

Joe Jackson Goes Beat Crazy



by Gisele Marie Baxter

Review: The Joe Jackson Band, "Beat Crazy" (A&M SP-4837)

Never may it be said that Joe Jackson has given in to the temptation of formula. Despite the success of the powerful, rough-edged pop featured on "I'm the Man", this talented Englishman and his band have decided to take risks on this, their third album. "Beat Crazy" is recognizably a Joe Jackson product, but marks a departure lyrically, musically and even vocally.

Jackson's voice, always strong, is here more controlled and more complex emotionally. It sometimes achieves an almost John Lydoneque snarl on the slower songs, but Joe is still much more accessible.

The band is every bit as

important as Jackson on this record, and fortunately gets the credit deserved. This album is beat crazy—these four excellent instrumentalists experiment with ska, reggae, and strong pop rhythms as they play together and counter each other. Bass, drums, guitars, and keyboards—all are brought upfront several times and answer the challenge proficiently. No one hides behind a wall of sound.

The lyrics are as sharp and perceptive as ever, but are often more complex and lack a lot of humor found in earlier songs. Other than "One to One", the songs of romance are not as effective as those on "I'm the Man", or "Is She Really Going Out With Him?", Jackson's classic from "Look Sharp!". Jackson is stronger here when creating

scenes of modern life, with its political causes and bigotries, its violence and commercialism.

"Battleground" is a powerful recitation about racial tension, dedicated to the acclaimed young reggae poet, Linton Kwesi Johnson. The background emphasizes compelling reggae guitar work, with bass-flavored instrumental breaks which feature crisp drum rolls. The angry spoken vocal finds its strength in a barely snarling quietude and a tough, beautiful, insistent lyric: "In the dark heat/ In the rhythm of the bass beat/ Something is wrong/ And no-one is taking the blame."

"Pretty Boys" kicks off with punch and keeps it up with great keyboard work, ska-flavored guitars, and a sar-

donic swipe at commercialism: "Maybe I should get a face-lift, start again/ Maybe I should trade my pointed shoes in/ 'Cause talent don't count/ For Pretty Boys."

Jackson provides a melodic piano line in the strong yet wistful ballad "One to One", which directs its mature lyric to a woman who is so caught up in her politics that she seems to fear a one to one relationship with the man who loves her.

The best song on "Beat Crazy" is Jackson's latest English single, "Fit", which has a powerful beat and a vocal to match, a poignant guitar line, and excellent percussion. Jackson expresses both anger and compassion in detailing the plight of modern world misfits, about whom others "say you can't be one

of us/ You only have yourself to blame/ You don't fit."

Musically, this album is consistently good—"Mad at You" has some outstanding instrumental work. "Biology" and "Somewhere up There" are not entirely successful; the former merits a crisper, more sardonic treatment. Also, I wish Jackson had included his wonderful cover version of Jimmy Cliff's reggae classic, "The Harder They Come". It would have been so right for this record.

"Beat Crazy" might not have the frenetic energy and the immediacy of "I'm the Man". However, its exotic rhythms are effective and compelling, and it marks so much development in these four fine musicians. The Joe Jackson Band remains a band to watch.

Why, Gloria?

by Michael McCarthy

You live in New York City, in a low-class apartment building. It's a quiet, hot afternoon, and you decide to drop by your friend's apartment on the same floor. Imagine your surprise when your friend tells you that her husband is an accountant for the "Mob", and their whole family is marked for death because he talked to the FBI. She convinces you to take her small son to your room for safety. Minutes later your friend, her husband, mother, and daughter have their heads shot off. The Mob, in which you have friends, comes hunting for the boy, to make an example of him. What do you do?

What an aging former "moll" named Gloria does is to try to get the little boy to Pittsburgh. They bounce from house to street to flophouse trying to escape discovery, have several bizarre run-ins with would-be killers, and along the way develop a strong bond of love.

