

Cinematic fallout covers No Nukes

by Marc Garvey

Just when it seemed that *The Last Waltz* and *Rust Never Sleeps* had forever altered the approach to making concert movies, Director Julian Schlossberg and his co-producer Dan Goldberg released their documentary about the MUSE benefit concerts. Unfortunately, the film fails to live up to the technical perfection of *The Last Waltz* or display the strong performance and thematic unity of *Rust Never Sleeps*.

Like the sound track that preceded the release of the movie by several months, *No Nukes* suffers from an identity crisis. The film never really succeeds in binding its political content to its musical and visual presentation. As a result, both the musical and political aspects of the film appear all too contrived and self-conscious to pass for the spontaneity and rebelliousness of rock 'n' roll at its best. And it wasn't so long ago that many of the people featured in this film were at the forefront of the musical scene.

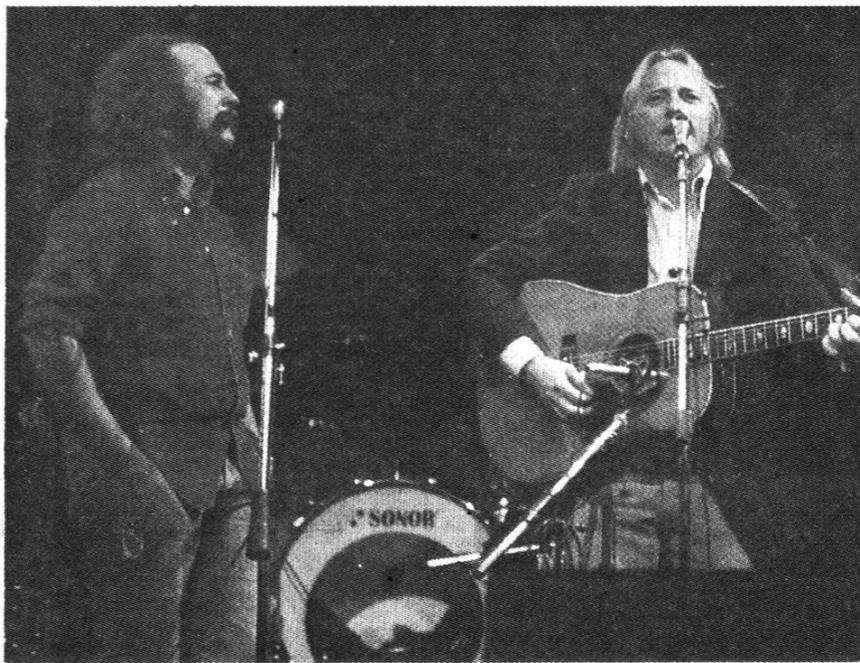
Much of the blame for the film's lack of conviction must rest on the shoulders of the faded, albeit well-intentioned, performers who appear in it. Schlossberg and the MUSE people act as if nothing had happened since Monterey and Woodstock. Their brand of West-coast-mellow rock no longer stands as the epitome of rebelliousness. One look at the cast says it all: there isn't a single street-fighting man among them.

No Nukes was filmed over a five day period in September last year at a series of benefit concerts produced by Musicians United for Safe Energy (MUSE). MUSE hoped to publicize its pro-ecology, anti-nuclear stance and, at the same time raise money for various anti-nuke and alternate energy organizations. The week-long program culminated in a rally at New York's Battery Park, the biggest anti-nuclear rally ever, attended by over a quarter of a million people.

Intentions aside, the quality of the film is amateurish and the performances

sem largely uninspired. Most performances are marred by poor cinematography and lousy editing. Pieces of *No Nukes* look as if they had been filmed under combat conditions with cameramen and soundmen operating in the most dangerous and adverse conditions.

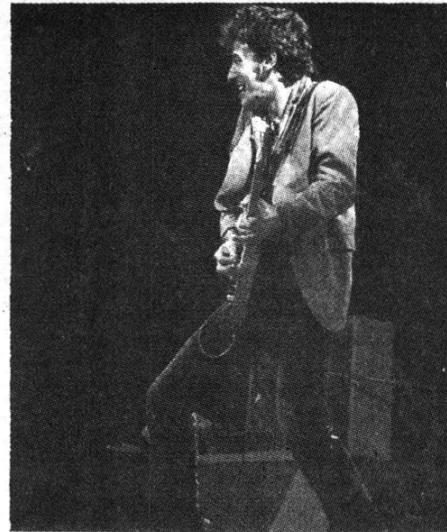
The most successful facet of the film is the bit of documentary footage and old Army newsreels that were shown to the audience between concert sets. In *The Big Picture*, an Army training film made in the early 1950's, a group of GI's huddle around their company Padre in the dark Mexican night, listening to his comforting assurances about the harmless effects of radiation. Many of the participants in the Army tests, where soldiers were purposely exposed to radiation from atomic blasts, are interviewed 25 years later, shown to be victims of abnormally high rates of cancer and other illnesses.



Crosby and Stills got together with Graham Nash for their umpteenth reunion; better luck next time!

The documentary pieces work because they lack the pretension that is present in most of this movie. At times they are melodramatic, reminiscent in their propagandist tone of *Reefer Madness*, or of the frenzied patriotism that existed in the US at the time they were made.

