Daytime. WCOL Columbus. A local star named I. D. Blackwell sings a song called "Little Boy Red" that sounds like a cross between

"Bread and Butter" and "Rainy Day Women 12 & 35"; I know I will never hear it again. CKLW Windsor. My first contact with Dionne's "Loving Feeling": fabulous. The prevailing social theme seems to be "get together," a phrase that recurs in new records by the Hardy Boys, Paul Revere & the Raiders, and Steppenwolf. Football and baseball through St. Louis and then across Kansas at night, sporadic voices singing country-western songs. I approach my destination in Colorado as the sun comes up. Someone on the radio is reading the menu of every high-school lunchroom in the county.

COLORADO, LATE SEPTEMBER, Colorado was calculated to change my head, and it does, but not by turning me into a full-time GI organizer, as I had planned. It takes me six days to break up with Ellen, my political ally and consort of over three years. In the three weeks she's been there without me she's decided the time has come for us to smash monogamy. One of has to leave, so I do. Before that, however, we undergo another drastic head change, this one chemically induced. We spend the early hours in the mountains, but as we are beginning to come down, we get into the car and put on the radio. "Suspicious Minds" comes on; I exult. "AM radio is good," I say. "That's Bob's message to the world," Ellen comments, but when the driver laughs, she insists, "Don't laugh; some people don't have anything near that important to say." Far on, Ellen, and thanks for the compliment. Later that evening all voyagers amuse themselves by listening to "White Rabbit," with the speakers pressed to both ears. I do this, too, but what really makes me larger happens later, driving along a mountain road in some strange after-calm. This song with horns, Tijuana horns, and a vocal compounded of Billy Joe Royal and Sam Cooke comes on. It sounds so extraordinary to me.

LOS ANGELES, EARLY OCTOBER. I escape Colorado with a

lot of Consumer Guide records and a few standbys: Flying Burrito Bros., Velvet Underground, Wilson Pickett, Immortal Otis, "Between the Buttons." My host is Larry Dietz, a mostly retired pop writer who still gets mailings from a few companies, and I latch on to the two obvious ones from Capitol. Abbey Road captivates me as might be expected, but *The Band* is even better, an A-plus record if I've ever rated one.

That should come as no surprise to those of you—which I assume means most of you-who regarded Music from Big Pink as epochal. Though I somehow always managed to avoid saying so in print, I didn't. That the Woodstock wonders had come up with something original—the way each voice captured what is most essential about both soul and country inflection while imitating neither, for instance—was obvious the first time I heard the dub. But I also knew that even though it was theoretically everything rock should be, right down to that human roughness around the edges, I was in fact bored by the record and found most of it lugubrious. This opinion was at once so subjective and so unusual that I tended to share it only with friends. I kept trying to dig the record, but I always found myself liking the songs better when they were performed elsewhere. "I Shall Be Released" is one of Dylan's best songs, but I would rather hear Bobby Darin sing it than Richard Manuel, and there are even versions of "The Weight" that I prefer to The Band's, which is admittedly a joy. Finally I decided I'd been chicken long enough. Almost gleefully, I planned a column titled "The Final Apostasy" to castigate their second album.

I like the record instead, and in retrospect I can work out a lot of smart critical reasons why. Lyrics: John Phillips is more facile, John Sebastian more charming, Randy Newman more subtle, but Jaime Robbie Robertson (assuming

he is the sole lyricist, probably an oversimplification) has become a more inventive writer than any of them, the best in America this side of Dylan. Except for Dylan, he is the only American songwriter to write good fictional/ dramatic songs ("Rockin' Chair," "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down") and the only one to master the semiliterate tone, in which grammatical barbarisms and colloquial ellipses transcend affectation to enrich and qualify a song's meaning. Music: Big Pink won much praise for its natural instrumentation—each musician played one instrument with no overdubbing, so that every cut simulated live performance. But on this record Garth Hudson not only remains the best organist in rock but also fills in on seven additional instruments. Except for Robertson, who engineered, all the others double up as well. Yet because the overdubbed music has a casual, almost unprofessional edge to it—as do the lyrics, the vocals, the lead parts—that natural sound is unaffected. There is no distracting gloss to distort the added color, no studio effect.

As always, however, such analysis is extraneous. The Band is an A-plus record because it makes me jump around. "Across the Great Divide," the first cut, is to the dirgelike "Tears of Rage," which opens Big Pink, as a storefront church on East 7th Street is to Riverside Baptist. If the first album captures country-soul feeling without imitating it, this one does the same with old-time rock and roll. It is folksier and funkier, but after one listen I find myself in wholehearted approval of The Band's practice of closing their live sets with something by Little Richard.

I have access to a car in L.A. and note with some displeasure that KRLA, formerly the best station in America, is tightening its programming. I also notice that half the songs on the radio are about breaking up. And I also descend into a Sunset Strip hell-hole called Thee Experience to catch the Flying Burrito Bros. They are lousy.

SAN JOSE, MID-OCTOBER. A week with my superstraight brother. Object: avoid distraction, write piece. The scene is so bleak that I never even try to find out whether he owns a radio. The scene is so bleak I can't even dig the Mets.

BERKELEY, LATE OCTOBER. Back to the world of distractions where everyone talks about music. My hosts are Greil Marcus, who runs the review section of *Rolling Stone*, and his wife, Jenny. I learn that opinion has shifted against the Beatles. Everyone is putting down *Abbey Road*. Strangely, I find that I no longer want to hear it. One evening I change my mind and put it on. It gives me a headache.

Surrounded by all those review albums, I find myself cherishing moments in Jenny's Volks with the radio on. Occasionally I go to FM, but I always return to KYA. I have always tended to listen to lyrics while driving: At home there's generally something else to do, but in the car, despite audio problems, the radio is it. But now I discover that I have never really listened to those lyrics before. I have judged them, registered them intellectually, even become excited over them, but I haven't felt them. This is not a profound observation, of course, but it sets me thinking. Assume that a song like "Suspicious Minds" is written by a professional songwriter with a certain gift for thematic calculation. He knows that performance and arrangement and melody sell records, not words. His job is not so much to write a coherent lyric as to come up with certain easily identified, salable phrases and situate them appropriately, so that people will be almost forced to go around humming, let us say, "Caught in a trap/ We can't get out." * Even the more serious songwriters perpetuate the system. If they're good at what they do, their best

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phrases and their best music come together, while most of the average stuff is submerged in between. That is why the old complaints about song banality are irrelevant: People just identify; they don't analyze. But what happens when someone finds that the banal song situation is his life? He listens to every word. Suddenly all that waste verbiage becomes immensely powerful, almost by accident, and the power is real, only it resides in the perceiver rather than in what is perceived. And is that Art? The perceiver doesn't much care.

The songs that mean most to me in Berkeley don't quite fit into such a category, because the same process tends to elevate good songs as well as indifferent ones. I become obsessive about "Undun," by the Guess Who, and about "Take a Letter, Maria," that strange Billy Joe Royal/Sam Cooke song I first heard while drifting over the road in Colorado. The lyric is not only coherent but also almost complex, in the narrative tradition of country-western music, but the singer, it turns out, is a black man named R. B. Greaves, and the Herb Alpert horns were recorded in Muscle Shoals. The song is in the form of a monologue from a businessman (black capitalism triumphs again) to his secretary, Maria; the chorus, a letter she is supposed to compose, the verses, his conversational comment. The businessman has been working late every night to build a good-life for his rhymes-with-wife. One night he gets home a little early and finds her "in the arms of another man." He walks out forever, and in the final stanza he asks Maria to have dinner with him.

This record is a classic example of the levels on which a good song operates. Musically, it is an American hodge-podge, with its raceless singer and its Hollywood fluff arrangement recorded amid all that Alabama funk. And what is its audience? If top-forty radio is kid radio, who's gonna buy a song about a businessman who splits on his wife? And isn't the device of addressing the song to

the secretary a little, well, arty, especially when she is transformed at the end from a device or at best a presence into a character in whom the narrator evinces personal interest? What's going on here? Why is this so complicated? And how does it all connect to the blatant male chauvinism of the song's basic assumption, which is that some asshole who devotes his life to his job instead of his woman—even if he does want a good-life for his rhymes-with-wife—can just walk out on her without a word of explanation when she does him wrong in return? And what does this have to do with my life? The answer, as I tool around in that little Volks, always seems to be the same: plenty.

LOS ANCELES, EARLY NOVEMBER. An attempted reconciliation with Ellen is combined with a joint interview with Mick Jagger. The interview is tense, but it is genial compared to the reconciliation. While we wait for Jagger, who is two hours late, Ellen puts on Abbey Road, which from her Colorado fastness she has grown to love. Damned if she isn't right—flawed but fine. Because the world is round it turns her on. Charlie Watts tells us he likes it too.

DETROIT, EARLY NOVEMBER. The plan had been to travel on to Denver for the Stones' warm-up concert, but instead I fly to Detroit, where Diane is saying good-bye to her relatives before moving to Guatemala. In the Warner Bros. promo pack I obtained in L.A. I note that the Kinks, who I have missed all over the country, will be at the Grande with Joe Cocker. Diane can't go but suggests I stay over an extra day and go with Sue. Well, the Grande is speed city and the Kinks thorazine valley, but Joe Cocker is Joe Cocker in all his spastic greatness, the ultimate turn-on. Hmm, yeah, wow. I stay with Sue for a week.

ON THE ROAD, MID-NOVEMBER. Driving to Washington in a Volkswagen with three women activists. We get WCFL most of the way. "Wedding Bell Blues" comes on, another radio experience. I think Laura Nyro is a blowzy purveyor of bullshit sensuality. I think it is slightly shame-

ful that intelligent people revere her. But as a composer of bullshit-meaningful songs for a great bullshit-meaningful group like the 5th Dimension, she's great, and I have learned to enjoy "Wedding Bell Blues." Two women in the car (not Sue) argue with me on the grounds that "WBB" implicitly defines woman in terms of her man. I will not bore you with the argument, but what it boils down to is this: The women are right, but it doesn't matter to me. There is some rock & roll & that can be understood as its creators intended it, more or less, but that's only half of it. What most excites me is a much richer phenomenon: the way that intention tends to fit into a larger and more complex pattern of art and politics and pleasure. "Wedding Bell Blues" is slick-robust, like Herb Alpert in Muscle Shoals, and so is the 5th Dimension, and so are the needs the song fulfills in its audience and even the desperate need to believe in something earthy out of which I imagine it was written by Laura Nyro herself. It's not quite real, but it's far from false, and that is very sad and very beautiful. Like most things, if you're in the mood.

WASHINGTON, MID-NOVEMBER. Sitting on the cold grass there is a good song from John Hartford and "Give Peace a Chance" and Arlo Sings Woody and a lot of 1963 bullshit solidarity. Jimi Hendrix is supposed to show up, but I can't wait. I march to the Justice Department instead. Chuck, Chuck, Chuck Berry, stop the trial, free Jerry.

NEW YORK, LATE NOVEMBER. No music on the bus and most of my stuff is still in Colorado, but one artifact remains: my jukebox. Well, it's really Ellen's, but I have squatter's rights. Three immediate substitutions. Off: "Get It on Home," "Darling Be Home Soon," "Let's Spend the Night Together." On: "Take a Letter, Maria," "Undun," "You Can't Always Get What You Want."

LOOK AT THAT STUPID GIRL

I have not made an exhaustive study, but I have been struck by how little writing has appeared on the subject of rock and women. A woman should be writing this. But no woman has written it yet, and I've felt for at least a year that somebody had better. Because I believe women's oppression demands the most far-reaching analysis of social structures ever attempted, I feel obliged to ignore the certain ridicule of the satisfied oppressors and the inevitable resentment of the conscious oppressed and try to analyze the problem myself.

I received my own sexism sensitivity training from a militant feminist who is almost as fervent about rock as I am, and I know that to a lesser extent such enthusiasm is shared by many active women's liberationists, so I don't believe indifference causes the silence. On the contrary, many women are explicitly perplexed by the paradox of their attraction to a music that is not only male chauvinist—almost everything is—but even, to call upon a useful distinction, male supremacist. I think a similar paradox plagues the women's movement as a whole.

To charge that the typical feminist wants to "be like a man" is a canard. She wants only the freedom to explore what it is to be a woman. But in order to gain such freedom she is obliged to gather power, and in the process of gathering power she accrues "masculine" characteristics. Without some minimal share of "male" autonomy/activism/energy (these may seem like perfectly unexceptionable qualities, but they aren't when, as is so often the case, they block their equally unexceptionable opposites: communality/responsiveness/equanimity), she

would never be able to assert herself in the first place. And it is with self-assertiveness, counted so "unfeminine" by many men (and women), that her struggle must begin. Of course, that is not where it's supposed to end. In the most productive pattern of self-liberation the new feminist both declares her independence—from her man, her job, her life training—and discovers her solidarity—with other women.

A like pattern of release and new community emerges from a political analysis of rock and roll. Musically, rock has always been an affirmation of energy-aggressive where pop was acquiescent and folk reflective—and it has always instilled in its audience a penchant for activity, beginning, I suppose, with foot-tapping and ending, I suppose, with state-smashing. The independence this activity implies and reifies has also led to solidarity, mostly generational, with music the great adhesive. In fact, insofar as the new feminism results from a certain style of heightened political awareness that began with the civilrights movement, it can be said to have some of its roots in the adolescent rebellion symbolized by rock and roll. This is a far-fetched rationalization, and there is no need to take it as more than a curiosity, but it does help resolve the paradox. Women like rock not only because it has human value but also because some of that human value is, or has been, good for them as women.

I assume that by now I have lost most of those who begin this column every time in the hope that I will be writing about rock and roll. I have lost them, dudes and chicks both. After all, they're in it for the sex in the first place. The metaphor around which rock's liberating energy collects itself—the content of that energy—is sexual. Since we grew up in an antisexual society, we have tended to embrace that giant breakthrough with the total passion we think it deserves. But because rock draws upon traditional

folk attitudes dating back (at least) to African tribal dances and Scottish ballads—or, more directly, blues and country music—its sexual energy, like all formalized sexual energy I know about, is also sexist energy. It posits the classic pattern of man the pursuer/actor and woman the pursued/acted-upon. The subculture that is identified with rock—and the more precise the identification, the more this is true—has instituted this pattern with a vengeance that is almost literal, sloughing off all the genteel post-Victorian camouflage so many of us grew up with and getting back to basics. For the hard-core rock freak, a chick's place is not only in the home but between the sheets, and a feminist is more fucked up than fucked over and better off just plain fucked.

The sexist message can be discerned in one form or another in just about every rock song that concerns men and women, but lyrics, except when they are clearly audible and blatant, are the least of it. It is in the theater of rock, both in the media and in live performance, that sexism really prevails. Don't even think about groupies—just name female rock musicians. The idea, of course, is ridiculous. Among concert-calibre groups, the total is two drummers—Maureen Tucker, of the Velvet Underground, and Ruth Underwood, of the Hamilton Face Band—and the two women who perform with Sly Stone. There are also a few singer-pianists and many folkies who accompany themselves on (low-energy) acoustic guitar. No electric guitarists at all.

It is possible to argue that women—as a function of cultural deprivation, of course, not innate disadvantage—have little bent for instrumental improvisation. As rock exists now, that may be true, although if so, it is even more true of jazz. But the deeper truth, I think, is more unpleasant than any cant about cultural deprivation. First, women cannot play rock guitar because men won't listen

to them, and there is no need to belabor phallic analogies to explain why. Second, women cannot play rock because they cannot and/or do not want to create in blues-based male styles.

Granted, this is speculation, and granted too that there have to be a lot more men with guitar chops than women. The nice thing about such speculations is that anyone is free to make them because they're never fairly tested. I know by name of three female rock groups: Joy of Cooking (wonderful pun), the Enchanted Forest (who according to a recent Rat were put through the ringer by a male manager), and the Ace of Cups. I saw the Ace of Cups two years ago. They were strong vocally but didn't have much instrumental kineticism. They were, however, much more than professional, and I think it is significant that the group, despite its professionalism and gimmick appeal, never got a recording contract. I hope for my sake and for the sake of the music that women see fit to defy the odds and enter rock in capacities other than Resident Female Principle.

You see, I have felt over the past year and a half a steadily increasing disaffection with rock's male chauvinism. I am acutely uncomfortable with songs of cock-pride (Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love," for instance), even though I still dig them as artifacts. I perceive all too well the other side of the born-to-be-wild theme—sorry to break your heart, babe, but the road is calling me. I am so far gone that I am offended by the Guess Who's "No Time" and uplifted by Janis's "Turtle Blues." I listen to "Do Right Woman," purportedly a hymn to the equality of the sexes, and hear its message: A well-fucked woman has nothing to complain about. I can't even take the goodhearted condescension of John Sebastian without wincing a little. So far, of course, I have managed to overcome my distress. Music is one of my great pleasures, and I'm

not about to give it up. But there are times when I wonder how acutely conscious women continue to stand for it.

The carrot-and-stick of sexism is subtle and pervasive. Sexism predates any political or economic system, and it is carried by the entire culture. Just because it can be so far-reaching, feminist analysis fascinates the kamikaze left. A woman in a properly destructive frame of mind can justifiably reject almost all the art that has ever existed in the world. I can't, and I won't. My love for popular culture has always been nourished by one overriding assumption—that there is a human spirit strong enough to break through the distortions of any structure imposed upon it.

Whether we admit it or not, we always perceive art through a built-in set of compensations; we judge it and respond to it not only in terms of what and how it does and says but also in terms of what we feel about the limitations of its creator. No civil-libertarian atheist blames John Locke for having been a deist in 1690. Unless a woman wants to contend that it was only masochism that induced her to dig on "Heart of Stone" in 1965, then she has to admit that there was something there—some energy, as my rhetoric would have it—that was good for her. Even if the energy of rock is nothing more than sublimated (or not so sublimated) machismo, such machismo can be a step on the way out, a naïve reaction against apparent sources of oppression, and in that way it is beautiful.

There is another false trap here. Aesthetic reactions ought to come from the whole person. When a woman is turned off by some cocksure chauvinist on the stage of the Fillmore East, she is not "judging art politically." On the contrary, she is responding naturally to what she has come to feel as her own experience, just like the black man who doesn't want to be called boy, even by D. W. Griffith. The quality of a man's response to such implied insults has

a lot in common with the quality of a white's response—secondhand, perhaps, but also gut-level if he's conscious enough. Nevertheless, I think hypersensitivity ought to be avoided. There is a sense, for instance, in which "Back Street Girl" is a sexist song, but there is also a sense in which it is a biting, accurate indictment of sexism—not to mention class oppression—at its most humiliating. In this and other, vaguer cases I tend toward the kinder interpretation and reaction. When you love something as much as I love rock, that's probably a good rule and instinct.

I am rarely sanguine about politics these days. I believe the women's movement is going to make a lot of people, male and female, excruciatingly unhappy before it starts doing a whole lot of unequivocal good, but for all that it must continue, and it will. The prospects for a sexually integrated music in the near future are nonexistent, but it's nice to think that the next time music is revitalized, women may do the revitalizing. Maybe the sensibilities of all of us will be extended in ways difficult to imagine and trying to undergo, but deeply pleasurable when we get there. Whenever that is.

June, 1970

A MUSICAL WEEKEND

It was six P.M. Saturday, the apogee of the Big Sur Folk Festival at the Monterey Fairgrounds, and the Beach Boys were thumping out an old Coasters' song called "Riot in Cell Block Number Nine." They hadn't changed. Brian wasn't there, and Dennis was off doing a road movie with James Taylor, and his replacement had black hair and a

Polish (Jewish?) name, and Mike Love's beard was longer than ever, and even though they've done r&b novelty songs in the past, this one seemed (to me if not them) more, well, relevant than "Long Tall Texan." But they hadn't really changed. They were still goofy and unsexy and good-humored and innocent as only Los Angeles surfers, which none of them are, can be innocent, and that was doubtless the main reason the press section was waxing somewhat enthusiastic, clapping and jiving. Around the time of "Good Vibrations" the audience, which had been quite cheerless as the set began, picked up and went into some semidutiful joy-of-rock-and-rolling of its own. It was nice. Good old rock and roll. Good old auto-hype. Good old Monterey.

The afternoon had been disappointing, or anyway, remarkably low-key. There was the opening from Joan Baez, under whose auspices the festival has been held-in Big Sur, at Esalen—since 1967. Kris Kristofferson and Merry Clayton proved themselves no more and no less than the strictly music-industry phenomena that their histories his as the secret genius of Nashville, hers as the all-time studio soulchick-would suggest they are. Kristofferson did introduce another Nashville singer-songwriter named Chris Gantry, who despite his one major credit—"Dreams of the Everyday Housewife"-provided a good ten minutes of verbal musical pyrotechnics. And Merry Clayton did get everyone on their feet for a while. But then, her backup band, a terrible demi-Sly outfit, had more success, so it was probably just the old superspade shuck once again. John Hartford provided an enjoyable set, wry and quiet, with a little country fiddling for energy. And then the Beach Boys came on. Yeah, it was nice enough.

And nice was all anyone had a right to expect. The Big Sur Folk Festival has gathered a reputation over the years: no advertising, no mass influx, no paid performers, all proceeds to the Baez nonviolence foundation. This kind of reputation is usually referred to as underground, which means that it is strongest among two overlapping audiences—those who are hip and those whose business it is to know what is hip—and that most people don't get wind of it. In this case the reputation is combined with a variation on the old folk aesthetic/ethic: no star trips, no reveling in decibels, and lots of acoustic guitars. I've got very little against acoustic guitars anymore, although I certainly prefer the postrock appetizers (Chris Gantry, who bears watching) to the prerock leftovers (Mark Spoelstra, who got something closely resembling the hook later on), but the result seemed, well, irrelevant to me. The ideal setting for an acoustic guitar, I think, is a room filled with people who like each other, or a small club.

Oddly enough, the only purely acoustic music at Big Sur/Monterey came from the two rock ex-superstars who appeared: John Phillips (who sounded fine when he sang songs from his own album and thin, not to say spectral, when he tried to reprise old Mamas & Papas material) and Country Joe McDonald (who has finally regained his old authority). Most of the acoustic people opted for drums behind and electric guitar alongside. The result was intimate, personal, and never indecently ambitious. Since the crowd numbered six or seven thousand, it was a peculiar kind of intimacy. Yet given the outdoor setting and the hordes who usually attend such affairs, intimacy is what it was.

Now, there is some question whether those who anticipated the weekend most acutely were in the mood for intimacy. Perhaps. But in the back of everyone's mind was the Haight and flower power and all those heavy vibes. It would be the Monterey International Pop Festival all over again; 1970 would become 1967. We were returning to the wellspring after three years of bureaucratic dam-up.

Despite its strict antihype, the Big Sur event was getting too big for Esalen anyway, and this year it looked as if Joe Cocker wanted to show. Just imagine what a destructive effect an hegira of Joe Cocker freaks might have on that carefully secluded interactive environment. So on Saturday there would be a second Monterey Pop Festival, and the night after, to top that, the three remaining original San Francisco groups—Quicksilver, the Airplane, and the Dead—were to open a new Winterland, one more attempt to break Bill Graham's death-grip on rock concerts in Hip City. Needless to say, I had a pass.

I remember Monterey as a turning point, the beginning of a hope that would have seemed entirely chimerical a year or two before and proved to be exactly that. Yes, that was where I had first seen Quicksilver, the Airplane, and the Dead, but it was also my first exposure to Jimi Hendrix and Al Wilson. I had shaken hands with Brian Jones there and led my piece on the festival with a long tribute to Otis Redding. They were gone too. Monterey was a happy accident, and I no longer placed any credence in its myth.

And yet I attended Monterey Two and participated willingly in the little daydream of California's pop cognoscenti. The big thing, they all seemed to agree, was to avoid the mob. Keep the numbers down. Shun the mass with its mass taste. Let the city government move in with its decibel-meters. Let it be a one-day affair. Perhaps the sense of that lost promise would be regained, if only for a day or two. Perhaps everyone would have a great time.

But it was only a nice time, a barely pleasant time, because you don't hedge your bets and gain a great time. The first Monterey produced something bigger than Derek Taylor and Emmett Grogan could have handled between them, namely, Woodstock and Altamont and what the trades refer to as the next billion-dollar business. And the

best anyone who wants to be comfortable with all this can achieve is a retreat.

That suited some. Al Aronowitz, who likes to exert that expansive sense of one's own prerogatives that accrues to reporters as it does to few men, dropped down after Jimi Hendrix's funeral to pick up on the weekend. Between the afternoon and the evening concerts he stood backstage near the free-for-some organic food and compared this festival to others he had attended over the summer. At the Isle of Wight, he reported, the crowd had gotten completely out of hand. Cans and bottles were thrown at the press section. Fences were wrecked. It was almost a free-for-all. This one was truly peaceful. Aronowitz was pleased that at least one portion of hip culture was living up to its own pretensions.

Joe McDonald, coiffed so stylishly it looked like he was wearing Aqua Net, listened to Aronowitz for a while, grinning. It was weird to see the famous Berkeley toughie dressed like a try-out for Harper's Bizarre. But the old Joe was underneath.

"Oh yes," he said. "This crowd is much better behaved. They're well-behaved children, good children. Good children."

I drove back with Sam Silver, of *Good Times*. As befitted a political rock writer, he was disturbed at the lack of politics. Only Country Joe, who had written a song for Eldridge Cleaver and included "The Ballad of Hattie Carroll" in his performance, and Joan Baez, who not only sang her protest songs but also spoke briefly for the lettuce boycotts and other good causes, offered any content. And people's music, where was the people's music? I tend to scoff at talk of people's music, but Silver made some good points. There really are people's bands in Berkeley, and some chicano music would surely have been more, well,

relevant than the Nashville cats who dominated. But Joan Baez, with one foot in the record industry and the other in the wounds of the world, doubtless feels more comfortable with Nashville. What strange amalgams ensue when the pop attitude is adopted halfheartedly.

I was staying in Berkeley with Susan Lydon, who used to make her living writing about rock and roll and women's liberation and now just makes her living. She is involved with what might be described (by me if not her) as personal (and mostly historical) popular arts—crafts, really-like furniture and embroidery and jewelry, and early the next morning we drove to the flea market in Alameda to look for stuff. Many longhairs exhibited wares there, mostly Susan's sort of thing, but a few of the longhairs were into pop. These tended to be hard-nosed in their business practices. One guy wanted five bucks for a Dr. Pepper thermometer. Late in the afternoon I came across a longhair named Barry who was selling comic books and old records. He also exhibited a pretty good portable phonograph for fifty dollars. Slightly overpriced, I thought, but Susan had been living without a record player for months, and maybe she could deal with him. We were both feeling sick, and I was inspired to offer my Winterland pass as part of the bargain. But that wasn't enough to get the price into Susan's range, and finally he agreed to come over and trade.

Barry had blond hair and what I assumed to be surfer or ex-surfer muscles. He brought a friend to judge the value of Susan's goods. She showed him an Arabian tapestry, a fur rug, Oriental rugs, small pieces of embroidery. Barry seemed unmoved. What records did she have, he kept asking. Could she get him any dope? How big were her lids? Oh, Barry was very hip. Susan was getting pissed, and to mollify her, Barry took to admiring certain of her

possessions—a Tiffany lamp worth more than his record player, a quilt.

"What do you call that?" he asked.

"A patchwork quilt," Susan said. "It's a pretty good one."

"A Patrick quilt?" Barry asked.

"A patchwork quilt," Susan said.

"What, what?"

"Patchwork, patchwork," everyone repeated.

"Oh," Barry said, "patchwork. I couldn't understand you. Christ, these New York accents"

Barry had good taste in music, though. He ended up taking my Winterland pass, the Arabian tapestry, the fur rug, twenty-six dollars, and two albums I knew Warner Bros. would replace, Live/Dead and Neil Young's After the Gold Rush. If someone were to ask me to name the two best albums of the past twelve months, I'd probably answer Live/Dead and After the Gold Rush. It's reassuring to learn how good music can change the heads of people like Barry.

One reason I didn't mind forgoing my visit to Winterland was that the opening was also the occasion of an important day in the history of media: the first live quadraphonic television broadcast. Quadraphonic is fourspeaker, all-around sound. Two FM stereo stations can cooperate with one TV station on one quadraphonic broadcast. Do you remember how you resisted stereo when it first appeared? Well, you're not resisting it now, are you? And soon, given the continuance of our present economic system, most of us will be listening to music over four speakers, more complex cartridges and amplifiers, and more expensive phonograph records.

Far be it from me to obstruct the progress of art. Susan and I went up to Greil and Jenny Marcus's, and he set up the TV and his big FM tuner and two other radios, and

we settled down to four channels of the Grateful Dead. No, it wasn't like being there. The Marcus house was less busy and less exciting than Winterland seemed to be. But it was more lifelike than stereo, you bet.

Between acts the two radio stations competed in filling in the void of no music. And then something very strange happened. One station learned that Janis Joplin had just died, and the other didn't. So as the announcer on one station rattled on about the red of someone's guitar blending into the red of his shirt, the other talked about heroin in a blank undertone. The displacement was eerie. Fittingly, our talk turned to Altamont, and then festivals, and Greil mentioned that in aerial photographs of the Isle of Wight Festival there was a well-defined patch right in front of the stage that looked relatively uncongested. That was for press and VIP's. Behind it, all of the fans were compacted together, like dead plankton in a red tide.

We didn't listen to the Airplane, and before Quicksilver came on, Susan and I went home. We listened to Johnny Darrell and *Abbey Road* and *Tracy Nelson Country* on her newly acquired stereo before going to sleep.

October, 1970

ROCK IS OBSOLESCENT, BUT SO ARE YOU

It was sometime in the middle of 1968, a year or so after *Sgt. Pepper*, that the rock-is-dead movement began, and it has done nicely ever since, picking up adherents at a slightly slower rate than the music itself. The result is a virtual standoff that often discomforts those who regard their commitment to rock as binding, but it really represents a healthy balance. People who were turned on by

rock early, which by today's lax standards means around the time of Rubber Soul, (often) weary of the music and move on to Webern or politics or astrology or teevee, but there are always others who gradually intensify their interest until they too reach a peak, turn off for a while in turn, and then (often) return to a more natural level. This has also been the publicity pattern. After the febrile coverage of 1967 the big media overreacted against that-youthshit for a while, but now the music receives more or less the quantity (if not the quality) of attention it deserves. You could even say rock is better than ever. Record companies are once again signing new groups, although not, thank the powers, with the greedy enthusiasm of a few years ago. The LP charts are much heavier with Our Music than they were during the golden era. The concert business thrives despite exorbitant performance fees and seat prices. And a new phenomenon, the rock movie, is a sudden fad among nervous cinemoguls.

Yet it would be willful to insist that there hasn't been a lessening of anticipation and excitement, and many would claim the letdown is basically artistic. I agree only from my own peculiar perspective, because by "artistic" I do not mean "musical." The most unequivocal portents, after all, transcend music per se-Joplin and Hendrix dead, the festival disasters, and the breakup of the Beatles. Not that the music is all good: I don't like a lot of what is popular myself. I am uncomfortable with horn groups like Chicago and Blood, Sweat & Tears, which fill me with nostalgia for the (retrospectively) unpretentious crudity of white blues. I am saddened by the humdrum success of CSNY, which never makes records as vibrant as its live performances; Steppenwolf, which grinds on long after having exhausted its originality; and Grand Funk Railroad, which charms me in theory and oppresses me in practice. I am no longer entirely sanguine about AM radio, which

with a few brilliant and significant exceptions seems to have returned to the pre-Beatles level, enjoyable enough but less than thrilling. Meanwhile, black popular music, which ought to be getting us out of this mess, founders in self-conscious racial confusion, much as it did a decade ago.

The good, though, can be very good, and there is a lot of it. Stage Fright was a disappointment, even to a distant admirer like myself, but it is undeniable that The Band has powered a move toward disciplined music that provides deep and accessible pleasure even as it coagulates in its own conventions. Musicianship, so long just a shibboleth, has become a communicative reality—the list of innovative guitarists seems to lengthen with every round of concerts. Talented singer-songwriters continue to mature or arise fully grown from the head of Bob Dylan. The end result, at least as I calculate it: There has been no significant (downward) change in the number of satisfying rock albums released annually since 1966. If anything, the number has been going up.

Three factors contribute to the illusion that there has been a decrease. One is the tendency of superstars to stagnate and/or detour into temporary ruts. Two is the glut of rock albums and the consequent high shit ratio. But most important is three, the cycle of excitement and ennui I have described. What this means, even for me, is that it is harder to get off on good music than it used to be. That is why we tend to ignore the good music, and the reasons for our lowered response suggest the true shape of rock's artistic decline.

The aesthetic originality of rock never inhered in its strictly musical qualities. Even its stubborn simplicity—the stupid beat, the changeless changes—was anticipated in a more sophisticated way in the visual arts. But the visual artist, for all his multiples and collage elements and

found objects and stories in Harper's Bazaar, could barely approximate one effect that rock achieved fully and naturally. That effect was public presence. Because it was popular, rock implied broad new settings for creative force. Two of its most pervasive characteristics—its unrelenting eclecticism and the perceptual distortions endemic to the star system—also helped extend this contextualizing power, this ability to make new connections between things already known, to dignify the ephemeral and demean the profound. It was contextualizing power that provided the ground for rock's most appropriate aesthetic effect: shock. Rock gimcrackery is as old as "Sh-Boom," but as the music began to be taken seriously, its surprise became a serious pleasure. The reason rock has engendered such rhapsodic excitement—and still does, even after all the alarums, for casual listeners who suddenly dive in or for old (usually young) fans who are inspired to dig to new levels—is not merely that it offers so much, emotionally and intellectually and physically, but that it does not at first appear to do so. Yet as more and more of its audience becomes accustomed to this possibility, the excitement of discovery naturally diminishes. And so the artistic vitality of the music diminishes, too, because it is that sense of discovery, that startling perspective that can skew the whole world for a week or a year of instants, that renders rock truly important.

In the past, one aspect of rock discovery had to do with a sense of unity with listeners who were often quite different from oneself: ghetto kids, heads and hippies, bikers, prepubescents. Now that communion has been sundered into sects, often friendly but always in some sort of competition. Likewise, the ability of rock stars to make us care passionately about themselves was largely unprecedented; many of us (not in the big rock audience, but in the audience likely to be reading this) might have cared that way about real artists, but not with the same suspension of disbelief in the human reality of public image. Now, I think, the obviously destructive aspects of stardom (symbolized by the festival debacles on the one hand and the doom of Joplin and Hendrix on the other) disturb even the palmiest pop optimist. Even eclecticism is exhibiting its unattractive side, for what is all that Ellington-cum-Satie, Las-Vegas-lounge rock, and psychedelic psoul if not eclectic?

Not that the related ideals of broad-based appeal and stardom and eclecticism have been abandoned. On the contrary, the last two years have seen the development of a new phenomenon, which I call semipopular music. Semipopular music is music that is appreciated—I use the term advisedly-for having all the earmarks of popular music except one: popularity. Just as semiclassical music is a systematic dilution of highbrow preferences, semipopular music is a cross-bred concentration of fashionable modes. I'm not putting it down, for this is the music I am always praising ecstatically—the r&b takeoffs of Van Morrison and Randy Newman and Nolan, the easy electronicism of Terry Riley, the Wayne-Newton-with-a-bite of Nilsson, the self-conscious hillbilly plainsong of Tracy Nelson Country and (a very convoluted case) the Everly Brothers' Roots. Indeed, since writers and musicians usually prefer semipopular music, some of it even becomes popular; The Band and the Grateful Dead and Rod Stewart could all be argued into the category. My favorite examples, however, are untarnished by such associations. First is the Flying Burrito Bros., who on their first album offered the most outrageous combinations of pedal-steel and wah-wah distortion, verbal obscurity and country soul, all through the medium of a lot of ex-Byrd not-quitestars. But even better is the Stooges, whose sole purported attraction, Iggy, continues to possess every star quality except fame.

I suppose semipopular music is decadent. It wouldn't be the first time that decadence has been the source of acute aesthetic pleasure. And indeed, the way it is so often enjoyed—quietly, stoned perhaps, in the company of a few friends, on a sound system that can convey its technological nuance—is very insular. But because it originates in a certain fondness for what other people like—a kind of musical populism much more concrete than that of the folk music of the early sixties—I think it is basically salubrious, a source of private strength that doesn't recoil from public connection.

We really were very unrealistic, for some part of us expected music always to suffuse our world, and not only that but reshape it as well. That it could seem to do so for even a few years was something of a miracle. Now the time has come to regroup. I am no proponent of the politics of change-your-head, but I do believe public action must be balanced with personal resilience. Maybe the Beatles, each retreating into the personal for a while, are still our vanguard. Oh, I know, not really. But it's a kick to look at it that way for a time, isn't it?

November, 1970

5

Consumer Guide (16)

THE HUMBLEST FORM creates its own imperatives, even the lowly Consumer Guide. This abstract, which began as sensible conservation of energy, has gathered its own inertia, until now it has changed my listening habits and perhaps my taste itself. As I've explained before, reviewers share the occupational hazard of ennui and for that reason tend to flatter work that is idiosyncratic or formally elegant. In an effort to combat this prejudice-not that I could ever hope (or want) to conquer it entirely— I listen to certain records more and more. These are mostly efforts that seem competent but undistinguished on the surface yet nevertheless (usually due to some sort of hype, to be honest, although a word from one of my far-flung advisers or some quirkish detail will also suffice) offer some hope of quality. After all, I say to myself, the guy who pays cash for an album isn't going to give up after one or two tries, so why should I? Often I find myself getting into stuff I dismissed at first, which is all right except that it tends to flatten my response simply because I spread it so thin. Even the pattern of my pleasure-listening changes. I often find myself playing records I kind of like, even for visitors, and eventually I kind of like them more.

All of which balls up my trusty rating system and spoils my fun. After all, who wants to give eight A's out of twenty records? Not nasty old me.

As I keep insisting, I do believe there is an objective correlative, as we used to say. That is, music is getting better all the time, and only a few labels release a consistent stream of crud. There is still quite a bit of crud, of course, some of it well received by all the fools who don't agree with me, most of it ignored by everyone. What's getting harder and harder is to distinguish between good, better, and best, and I'm no longer sure the Consumer Guide helps much. Well, what the hell. You just read it for yocks anyway, right? So here's another.

Bull: This Is Bull (Paramount). Speak for yourself, Ferdinand. D.

Eric Burdon and War: The Black-Man's Burdon (MGM). On the front cover of this album is a black man in silhouette. On the back cover Eric, looking paunchy, rests his head in the crotch of a black woman straddled above him. He also holds her ankles. Inside the jacket seven men, presumably the band, occupy the background of a full-length photo of a grassy field. Six of the men are black; five are bare-chested. In the foreground recline two naked blondes who obviously belong in a centerfold. The left hand of one is thrown back to reveal a clean-shaven and possibly airbrushed underarm, so that her right hand does not quite conceal her pubic hair. Her companion hides her sex with both hands. The only man who is standing appears to be walking toward the women. He has removed the belt from his pants. D plus.

The Byrds: (Untitled) (Columbia). I'm sorry. I love them—or do I mean him?—too, but it finally seems to be ending. The new songs are unarresting, the harmonies weak or just absent, and the live performance... well, I'm

sure you had to be there. I was, lots of times, and I guess I will be again, but as always it will be more to demonstrate my devotion than to get off, and such events don't transfer very well to vinyl. I'm sorry. C plus.

Canned Heat: Future Blues (Liberty). I miss Alan Wilson more intensely than I ever enjoyed him. The pitch of involvement Joplin and Hendrix could demand at their best made their deaths seem proper and even—and this is a still more outrageous way of putting it-metaphorically correct: the only way to finish the act, so to speak, after all that power had begun to run down. However much sense Wilson's death meant in his life, which was never happy, it was inappropriate to his art, which continued vital to the end. On this record his creative force, never imposing but always there to be enjoyed, is at a peak, and the rest of the band coheres alongside him. Bob Hite finally sounds like himself, and Harvey Mandel and the rhythm section really cook together. The original material (most of it by Wilson) is excellent, and the rest is perfectly apropos. I never much liked their previous LP's, but I'm sorry there won't be more like this one. A.

Jesse Davis (Atco). Perfunctory funk from Taj Mahal's lead guitarist. His own songs are forgettable, his cover versions flat, and despite an embarrassment of studio help (Eric, Leon, Merry, Gram, etc.) the music never gets off the ground. C.

Derek and the Dominoes: Layla (Atco). Reviewers (myself included) tend to be hostile toward double albums because they mean double listening work—it is almost always feasible, after all, to put the best of a set on one superrecord—but even though this one has the look of a greedy, lazy, slapdash studio session, I think it may be Eric Clapton's most consistent recording. The high-keyed precision of his guitar contrasts nicely with the relaxed rocking of Whitlock/Radle/Gordon, and

Duane Allman's overdubbing is unbelievable. Much better than his solo LP, one of those rare instances when musicians join together for profit and a lark and come up with a mature and original sound. A.

The Guess Who: Share the Land (RCA Victor). Having encountered the versatility, strength, and honest ambition of this AM group, we now confront its limitations, which appear almost fatal. The replacement of guitarist-composer Randy Bachman by Heavy Greg Leskiw doesn't help. Their most unflawed and uninteresting record. C.

Jimi Hendrix: The Cry of Love (Reprise). I was never a Hendrix freak, so perhaps my suspicion that this is his best LP is irrelevant. As usual, the individual compositions are nothing special, but the tone of the whole is superb. All the pretensions have been loosened just a little but not (as on Band of Gypsies) abandoned altogether. An excellent testament. A minus.

Elton John: Tumbleweed Connection (Uni). Did someone call Grand Funk Railroad a hype? What about this puling phony? C plus.