The question which arises is "why is this all going on?" The movie never really provides an answer. There is some interest in the warm relationship growing between a helpless boy whose family has been murdered, and an aging "tough broad" who has never had (and heretofore didn't want) a family of her own. However, it is fairly predictable that a boy looking for a mother and a stifled mother with no outlet previously for her softer feelings will become attached to each other, and this alone does not provide a strong enough base for a movie. The relationship is too commonplace in its nature and too extreme in its environment to be of lasting interest. This is a Cassavetes movie, so of course there are lots of guns, violence, and desperate situations, but the shock/action effect is dissipated by the relationship; the different aspects of the film never mesh together. It is too

unevenly paced for an action film, too heavy-handed for an exploration of love, and not intense enough for a gripping study of the desperation that drives Gloria as one escape after another is closed off to her.

Not that the film is void of merit. The dialogue is gutsy and alive. Buck Henry gives a strong characterization of the doomed informer. Although echoing some aspects of a recent successful movie featuring a child actor, Gloria is less (but still partly) melodramatic. The characters are more dynamic, and the performances less stylized and indulgent. John Adams is refreshing as a child who is real: intractable, whining, funny, noisy, scared, yet appealingly vulnerable without being Hollywood cute.

Gena Rowlands effectively portrays a pistol-packing female tough. Her part provides enough scope to avoid a stereotype, but not enough to allow a really penetrating portrayal such as in her Oscar-nominated performance in *A Woman Under The Influence*. This movie is a bit of a comedown for her, as it is for husband and writer/director John Cassavetes. While the New York underground microcosm is still there, as is the buried undercurrent of emotions revealed in the desperation of his characters, this film is an uncertain encounter, rather than a confrontation or attack as in his more compelling films. One never knows what Gloria is driving at, and never quite gets caught up enough in the events to stop asking the question. It lacks focus, fire; without the nerve-shattering intensity, Cassavetes' riveting dark world becomes merely ordinary and a little dull. This movie is too mechanical, superficial in its exploration and "safe" to be any better (or any worse) than most of the bland rehashes of pseudo-life that we get on the screen these days.

The Awakening a bit sleepy

by Michael McCarthy

The enormous success of *The Exorcist* kicked off a slew of "demonic possession/girl with strange powers" flicks, most of which were unimaginative and pretty boring in comparison. *The Awakening* (based on a book by Bram Stoker) is one of these films, although it tries harder than most to provide an eerie and shocking climax.

The story starts off at familiar-looking archeological digs, where Matt Corbeck (Charlton Heston) finds the tomb of "The Nameless One", an ancient Egyptian princess so awful her name has been removed from all recorded history. Matt's wife is pregnant, and amidst weird sounds and strange Arabic music, the discovery of the casket and the birth of the baby are simultaneous (establishing a relation-ship). Eighteen years later, an obsessed Corbeck conducts a ritual which reincarnates the

princess in his already pretty odd daughter. For the fans, there are a number of vault scenes, gruesome and sudden deaths, psychokinesis and other occult events, accompanied by growlings and anomalous sounds. These energetic events, which are sometimes quite suspenseful, are, however, few and far between.

The movie takes a very long time to get going. The details of the unearthing are too tediously followed, as are a couple of superfluous and boring sub-plots (romance thrown in for human interest). When the action starts, it does not build continuously enough, to high enough peaks, quickly enough. The ending is dissatisfying and poorly acted.

Charlton Heston overacts his part, trying to bring too much emotion and depth to a basically shallow character who is dwelt on far out of proportion to his importance or potential for interest. Susannah York as Chuck's

love interest and Stephanie Zimbalist as the possessed daughter are little more than decoration. The acting is very much secondary to the visual effects, which are only sometimes stirring, and the plot, which never is.

The dialogue is silly and anticlimatic (after laborious unearthing of an inscription which unmistakably describes the "evil one", and dragging the reading of same interminably, York innocently asks "can it be her?", which is typical of the alacrity and insight of all the characters). The plot is weak and derivative; even the camera shots and scene switches are copies of William Friedkin's style. How far can the mimicry be carried? As one watcher remarked (after the movie ends abruptly just as "The Nameless One" regains embodiment), "You just know there's going to be a sequel. . . . Hopefully, the movie company will be repossessed first."