Conversely, *No Nukes* is anything but representative of "the times." Musically it is little more than empty star-gazing, a chance to see some "once-greats." The most memorable images of the performers are the most pathetic or banal: Carly Simon's sexuality; hubbie James Taylor's docility; Steven Stills, bloated almost beyond recognition, wearing a blue blazer, looking more like Elvis, or maybe the third Blues Brother, than the radical artist of the early seventies. For some reason Schlossberg thought it important to include shots of Graham Nash dressing into his stage apparel (no more patched Levis for this



Springsteen saves the show - for a while, anyway.

guy), or Jackson Browne clowning it up for a press conference, along with other such inanities.

Even the few genuinely sincere performances in this film are reduced to incoherence by the sloppy editing and poor direction. On stage Bruce Springsteen is a well of energy and emotive, powerful music. One just has to look at him to know that he still cares more for his music than the cause-celebre posturing of many of the people he shares the stage with. Performances by Ry Cooder and Tom Petty aren't even included in the film; a mistake considering the musical abilities and showmanship of the two.

The majority of the once-great, once-respected musicians in this film come off as little more than "entertainers," a la John Denver, in a hip USO show for born-again flower children and unconverted middle-of-the-roads. *No Nukes* is overshadowed by too many personalities and the presence of a show business sense of public relations. The lack of conviction that flaws the film originates with the MUSE people, and their motives, no matter how well-intended, do not even begin to conceal it.

Talking heads remain in light

John tells Yoko she is the walrus

by Michael Dennis Skeet

Talking Heads
Remain In Light
(SIRE SXR 6095)

Remain in Light (Sire XSR 6095), the latest album by Talking Heads, rivals Springsteen's *The River* as the best album I've heard this year. In fact, because of its daring approach, I'll give it a definite number 1.

The use of the word 'daring' refers to a stylistic change that's immediately noticeable and very pleasing. David Byrne has become fascinated with African rhythms of late, and this past summer he modified the band, in conjunction with new producer Brian Eno, in order to

achieve a new, fuller sound. The 'new' band played at the so-called 'New Wave Festival' in Toronto in July, and was well received.

The same nine people recorded *Remain in Light*, and it's to be hoped that Byrne keeps the line up together for a few more albums, because this one really works.

The quirky, jerky rhythms that characterize earlier Talking Heads music have been supplanted by a strong, forceful beat that is most strongly apparent in the album's first song *Born Under Punches (The Heat Goes On)*. The same tune shows what leeway Byrne and Eno have been given by the expanded lineup; the production is spare and clean, but instruments and voices weave amongst each other with an effect that is practically hypnotic. The same effect continues throughout the album; the Heads are screaming *I Got Rhythm!* and believe me, it makes a world of difference.

Remain in Light has to be considered an unqualified success. To me, it's the perfect combination of innovation and accessibility; the music is unique and different, and yet it's completely approachable, and you should be able to fall in love with it at first listening.

Double Fantasy
John Lennon/Yoko Ono
(Geffen XGHS 2001)

My initial, uncharitable reaction to John Lennon's new single (*Just Like Starting Over*), was to seriously doubt any kind of future for rock 'n' roll. Here was

one half of the greatest songwriting team since the Gershwins cranking out sentimentalized, retrained elevator music. I absolutely dreaded the prospect of reviewing the new album.

My opinion of *Starting Over* remains the same, but I'm relieved to say *Double Fantasy* is not a disaster. In fact, it may well be quite a good album. I say 'maybe' for the simple reason that I can't get the Beatles out of my head. I realize full well that it's been a decade since the band split, and that most of this year's freshman class has experienced the Beatles only at second-hand, but to me, John, Paul, George and Ringo will always be the Beatles first and individuals second.

So when I hear John Lennon, I'm comparing him (even if it's only subconsciously) to his glorious past. But John Lennon is 40 now. He's married, has a son, and leads a relatively quiet life on a New York farm. He seems to have reached some sort of equilibrium.

Double Fantasy is not a rock 'n' roll album. As pop music, though, some of it succeeds very nicely. The songs are more or less evenly divided; some written and sung by Lennon, the others by his wife Yoko. Yoko, whatever her skills as a poet, will never make it as a musician; her voice is just too weak, for one thing, and few of her tunes are really original. Even she has moments on *Double Fantasy*, though; the simplicity of *Kiss Kiss Kiss* is combined with a real wizard production job to good effect (great effect on my system. I use four speakers, and had no idea where

Yoko's voice was going to come from next).

Most of the good tunes on *Double Fantasy* are Lennon's; one of them is absolutely precious. *Beautiful Boy (Darling Boy)* is a song for John and Yoko's young son Sean. Lennon melds a delicate, pretty tune (as good as anything he's ever written) and an honest, loving lyric to produce a song that really shouldn't even be discussed - just listened to.

To be sure, *Double Fantasy* has weak points. Some of Yoko's songs are silly, some of John's too slickly-produced. In all, there are nearly as many songs that don't make it as there are that succeed. But one point comes through strongly: this is an extremely honest album. John Lennon has laid himself open in a way that few of us, artists included, can. For this alone, he deserves praise.