Janis Joplin: *Pearl* (Columbia). I'm sorry to say that at moments this lags a little, especially because the potential of Janis and Full Tilt Boogie was, by this evidence, enormous. Great anyway, of course. A minus.

Mashmakhan (Epic). Gene Lees says: "I like Mashmakhan first of all because it swings. There is an enormous difference between swinging and pounding. Most rock music does the latter: it just jumps up and down in one place, with no sense of rhythmic propulsion. Sadly, people who dig it are incapable of hearing real swing when it occurs." And on and on, every word bought by Epic, concluding: "This is a hell of a good group." I dare you to spend money to decide which of us is right. D.

Curtis Mayfield: Curtis (Curtom). My grade reflects a certain cultural relativism; that is, I don't approve of these

essentially middle-class guides to black pride, but a lot of black people do, so I feel obliged to qualify my judgment. Mayfield is a more trustworthy talent than Isaac Hayes, say, so that the two long cuts are better than might be predicted. I still prefer the old Impressions. B.

Mother Earth: Satisfied (Mercury). Tracy Nelson doesn't touch everyone, but once she does, she carries you away. She can be sexual and spiritual not successively but on the same note and breath; she seems to suffer and to transcend suffering simultaneously. Vocally, Mother Earth is now Tracy Nelson, and although in theory I miss the male voices—especially Robert St. John's—I'm not really complaining. Yet this record is a slight disappointment. I love it, but I know that my prejudices are strong and that only once—on her own composition, "Andy's Song"—does Tracy burst calmly into free space as she does so often on the two previous Mother Earth LP's and on Tracy Nelson Country. Recommended unequivocally to her cadre and equivocally to the benighted. A minus.

Anne Murray: Snowbird (Capitol). An honest pop country album from the Canadian singer who had a well-deserved hit with the title song last summer. A corny and superfluous "Get Together" is more than made up for by a draft-dodging song called "Running" and (believe it or not) the best cover version of "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight" I know, B.

Mike Nesmith and the First National Band: Loose Salute (RCA Victor). Nesmith has turned into a kind of middlebrow Gram Parsons, somewhere between a countrified Monkee and the Jimmy Rodgers of Sunset Strip. This is a wonderful amalgam of gimmicks and mannerisms and good songs, long-vowel articles and near-yodels and electronic excursions and whatever else might happen. His first album with this group, Magnetic South, is equally sublime schlock. B.

The Osmonds (MGM). The most heart-warming thing to happen to the wonderful world of pop music since Georgia Gibbs recorded "Dance with Me, Henry." Mike Curb strikes again. D plus.

Emitt Rhodes (Dunhill). Like Paul McCartney, from whom he is occasionally indistinguishable, Rhodes has done a true solo album by multiple-tracking his own accompaniment and engineering the result himself. Only Rhodes does it better. Why, then, did I give McCartney a B plus? Because I was taken, that's why. B minus.

Leon Thomas: The Leon Thomas Album (Flying Dutchman). I've got to admit it: If anything like a Great Artist—a concept I by no means entirely approve—has arisen in popular music since the first great days of rock, Leon Thomas is probably it. He has literally expanded the musical possibilities of the human voice. He is as powerful a jazz/blues singer as Joe Williams or Joe Turner, both of whom he occasionally resembles, as inventive a scatter as Ella Fitzgerald. But that's just the beginning, for despite the generation lag, Thomas beats Turner and Williams in their mode even while singing his own, and he turns scatting from a virtuoso trick into an atavistic call from the unconscious. So even though I think Oliver Nelson's arrangements here don't suit the material; even though I'm slightly embarrassed by the inflation of a Thomas composition like "I Am"; even though I'm not sure all of Thomas's explorations in black consciousness are apropos; despite all this, I have to suspend my disbelief and recommend this record unreservedly to anyone with the slightest fondness for jazz. A.

The Velvet Underground: Loaded (Cotillion). I presume anyone who saw the guys at Max's this summer has already bought this, which is to Manhattan what *Time Peace* is to New York. That is, this is really "Rock & Roll"

(a title), but it's also really intellectual and ironic. Lou

Reed's singing embodies the paradox. A.

Stevie Wonder: Signed, Sealed and Delivered (Tamla). Sometime in the past (can it be?) eight years Little Stevie became Big, and so did his frantic one-smash-a-year style—wheezes, shrieks, and all. Consistent Motown albums are rare, and this has its weak moments, but it's still the most exciting LP by a male soul singer in a very long time, and it slips into no mold, Motown's included. A minus.

ADDITIONAL CONSUMER NEWS: Since MGM prexy Mike Curb declared himself the moral guardian of youth culture, I have been keeping an especially sharp eye on his releases. MGM has released a series of forty reissue albums, including music by artists like Freda Payne and Don Gibson, who did none of their important work for MGM, and the Velvet Underground, which also no longer records for him. You remember Curb's stand on drugs? Well, on the first Velvets LP there is a song called "Heroin." It is not a prosmack song by any means, but then, "Street Fighting Man" isn't a prorevolution song either. Reportedly, Lou Reed is reluctant to perform the song because of the way it is often misconstrued. "Heroin" is the first song on side two of the Golden Archive Velvet Underground, MGM has also released an album called The Best of Marcel Marceau, which consists of thirty-eight minutes of silence and two minutes of applause, a singing Marine, and Heintje, Holland's fourteen-year-old answer to Oedipus, right down to the charming little bulge in his pants. . . . Consumers will be interested to note that Capitol Records is raising the list price on its records one dollar, which is proportionally equivalent to Chevrolet raising its prices six hundred dollars. Get them while you can-or don't get them at all. Record coops, anyone? . . . Due to continuing political confusion, I never wrote about the three-LP Woodstock album, even though I often play it for pleasure. I will say, however, that Woodstock Two is worth missing unless you happen to love Jimi Hendrix, who is especially well represented. The great Grossman holdout apparently continues: Joplin and The Band are absent once again. So's the Dead. . . . Shelby Singleton's Plantation Records, which first hit with "Harper Valley PTA," is getting a lot of c&w air-play for "The Battle Hymn of Lt. Calley," written and performed (execrably, by the way) by non-professionals and published, no kidding, by Quickit Publishing Co. I won't regale you with morality, but I do have one question: Why didn't Jerry Rubin think of this? . . . Alice Cooper's "I'm Eighteen" is one of the great singles of all time.

1 6 1

Leaders and Parking Meters

IT WASN'T UNTIL the sixties that I came a rock and roll fan in the truest sense of the word, because it wasn't until the sixties that I identified with the music-makers as well as getting off on the music. Part of the reason for this is obviious—I have a lot more in common with John Lennon than I do with Elvis Presley—but part of it is fairly subtle. As an adolescent, I think I would have found fanhood a threat to my individuality, but as I became more secure in myself, I could afford the silliness fanhood entailed. Emotionally, that explains the approach of these pieces, which is to treat artists both as public figures and as friends. Aesthetically, the explanation is even simpler: In an age of electronic multimedia, I believe, the functional unit of a star's creativity is not the work but the persona of which that work is the center. Most of the artists in this section have fairly stable personas by now, and (with the possible exceptions of Jethro Tull and Cat Stevens) all are quite clearly giants in one way or another. I regard most of these essays as temporarily definitive. Except for two pieces from The New York Times, all of this work appeared in The Village Voice or Newsday. The pieces on Elvis Presley and Bill Graham are revised essays combining material published in both outlets.

CHUCK BERRY: ETERNAL ROCK AND ROLLER

Chuck Berry is the greatest of the rock and rollers. Elvis competes with Tom Jones, Little Richard cavorts after hours for Dick and Johnny, Fats Domino looks old, and Jerry Lee Lewis looks down his noble honker at diehards who refuse to understand that Jerry Lee has chosen to become a great country singer. But for a fee—only two thousand dollars until recently-Chuck Berry will hop a plane and play some rock and roll. In this year of the boogie the man who used to be the ideal second attraction, drawing a core of raving fanatics like me and a broad base of casual admirers who dug to get off on a legend every once in a while, has come into his own. Everyone from the folkies to the heavy metal kids claims his songs for encores, and much better than that, Chuck himself is back on top: The London Chuck Berry Sessions reached top ten in the wake of a number-one single, his first certified million-seller, "My Ding-a-Ling."

For those who skipped fourth grade, let me make clear that "ding-a-ling" is a play on words that engenders quips like the one Chuck made when he was awarded his gold record at Madison Square Garden on October 13: "I never knew 'My Ding-a-Ling' would get so big." A lot of his raving fanatics are mortified. We've always dreamed of another big single for our hero-his last was "You Never Can Tell" in the Beatle summer of 1964—but "My Dinga-Ling" has been embarrassing us at concerts for years, and not because we wouldn't sing along. It was just dumb, inappropriate to the sophistication of his new, collegiate audience. Anyway, that's how the rationalization

went.

Obviously, what we meant was that it wasn't sophisticated enough for us-his other stuff was so much better. But popularity has changed the song. I feel sure that it's delighting all the twelve-year-olds who get to figure out that they've snuck something dirty onto the AM radio—a rock and roll tradition that has been neglected since the concept of dirty became so passé-because I'm fairly delighted myself. Believe me, twenty-one thousand rock and roll revivalists filling Madison Square Garden to shout along with a fourth-grade wee-wee joke constitutes a cultural event as impressive as it is odd, a magnificent and entirely apposite triumph in Chuck Berry's very own tradition. For Chuck Berry isn't merely the greatest of the rock and rollers, or rather, there's nothing mere about it. Unless we somehow recycle the concept of the great artist so that it supports Chuck Berry as well as it does Marcel Proust, we might as well trash it altogether.

As with Charlie Chaplin or Walt Kelly or the Beatles, Chuck Berry's greatness doesn't depend solely upon the profundity or originality of his oeuvre. In the traditional sense the body of his great work isn't exactly vast, comprising about three-dozen songs that synthesize two related traditions, blues and country-western. Although in some respects Berry's rock and roll is simpler and more vulgar than either, his simplicity and vulgarity are defensible in the snootiest high-art terms. His case doesn't rest on such defenses, however. It would be perverse to argue that his songs are in themselves as rich as Remembrance of Things Past. Their richness is a function of their active relationship with an audience—a complex relationship that shifts for every perceiver every time a song enters a new context, club or album or radio or mass sing-along. Proust wrote about a dying subculture from a cork-lined room. Berry helped give life to a subculture, and both he and it change every time they confront each other.

Typically, this public artist is an obsessively private

person who has been known to drive reporters from his own amusement park, and the sketches of his life overlap and contradict each other. The way I tell it—with a goodly assist from Michael Lydon-Berry was born into a middleclass colored family in St. Louis in 1926. He was so quick and ambitious that he both served three years in reform school on a robbery conviction and acquired a degree in hairdressing and cosmetology before taking a job on an auto assembly line to support a wife and kids. Yet his ambition persisted. By 1953 he was working as a beautician and leading a three-piece blues group on a regular weekend gig. His gimmick was to cut the blues with countryinfluenced humorous narrative songs. These were rare in black music, although Louis Jordan, a hero of Berry's, had been doing something vaguely similar in front of white audiences for years.

In 1955 Berry recorded two of his songs on a borrowed machine—"Wee Wee Hours," a blues that he and his pianist, Johnny Johnson, hoped to sell, and an adapted country tune called "Ida Red." He traveled to Chicago and met Muddy Waters, the uncle of the blues, who sent him on to Leonard Chess, of Chess Records. Chess liked "Wee Wee Hours" but flipped for "Ida Red," which was renamed "Maybellene," after a hair cream, and forwarded it to Alan Freed. Having mysteriously acquired 25 percent of the writer's credit, Freed played "Maybellene" quite a lot, and it became one of the first nationwide rock and roll hits.

At that time any fair-minded person would have judged this process exploitative and pecuniary. A blues musician comes to a blues label to promote a blues song—"It was 'Wee Wee Hours' we was proud of, that was *our* music," says Johnny Johnson. But the owner of the label decides that he wants to push a novelty: "The big beat, cars, and young love. It was a trend and we jumped on it," Chess

has said. He then trades away a quarter of the blues singer's creative sweat to the inventor of payola, who hypes it into commercial success and leaves the artist in a quandary. Does he stick with his art, thus forgoing the first real recognition he's ever had, or does he pander to popular taste?

The question is loaded, of course. "Ida Red" was Chuck Berry's music as much as "Wee Wee Hours," which in retrospect seems rather uninspired. In fact, maybe the integrity problem went the other way. Maybe Johnson was afraid that the innovations of "Ida_Red"-country guitar lines adapted to blues-style picking, with the ceaseless legato of his own piano adding rhythmic excitement to the steady back-beat-were too far out to sell. What happened instead, of course, was that Berry's limited but brilliant vocabulary of guitar riffs quickly became the epitome of rock and roll. Ultimately, every great white guitar group of the early sixties imitated Berry's style, and Johnson's piano technique was almost as influential. In other words, it turned out that Berry and Johnson weren't basically bluesmen at all, and the audience knew it better than the musicians themselves. Leonard Chess simply functioned as music businessmen should, though only rarely do they combine enough courage and insight to pull it off, even once. He became a surrogate audience, picking up on new music and making sure that it received enough exposure for everyone else to pick up on it, too.

Obviously, Chuck Berry wasn't racked with doubt about artistic compromise. A good blues single usually sold around ten thousand copies, and a big rhythm-and-blues hit might go into the hundreds of thousands, but "Maybellene" probably moved a million, even if Chess never sponsored the audit to prove it. Berry had achieved a grip on the white audience and the solid musical and financial future it could promise, and remarkably, he had in no way

diluted his genius to do so. On the contrary, that was his genius. He would never have fulfilled himself if he hadn't explored his relationship to the white world.

Berry was the first blues-based performer to successfully reclaim guitar tricks that country-western innovators had appropriated from black people and converted to their own uses twenty-five or fifty years before. By adding blues tone to some fast country runs and yoking them to a rhythm-and-blues beat, he created an instrumental style with biracial appeal. Alternating guitar chords augmented the beat while he sang in an insouciant tenor that, while recognizably Afro-American in accent, stayed clear of the melisma and blurred overtones of blues singing. His few detractors still complain about the repetitiveness of this style, but they miss the point. Repetition without tedium is the backbone of rock and roll, and the components of Berry's music were so durable that they still provoke instant excitement at concerts almost twenty years later. Anyway, the instrumental repetition was counterbalanced by unprecedented and virtually unduplicated verbal variety.

Chuck Berry is the greatest rock lyricist this side of Bob Dylan, and sometimes I prefer him to Dylan. Both communicate an abundance of the childlike delight in linguistic discovery that page poets are supposed to convey and too often don't, but Berry's most ambitious lyrics never seem pretentious or forced. True, his language is ersatz and barbaric, full of mispronounced foreignisms and advertising coinages, but then, so was Whitman's. Like Whitman, Berry is excessive because he is totally immersed in America—the America of Melville and the Edsel, burlesque and installment-plan funerals, pemmican and pomade. Unlike Whitman, though, he doesn't quite permit you to take him seriously—he can't really think it's pronounced "a la carty," can he? He is a little surreal. How

else can a black man as sensitive as Chuck Berry respond to the affluence of white America?

In three of his next four singles Berry amplified the black half of his persona, the brown-eyed handsome man who always came up short in his quest for the small-time hedonism America promises everyone. By implication, Brown Eyes' sharp sense of life's nettlesome and even oppressive details provided a kind of salvation through humor, especially in "Too Much Monkey Business," a catalog of hassles that included work, school, and the Army. But only "Roll Over Beethoven," which introduced his other half, the rock and roller, achieved any real success among the white teen-agers to whom he was obliged to sing. Chuck got the message. His next release, "School Days," was another complaint song, but this time the complaints were specifically adolescent and were relieved by the direct action of the rock and roller. In fact, the song has been construed as a prophecy of the Free Speech Movement.

Although he scored lots of minor hits, Chuck Berry made only three additional Billboard top-ten singles in the fifties-"Rock and Roll Music," "Sweet Little Sixteen," and "Johnny B. Goode"—and every one of them ignored Brown Eyes for the assertive, optimistic, and somewhat simpleminded rock and roller. In a pattern common among popular artists, his truest and most personal work didn't flop, but it wasn't overwhelmingly popular, either. For such artists, the audience can be like a drug. A little of it is so good for them that they assume a lot of it would be even better, but instead the big dose vitiates them, often so subtly that they don't notice it. For Chuck Berry, the craving for overwhelming popularity proved slightly dangerous. At the same time that he was enlivening his best songs with faintly Latin rhythms, which he was convinced were the coming thing, he was also writing silly exercises with titles like "Hey Pedro." But his pursuit of the market was also a rapprochement with his audience, with whom he seemed to have instinctive rapport, remarkable in a thirty-year-old black man. For there is also a sense in which the popular artist is a drug for the audience, and a doctor, too—he has to know how much of the vital essence at the core of himself he can administer at one time, and in what compound.

The reason Berry's rock and roller was capable of such insightful excursions into the teen psyche—"Sweet Little Sixteen," a celebration of everything lovely about fanhood, or "Almost Grown," a first-person expression of adolescent rebellion that sixties youthcult pundits should have studied some-was that he shared a crucial American value with Brown Eves. That value was fun. Even among rock critics, who ought to know better, fun doesn't have much of a rep, so that they commiserate with someone like La Vern Baker, a second-rate blues and gospel singer who felt she was selling her soul every time she launched into a first-rate whoop of nonsense like "Jim Dandy" or "Bumble Bee." But fun was what teen revolt had to be about inebriated affluence versus the hangover of the work ethic. It was the only practicable value in the Peter Pan utopia of the American dream. Because black music had always thrived on exuberance—not just the otherworldly transport of gospel, but the candidly physical good times of great pop blues singers, exemplified by Washboard Sam, who is most often dismissed as a lightweight by the heavy blues critics—it turned into the perfect vehicle for teen rebellion. Black musicians, however, had never been capable of optimism that was cultural as well as personal those few who were, like Louis Armstrong, left themselves open to charges of tomming. Chuck Berry never tommed. The trouble he'd seen just made his sly, bad-boy voice and the splits and waddles of his stage show that much more credible.

Then, in late 1959, fun turned into trouble. Berry had imported a Spanish-speaking Apache prostitute he'd picked up in Juarez to check hats in his St. Louis night-club, and then fired her. She went to the police, and Berry was indicted under the Mann Act. After two trials, the first so blatantly racist that it was disallowed, he went to prison for two years. When he got out, in February of 1964, his marriage had ended, apparently a major tragedy for him. The Beatles and the Rolling Stones had paid him such explicit and appropriate tribute that his career was probably in better shape after his jail term than before, but he couldn't capitalize. He had a few hits, possibly written before he went in, but the well was dry. Between 1965 and 1970 he didn't release one even passable new song, and he died as a recording artist.

In late 1966 Berry left Chess for a big advance from Mercury Records. Working alone with pickup bands, he still performed a great deal, mostly to make money for Berry Park, a recreation haven thirty miles from St. Louis. But he found that something had happened to his audience—it was getting older, with troubles of its own, and it dug blues. At auditoriums like the Fillmore, where he recorded a generally disappointing LP with the Steve Miller Blues Band, Chuck was more than willing to stretch out on a blues. One of his favorites was from Elmore James: "When things go wrong, wrong with you, it hurts me too."

In 1970 he went home to Chess Records, and suddenly his new audience called forth a miracle. Berry was a natural head—no drugs, no alcohol—and most of his attempts to cash in on freak talk had been abject failures. But "Tulane," one of his greatest story songs, was the perfect fantasy. It was about two dope dealers: "Tulane and Johnny opened a novelty shop/ Back under the counter was the cream of the crop." Johnny is nabbed by narcs, but Tulane, his girlfriend, escapes, and Johnny confidently pre-

dicts a fix. But there is a sequel. In "Have Mercy Judge," Johnny has been caught again, and this time he expects to be sent to "some stony mansion." Berry devotes the last stanza to Tulane, who is "too alive to live alone." The last line makes me wonder how he felt about his own wife when he went to prison: "Just tell her to live, and I'll forgive her, and even love her more when I come back home."

"Have Mercy Judge" is the first good blues Berry ever wrote, and like all his best work, it isn't quite traditional, utilizing an abc line structure instead of the standard aab. Where did it come from? Is it unreasonable to suspect that part of Berry had been a bluesman all along, and that this time, instead of going to his audience, his audience came to him and provided enough juice for one final masterwork? A year ago, the answer would have been Yes, and that's that. But now there is a new audience. Chances are that it isn't a good enough audience to inspire great work, and that Berry's vision, prophetic in the fifties, doesn't really speak to the reality of the seventies. "My Ding-a-Ling" is probably just one more novelty hit in a sated market. But all of us raving Chuck Berry fanatics will be keeping an eye on him, hoping for yet another miraculous surprise.

> Newsday October, 1972

ELVIS PRESLEY: AGING ROCK

I was never an Elvis fan when I was a kid. In fact, I couldn't stand him. As it happened, I heard "Don't Be Cruel" three or four times before I learned Elvis was sing-

ing it, and once I had admitted to myself that I was hooked on that song, it was no real sacrifice to extend my reluctant enthusiasm to "All Shook Up." But I never understood the excitement over "Heartbreak Hotel"—I considered the Stan Freberg parody exceedingly witty—and refused to even listen to "Hound Dog" or "Love Me Tender." Can it be that I was the only American under age sixteen who wasn't shaken by that seismic pelvic power? Bob Dylan lived for Elvis, and I thought he was just another greaseball.

Of course, he really was a greaseball, which was why I didn't like him-he reminded me of every rock who ever threatened to beat me up. All of his musical contemporaries were faintly comic, and most of them were black. They had no real connection to me. I loved Jerry Lee Lewis's records, but I wasn't really shocked, much less inspired, when he married a cousin who was younger than I was—that was the kind of thing crazy people from Louisiana did—and I laughed and laughed the first time I saw Fats Domino on television, because he was wearing what looked like high-top basketball sneakers, dazzling white, with white crepe soles an inch thick. Elvis was different. Like a lot of straight and scared-shitless adolescent males, I must have been jealous of his effect on girls, and perhaps I gained some cachet in my own mind by dissenting from such blanket popularity. But it was simpler than that. He was real, almost like guys I knew, and he frightened me a little.

Much later, long after the Beatles, I began to think about Elvis again. By then I had been claiming Chuck Berry as a "true folk artist" for years—he was black, after all—and realized that half my friends had been rocks in high school just to frighten people who might benefit from a little fear, including not only adults but also straight adolescent males. But Elvis didn't move me. He had been

immersed in Hollywood schlock for almost a decade, and even though *Melody Maker* still named him best male vocalist in the world every year, those few of his singles that become big hits were invariably monuments of schmaltz. True, he was still a star in middle America. His movies made money, and his albums sold surprisingly, and even his singles, which were never heard in New York, had a way of creeping up to fifty on the national charts. But there was reason to consider his career moribund at best.

Nevertheless, I came to understand. I had been such a rock and roll fan, yet I had missed Elvis, who personified everything that was best and worst about rock and roll. He was every white Southern boy who envied his black neighbor. He was every black leather jacket that turned into a poet and every set of sideburns that became a cop. He was inchoate rebellion serving two docile, short-haired years in the Army and swivel-hip sexuality mouthing stolid Calvinist hymns. He was the best of American folk culture—blues and country and gospel music—standing by like a good American while his genius was transmogrified into pink Cadillacs. So that you had to admit, eventually, that if that was where pink Cadillacs came from, then maybe pink Cadillacs weren't as bad as your professors taught you to believe.

Then, around the turn of 1968, there were indications that Elvis was not content to drift into million-dollar oblivion. Or perhaps, since his movies were starting to slip, he was worried that the dollar value of his apparent oblivion was about to plummet. In any case, he began to sidle back toward rock and roll. His singles—"Big Boss Man," "Hi-Heel Sneakers," "U.S. Male"—became much funkier. Late that year he taped a television special in a black leather suit, in front of a select live audience, opening with "Guitar Man" and closing with a mild social-

conscience song, "If I Can Dream," that eventually reached top ten. On that show, too, he used a black chorus and talked respectfully, not to say pietistically, about the roots of his music. But it wasn't until Greil Marcus brought out the recording of that performance for me, almost three years later, that I realized how significant it had been. Marcus has spent as much time listening as anyone who is liable to be objective, and he believes Elvis may have made the best music of his life that crucial comeback night. It's so easy to forget that Elvis was, or is, or can be, a great singer. Any account of his impact that omits that fundamental fact amounts to a dismissal.

And yet he is still dismissed. No one comes out and calls him a low-life no-talent anymore, but it is customary to identify him as a creature of Colonel Parker, the renowned genius-manager. Amateur sociologists theorize that if Presley hadn't come along, someone else would have filled the same cultural need. Rock and roll historians like Charlie Gillett believe that his best music was behind him by the time he left Sun Records in Memphis, owned by good-guy blues lover Sam Phillips, for the greedy producers at RCA Victor in 1955. Others trace his deterioration to his first movie, Love Me Tender, which was also the occasion of his first schmaltz ballad. Political critics complain that he fecklessly abandoned his own vital rebelliousness when he submitted to the draft in 1958. Others feel he lost his calling when he stopped touring in 1961. And now it is said that he is just another Tom Iones.

None of these analyses is entirely untrue—there is a great deal of the pink Cadillac about Elvis. The problem with pink Cadillacs, apparently, is that they make it impossible to see who's driving them. They inspire uneasiness, which protects itself by turning into condescension. For the fact is that Elvis is not just a freak of nature or the

media. He is both a smart man and a genius; he knows what he is doing. The Colonel's astuteness is unquestionable, and his efforts have certainly nourished the Elvis legend, but his musical influence has always been negligible, and in recent years Elvis seems to have taken over as an image strategist as well, leaving his manager to tend to business. Whether or not the image is true—and I suspect it is—its content is clear enough: Elvis is both a headstrong rocker and a corn-pone sentimentalist. His taste for schmaltz predated his career—the first song he ever recorded was the Ink Spots' "My Happiness," a gift for his mother, whom he adored—and he always wanted to go to Hollywood.

As a white man who sang black music credibly, Presley was a historical necessity, but his individual musical identity overshadowed that necessity and perhaps even created it. At the early Sun sessions, on the many good songs he cut for RCA, for much of that television show in 1968, creating a classic hit single in 1972, Presley exhibits unique talents—his feel for phrasing as well as drive, his ferocity and tenderness, the provocative carelessness of his timbre—that are essential to a magnetism that Charlie Rich or Conway Twitty or Carl Perkins could never have generated. What's more, he apparently more or less produced his RCA output himself, not only selecting musicians and material but working out head arrangements in the studio. If the Beatles are responsible for Rubber Soul and Sgt. Pepper, then Elvis Presley is the auteur of "It's Now or Never," his second post-Army single, based on "O Sole Mio" and reportedly the biggestselling record of his career.

I understood perhaps half of this when the rumors about a real live performance, the first in eight years, began to circulate in the first half of 1969. Everyone expected the usual series of arena gigs, so when it was announced that the great experiment would commence instead in the Showroom Internationale of the Las Vegas International Hotel, there was much disappointment. I got a letter from an apparent nonmillionaire from Long Island who flew out to Vegas just to see Elvis, but none of the professional rock fans in the East felt quite that dutiful. We had all been moderately knocked out by Chuck Berry and Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis in the wellspring of the rock and roll revival, and we anticipated something of similar value—solid, professional rock and roll. Obviously, we were still untouched by that greaseball.

But Elvis Presley has been supporting RCA Victor since 1956, and he is invariably surrounded by corporate magic. In this case the owner of the Las Vegas International Hotel invited RCA to fly a press party out for the opening. We could stay as long as we liked, on the house. Like most of those invited, I had never been to Las Vegas. Elvis was a major inducement, of course, but only as part of the package.

As it turned out, the Las Vegas International—one of America's great opulence hotels, where everything looks fantastic and nothing quite works—was perfect for Elvis. The Showroom Internationale, an absurdly ostentatious two-thousand-seat nightclub, made its counterpart at Caesar's Palace look like a roadhouse with pretensions. Half the audience at the opening seemed destined to die of gout. As I tasted my Fonds d'Artichauts Farcis Walewska and marveled at the menu heading-"Bon Apetit," it said—I went into a small down. After the gold curtain rose and the Sweet Inspirations, back by an actual-count twenty-two-piece orchestra, proceeded to run through "How High the Moon," "Alfie," and "The Impossible Dream," the down became a depression, and after thirty minutes of leftover Don Rickles from a comedian named Sammy Shore I had pretty much tuned out. Elvis's male

back-up vocal group, the Imperials, came onstage, and so did a small rock band. I braced myself for another warm-up—"D-I-V-O-R-C-E," "Danny Boy," and "Do You Know the Way to San Jose?" Suddenly, a lithe figure in a modified black karate costume dashed onto the stage and ripped into "Blue Suede Shoes." Guess who.

It was pentecostal. We were cheering before we had fully comprehended what had happened, and by the time it was over, one critic was standing on her chair and the publicity assistant from RCA was shrieking in a most unflacklike manner. Every sclerotic scene-maker in the room evinced a comparable nutsiness. Elvis was fantastic. His clothes were stylish but not showy. His sideburns swept forward, and his hair was just long enough. His baby-fat jowls had disappeared. And his material was perfect, ranging from "That's All Right, Mama" to "Yesterday" but concentrating on the rock and roll. Most of the time, the orchestra was silent—one guy in the back tapped time on his cello throughout the performance—and Elvis's own band carried the music. Most important, Elvis proved that he was not just a greaseball—he showed a precise, humorous sense of himself. He had lived long enough with the rocking and sentimental sides of his persona to understand that there was a sense in which each negated the other. Every time he wiggled his hips or lowered his eyelids, women screamed, but he knew they were screaming as much for a memory as for a presence, and we knew he knew. Like the Beatles, he was comfortable with his own eminence. It was part of his act.

I didn't see Elvis again for almost three years, and by that time I was ready to be taken by surprise all over again. His comeback secure, Elvis was turning complacent all over again. The hits came more frequently, but they still tended to be maudlin—he hadn't released any satisfying records since "Suspicious Minds" and Memphis to Vegas,

the single and album following that first Vegas shot. Every big-city concert sold out, of course, but it was said that he was beginning to look puffy around the jowls again, and that his act was going soft at the edges as well.

Still, there were a record four consecutive weekend shows scheduled for Madison Square Garden in June, 1972, the first time he'd ever appeared live in New York, and I wouldn't have considered missing him. Accompanying me were two friends, both of whom had been thinking mostly about Weatherman politics when I'd first seen Elvis in Vegas in 1969, and yet the three of us fit into the crowd. It included teen-aged girls who'd caught the bug somewhere and teen-aged boys who were into fifties rock and roll as if it were folk music and the usual complement of the middle-aged fans Elvis has always attracted. But at least half the audience looked to be between twenty-five and thirty-three. Well, you might say, Tom Jones gets the same kind of crowd, but it was different. Dress was more casual, hair a little scruffier; the fans showed a likable straight-to-hip heterogeneity, like the fans at a Knick game except that they were mostly in male-female couples. The weekend audience of eighty thousand included a sort of subcrowd of perhaps fifty thousand people who had graduated from high school sometime before the Beatles arrived and hadn't seen much of each other since. Elvis had provided the occasion for the vastest high-school reunion in history.

The Sweet Inspirations were received with well-earned enthusiasm, but the night I was there the comedian was almost booed off the stage, almost as if all that remembered adolescent hostility needed one small, symbolic outlet. Souvenirs were huckstered at intermission, and the crowd was reminded not to stand or rush the stage. Then the lights dimmed, and the orchestra played a few bars from 2001.

The hall was illuminated with an explosion of flashbulbs as Elvis appeared in an outrageous powder-blue outfit, his hair straight and dyed black, the dark hair on his chest bristling through his open shirt. First came "That's All Right, Mama," then a survey of mainstream rock, uptempo hits from Creedence and Three Dog Night and Tony Joe White, ballads from Buffy Sainte-Marie and Dusty Springfield and the Righteous Brothers, every one a great song. Elvis gyrated and got some shrieks, but more amazing than the excitement he inspired was the effortless control he exerted. That whole mass of people, including me, really moved as one. The emotion was like that at a political rally or sports tribute, except that its source was explicitly rather than covertly sexual. And like all outpourings of fellow-feeling, it subsumed sexuality, achieving some combination of solidarity, love, and communal selfrecognition.

Having established the audience's identity, Presley then set about defining its relationship to the past where that identify was forged. He didn't camp up the medley of old hits, but he did dramatize our distance from our own youthful energy, singing "All Shook Up" with very little motion and introducing "Hound Dog" as his "protest song for the show," which of course is what it always was. And then he brought us back to the present with "Bridge over Troubled Water." The song has been mushed over so many times that it's hard to hear anymore, but whatever its failings it is epochal and precedent-setting, because it is a love song about friendship—that is, about bonds between people that have very little to do with pop romance, just like two more recent standards, "You've Got a Friend" and "Lean on Me."

And then there was a long climax, starting with a rocking version of "Suspicious Minds." There was a false moment when Elvis spoofed one line—as if once again he

didn't trust his own energy and excitement, a mistake, for by then the excitement was not only genuine but virtually unstoppable. Then Kris Kristofferson's "For the Good Times," which like "Suspicious Minds" is an adult breakup song, touched with the kind of detail that tells you the writer has felt the exhilaration of young love and known it to fail. The next two ballads were like that, too, and since the optimism of teen-aged love was a large part of what our rock and roll was about, it was suddenly as if Elvis was trying to tell us something about ourselves about why he had long since stopped being a rebel and why no one was rushing the stage. Even as that optimistic energy gained us some of what we wanted, it had wearied us all, including Elvis in his mansion. We were older. And vet we remembered, and we endured, and we were together one more time. When Elvis said good night with "Can't Help Falling in Love," it felt like he was singing for all of us.

When the recording of this monumental music appeared, however, it was as mediocre as most of Elvis's LP's. This doesn't mean that my rapture at the Garden was unreal, but only that Elvis didn't do it alone—he was working in concert with all of my brothers and sisters in the audience. Of course, under most circumstances those people wouldn't have felt like my brothers and sisters at all. Some of them had probably threatened to beat me up in high school, and I would certainly never attend a reunion with them. So Elvis's genius in Las Vegas was really no different from his genius at the Garden—he enticed me into communion with people whose values were very unlike my own.

The theory of generational solidarity, once essential to almost everyone's rock rhetoric (including my own), has proved somewhat chimerical. Roughly speaking, it is a class-based delusion that occurred when educated people

with access to media simultaneously formulated parallel observations about their acquaintances. If Elvis makes this clearer-if you cancel out his excessive vanity and ambition, his values are a lot more middle-American young-adult than mine, or probably yours—he also makes the alternative a little easier to take. I myself would not choose to become an honorary narcotics agent, as Elvis has, but I've thought enough about Elvis's alleged sellout to conclude that he arrived at his values through a difficult and organic process of struggle and suffering. Every fifties rock who eventually decided to work and raise a family, however halfhearted that decision might have been, underwent a similar process. People do what they must to survive. Yet they do change; their rebellion does persist. Ours is the first generation in which all of urban mass society not just the jazz fans and the Cole Porter buffs and the obsessively Calvinist country-western audience and the blues supporters—recognizes songs of adult heartbreak as the center of its music and deals with friendship as a basic human need. I'd like to think we could go a lot further than that, but I'm happy enough to say "we," and I'm willing to believe that we may make part of the trip in some equivalent of a pink Cadillac.

> The Village Voice August, 1969 Newsday June, 1972

THE DRIFTERS IN HISTORY

Rock and roll is here to stay in the Garden of Eden in Northport, Long Island, oldies night for the swinging singles and marauding marrieds of Sunken Meadow. Last week the Cadillacs, next week the Shirelles, and now, ladies and gentlemen, the Drifters. Jackets required, of course—you think this is some roughneck joint?

The bassist and the drummer from the house band, looking even gaudier than the flamingos in the audience with their black jumpsuits and ruffled lavender shirts, are already on stage. A portly, coffee-colored man in a tux is tuning a guitar. On his cue the makeshift combo goes into a familiar riff, and four Afro-American men—all in their mid-to-late thirties, all wearing identical cream suits and chocolate shirts—swing past the bar and onto the tiny makeshift stage. It's "Up on the Roof," a top-ten million-seller in 1963, followed quickly by "Honey Love," a number-one rhythm-and-blues hit in 1954.

The dance routine is a little sloppy, although it's twice as energetic and ten times as difficult as anything any of the seventy-five or so patrons is likely to try, and the singing is just a little disappointing. Which is not to suggest that complete satisfaction is possible. When the Drifters recorded "Up on the Roof," the lead singer was Rudy Lewis, who died in 1964. When the Drifters recorded "Honey Love," the lead singer was Clyde McPhatter, who died in 1972. Although he was gospel-trained, Lewis was one author of the Drifters' smooth pop style, and the Garden of Eden version is a credible if somewhat flat replica. But "Honey Love" doesn't make it. McPhatter's rendition was a masterpiece of concupiscence, the sexiest song of the year of the sexy song. In the Garden of Eden it sounds campy.

To me, that is. I happen to know McPhatter's version, not because I was one of those superhip white kids who listened to black radio in 1954, but because Scott Muni played it on WOR-FM in 1967 and I flipped for it. The audience is happy in its ignorance, and it ought to be—

this is a fine show. The Drifters perform ten songs, every one either top-thirty pop or top-five r&b, and there are plenty more where those came from. The excitement builds effortlessly, and the show climaxes with an encore of the first Drifters' hit, "Money Honey," and the seminal "There Goes My Baby." In 1959 "There Goes My Baby" introduced the big string arrangement to rock and roll, and the Drifters to the mass teen public. Ben E. King's vocal on the record is a landmark of early soul music. Fittingly, the 1972 version is slower, even more strained and soulful. For what is supposed to be nostalgia, this is powerful stuff, and the crowd goes as wild as crowds go in such circumstances.

The Drifters are arguably the greatest black singing group in the history of rock and roll, although what that means is even more arguable. Groups do change, but whereas there have been eight Temptations over more than a decade, the Drifters had gone through eighteen members in less time. It is reasonable to assume that their group identity was as much a matter of production and management as of personnel. In 1959, in fact, the group's manager, George Treadwell, fired an entire quartet of Drifters. Then he waved his magic pen and transformed a young group called the Crowns—lead singer, Ben E. King—into new Drifters, paying them seventy-five dollars a week to learn all the Drifters' r&b hits and fulfill the Drifters' contracts. Eventually, they did a lot more.

Since groups are never entirely the creatures of managers and producers, it is fitting that Treadwell created something he couldn't have anticipated when he made this switch. From 1953 to 1959 the r&b innovations of Clyde McPhatter dominated the Drifters, even though McPhatter had left in 1955. But Ben E. King ended McPhatter's influence; in fact, he created the Drifter's pop

period. Like McPhatter, he soon escaped Treadwell to go solo, but unlike McPhatter, he wasn't really missed, because his innovations proved infinitely malleable. The producers of the r&b Drifters, Jerry Wexler and Ahmet Ertegun, were expert at providing a catchy, funky bottom from which the various Atlantic Records vocalists could build, but they never found a lead Drifter who could swoop and shout and shift rhythms like McPhatter. King's genius, however, was to integrate a genuinely evocative, gospel-rooted singing style into the full pop productions of Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, Bert Berns, and Phil Spector. Rudy Lewis and Johnny Moore found they could imitate the knack, and each came up with many hits that rose higher on the pop charts than anything McPhatter or his successors ever recorded.

The Drifters at the Garden of Eden represent a third period—the oldies Drifters. The group has been so malleable that it seems almost appropriate that two sets of singers now claim the name. One group comprises three young unknowns and Johnny Moore, who first joined the Drifters in 1955, singing lead on about two-fifths of their recordings, with not so many hits to show for it. The other set, the one at the Garden of Eden, includes all the original pop Drifters, or Crowns, except Ben E. King-lead Charlie Thomas, baritone Dock Green, and bass Elsbeary Hobbs -plus Al Banks, formerly of the Turbans, and guitarist Abdul Samed. Under the name Billy Davis, Samed was with the pop Drifters from the beginning, and his presence adds legitimacy to the second set, but Moore, who split off from the others a little less than a year ago, is such a brilliant performer that it's unlikely that anyone who goes to see either set of Drifters will get cheated. That's the beauty of the concept.

Both sets are living off a phenomenon that is not a fad

or a craze but a simple fact of chronology and economics. The people who grew up with rock and roll are now adults, with enough money to pay to see their favorites at revival concerts or small showcases like the Garden of Eden. It's more complicated than that, of course—like many old-time performers, Charlie Thomas says his most enthusiastic fans are college kids who weren't even born when "Money Honey" was recorded, and Ben E. King is more famous in Europe than he is here. But all the Drifters make more money now than they did when they were stars on contract. By simulating all the Drifter hits, they encapsulate the evolution of a prototypical black rock and roll quartet, a presentation as vital in its way as their recordings were in theirs.

Rhythm-and-blues fanatics, the moldy figs of rock and roll, will tell you that the Drifters just about died artistically when the big pop producers got together with the ex-Crowns, but they not only miss a lot of great music that way, they also miss the point. McPhatter and (occasionally) his successors were great singers, but the Drifters weren't merely about great singing: They were a great phenomenon. The smoothness to which they aspired in their pop phase wasn't just a cop-out; it suggested, among other things, that emotion could be understated and even sweet without being gutless. And their songs were as good an overview of teen-age life as anyone this side of Chuck Berry ever provided.

And, of course, if the Drifters had stuck to pure rhythmand-blues, they'd be lucky to be working in the post office now. The drinkers at the Garden of Eden aren't teen-agers anymore, but they pay the bills. Abdul Samed sneaks in some jazz licks, Elsbeary Hobbs does the traditional bassman clown routine and brushes an artificial prelapsarian apple away from his head, and the Drifters perform. Second set they ask for requests, and nobody can remember their songs. People keep naming "So Fine" and "Get a Job." A white man comes in with a black woman, and some roughneck bouncer type makes a joke: "I like niggers; it's wops I can't stand." Ho ho ho. Manfully—they've certainly done it before—the Drifters go through "So Fine" and "Get a Job" and "Little Girl of Mine." Then they remind us of "Don't Go," "Sweets for My Sweet," "I Count the Tears." Ars brevis, vita longa. Unless you happen to be Rudy Lewis or Clyde McPhatter.

Newsday
August, 1972

SMOKEY ROBINSON

Smokey Robinson's first hit was called "Got a Job." It was about a beleaguered grocery clerk who knew things might be even worse, but that doesn't mean Smokey was ever a grocery clerk himself. He once told Michael Lydon: "Some people say they write from experience. Not me. I write songs no matter what mood I'm in; it's my work, dig?" Like the early Lennon-McCartney, Smokey has always been a popular songwriter, and just like Smokey's love songs, "Got a Job" was a distillation of popular sentiment, this time about the recession of 1958. He didn't need experience—he just knew.

The son of a Detroit municipal truck driver from what he calls "the suave part of the slums," Smokey formed the Miracles mostly for fun. He wanted to become an engineer or maybe a dentist, but as is so often the case for black men, the ladder that presented itself was the entertainment business. At an audition Smokey met another such black man, Berry Gordy, a sometime auto worker who had

written a few hit songs and wanted to start his own record label. Together, Smokey and Berry helped each other's American dream come true. Berry taught Smokey how to hone down his songs, and one of them, "Shop Around," became the national hit that established Motown Records.

Gordy's greatest song line—"Now give me money, that's what I want"— is often quoted as the epitome of his crass selloutism, but not by people who don't have money themselves. Gordy didn't sell out-or rather, what is deprecated as selling out is the embodiment of his upwardly mobile black sensibility. The ambition that inspired him to found a company was an essential part of the content of the art it produced. Sure Gordy catered to the white audience, but that was what rock and roll had always done. He just did it better. Especially in its romantic phases, black fifties rock and roll below genius level—even a record as sacrosanct as the Penguins' "Earth Angel," say-was charming and quite wonderful but somewhat silly. Motown wasn't silly; it was real on its own biracial artistic and economic terms, because Berry and Smokey believed in those terms. It is significant that Gordy named Smokey's label, Tamla, after one of Gordy's favorite songs, Debbie Reynolds's "Tammy,"

Smokey's songs were a synthesis, not a compromise. He was a popular songwriter, all right, but that didn't prevent the perhaps apocryphal story in which Bob Dylan, who was some other kind of songwriter, called him "today's greatest American poet." His lyrics, more sophisticated than in most rock and roll, infused the tried-and-true themes of pop romance with a new epigrammatic directness. The simplicity of a line like "I don't like you, but I love you" or the compressed paradox of the Temptations' "It's Growing" would have been beneath most pop songwriters and beyond most rock and rollers. Confronted with the pop romance dichotomy—love is joy, but parting is

pain—he chose to do his homage primarily in terms of pain, but his understated wit kept him from wallowing in it.

And so did his voice. Although his singing style derived from fifties groups like the Drifters and the Moonglows, he never aspired to the complete clarity that was the direction of their style of artifice. Even at his most mellow, he always suggested the hint of a burr of pain underneath. Yet at the same time he was always a little breathy, so fresh and boyish that it was impossible to accuse him of selfpity. He rounded out his act with happy dance routines and advice songs, working with energetic good cheer to make other people happy while taking upon himself the twists and turns of heartbreak we had all suffered.

Even in the extremities of his pain he remained modest, so that his impact never quite equaled his achievement or his reputation. He refused to assert his power over the audience; in fact, that was just what was so wonderful about him. Not only did his persona lack any nasty macho flash, but it was obviously only a projection. Maybe Smokey was helpless and unhappy, but William Robinson was a ridiculous success: the vice-president of a major record company and happily married to his high-school sweetheart, Claudette, who used to sing with the Miracles but now stays home with the kids, Berry and Tamla. He is so nice he annoys interviewers; what kind of copy can you get out of an ideal middle-class person? Yet that's what he is—intelligent, good-humored, compassionate, in love with his work and his family.

The past few years have not been the best for Smokey. His songs are not as strong or poignant as they once were, and he knows it. Despite a freak number-one hit, "Tears of a Clown," which first broke off an old album in England, his records haven't sold. His work has kept him away from his family, and Berry Gordy's plan to move Motown to Los

Angeles will uproot Smokey from everything he knows best. To ease the pressure, he decided to break an association of more than half a lifetime and stop performing with the Miracles. On June 23, 1972, he said good-bye to New York before a packed biracial house at Madison Square Garden.

It was obviously an historic occasion—Claudette was on stage for what Smokey said was the first time in six yearsyet Smokey failed to make history. Especially when they seek the adult audience, Smokey and Motown share one egregious middle-class fault: caution. If he attempted a display of mythic stature, there was a chance he'd flop, so Smokey stuck to the show he'd used throughout his long farewell tour. He relied on recent material he knew to be weak, even pushing his most recent single, and ran through "Got to Be There" and "Abraham, Martin and John" as if this were another nightclub gig. Predictably, the audience didn't seem to care—it was not so much that anything was wrong as that it wasn't as right as it m ght have been. Smokey could probably transform himself into a myth, but he doesn't really care to. That lack of megalomania is the stuff of his particular myth in the first place. He just wants to do the best he can.

> Newsday June, 1972

BARBRA STREISAND, FEATURING MARY HOPKIN

Two album jackets.

Barbra Streisand, What About Today? Avedon por traits of Barbra fore and aft. On front she's a delicately

tinted rotogravure beauty from the thirties, but behind, sheathed in some sort of black leotard, she is all soft-focus *moderne*, vague and soulful. There are also credits and a signed message: "This album is dedicated to the young people who push against indifference, shout down mediocrity, demand a better future, and who write and sing the songs of today. With my deepest admiration, Barbra Streisand."

Mary Hopkin, *Post Card*. Three color photos of Mary, one front and two back, framed in white to resemble old-fashioned rough-edged postcards. Very demure. Also, on what is apparently the back of the postcard, the credits, printed childishly in felt pen and signed "love from Paul." There are no additional messages.

Paul is producer Paul McCartney, whose distaste for messages is well known. Yet his album certainly has thrust and shape, and it dovetails perfectly with What About Today? If Streisand, the only important traditional pop singer the under-thirty generation has produced, is paying her tribute to the mainstream music of her contemporaries, then McCartney, the most fluent if not the most profound genius of that music, is paying his to traditional pop. In his purposely slight way, he succeeds. Streisand fails.

By conventional standards—that is, by Streisand's own standards—this cannot be the case. Her record has to be superior merely because she possesses the better instrument. Mary's soprano is lissome enough but almost devoid of color or dramatic range, and for Barbra that is what vocal music is all about. Even more than her predecessors, she is not so much a singer as an actress, turning each song into a little playlet—or rather, since hitting the notes is important to her, a little operetta. Every song is a new role, and her natural mode is the tour de force.

It is this very conceit that rock has striven to destroy from its inception. The rock singer may play-act, but never so frankly or variously: His concern is image rather than role. Like the blues and country artists who were his forebears, his aim is always to appear that he is singing his own life—not just recalling his own experience in order to enrich a song, in the matter of Frank Sinatra, but singing his own life and preferably his own compositions. To a sensibility accustomed to this conceit, the histrionics of Broadway nightclub pop seem absurdly corny, no matter how "sophisticated" the approach, and the audience for such transparent dramatics seems positively innocent in its eager suspension of disbelief.

Yet it is affection for this sort of innocence that has prompted McCartney to put together *Post Card*. The material ranges from Donovan fantasy and Nilsson whimsy through folk songs and children's songs right down to that classic role song, "Those Were the Days" (how can a teenager sing such a song?), and the perfect finale, "There's No Business Like Show Business." The accompaniment, most often woodwinds and piano, is full of sentimental flourishes but never banal, and everything is held together by the stubborn sweetness of Hopkin's voice. She sounds just like the somewhat star-struck rural adolescent she is, and her unworldliness binds all the disparate elements into a coherent tribute to everyone's dream world, the dream world that the pop of the past served so well.

Post Card is a very unprepossessing album; its achievement is oblique, even inferential, like the dramatic achievement of the singing itself. Miss Streisand takes the opposite tack. It is possible to see the very overstatement of her style as another response to the plight of traditional pop; because she doesn't even pretend to be natural, her naturalness ceases to be an issue. This sort of mentality readily produces the sort of earnest tribute Miss Streisand has included on the back of the jacket and ignores the fact that those she is saluting eschew just such straightforwardness.

Here are the two mes, Barbra is clearly saying: Showbiz Chantoozy and Serious Young Person. The songs on What About Today? range from the frivolous to the painfully meaningful, the composers from contemporary to Harold Arlen. The contemporaries are hardly a startling bunch: You might find Paul Simon, Lennon-McCartney, Bacharach-David, Jim Webb, and even Buffy Sainte-Marie on the next Al Martino record. What is startling is that except for Webb, who is really a traditional pop composer anyway, it is they who have contributed the whimsy. All of the earnest songs about changing the world come from the fogeys. The messages of these songs are as predictable as the brass and strings that hammer them home. Not only is Streisand's emoting wasted on such dull material, it is shown up as an arbitrary exercise.

When applied to such songs as "With a Little Help from My Friends" and even "Alfie," however, it is worse than arbitrary. It is excessive, and it ruins the songs. After all that bull about the songs of today she has chosen only songs of today that are pointed deliberately at yesterday, and still she has failed. There are exceptions: Buffy Sainte-Marie's "Until It's Time for You to Go" and Lennon-McCartney's "Goodnight" both receive adequate treatment, and the two minutes and thirty-seven seconds of L-M's "Honey Pie" make it seem that the song was written for her, which it may well have been.

The most unforgivable failure, however, cancels all the good. That is Paul Simon's "Punky's Dilemma," which seems the essence of lightheartedness on casual hearing but is really a poignant and ironic presentation of a young man's military alternatives: resisting or playing along with the draft. In order for this irony to come across, however, it must be sung by a man. One wonders whether Streisand discovered this midway through recording and figured the hell with it, or worse still for such a famed interpreter,

never got it at all. The second seems more likely, for there are apparently many things about the music other twenty-seven-year-olds are making that pass her right by. This record misrepresents the spirit of that music in just about every way imaginable.

The New York Times
October, 1969

TWO NIGHTS AT THE WESTBURY MUSIC FAIR

1. Tom Jones

There were seven women in Section A, Row F, behind us, and the woman with the aisle seat, right next to where his burly helpers would hustle him on and off the round stage, had earned her prize appropriately, with middle-class virtues. The very night she had received her Inner Circle bulletin, in January, she had ordered her tickets for Tom Jones's opening night at the Westbury Music Fair. I had my seat by press privilege, and my mother, who accompanied me, had done nothing more strenuous then skip her church group to do so. She was acting very cool about it.

My mother is a sane, intelligent, demure woman with little interest in popular music, but as we eavesdropped on the women behind us, reminiscing about Elvis Presley and complaining about the plethora of uniformed guards, she got worried.

"I know this guy is going to get to me. I'm putting up a big front, but I know. I saw Enzo Stuarti and before it was over I was falling all over him, and you know what he is. It's the ambience."

She was right, but she has nothing to worry about—she succumbed to talent. Jones is very good at what he does. He has one of the best voices in popular music—not one of your failed opera baritones, but a rich, husky ballad instrument with heavy black and country influences and that essential romantic Welsh fillip—and he knows how to use it. Not many singers could do such a wide variety of top-forty material—from Wilson Pickett to Al Green, from Frank Sinatra to Three Dog Night—so credibly. Only once, on "Till," did he indulge in the overdramatizing most similar performers feel is obligatory.

Of course, the seven women behind us were not there for a rock and roll appreciation course. They were there for, you know, sex, and that is more problematic-it is considered gauche, somehow, for a woman in her thirties to exhibit her libido. Not that the crowd thought so. Women from eleven to sixty paraded at Tom's whim to the stage to present their love offerings-stuffed animals and champagne and a house key or two. They wiped the sweat from his face and his body and kept the handkerchiefs as souvenirs. And they kissed him, to the glee of their less fortunate sisters. Tongue kisses received especially enthusiastic applause. Their husbands, those who were there women outnumbered men about four to one-appeared indulgent. It was like New Year's Eve-one tongue kiss never ruined a marriage. Sex at a distance. Nothing like it for letting off steam.

I know I'm not a thirty-six-year-old housewife, but I reserve the right to be a little saddened and a little confused by all of this. Jones is a fine singer, but even my mother noticed that he's an awkward, rather overstated dancer. He dances a lot more surely than I do, but then,

he gets paid for it, and if Wilson Pickett were to swivel his hips that way, he'd be laughed off the stage of the Apollo. Elvis Presley and Mick Jagger also move a lot better than Jones, and movement is what all this sex is about, right?

Nobody at Westbury is complaining. Jones sold out three thousand seats for six nights as soon as the first ad appeared. That doesn't make him quite the attraction the hype claims—many rock acts sell at least as well just as fast, and Presley, for example, would do a lot better if he wanted the work—but it's impressive enough, and it ought to be remembered that Jones's fans have the money (and the inclination) to go to places like Las Vegas. That's obviously the kind of success Jones wants, and he earns it likably enough. He is at least as indulgent of his fans as their husbands are.

All in all, not a bad evening. My mother and I have a date to see Engelbert Humperdinck when he comes round.

Newsday April, 1972

2. ENGELBERT HUMPERDINCK

My mother and I returned to the Westbury Music Fair to see Engelbert Humperdinck last night. The truism about Jones and Humperdinck, who are both managed by a smart man named Gordon Mills, is that they project mutually exclusive images: the rough-hewn, sexy rocker and the handsome, romantic balladeer. Since I think of my mother as sentimental, I thought she might prefer Humperdinck, but she didn't. Neither did I.

I am a rock and roll person, and although I assume Humperdinck is good at what he does, there's no way I'll ever like it. I think the smooth, melodramatic pop style is as false as the fantasy lyrics of "To the Ends of the Earth" and "Through Spanish Eyes." Moreover, it tends to undermine whatever emotional possibilities survive the structure and melody of more realistic material, such as Humperdinck's big one, "Release Me." Musically, the evening was a loss for me before it began.

Sometimes, though, a charismatic performer overwhelms your prejudices, so that you marvel at the sheer fact of his presence at the same time you deplore it. Last night, however, even my low expectations were betrayed. I expected that Humperdinck would at least act comfortable with his own sexual appeal. Instead, he felt compelled to embellish it with naughty jokes ("If you have a virus, it gets you in the place you use most—it got me in the throat second") and endearing mannerisms ("Cease!" or "That's so cute!"). As my mother put it: "What seemed to be so natural with Tom Jones with this guy is so contrived. He's working so hard at it."

His audience was, of course, mostly female, a little older and a little less swinging than the Jones crowd. They didn't grab as much or scream as much or come on as much, but then if they dig Humperdinck's dreamy but somewhat sedate illusion, that probably isn't their style. They doubtless prefer to simply bask in the experience.

For me, the most moving moments in the show were provided by the fans. A woman in a black beehive next to me—a squatter who eventually was forced to relinquish her sixth-row seat—clapped wildly throughout the first two songs, almost like a little girl, while her blond friend simply sat there, close to tears. I was especially impressed by a woman named Ingrid who was elected by Humperdinck to sit on the stage during his rendition of "Sugar Sugar." She did a marvelous siren act, beckoning him with a crooked finger and then attempting (unsuccessfully, I'm afraid) to cool it a little when he approached.

The fantasies that performers like Humperdinck cater to are unreal, but there's something beautiful about them. How wonderful that the human spirit should preserve its utopian impulses, its longing for some sort of serene romantic perfection, even if the image around which these impulses organize themselves is a very silly and inflated man. I don't suppose Humperdinck's fans are going to feel very flattered when I say they're too good for him. But that's what I think.

Newsday May, 1972

CAROLE KING: FIVE MILLION FRIENDS

Carole King's *Tapestry* is a triumph of mass culture. In less than two years it has sold well over five million copies, putting it in a class with the best-selling albums of all time, and it is still on the charts, moving from 59 to 52 in the October 29 Cash Box, for instance. Such statistics are so overwhelming that they seem to transform a mere record into some sort of ineluctable cultural presence, and in a sense they do. But five million people isn't everybody there are a hundred million phonographs in this country. How would you estimate the overlap between Tapestry and the two albums that have sold even more, The Sound of Music and Simon & Garfunkel's Bridge over Troubled Water? Obviously, Tapestry shares a lot of its audience with Bridge over Troubled Water, but one way of explaining the difference between the two is to guess that twice as many Sound of Music owners also own Bridge over Troubled Water as own Tapestry.

All three of these albums are smooth, well made. But technique in itself is neutral—it can be bane or benison, manipulation or revelation. The Sound of Music exemplifies its perils, and the perils of popular culture in general. Pauline Kael wrote of the film that its audience became "the lowest common denominator of feeling: a sponge" and that it epitomized "the sentimental American tone that makes honest work impossible." By offering simplistic solutions to problems that are unreal in the first place, it can only separate its audience from the details of their real-life difficulties, thereby exacerbating them. In contrast, Bridge over Troubled Water is often funny and honest. It breathes life. Yet I suspect that its flawless, rather languid loveliness is ultimately sporific, whereas Tapestry is in many ways an eye-opener.

Not that Carole King approaches the bitter hard-rock perspicuity of Bob Dylan or Mick Jagger. Why should she? If such work were suddenly to sell five or six million units, it would probably be for the worst sadomasochistic reasons. These things happen in stages, and Carole King has achieved unprecedented honesty and innovation within her range of appeal. Those who dismiss her sanguine world-view as sentimental either aren't listening or are afflicted with a constitutional inability to understand that many people do attain genuine contentment without wearing blinders. Tapestry functions as pacific listening for rock fans with similar aspirations. On the two albums preceding Tapestry her old group, which later became Jo Mama, tended to jar this serenity with uneven mixes and slightly jazzy settings. Then Lou Adler decided to produce her. The result goes down easy.

Tapestry had its chin-up song ("Beautiful") and its pastoral-escape song ("Way Over Yonder") and its inane life-is-cosmic song ("Tapestry"). But it also evoked the joys of physical (not necessarily sexual) love and the pain of the geographical separation that is the curse of romance in our mobile paradise. It contained a true and sentimental standard about friendship and a true and ironic standard

about breaking up. It praised an outlaw. And it affirmed the continuity of life with two apt classics from her preperformance rock and roll composing career. But most of all, it established Carole King's individuality as a woman.

For Adler's production was so smooth that it slipped a real, potent woman past five million half-suspecting Americans. Carole King is genuine. She is beautiful not because her features are ideal—she is the greatest thing to happen to the Jewish nose since Barbra Streisand-but because her face is open, pleasant, honest, warm. So is her piano style—the first widely recognized instrumental signature ever developed by a woman. And so is her voice-not crystalline folky or hog-chomping funky, just a speaking voice that catches and breaks and even quavers as it conveys melody and emotion. Men had been permitted colloquial vocal styles for many years, and by 1970 they were the norm, but women, objectified in the male-dominated culture, were expected to conform to the old instrumental norm or else ooze sex. Carole King destroyed that expectation, perhaps forever. No matter how many I-will-follow lyrics she writes and sings, that ought to be worth a footnote in anyone's history of cultural revolution.

A success as spectacular as that of *Tapestry* is impossible to anticipate and almost impossible to follow, so no one felt too put off when King's next album *Music*, covered its substantial lyrical retreat with a few minor musical advances. But now there is *Rhymes & Reasons*, which reneges on the advances and continues the retreat. Song by song, the melodies haven't lost their magical properties, and the words are not dishonest when you listen carefully. But the energy level is very even, and none of the most memorable musical-verbal phrases, those little snatches at the heart of a song's meaning, jolt the sensibilities the way "It's too late, baby, it's too late" or "Smackwater Jack he bought a shotgun" did.

There is other material available. Unfortunately, King seems so bound up in the present that she has abandoned her past, but it would be delightful to hear her rendition of "Chains" or "The Locomotion" or the completely in-character "Something Good." What's more, she and lyricist Toni Stern have written two songs tougher than any in King's career. "No Sad Song" is a dispassionate account of the death of a Casanova which was a minor hit for Helen Reddy, and "A Fine Way to Go" is a hardnosed story of sexual frustration in a small town, with a catch refrain that all lovers of popular culture should commit to memory: "You can't get everything you need at the movies."

If King is avoiding such stuff to protect her image, she's making a mistake. Contentment and quiet concern are essential to her broad popularity, but what is extraordinary about the mass audience she has attracted is that a good portion of it expects sharp insight as well as peace and consolation from its music. Neither Music nor Rhymes & Reasons will ever approach the sales of Tapestry because both lack that quality. I respect Carole King's integrity too much to believe her choice is crass. She's been lucky in her life. She's honestly happy with her husband and child and physical comfort and work, so that "No Sad Song" and "A Fine Way to Go" just don't feel like her story. The truism about mass culture is that the audience levels the work, but the paradox can be a lot deeper than that. Too often, the work is vitiated by the fact of its own success.

> Newsday November, 1972

CREEDENCE: WHERE DO YOU GO FROM THE TOP?

Creedence Clearwater Revival, the Berkeley, California, rock band, recently spent thirty thousand dollars on a party designed to attract attention. Since 1970 Creedence was the leading record-seller in the United States, Great Britain, West Germany, Canada, Israel, Switzerland, Norway, and El Salvador, this would appear a somewhat redundant exercise, albeit tax-deductible, but in fact it wasn't. For Creedence finds itself in a quandary as perplexing as it is enviable. Riveted onto the most inflexible hardrock framework this side of the Stooges and Grand Funk Railroad—which is to say, a framework with just enough variety in the vocals and hook riffs to qualify for the second station of rock fixity—the band has turned off the kind of fan who exults every time he identifies a chord change, who assumes a hit single is a bad record, and who talks about rock rather than rock and roll. Worse still, Creedence has not infused its public—a category that subsumes a remarkable range of high-school students, truck-stoppers, heads, and miscellaneous—with the kind of ardor public idols are expected to expect. The trouble is, both failings are inextricable from the success they accompany, which is based on a fanatical devotion to the music of rock and roll.

The most reasonable complaint about Creedence's music is that it always sounds the same, excuse enough for the chord-change crowd to put it down. The Doors, a group of comparable importance (and structure), are often subjected to the same complaint, but there is a difference. Listen first to *The Doors* and *Morrison Hotel*,

then to Creedence Clearwater Revival and Cosmo's Factory. To an outsider, all four records (excluding "The End" and "Alabama Song") probably sound pretty much the same. The rock devotee would probably argue that each pair shows a similar paucity of development. But the rock and roll fan, accustomed to taking his differentiation in small increments, perceives no sameness and no stasis. For Creedence, Cosmo's Factory is in a dozen tiny respects an elaboration. The most obvious change is in the songwriting, especially the lyrics, but there are others, e.g.: John Fogerty's singing has become surer and more subtle, the four musicians are more integral, the sound of the recording is fuller, "I Heard It Through the Grapevine" apotheosizes "Suzie Q"'s artless concept of rock improvisation, and so forth. Morrison Hotel, on the other hand, represents a deterioration for the Doors, not in the work of Krieger, Manzarek, and Densmore-though they are victimized by a certain inevitable guilt by association—but in Jim Morrison's vocal presence. As he discovers his real affection for rock and roll music—one side of the album is called "Hard Rock Cafe"—he uncovers his ability to relate wholeheartedly to it. Suddenly, Morrison's timbre loses much of its former mystery with no gain in directness, his phrasing lacks wit, and the music, while competent enough, excites only those hung over on the persona he once managed to project with such ferocious intensitythose entranced by an afterimage, so to speak.

For although Morrison once made music that was good as music, music was never his specialty, and consequently it was never the strength of the group he defined. The Doors were film students, remember, and their deepest passion was communication, which Morrison called "politics." Only Robbie Krieger was a musician by commitment, and given a few bad breaks, the group might very well have disbanded as quickly as it succeeded. When

their success became perfunctory, so did their music. Creedence, in contrast, played music for love for a decade before "Proud Mary."

Maybe this only proves the natural superiority of music to hype. In the end, it says here, devotion to craft—or art, if you insist—prevails. Even if that's true, though, it's worth remembering that we don't live in the end until the end comes. Without the loving hype of their musical predecessors, the Fogerty gang would still be Golliwogs, lucky to play for scale in Lodi and not knowing enough to sing about it. Anyway, Creedence hasn't really forsaken hype. It's merely replaced Elvis's pink Cadillac and the Beatles' paisley Rolls with a less showy model, something like a Land Rover. John Fogerty's flannel shirt is as apposite as all of Jimi Hendrix's pirate finery. As Fogerty is forever insisting, this is a bad time for media flash.

In practice, this means that Fogerty has no taste for public sexuality—that is, for sexiness. It is really the music of rock and roll that animates his devotion, and thus he calls into question all of our glib generalizations about the sexual purport of fifties rock. Fogerty possesses a classic (unique and yet tradition-defined) rock voice of the rough-edged variety. He goes sweet and smooth only occasionally, usually to communicate something very close to spirituality-listen to "Lookin' Out My Back Door" with that in mind—rather than the husky come-on of Presley or Morrison. His voice has much in common with John Lennon's, but unlike Lennon he has never written songs about women, love, romance. Fogerty derives from "Blue Suede Shoes," "School Days," and "Rip It Up" rather than "Don't Be Cruel," "Brown-Eyed Handsome Man," and "Long Tall Sally." This is a significant and perhaps even neurotic limitation. He does sing about women—his first five albums contained nonoriginals like "I Put a Spell on You," "The Night Time Is the Right

Time," "Good Golly Miss Molly," and "My Baby Left Me"-but almost never in his own words. Fogerty's compositions (two big exceptions: "Proud Mary" and "Lookin' Out My Back Door") fall into two approximate categories: choogling songs about rock and roll (forerunner: "Rip It Up") and songs of social and personal protest (forerunner, I insist: "Blue Suede Shoes"). Supposedly, there is no way to write an effective protest song; the genre is corny by definition. But Fogerty, the richest source closed to him, finds the way again and again, not just in famous successes like "Fortunate Son" and "Bad Moon Rising" but in minor pieces like "It Came Out of the Sky" and (a personal favorite) "Don't Look Now," which manages to encapsulate the class system in two minutes and eight seconds. The two categories come together in "Down on the Corner," which is about poor boys who choogle.

The energy implied by coinages like "choogle" and "ramble tamble" has more to do with vigor than with potency, more to do with simple activity than with sexuality. That distinction has its parallel in Fogerty's politics, which are less apocalyptic (and revolutionary) than activist (and liberal)—the politics of agape rather than the politics of eros. Don't underestimate the honest liberal: The Airplane sings up against the wall, but Creedence puts its royalties where its voice is and underwrites the Alcatraz Indians. Yet even amid such mature ambitions, temptation lurks. Creedence is tired of being just friends.

It was apparently John's subalterns (you remember Tom? Doug? Stu?), double bridesmaids, who felt this need most and pushed for the December bash in which journalists from everywhere were flown to Berkeley and housed and fed for a weekend. But it was strictly a flannelshirt affair. Although the party was timed to coincide with the release of Creedence's sixth LP, *Pendulum*, there was none of the superliminal exposure that is the normal price of such gatherings. The sound system played classical

music, unobtrusively. In return for several good meals and unlimited booze in the famous factory, the journalists had to sit through a one-hour television film on the group, screened specially at a downtown movie house, and a twenty-five-minute set comprising two new songs and "Grapevine" which left everyone shouting for an encore that did not materialize. The guests, feeling frustrated and misused, almost stripped the factory of posters and other movables before receiving their complimentary copies of *Pendulum* at the door. Concrete results included a bemused cover piece in *Rolling Stone*, respectful repayments from the rest of the music press, and queries from *Time* and *Newsweek* that never turned into stories.

Pendulum was instant platinum, of course. The reviews were kind. But there was no noticeable increase in excitement, and that was clearly anticipated for a double-fold album comprising ten John Fogerty originals, none initially released as singles and several representing a minor breakthrough toward sexual subjects. In another group such gestures would scarcely merit comment, but for Creedence they were grand indeed, and grander still was the music itself, including a saxophone solo and girlie choruses and lots of John Fogerty organ and even some audible overdubbing here and there. Unfortunately, richer does not mean better. Fogerty felt he had to go somewhere from all that economical guitar-playing and hard-rocking back-up, which is understandable, and that he should choose for his inspiration Booker T. Jones and a dollop of Terry Riley is typical of the fine taste in influences which his song selection has always demonstrated. In fact, the album's ambitions were so intelligent that kindness was almost mandatory. But the unaccompanied organ doodling that climaxed side one lacked even the somewhat specialized interest of Booker T. Jones and Terry Riley and didn't compare too well with Doug Ingle, either. Overlooking that brief abandonment of the music of rock and rollplus "Molina" and "Pagan Baby," which are about women, though they can hardly be classified as songs of eros—there wasn't too much to say. Ho-hum, another brilliant Creedence album.

Then something positively bad happened: John Hallowell's Inside Creedence, an authorized biography by a former Life staffer with a penchant for amazement and inappropriate analogies. Bantam peddled it for a dollar, with merchandizing keyed to Pendulum-both were graced with the very same dumb cover photo. It wasn't just that it looked like a fan-book, thus supporting the teen image the group is uneasily trying to shake, but that it really was a fan-book. The music, after all, simultaneously transcends and elevates its image, as rock and roll always has. John Hallowell, however, lacks John Fogerty's genius for generous deception. If John (and Tom and Doug and Stu) is less than a demigod, you won't find out why from Inside Creedence. He is a humble leader and they his admiring but self-sufficient henchmen. Hallowell refuses to discuss drugs, and although he babbles about the group's sex appeal with all the jittery wistfulness of a man who wishes he were twenty-three again, he never explores concretely or analytically Fogerty's assertion that the group tries to "avoid the cliché uses of sex." Responsibility for this blunder must pass to the group's manager, whose name is John Fogerty. Although a silly book won't ruin Creedence, it does demonstrate how difficult the task of achieving a new level of seriousness without abandoning the old is going to be.

Fantasy released a single off of *Pendulum* after all, and it was the political side that sold, not the mid-Beatles rocker. Then, unexpectedly, John's older brother Tom, the rhythm guitarist, quit the group. He had just turned twenty-nine and felt touring separated him from his family, the release said; his number would be retired, and Creedence would perform as a trio. And, oh yes, he was

planning a solo album. Soon little brother was spied hurrying back to the studio, and suddenly there was a sense of panic. That would make seven albums in less than three years. You demand experiments in your music? What is more experimental, in a culture that deifies change, than to stick around the place you know and love the best for so long? How long will such devotion be rewarded? I think John Fogerty has reached the place where he must run to stand still. I hope he makes it.

The Village Voice February, 1970

THE TULL PERPLEX

Some thirty-two thousand Long Island longhairs communed with Jethro Tull at Nassau Coliseum over the past two nights, and it's safe to say that even they don't know exactly why they were there. Tull defies analysis so successfully that it has inspired no imitations while building its following in nine U.S. tours over three-plus years. Any bunch of funky opportunists can came up with a variation on white blues or country rock or Memphis boogie. Tull's concept is much more complex and more difficult to execute.

Because its fans have been known to get involved in riots—not only the modest ticket melee that preceded this appearance but at least one major tear-gas affair, in Denver in 1971—and because it has spawned groups like Blodwyn Pig and Wild Turkey, there is a tendency to lump Tull with the so-called heavy bands. This is like calling the Mothers psychedelic because they entitle an album Freak Out! The analogy is doubly apt because Ian Ander-

son, Tull's vocalist-flutist-guitarist-composer and conceptmaster, is both an admirer and, it turns out, an imitator of Frank Zappa. If Jethro Tull can be categorized at all, it is as a supercommercial Mothers of Invention.

Like Zappa, Anderson doesn't seem to like rock music or its audience and refuses to traffic in the good-time boogieing rhetoric that has become so commonplace. Although he is not as ambitious musically as Zappa, he does control his band and obviously plans its sudden shifts and turns. Tull's stage act is interspersed with comedy bits—most of which elicit not so much laughter as respect of the "He's really weird" variety—and is defined by its distance from itself. The musicians parody their own rock star roles—one moment that is quite funny comes during the drum solo, when all five members of the group appear on stage, thrashing tiny cymbals—and Anderson goes a step further. Secure in his reputation as a madman, a dervish, the Fagin of rock, and master parodist, he now parodies that.

Yet Anderson is careful to give the audience its allimportant money's worth. If the people pay for weird, he will be weird for a while. If they pay for heavy, he will program in one of those tedious unaccompanied solos. If they pay for rock, he will include several of the brilliant, intricate, hard-driving passages that are well within his reach as a composer and his band's reach as technicians. If they pay for meaning, he will perform religious commentary like "Aqualung" and "Windup."

There's no need to belabor the obvious when Frank Zappa himself has set it down in an album title: We're Only in It for the Money. The real question is whether the audience gets value, and the answer is "probably." Despite Anderson's veiled contempt, people seem to have their own good time, clapping spontaneously on many occasions, getting off on the drugs that Anderson himself

eschews. However unoriginal Anderson's attacks on organized religion—and for that matter, on the rock star trip itself—may appear to the matoor observer, they obviously serve a function for the audience that's listening. And Tull's music does have its virtues, summed up for me by one young fan: "It isn't corny."

But a young fan's corn can be an older one's manna, and when I want to see an embodiment of the spirit of self-conscious critical intellect on the stage, I'll wait for Mick Jagger, who seems positively innocent because he is still capable of having a good time. The Tull concert lasted over two hours, and I got pleasure from perhaps ten minutes of ensemble playing. Such ratios are antilife, and all the anticlerical bull in the world will never redeem that dead time for me. I wonder how the percentage really ran for the rest of the thirty-two thousand.

Newsday May, 1972

MARK, DON, MEL, AND TERRY

The title of the seventh Grand Funk Railroad album is printed simply but grandly across the front cover—Mark, Don & Mel—and on the back there are some incredible liner notes by the fourth Grand Funk Railroad, Terry Knight. The clerk gave me a glance as I was scanning the notes, so I asked him how the set was selling. "Can't tell yet," he said, "just came in," and in a moment he was volunteering his critical opinion: "If I had my way, I'd burn every one of their albums." He told me he was twenty-one, college dropout, son of an advertising man, into music. That last was why he was so vehement. They

weren't good musicians, there were so many good ones out there, it just wasn't fair, and it made him mad.

Then someone who had worked at the store longer came over to explain the Grand Funk hype. Because Capitol Records controlled a big distributing company, he said, it could push discount and display deals and create a blitz for its product, especially in the big general outlets. He recalled how twenty-five copies of the first Grand Funk album had languished in his racks for months. Then, wham, the hype took hold, and they all went like that. He was a little unclear, however, about just why the hype took hold when it did.

A few minutes later I was reading the notes to some friends, who were laughing. This was a bizarre piece of writing, even for Knight, whose capacity for bull is almost limitless. Its central conceit was that the members of Grand Funk Railroad were among those rare world heroes-including Jesus, Napoleon, Twiggy, and Mao, one of whom had recently concluded a business deal with Knight—who come to be known by first name only, It is noteworthy that at the time Knight was writing he was preparing lawsuits for fifty-five million dollars against the members of Grand Funk Railroad. It is also noteworthy that when I pronounced the deathless first names that climaxed this panegyric, my friends responded with a resounding "Who?" This was not an unfair question. Even more than the lawsuit, it indicated how grand Knight's conceit really was. And yet, and yet, this all made sense somehow.

Knight's lawsuit, which has grown since it was instituted and may well grow again before this is printed, is not really against the members of Grand Funk Railroad, or even against Mark, Don, and Mel. It is aimed at his business associates, the three co-directors of GFR Enterprises, Ltd., who are listed after Knight on the letterhead

as "M Farner," "D Brewer," and "M Schacher." Farner, Brewer, and Schacher are young musicians from the automobile fields north of Detroit. In 1966, when they were still in their midteens—assuming the ages they offer now are legitimate—Farner and Brewer played with a somewhat older character who had formerly been a prominent local disc jockey—Terry Knight. Knight wanted to be a star. Fans recall that when he quit his gig at CKLW in 1964, he left the impression that he was about to join the Rolling Stones. Instead, he wound up singing folk songs in a coffee house in Buffalo, so mortified that for months almost no one in Detroit learned where he was. Then he formed Terry Knight and the Pack.

The band was pretty successful but hampered by the usual ego hassles. Knight was up front more than Mark's many admirers thought appropriate, and he seemed to think anyone who smoked marijuana was a junkie. He was smart, and even though Mark and Don laughed behind his back they listened to him, but in less than two years animosity split the group. Knight performed for a while before settling into a desk job at Capitol, In early 1969, after a long silence, Brewer called him. There are those who believe Knight really called Brewer-in other words, that it was Knight's concept from the beginning. It's more likely, however, that the raw material came from the band, especially Farner, the singer-guitarist-composer. But Knight shaped it and named it, and now in a way his conceit has come true-whereas most rock groups are referred to by the last word in their name, everyone calls Knight's band Grand Funk.

Grand Funk's loud, simple, repetitive music had direct antecedents among all hard-rock traditions of amplification and showmanship—Duane Eddy and Link Wray, the Who and the Yardbirds, Cream and what was briefly known as British blues, and especially American heavy bands like Blue Cheer and Iron Butterfly. Intended to overpower in live performance, this music lacked the sort of identifying marginal detail—hook riff, dance beat, catch phrase or melody—that helps to vary radio programming, and so Grand Funk got little air-play. What notice its records and performances attracted from print media was negative. And yet hard-rock fans who hate Grand Funk Railroad invariably identify its success as hype.

"Hype" is a term often applied to someone else's promotion. Usually, it is fairly routine-big ads, stories in the trades and the rock press, radio exposure, special merchandising-but because they were denied direct media access to their audience by taste-making middlemen, Grand Funk had to come up with something special. That was Terry Knight's job. His solution was simple: Instead of dispersing information by electronic and print media, he used trucks and airplanes. It was also paradoxicalessentially, he started a grass-roots movement with corporate money. Capitol's clout as a distributor was useful but secondary. If it were that easy, Capitol wouldn't lose money on so many artists. Rather, the key was Frank Barsalona, of Premier Talent, the biggest booking agent in rock, who took on Grand Funk after another of his acts saw the group at one of the five Southern pop festivals it played for free in the summer of 1969.

Book any rock act before a similar act, and a percentage of the audience is bound to dig it. The process is obvious enough to have made agents like Barsalona very powerful, but it is not automatic. In fact, Grand Funk's success has not been duplicated. Something about the overwhelming simplicity of the music hit the audience. Something about Farner's presence—striding the stage gracefully, his compact torso gleaming with sweat, his gorgeous auburn hair

swinging and shimmering beneath the lights—inspired countless midadolescent males to spread the word. Something about his exhortations to his brothers and sisters made Grand Funk Railroad the spiritual center of a whole youth culture for a season. In fact, the group was so successful that it made enemies, demonstrating conclusively that there are many youth cultures. Even today, you can find plenty of kids in record stores who are eager to put down their younger, less privileged and articulate brothers and sisters for liking Grand Funk Railroad.

Because its tidings traveled largely through industry channels and by word-of-mouth, there is a sense in which the entire Grand Funk phenomenon—three musicians, one media master, some middlemen, and approximately three million teen-agers—remained a secret until its climax on July 10, 1971, when Grand Funk made its Beatle move and filled Shea Stadium. For the teen-agers, secrecy was essential-they wanted to share something adults could not touch—but it frustrated Knight. He claimed to be happy behind the scenes, but he wasn't-after all, he had done what all the scoffers had said he would never do, and the scoffers seemed hardly aware of it. He claimed contempt for the press and said Grand Funk would not talk to journalists because they resented all the bad reviews-more likely he didn't want them to say something radical, of course—but bombarded the press with mimeographed releases. Finally, he invited hundreds of journalists to a press conference with the band in May of 1971. Only a handful showed up.

But at Shea Stadium, the end of the beginning and the beginning of the end, fame finally came to Grand Funk for the band as an entity, which was more Terry Knight than it was, you remember, Mark, Don, and Mel. And this was just. Populist critics convinced themselves that be-

cause the phenomenon was genuine, the music was good, but despite those millions of keepsake albums, the music was not the phenomenon. It was a derivative synthesis, most likely without much long-term value even for those who bought it. But the hype, ah, the hype will live on in the annals of humankind.

Yet whatever the aesthetic justice of seeing musicians as symbolic figures, they remain human beings. Mark Farner does make some good music—he has written many good rockers and a couple of first-rate ballads. He is talented and young and-not incidentally, because it comes through on stage—idealistic. He finances an underground paper in Flint, Michigan, and has been seen in the vicinity of John Sinclair's Rainbow People's Party. Sometime in March he and Don and Mel asked John Eastman-the same John Eastman, Knight reminds us continually, who figured so prominently in the breakup of the Beatlesto help them extricate themselves from Knight. Some of Farner's political admirers claim this is because he learned that Knight was investing Farner's earnings in oil, but Farner knew that years ago, Most likely, he and the others just want to be men for themselves.

It turns out that Knight has his co-directors so entangled in legalities that their attempt is likely to fail, but that seems almost irrelevant. So does the cynical suggestion that the whole thing is a vast publicity stunt to revive the band's sagging career. A year ago Knight was talking about releasing three LP's a year in perpetuity, but everyone knows there isn't that much difference between a phenomenon and a fad. The lawsuit is like a death notice for what we will call a phenomenon. Phenomena needn't last, and Grand Funk was an extraordinary one. Let those who participated remember. Mark, Don, and Mel will do all right for themselves, Terry Knight will win again,

and those three million teen-agers, well, whatever the quality of the music, they had themselves a good old time.

Newsday May, 1972

BILL GRAHAM

I can't remember exactly what the speech was about. Like many men with hard-boiled pretensions, Bill Graham can be as fulsome as any other showbiz tough guy when mollified, and this was such an occasion. In between White Trash and Mountain, both of whom put in guest appearances at the Fillmore East's farewell show, Graham came on stage and uttered a few forgettable words before some guy in the balcony yelled out an interruption. The balcony speech I remember in its entirety. "Fuck you!" the guy said.

Graham glanced up and continued briefly, but soon someone in another part of the balcony began to shout. That stopped him. Graham looked in the direction of his first tormentor.

"I'm not going to say much more," he said. "It only takes one guy like you to ruin it for you."

I must admit I felt a bolt of sympathy for Bill. The poor fucker packs the house, admission by fucking invitation only, and a couple of ringers sneak in to haunt him. Not that there weren't plenty of enemies on the scene anyway. On Second Avenue there was a small riot as a horde of street folk, rock freaks, cultural historians, and outside agitators mounted one final crash at the citadel of the stars. Certainly, few of the rock writers I said hello to inside qualify as Graham's friends, and although the audience consisted largely of employees, that guarantees nothing.

The story is that Graham used to take a perverse delight in suckering green-shirts who didn't know his face into insulting the boss. To be honest, I've yelled insults at the stage myself on occasion. But the consensus seemed to be that this was Graham's night. We'd all had our share of good times at the Fillmore East, and most of us never paid a cent for them. Some appearance of courtesy was in order.

Most people I know profess to have hated the Fillmore East, and I suppose they're telling the truth, but I never did. Maybe I'm like one of those carp that thrive on the pollution at the bottom of Lake Erie, or maybe it really wasn't such a terrible place. The complaints did vary, after all; sometimes they even contradicted each other; and they all boiled down to lovers of popular culture cringing from the rest of the populace. Those without money complained about the prices, while those who could pay complained about having to wade through the hustlers who surrounded the place every weekend. Hip mythmongers complained that Graham was ripping off the Lower East Side community, while those who have lived in the neighborhood all their lives complained that he was simultaneously attracting riffraff and driving up rents. Everyone hated the security freaks until they found someone sitting in their seats, and people who would shout fire in a crowded theater got pissed off because they couldn't smoke in the auditorium. Graham reneged on an early promise to rip out the front seats and put in a dance-floor and was accused of destroying the participatory energy that had made the Haight so exciting back in those balmy premedia days, but no one noted that in these smoggy postmedia days at San Francisco's Winterland, which is all dancefloor, there are a lot more people sitting around in the Coca-Cola than dancing. My own pet peeve was the endless encores, which rarely satiated the music-starved multitudes around me. Graham claims that he was forced to such lengths by his audience. The farewell show, which he

presumably controlled, ran eight hours.

And in the end it proved to be a show indeed. Less than a year after closing the Fillmores East and West and promising (or threatening) the rock world with an extended vacation, he was producing more than any independent in the country. He had really pulled out, it was obvious in retrospect, because halls the size of the Fillmores were no longer the most efficient way to present live rock. The music had outgrown them, and for all Graham's complaints about rock's big-business aspects, there he was putting on the Stones all over the West Coast. To prove that the pullout was really only a show, the closing of the Fillmore West was recorded on film and released as a music documentary less than a year later. The title was simply Fillmore, but it could just have well have been Graham.

In Fillmore Graham reveals that rock and roll isn't really the life he would have wished for himself. He recalls—not dolefully, but with some nostalgia—that around the time he was managing the San Francisco Mime Troupe he wanted to be a character actor. What he doesn't seem to quite understand is that he has long since achieved his wish. Graham is typecast in a role he created himself, and he is always on. When the most entertaining moments in a movie that features San Francisco rock groups from the Dead and the Airplane all the way down to Cold Blood and It's a Beautiful Day are provided by a man talking on the telephone, you know he's exerting real dramatic presence. Gazing up at Graham's enormous likeness on the screen, I felt like Winston Smith at the end of 1984—I loved Big Brother.

This must have been more or less what Graham intended to achieve by diminishing his public identity. What would we do once we didn't have Bill Graham to kick around any more? Graham denies everything, of course. He admits

to interviewers that he wants to be liked, of course, but he'd rather be respected, and if nobody respects him, that's all right, too, because he still knows he's the most creative rock producer in history. Ah yes, obviously a man at peace with himself. He should tell it to a shrink. Like so many impresarios, Graham is possessed by a need for approval as intense as that of the most insecure and egomaniacal performer's. In an essay called "Socialist Impresarios," written for the New Statesman in England in 1962, Colin MacInnes established the historical inevitability of such characters: "Ever since the days of ancient Egypt and beyond, popular arts have always been sponsored, initially at least, by loud-mouthed hucksters with artful patter and a big drum: in other words, by impresarios obsessed by the whole idea of promotion, themselves emotionally involved in the adventure whatever their other motives may have been." Bill Graham really is the world's most efficient and creative rock producer. No doubt, some people hate him just because he is successful. But many more hate him because he has the personality of a successful man.

The drama Graham gathers around himself has distinctly Freudian overtones—he plays the Reality Principle within a little world that is dedicated to the Pleasure Principle. This may appear contradictory, but not to someone who happens to embody the contradiction. After all, where else could the Reality Principle experience so much Pleasure? Where else could it contend with so many yocks and yo-yos—sybaritic musicians, gimme-gimme fans, utopian politicos? Fillmore deals mostly with musicians, who habitually test their own approvability with whims that shift like the phases of the moon. But it also records Graham's view of the transmogrification of the audience from a flower generation—although he was there, his descriptions sound strangely like the ones that appeared in Time and Newsweek in 1967—into a greedy

pack of adolescent suburbanites, yowling for encores from any group the record industry could hype them on. And these kids lead us directly to the politicos, because Graham doesn't really distinguish between them.

Graham subscribes to the spoiled-brat theory of the American Left. For him, a fifteen-year-old hitter shouting for more Sir Lord Baltimore is a direct antecedent of the movement. "Might makes right," he tsks sarcastically as freaks fight bayonets with rocks in a newsreel clip in Fillmore, and oddly enough he is not talking about the bayonets. Unfortunately, Graham's theory has been supported by his experience. The radicals he has dealt with, like most radicals, have been long on rhetoric and short on experience. When they demanded a "community free night" at the Fillmore East, they assumed that there actually was a freak community that wanted to groove on its own nonimported, nonstar culture, and that this community attracted the Fillmore and its audience to Second Avenue. The reality-and the Reality-was more complicated. In any mass society, whatever its politicoeconomic system, hip entrepreneurs like Graham are as crucial to the spread of new culture as are subcultural enclaves to its nurture.

Because they turned out to lack this entrepreneurial knack, not to mention what MacInnes would call "the inspired impresario temperament," the people who took it upon themselves to run the free night never did get it together. As a resident of the Lower East Side and an observer/participant of both hip music and hip politics, this didn't surprise me, and yet I sided unequivocally with the radicals. But only now that I love Big Brother do I understand why. Graham's impulses are almost as good as those of a man who likes representing the Reality Principle within our present reality can be. He has staged

countless benefits and free concerts, and he really does try (in his inevitably elitist way) to produce rather than just promote. He has done more than his share to turn people on. Yet he is far more ready to provide people with entertainment (Pleasure) than with power (Reality) because it costs him less to do so. Accumulated capital is might, and Graham has it, and it does not make right. Graham's own attraction to the Pleasure Principle is showing a heavily sybaritic side—a luxury apartment in San Francisco, a house in Marin County, a country place in Santa Cruz, and a villa in Switzerland are too much remuneration even for work as obsessive as Graham's. That's why musicians like him, fans get their music from Howard Stein, and politicos continue to breathe fire at the mention of his name.

Call it a paradox that won't be resolved until the millennium, when a just politico-economic system finally permits real spiritual growth. But understand that Graham relishes the paradox because it is identical to his role, and that by doing so he is not speeding the millennium on its way. We love Big Brother for his exhibitionistic hostility, his epithets, his profane intolerance of inefficiency. He's so good at it, so colorful, so right on. But what the politicos understand is that pleasure will never redound to everyone until we stop loving people just because they are colorful. Yes, Bill Graham is very good at what he does. If only he were utopian enough to try to be a lot better.

The Village Voice
July, 1971
Newsday
May, 1972

FOUR PIECES ABOUT BOB DYLAN

1. OBVIOUS BELIEVERS

I think people are missing the point of Nashville Skyline, which is as it should be, since they were probably supposed to. The beauty of the album is that it is totally undemanding. In the past, it was always possible to enjoy Dylan without understanding him; I don't think he would have achieved his postfolk popularity otherwise. Even if you found his metaphors opaque and his situations sur-surreal, you could dig him-Dylan-himself in the most showbiz that-man-himself sense, Dylan the presentation—for, comprehensible or not, Bob Superstar was always lurking in the inflections of that endless wit as well as out front in the persona shifts that have always defined his career. It was fun to wrestle with him. But you never held him for the count of three. Granting the two obvious exceptions—"Down Along the Cove" and "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight"-even the songs on that great blow for simplicity (and it was, it was), John Wesley Harding, were as gnomic as any of his previous work—less action-packed, less grandiloquent, but finally elusive. Only the kind of know-nothing know-it-alls that Dylan seems to attract by the thousands could ever believe they had pinned that album down.

But as everyone knows, this record is different. The songs are so one-dimensional that they seem contrived, as if daring A. J. Weberman to search out the secret symbolic meaning. Unfortunately, even though Dylan is in too genial a mood to actually be daring anybody, the know-it-alls can be expected to take him up on it. This time they

will be ignored, which is good, because stupidity should always be ignored, but also bad, because there is still some trickery going on, and I get the feeling nobody wants to know about it.

As usual, it has to do with image. For the past four years, since the traumatic turn to rock, Dylan has been as private a celebrity as J. D. Salinger. In the beginning he was shy, perhaps wary of his own fame, but at the same time a funny and engaging, hence beloved, performer. After Newport, 1965, however, he stopped doing his half. Public appearances became rare, and because he was in demand as a profile subject, his distaste for reporters became notorious. Even before the accident he was difficult to reach; afterward he became an unequivocal recluse. But although none of his fans were sure he would ever be heard from again, they continued and in fact intensified the one-sided affair. Then, after two and a half years, the ice began to crack.

The last songs on John Wesley Harding presaged a new Dylan, and at the Woody Guthrie memorial in Carnegie Hall we got a glimpse of him-bearded, smiling, neighborly, one-upping everyone with lively electric versions of Guthrie songs but doing it in a really nice way. Music from Big Pink, with its new songs, was another message of love, and they kept coming. Before John Wesley Harding even Dylan anecdotes were precious, but now they became more common, and what's more, credible-Dylan at the Woodstock P.T.A., Dylan offering the Everly Brothers a song at the Bitter End. He began to grant somewhat impersonal interviews—one to Hubert Saal, of Newsweek, a long one to some friends at Sing Out! And while the recording sessions for John Wesley Harding had been top secret, the music press offered a virtual play-by-play on Nashville Skyline. We heard of television appearances with Johnny Cash and a projected tour. After all the Cash

stories no one was surprised when Nashville Skyline turned out to be an extension of "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight."

As always, Dylan insists that the new Dylan is the real one. He told Hubert Saal that he never really identified with folk music. It was just something he latched on to: "I suppose there was some ambition in what I did. But I tried to make the songs genuine." Self-expression? He says of Nashville Skyline: "These are the type of songs that I've always felt like writing when I've been alone to do so. The songs reflect more of the inner me than the songs of the past." After eight years as psychic wanderer, Dylan is transmuted into man-about-the-house—friendly, stable, secure, polite to interviewers, and promising not to vomit it back in our faces next year. Well now, I don't know. I am certain Dylan is sincere, but I am also certain that he was sincere about protest music when he was into that. He is a master image manipulator, but his mastery has always been purely instinctual—his dislike of the press is sincere, too. I don't think Dylan even wants to have an image, but as an entertainer he can't avoid it, and his sense of what he must do is so acute that he just naturally finishes one step ahead, race or no race.

In "Lay, Lady, Lay" Dylan offers the central argument of Nashville Skyline: "Why wait any longer for the world to begin?/ You can have your cake and eat it too./ Why wait any longer for the one you love/ When he's standing here in front of you?" * I quote all four lines to make clear how well the first two fit the love song. Yet the world they imply is a world of events as well as a world of love—like so many Beatle fragments, the stanza gets better all the time. "Why wait any longer for the world to begin?" is a

[&]quot;Lay, Lady, Lay" by Bob Dylan copyright © 1969 Big Sky Music. Used by permission of Big Sky Music.

political cop-out, but it's a beautiful one, beautiful because it is true. Why wait, when it is possible to create within your own world and still anticipate that better one?

The most important implications of the sentiment are political not because it doesn't apply equally well to ye olde artistic/religious/identity search but because Dylan retains political importance not just for the folk diehards but for everyone who cares about both Dylan and politics. John Wesley Harding was political though ambivalent—if "All Along the Watchtower" was ominous, "Dear Landlord" was conciliatory—and many of us would not have been surprised, before the Nashville stories, if the follow-up had been even more political. But Nashville Skyline, we are told, is apolitical, inspiring some nasty gloating from the fainthearts who are beginning to fear radicalism. They're glad the radical culture hero has turned into a good old boy.

Country music, the mode of Nashville, has its audience base in the white South, the Midwest, inland California, and the nouveau suburbs. It is naturally conservative, which has not stopped the Byrds and the Flying Burrito Bros. from dissociating themselves, more or less explicitly, from the yahoo reaction of the drugstore truck drivin' man. Such a position is possible because the basic impulse of the music seems Jeffersonian—ruggedly individualistic, antistatist, full of the man-to-man charity that Gram Parsons has called white soul and Dylan has celebrated by giving his seat to the poor boy on the street in "Tonight I'll Be Staying Here with You." It would be fair to say that Barry Goldwater is more sympathetic to this configuration than Jacob Javits but equally fair to say that Paul Goodman is more sympathetic than either.

The Jeffersonian impulse infused the movement when Dylan was its minstrel, but because the state has proved more brutally implacable than such idealism could have predicted, the movement has responded with a militant militarism of its own. The movement insists on organizational solidarity, and if there is anything clear about Dylan, it is that he doesn't like organizations. He is a Jeffersonian; he insists on being his own man. He has gone to country music because it is a repository of Jeffersonian values. But he has no apparent interest in exposing, or even understanding, their subversion. For although country music appears Jeffersonian, it is really Jacksonian—intensely chauvinistic, racist, majority-oriented, and antiaristocratic in the worst as well as the best sense. That is to say, it voices both sides of populism: the democratic and the fascistic.

The Sing Out! interview, conducted in Woodstock, ended strangely, with Dylan defending a painter friend who supported the war: "I've known him for a long time, he's a gentleman and I admire him, he's a friend of mine. People have their views. Anyway, how do you know I'm not, as you say, for the war?" Shocking. But just for fun, let me suggest the possibility that Dylan is for the war. It is fatuous to believe that good art and good politics go together, and if Dylan isn't a political conservative, he is certainly becoming an aesthetic conservative. More and more his work emphasizes formal discipline, concision, understatement. His music has become markedly more complex. He has experimented with the pop-song break instead of chug-chugging from stanza to stanza. This kind of distillation can take place only in a controlled environment, but Dylan obviously cherishes his privacy for more than scientific reasons. In Sing Out! Happy Traum told Dylan: "I think that events of the world are getting closer to us, they're as close as the nearest ghetto," and Dylan responded, "Where's the nearest ghetto?" How long will it take the Panthers to reach Woodstock? A hundred years, maybe, or five. And if it's five, what will Dylan do then?

He says he writes songs only because he has a contract; as long as he must, he does them as well as he can. So perhaps he wouldn't miss his art. But he would miss his privacy terribly. A disinclination to go out among men is the mark of the aristocrat, self-appointed or otherwise.

Has Bobby really turned into T. S. Eliot, fighting from his own tower? I don't think so. Although Dylan's artistic direction has become more rhetorical and less revolutionary—moving from Apollinaire to Yeats—the devices of his rhetoric are significant. He is a private man but a public artist. "The most you can do is satisfy yourself," he told Sing Out!, but also, "If you're doing it for them instead of you, you're likely not in contact with them." Dylan wants contact with them, if not them. He knows the audience is crucial, and he wants to reach everyone. S.O.!: "Why do you think your music appeals to American Indians?" B.D.: "I would hope that it appeals to everybody." S.O.!: "I know suburban people who can't stand it." B.D.: "Well, I wish there were more I could do about that."

So here he is, folks, Homebody Bob, singin' ten songs for your listenin' pleasure—well, nine, really, one is a hoedown sort o' thing. Everyone knows by now, I hope, how intense that pleasure is. But hasn't anyone noticed something odd? All of those leaks from Nashville, we all knew for certain what it would be, we even knew the details of the duet, and yet when we put it on the turntable, there was one bug: Dylan wasn't singing. It was someone else, some cowboy tenor who sounded familiar. Everyone remarked upon this, of course, but no one mentioned that by the mere trick of changing his voice Dylan had crossed us up once again. Nashville Skyline was as much a switcheroo as John Wesley Harding. It is touching that everyone wants to believe that Bobby Dylan has settled down, but don't count on it. All those protestations of easy innocence may be just one more shuck.

Or maybe they're not, Which would make them the biggest shuck of all.

The Village Voice May, 1969

2. Consumer Guide: Self-Portrait

Bob Dylan: Self-Portrait (Columbia), Jon Landau wrote to suggest that I give this a D, but that's pique. Conceptually, this is a brilliant album, organized by two central ideas. First, that "self" is most accurately defined (and depicted) in terms of the artifacts to which one responds—in this case, pop tunes and folk songs claimed as personal property, semispontaneous renderings of past creations frozen for posterity on a piece of tape, and (perhaps) even a couple of songs one has written oneself. Second, that the people's music is the music people like, Mantovani strings and all. But in order for a concept to work it has to be supported musically—that is, it has to make you listen. I don't know anyone, even vociferous supporters of this album, who plays more than one side at a time. I don't listen to it at all. The singing is not consistently good, though it has its moments, and the production-for which I blame Bob Johnston, although Dylan has to be listed as co-conspirator—ranges from indifferent to awful. It is possible to use strings and soprano choruses well, but Iohnston has never demonstrated the knack. Other points: It's overpriced, the cover art is lousy, and it sounds good on WMCA. For further elucidation, see Greil Marcus's farewell piece in Rolling Stone, C plus,

> The Village Voice July, 1970

3. Tarantula: Not Good Enough, Says Bobby

The official appearance of Bob Dylan's Tarantula is not a literary event, because Dylan is not a literary figure. Literature comes in books, and Dylan does not intend his most important work to be read. If he ever did, his withdrawal of the pieces that form Tarantula from publication five years ago indicates that he changed his mind. Of course, it's possible that he's changed his mind againwith Dylan, you never know. Most likely, however, his very elusiveness is what the unexpected availability of this book is really about. The pursuit of the great public artist by his great audience has been a pervasive theme of his career, and the bootleg version of Tarantula hawked on the street and under the counter by self-appointed Dylanologists and hip rip-off artists were simply a variation on that theme. For Dylan to permit the release of the book now (at a non-rip-off price, it should be noted) is to acknowledge the loss of a battle in his never-ending war for privacy. Quite simply, his hand has been forced by his fans. He is a book-writer now, like it or not.

To assert that Dylan doesn't belong in the history of literature is not to dismiss him from the history of artistic communication or of language. Quite the contrary. A songwriter does not use language as a poet or a novelist does, because he chooses his words to fit into some larger, more sensual effect; an artist who elects to work in a mass medium communicates in a different way from one who doesn't and must be judged according to his own means, purposes, and referents. That much ought to be obvious. But Dylan's choices do more than merit their own critical canons—they are incisive responses to modernism's cul-desac, in which all the arts, especially literature, suffer from self-perpetuating intellectualism and elitism.

What makes this all so confusing is that Dylan's fame and influence are based on his literary talents and pretensions. Just for fun, I might suggest that Dylan is no greater artist than Chuck Berry or Hank Williams, but only Dylan could have become the culture hero of a decade of matriculating college classes. Even at first, when Dylan's best songs were mostly acute genre pieces, he was believed to embody transcendent artistic virtues. The standard example was "Blowin' in the Wind," which interspersed straightforward political questions with metaphorical ones, always concluding: "The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind, the answer is blowin' in the wind." The song's "poetic" language-effective in the musical and emotive context, even though it appears hackneyed on the page—captured listeners sympathetic to its apparent assumptions and inspired much unfortunate imagemongering, but in retrospect we notice the ambivalence of the title: Can the answer be plucked from the air, or does it flutter out of reach?

Dylan may not have been aware he was equivocating when he wrote the song, but that doesn't matter, Equivocation was inherent in his choice of method. Like most of his confreres in the folk movement, Dylan got his worldview from the listless civil-rights and ban-the-bomb radicalism of the late fifties but was forced to find his heroes elsewhere, among the avant-garde artists who helped young postconformists define for themselves their separation from their fellow citizens. Once-Dylan found the ambition to use those artists as his own exemplars, he had to come to terms with their characteristic perspectivenamely, irony. Sure enough, in "My Back Pages" (1964) he was renouncing politics with a nice ironic flourish—"I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now." Unfortunately, the same song signaled his debut as a poetaster with a portentously clumsy opening line.

Between early 1964 and mid-1966—a period that in-

cludes the four albums from Another Side of Bob Dylan to Blonde on Blonde and the switch from acoustic to electric music—Dylan became a superstar. Pioneers of youth bohemia seized upon his grotesque, sardonic renderings of America as experienced by a native alien and elevated Dylan into their poet laureate, In response, professional defenders of poetry declared themselves appalled by his barbaric verbosity. Many of us, even while we were astonished, enlightened, and amused by Dylan's sporadic eloquence, knew why John Ciardi wasn't. But we didn't care, not just because Dylan's songs existed in an aural and cultural context that escaped the Ciardis, but because we sensed that the awkwardness and overstatement that marred his verse were appropriate to a populist medium. No one was explicit about this at the time, however, least of all Dylan, whose ambitions were literary as well as musical and whose relationship to his everexpanding audience was qualified by the fascination with an arcane elite to which his songs testified.

Tarantula is a product of this period; in fact, Dylan fans who want a precise sense of what the book is like need only refer to the liner notes of Highway 61 Revisited. The basic technique is right there; the vague story, peopled with historical personages (Paul Sargent) and fabulous or pseudonymous characters (the Cream Judge, Savage Rose), punctuated with dots and dashes, and seasoned with striking but enigmatic asides, all capped off with a fictitious letter having no obvious connection to what has preceded. That's all, folks. The book is a concatenation of similar pieces. Most of them seem unconnected, although a few characters, notably someone named aretha, do recur. The only literary precedent that comes to mind is Naked Lunch, but in a more general way the book is reminiscent of a lot of literature because it's an effort to read it. Unless you happen to believe in Dylan, I question whether it's worth the effort, and don't call me a philistine

—it was Bob Dylan who got me asking such questions in the first place.

For the strangest aspect of Dylan's middle period is that although it was unquestionably his literary pretensions that fanaticized his admirers and transformed the craft (or art) of songwriting, Dylan's relationship to literature as a discipline was always ambivalent. In fact, even to call it ambivalent is to point up the confusion—it was actually downright hostile. From Tarantula: "wally replies that he is on his way down a pole & asks the man if he sees any relationship between doris day & tarzan? the man says 'no, but i have some james baldwin and hemingway books' 'not good enough' says wally." From the notes to Bringing It All Back Home: "my poems are written in a rhythm of unpoetic distortion." Dylan borrowed techniques from literature—most prominently allusion, ambiguity, symbolism, and fantasy—and he obviously loved language, but he despised the gentility with which it was supposed to be tailored. His songs do seem derivative, but (like Tarantula) they don't derive from anyone in particular. Obvious parallels or "influences"— Blake, Whitman, Rimbaud, Céline-share only his approach and identity: the Great Vulgarian, the Magnificent Phonus Balonus. He wrote like a word-drunk undergraduate who had berserked himself into genius, the jumbled culture of the war baby-from Da Vinci to comic strips, from T. S. Eliot to Charlie Rich-his only tradition. His famous surrealism owes as much to Chuck Berry as to Breton or even Corso, and even though his imagery broadened the horizons of songwriting, it was only a background for the endless stream of epigrams—which songwriters call good lines-flowing into our language, some already clichés ("The times they are a-changin'," "You know something's happening, but you don't know what it is"), others still the property of an extensive, self-informed subculture ("Stuck inside of Mobile with the Memphis blues again," "Don't follow leaders, watch the parking meters"). Dylan may be a poor poet, but he is a first-class wit.

But such talk accedes to the temptation of placing Dylan's work in a page context, always a mistake. Literature may have engendered the Dylan mystique, but rock and roll nurtured it. We remember those lines because we've heard them over and over again, often not really listening, but absorbing the rhythm of unpoetic distortion just the same, Tarantula may contain similar gems, but we'll never know they're there, because Tarantula will never be an album. The wonderful letters, the funny bits, as well as the dreary, vaguely interesting stuff and the failed doomsday rhetoric-all will go. Aretha Franklin's continuing presence through the book is a portent of why, for shortly after Tarantula and Blonde on Blonde Dylan made another switch by abandoning the verbal play (and excess) of his long songs for brief, specifically pop works. For a while it appeared that this meant a total abandonment of the complexity of his vision, but New Morning makes clear that it is only a condensation. More and more, Dylan affirms the value of the popular and the sensual over the verbal. This book will find its way into A. J. Weberman's Dylan concordance and doubtless become a cult item, but it is a throwback. Buy his records.

The New York Times Book Review
June, 1971

4. I AM DYLAN

Bob Dylan may just be into his music, man, but in the past month he's continued to show a star's canniness. Just after the dubious *Greatest Hits Volume II* package, which is certain to be bought even by those who own all the old

stuff because it contains six new cuts, he released the heartening "George Jackson." Rolling Stone commented that "the song immediately divided Dylan speculators into two camps: those who see it as the poet's return to social relevance and those who feel that it's a cheap way for Dylan to get a lot of people off his back." This is ugly nonsense, of course, because the song is neither. Dylan seems finally to have come to terms with his own development. His inclusion of both "Hard Rain" and "My Back Pages" in the new compendium indicates that the protest Dylan and the antiprotest Dylan are both part of the star persona now. "George Jackson" is not a return to protest (Dylan has never lacked social relevance—that's what being a star means), and if the next LP doesn't include a lot of new political songs, that won't prove it was just a way of getting rid of poor A.J. More important is that Dylan responded with real human sympathy to a hideous assassination that Rolling Stone chose to fudge over with a notably pusillanimous account by a reporter from the San Francisco Chronicle. The song is getting airplay (62 percent in the December 11 Cash Box, and 57 with a bullet on the singles chart), most often with the "shit" taken out somehow, Reportedly C.B.S. president Frank Stanton personally ordered WCBS-FM to get rid of the "shit" or take it off, and WCBS-FM elected to take it off. Ahh, shit,

The Village Voice
December, 1971

JAMES TAYLOR

Let us be candid about this. James Taylor's immense popularity has had only negative effects among fanatical rock and rollers like myself. About a year ago, a mimeographed rock fan-mag called Who Put the Bomp? ran a ten-thousand-word appreciation of the Troggs (remember "Wild Thing"?) by Lester Bangs, a rock critic as well respected as he is wild-eyed, which was interrupted by a long fantasy in which Lester himself snuck off to North Carolina and ran Taylor through with a broken-off Ripple bottle. That's how deep the feeling goes. Me, I only took the poster from his third album and ripped it into four or five pieces. Then I hung the face on my wall and scrawled upon it slogans from imaginary Maoist comic books, e.g.: "Eat felt-tipped death, capitalist pig!"

All of which is only to acknowledge that no matter how sincerely I try to clear my mind of impure thoughts—and I do—I am no more likely to enjoy a James Taylor concert than an Engelbert Humperdinck concert, and that furthermore this prejudice is not primarily musical. If James Taylor weren't so famous, he would be inoffensive, even likable. Upon sane reflection I recognize that he is a master of folk guitar, and that I even like some of his songs—"Fire and Rain," "Something in the Way She Moves," "Night Owl." What's more, his midnight performance at Radio City Music Hall Friday night won me over to several old compositions that I'd heard without listening, especially "Knocking 'Round the Zoo," about his stay in a mental hospital.

Friday night was a special occasion for Taylor. Like so many of the wealthier rock stars, he apparently suffers from a pathological fear of crowds and performs rarely—this was his first official appearance in New York in about a year, and no tour is planned. And just a few hours before the concert he took an even bigger step by marrying Carly Simon, of Elektra Records and Simon & Schuster. Several of his admirers remarked that he looked elated. I wonder what he looks like when he's going to sleep.

The combination of performer, audience, and surroundings produced a predictably genteel event. A back-up band of L.A. studio musicians called the Section played an introductory set of mildly jazzy instrumentals that were skillful, wooden, and quite sterile. Taylor's appearance did provide some real life, but on such a cooled-out level that it was perceptible only by contrast. Moving with the exaggerated calm of a very nervous person, he went through all the old favorites in the spoiled collegiate drawl that is his unfortunate vocal trademark. There was also what was apparently a ten-minute song cycle from his forthcoming album that on first hearing sounded ambitious, which is good, and more trouble than it was worth, which is not. His audience responded with a muted enthusiasm that never bordered on the rambunctious. Everything was polite. Taylor even introduced his sound man by name, and when his amplifier made an incontinent noise, he promised that it wouldn't happen again.

There are rock stars who pretend that every electronic squawk is the word of God made manifest among us, and rock stars who can't remember their sound man's name when they want to bum a cigarette off him. Understandably, Taylor and his audience react to such pretension and egomania. They are intelligent and liberal and good. They work for McGovern.

Essentially, though, Taylor is leading a retreat, and the reason us rock and rollers are so mad at him is simply that the retreat has been so successful. We assume that there is something anarchic in all of us, something dangerous and wonderful that demands response, not retreat. In some semiconscious way Taylor must understand this. He has written a brilliant parody of the macho white-blues fantasy, at once so attractive and so repellent, called "Steamroller." It is significant that he and his band and his audience could find no other climax to the concert. There

was sweet baby James, singing rock and roll as if he meant it: "I'm a napalm bomb, guaranteed to blow your mind."

Another line of Taylor's interests me in this context: "I'm sure enough fond of my rock 'n roll." Me, I'm a lover, not a fonder.

Newsday November, 1972

CAT STEVENS

Wasn't it Isadora Duncan who encountered an Italian fisherman on a Mediterranean beach and vowed to conceive his child then and there? Watching Cat Stevens at Philharmonic Hall Tuesday night, I fantasized that during the period of obscurity that is apparently obligatory for all heroic singer-songwriters, Stevens read of this and vowed then and there to emulate the fisherman. He certainly did look nautical in his long-sleeved boat-necked T-shirt, his simple blue pants, his white shoes. His skin shone bronze in the artificial light, his golden locket swung astrologically, and his black curls earned the term "locks" better than any rock hair I've ever seen. He was young, he was virile, he was sensitive, and he was inarticulate.

Very roughly speaking, Stevens is the English James Taylor. Like Taylor, he is a promising but failed rock and roller from the sixties who built his reputation as an acoustic singer-songwriter in this decade, and like Taylor he now works with a band on tour. His second solo album, Tea for the Tillerman, was to 1971 what Taylor's second solo album, Sweet Baby James, was to 1970. Currently, his fourth album, Catch Bull at Four (the title refers not to death in the afternoon but to Buddhism), is number one

in the country. But while both performers attract an audience that is devoted and well behaved, Taylor's is much more concentrated among what might be called the collegiate counterculturists. Stevens attracts a good sprinkling of adult-identified adults and a great many of those luminous teenybopper girls who five years ago used to gaze adoringly at Donovan. In fact, his resemblance to Donovan is rather eerie.

Unlike Donovan and James Taylor, however, Stevens is almost always very rhythmic, and he tries to be sexy in a more or less conventional way. Although he never goes so far as to stand up while he sings, he is intensely enthusiastic. But only within a limited range. His crucial talent is an undeniable genius for the melodic catch-phrase, and from there he tests one's tolerance for redundancy. For emphasis, he always repeats a syllable—"Trouble, you're too much for me, ee," just like that—and for a climax, he always raises the decibel level, although never to an unseemly level. For general excitement, he shakes his head and locks. Many sit-down performers do this, but not with Stevens's hypnotic persistence. I kept trying to figure out what it reminded me of, and I finally did. Stevens looks as if someone just punched him out and he is trying to regain his wits.

It should go without saying that I wish he would. As a rock and roller, Stevens failed because he was ahead of his time—the slightly surreal values of "I Love My Dog" and the antibusiness tack of "Matthew & Son" were rare virtues for the midsixties—but times have changed, and if anything, Stevens has moved away from them. Despite his pretensions to poetic obscurity, he is without doubt the most mindless of the major singer-songwriters, even running slightly ahead of John Denver, and all the time he's spouting his romantic and generational clichés he's

also playing the guru. I don't mind when Johnny Nash sings a charming ditty about how things are getting better, but when Stevens informs the world that we're all on a peace train, I get annoyed. We're not, and if Stevens ever stops shaking his head long enough to see clearly for a second, he might realize it. I wish I were convinced that he would then be honest enough to break the news to his audience.

Newsday Nevember, 1972

JONI MITCHELL

Instead of writing, I fell asleep and dreamed I was reading the cover of *For the Roses*, which is some sort of tribute to Joni Mitchell's power. Because lyrics are music, and music is for listening, not much of my fantasy life is invested in printed lyrics. I figure the reason Bob Dylan has never provided a jacket libretto is that he wanted the reality of his songs to remain aural, and what's good enough for him But Joni Mitchell invites perusal. She has been writing textbook lyrics-as-poetry ever since "Both Sides Now."

"Both Sides Now" is such a great song that in 1968 it became a hit for a woman, Judy Collins, even though it wasn't about a man. But it does not proceed from vocal modes—it is philosophical rather than lyrical, literary rather than colloquial, a rather bookish song, and unlike most songs with similar pretensions, it almost lives up to them. The lyric is consistent and sophisticated and develops with beguiling logical ease. Yet it is also a piece of

corn. With its iambs marching like so many wooden soldiers through lines like "The dizzy dancing way you feel," it reads as if nothing had happened to English prosody since Keats and Wordsworth.

Nevertheless, "Both Sides Now" is a great song, because the woman who wrote it has a talent for melody that equals her talent for words. When sung, those iambs make the melody soar. Yet when Mitchell performed it on Clouds—slowly, with a single acoustic guitar, in the reedy style of her first two LP's, the somewhat stiff production accentuating that thin voice with the startling highs and lows and the attenuated middle—it didn't sound especially thrilling. It seemed designed for the rich, relaxed, rather melodramatic clarity of Judy Collins's contralto and Joshua Rifkin's arrangement. It was tempting to classify Mitchell somewhere behind Collins and Baez, a second-rate folkie madonna.

But unlike Baez and Collins (and even Dylan and Taylor) Joni Mitchell has always sung her own material exclusively. She is a composer first, a performer second. And although David Crosby, one of a long succession of famous boyfriends, produced her first album, the four since then list no producer at all—just an engineer, Henry Lewy. Her recording career has been a public learning experience. First it seemed that she wanted to perform up to the standard of her own composition. Now she appears to be adapting her composition to the even higher potential of her own performance.

The first two albums are marred by indecisive material— Joni ascending almost imperceptibly into the ether—and by the misuse of her chief vocal asset, or quirk, a range of about three octaves. She sang melodies written for a normal folk soprano with almost decorous formalism, as if she were afraid of tripping over her own register. But by her third album, *Ladies of the Canyon*, she sometimes used the banister instead of the stairs, and by the fourth, *Blue*, she was writing melodies so slippery that other women complained they were unsingable.

Well, Joni Mitchell has never evinced a very highly developed sense of sisterhood anyway. Despite her somewhat obsessive protestations of femininity, she likes the challenge of boys' competition, and even though she gets beaten up again and again, she always goes back for more. Over the past three albums she has offered an exciting, scary glimpse of a woman in a man's world. As long ago as "Both Sides Now" she was explicitly rejecting conventional love relationships for the something lost and something gained of living day by day, but her doubts have become more explicit with each record. From the song "Blue": "Well everybody's saying/ that hell's the hippest way to go/ Well I don't think so." Only to add: "But I'm gonna take a look around it though."*

Like her voice, Joni Mitchell's lyrics have always suggested emotional life with startling highs and lows and an attenuated middle. Just because she knows herself, she reveals how dangerous and attractive such a life can be, especially for women. If this is what it's like for James Taylor's (Graham Nash's) (B. Mitchell Reid's) girlfriend, what can it be like for her lowly fans? In a male performer such intense self-concern would be an egotistic cop-out. In a woman it is an act of defiance.

Not that Mitchell herself has always perceived it that way. The key to *Blue* is improvisatory flexibility—if the shifting interpersonal values of the Los Angeles music scene fit her life-style, she implied, so the relaxed jam of

^{* &}quot;Blue" by Joni Mitchell copyright © 1971 Joni Mitchell Publishing Corp. All rights reserved. Used by permission of Warner Bros. Music.

the music itself suits the changes of her voice. But on *For the Roses* she is more wary, even cynical. At times, her criticisms of the men who have failed her after all sound almost petulant—how can the jet-setting Joni of *Blue* demand "More quiet times/ By a river flowing/ You and me/ Deep kisses"?* But the appearance of petulance is often a price of liberation. The pretty swoops of her voice used to sound like a semiconscious parody of the demands placed on all female voices and all females, the demands that produce phony folkie madonnas and high-caste groupies. This music is more calculated, more clearly hers, composed to her vocal contours not on the spot but with deliberate forethought.

For the Roses has none of the ingratiating ease of Blue—there is no "All I Want" here, no "Carey," nothing bright and lively, nothing good-time. Mitchell's line has become so sinuous and complex that the melodies lack first-time appeal—those iambs are gone forever. In another artist such foreboding music might even hint at elitism, but it so happens that Joni's biggest single is on this record—"You Turn Me On (Like a Radio)" has gone top ten. Anyway, Joni has spent too much of her life trying to please. She's wise enough to warrant stubborn attention, and ultimately, For the Roses becomes almost hypnotic. It is one more advance in an artistic career that has never faltered. Maybe next time she'll write a song or two to her women friends.

Newsday January, 1973

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THE ROLLING STONES: CAN'T GET NO SATISFACTION

The night a friend in California called and told me about Altamont, I was having dinner with a woman I'd met a week before—just when the crowd at the speedway was beginning to gather, in fact. We had sat in my apartment and listened to Let It Bleed, and as Mick Jagger sang out the climax of "Gimmie Shelter" to Merry Clayton—"Love, sister, it's just a kiss away, it's just a kiss away"—I touched her for the first time. There were contradictions there—did I love her just because I wanted to kiss her?—and contradictions within contradictions—did Mick really mean that?—but I ignored them as always. The Rolling Stones epitomized the thing I loved most in the world, rock and roll, and they could induce me to ignore anything. I played their records all the time.

The phone call from California changed that. In the year or so after Altamont—the end of 1969, all of 1970, and into 1971—I almost stopped listening to the Stones, and whenever I did, the contradictions welled up in me. Admittedly, my reaction was uncommonly intense, and most of those who shared it had always dug the Stones as symbols, not as a rock and roll group. Their response to Altamont was comparably abstract. As Mick Jagger told an interviewer recently: "Of course some people wanted to say Altamont was the end of an era. People like that are fashion writers. Perhaps it was the end of their era, the end of their naïveté. I would have thought it ended long before Altamont." Yet one must suspect an artist as subtle as Jagger of being disingenuous here, as if he were ever

anything else. Writers focus on Altamont not because it brought on the end of an era but because it provided such a complex metaphor for the way an era ended.

Time: the final month of the decade that spawned that unprecedented and probably insupportable contradiction in terms, mass bohemia, popularly known as the counterculture. Occasion: On America's ultimate frontier some three hundred thousand bohemians come together with their chosen images, five formerly lower- to middle-class Englishmen who fuse Afro-American music with European sensibility. Denouement: An Afro-American bohemian is murdered by a lower-class white Hell's Angel while the Englishmen do a song called "Sympathy for the Devil."

As civil war this sequence may have been small potatoes—the dope snuffs in the interstices of San Francisco's black Fillmore district and hippie Haight were a lot worse—but as a work of art it was exquisite, the culmination of the Stones' oeuvre, not to mention a great movie script. Keith Richard, the stud to Jagger's sybarite, acknowledged its aptness in his own rough way: "Altamont, it could only happen to the Stones, man. Let's face it. It wouldn't happen to the Bee Gees and it wouldn't happen to Crosby, Stills and Nash."

Richard may be rough, but his use of the passive "to the Stones" is also a trifle disingenuous. After a century of psychotherapeutic speculation we ought to understand that if something can happen only to you, you are probably helping it along. Not that the evasion matters. If it is typical of the Stones' genius that their responsibility is difficult to pinpoint, it is typical of their burden that everyone who's into blame blames them anyway. After all, Altamont was as much the Grateful Dead's show as it was the Stones'. The Stones consulted with the Dead when the event was conceived, and recognizing that a free concert in California was Dead turf, scheduled them to perform

last, although in the end the Dead fell back before the bad vibes. The Angels were—and still are—the Dead's friends, and the Stones' Altamont coordinator, Sam Cutler, went to work for the Dead when it was all over. Yet no one ever accused the Dead of laying their star-tripping bummer on Woodstock Nation West—least of all me. Ignoring the contradictions once again, I instead found myself transformed into a Grateful Dead freak.

I ignored the contradictions, but I was quite aware of them. Even as I stomped out the key lines of "St. Stephen"—"Talk about your plenty, talk about your ills/One man gathers what another man spills" "—I recognized how smoothly the Dead Americanized volatile intellectual imports like karma and eternal recurrence. Only within a culture as benign and abundant as that of Northern California could anything real and humane accompany such vast cosmic notions, but it did, and the Dead were its highest manifestation. They were not uncomplicated men, but within the controlled environment of the concert hall they generated a joyful noise that went beyond complications, and I was happy to sing along with Jerry Garcia on "New Speedway Boogie": "Things went down we don't understand/ But I think in time we will." †

The catch was that I already understood—understood that giving the Angels police power at the hub of that sprawl was a criminally naïve extension of the American karmic principle, popularly known as do-your-own-thing. But I also understood that if the Dead were naïve, then Mick Jagger—who accuses others of naïveté, remember—was probably something nastier. I would call it criminally ironic. Jerry Garcia's serenity is religious, and smug; Jagger's detachment is aesthetic, and jaded. Like most Stones

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^{† &}quot;New Speedway Boogie" by Robert Hunter copyright © 1970 Ice Nine Publishing Co., Inc. Used by permission.

fans, I felt more in common with Jagger, so after Altamont I got it on with Garcia. He was from another sphere—I felt no responsibility for his errors. Jagger had been doing

my dirty work for years.

The phrase "dirty work" is fortuitous—suggesting working class, baby work out, down and dirty, dirty-minded—but too pejorative at the outset, for above all, the Stones were and are the greatest rock and rollers ever. For pure rock and roll the only conceivable competition comes from Chuck Berry—not Elvis or Little Richard, not the Beatles or Creedence or the Dead. The Stones' devotion to rock and roll turned us on and brought us through. If the Dead soared beyond their own complications, then the Stones rolled right over the contradictions. They always gave us a rocking good time, and they had a good time themselves while they did.

But the contradictions were there. Good times were always at the heart of rock and roll, absolutely, but the good times had to be won, like anything else. What has made the Rolling Stones so special is their understanding of how long and paradoxical the struggle for really good times must be. Unlike the American folkies—their more privileged and romantic analogue—the Stones were always antiutopian. They never idealized, and they never expected to be pure. As a consequence, they were never put off by the commerciality of rock and roll. In fact, having been released from some of the dreary stiffness of the English class system by the tough, joyous physicality of their Afro-American music, they were if anything eager for whatever material benefits might accrue, though they certainly weren't counting on them.

Most of this the Stones shared with the Beatles. Because both groups perceived American affluence and music from a distance, they understood how very vital it was, and even more important, both were wise enough to intuit that their distance from the Afro-American source would be a necessary and authentic part of whatever they did with it. In order to be itself, English rock and roll had to stand outside itself. For the Beatles this insight was anything but ominous. Basically optimistic and rooted in American pop, they manifested their sense of distance in silliness, fun, play. But the Stones came from a darker, angrier place.

Anyway, Mick did. Although he first found it hard to choose between rock and roll and the London School of Economics, it would be a mistake to call him an intellectual—just like Bob Dylan, he doesn't permit it. But even if he never thought of it in such terms, the way Mick acted out his distance from the music he loved was a measure of his alienation, both from himself and from his native culture. Of the others, only Brian Jones matched Mick's occasional desperation. Keith was your basic straight-ahead rocker, and Bill Wyman and Charlie Watts were typical musicians right down to their fondness for jazz.

But all the Stones were rebels, by commitment as well as necessity. They flaunted their clothes and hair, their collective sneer, and their music itself. It is often observed that the black-oriented rhythm-and-blues they preferred was more openly sexual than the Beatles' pop rock and roll, but what really set it apart was the project of self-definition it implied. Like so many bohemian rebels, the Stones sought correlatives for their own uniqueness that no one else had found first. They liked not only rhythm-and-blues but obscure rhythm-and-blues, and if the Beatles rebelled into sexuality, the Stones conceived sexuality as a means to a larger rebellion.

Early analyses of their music veered between two poles—Jagger was either a great blues singer or a soulless thief—and both were wrong. Like so many extraordinary voices, Jagger's defied description by contradicting itself. It was liquescent and nasal, full-throated and whiny. But

it was not what Tom Wolfe once called it, "the voice of a bull Negro," nor did it aspire to be. It was simply the voice of a white boy who loved the way black men sang—Jagger used to name Wilson Pickett as his favorite vocalist—but who had come to terms with not being black himself. Of course, Jagger picked up a defense mannerism along the way: He always sang with a curl of his lubricious upper lip. His style was an audacious revelation. It was not weaker than black singing, just different, and the difference always involved directness of feeling. Jagger didn't so much sing Muddy Waters' "I Just Want to Make Love to You" as get it over with, and although he really seemed to wish us "Good Times," he made the prospect sound doubtful where Sam Cooke enjoyed the wish itself.

But even as Jagger equivocated around the usages of black singing, and around the lyrics themselves, he rocked. Even when the Stones were as crude and out-of-tune as their detractors claimed, they made us shake our money-makers. Their insistence on beat and volume was so aggressive and single-minded that they drove off the tender-minded altogether, which was the whole idea. Whatever nuance we thought we pinned down in Jagger's singing—lust or tease, self-confidence or self-mockery—he would most certainly baffle us one convolution later. Only the hard physical reality of the music was certain.

For those who heard them this way—and we were no more explicit about it than they were—the Stones were fab faves indeed, but just how many of us there were was unclear. For the first year and a half of Beatlemania the Stones were the number-two English group only in publicity—their sales lagged behind the Dave Clark Five's and Herman's Hermits' and barely stayed ahead of the Kinks' and the Animals'. Then came "Satisfaction." It was the perfect Stones paradox—the lyrics denied what the music delivered—and it dominated the summer of 1965.

Driving home from rainy retreats, vacationing parents and their children shouted out "I can't get no" in unison while older brothers and sisters decided that the middle verse was about a girl who won't put out because it's her period. A whole country was brought together, sort of, by Mick and Keith's anthem of frustration.

Suddenly, the Stones' rebellious project of radical self-definition was becoming a mass movement—against everything that kept the world within our reach and out of our grasp, everything that stopped us from making felt possibilities real. Mick and Keith now wrote most of the material. They voiced the enthusiastic hostility of the new mass bohemianism more directly than the rhythm-and-blues artists, who usually muted their hostility because they were too busy just surviving to pursue hopeless battles. The Stones and their constituency were sure enough of their own survival to covet something better, but the Stones, at least, were much too realistic to expect to achieve it. Their anger was almost part of a vicious cycle.

In the end, in fact, their anger was directed not at the cruelties of politics and economics so much as at a metaphysical joke. The Stones wanted what they couldn't have and felt detached even from their own desire. Mick accepted his inability to sing from as deep in his heart as Wilson Pickett, he even reveled in it, but he wasn't sure he liked it, not deep in his heart. Having found the courage and insight to define his whiteness in relation to black people, he still resented having to do so, because at one of his many levels he was pure libido—he wanted everything, and he was arrogant enough to believe he deserved it. Black or white was no fairer a choice than good or evil.

The Stones' attitude toward women was especially ambiguous. Their realism stemmed from the tough antiromanticism of rhythm-and-blues, which asserted that sex was good in itself (I'm a king bee, buzzin' 'round your hive, and I just want to make love to you) and connected to love (we got a good thing goin'), and that love involved pain that was deeper and more complex than pop heartbreak. But almost as soon as Jagger and Richard began to compose, they created a persona whose hostility to women rose above and beyond the call of realism. The protagonist of "Heart of Stone" wasn't just a little red rooster strutting his stuff or a heart-pained lover for whom blue had turned to gray, and he wasn't just tough, either. He was hard, bearing the same relationship to the blues stud that the metallic incursions of the Stones' music did to real rhythm-and-blues. It's almost as if women in all their contradictory humanity symbolized the conditions of life which were the ultimate target of the Stones' anger. Or maybe it worked the other way around.

In any case, it built from there. By the time of the Stones' ascendancy-in-exile—the three-year period following their 1966 tour when they were banned from this country due to drug arrests—the heart-of-stone man who kept stupid girls under his thumb and then discarded them like yesterday's papers seemed to have become Mick's basic character. Actually, the Stones celebrated their share of heroines—some as autonomous as the elusive (hence imaginary?) Ruby Tuesday—and Mick's more likable rhythm-and-blues stud got his share of the action, including classic songs like "Goin' Home" and "Let's Spend the Night Together." Moreover, many of the antiwoman songs could be construed as class revenge—Mick the real (albeit rich) finally enabled to lay open the vacuity of his former economic oppressors.

Yes, the beauty of the Stones was that they always left themselves an out. There was no need to take their sexism literally. No matter how Mick's character seemed to exploit his stray cats and Siamese cats and back-street girls and factory girls, chances were he wasn't any more sincere or

one-dimensional than usual. After all, Mick wasn't even male in the usual sense. The most sexually exciting man in rock had always been the most androgynous, deliberately counterposing his almost girlish stage demeanor to Keith's droogy leer. In fact, all the Stones had posed in drag on a forty-five jacket back in 1966. So even when Mick performed "Midnight Rambler," that psychotic little showpiece, it could be said that he was merely exposing the petty rape fantasies of his male audience for what they were. Yet no matter what music historians will say, that wasn't the way his male fans—not to mention his female fans-could be expected to take it. Maybe this was obtuseness, but it was also common sense. After all, the spate of antiwoman songs that appeared between 1965 and 1967 can be passed off as a devastating catalog of sexist stances, but Keith's explanation ought to be kept in mind: "It was a spin-off from our environment... hotels, and too many dumb chicks."

The 1969 tour was a triumphant exploration of the complexities of the Stones' stance. All that irony and enigma was magnified into a complete drama of good and evil, aspiration and frustration—a joyous, bitter celebration of what could only be designated The Truth. With an omega emblazoned on his black shirt and an Uncle Sam top hat, Jagger took each of us as far as he or she wanted to go. Contradictions within contradictions—Uncle Mick could always show you one more. The triumphant sexist of "Under My Thumb" became the desolate supplicant of "Love in Vain." The nasty triumph of "Midnight Rambler" turned into the candid need of "Gimmie Shelter." As for Altamont, it was simply the final contradiction in a long series.

It was final because it went against the whole purport of the Stones' drama. The truth was that the world was compounded of good and evil, so that any undertaking as

utopian as Altamont was doomed by definition. If the Stones' audience didn't understand it that way, it was because the Stones themselves, in all their multileveled contradiction, were unwilling to come out and tell them. They would suggest it, yes, embody it, but they wouldn't make it plain, because the nature of The Truth is that it isn't plain. If a fan wanted to take Mick's struggle with male roles as an invitation to midnight rambling, well, that was the nature of the game. Like any bohemians-like any artists, perhaps—the Stones had always been disinclined to relate to the mass of their followers. The Stones were too arrogant, too idiosyncratic. Yet they had helped create a movement around their own bohemianism, and that part of them that was pure libido wanted not only to sweep regally through the alien land where they had found their roots, divesting it of several million dollars, but also to prove that they were part of all they had helped create. A part of them wanted to be good guys.

They failed abjectly, at least in the short run, but it is naïve and dishonest for their former admirers to blame them unless they also blame themselves. All of us who reveled in their irony, all of us who pleasured ourselves in their art, all of us who pursued romantic fantasies under their partial and contradictory pretenses, are just as responsible. Until we acknowledge our own acquiescence in their decisions, the Stones have a right to minimize their own responsibilities as adamantly as they do.

For no matter how they minimize it, the experience has changed them. Sticky Fingers, released in 1971 but recorded much earlier, went even further in the direction of aesthetic image exacerbation than had marked their 1969 tour. The single, "Brown Sugar," was at once a brilliant exposure and a blatant exploitation of the racial and sexual contradictions of their stance, and "Moonlight Mile" com-

mented definitively on the relationship between sex, love, and distance from self.

But the Stones who are touring the country right now are-almost-good guys. They are less arrogant, less gleefully greedy, and more clearly concerned that their tiny portion of utopia—concerts for their still-expanding audience—be achieved as fairly and efficiently as possible. Both live and on their new album, Exile on Main Street, they are more into music and less into their own image. Especially on record, Jagger has receded a little into the background, and Mick Taylor, who was almost invisible as Brian Jones's replacement on the 1969 tour, has come forward a little. Taylor is younger and has roots in the new tradition of boogieing jam, so this is a move toward the audience. It's not as if the Stones have consented to join the movement they half-wittingly helped create, but they seem ready to relate to it, and somehow that doesn't come off as a cop-out. When such dedicated artists move honestly toward their fans, you believe that love may be just a kiss away after all.

> Newsday July, 1972

LIVING WITHOUT THE BEATLES

1. I.P.M.C.

Not one but two of George Harrison's friends got more applause than the best-selling ex-Beatle at the Bangla-Desh concert at Madison Square Garden. Dylan did, of course—New York is his turf—but unless I am deceiving myself, so did Ringo. Admittedly, self-deception is a real possibility. I clapped and shouted enough to provide Ringo's margin of victory all by myself, and that epiphany exhausted, sat and gazed upon my hero through opera glasses. I was only twenty rows back, among the industry freebies, but I craved detail, and wouldn't you know? George kept getting in the way. His white suit had obscured Ringo's grand ole black-on-black for most of "It Don't Come Easy" as well, but both times Ringo seemed aware that he was being upstaged. He looked calm and even complacent, brimming with quiet happiness, as if after eight years he still couldn't quite believe his own good fortune—a seat right up on stage, the best industry freebie of all. That's why we love him, after all, and why unlike the others he remains immune to the vagaries of our affection. Ringo is our representative on the Beatles.

Think about it. Ringo joined the group in the summer of 1962, replacing the corny good looks of Pete Best with a homely corrective to all that genius. The Beatles were on the brink of their fame. They had just signed with George Martin and EMI and dominated the thriving Liverpool pop scene. In less than a year they would become a national craze, with international Beatlemania already imminent. What a time that must have been for Ringo, a continual up among three intimidating near-strangers. In retrospect it must seem the high point of his life, but if he's passed his peak, he's not complaining. Ringo may not be able to describe the dark chamber of his future, but he knows it's his, and that suffices. He is a family man now, unalienated from his lifework and identity. Four or five years ago, when John was talking about expanding into films and George was learning sitar and transcendental meditation and Paul was turning in on himself in a London town house, Ringo also had plans of his own-he wanted to start a Beatle museum. And now that the breakup is

real, he has written a song, his fourth, called "Early 1970," the B side of the best single any ex-Beatle has released. Perhaps you saw the lyrics in Howard Smith's column. After devoting a stanza each to Paul ("When he comes to town, I wonder if he'll play with me"), John ("When he comes to town, I know he's gonna play with me"), and George ("He's always in town, playing for you with me"), he goes on to himself: "I play guitar, A D E/ I don't play bass cos that's too hard for me/ I play the piano if it's in C/ And when I go to town I want to see all three." He really is the ultimate Beatle fan.

Conversely, George is the ultimate ex-Beatle, exploiting his Beatleness to assert his own identity. The old mediator and business head has turned into a superduperstar, and even as he talks of getting the group together again, he relishes his ascendancy as an individual. It may be that John first wanted to break up the group and was persuaded to stay by the insidious Paul, as John claims, or that Paul was shut out by the others until he had to leave, as Paul claims, but it is silent George who has adapted best to being out on his own. The catch is, he isn't out on his own, for unlike the other three, George feels totally at home in the new condominium that dominates rock-I.P.M.C., the International Pop Music Community, George fits in because he knows how-he always played lead guitar and second fiddle—but even more because the prevailing trend suits his predilections. John is a media artist, Paul a composer, and Ringo just a Beatle, but George, ahh, George is a musician, he likes to play his ax, he likes to jam.

The ascendancy of I.P.M.C. represents a fundamental changeover, from Pop to Music. Five years ago, rock was created by integral groups, each of which directed its own organic identity at the audience. It's true that that identity

^{* &}quot;Early 1970" by Ringo Starr copyright © 1971 Startling Music Inc. Used by permission.

was often filtered and distorted by friends and outsiders. and that group members did create individually and interact with each other. But the group was still an aesthetic unit that communicated vertically, toward us, and thus related primarily to us. From the Beatles' earliest success, when their lively-but-harmless moptopness was manipulated by Brian Epstein, through all the spontaneous changes of their collective genius, what went on among them came right down to us as a self-contained but multifaceted and evolving whole. In contrast, the aesthetic unit of I.P.M.C. is the individual musician, who communicates horizontally in continuing semispontaneous improvisation with his coequals. We in the audience are only incidental beneficiaries of his flirtations and affairs, at least until we stop buying. George is an I.P.M.C. man as regards both the public and his fellow superstars. In Let It Be, remember, it was George who rejected touring because he thought the Beatles, like Stravinsky, were responsible only to the art of music. Later, when Paul broke up Stravinsky, George reportedly made the perfect joke: "Well, I guess we need a new bassist."

Although I.P.M.C. is vast enough to defy efficient generalization and is the locus of some of my favorite rock—Delaney & Bonnie, Layla, Mad Dogs & Englishmen—I strongly suspect the new mainstream of draining back toward an individualism that rock and roll once seemed to challenge. That's a big argument, however. For now, allow me to note that there really is something about music-for-its-own-sake (read: I.P.M.C.) that transcends life's harsher details, and that this is not so true of music-as-popular-communication (read: group-rock). George's religiosity is tellingly appropriate. Don Heckman referred to George as "the most introspective of the Beatles," but that's just I.P.M.C. claptrap. Playing headsie with the Universal Mind is not introspection; more often, it constitutes an evasion of hard inquiry by heirs of privilege

with access to easier rewards, like riding the hounds or playing the guitar. The Bangla-Desh benefit started a lot of money on its way to people who plainly need and deserve it and established an awesome moral precedent, yet I find it hard to take seriously as politics because George has specifically disclaimed political motivation. "The political side is not my concern," he told the trades. "Any war is wrong." George's know-nothingism is admirably candid, but it is also embarrassing and infuriating. Listen to the music. He can't feel the pain, has never known such distress, doesn't understand, but it sure looks like a mess quote unquote, free the people of Bangla-Desh. The flip of the "Bangla-Desh" single, "Deep Blue," an unoverdubbed quickie that I consider George's most affecting piece since "Here Comes the Sun," amplifies his almost comic intellectual gaucherie. Written for his ailing mother, but by implication applicable to all suffering, including Bangla-Desh, it ends up another piece of lordy-lordylordy, with all that suffering reduced to so much Eternal Recurrence. It makes sense. The man who seeks after transcendence wants to avoid the ugly, immanent contingencies that taking sides involves. But maybe avoiding the contingencies is even uglier.

Despite the puffs of I.P.M.C. stalwarts like the *New York Post's* Al Aronowitz and *Rolling Stone's* nameless hydra, the Bangla-Desh concert was far from an unqualified aesthetic success. Because rock and roll is happy blues, there is something intrinsically awkward about the idea of a rock benefit, unless the cause is revolution for the hell of it. The only way Leon Russell performing "Jumping Jack Flash" and "Young Blood" (brilliantly, too) can be said to relate to a few million starving dark-skinned people on the other side of the planet is by flat, yet there he was; it's hard to blame the confused minority who clapped in time to "Bangla-Desh" as a film of the mutilation came on during intermission. With his never-failing

critical acuteness, Dylan defeated this quandary by reverting to folk music, but Harrison's disinclination for hard inquiry told. The plethora of musicians may have been necessary—how else render George's I.P.M.C./wall-of-sound synthesis on stage?—but was still an excess wretchedly inappropriate in context. In fact, the whole production was anachronistically showbiz.

Of course, the same overblown fatuity characterizes All Things Must Pass, which sounds more like Muzak to my ears than Ram does. I'm not even sure that the prodigious flatness of Harrison's new music—probably attributable to monomaniac Phil Spector, whose production work continues to sound best on a car radio as it approaches cosmic vagueness—can be adapted to the dynamic depth of live performance at all. Maybe George don't need no wahwahs, but he is a man of the recording studio more than ever—after all, how else can he make his voice do that? I.P.M.C. encourages a profitable mystique of concert jamming, but for every Mad Dogs & Englishmen, puts on half-a-dozen shoddy shows. Derek and the Dominoes are terrific when an extra guitarist hypes them up, uninspired otherwise. Leon Russell pumps away stage right like a coiffed locomotive, flanked by two women singers selected primarily for the mobility of their tits who function as a kind of tender, fueling Leon with attention, while the rest of the band cabooses desperately behind. And despite Al Aronowitz's smug exultations about the "respectful and appreciative" crowd that responded to the "exercise in charisma" by performers who would never "invite a crowd to bedlam and hysteria"—as do group-rock holdouts such as Sly and the Stones and Grand Funk, all of whom excite Aronowitz's disapproval—the music at Madison Square Garden, excepting Dylan and a few wonderful moments here and there, was competent at best. Since I.P.M.C. is thought of as an antidote to pop image and hype, it would

seem strange that the ultimate I.P.M.C. concert should succeed as an event, which it certainly did, but not as music. The fact is, however, that concerts in Madison Square Garden are rarely more than events up in the cheap seats, and I've heard nothing from my sources in the cheap seats to indicate that this one was an exception. Here is fan Karin Klein, who wrote the *New York Post* in response to Aronowitz: "The songs were very cut and dried, without particular flair or warmth. The basic result seemed to be a put-down of the audience's mood, and the impression that George and Friends would like to do their piece and go."

They did their piece, and they went.

2. LIKE A HORSE AND CARRIAGE

In early 1970 Tom Paxton released a single called "Crazy John," Paxton is one of those ex-purist folk singers whose major talent is persistence: When Dylan went electric, Paxton commented, "Where it's at is a synonym for rich," but a few years later he was riding the heretic's tail at the Isle of Wight. "Crazy John" was evidence of Paxton's new vocation, offering that wonderful nut, the John Lennon of bed-ins and peace billboards, some sage folk advice: "They never can hear you, John/ So how can you teach them?/ They never come near you, John/ So how can you reach them?" * It's appropriate for a folk singer to offer such a sterling example of that contemporary usage, the paranoid "they," because the very idea of the folk connotes an integral audience, us, separated by time and/or values from the shapeless mass, them, Paxton thinks John is crazy because he does not recognize this dichotomy, and in an ass-backward way he is right, for if John were ca-

^{*&}quot;Crazy John" by Tom Paxton copyright © 1969 United Artists Music Co., Inc., New York, New York. Used by permission.

pable of such easy formulas, he might be almost as boring as Paxton himself. But John is a media artist, and like any media artist he continually confronts a maddening question: Where is my audience? More than any other pop star (except perhaps Dylan) he enjoys a creative relationship with his own celebrity, plying it not merely out of ambition or self-protection but because the process piques him aesthetically. John Lennon in public is like a filmmaker at the Movieola or Yoko Ono at a happening in 1963.

New York artists used to look at the six o'clock news or. perhaps, some wonderful new rock and roll group from England and think, "Huh, what a weird thing to reach so many people at once." They perceived mass-cult outreach as a basically formal quality, irrespective of content, and experimented with it by devising art events that if they were very clever, might make Howard Smith's Voice column, once Howard Smith had devised a column to deal with such phenomena. In this context the Lennon/Ono marriage was the most successful multimedia move of the decade. Yet the taint of the avant-garde has stayed with Yoko, for after all, the cover of Rolling Stone or Crawdaddy just ain't the cover of Life, and if Ono/Lennon appear on Cavett, you can expect McCartney/McCartney to show up on Carson any time now. Ex-groupie or no, Linda Eastman McCartney has class, and banker's daughter or no, Yoko Ono doesn't. John married genius, and Paul married power, and in the world of public media it's hard to be sure which is more important.

None of this is to imply that Paul, or John, married for convenience. Like all artists, great popular artists believe their own myths, and for popular songwriters of the pre-Beatle era—which is exactly how Lennon and McCartney began—there was only one of these: romantic love. Repeat: They were *popular songwriters*. Even though the

staple of rock and roll in the fifties was teen schmaltz of wondrous innocence and vapidity, and even though the popularization of black music meant romanticizing the hard-assed realism of rhythm-and-blues, the sheer physicality of rock and roll, its sexual underpinnings, always implied a negation of such escapist rhapsodies. But the Beatles, unlike blues-influenced fellow geniuses Jagger and Dylan, never showed much interest in this negation. Instead of projecting sexuality, they evoked it and made fun of it simultaneously, just one more example of the insistent popness that always tempted the cynical to suspect they were the finks. After turning out enchanting variations on the permissible themes of union and parting for three or four years, their version of the myth gradually became more acerbic ("Girl," "If I Needed Someone," etc.), but their formal commitment to pop remained unchanged—those later songs are reminiscent of the down Smokey Robinson, especially on the all-important pop surface.

It was only during their mature period—including Sgt. Pepper, their best album, and The Beatles, their most consistent and probably their worst—that they abandoned the subject altogether. Great popular artists believe their own myths, but like all artists, they do so from a distance. As his relationship with Jane Asher became more problematic, Paul's romantic experiments became more outré. He never quite gave up on romance, but it is significant that "Hey Jude," one of his truest and most forthright love songs, was omitted from The Beatles, whereas "I Will," a piece of fluff that seems designed to fit unobtrusively into that pastiche of musical exercises, was included. When Paul took up with Linda, however, he also took up the love theme with fresh enthusiasm. Typically, John's withdrawal and return were more extreme. He discovered Yoko well before the white album, but not until "I Want

You," on Abbey Road, did he signal his renewed embrace of the myth. For both moderate Paul and manic John, romance was a lot of what getting back was about. After desperate years, each decided love is all you need, because each found his one-and-only, doo-wah doo-wah.

But the revitalization of the myth of romantic love almost inevitably contributed to the disintegration of another myth, the myth of the Beatles. It is significant that it was the group's songwriters and resident movers who swung so precipitously from one myth to the other. In Hunter Davies's official biography Cynthia Lennon chides her husband for preferring the group to his family. "They seem to need you less than you need them," the quote goes, and John admits it: "I did try to go my own way after we stopped touring, but it didn't work. I didn't meet anyone else I liked." At that time, according to John, Paul had just about taken over leadership of the group. Engaged to Jane Asher, Paul regretted that he was still so much a bachelor, but he wasn't-he was married to the Beatles: "We're really the same person. We're just four parts of the one." At that time Pattie Harrison was thought of as the independent Beatle wife because she still did some modeling. Now Ringo describes her as "a long-legged lady in the garden pickin' daisies for his suit," and the marriage seems ornamental, the sort of show-business union that might just end sometime. This impression may not be factual, of course, but there's no doubting the accuracy of Davies's description of Ringo as something of an Andy Capp, albeit solider and more devoted-Ringo is a common man in ways that don't inspire our ready identification as well as in ways that do. In any case, we realize in the context of more recent history that George and Ringo did not separate themselves from the group by marrying, although each gained a margin of autonomy. That margin proved necessary, because when John and

Paul married, they married hard, replacing the Four Mates with "Man We Was Lonely" and "Love is you/ You and me." "It was as if their ambivalent relationship to the sexuality of rock and roll finally caught up with them. Men in groups gave way to couples.

John started it, of course. His mates mated with suitably mod types—an actress, a model, a hairdresser, Yoko, whatever else you might think of her, was a rather unbirdlike original, from her mature body to her obsessive creativity. She was strong—too strong. It is possible, I suppose, that the other Beatles bore her some faint racial or (more likely) artistic prejudice, but her deepest offense was to their male chauvinism. She aroused John's male chauvinism, too, but because he was in love with her he responded differently: He actually thought she could become the fifth Beatle. And when he found he couldn't work her into the Beatles, he began to rework the other available myth instead. Like all artists, great popular artists not only believe their own myths but carry them to new extremes: The dream is over; long live the dream. The myth of romantic love is usually a trap for women, but a sufficiently potent woman can transform it (it has been transformed before, after all) by compounding it with that vague notion of the perfect equality of all free spirits that can also be descried lurking around our culture. Actually, the combination isn't so much a compound as a colloid, mixing disparate elements in suspension, Nobody just screams away his entire oedipal heritage, and even as John acts out the fierce symbiosis of his marriage, he remains a jealous guy who interrupts his wife on Howard Smith's radio show.

Paul, the born romantic, came more readily to the new

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romanticism, but naturally in a much more sentimental way. John has dedicated an album to Yoko, but it is hard to imagine him doing something so cutesy as concealing a Y.I.L.Y. on some secret border. Paul and Linda are also much more moderate—in fact, it might be argued that they cop out on the new dream altogether. Linda is a creative partner but in a traditionally subordinate way, not just in the view of her husband's fans but in the view of her husband. Her work is the mod art-craft, photography, and she has looked to rock as an energy source for years; in contrast, Yoko is a conceptual artist who was completely outside the music when John came to her. John now calls himself John Ono Lennon, but it's Paul and Linda McCartney, or even (on their first coauthored song, "Another Day") Mr. and Mrs. Paul McCartney.

In its radical or liberal version, however, romantic marriage has destroyed the group. The Beatles were an aesthetic unit, but what did they transmit in common? Exuberance, ves. Cheek, although George's head change changed that somewhat. Youth, and then youthfulness; rock and roll, and then rock. But above all, what the unit transmitted was unity, the possibility that four very different individuals could constitute a harmonious and functioning whole. That image was very important to the way we thought in the sixties, and Yoko and Linda have made it impossible, not only by inspiring a countermyth but also by intensifying their husbands' divergences. John and Paul complemented each other: Paul was conservative, John mercurial; Paul was fascinated with the silly history of pop music, John with its grand future; Paul was more comfortable with money, John with fame. But their women augmented rather than complemented. In class terms Paul married up to Linda and her show-business wealth, whereas Yoko married down to John, who seems unlikely to abandon his scrappy lower-middle-class heritage no matter how many possessions he accrues. But psychologically, the spirit of the husband, focused by the wife, dominates each marriage.

These personal changes are reflected in their musical work, except perhaps for McCartney, which despite its melodic interludes I find difficult to take seriously as anything more than a million-selling wedding announcement. In a way, though, McCartney can be said to have provided impetus for John's Plastic Ono Band, from egocentric title to spare production. It's as if John is saying, "This is what personal minimal music ought to sound like." Plastic Ono Band is conceptual in the Yoko Ono rather than the Sat. Pepper sense. It is one of the few albums I admire that does not permit casual enjoyment. You have to listen to it. Those who can do that—and there are many not in the category—customarily praise its lyrics, whereupon those who can't, conclude that John has not only gone off the deep end but also dragged his friends with him. It is distressing that anyone can take a collection of psychotherapeutic truisms as revelation, although "I Found Out" and "Well Well" are more than that on even the most obvious level. It is even more distressing, however, that others consider John a simpleton (or perhaps a wonderful nut) who doesn't know what he's doing. Anyone who loves Rosie & the Originals the way John does understands the value of dumbness. Of course the lyrics are crude clichés. That's just the point, because they are also true, and John wants to make very clear that right now truth is far more important than subtlety, taste, art, or anything else.

I am not encouraged by John's admission that he now writes melodies for lyrics rather than the opposite, because I believe music will get you through times of no lyrics better than lyrics will get you through times of no music. I also believe, however, that music overwhelms lyrics on

Plastic Ono Band. Carman Moore, who is a composer as well as a critic, thinks John has emerged as the most musical Beatle in terms of chords, melodic lines, and other such arcana, which only shows what I've said all alongthat you can perceive that stuff without analyzing it. For me, the musicality of Plastic Ono Band can be summed up in one word: strength. At first, of course, what came through was crudity. The music sounded stark and even perfunctory compared to the free harmonies and double guitars of the Beatles' rock and roll. But the music of the album inheres not in its instrumentation but in the way John's greatest vocal performance, a complete tour of rock timbre from scream to whine, is modulated electronically. Like so much great rock and roll, it depends on studio gimmickry, with the greatest of the gimmickers, Phil Spector, providing the expertise while stripped of his power to grind sixteen tracks down to mush. John's voice unadorned appears only twice: on "Working Class Hero" and after the nonbelieving malediction of "God," when John says, "I just believe in me/ Yoko and me/ And that's reality."* Elsewhere it is echoed, filtered, and double-tracked, with two voices sometimes emanating in a synthesis from between the speakers and sometimes dialectically separated. In addition, the guitar and even the drumming is distorted.

This trickery slips by because *Plastic Ono Band* just isn't a tricky album. It does sound strong, even primal; there really is something quintessentially raw about it. Yet it isn't. John is such a media artist that even when he is fervidly shedding personas and eschewing metaphor, he knows, perhaps instinctively, that he communicates most effectively through technological masks and prisms. Sep-

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arating himself from the homemade pretensions of, say, McCartney, he does not bullshit himself or his audience about where he is in the world—namely, on some private pinnacle of superstardom. As always, he wants to reach us with a message that is also a medium and really equals himself. Like any great artist, the great popular artist feels compelled to embody his myth in a form that offers its own pleasure. Plastic Ono Band had to be a one-shot, and in retrospect. Imagine follows it as inevitably as New Morning followed Self-Portrait. Its myth is twofold: Yoko plus the movement. The word "imagine" is a Yokoism crucial as well to Marcusian theory, which regards the ineluctable utopianism of the artistic imagination as essential to social transformation—we cannot change unless we can envision change. If "Working Class Hero" is John's movement credo and "Power to the People" his movement marching song, then the title cut of the new album is his movement hymn.

Chances are the movement is just another of John's phases, though he has always shown that mix of genius, indignation, and pugnacity that characterizes the movement media heavy. In any case, it is certainly an invigorating development for those of us who have been straining to link rock and politics. Yet the movement's ability to get across to masses of people has proved so sporadic that a part of me suspects John's new stance portends his downfall. The thing is, Imagine doesn't quite make it. At its best it is richer and more exciting than Plastic Ono Band because its potential appeal is much broader. "Gimme Some Truth" is the union of Lennon unmasked with the Lennon of Blunderland wordplay, the kind of venom Dylan never quite managed to spew. "It's So Hard" is the perfect blend of big blues and metapolitical despair. "I Don't Wanna Be a Soldier Mama I Don't Wanna Die" is a proper Spectoral extravaganza. "Oh Yoko!" is pure spontaneous joy and captures more of the spirit of fun than all

of Ram. And other songs succeed, too. But the combination of nasty lyric and good-timey ricky-tick on "Crippled Inside" has been exploited by every ex-purist folk singer since Phil Ochs, and "How?" is so psychotherapeutically lugubrious that it might not even have worked on *Plastic Ono Band*. Nor are these mistakes simply bad tries. They are symptomatic of Lennon's limitations as an individual artist, limitations that, contrary to suggestion, are not musical. John's music suits his vision perfectly. It's his vision that is lacking.

As indicated, I think Ram is a bad record, a classic form/content mismatch. If music is just gentle, fey, and occasionally funky, then why labor over it so assiduously? If you wanna have fun, then have it; don't just succumb to conspicuous consumption. I am infuriated by the McCartneys' modern young-marrieds image—just normal folks who happen to have a wee recording setup on their Scottish estate. Since Paul's political perspective seems limited to Zero Population Growth, the production lavished on this album amounts to an ecological obscenity. Yet Ram is far from Muzak and offers amenities that John could use. Paul's voice conveys a warmth and sophistication that might make John's manic-depressive extremism more palatable at those times when we just feel like lying around and listening to the stereo. Also, Paul uses Linda well. John seems unable to understand that although Yoko is a good artist, all that distinguishes her from a number of her fellows is access to media. This is indeed an important, and legitimate, distinction, but it ought to demonstrate once and for all that the function of avantgarde art is to inspire other artists, not the public. Yoko has entered John's music successfully twice (on "Cold Turkey" and on "Do the Oz," by the Elastic Oz Band), and although her own records are interesting, they will never reach a large public unless she makes the move. But Linda's participation on Paul's records works in a good way, another example of the trend to allow women as well as men to sing in their everyday voices. It is not his commitment to yesterday or another day but to everyday that might eventually render Paul's music pleasant again. Let's hope so.

What John needs most, you see, is just that acceptance of the everyday that in Paul-without-John appears to us as repellent complacency. He needs further rapprochement with the reality experienced by his audience. He needs continual reminder of his pop heritage, to balance his oedipal heritage and his lower-middle-class heritage. That balance is what the Beatles always reflected back to us, because we're all like that and tend to forget it. It is missing from the New York artistic/political avantgarde, which is why that avant-garde never lives up to its genius. John really does need it. But it's obvious that John doesn't want to get it from Paul ever again. "How Do You Sleep?" is the kind of public act committed by a lover who wants to make sure he will never return in momentary weakness to the one who has rejected him so cruelly, the best proof yet of how deep the Beatles' unity once was. Perhaps he'll find it in himself or in George, who is capable of songs of rare beauty, or elsewhere, but although I'll always love him, I wouldn't be surprised if it were lost to him forever. It is strange to foresee the artistic death of an artist who is still so vital, but I often do.

What the breakup of the Beatles represents on the largest symbolic scale is a central problem of our time—the inability of couples to coexist within cooperative groups. Perhaps they'll all survive to lead happy, truly

productive lives, or perhaps like so many of us, they will be trapped by this dilemma. John will be a tragedy, George and Paul something not so affecting. But for Ringo it will be worst of all, and since Ringo is all of us, we'd better figure out what there is for us now that we can't be Beatle fans any longer. Find our own love, maybe—and form our own group.

The Village Voice September, 1971

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Consumer Guide (31)

DESPITE THE PROLIFERATION of A records this month—three of them-I have settled on a depressing thesis: I don't believe artists are trying to make good albums any more. The basic reason is a lack of material. Every time a group breaks up or a leader goes solo, not only does a lot of collaborative experience go out the window, but the songwriting talent thins out. The record companies don't care, though, because they know that albums have been established as the basic "artistic" units of the music. This once seemed like a useful idea, but it has turned into a commercial fiction, just like the autonomous power of the "artist"-star. All the companies want is product. An artist with a lot of charisma—which is to say, an artist who is willing to break his ass touring a couple of times a year—can count on a core of fans who will buy three or four mediocre albums before they wise up. All that is necessary is two or three cuts that are good programming, AM or FM, and a moderately intriguing stage act that can be reduced to plastic. Shades of payola and the fabulous fifties, and where does it all lead? Into the shit. Tune in next month for more depressing prognostications.

Eric Andersen: *Blue River* (Columbia). I was ready to discard this, but because it was so pretty I suffered second thoughts, which is too bad for both of us. In 1967 Andersen sounded like early electric Dylan, so now he sounds like . . . James Taylor. He's honest enough to back himself with a girlie chorus, but that's as far as his honesty goes. If I'm liable to run into noodleheads like Andersen walking down some country road, I'll have more fun in Central Park, C.

Marc Benno: Ambush (A&M). In a lot of ways this is a perfect record—easy studio funk unmarred by a single error of commission. Benno does Boz Scaggs a lot looser and happier than Boz Scaggs has for a while, and Bobby Keys stands out among the sidemen (Radle, Keltner, Utley) only because he's never sounded better. It's even divided into a dance side and a listening side. Yet I no longer trust such basically unthinking supercompetence to provide lasting pleasure. Anyone who doesn't share my reservations should probably buy this, and even if you do—well, I keep playing it. B plus.

Roy Buchanan (Polydor). Yes, he really is a hell of a guitar player, and no, he doesn't have any idea what to do about it. C.

Chi Coltrane (Columbia). A remarkable percentage of female singer-songwriters resemble movie stars, at least on their album jackets, which makes me wonder whether companies sign them because they sing and write. There's a hit single to go with the flowing blond hair here. It's a humdrum r&b rip-off that's about as catchy as the Buffy Sainte-Marie imitation, which makes it better than the rest. C minus.

Crazy Horse: At Crooked Lake (Epic). A lot better than the second but not as good as the first and different from both. Anyone who misses circa-1966 Byrds will be pleased to learn that this country-rock album features songs about spaceships, the brotherhood of man, and singing in a rock and roll band. B.

John Fahey: Of Rivers and Religions (Reprise). Fahey is immersed in country blues, from which he derives his own unique guitar music—eerie, funny, stately, and incredibly calm. The best tranquilizing music I know, because instead of palming off a fantasy of sodden deliverance it seems to speak of real reserves of self-control inside the American psyche. Not for everyone, but I think this is his best. A.

Grand Funk Railroad: *Phoenix* (Capitol). I guess I turn in my Free Grand Funk button, because I think their records have been getting steadily worse—or less interesting—since *Closer to Home*. The most annoying problem is Mark Farner's singing, which combines the worst of Jack Bruce with the worst of Eddie Fisher, but the instrumentals and arrangements aren't exactly dynamic, either. Sorry, really, but.... C minus.

Al Green: I'm Still in Love with You (Hi). Easily the most consistent soft-soul LP of the year, anchored in with an impressive collection of unforgettable background themes. I'm happy to own it. But I still remember that less than a year ago Green looked like he might turn into the Compleat Soul Man rather than Black Smoothie of the Year, and I make the following request: Remember Otis Redding. Okay, Al? A minus.

Tom T. Hall: Tom T. Hall ... The Storyteller (Mercury). Counting a disappointing greatest-hits album, this is the fourth LP from Hall in about a year, and the workload must be getting him down. This time even the title is a mistake—for the second straight album, the most impressive song is a romantic ballad. How about picking up some new yarns on a long vacation, T.? C.

Mickey Hart: Rolling Thunder (Warner Bros.) In which the ex-Dead drummer compounds Alla Rakha, Sho

shone chants, a water pump, big-band jazz, and electronic music, not to mention Paul and Gracie and Jerry and other Our Gang regulars. More original than your typical Marin County special, and I really don't like it much. C plus.

Waylon Jennings: Ladies Love Outlaws (RCA Victor). Waylon lets you know he has balls by singing as though

someone is twisting them. C.

Al Kooper: A Possible Projection of the Future/Child-hood's End (Columbia). I know, what could be worse than a sci-fi concept album by Al Kooper, who hasn't been good for a whole LP since early electric Dylan. Only it's really solid, without one bad cut. Kooper's melodies stick to the ribs, and his lyrics are adequate or better, and does he do a job on some oldies from Curtis Mayfield and Smokey Robinson. Recommended. B plus.

Labelle: *Moon Shadow* (Warner Bros.). When you think about it, Patti LaBelle and the Bluebelles weren't such hot

stuff either. C minus.

Martin Mull (Capricorn). Firesign Theater/Cheech & Chong equals Randy Newman/Martin Mull. B minus.

John Renbourn: Faro Annie (Reprise). Mixing country blues with old English ballads, this became my folk record of the month when it tempted me to listen to something called "Willy O'Winsbury" all the way through, which is more than Pentangle could do. B.

Boz Scaggs: My Time (Columbia). Scaggs has finally come out with it and recorded a making-out album for ex-hippies. Side one is the usual hokum—laid back and overproduced at the same time—although not bad if you overlook a few doodly-doodly-boops. But there's nothing on side two that Johnny Mathis didn't do better fifteen years ago. C plus.

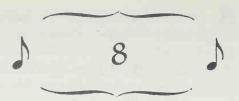
Valerie Simpson (Tamla). Look what Valerie has done—discovered that Motown is only plastic. I was so happy believing it was human, or something for people to

dream on. The previous two sentences paraphrase one of Simpson's songs, called "Genius." Genius, isn't she? No. C minus.

Loudon Wainwright III: Album III (Columbia). In which the genius relaxes with a pleasant folk-rock band and sees fit to steal a song from Leiber and Stoller and a melody from "Sweet Little Sixteen." Admitting that the chief use of epigrammatic wit is humor, Loudon consents to be funny right out and also allows himself a few moments of genuine lyricism. The misanthrope grows older. Very encouraging, A minus.

Wolfman Jack (Wooden Nickel). An out-and-out ripoff, which is fine—the Woofman has always been more extreme than human dee-jays—but still costs you money. Remember, the radio is free. E.

Yes: Close to the Edge (Atlantic). I only started listening to Yes with Fragile, which I liked, I thought, but I suspect that if I'd started with the first one, I never would have gotten there. At the level of attention they deserve they are a one-idea band, and every time I switch this off in frustration I remember that someone in the Eagles called them "sissies." Can anything that induces me to quote an Eagle be good? C.



Weird Scenes after the Gold Rush

Because most of it originally appeared in Newsday, I can describe the section that follows as a hodgepodge that illustrates some of the possibilities of newspaper criticism. Most of the artists haven't peaked as yet, and some of them probably never will, but I'm not going to guess which ones. If the personality pieces in "Leaders and Parking Meters" attempt to define the past, when rock was establishing its own permanence, "Weird Scenes after the Gold Rush" is about the flux of the future that such permanence makes inevitable.

ADVENTURES OF THE DEAN OF LONG ISLAND ROCK CRITICS

The last thing I did before setting the police lock was to turn off the amplifier and Ellen McIlwaine. I drove up Avenue C to the tunnel and out the Long Island Expressway, threading my way past my parents' old exit and my parents' new exit to Port Washington. A lot of kids were leaving a Main Street movie called *Tales from the Crypt* as if it were the only show in town. Out at the shopping center a decidedly nonpsychedelic orange-and-black poster had fallen from its perch. The big letters said: "Coliseum Ent./ Wally Rubin/ Sands Point Theater/ Thurs. Mar. 30/ Country Joe MacDonald/ Lisa Palattella/ Clean Living." The little letters said: "Tickets \$6.00 and \$4.50."

I missed Lisa Palattella, which Doug Ehrlich, of Coliseum Ent., assures me I ought to regret. Well, I have my own regrets. Clean Living—I should have figured from the name—turned out to be one of those ubiquitous pastoral folkie-rockie groups that turns wine into water, the kind of band that makes me want to scream just so somebody does. They interspersed their own dilute ditties with the likes of "Not Fade Away" and "Rock and Roll Music." Even "Rock and Roll Music" sounded washed out.

If there were 150 patrons in the 600-capacity theater, some of them were hiding under the seats, though I can't imagine what from. The concept behind bands like Clean Living is that funky and quaint are the same thing. This is a fallacy. Rock and roll is a continuum running from hostility to fun, with sexuality (and love) synthesizing busily in the middle. It is crass and miraculous. Folkie-rockie musicians have learned to see past the crassness, but they can't find it in themselves to affirm it, which is where the miracle comes in. So they distend the fun to very unsexy proportions, cheered on by audiences as uncomfortable with hostility as the musicians themselves—generally audiences that can afford six bucks and four-fifty for a dubious star attraction and two unknowns.

The median age of this audience was about fourteen,

a little young for folkie-rockie—in fact, barely old enough to have been conceived amid the aggressive good cheer of Chuck Berry and "Rock and Roll Music." They dug that anyway, of course, and they got off on the Coasters' "Young Blood"—probably knew it from Leon Russell's Bangla-Desh version, and the drummer did sing a spirited bass part—but in general they acted like bored pubescents with too much spending cash. Doug Ehrlich reports that the more sophisticated late-show audience got it on with Clean Living. Doug Ehrlich is seventeen. So was the late-show audience.

Country Joe, one of those prescient folk musicians who formed rock bands back in the early days of hippie, now plays solo with an acoustic guitar. He expresses a lot of politico aggression, much too tough-minded for folkierockie, and he opens his act with a hand-clapping song called "Entertainment Is My Business." Country Joe probably cleared two grand for the night's work, about what the Coliseum lost, but if he'd had to transport musicians and equipment from San Francisco, he would hardly have broken even. He is rumored to be putting together a new band.

Country Joe is my age and has a head something like mine—his milieu is Berkeley, an outpost of Manhattan, rather than Marin County, an outpost of Nirvana—and I haven't put on one of his records for pleasure in years. At the shopping center he was very good, however, a pro who succeeded in entertaining an audience whose experience had little to do with his new women's-liberation consciousness. Lucky for them—Country Joe is writing songs about the family that can't be reprinted in a family newspaper. "Some of you are probably too young for this, he said, "but you've been watching your parents all your lives, right?" The kids cheered.

After the show I talked briefly to Country Joe-he

corrected my pronunciation of "macho," a task ordinarily performed by women—and then drove in to hear Stevie Wonder at the Bitter End. Stevie Wonder's exuberance transcends taste; at the age of twenty-one he has been making hit records for nine years. When most Motown artists were imitating Dawn Dolls, he was singing "Blowin' in the Wind"—it must have been his age—and he recently showed up unannounced at the Free John Sinclair benefit. He had transported a twelve-piece band to the Bitter End, which was packed with an interracial audience that dug both his reprised hits and his unprecedented synthesizer improvisations. So did I. After the show ended, I drove to Slug's, in the far east, near home, where Larry Coryell ripped my brain out with his guitar.

When I got home, I put on two Stevie Wonder records. A woman I love called for the first time in six weeks at around 3:30, and I put on Ellen McIlwaine and Lesley Gore as we rapped down our traumas. Dominique had seen Black Sabbath the night before. Pure adolescent hostility, I told her. She told me she dug it. At around five I began work on this piece, playing side twos from my nondescript pile very low on mono as I worked. The first four—Uncle Jim's Music, Boondoggle and Balderdash, Larry McNeely, and Gary St. Clair—all sounded folkie-rockie to me. They went on the discard pile. In the *Times* the next day Don Heckman praised Stevie Wonder because his music approximated jazz. That's the way he always judges things. He must be thirty-six or something. I will be thirty in nine days.

Newsday April, 1972

COUPER-TROOPER

The between-set music was Carole King and late Byrds and Dylan's Greatest Volume II, all favorites of Howard Stein, I'm sure, but about as appropriate at an Alice Cooper concert as Doris Day at an Alan Freed teenorama. The opening acts, electric gut Wet Willie and jive king Dr. John, were more to the point, for Alice is the drag king of electric jive. Alice-the-person was born in Phoenix and got it together in Detroit, passing through Frank Zappa's freak show sometime in between, and aside from the assumed first name and a heavy application of eve makeup, is about as feminine as Mark Farner—slinky costumes, after all, have been a predilection of rock misogynists since the early days of English fop. Alice-the-group makes music that at its best is pure rock and roll, and I mean pure—not blues or rhythm-and-blues and barely blues-based, with no overlay of surfer harmonies and not a hint of folkie sentiment. A similar will to power energizes groups like Led Zeppelin and Grand Funk and Black Sabbath, but whereas they depend on overwhelming displays of amplifier expertise, Alice Cooper's musical approach is closer to that of two one-shot groups of the midsixties, the Count Five ("Psychotic Reaction") and the Music Machine ("Talk Talk"). Neither showed the slightest understanding of the (blues) emotion that was part of early rock and roll—they just plastered your brains to the ceiling with sound. That's Alice's approach, and to an extent it's fine with me.

Alice's good songs are structured like singles, with clearly audible lyrics in the male-rebel tradition and the music

tightly constructed around one or two hook riffs. Where your average heavy group goes in for boring solos, however, Alice substitutes theatrics, which unfortunately are also boring. He goose-steps; he plays with a boa constrictor; he chops up a doll; he is hanged by a black-hooded executioner; he throws Alice-Cooper-is-hanged calendars to the audience. Despite the fact that the hanging was patently bogus, without any saving suggestion of parody, and Alice never got a calendar past the first three rows, the audience, which was medium young, seemed to get off on all this stuff. Not ecstatically, though-my fourteenyear-old companion described it as "interesting." I suspect I might have been disturbed if it had been better done, since it seemed to suggest the death-tripping and authoritarianism that I'm afraid will be the first youth fads of the seventies. What I felt instead was a curious alienation, even though the music was intelligent and original rock and roll. Perhaps its intrinsic coldness encourages alienation, but I think the real reason I felt alienated is that I didn't understand what was happening there, and I wonder what Howard Stein's choice of between-set music indicates about his understanding. One reason Bill Graham closed the Fillmore was that he no longer understood why people liked the music they liked, although, of course, Graham didn't put it so politely. The Academy of Music is a good hall, and there has to be a heavy teenorama somewhere, but I'd feel a little more comfortable, somehow, if I thought someone I trusted really knew what was going down.

The Village Voice
December, 1971

1 1 1

While New York distribution plans remain uncertain, allow us to beguile you with yet another uncertified Rolling Stones Ticket Rumor. Stones tickets for San Francisco. Los Angeles, Long Beach, and Chicago went on sale simultaneously through Ticketron. In the Bay area allnight queues averaging two hundred convened at each of the fifty or so Ticketron outlets, which at the announced maximum of four tickets per customer makes forty thousand tickets. For their San Francisco appearances the Stones plan to play four nights at Winterland instead of one impersonal night at the Oakland Coliseum. Four times the Winterland capacity of 4,500 minus 200 complimentary places makes 17,800. You will have to do the rest of the arithmetic yourself, since the Ticketron computer broke down in the ensuing crush. And to what avail? According to our rumormonger, most of the tickets had already been sold beforehand by Ticketron employees and were being scalped at up to fifty dollars while the lines were still moving, so that only thirty or forty faithful from each queue attained their prizes at the announced price. Anyone for a mail lottery?

3 3 3

The latest rage in radio programming is golden oldies. Oldies have been a part of top-forty programming for a decade or more, but now many stations, including New York's WCBS-FM, have switched to an oldies-only format. Not to be outdone, WNBC-AM has hired a disc jockey

who qualifies as an oldie himself. Yes, it's Murray the K, with two weekend shows. He will play both music and taped interviews, some of which will qualify as oldies themselves, and some of which will be new. WNBC says Murray's announcing style will be mature and reflective, though, which means we'll miss that old submarine-racewatching fleeozash.

ALL MY FRIENDS CALL ME A FOOL

Sometimes I feel silly carrying the torch for AM radio. Ultimately, I know, this is a hopeless affair. The radio isn't ever going to be what I want it to be, which only proves that I care about the radio more than the radio cares about me. Or is it so simple? It hasn't always been this one-sided, after all, and we've had a lot of wonderful times together just because our aspirations are so divergent. No matter what those sophisticated-type songwriters say, unrequited love is not a bore. You learn all kinds of things.

Like so much of the best popular culture, AM radio once attracted an audience diverse and open enough to encourage creative latitude but not so spread out that it could be covered only with a mass-cult leveler. This audience began to develop in the midfifties, when certain programmers decided that teen-agers, who consumed most popular music anyway, would consume it more enthusiastically if made to feel it was theirs by proprietary right—ergo, topforty rock and roll. For a long time, however, the programmers couldn't bring themselves to abandon adults and grownupoids altogether, which together with the ups and downs of rock and roll itself meant that pop pap persisted. The Beatles hit just when the top-forty audience became identical to the rock and roll generation, clearing away the crap for a golden era that lasted roughly into 1966.

Inevitably, the disintegration began. Some of the most acute rock and rollers banded with reprobate folkies and others to form what was then called the underground and has now broadened into the FM rock audience. As Beatlemania waned, ex-teen-agers went back to being grown-ups and demanded music to soothe their not-so-savage souls. The black audience became more self-conscious, its music less accessible to white listeners. Programmers discovered preteens. The result was AM radio that tried to provide a little schlock for everyone.

Yet because it is so massively impersonal, AM can still give me a thrill. I guess it's the thrill of being a citizen. Tired of selecting my own music or afflicted with a busted changer, I put on some FM rock, but because it is programmed by members of my presumed subculture, I expect too much, so that I end up annoyed with its bland pretension rather than excited by some bold discovery or juxtaposition. But driving along with my ray-dee-oh, I discern a gem amid the dreck and wham on the volume—for the Marvellettes' "Playboy" or the latest Stones or some concoction from the music biz's vast left field. Suddenly I have made contact with the outside world. Thousands of people, most of them nothing like me, are listening to this song.

As in so many things, the faults of AM also function as virtues. The repetitive tight format ruins songs that can't live up to their own popularity, but it also forces us to live with songs (and subcultures) we might otherwise ignore. Just because its audience is so broad, AM broadens us, and I am grateful to the nine-year-olds and the housewives and the self-conscious blacks for all their gifts—I'll name "Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep" and "Everything I Own" and "Inner City Blues," but there are many others.

The hip FM audience is justly proud of the breadth of its own eclecticism. Certainly, tastes that range from Poco to Pink Floyd, from Don McLean to the Who, from Judy Collins to Rod Stewart, aren't narrow in the obvious sense. Like the FM audience itself, however, all these artists (good and bad) partake more of the spirit (or appearance) of experiment than of its substance. That is narrow. It's narrow to reject finished products, products others prefer, as plastic (a term that has become unfashionable, and about time, since everyone's records are made of it)—or commercial (a term so ironic it makes record executives laugh all the way to their conglomerates). Above all, it's narrow to define yourself by polarization. I defy anyone who sneered at my three exemplary AM songs to find me an FM song as transcendently silly as "Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep" or as true to adult love as "Everything I Own" or as representative of the upwardly mobile black ghetto as "Inner City Blues."

The virtual absence of black popular music from FM is especially ominous. Not that FM people aren't happy to listen to blacks who subscribe to their (white) values and styles, from Jimi Hendrix all the way to Billy Preston, or that standard black geniuses like B. B. King and Aretha Franklin and (finally) Marvin Gave aren't in most FM formats. But programmers admit that a white female singer as good as Ann Peebles or Denise LaSalle would be played immediately, and that the bias of their audience is so subtle and pervasive that any new black artist has to be eased onto the station. On AM, meanwhile, black music has made yet another comeback. Just a few weeks ago, eight of the top ten records were by blacks, and if the current crop of black successes includes the 5th Dimension and Sammy Davis, Ir., well, that's the price of mass cult.

I suppose it's just that I grew up when I did, but I'm happily hooked. I will never turn my Toyota into a personalized module with a tape deck or even an FM receiver, and even though I know that the best popular culture appeals to a relatively narrow audience, I'll remember

magnificent exceptions like Chaplin and the Beatles as I punch the station selector, tuning out Sammy Davis in hopes of finding the Chi-Lites somewhere. That "Oh Girl" is a helluva song.

Newsday June, 1972

RICK(Y) NELSON: HOW TO CHANGE YOUR NAME

In the autumn of 1971 I saw Rick Nelson, once known as Ricky, at one of Richard Nader's Rock & Roll Revivals in Madison Square Garden. Bobby Rydell was also on the bill. We remember Ricky Nelson as bloodless, but Bobby Rydell, who does not choose to call himself Bob, was always the ultimate rock and roll fink, and he still is. Dressed in a turtleneck outfit and making jokes about his incipient baldness, Bobby offered nightclub versions of his hits, slackening the rhythm even more and scatting a tad, and his aging legions loved it. Nelson was wearing purple, and his hair was long. When he interrupted the oldies to sing Bob Dylan's "She Belongs to Me," which had turned into his first hit in four years in the fall of 1969, people started to boo.

Well, boo-hoo. Rick was so moved by this experience that he wrote a song about it, and after a long while "Garden Party" became his first top-ten song in nine years, and the eighteenth of his career. But if Rick thinks it's selling because it has a message, which it does, or because the kids crave the mainstream country-rock that he and his Stone Canyon Band have been playing for the past three years, which the kids may yet, he's making a big, long-

haired, purple mistake. "Garden Party" is a smash because it has a hook, a chorus that catches firmly between your ears immediately upon contact. The arrangement sounds like Johnny Cash and the Tennessee Two, Sun Records circa 1956—a simple guitar run, with Tom Brumley adding sly hints of excitement on steel. If anything, it is simpler than the music of Nelson's teen-age idol days, and it rocks less.

So maybe Rick hasn't changed as much as he thinks. Typically, the lyric is even and ingenuous and touched with a self-pity that is rather attractive—more like a surpassingly gentle, and sincere, sadness. The lyric explains that the audience didn't accept or even recognize Rick's newer music because he "didn't look the same." Taking a cue from the triumvirate of rock geniuses—Lennon, Dylan, Berry—whose presence at the concert he has happened obliquely to mention, Rick then reaches his foregone conclusion. He can't please everyone, so he's got to please himself.

Well, all right now. Nobody can argue with that. But it misses the point. Long-haired country-rock musicians, having tried nonchalantly to please everyone, and failed, may turn just as casually toward pleasing themselves, but mass-cult geniuses feel the tension more acutely. Impelled to gratify themselves, they are also driven to enthrall their audiences, and so they never forget that in order for an audience to respond to a piece of music, or a persona, it must be recognizable. If the disc jockeys no longer play your new single automatically, then you must hang it on a hook for them. And if you have a new image—that is, if you conceive yourself in a new way—then promulgate that new image in clubs, where only your own fans will come, and where they will actually be able to see you, not some purple figure on a distant stage. This isn't to deny that Rock & Roll Revivals attract a lot of guys who would rather

drink a bottle of Vitalis or throw it at someone than listen to a Bob Dylan song. But twenty thousand of the furriest freaks in the world wouldn't be able to groove on competent-plus country-rock from Rick or Ricky. How would they know what it was?

Ricky was always better than his rep, true enough. Conscientiously replacing his lesser schlock ballads with rockers culled from forgotten albums, United Artists has come up with a two-record retrospective album in its Legendary Masters Series that cuts other so-called Legendary Masters, specifically a small-time legend like Eddie Cochran, all down the line. Nelson's specialty was consistent, low-key excitement. He was really as well adjusted as his persona; he suffered, yes—he wasn't dishonest or inhuman—but life had been good to him, and he never failed to appreciate it. The problem is, that sort of niceness has outlived its usefulness. It may be real, but it no longer speaks to an audience.

A few writers, distressed by the somewhat excessive success of other country-rockers, will tell you that the Stone Canyon Band is as good as Manassas or Poco or Eagles. Uh-uh. Nelson has absolutely no blues feeling in his voice, and although his unpretension may be more likable than the overweening of a Steve Stills, Stills would never write a line as insipid as "Tell me life, what are we here for?"

Yet I do like him more than I like Steve Stills, and I wish him nothing but luck. Here's the scene I envision. It is Madison Square Garden sometime in the foreseeable future. Nelson has swallowed his principles and a lot of Richard Nader's money and is headlining a Rock & Roll Revival. He comes on stage dressed in burnished buckskin fringe, and his silky hair glistens in the spotlights. The Stone Canyon Band goes into its familiar imitation of

the Tennessee Two. In a penitent spirit the house stands and applauds. And they cheer "Just Like a Woman," too.

Newsday October, 1972

3 3 3

Except for rock-critic fan Dave Newberger, who detected a slip in the table of contents, nobody wrote to tell me why Consumer Guide (20) was unlike all other Consumer Guides. A few wrote to insult me or compliment me, but no one, not even industry people, noticed that every record in that CG was distributed by one of two corporations, C.B.S. and Kinney, who between them control about half the record market. That frightens me, I don't pretend to understand conglomerate economics very well, and as of now Atlantic/Atco/Cotillion and Elektra and Warner/Reprise (all one company) and Columbia/Epic do preserve some autonomy and issue creative productthough none of these companies has any better ear for new talent than the competition—but vague echoes of the trustbusters keep troubling me. Economists with enlightening facts or theories are invited to advise.

TRYING TO UNDERSTAND THE EAGLES

The Eagles—Glenn Frey, Bernie Leadon, Randy Meisner, and Don Henley—are the tightest and most accomplished rock band to emerge since Neil Young's Crazy

Horse. The usual compilation of credits—Poco and the Burritos and the Stone Canyon Band, Bob Seger and Linda Ronstadt—does not mean the usual compilation of disgruntled sidemen doing battle with their own well-deserved anonymity. The difference is partly chemistry—the Eagles are an organic group, not a mixture of musicians—but mostly raw talent. These guys can execute. Not only do they all sing and compose, which is nothing new—they're good at it.

The Eagles are a culmination of the vaguely country-oriented mainstream of American rock. Building its following from a core of white college and precollege males, this music extends from electric citybillies like the Flying Burrito Bros. at one extreme to thrice-removed folkies like America at the other. Most such bands either undermine their popularity with purism—diluted purism, to be sure but even steel guitars and bluegrass harmonies and traditional material cut into the mass audiences—or seem to design their music for broadcast into elevators. In contrast, the Eagles have a basic commitment to rock and roll, probably by way of Frey, who grew up in hard-rock central, Detroit. Commercially and aesthetically, this is a big plus.

Another thing that interests me about the Eagles is that I hate them. "Hate" is the kind of up-tight word that automatically excludes one from polite posthippie circles, a good reason to use it, but it is also meant to convey an anguish that is very intense, yet difficult to pinpoint. Do I hate music that has been giving me pleasure all weekend, made by four human beings I've never met? Yeah, I think so. Listening to the Eagles has left me feeling alienated from things I used to love. As the culmination of rock's country strain, the group is also the culmination of the counterculture reaction that strain epitomizes.

Rock musicians differ from their fans in several crucial respects. For one thing, those who succeed earn a lot of money, and they usually have money even before success hits, from the studio and back-up gigs where they make their recording contacts. Their work is meaningful even when it isn't profitable and provides them with automatic status. The rock star is the perfect fantasy hero—not only has he beaten America's options, but he also gets laid. Considering their privileges, it's no wonder that many musicians are turning into spokesmen of hip reaction.

In Leadon and Meisner's "Earlybird" the square title character, who "spends his time denyin'/ That he's got no time for flyin'/ In the breeze," is compared to a hipper bird: "High up on his own/ The eagle flies alone./ He is free." Later, the singer sets up an implicit comparison between himself and the eagles: "Y' know it makes me feel so fine and set my mind at ease/ To know that I don't harm a soul in doin' what I please." *

This comparison is a little confusing, of course. The eagle roams the sky not in search of freedom and fresh air but in search of prey, which is why he is such an apt symbol of American imperial power. Although I doubt that the group intended the martial resonances of its name—that would be dangerous, image-wise—the Eagles definitely do espouse a new, hedonistic brand of American individualism. The youth counterculture of the sixties always had a certain eccentric frontier quality to it, with the understanding that frontier life was cooperative as well as individualistic. But the stress of mass cooperation eventually bummed everyone out—it was just too heavy, y'know?—so the new alternative man goes it alone. As the

^{* &}quot;Earlybird" by Randy Meisner and Bernie Leadon copyright © 1972 Benchmark Music and Kicking Bear Music, All rights reserved. Used by permission of Warner Bros. Music,

refrain of "Peaceful Easy Feeling" advises: "Lighten up while you still can,/ Don't even try to understand,/ Find a place to make your stand/ And take it easy." *

Actually, the protagonist of "Take It Easy" doesn't plan to make his stand alone. He craves female companionship —but please, no one who will stone him or own him or bewitch him or tie him down or let him down or do anything much but chug all night. After all, "she can't teach you any way/ That you don't already know." † That line comes from a song that in a less male-chauvinist context might seem as thoughtful a representation of the ethic of sexual autonomy as Joni Mitchell's "All I Want" but is here reduced to the hippest of hip come-ons. There is more wisdom about the real give and take of sexual relationships in most of the silly romantic ditties of the early sixties than there is on the Eagles' entire album. In the end these eagles fly alone with a vengeance.

It is no accidental irony that such hard-rock professionals convey their integrated vision of self-possession and pastoral cool by way of a dynamite corporate machine, including genius manager David Geffen and genius producer Glyn Johns. It is the custom of affluent liberals to let others do their dirty work—that way they can continue to protect the illusion that they are not harming a soul by doin' what they please. It's no accident, either, that the Eagles' hip country music excises precisely what is deepest and most gripping about country music—its adult working-class pain, its paradoxically rigid ethics—and leaves sixteen tracks of bluegrass-sounding good feelin'.

[&]quot;Peaceful Easy Feeling" by Jack Tempchin copyright © 1972 Benchmark Music and Jazz Bird Music. All rights reserved. Used by permission of Warner Bros. Music.

^{† &}quot;Take It Easy" by Jackson Browne and Glenn Frey copyright © 1972 Benchmark Music. All rights reserved. Used by permission of Warner Bros. Music.

After all, there's nothing to be gained scaring our young people. The music, the lyrics, and the distribution machine are all suave and synthetic. Brilliant stuff—but false.

The Eagles are the ultimate in California dreaming, a fantasy of fulfillment that has been made real only in the hip upper-middle-class suburbs of Marin County and the Los Angeles canyons. The Beach Boys sang about something similar a decade ago, but they also reminded us that happiness and material things are far from unconnected. The Eagles put that truth aside and pay only lip service to the struggle that real fulfillment involves. Even the Beach Boys learned that in the end our welfare and the welfare of others are bound together. We all tried to forge a humane generation and ultimately fell back exhausted. Retreat was only natural. But any prophet who tells you not to try and understand is setting you up for a swindle.

Newsday June, 1972

1 1 1

Black Oak Arkansas, which recently purchased thirteen hundred acres in the Ozarks in order to build a private community called Heaven, has decided to share the land in a show of generosity unprecedented among rock groups. As manager Butch Stone explains: "It's our way of saying thank you." The celestial gesture will consist of one acre, divided into six million square inches parceled out one to a thank you, with the group continuing to pay taxes and to control what Stone describes as "land improvements." I figure that if someone were to get together with 143

friends and mail all requests from the same post office at the same time, he might be able to keep a pet flamingo on his collective square foot, though it would more likely measure twelve feet by one inch. Anyway, flamingos probably count as land improvements.

JOY

Joy of Cooking is Berkeley-based and has gigged around Northern California-most often at a little club called the Mandrake—for the better part of three years. It is led by Toni Brown and Terry Garthwaite, women in their thirties who are veterans of the Bay-area folk scene. Toni does most of the composing, plays keyboards, and sings harmony, counterpoint, and some lead. Terry is the lead singer and plays guitar. The other band members are men. Conga drummer Ron Wilson studied classical piano for twelve years and somehow ended up working with computers, a life he gave up at age thirty-five to join the group. Bassist Jeff Neighbor, who also plays violin and numerous other instruments, replaced Terry's younger brother David shortly after the first album, Joy of Cooking, was released. Neighbor teaches music in the Berkeley elementary schools. Drummer Fritz Kasten has also played piano and alto sax. He has worked with Vince Guaraldi and with the San Francisco State Symphony Band. At twenty-six, he is the youngest member of the group.

A rock and roll fan is properly suspicious of such credentials. Creedence or no Creedence, Berkeley is an incestuous, self-righteous town blessed with an unparalleled concentration of mostly self-righteous talent. The far-from-adolescent protagonists of Joy of Cooking, with their roots in everything but rock and roll, could be predicted to turn

out music that makes up in art, as they say, what it lacks in vitality, fun, and the common touch. Their album, however, is already moving up the trade charts, and when there's a tour, it can be expected to break big. If it's hard to imagine the band exciting young teen-agers, it's not because the music is sterile but because Joy of Cooking is a very adult rock band. It's adult, however, in the youthful way we try to be adult—without abandoning freshness and spontaneity—and so young teen-agers, who are not as predictable as older teen-agers like to think, can also dig it. After all, it has vitality, fun, and the common touch.

Toni Brown's piano, which dominates, seems at first to fall into all the kitschiest traps. As a secret believer in the highbrow-lowbrow synthesis, I have always favored the straight-ahead barrelhouse boogie of rock and rollers like Little Richard and Chris Stainton or the more intellectual inventions of the great jazz pianists—the angular, reflective commentary of Thelonious Monk or the mad flights of Cecil Taylor—to middlebrow keyboard ticklers like Nina Simone, whose histrionic rolls insert unconvincing emotion into a song, or Les McCann, a leading proponent of self-conscious funk. But Toni's resemblance to the middlebrows is only superficial. When playing for herself, she prefers abstractions like those of modernists Chick Corea and Keith Jarrett, but she's smart enough to know that stuff doesn't work in a band, and so she has stripped the pulp from the overripe Simone/McCann approach and come down to a clean core of rhythm.

Polyrhythms are really what Joy of Cooking is about. Ron's congas are the best proof, but when you listen thoughtfully, you realize that Terry rarely takes a solo or even plays a lead line and that Toni's one-chord improvisations work because they weigh about the same as the bass lines and drum patterns. Toni says the one rock pianist who has affected her is Stevie Winwood. This

makes sense, but it's not the kind of thing that occurs to you, because Joy of Cooking, unlike Traffic, is a disciplined band. Understanding that friendly polyrhythms can get boring, the group intersperses closely structured songs with stretched-out dance numbers. Toni switches to organ, Ron takes a harp solo, Terry plays lead for a chorus or two. Also, they sing.

For Toni and Terry to play lead instruments is an almost unprecedented breakthrough for women, but their success with vocal posture, where the precedents simply get in the way, is even more exciting. Basically, there are three kinds of female singer: the virgin, the sexpot, and her close relative, the sufferer. Each of these stereotypes suggests a human being who does not act upon the world, and the exceptions—little girl Melanie, for instance—usually play equally demeaning roles. Probably because the image seems closest to some metaphorical reality, most of the great women singers have been sufferers, but usually their defeat is so complete that even if they start out with a certain jaunty wit—like Billie Holiday—they end up hopelessly ravaged, and their occasional assertions of strength -think of Janis or Aretha-have a desperate edge. I can think of only two sufferers who have managed to project a relatively sure and consistent dignity: Bessie Smith and Tracy Nelson. Judy Collins and Joan Baez are dignified, of course, but at the cost not just of feeling but of corporeality. Partly because her looks-straight dark hair, big eyes, pretty face—fit the mold, partly because her voice is clear and sweet, Toni is close to the Judy Collins image, but the effect is modulated because she sits behind her instrument and because she shares the stage with a very different woman, Terry.

Terry's unique power as a performer came clear to me the third time I saw the group perform, between a terrible macho-rock band called Robert Savage and sexpot Linda

Ronstadt in the enormous Long Beach Municipal Arena. My previous experiences had been 'at the Mandrake, in Berkeley, and at the Troubadour, in Los Angeles, where the intimate circumstances favored the group's quiet style. At Long Beach, especially in the wake of all that amplification, they seemed likely to disappear. Response was lukewarm to "Hush," which had enjoyed some local AM air-play, and the next song was no better. Then the band went into an adapted folk medley of "Brownsville" and "Mockingbird." To my astonishment, the intro elicited some spontaneous clap-time from the audience. Toward the end of "Mockingbird" Terry took the mike off its stand and began her scatting counterpoint with Toni. Then Terry began to scat alone. She has been described as a laid-back Janis. Her voice has that gritty quality, but she never screams, and what she abjures in power she makes up in subtlety. There is no better improvisatory singer in rock, but she gives the sense that it hasn't been easy. Terry is a beautiful woman whose initial impact is mostly toughness; both her frizzed-out hair and something embattled in her face obscure its delicate bone structure until you get to know her. The sexuality she projected as she bobbed about the stage in Long Beach showed a similar reserve. It was self-contained, true to its own rhythms; it was sexual, not sexy, completely unlike the gyrations expected of chick singers who are getting it on. Yet the audience began to clap again, and the turned-on greaser next to me, who had been demanding an encore from Robert Savage half an hour before, turned and commented: "They've really got it together." Could any band of women ask for a more miraculous compliment? Not yet.

Edgily, Toni and Terry insist that Joy of Cooking is not a band of women, and it isn't. It's an integral unit. But it's led by women, and it seems to speak for them. Not long ago, Joy of Cooking preceded Barry Melton, the former Fish, at a small Bay-area concert. Melton is a good guy in his way, but he is a classic example of the white singer who tries to camouflage his racial confusion with a mask of phony black misogyny, and when he started to sing about gittin him four or five wimmin, he was booed to a halt. Such incidents have been rare, but they're bound to increase. Whenever hard-core rock fans talk about their subculture, they forget how many brothers and sisters are left out of the consensus. Many vaguely feminist women have no special connection to rock not out of ideology but simply because it has never really spoken to them. Joy of Cooking can end that. Not that Toni's lyrics are any more political, in the narrow sense of that term, than her stage demeanor. She is simply a literate female who has not been a girl for quite a while and who writes from the experience of trying to be her own person. Allow me to quote a long stanza as a kind of finale: "I used to think a woman was just made to love a man,/ That a man was someone for a woman to hold to while she can./ And then one day my man walked out on me. Well, you know I got the blues./ I'd been living off him for so long I had nothing of my own to lose./ And now I'm gonna move,/ Stretch out and find my wings and who I am/ And if I ever pass this way again I'll be ready for a good man."*

If the women's movement has taught us anything, it is that such realizations are political if anything is. It's enough to make you believe in art. You, and maybe the greaser next to you, too.

> The Village Voice April, 1971

^{*&}quot;Only Time Will Tell Me" by Toni Brown copyright © 1970 Bear Brown Pub, Used by permission.

DEAD HEADS PAY THEIR DUES

A Grateful Dead concert at the Felt Forum is postflower America reveling in its contradictions, but Dominique was reminded of the Soviet Union, where the queue has not withered away, and elbowing ahead of your comrades is a national pastime. As we pushed on in toward our complimentary third-row seats, the crowd got heavier, and so did the contradictions. The cross section of Dead heads heavy music proles and suburban folkies and old rock and rollers—is a confusing combination of our fabled new community and the nightmare mob of Ortega y Gasset, Half the audience avoids the crush, but the remainder presses forward, packing the aisles and the front rows, and everyone is up and boogieing. To boogie, you just stand and move to the music, relating to your brothers and sisters no matter how stoned you are because your brothers and sisters are sweating and boogieing on all sides. It isn't a dance, and not just because there isn't room at a concert —even in seatless halls the floor is always tight up front. Folks do dance with each other in back, but for most the exhilaration of the boogie increases exponentially with the proximity of the musicians, and if Jerry beams his cosmic grin down at someone, he/she will not shriek like a twelveyear-old chickie at the TAMI Show but just boogie harder.

The dismay of the mass-culture theorists and their politely raised offspring is understandable—too many people in too little space, all competing to get to the fore of the hero-worshiping swarm, ignoring the hard-earned wisdom of the fire laws and damaging property that they and their sibling consumers will pay for in the end. Many

of the boogiers are usurpers who buy cheap seats and confidently move up or just sneak in to begin with. Despite the love-and-community rhetoric and sacramental jointpassing, the boogiers do discriminate against the weak and the short and the timid—a few always pass out, many more get sick, and eventually someone will die-and a boogieing biker is almost as likely to knock your head off at a Dead concert as anywhere else. Yet when we finally reached our seats, we had no trouble claiming them, and the wallet and cigarettes that Dominique had unknowingly dropped at the other end of the row were passed down a minute later. A girl standing in front of us started to bum out but revived when an orange miraculously materialized. Regulars greeted other regulars, remembered from previous boogies, and compared this event with a downer in Boston or a fabulous night in Arizona.

A lot of people avoid live rock because they can't stand the crowds. In a medium-sized hall where the music can be felt in back, that smacks of the old aristocratic bullshit to me, Rock and roll developed as it did because it was a mass art, and if it can bring us together in a celebration, that's good-club intimacy and living-room privacy are fine, but in the end I am proboogie. The Dead, who played four nights at the Felt Forum instead of filling Madison Square Garden and who arranged a special live broadcast on WNEW-FM to accommodate those who couldn't make it, demonstrate that despite the contradictions, live performances are still a viable form. Ideally, the band radiates fun while a hip, property-oriented tough like Bill Graham, who produced the series, does the work, Someone has to pay, I guess, but anyone clever enough to get past Graham deserves to boogie as much as this reporter. A lot of hassle might be avoided if reserved seats were eliminated—the fanatics should be in front, first-comefirst-serve. The risks and the contradictions are real, but the principle seems to be that a good time involves

a few dues. That doesn't seem like such a bad principle to me.

The Village Voice December, 1971

WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL?

I was curious, so perhaps you are too: "Goodbye Media Man," Tom Fogerty's first single as a single, is unextraordinary musically, simplistic lyrically, and also Tom doesn't sing too good. Part II is better than Part I, should you run into it on a jukebox in Lodi; it's also shorter and has less words. Get back, Tom.

Creedence Clearwater Revival: *Mardi Gras* (Fantasy). Creedence is no longer a one-man band, which has disoriented a lot of John Fogerty fans, myself included, but once you get used to the new group, which is really what using Doug Clifford and Stu Cook to compose and sing amounts to, it sounds as good as the old, and potentially even better. A minus.

Tom Fogerty (Fantasy). This is not quite incompetent, but it is exceptionally unoriginal—even a pretension or two would be welcome. Good thing identity crises weren't so fashionable in the days of David and Ricky Nelson. D.

Doug "Cosmo" Clifford (Fantasy). Some of "Cosmo's" work on Mardi Gras sounded promising, but he must have been fibbing. Docked a notch for time: 27:32. D.

It's official: The members of Creedence Clearwater

Revival, which only two years ago was the most successful American band in the world, have decided to pursue separate careers. John Fogerty's current project is producing a seven-man band called the Blue Ridge Rangers. Strange thing is, all seven profiles on the dust jacket look just like John Fogerty. Chances are the Blue Ridge Rangers will never pursue separate careers.

JOHN LENNON'S REALPOLITIK

The new John Lennon album—billed as Some Time in New York City, by John & Yoko/Plastic Ono Band/Elephant's Memory—proves conclusively that the ex-Beatle deserves to stay in New York City. My evidence is a line from a tune called "Attica State": "Come together join the movement." No doubt the State Department, which persists in trying to deport him, thinks this makes Lennon a subversive, but I ask you, who but a true New Yorker would exhibit such chutzpah?

On the other hand, maybe it isn't chutzpah. Maybe it's just naïveté. Among my movement friends the line seems to be that there is no movement, which like most 1972 radicalism is a deliberate paradox—we want the world, but we'll settle for George McGovern. That I write of "my movement friends" in one clause and "we" in the next is another paradox. I can't speak as a movement person—I've been tear-gassed a couple of times and can claim abortive participation in a few action projects, but like most people who perceive paradox too easily, I'm better at analyzing history than making it—and anyway, since the very idea of the movement has lost credibility, it would be politically counterproductive for me to do so.

More than ever, my skepticism applies to rock and roll. Unless the music business becomes a much stranger business than it already is, the violent overthrow of the U.S. government is not likely to come in quadraphonic sound. Right now, anything goes, and *Some Time in New York City* is in the spirit of anything goes. The lyrics are printed on the jacket, which is designed like a newspaper, and properly so, for seven of its ten songs are not only political but also topical, almost in the spirit of real broadsides.

The time is right for such a move. It's true that what used to be called protest music accomplished less with words than rock and roll did with nothing but sound—inflections that shook teen-agers out of their white-skin gentility, rhythms that aroused their sexuality and aggressiveness—but now things are more complicated. It's no accomplishment to boogie adolescents into youth rebellion any more. The hip young are rapidly turning into another interest group, like labor unions. If rock and roll is to continue to function politically, it must continue to liberate its audience—to broaden fellow-feeling, direct energy, and focus analysis.

It can, too, in many ways, and lyrics are one of them. Rod Stewart's "Handbags and Gladrags," in which Mike d'Abo describes a high-school girl from her grandfather's vantage, combats youth chauvinism as aptly as "Yakety Yak" unmasked parent power. The Staple Singers' "I'll Take You There" suggests a utopia free of liberal con-men. But the new Lennon/Ono songs are more direct, hence more risky. They attack issues so simplistically that you wonder whether the artists believe themselves. Is love and care all the inmates at Attica need? If I had the luck of the Irish, would I rather be English instead? This time John appears to have plunged too fast. Agitprop is one thing. Wrong-headed agitprop is another.

Agitprop that fails to reach its constituency, however, is hardly a thing at all, and since Lennon's forte has always been the communication of new truths to a mass audience,

that possibility is very distressing. He isn't exploiting his charisma this time, he's gambling it. Not that he isn't singing better than ever. Not that Phil Spector hasn't added brilliant musical touches—invisible strings, bottleneck guitar, little Peggy March riff—or that Elephant's Memory, a fine-rocking movesymp band, doesn't boogie throughout. But the lyrics exhibit a fatal movement (and avant-gardist) flaw: While striving to enlighten, they condescend. I have yet to hear of a woman, feminist or no, who isn't offended by the presumption of the two feminist songs. Does Angela Davis have to be told that she's one of the million political prisoners in the world? It's bad enough to praise David Peel and worse still to record him, but imitating his thoughtless hip-left orthodoxy is worst of all.

Still, you can trust a paradox-finder to discern some hope in all of this. *Imagine* was a successful popularization of *Plastic Ono Band*'s experiments. Who is to say John can't do it again? Wouldn't it be wonderful if all this heart-in-the-right-place effort could be transformed into something that could be expected to be real to people? Maybe we could even learn to love Yoko's singing as much as John does. Just imagine.

Newsday July, 1972

THE ROLLING STONES: THEY NEED US; WE NEED THEM

The difference between the Rolling Stones who played this country in 1969 and the Rolling Stones who climaxed their 1972 American tour with four sold-out concerts at Madison Square Garden is the difference between a group and a band. The distinction is subtle, and sometimes unnecessary, but crucial. The Stones of the sixties were not only coherent as a unit; despite a great deal of surface evolution, they were also deliberately static. Instead of dealing with the paradoxes of real life in their time, they chose to defy them—nothing less, nothing more. In a way, Brian Jones epitomized this choice by his knack for melding esoteric musical modes into the old context. So did the opening acts on their 1969 tour. B. B. King and Chuck Berry are so much the unchallenged masters of their chosen idioms (urban blues, rock and roll) that they need never grow another inch.

It was as if the 1969 Stones were telling us: "This is what we do and what we've always done. We do it better than anyone, and that's enough." But the 1972 Stones—with Mick Taylor, Jones's replacement, risen from his former anonymity to unresented partnership and almost all the lead guitar parts, and Nicky Hopkins, Jim Price, and Bobby Keys, session men to the world, fully integrated into the band for this ride—are something like Stevie Wonder, who opened the tour this year. Wonder is a black musician who has been around even longer than the Stones, but because he began at age twelve, he has never stopped evolving. The 1972 Stones seem committed to evolution as well. Without surrendering their identity, they are determined to sur-

Not that the Stones have turned into another demi-impro jamming band. Far from it. Every change is calculated, and even if Charlie Watts is permitted a solo drum break and Taylor and Hopkins and Keith Richard take the place out front for a moment, Mick Jagger prevails. His image and performance dominate the band. But he has evolved, too. Just so no one misses his uncanny compulsion to undercut his own fabled demonism with humor, this time he is playing the clown, the village idiot, the marionette. He scratches his head and scampers over the stage fixtures like

vive in the living world.

a monkey man; he drools and sucks his fingers and lolls his tongue; he bows from the waist like a mechanical doll or a butler. If someone throws a likely hat from the arena, he puts it on.

Mick is working for his audience as never before. The fans get off automatically, erupting with the first bars, but Mick struggles to double and triple the explosion. When before has he echoed Sly Stone—"Higher!"—or implored the audience as he does in "Sweet Virginia": "Come on down, I beg of you"? When has he asked for our help? When has he acknowledged how much he needs us?

Well, we need him, too. His new fans may react uncritically to a legend, but for those of us who have been with him from the beginning, every tour and album by the Stones represents a new crisis. Will they do it again? No one else has survived as fully public—that is, touring—artists since Year One of the new era. The Stones are it. Last night, as Mick sang a few bars after the ecstatic rave-up at the end of "Street Fighting Man," he shook his head in wonderment, as if to say: "Whew, how 'bout that? We beat the game again." Then he walked off.

And soon the entire ensemble—both the expanded Stones and Wonder's band Wonderlove—came back on. Instead of the usual serving-woman, Mick himself led the sightless Stevie to the microphone, holding his hand. Jumping up and down with the sheer energy both men must sometimes substitute for joy, the black man and the white man brought everybody together with a blast from the past, "Satisfaction," the only sixties-identified song the band performed all night.

"I can't get no," we all screamed. But we were satisfied.

Newsday July, 1972 The Rolling Stones: Exile on Main Street (Rolling Stones). Incontrovertibly the year's best, this fagged-out masterpiece is the summum of Rock'72. Even now, I can always get pleasure out of any of its four sides, but it took me perhaps twenty-five listenings before I began to understand what the Stones were up to, and I still haven't finished the job. Just say they're Advancing Artistically, in the manner of self-conscious public creators careering down the corridors of destiny. Exile explores new depths of record-studio murk, burying Mick's voice under layers of cynicism, angst, and ennui: "You've got a cutthroat crew/ I'm gonna sink under you/ I got the bell bottom blues/ It's gonna be the death of me." * A plus.

GROWING UP GRIM WITH MOTT THE HOOPLE

Mott the Hoople is an English rock band that cohered in July, 1969, around a singer from the industrial Midlands named Ian Hunter. Hunter had one freakish specialty—an imitation of the world-weary middle-period Dylan that cut Sonny Bono all the way to 4th Street. As if to prove himself the champeen Dylanizer, Hunter did Sonny's "Laugh at Me" on the group's first album. The invitation was difficult to resist. With its revival of a teen tearjerker balanced against its jacket by the kitsch surrealist M. C. Escher, the album was like the two that followed—distinguished only by what it covered and by

^{*&}quot;Soul Survivor" by Mick Jagger and Keith Richard copyright © 1972 Promopub B.V. Used with the permission of the publisher.

what covered it. The music itself was a lot of highly undistinguished heavy riffing.

But the fourth LP, Brain Capers, opened the door on the arch, arty sensibility that had obviously been closetedholding its ears and jumping up and down with perverse glee—somewhere behind that wall of sound. Like so much English hard rock, Brain Capers was rather morbid thematically—it opened with a little something called "Death May Be Your Santa Claus" and followed with new versions of old songs about heroin and the power of darkness. But where Ozzy Osburne, of Black Sabbath, and David Byron, of Uriah Heep, declaimed their doom shows like demented evangelists, Hunter's vocals provided a mad note of urbane detachment—he didn't imitate Dylan any more, but he achieved a little of what Dylan had. And while the band pounded away with that denial of sensual nuance so common among the English superheavies, there was something in the rave-ups that cleansed while it scarified, some undertone of jazzy atonality. The result was a record that neither surrendered to nor tried to escape from the rebellious pessimism that had come to pervade English hard rock. Instead, it confronted that pessimism, positing a possible survival against the likely obliteration.

These intimations of apocalypse may sound strange here in the land of let's-boogie, but I am talking about England, where there is definitely weird stuff going on in rock and roll. I take it as a combination of the grim English adolescence—most kids there go to work at fifteen—and the distance between English pop and its American roots. For the English, rock and roll has never involved doing what comes naturally. No matter how well off the prospective American rock musician may be, it seems that he is closer to down-home funk than his (often working-class) English counterpart, and (due largely to the inspiration of the Beatles, of course) he is no longer embarrassed about showing it. Occasionally, England will

produce some mad blues avatar like Eric Burdon or Joe Cocker, but for the most part the English work out their built-in detachment aesthetically. Invariably, their music redefines that old catchall: art-rock.

I don't want to overgeneralize—Ten Years After and Savoy Brown aren't art-rock, and neither is John Mayall. But the two biggest second-generation English bands—in America, that is—Led Zeppelin and Jethro Tull, dissimilar as they are, can be coaxed into the category, because each relates to rock and roll not organically but intellectually. Each idealizes the amplified beat. For Tull (as for all the upper-middle-classicals: Yes; the Moody Blues; Emerson, Lake & Palmer) it is a simple, compelling structure into which Good Music can be inserted. For Led Zep (as for Mott the Hoople and Black Sabbath and Slade) it is an end in itself, a kind of formal challenge.

What is most striking about all art-rock is that it isn't very sexy. Bands like Tull make head music, using the physical compulsion of beat and volume to involve the mind. Bands like Led Zep, on the other hand, make body music of an oddly cerebral cast, arousing aggression rather than sexuality. This means that the second kind of English hard rock—Led Zep's and Mott's—has a strange potential double audience. It can attract intellectuals, and it can attract working-class kids.

Only two American bands of any consequence have made such music, and they split this audience down the middle. The Velvet Underground, nurtured by Andy Warhol before nestling down in Boston's academic ghetto, was America's first and greatest critics' band. And Alice Cooper, after an early flirtation with the Zappaphiles, has become the focus of the entire downer generation. It's curious that the only American "English hard-rock" bands are also the only American bands with an explicit connection to homosexuality—Alice Cooper through Alice's since-abandoned transvestitism, not to mention his as-

sumed name, and the Velvets through the Warhol superstars.

In England such connections are commonplace, from Mick Jagger's androgynousness and Ray Davies's camping all the way to David Bowie, who in case you haven't heard is a singer-composer-producer who is also a transvestite and a bisexual and a trained mime and who is currently trying to ride a massive hype into superstardom. Bowie's manager is Tony De Fries. De Fries also manages Mott the Hoople, Lou Reed, of the Velvets, and Iggy, whose band, the Stooges, doesn't rank with the Velvets or Alice Cooper because it never developed a real following. For the record, the Stooges weren't into homosexuality. Iggy liked to make himself bleed on stage, though.

Like everyone else, De Fries and his stable want to reach a new rock audience that barely remembers the Beatles. In England this audience has far-out tastes, going for the fey fantasies of T. Rex and the crude generational hostility of Slade where the Americans go for the Osmonds and Grand Funk. But the fact that English tastes once took over America doesn't mean they will again—in a sense, the Beatles were a one shot. Artistically, the English groups are superior, but as phenomena they are no more real. By the time of Brain Capers Mott the Hoople had a substantial English following. In America, however, they had a Velvet Underground reputation when they would have preferred an Alice Cooper market. When their U.S. record company dropped them, they were so disheartened they were ready to disband. But De Fries and Bowie persuaded them to give it one more try.

The reason was "All the Young Dudes," a song Bowie wrote and produced for Mott the Hoople. A big hit in England, it made only top fifty here, which, since Mott's new label was pushing hard, doesn't mean a thing. No matter. "All the Young Dudes" is the most exciting piece

of white rock and roll released all year. It recalls the Stones at their peak, when all that ironic density still pertained to us as well as them. Like "I'm Eighteen," the hit single that transformed Alice Cooper from the group that slaughtered chickens to the group that destroyed stadiums, "All the Young Dudes" is an attempt by an over-twenty-five to get under the skins of the new rock audience. But where the American produced a defiant cry of joyful alienation, the English art-rocker tried to suggest paradoxes of power and frustration, solidarity and isolation.

Because Mott the Hoople is produced by David Bowie and opens the *All the Young Dudes* album with "Sweet Jane," a Velvet Underground song, it is generally assumed that the band is flirting with the trendy gayness now threatening the red-blooded American boogie. Hmph, just listen to the very first stanza of "Sweet Jane": "Now Jack he's in his corset, and Jane she's in her vest." Only thing is, the crucial line in that song is the next one: "Me, I'm in a rock and roll band."* In "One of the Boys," which opens side two, the same identification is reconfirmed: "I borrowed a gypsy Gibson just to show them/ And now I'm a rock and roll star I don't want to know them/ If they want a straight they better go out and grow one." †

Lately, the old figure of the self-conscious rock and roll star has been turning into the even more traditional world-weary art hero, with all the effeteness that implies—Mick Jagger's coat is worn and frayed, and he wants to shout, but he can't hardly speak, while Bowie's own persona, Ziggy Stardust, is an androgynous alien trying to

e "Sweet Jane" by Lou Reed copyright © 1970 by Dunbar Music, Inc., and Oakfield Avenue Music, Ltd., 1133 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y. 10036. Used by permission.

^{†&}quot;One of the Boys" copyright © 1972 Ackee Music Inc. Used by permission.

conjure some love out of a dying planet. But whereas Jagger really is a fagged-out ten-year music veteran, and Bowie really is an art-scene outsider trying to reach the masses through music, Ian Hunter is the lead singer of a genuine second-level touring band. He is familiar enough with the kinks of the pop world, but fame has not separated him—not totally, anyway—from his own class and generational origins. If he is part of a subculture in which love's sweet sentiment seems a thing of the past, as it does in "Sweet Jane," he can also remember how he grew his hair to scare the teacher as one of the boys: "I don't say much, but I make a big noise."

In "All the Young Dudes" the rock and roller who knows Jack and Jane and the rock and roller who is one of the boys combine to undermine the notion that Jack and Jane are merely weird or the boys merely ordinary. For this is a dying planet in the sense that economic pressures break down traditional roles faster than anyone can find comfortable new ones—Dad wears a secret tummy-flattener to the P.T.A., and Mom affects a suede jerkin around the office. Meanwhile, the kids cope. A generation because they are a market, they band together, fortified by details of style against their own fate: "Don't want to stay alive when you're twenty-five."

Singing against an unforgettable chorus, an inspiriting, somewhat brutal-sounding hymn to subgenerational solidarity—one line, "All the young dudes carry the news," repeated over and over—Hunter reveals the cruel limits of such solidarity. Whether the dudes are homosexuals, droogs, mods, rockers, or mockers—or just the boys—doesn't matter. Whoever they are, they are united by a style ("He dresses like a queen ...") against time, and they're out on the street determined to face it down together ("... but he can kick like a mule"). They're not "juvenile delinquent wrecks," they tell us: "We can love,

we can really love." But in the end the love and the facedown are inextricable, for the only accessible adversaries are those contemporaries who don't conform to their style. As the chorus repeats to a fade, Hunter calls out: "Hey, you there. You with the glasses. I want you. I want you in the front. Now." Soon, he loves and faces down his victim, who I imagine as some hapless Emerson, Lake & Palmer fan. "How did it feel?" someone asks. Hunter's reply is barely audible, the last word of the song: "Sick."

Obviously, this is not exactly trendy gayness. The dudes love only in their apparently sexless camaraderie, and on the rest of side one, Hunter plays an unusually vindictive rock misogynist. As the harsh rhythms of English hard rock imply, both homosexual and heterosexual contact is likely to be understood in terms of the patterns of dominance and submission that accompany any struggle, including the struggle for identity. Side two is a little more hopeful. Organist Verden Allen sings of a woman who is his sexual equal, and guitarist Mick Ralphs declares that he is "ready for love" before Hunter closes with "Sea Diver," a somewhat ambiguous lament for the wasted chances of youth. "Oh Lord, I wish I could escape this iron veil," he moans, and then answers himself, apparently in another voice: "Write on, my son, write on, my son/ Write until you fail." †

Especially in comparison to the raucous aggression of *Brain Capers* and the earlier albums, this is mature, reflective stuff. Its mood is reinforced by Bowie's well-pruned production and Hunter's almost tender reading of the final song. Under Bowie's direction Hunter has become a Dylan imitator on a new level—he wants his music to enlighten

^{• &}quot;All the Young Dudes" by David Bowie copyright © 1972 Vaudeville Music Ltd. Used by permission.

^{† &}quot;Sea Diver" by Ian Hunter copyright © 1972 Ackee Music Inc. Used by permission.

as well as entertain. In "All the Young Dudes" he comments: "We need TV but we got T. Rex." Even though he can't make it with the Beatles or the Stones—they're for his older brother, sitting at home—he knows there is something better than Slade's hostility and T. Rex's fantasy. And so Mott the Hoople enters the battle for the soul of English working-class adolescents, capturing their angry confusion but trying to point beyond it, too. That sort of transcendence is what art-rock really ought to be about.

Newsday
December, 1972

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In what is always described as the "prestigious" *Melody Maker* poll, Emerson, Lake & Palmer came up with a total of five awards, the most interesting of which was for Best Composition. The winner was not "The Endless Enigma" but *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Funny, I always thought someone named Moussorgsky composed that one.

111.

Jack Good, the British rock impresario who originated the television show *Shindig* in the heyday of Beatlemania, is hard at work on his dearest project, a rock version of *Othello*. In its original Los Angeles stage production, Good's *Othello* was a zany, ham-filled masterpiece starring William Marshall as Othello and Jerry Lee Lewis as Iago.

The film version, produced by Metromedia and distributed by Cinema V, is reportedly more sedate. It will feature Season Hubley (Desdemona), Lance LeGault (Iago), and Susan Tyrrell (Emilia). Color will be provided by Richie Havens, who-makes his acting debut in the title role. When last seen, Havens had just flubbed the same line for the fourteenth consecutive time.

CARLY SIMON AS MISTRESS OF SCHLOCK

The first time I heard Carly Simon's "That's the Way I Always Heard It Should Be" I almost stopped the car to cheer. In the wake of that stark opening, hooking as effectively as the catchiest guitar riff—"My father sits at night with no lights on"—the calculated drama of the song would probably have grabbed me in any context. The married people the lyrics described sounded like friends and acquaintances whose suffering belied pop music's weddingbell clichés, and the persona singing the lyrics was any number of women I knew. But that wasn't why I was excited. I was excited because they were all on the radio.

It was relatively unimportant that a truth I knew had been articulated. In the subculture to which that truth applies, articulation is commonplace. In fact, it is frequently a cop-out, a substitute for doing something more concrete—like proffering support to isolated fellow spirits over the radio, for instance, or promulgating a new image of woman. A man spurning marriage because love ties you down, babe, is one thing. A woman questioning marriage because marriage so often destroys love is another. I liked the nonethnic directness of Simon's vocal stance, neither phony funky nor sweetly sickening. Good propaganda, I thought.

That was late fall of 1970. I heard the song a few more times, but it wasn't a hit, and when I got the album, I was disappointed. That nonethnic accent turned out to be pure ruling-class honk—Carly was from a ritzy publishing family—and her brother had contributed some high-tone cover photos that did as much for the image of woman as an issue of *Vogue*. More important, only two songs on the album really came through: "That's the Way I Always Heard It Should Be," with lyrics not by Simon but by Jacob Brackman, and another Brackman song that I knew (and liked better) in an earlier version by Fred Gardner. Listening again as I write, I feel sure I was right. Except for "One More Time," Simon's compositions still sound stiff and overperformed, typical rock-as-art jive. At the time I closed my ears and hoped she would go away.

Instead, the album got good reviews-mostly because its sociocultural milieu was so familiar to reviewer types, I suspect, although the distinctiveness of Simon's singing style can't be denied. Many months passed before the single finally hit and the pressure of radio exposure blew it apart. "That's the Way I Always Heard It Should Be" is in the noble tradition of "Leader of the Pack" and "Society's Child." In all three a young woman's challenge to the social limitations of romance is milked for melodrama, and in all three, realistically enough, she capitulates. Of course, Simon's song comes on more sophisticated, although it's worth noting that "Society's Child" seemed equally sophisticated five or six years ago. In any case, sophistication ruins Simon's song. Only in such a painstakingly precise song would the hazy outline of its persona —who talks like a recent college graduate yet claims that her college friends have already alienated their children, a process that normally takes ten years or so-be so noticeable. And only in such a wordy song would the basic principles of schlock pop-melodrama production be flouted so arrogantly. Its shock absorbed, the song was simply no fun to hear. I can only assume that those who bought it would rather contemplate a record than listen to it.

As her career progressed, I liked her less. It seemed to me that she epitomized women's lib as an upper-middle-class movement. Girls and young women empathized with her problems and her projected independence without understanding that her independence was primarily a function of economic privilege. Boys and young men found her attractive because she was autonomous in theory and dependent in practice, the ideal combination. Then she married James Taylor, which I took as a cross between Julie Nixon marrying David Eisenhower and Warner Bros. merging with Elektra.

And then there was "You're So Vain," a record so wondrously good-bad that it eventually overcame every one of my prejudices. Verbally, it is so overblown that I can only assume Simon is parodying her own hubris. Why else would she rhyme "yacht" (in a simile that shilly-shallies instead of specifying), "apricot" (in one of the song's numerous syntactical awkwardnesses), and "gavotte" (a dance that has been dead for two hundred years) or stick in impossibly clumsy qualifiers like "strategically" and "naturally"? What does "clouds in my coffee" mean? Why does she transgress against colloquial speech rhythms at every opportunity? And who cares?

Not me, because the song is recorded the way I always thought "That's the Way I Always Heard It Should Be" should be. Since "You're So Vain" is such a name-dropper's delight anyway, it is worth mentioning that its producer Richard Perry, is married to the daughter of George Goldner, who in conjunction with producer Shadow Morton was responsible for both "Leader of the Pack" and "Society's Child." Perry has specialized in bringing performers as diverse as Captain Beefheart, Tiny Tim,

Theodore Bikel, and Barbra Streisand into the pop mainstream, and he's done just the same for Carly Simon. From the unmistakably eerie percussion that introduces the track right through Mick Jagger's off-harmonies on the final chorus, the song is a schlock masterpiece. It puts Ms. Simon exactly in her place.

In the name of honesty, in the name of what is fair, I have to admit that Simon's third album, No Secrets, is much superior to the first two. This time it is the Brackman lyrics that sound forced, while most of Simon's own songs are likable enough. Significantly, "Embrace Me You Child," a song about how good her own family was for her, works best. Simon's independent pose is crumbling fast, and that's just as well—the task of redefining the female image can be left to stronger, braver women. It is appropriate that the song that establishes Simon's stardom more or less permanently, "You're So Vain," is about the aristocracy of pop decadence in which she moves so easily, albeit with all the usual easy misgivings. I'm so vain that I know the song isn't about me, and I hope everyone who feels the same is as glad about that as I am.

Newsday January, 1973

BETTE MIDLER: THE ART OF COMPASSION

I knew nothing about Bette Midler when I first saw her perform at the Bitter End. If I had, I suppose, my uneasy presentiments might have hardened into prejudices. Bette Midler really is showbiz, easy to pass off as a minor-league camp queen or a ringer for Barbra Streisand. Upon reflection, however, I prefer to think of her as the Beatles.

A Jewish girl from Honolulu—a combination worth mulling over—Bette achieved some Broadway success with a small part in *Fiddler on the Roof*, but she really wanted to be a solo singer, waiting her turn at clubs like Hilly's and the Improvisation, where she performed torch songs, for free. Her present act came about only when she got what appeared to be a dubious break—a gig at the Continental Baths, a gay men's hangout. It was there that she got together with her band, and there that she was discovered by Johnny Carson, who introduced her to the night people of middle America both on television and live in Las Vegas. It was there that her new career of club dates, talk shows, and record contracts began.

The Bitter End-was part of this new career, designed to introduce her to people like me. Admittedly, my immediate reaction was befuddlement. There was the band, a typical scruffy rock quartet except for musical director Barry Manilow, who looks suave. And there, followed by a slow spot, was the Divine Miss M., making her entrance. This woman was definitely not pretty. Her hair was in some weird bob, she wore a lot of obvious makeup, her left shoulder strap slipped every time she shook her bazooms, and her matching platforms and pedal pushers were gaud for a bawd.

I grew more confused as Bette opened her act with "Friends," by Buzzy Linhart, a local singer-songwriter who seems determined to hang on until God makes him a star or an egg cream, and Bessie Smith's "Empty Bed Blues." Each song was performed in a brassy, gesticulatory style appropriate to neither, and there was a moment during "Empty Bed Blues," which had been stripped to its raunchiest metaphors, when Miss M. sounded more like Betty Boop than the sainted Miss Smith. Yet something in her enthusiasm for her audience and her material captivated me. While I mulled the combinations over, Miss M. introduced herself in a breathy voice, told what I assume

were some fibs about where she bought her shoes—she likes to refer to herself as "the last of the tacky women"—and launched into a choreographed version of the Andrew Sisters' "Chattanooga Choo Choo." Then she sang "Delta Dawn," which she said she had learned from Tracy Nelson.

I was amazed, and thinking of all the times I'd sat in my living room turning people on to records they'd never try themselves, I decided that this woman was one of us. She was obviously open to every emotion and aspiration ever transfixed by pop music, somehow surmounting all its forms without abandoning an eye-level perspective. She didn't devalue Bessie Smith by implying that some of her images were slightly overextended—on the contrary, that was how she experienced the extremity of the blues singer's pain. And by parodying the absurd, precise energy of the Andrews Sisters, she also celebrated the joy and playful cunning with which they responded to their dilemma in their time. It was all showbiz, just an act; we both knew that. In a way, that was the point.

By the close of "Delta Dawn," which she performed straight-melodramatic, but straight-I was physically moved. Bette had had her way with me. I careened from laughter-at her patter, at her self-deprecation, at the way she shook her bazooms—to a surprising ache—her version of John Prine's "Hello in There," a song I had always considered hokum, had me flashing on every old person who ever struggled up the stairs of my buildingand often I felt both at the same time. The tour de force was her final selection, the Shangri-Las' "Leader of the Pack," which she interpreted as the great exploration of the conflict of love and authority I had always known it was. Sure its tragic overstatement was silly-viewed in perspective, adolescent breakups hardly warrant such sturm und drang, even when parent-induced. But for both artists and audience, the emotional reality went beyond the facts. Bette had the compassion to respect that emotion.

It is Bette's genius to replace self-expression with compassion, compassion that is directed not merely at the audience, in the manner of Judy Garland, but also at the material. This is very much a woman's genius. Because they are forced into narrower images and stereotypes than men, women have barely participated in the long struggle to make singing as real and undefended as speech—not until Carole King could a natural woman exploit the modest range of a normal speaking voice. Because everything about Bette screams artifice—not just the way she stretches her voice into every conceivable theatrical shape, but her clothes, her makeup, her comedy routines—she seems a throwback. Her theatricality becomes a metaphor that unifies all her styles and periods. The women in her songs inhabit images and play roles, and so does she. Why not? Naturalness is a phony, and no matter how many guys with guitars tell you different, doing your own self-expression just isn't enough. The world is too hostile.

This is the kind of postsixties perception that has moved youth culture toward electoral politics on the one hand and pastoral escape on the other. Bette is anything but a throwback, because she understands that artifice is a necessary gambit, not a desirable way to organize your life, and like most of her contemporaries—she is in her late twenties—she has gained from all the utopian canons of the free self that made the sixties possible. One reason she doesn't want to turn into Barbra Streisand is that her voice isn't as conventionally beautiful as Streisand's—if all the strictures about singing hadn't been relaxed, she might not have the chance to turn into Streisand, and knowing that affects her ambitions. The gay people who were her first fans understand better than anyone how essential masks are to the survival of anyone with an unusual or

threatening self to express, but they are also striving to come out. Bette can deal with this surface paradox because she is a child of the sixties who has lived in a pocket of contrivance, the world of theater.

What Bette does has excited me more than all the new rock groups put together, and in my palmier moments—especially at her Carnegie Hall concert in June, where an auditorium full of peacocks gave her a two-minute standing ovation just for trotting onto the stage—I wonder whether the messiah will be a woman this time. For several years now, those who live their lives by music have been waiting for a new miracle worker, someone to bring us together again. Elvis in 1955, the Beatles in 1964, and who in 1973? Not Bette Midler?

The very unlikelihood of the idea is what makes it intriguing, for avatars never arise where you're looking for them. They need room and time to grow among folks who love them, preferably in an environment so ignominious that the outside world won't even notice. The contempt inspired by English rock and roll in 1963 can only be compared to the contempt inspired by Southern red-necks in 1954. Because communications are so expanded, the wise money in the music business says it won't happen again, and the wise money is probably right. But if it does happen, you can be sure it won't be a rock group. Music from Africa or Latin America or Japan, perhaps. Or maybe someone who paid her—yes, her—dues in a steam bath for New York's homosexuals.

If I were really serious, I suppose, I wouldn't jinx the chance by writing about it, only I know not even Bette herself will believe it. For she has yet to perform the essential task of the miracle worker—the gathering of the new tribes—and if gay people and certain women and the hip theater crowd suggest an interesting core, they are

not enough. She has to reach the kids. She has to convince the love generation that she really knows about love, for if Elvis was about sexual rebellion and the Beatles were about joy, love is what Bette is about, in all its intricacy and effort. I don't even like to imagine the kind of effort that will require from her, for if the youth audience is the most flexible and devoted in the world, it is also the most self-righteous, and it isn't about to cotton to a musical-comedy queen.

So far, youth spokesmen have regarded Bette with suspicion. She attracts older people, after all. The commonest put-down is to pass off what she does as camp. It's a lot more than camp, I think, but then, camp is more than it is usually imagined to be by those who think the gay world is alien to us normal people by definition. Allow me to quote Susan Sontag: "Camp taste is a kind of love, love for human nature. It relates rather than judges the little triumphs and awkward intensities of 'character.' . . . Camp taste identifies with what it is enjoying. . . . Camp is a tender feeling." Bette Midler does something like that, and it seems to me that whole insular masses of people could use a shot of it.

Newsday August, 1972

LITTLE STEVIE GROWS OLDER

Back in the summer of 1963, when his first number-one record was on the radio, it was easy enough to dismiss (Little) Stevie Wonder as a one-shot. "Fingertips" was a freak hit on an independent label by a blind twelve-year-old. It

did not promise durability. Even if Motown Records prevailed as no black-owned label ever had, there was no reason to expect even its most solid artists to prevail along with it. Rock and rollers just didn't prevail—except for Elvis Presley, every one of the original geniuses had already passed into oblivion, or so it seemed. No one would have predicted that in 1973 Motown would be the hottest entertainment complex in the country, with Smokey Robinson, the singer-songwriter of the Miracles, its vicepresident, and Diana Ross, the anonymous lead singer of the unknown Supremes, née Primettes, on her way to an Oscar nomination for portraying Billie Holiday. As for Little Stevie, he was destined for the reject pile as surely as Frankie Lymon and Annette Funicello.

But Stevie kept coming on: just like everyone else at Motown, he was tenacious. "Fingertips" was basically a novelty instrumental—as any record featuring a prepubescent harmonica player and a live audience had to be-and its follow-ups were also novelties. In the usual pattern, the follow-ups didn't do anywhere near as well as the original. In the fall of 1965 there was a surprising vocal version of "High Heel Sneakers," but it went nowhere. And then, that winter, came "Up Tight."

In a way, "Up Tight" was a novelty, too, predicated on the ghetto catch-phrase it immortalized, but it was also a great record in a more conventional way than "Fingertips" because it established a vocal identity. Wonder's strength, unlike that of most Motown performers, turned out to be freedom from discipline—the wild innocence of his harmonica carried over into his singing. Like the other Motown wild man, Levi Stubbs, of the Four Tops, Stevie was held partly in check by the rigorous Motown production machine, but whereas in the Tops' music the resulting tension often grated, in Stevie it only increased the excitement. He never wallowed in emotion. Instead, he soared above it.

There were no major successors to "Up Tight" until the following year, when Stevie turned to ballads, to this day the most dubious aspect of his musicianship. Even his version of "Blowin' in the Wind"—a major departure for Motown, which was still in the dance business but acceded to the protests of their own irrepressible sixteen-year-old—was a little soupy, and the equally successful follow-up, "A Place in the Sun," was downright fatuous. Then, just when he appeared to have drifted into soul limbo, he came up with "I Was Made to Love Her."

"I Was Made to Love Her" is not much of a song, which makes it the perfect vehicle for Stevie's classic performance. Against the smooth, fast-flowing Motown arrangement he grunts and gasps and growls and gulps, not in the usual melodrama but more or less at random, by surprise, as the spirit moves him. He never stops singing the lyric, never pauses for a moment of what other singers would classify as interpretation, and yet the lyric is obviously not what is happening—it's just a track to run his voice down.

"I Was Made to Love Her" should have established Stevie as a source of potential excitement into the indefinite future, yet somehow it didn't. No one anticipated minor pleasures like "Shoo-be-oo-be-oo-be-oo-ba-day" or "My Cherie Amour." The best soul album of 1970, Signed, Sealed and Delivered, went almost unnoticed, even though it contained three hit singles. The next album, Where I'm Coming From, received even less attention despite its radical departure from precedent. The album sounded more like some smart-ass white kid than a disgruntled black entertainer, and mixed in with the bad poetry and the overextended message songs was music so peculiar that it's hard to imagine how it survived Motown supervision. Stevie played both parts of a five-minute nondialogue between a black man and The Man and trotted through an absurd silver-lining lyric with its own hoofer's beat, exploiting his vocal quirks for new kinds of meaning both times. He showed off not only on drums, piano, and harmonica—the old standbys—but also on various electronic instruments. He even performed credibly on a soppy ballad.

Around the beginning of 1971 Wonder's Motown contract ran out. Again no one noticed-no one but Stevie and Motown. Like any overprotective parent, Motown can be nasty when the kids get ideas of their own. The great Holland-Dozier-Holland production team had to fight years of lawsuits before establishing its own company, and neither David Ruffin nor Eddie Kendricks has survived the benign neglect with which Motown permitted them to leave the Temptations. But in the end Wonder returned to Motown with Music of My Mind, an album he had not only produced but also financed himself. There were minor hits on it. Then he and his integrated band, Wonderlove, did a well-reviewed tour with the Rolling Stones. Still he was half-ignored by everyone, including Motown. That stopped when "Superstition" became a number-one single, his second, after almost a decade. The vice-president of Motown presented him with a platinum record for "Superstition" and a gold record for the album Talking Book at a sold-out concert at Carnegie Hall.

Because he is blind, Wonder has always been compared to Ray Charles. Although both singers flaunt an unembarrassed relish for aural fancy that may relate to their sightlessness, the comparison has always seemed a little inept. Ray Charles did create soul music, after all. Stevie Wonder is just a talented kid. Yet now Wonder is in a position to synthesize something equally far-reaching: He is young enough and rich enough to put five years of brotherhood and black-beauty and youth-culture and believe-in-music rhetoric into practice. At twenty-two, he

plays countless instruments, excelling on the ARP synthesizer. He has been a great singer for at least five years. His music is more than modernized blues/soul/jazz/gospel, borrowing from disparate white sources as well. Unlike Jimi Hendrix, he doesn't have to win over the black audience, and unlike Hendrix and Sly Stone, he doesn't seem likely to destroy himself. He is blessed with an unpretentious natural optimism that proceeds from his experience, for after all, he had all the odds against him and never lost a round. Potentially, Stevie Wonder could be the center of a whole new kind of rock and roll.

Since Wonder approaches his career with the same freewheeling instinct that shapes his music, he may not achieve popular supersuccess—that requires real cunning. But he does say that if he could set an arena dancing the way Sly does, he would never be late for a concert in his life. It's probably true, too. If this is to be a decade of upbeat performers, I'd just as soon they have as much right to the upbeat as Stevie Wonder does.

> Newsday February, 1973

IN LOVE WITH THE NEW YORK DOLLS

"People have the wrong idea about us," says Arthur Kaye, bassist of the New York Dolls. I strain to hear what will come next, for although Arthur is a big guy, standing well over six feet in his platform heels, he speaks in a barely audible lisping murmur. "They think we're a bunch of transsexual junkies or something."

Of course, Arthur, that's a ridiculous notion. Although you are wearing red lipstick and a New York Rangers

jersey-minidress over white tights. And David Johansen will tie up his arm and inject himself with an imaginary hypodermic while singing "Looking for a Kiss" at Kenny's Castaways tonight. And Syl Sylvain will look like the strutting image of Liza Minnelli in *Cabaret* at the Mercer tomorrow. And Billy Murcia, your first drummer, died in what is called a drug-related incident while the band was overwhelming England last fall. Transsexual junkies? What a calumny.

Johnny Thunder has his own theory, which he offers in the band's more typical sensitive tough-guy voice: "I think we're just a bunch of kids looking for a good time." This occasions merry agreement among the others, merry because they've all been drinking up their share of forth-

coming proceeds at a restaurant near Kenny's.

"That's right," Syl says. "Apple pie and ice cream." And as if to prove that his cohorts are just healthy American boys, New York division, Jerry Nolan, the new drummer, orders some ice cream. Actually, Nolan is just a healthy American boy—an Army brat with a heavy Brooklyn accent who has been into rock and roll since his big sister took him to see Alan Freed in the fifties. Thunder, Kaye, and Sylvain are bombed-out working-class dropouts from the depths of Queens. Johansen comes from a somewhat more middle-class background on Staten Island. They're probably fibbing, but all claim to be somewhere between eighteen and twenty-two. Just a good old-fashioned punk rock and roll band.

The original members—Kaye, Thunder, and Murcia—got together a year and a half ago, shortly after Kaye and Thunder first met on Macdougal Street.

"I hear you play guitar," Thunder said. "I play bass."

"I'm not too good," Kaye replied.

"Well, neither am I," said Thunder.

After switching instruments, the two joined with Murcia

to form the Dolls. Thunder named the group and sang. Soon Sylvain added a second guitar, Then Johansen, who had been performing as a solo singer-songwriter, joined on. The group played for anyone who would listen—at political rallies, a steam bath in Brooklyn Heights, and like that. The Mercer Arts Center, where they made their reputation, was one more such opportunity. By the time the Dolls got there, about a year ago, the Mercer was already a haven of what is called glitter-rock, which I would define as deliberately dumb rock and roll played by bands of ambivalent gender allegiance. The Dolls are not a glitter-rock band. I can't offer an absolute guarantee—they are so much to my taste that I have to mistrust my taste a little—but they sound to me like the best hardrock band since the Rolling Stones.

The comparison is unavoidable, but the Dolls resist it, and for good reason-it limits and dates them. Unfortunately, there's really no other way to understand a new band. Like David Johansen, Jim Morrison was described as Jagger-like when his fame began, and the image had to suffice until the Doors' specific identity took hold. As Johansen points out, he has more in common facially with Peter Noone, of Herman's Hermits, but his hair and hip gestures are very reminiscent of Jagger, and he generates the same wild unisex eroticism. Like Jagger, Johansen seems to have been through a lot. But whereas suffering made Jagger tough and distant, Johansen remains vulnerable and close to the surface. He is attractive and dangerous as only someone who always means well and always follows his well-meaning impulses can be attractive and dangerous, the kind of person you forgive in advance for hurting you. That kind of appeal is called star quality.

The rest of the boys also resemble the Stones, especially the early Stones, more than recent hard-rock bands. They convey the same poor, desperate, droogy decadence in 1973 that the Stones did in 1964, and their music is the same elementary metallic blues cacophony, only more anarchic. The Dolls do not possess a classy blues soloist like Mick Taylor, and they wouldn't know what to do with him if they did. They're quite content to careen around the stage making noise, with Nolan, who has firmed up the group's commitment to the rock and roll myth, keeping a rapid beat. "We're a lot faster than the Stones," Johansen says. And somebody else adds: "And younger."

Some rock snobs put such music down because it seems so elementary, even impoverished. That's exactly what it's supposed to be, of course, and in any case the Dolls are not another minimal band in the manner of critical faves like the Stooges and the MC-5 or popular successes like Grand Funk and Black Sabbath. The crucial difference is that the Dolls have good material. Working with the band for his melodies, Johansen writes hard-rock lyrics in the tradition of early Peter Townshend and Jagger-Richard. He says his favorite composers are the old Brill Building hit-makers, Jeff Barry and Ellie Greenwich, and like them, he shows that knack for the magic catch-phrase.

The songs wouldn't be so memorable if they weren't arranged as exuberantly as they are composed. The Dolls may not be virtuoso musicians, but they know how to structure a song. They create and intermesh within the bounds of their technical competence. They think up intros and closes and segues and fades; they add harmonies for variety; they end a song before you want it to be over or extend it after you thought it was done. They do dozens of little things that require not training but immersion in rock and roll and street-type savvy. They do what great rock and roll bands have always done.

The Dolls are managed by Marty Thau, who used to be a promo man at two of the greatest singles labels, Cameo-Parkway and Buddah. A promo man is someone who gets radio stations to play singles, and Marty Thau was very good at his work. Some trendy music-industry types whisper that Thau is too square for this band, but it's more likely that they're too hip—they don't know the Brill Building handshake.

Thau loves this band, but he's had an immense amount of trouble getting them a record contract. Buddah told him that the band was great but Johansen didn't make it; MCA told him that Johansen was a star but the band was lousy. A&M's New York staff was informed by president Jerry Moss that the Dolls were wrong for the label's image. Paul Nelson, head of New York a&r for Mercury, loves the Dolls so much that he's seen them twenty-five or thirty times, but the president of Mercury hates them. Atlantic says they're too crude; Columbia says they're too hard; Paramount says they're too loud; Capitol says they're too weird. RCA and Polydor express interest but don't even come to see them. Give or take a few subsidiaries, that leaves Warner Bros. for the time being, but others may come back in.

Of course, the fact that the Dolls were drunk at their first major audition and unrehearsed at their second couldn't have helped. Nor was Thau's \$250,000 asking price an inducement. And it's true that teen-agers aren't into the Dolls' kind of hard rock anymore—they seem to like heavier, more melodramatic stuff.

It's also true, however, that the Dolls are the first new band with major talent to play such music in years, and if anybody can get them recorded and promoted right, it's someone like Marty Thau. Ever since the beginning, the rich, classy men who own the big record companies have hated rock and roll. They'll jump on any other bandwagon to get rid of it for a while. But it keeps coming back, haunting them with its unreasonable demands. This time it's wearing makup and platforms and suggesting possi-

bilities of love that decent people don't want to think about. And eventually, some brave, greedy capitalist will try to make it go.

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An eight-million-dollar countersuit may seem paltry compared to the fifty-five-million-dollar suits that opened the hostilities, but it seems that one thing Terry Knight never taught Mark Farner, Don Brewer, and Mel Schacher, known to the world as Grand Funk Railroad, is how to think big. The musicians claim that their estranged manager kept two-thirds of all the group's recording royalties and 68 percent of all publishing royalties, the latter through a dummy corporation. They are suing not only Knight but also their former lawyers, Howard Beldock and Jerrold Kushnick, which is understandable in view of their claim that one million dollars in gate receipts was improperly invested in an oil firm headed by Donald Beldock, who is Howard's brother.

7 7 7

Anyone struck by the recent flurry of official rock and roll—from the Rolling Stones and their Malagua benefit in Los Angeles January 18 to the President's inaugural youth ball, featuring Solomon Burke and a rock group

called the Mob (why not Our Thing?)—will doubtless be interested in Slade's first appearance at the London Palladium on January 7, sponsored by none other than Edward Heath. Slade, you will recall, is the biggest, roughest hardrock band in England, and Edward Heath, you will recall, is the tax man mentioned so disparagingly in the Beatle song of the same name almost seven years ago. Well, the world does progress. The occasion of the concert? The entrance of Great Britain into the European Common Market.

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Faberge, Inc., has announced the formation of a new division of its Brut Productions subsidiary. The division will be called Brut Records. Those of you who always thought those were cosmetics may or may not be relieved to learn that Brut Productions makes movies. Brut Records will be distributed by Buddah, which is an entertainment service of Viewlex Corp., not an Enlightened One.

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Can a superhero be a superstar? Buddah Records announces that it has just signed Spider Man. . . . Can a down-home boy be a superstar? Atlantic Records announces that it has just signed Doug Sahm, a/k/a Sir Douglas. . . . Can a superstar be a record magnate? Elton John announces that he has founded Rocket Records in England. He won't record for Rocket himself, a decision

that would have ruined any of the other artist-owned labels in months. . . . Speaking of artist-owned labels, sort of, Terry Knight has finally found a distributor for his Brown Bag Records. Not Capitol, which has apparently decided to go with Grand Funk Railroad rather than the Fourth Funker, but United Artists. . . . Finally, according to their own press agent, the Bee Gees are now shooting a "nonmusical horror film." You betcha. Filming will take place in Yugoslavia. Where they belong.

BEST SINGLES OF 1972

Nineteen seventy-two was a very bad year for albums and a very good one for singles, the first year in my six-year tour as a rock critic when that has been unequivocally true. There have been exciting, innovative albums this year, but for the most part they haven't sold, and since we're talking about popular music, that's a contradiction in terms—innovation in a vacuum. In contrast, most of my favorite singles have been big sellers. In fact, since I listen to singles only on AM radio, they pretty much had to be. Aesthetically, record for record, I think the singles on my list are as exciting as the year's best albums. Some of them are almost revolutionary. But because they sell, they are exciting not only aesthetically but culturally. They can be expected to move and change people in a way no rock album has for years.

It should come as no surprise that so many of the year's best singles are by black artists. Black music has always been geared to the AM radio and the singles market, and now that it is experiencing a surge of vitality unlike anything since the heyday of soul in the midsixties, it dominates the airwaves once again, disseminating a humane

and sophisticated kind of racial pride that justifies all the silly struggles with meaningfulness which have weakened it in the past.

Since part of my pleasure in singles is hating a few of them, I will also include my ten-worst list, and since compiling a top ten always leaves me with a bad conscience about omissions, I'll also include a second ten. Singles are so subjective that I wouldn't argue a hard judgmental line on any of them, but I will say that every one of them made me happier than any recent album I can name off-hand. I'll list the worst ten first—might as well end things on an up note,

TUNE-OUTS

- 10. The Doobie Brothers: "Listen to the Music"
 - 9. Seals & Croft: "Summer Breeze"
 - 8. America: "A Horse with No Name"
 - 7. Mac Davis: "Baby, Don't Get Hooked on Me"
 - 6. Billy Preston: "Outta Space"
- 5. Three Dog Night: "Black and White"
- 4. The Moody Blues: "Nights in White Satin"
- 3. Don McLean: "Vincent"
- 2. Sammy Davis, Jr.: "The Candy Man"
- The New Seekers: "I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing"

SECOND TEN

- 20. B. J. Thomas: "Rock and Roll Lullabye"
- 19. Rod Stewart: "You Wear It Well"
- 18. The Raspberries: "Go All the Way"
- 17. The Jackson 5: "Little Bitty Pretty One"
- 16. Bread: "Everything I Own"
- 15. Led Zeppelin: "Rock & Roll"

14. Paul Simon: "Me and Julio Down by the School-yard"

13. Melanie: "A Brand New Key"

12. The Temptations: "Papa Was a Rolling Stone"

11. Johnny Nash: "I Can See Clearly Now"

TOP TEN

10. Elvis Presley: "Burning Love" (RCA Victor). The follow-up is a schlock ballad—whadja expect, "All the Young Dudes"?—but this is the most exciting single Elvis has made since "All Shook Up," sixteen years ago. Not only that, it's dirty. Who else could make "It's coming closer, the flames are licking my body" sound like an assignation with James Brown's back-up band?

9. Curtis Mayfield: "Freddie's Dead" (Curtom). I wonder whether I'll ever fully digest the complexity of this record, which transmits the bleakest ghetto lyric through the uncompromising vivacity of Mayfield's music. Maybe what he's really telling whoever needs to hear it is that both candor and the rhythms of life are necessary com-

ponents of our survival.

- 8. Aretha Franklin: "Day Dreaming" (Atlantic). The most credible version of the often saccharine domestic fantasy—apparently a reaction to the dangerous turmoil of black family life—that reached its incredible 1972 low in Love Unlimited's "Walking in the Rain with the One I Love." It works because of an imaginative (unclichéd) lyric that is literally about the imagination—supported, of course, by Arif Mardin's arrangement (special credit to Hubert Laws on alto flute) and the transcendent flights of Aretha herself.
- 7. Bill Withers: "Use Me" (Sussex). A good, obsessive song about sex without love and how good and obsessive it can be—the perfect complement to this year's power-of-

friendship standard, Withers's "Lean on Me." Hook-of-theyear award for Ray Jackson's electric piano riff.

6. The Chi-Lites: "Oh Girl" (Brunswick). This masterful piece of folk kitsch, suggesting a new kind of male black persona related to but not identical with Aretha's dream-boat, is the best of an important trend—the return of the falsetto group. Not as good as "In the Still of the Night," better than "The Closer You Are."

5. Alice Cooper: "School's Out" (Warner Bros.). Backing up Alice's vocal, an all-time ugly, is an honest-to-true kiddie chorus that at some indecipherable point is transmogrified into a synthesizer—earphone heads, dirty necks, so twentieth century. Who has ever said more about the crazy dropped-out thrust of hard rock: "We got no class/ And we got no principles/ We got no innocence/ We can't even think of a word that rhymes."*

4. Gilbert O'Sullivan: "Alone Again (Naturally)" (MAM). I can't remember a number-one ballad that I didn't hate by the time it dropped from the charts—not until this one. The secret is not just the leaping brilliance of the lyric—imagine, real compassion amid all the phony crap—but O'Sullivan's cracked whine of a singing voice. Or maybe I'm just getting old.

3. The Staple Singers: "I'll Take You There" (Stax). A perfectly edited single, with Mavis's raunchiest vocal complemented by exciting breaks from each musician, even the bass player. I wonder what Three Dog Night was doing when that line about smiling faces lying to the races was on every radio. Probably cruising around in a Lear jet.

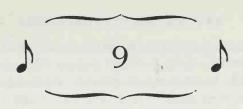
2. Derek and the Dominoes: "Layla" (Atco). Recorded in 1970, this was the most innovative hard-rock single to hit in 1972, so maybe there's a place for album artists after all.

^{*&}quot;School's Out" copyright © 1972 Ezra Music. Used by permission.

The two greatest hard-rock guitarists (Clapton and Allman) at their densest and most complex as well as their most pyrotechnic. A multileveled masterpiece. All that and an incomprehensible lyric—rock and roll must be alive after all.

1. The O'Jays: "Back Stabbers" (Philadelphia International). Whenever anyone challenges my singles rap, this is the retort I think of first. The best record ever from the year's top producers, Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff. A smooth, hard-rocking concoction, it mixes dozens of elements—Latin rhythms and faintly jazzy singing, mellifluous back-up and harsh lead, even strings and brass—into what can only be called the rock and roll of the seventies. The most musically compelling version of the smiling-faces phase of an old black-music theme; Trust your brother, but not too damn much.

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Appendix: Weird No Longer

TWO NIGHTS IN THE LIFE OF A SOUL MAN

ALL OF US—two female, four male, six Caucasian—caught the A train at 14th Street, reaching 125th at about elevenfifty. Then we walked the two blocks to the Apollo, where the traditional midnight show was scheduled to begin at twelvethirty. As always, I was a bit uneasy. Any white man who feels entirely at ease on the night streets of Harlem has more faithhope-and-charity than I do. And almost any white man who thinks he fully comprehends the Apollo is deluding himself. Does he really get all that silly choreographic showmanship? Can he distinguish a clean shing-a-ling from a phony without a cue from the audience? Does he get all the jokes? Does he leave the theater cleansed and purified by his own adrenalin? Does he ever feel "welcome"? The guy next to us-35 perhaps, green pullover shirt, no tie—made as if to pass out over one of our seats, but his wife, who was watching the movie, kept him upright. The family of six behind us was watching the movie, too. The only function of the movies at the Apollo is to give the performers a rest, but the audience watches. No

matter what 1954 western is on the screen, no matter how loud the babble, there is always a cheer when the bad guy (parboiled by the decomposing Technicolor emulsion) finally gets his. This was a not-so-bad circa-1962 English B starring Oliver Reed as the spiritual leader of a gang of bohemians that included the obligatory snake-hipped Jamaican, who was good for a few laughs. Then there was an atrocious Secret Agent James Hound cartoon, and as the audience tittered lazily a few red lights showed behind the screen. Pickett's band was setting up.

The Apollo runs with vaudeville precision. This befits its variety-house history, but the reason is that its patrons won't stand for anything else. So there is none of the endless tuning up that goes on at longhair concerts and white teenybopper extravaganzas. The curtain rose as Pickett's band did one sharp instrumental, and then King Coleman came on, costumed in an iridescent canary yellow sport jacket, matching Bermudas, calf-length boots, and a ruffled psychedelic-Hawaiian shirt. Coleman, a hefty fellow with a shaved head and goatee and a faintly effeminate manner (like his clothes, an affectation of comic elegance), is one of the regular emcees, a barely passable but imperturbable shout singer who can contort his body like a pipe cleaner while continuing to dance with his feet—a spastic with rhythm, a caricature of the soul man. Coleman sang "Knock on Wood," got some jocular applause for an intricate hula maneuver, and then, having kicked off the show at zero level, introduced the Artistics.

At its most ideal, the soul show is a gradual softening-up to the inevitable catharsis. The audience demands each time to be shown the way, to be born and born again, and while they're willing to believe, they're not promiscuous about it. At the end of a long Saturday, with the whole front of the orchestra already having seen a show or two, the lead-off group isn't likely to do much more than instill a sense of guilt in the unresponsive. The Artistics did just a little more than that. And Judy Clay, who followed, really got things going early.

Judy Clay is the most significant example of an important trend. The deep-soul sound of Stax-Volt in Memphis had always included some white musicians, most notably guitarist Steve Cropper, but not until Jay and the Techniques hit with "Apples, Peaches, Pumpkin Pie" and the American Breed with "Step Out of Your Mind" were there integrated groups whose primary appeal was in the teenybop market. "Storybook Children," which King Coleman announced to warm applause as Judy Clay's big, big record, went one better. "Storybook Children" was not really such a big, big record—it hit in New York and made top sixty nationally, top twenty r&b. Also, it was not really by Judy Clay. It was by Billy Vera and Judy Clay. Billy Vera is white, which makes him one half of the first interracial romantic duo. Sonny and Cher crossed with Peaches and Herb—maintaining the surnames, one assumes, makes it seem more formal. It is hard to imagine where they can perform before they become big enough to warrant concerts. Considering the Old South sexual situation they embody (although Judy rejects Billy in the song), they are more likely to do the Biloxi Kiwanis Club than the Apollo. Integration has a way to go. Judy sang alone.

She came on in a floor-length white gown which did a good job of concealing her girth. Judging from her biceps, her girth is considerable, but it can't be much bigger than her voice, which is up there with Fontella Bass and Big Maybelle. She began uptempo on "Satisfied Heart," with thirty seconds of successful scatting at the end, then brought it down into a solo "Storybook Children" that had many of the men crying out whenever she punctuated with an "ohyeh-oyeh." She went off to very big applause. The Esquires could not have been too happy about following her.

Like the Artistics, the Esquires are from Chicago. They were riding a two-stage one-shot: "Get on Up," which went to eleven in *Billboard*, followed by "And Get Away," which

reached number 22. This was the most transparent back-tothe-'50s soundalike follow-up of the decade, capitalizing almost entirely on a strangely neglected '50s trick—the bass man. I hope they are putting their royalties in the bank. Dressed in orange suits and white shoes, they set up a threeand-one, the presumed lead at one mike with his Posner special slicked down over his forehead while the rest imitated Rockettes at the other. I noticed the bass man, the cause of all their success—older, with a receding hairline, he looked out of place doing his kicks. He danced while the lead did his falsetto number, stuck in the "andgetaway" or "getonup"same three catchy notes for both—where it was needed, and performed like a yeoman. But the group was received with restraint. Then the Coasters did twenty minutes of well-polished comedy, sang old hits in which the greatest bass parts ever written easily outshone the Esquires's, and resisted calls for an encore. It was star time.

Excluding Levi Stubbs of the Four Tops, Wilson Pickett is the most consistent hitmaker of all the soul men, but he is not a real giant on the circuit. He is merely a clean stud. Tall and dark, long-legged, a superb dancer who uses his loud, husky voice with uncanny rhythmic anticipation, he depends in the end on his arrogance. He can exhort only from above. Pickett had just returned from a week's tour with Mitch Ryder, who does the soul thing for the benefit of white teenyboppers, and found himself going over with Mitch's audi-Pittsburgh, Baltimore, West Virginia, ences in Massachusetts. The little girls actually stormed him some, not as energetically as they did Ryder, but after all, Pickett was black, and he wasn't even putting out the way he had already put out three times that Saturday at the Apollo. It must have been getting him down.

There was something strange about the show from the start. Pickett, in a broad-checked gray suit and a dark shirt open at the neck, opened fast with "You Can't Stand Alone," improvised for a few minutes at the end and then, without

even pausing, moved into "I'm in Love," improvising there for a few minutes as well, and then lowered his voice for a recitative.

Already? But there it was, guitar and drums holding the beat.

"I'd like to say at this particular time that I'm lookin' out in the audience tonight, and I know I see lots of soul sisters and soul brothers. And I know that means one thing—that y'all came out here to have yourselves a good time. I been out here since noon this morning but I don't want to go home until everybody has a good time."

I sensed a slight tensing in the balcony. Going home? Damn right you're not going home. Guitar and drums continued the same riff.

Pickett edged for the stairs stage left. Two henchmen appeared, one carrying a cloak. But they didn't follow him down the stairs. What was he doing down there? Show's just startin'...

Pickett looked out over the audience. Same beat.

"I got a good friend out there in the audience tonight— Miss Betty Harris. And I want Betty to come out here and help me help you have a good time. Betty, where are you at? You come on up here and help me out tonight."

A very foxy chick in a white mini and yellow stockings appeared from the wings and joined Pickett on the apron. She got a few whistles, but people were uneasy. This downstairs business was jive, and so was Miss Betty Harris. Where was the wicked Wilson Pickett?

He was beginning to sing again—"Got to have a love, got to find a love, got to . . ." But somewhere in there the mike went to Miss Betty Harris and she took up the call, prancing up and down the aisles and encouraging folks to clap hands, one by one. None of them kept it up. What the hell was Wilson doing? Wasn't he there to sing?

Apparently not, for after Betty finally went off Pickett called for Mitch Ryder's bodyguard to come up and take a

bow. Mitch Ryder's bodyguard? Impossible. But there he was, a black guy named Romeo. Pickett called him Hercules and asked the audience to applaud his shoulders. About four people clapped. But Pickett wasn't through.

"I saw Mitch Ryder's trombone player out there. Let's get

Mitch's trombone player down here."

Somewhat sheepishly, a redheaded white kid with a mustache got up and walked down the aisle. He appeared unhappy. And still the band held the beat. But after the redheaded kid had been up front for about ten seconds the booing began. Pickett seemed . . . not quite oblivious.

"You know, I love performers and we performers got to stick together. All the performers are going to be down here this week. We gonna have Chuck Jackson"—that got barely a ripple—"and Sam and Dave gonna be here, and do y'know who else gonna be here the end of this week?" He waited a second, then enunciated the name lovingly. "James Brown." He waited for the applause, got none, kept going. "He's gonna get up on that stage there with me, Wilson Pickett, and he gonna say 'Good God,' like that, 'Good God.'"

By now the booing was more general. There were catcalls from a dozen spots in the auditorium. We looked around and checked the exits. The trombone player was still up there, frozen; the noise let up a little when he escaped to his seat. Then Romeo sat down. Finally Pickett climbed back on the stage. The band had stopped. There was plenty of booing.

"Sing a song, man!"

"Shut up," Pickett said.

The booing continued.

"Shut up!"

More.

"Y'know, I've never seen a roomful of colored people talk so much. Now shut up!"

They kept griping and yelling and I think it was then that Pickett realized he had lost control. The boos kept spreading.

Desperately, he looked for a scapegoat, and found him, a little Spanish-looking guy who was heckling from a front row.

"Come on up here!" Pickett demanded.

The little guy stayed in his seat.

"Come on up here, you talk so much."

The little guy got out of his seat, came around to the apron, and peered up at Pickett.

"I said come up here, man. Come on up."

The little guy appeared to waver for a second, then headed back to his seat. But Pickett kept goading him.

"What's a-matter, man, you 'fraid to come up here? You got something to say, come on up here and say it."

Suddenly, with a burst of courage that was almost visible, the little guy turned around, climbed the stairs and walked center stage to meet Pickett. His skin was yellow next to Pickett's burnt brown. He looked very short. Pickett put a hand on his shoulder.

"Y'know, I don't know you, I never saw you before in my life, but I know one thing—you're not a black American." He said it almost offhand.

The little guy seemed unable to talk for a second, then began to mumble inaudibly. He had an accent. "I consider myself one of your . . . I am a . . . We have been divided in the past . . . people like . . ."

Pickett cut him short: "And I hope we gonna stay divided, you hear?"

"Sing a song, man," yelled someone from the audience.

"Come on, sing."

The little guy got up courage to talk again: "I just want you to sing 'If You Need Me,' it's the best record you ever done, man."

"Where you come from? What country you from? You from Jamaica or something? I know you're not an American."

"I am from Central America," the little guy said. "I am from Honduras. Do not judge me because I speak with an accent. Do not judge a book by its cover . . ."

"That's right, baby."

"Sing a song, Pickett."

The little guy was very excited and he kept talking, got a few cheers, fewer catcalls. King Coleman was back onstage.

"Sing a song."

The little guy was still talking when Pickett broke in on him again. "You know what's wrong with you? You talk too damned much. Why you talk so much, anyway? I don't care who you are. I don't care where you come from. But you know I don't come up to you on your job and try to take your job away. I don't come up and take your typewriter"—he thought a second—"or your broom. So why do you have to come up here and do my job?"

"I just wanna hear you sing 'If You Need Me.'"

"You know what? I'm gonna give you your two dollars back. Here, here's your two dollars . . ."

"I don't want it. I just want you to sing 'If You Need Me.'"

"How do you know what song I'm gonna do? How do you know that wasn't gonna be my very next song? Man, why don't you mind your own business and just sit down?"

"Sing a song."

"Don't just stand there and talk, Pickett."

"Why don't you sit down, man? Who asked you up here anyhow?"

The little guy looked at Pickett and jumped off the stage. Everyone was booing.

"Let's everyone give him a hand, ladies and gentlemen—for sitting down."

More boos.

"Sing a song."

"You blew it, man."

"Sing a song."

The band was silent as Pickett looked out over the audience. Then, a cappella, he began to growl tunelessly into the mike:

"We shall, we shall overcome . . ."

"Shut up!"

"Boo!"

"You blowed it!"

"... we shall, we shall ..."

They kept booing and Pickett told them he didn't feel like doing any more songs, he liked to do a show his way, and walked off stage and King Coleman told everybody it was all over, good night folks. Muttering and shouting, but often joking too, they began to leave. The crush at the office was impossible—everybody wanted refunds—and I was separated from my friends. A dozen angry fans, led by one drunk, had pinned a white cop against the ticket booth, long since closed. Finally he was rescued by a black cop who stalked inside saying everyone should get a refund. A hipster in ascot and hippie shades watched the scene. The second time I glanced at him he told me I better get my ass the hell out of there. Three squad cars had appeared. I waited a few stores down until the others came out.

On the way back to the subway a guy asked us how we'd liked the show. He was standing alone in front of a bar. I told him it was terrible, Pickett didn't even do his act.

The guy did not seem surprised.

"Didn't do his act? Huh! 'The wicked Wilson Pickett.'"

He put it in quotes, just like that. "Wilson Pickett can kiss my ass."

Sunday I went to see B.B. King at the Cafe au Go Go. His fingers stiff from the near-zero cold, he missed a note occasionally, but was cheered wildly, almost indiscriminately, anyway. King told me had never played a white audience before, and he loved it. "The reaction they get," he said, "is better than my own people usually seem to get."

Next night I was back for the late show at the Apollo, alone. I arrived at nine-thirty, the very end of James Hound with the guitars already sounding behind the screen. The orchestra was about half-full, a normal Monday night crowd for such bad weather. Almost nothing else was different. The band

opened with "Soul Man," guitar and bass singing the Sam and Dave parts. King Coleman opened in blue Bermudas and no jacket, and changed four times in the course of the show. The Artistics wore off-mauve and did an extra song, the chorus of three doffing their jackets and whipping up some hand-clapping in the aisles while the lead falsettoed interminably on stage. Judy Clay wore the same gown in pink and sang a little longer. Esquires and Coasters were identical down to the last kick and wisecrack. And Pickett was introduced with Saturday's hyperbole.

He was dressed in shiny green, no jacket, and he appeared unchanged, getting to "I'm in Love" at about the same time, but this time he was drawing it out, keeping it moving oohooh-ooh, got-ta have a love, ooh-ooh, got-ta have a love, and I wanna know one thing now, I wonder how many young ladies out there in the audience tonight can truthfully say they got a good man sitting by their side, just raise your hand now, and a young girl sitting across the aisle from me giggled and raised hers, shyly, one of maybe a dozen, and Pickett shook his head mournfully and asked the same question of the men, and the girl tried to drag up her boyfriend's hand, but he was stronger. Bass-guitar-and-drum kept that beat. Then Pickett related a little fable about a man whose woman wanted him to wind it up and . . . sock it to her, not once, not twice, but three times, and illustrated with the proper pelvic gestures. Every time he hesitated on "sock," giving it that water-down-the-faucet sound that Stephen Dedalus used to think about, half the audience socked it back, some out loud, some under their breath. They were his and he hadn't even started.

The band stopped finally and Pickett was alone with the audience and his microphone. He looked like he wanted to just keep going. "Ain't we havin' *fun* out here tonight? Have mercy." Then he talked about Bobby Womack, who had written "I'm in Love," and about all the performers who were out there in the audience tonight, he wouldn't introduce them

but wouldn't the audience give them a nice big hand anyway, and the audience gave them a nice big hand. *Then* he introduced every member of the band, and got cheers for every man, and without missing a beat went into "Stagger Lee," and, before he had completed four bars, stopped.

He looked over at his bass player.

"Ernest, how'd you like to do Jackie Wilson for us?"

Ernest looked bashful and didn't say anything, though he seemed to kind of shake his head.

"Come on, Ernest, do Jackie for the people, help me out a little, doctor says I'm not supposed to do any singing for a week, so . . ."

This time Ernest mumbled a no.

"Ernest, you're ashamed."

Ernest shook his head.

"Yes you are, you 'shamed, Ernest. You 'shamed."

The band was laughing. Ernest hung his head. The audience was laughing too, and Pickett looked out at them.

"You know, Ernest is a fine musician, he's been with me about five years now, and all the time in the hotel room, you know, he's asking me if I won't let him do the Jackie. All the time he's showing me how he can do the Jackie, pestering me to let him do the Jackie on stage. Now I give him his chance and he won't do the Jackie. He *must* be ashamed."

Ernest mumbled something else.

"Well, I'll play bass for you. That's no problem at all."

Everyone cheered as Pickett took the red Fender off Ernest's neck and put it around his own. He played a few notes, grimaced, took it off again. "Maybe I'd better not."

But they egged him a little and of course he put it on again as the band went into "Higher and Higher," picking out a competent bass line as Ernest, hesitantly at first, then with growing confidence, began to sing, "Your love has lifted me higher/Than I've ever been lifted before," then began the Jackie Wilson jumps, kicking his feet in the air, and finally climaxing on the floor, still singing. Nobody mobbed him, but everybody cheered enthusiastically when he finished.

And still Pickett didn't sing. This time he asked for "Soul Man" ("that Sam and Dave thing"), and when someone told him it had opened the show he still wanted it, and then I thought he was going to lose them after all. Ernest and the guitar player were ready, there was the familiar guitar lick and then the horns, and then King Coleman was out on the stage yelling something, the *real* soul man, something like that, glancing back in the wings and finally going back and pulling, or pretending to pull . . . Sam Moore, the Sam, yellow suit, no tie, reluctant at first and then warming up like the pro he is, winding it up and really . . . socking it to them, and everybody seemed faintly delirious.

Before that could die down Moore was gone and Pickett was asking for a few girls to help him do the Funky Broadway, it was late and they'd have to go home soon but he wanted everyone to be happy, and someone in the balcony yelled for "Midnight Hour," and Pickett obliged with a good long "Midnight Hour." It was late, around eleven, there was movement toward the doors, folks standing in back for the end of the show. Judy Clay was back there, dancing out, and it went on and on, Pickett dancing, King Coleman dancing, and then they slipped into "Funky Broadway" without a break, and did that long too. The audience was really filing out now, with Pickett and Coleman talking about the dances they'd be showing the people next night, and the band was still playing "Funky Broadway" as the curtain came down and the rest of the audience filed out, singing and swaying to the lobby, where many Apollo souvenir books and Wilson Pickett programs were sold.

I got onto the downtown D train. Seated across from me was a black man in a leather jacket, rubbers, holding a *Daily News* in his leather-gloved hands, his receding hair pomaded in a modest pompadour back over his skull. His eyes were

bloodshot, and every once in a while they would go blank for a second.

He was the Esquires' bass man. At 59th Street he got off, carrying a brown bag with two cans in it. He appeared confused, read all the signs, then crossed the platform to wait for the Eighth Avenue. He was very tired, and nobody but I knew who he was.

Cheetah April, 1967

WE SHOULD BE TOGETHER

For the past few weeks I have attended the Alternate U.'s course in Rock and Revolution. If that sounds like a dubious enterprise to you, you're right, and the radicals in the course know it—but they gotta try anyway. Roughly speaking, their purpose is threefold: to analyze how capitalism perverts and vitiates rock, to envision how the music might change in a less exploitative system, and to implement those changes. Since I believe rock embodies many of the virtues of capitalism as well as some of its faults—rather than containing the seeds of the New Culture-my objections to the analytic approach ought to be obvious. But the specific targets of the action projects—the concert scene, the Woodstock ripoff, support for local bands—are good ones, at least in theory. I think Warners ought to give a print of Woodstock to the Movement, but I don't think this goal is best accomplished by calling Jack Warner a pig before spitting ritually in his eve—especially since Warners is now owned by Kinney and Jack Warner is dead.

A few days before the Panther demo in New Haven, several R&R students tried to convince Jefferson Airplane to come to New Haven and abandon its Fillmore-sponsored free Sunday concert in Central Park, which it was feared would

split that mysterious entity radicals refer to as "the community." Reportedly, this request caused some consternation in the band, with Grace and Marty tempted and the others reluctant. The objections were more tactical than political—where another group might have questioned the purpose of the demonstration itself, the Airplane apparently raised a smokescreen of petty and paranoid reservations. Now, rock musicians do have reason to worry about being used by politicos: many movement people regard rock as bait, nothing more. That wasn't the case this time, however. Anyway, the Airplane not only has revolutionary pretensions, it sells them.

Saturday night the Airplane played Stony Brook, where Grace reportedly berated the audience for not being in New Haven. They were in Central Park Sunday. As it turned out, the demonstrators were already home. Abbie Hoffman tried to take the stage but was beaten off by a few greenshirt heavies. Thursday night I went to see the Airplane at the Fillmore East. I was stoned and didn't try to take notes, so what follows is in a sense my fantasy. It always is anyway. This sure was a strange one.

The vibes as I walked in were hostile-as-usual. Joe's Lights was screening the scene from *North by Northwest* in which Cary Grant is attacked by a crop-dusting plane at a deserted crossroads in southern Illinois. Southern Illinois, I thought. That's where the government's special Viet Nam institute is located. Walt Frazier of the Knicks went to school there; so did Dick Barnett. A right-on image. Then there was that shot of Abbie Hoffman and Grace Slick at Trish Nixon's Finch reception, with the caption: "What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?" And then the tease began. On film, we saw and heard the band singing "We Can Be Together" and "Volunteers"—a little corny, but after all, this was showbiz. The audience was ravenous for the real thing, and stood up as the live band went into "Volunteers." I stood with them.

Grace was wearing one of her bitch costumes—short black skirt, see-through top, black squares covering her breasts, black hair teased and splayed in a crown around her head and looked like a cross between Jean Shrimpton and the Wicked Witch of the North. She was high—on coke, apparently-and, as she explained later, menstruating. Midway through the second song, "Somebody to Love," she began to complain about the vibes, the standard New York territorialimperative bad-rap: how can you live like men if you're stacked like rats in a cage? "We adapt," I yelled. Were we going to Washington? Grace wondered, ignoring the same question when it came back from the audience. Wouldn't we just be stacked together there, too? Was the enemy really in Washington? Sure there was the White House, but what about right here—on stage? All of us out there, she said, we had paid money for our seats, and with that money the Airplane hired the Cadillac that would protect them from the crowd after the concert. The cops might hurt us on our way home, but not Grace—not in that Cadillac. And wasn't that weird? And wasn't anyone going to do something about it?

No one did, of course. Grace alternately taunted and teased us throughout the show, secure and frustrated in the certainty that most of the audience wasn't even listening, and that the listeners didn't understand, and that the understanders wouldn't act, not beyond a few catcalls. Knowing all this seemed to compound her self-doubt and bitterness. For if her audience would demand that she give up her Cadillacs and go to all the demos, Grace would do it. She would have no choice, and perhaps she would even like to be denied that choice. Never happen. She told us she was out for herself first, and suggested through unimaginable shields of irony that we'd better follow her example.

There was a cretin sitting two seats to my left. It's elitist to accuse a brother of cretinism, and to do so arouses in me the same ambivalence that Grace's Cadillac arouses in her. Yet in the end Grace went home in her Cadillac, and in the end I say that the guy two seats to my left was a cretin. He was a demilonghair in his late teens with braces that made him

sputter when he shouted his love-hate obscenities at Grace. Grace asks for it, of course. She wants to be tougher than any man, but perhaps she's once again hoping in a vacuum that this can change, and out for herself until it does. Sing or fuck, the cretin was bellowing, and so were many other men in the audience. What little real hostility all of Grace's torments could elicit was directed at Grace-the-woman, not Grace-theclass-enemy. And the justice of the radical feminist argument came so clear once again, for how are men who hate women so desperately going to change anything for the better? Grace knows: they don't even pretend to want to.

The Airplane played for over three hours, including an hour of encores. Abbie Hoffman had been there earlier, sitting on the floor in back. I wonder if his fist was among those that outnumbered the peace signs as the band left for the last time. It had been one of those insatiable Fillmore crowds, demanding not just music but physical and spiritual exhaustion, and in the end Grace rode home in her Cadillac while the men began their final jam with a song about women doing what they're told. The crowd loved that, and the bad vibes began to dissipate. Who needs politics when all that musical energy is there to be harnessed? That energy can save the world, right? Yeah, Ralph J., yeah, Jann-save the world.

I'm hitchhiking to Washington tonight, but before I do I'm going to watch the Knicks and Lakers. I really dig competition, you see. It's a delayed taping on ABC: the game will already be over, but I'll pretend that it isn't. I may even stop in and take a look at the Mothers before I head on down to Concentration Moon.

The Village Voice May, 1970

CAPT. B. FART

It was Wednesday night, before the good captain had wearied of the Bitter End West, but you still couldn't understand what the fuck he was saying. Fantastic, yes, he was fantastic, but ... he came out wearing his Trout Mask Replica hat, which is shaped like . . . which is shaped like a standard topper with a sandpail upside down on top of it, if you really want to know, except that it's all the same black cloth hat and there is a shuttlecock which might be taken for the tip of a duckpin or the end of a plastic penis on top of that. Dutch-looking, that hat, though perhaps it only seems so because you know the captain's other name is Van Vliet. The rest of his appearance is less extraordinary. His stage demeanor is friendly but preoccupied; at odd moments, he smiles. He is fat, but not rotund and robust like Mama Cass or Bob Hite, more like Jim Morrison during those periods when he will permit no photographs, pallid and jowly. This would seem to support the popular suspicion that the captain is tripped out or strung out or doing one of those vegetable imitations for which heroes of the underground are so notorious, except that (according to an adulatory but credible cover story by Langdon Winner in Rolling Stone) he eschews all inebriants. In short, Captain Beefheart is a somewhat confusing figure, but he is oh-so-definitely weird. He has gigged perhaps thirty times since convening his Magic Band in 1964. Those performances are legendary. Lately, he has acquired a new manager; his engagement at the Bitter End West was his third billing around Los Angeles this fall.

Beefheart's association with Frank Zappa, a teenage chum who controls his present record company, has inspired an unfortunate tendency to put him on the Bizarre Freek List—Wild Man Fischer, Alice Cooper, the GTOs, Captain Beefheart. But not only is Beefheart more profoundly interesting than any of Zappa's permanent floating seminars in the psychoses of late capitalism, he is also, I think, a lot more interesting (and certainly more likable) than Zappa himself. Zappa receives rather uncritical approval from most of the "serious" rock audience, especially that portion that maintains loyalties to jazz or traditional music. This is mostly because his expert

image manipulation has everybody buffaloed: it isn't the products of his apparent musical sophistication that attract his fans so much as the way be has sold the idea.

It's ironic that the most ardent admirers of such a master of media reject the whole idea of celebrity as star-tripping or some such inanity, when it is his acute and quite cynical understanding of the way celebrity works that has attracted them in the first place. I am often tempted to put Zappa right up there with Bobby Sherman as a selfish exploiter of popular taste. That Bobby Sherman wants to make money while Zappa wants to make money and pose as a successor of Varèse is almost beside the point. There are reports that the new Mothers are warmer, but until now they have shown an overriding contempt for rock music and its audience. The guises of this contempt can be amusing, insightful, and even exciting to listen to, but it's still contempt underneath, and my suspicion is that it isn't good for people. Not that Beefheart's theatre isn't reminiscent of Zappa's, or that there aren't musical similarities between them. It's only to insist that the differences are more significant.

Beefheart is a blues-derived singer who also plays harmonica and soprano sax. His band comprises three guitarists, a drummer, and a guy referred to as Ed Marimba whose specialty is the marimba—a rock and roll first, I would guess although he also plays drums. The Magic Band resembles the Archies in that none of its members is known by his real name, although one guitarist, a tall person with spaniel-ear hair and a funny peaked cap, has been called Zoot Horn Rollo for so long that when Beefheart muttered his cognomen into the microphone it was almost possible to understand what he had said. The second guitarist, decked out in tuxedo, goatee, and pointy mustache, tuned both necks of his guitar and then touched only the bass (which he often strummed rather than plucked, by the way). The third, a refugee from the Fraternity of Man, played some solos that can only be described as "bitchin'." The drummer was remarkable primarily for his

alias, which was Drumbo. The sounds produced by this ensemble were suitably jarring: uneven 'rhythms, the captain's famous free-form saxophone blow, and that marimba relentlessly mocking the guitar line. But the disturbances didn't end there. Those snatches of lyric that were decipherable were pure (or perhaps impure, which is even better) dada, Jarry-cum-Corso-cum-Ecclesiastes-cum-Groucho-cum-Dennison Clothes, and Beefheart's comments from the stage often sounded jocular; he kept saying something like, "If you came here for entertainment, that's what you're going to get." He also glanced occasionally at a magazine. Apparently, that's where he stores his lyrics—he did appear to refer to it several times while performing—but initially it looked like he was reading. How far out can you get?

All of this still sounds like the Mothers, I know, But where Zappa's distance from his audience is a calculated means of bullying it into respectful cash-on-the-line attention, Beefheart really doesn't give a shit. Zappa plays the avant-gardist and Beefheart is the real thing. He does perform, but for once performance and self-expression are almost identical: his detachment is in some sense pure and even innocent, and at the same time he is arrogant as only the pure in heart can be arrogant. Unlike your run-of-the-mill musical galahad, however, Beefheart's noises sound truly original-much more original, my intuition tells me, than Zappa's usual mix. (Reportedly, Zappa agrees.) Beefheart's music remains closer to its blues roots than Zappa's does to '50s r&b—or maybe, on the contrary, it is the relatively abject nature of its inspiration that renders Zappa's music so unsatisfying for me. But that's overly kind-I like dumb rock and roll too much to put it down. When the Mothers do one of their "Louie Louie" medleys, they are juxtaposing their own supposed brilliance to the banality of the material. But when the Magic Band plays for twenty minutes on top of "Spoonful," they transcend parody and even restore to that tired riff some of the strength that made it so popular in the first place. The spirit of Beefheart's lyrics is to some degree consonant with the blues conceit of his music, and his voice is truly freaky, Howlin' Wolf plus two octaves. When their mood is friendly, as it was on "Alice in Blunderland" that Wednesday night, his musicians even rock.

Beefheart's superiority to Zappa is best demonstrated by his two most recent albums. The first, Trout Mask Replica, is a double-LP produced by Frank himself. Langdon Winner, apparently succumbing to the old critical fallacy that hard is better and art is hardest of all, has called it "the most astounding and most important work of art ever to appear on a phonograph record." Myself, I gave it a B+. The record is arresting, even brilliant, but choppy, and full of a gratuitous hostility that reminds me more of Zappa than it does of Beefheart. In addition, it is interrupted all too often by little comments from Big Mother in the control room, an effect that has become so unforgivably cornball it can only be explained in terms of Zappa's ego. After twenty tries I still never play it for fun and the more difficult varieties of aesthetic pleasure it provides do not seem to me as rewarding as all that. The mistakes on the current album, Lick My Decals Off, Baby, end with the title, which sounds as if it were suggested by someone at Straight even though I know Beefheart produced the record and chose the title himself. Decals recapitulates all the best qualities of Trout Mask Replica, but it is also more accessible. The music still jars, yet after some acclimatization you can play it while doing the dishes, and although like all of Beefheart's music it is ominous, the style of ominousness has changed. A favorite example is the relatively singable "Smithsonian Institute Blues," where the recurrent word "dinosaur" is pronounced "dinasewer" and transmutes momentarily into "Dinah Shore," as if our own march to the tar pits is somehow hastened (or not) by our choice of entertainment, which of course it is. That tone of playful doom is certainly not unprecedented in Beefheart's lyrics, but this time it seems better modulated to me. The musical success of the

record is comparable. In some way that defeats my talent for analysis, the deliberate ugliness of the music has an attractive undertone. Ahh, who knows? Maybe I'm just getting used to it.

And maybe it goes back to that performance Wednesday night. Beefheart connoisseurs tell me he has never been so on, and I believe it: he was simultaneously repulsive and engrossing and wondrously funny. I saw him again Sunday and although one of my companions was knocked out, I wasn't. By then Beefheart had become unhappy with the room, which is like the New York Bitter End only bigger and more plush. There was less singing, less rock and roll, and a composed drum duet (Drumbo had fits but he and Ed Marimba ended on the same beat) that was exciting to watch but somehow disappointing in the contrivance of its tension. I was a lot closer to the stage and still couldn't understand the words. I knew they were good, but I still couldn't understand them. I don't think the good captain was trying very hard.

In fact, I know that if I'd seen him only Sunday I wouldn't be writing this now. Ideally, he should be at least that good, and probably better, every time he performs. Yet a hundred thousand consumers are expected to purchase *Lick My Decals Off, Baby*. Not bad for such a galahad, and no doubt Frank's talent for exploitation hasn't hurt. Yes, the contradictions of being an avant-gardist in pop society are numerous. It might be argued that Beefheart's art ideas, which are clearly drawn from the visual arts—he paints and sculpts and writes poetry, too—aren't really avant-garde at all. Old hat, even. Maybe John Fogerty is in the vanguard. But more of that another time.

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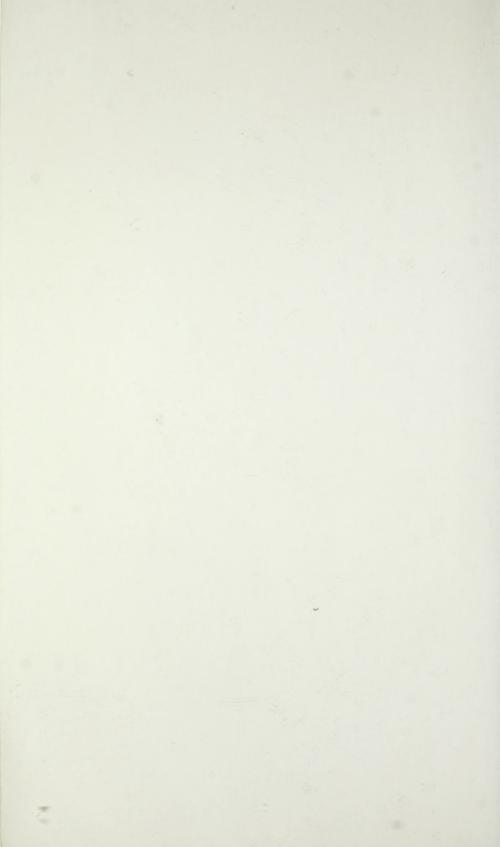














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