



by Mark Teehan

**STEPHENWOLF - "Slow Flux" [Mums].** The big bad Wolf's back, tougher and meaner than ever. Well, musically that is - on the back cover they come across as a bunch of business execs with those white shirts and that neat, imploring look. What a far cry from the old "Born To Be Wild" late '60s arrogant, macho, rebellious image. Guess that's times changin'-no more Mr. Bad Mangy Guys. Anyway, after roughly a 3-year layoff and several John Day solo jobs the gang has returned intact, with the exception of Kurt Henry who seems to have been replaced on guitar by Billy Cochran (do wish they'd put a few credits or some info on the back cover). All in all "Flux" is a decent comeback effort, as good as could have been expected. The group seems to have integrated their mellower, more subdued side (as exemplified on "Ladies") into their harder blues-influenced traditional mold. Careful use of outside material plus spreading the writing credits around within the group has also helped; you won't trip over anything here up to their early blaster hits, but most everything passes the Grade B quality test: dependable, solid, etc. (except a wasted diatribe vs. Tricky Dick-ain't worth the effort boys). Cochran gives the group some added flexibility in the riff region, and otherwise they pull together OK-maybe a bit stiff in places but then you gotta expect a little rust. Kay's vocals are as good as ever, tough and rough on the rockers and tender, understanding on a pair of ballads.

It's on these 2 tracks, located just inside the flipped half of this record, that the group peaks quite nicely. "Smokey Factory Blues" is a worker's lament for his loved one as he struggles on the big freeway to work so early in the morning, and offers an effective intro with acoustic guitar and synthesizer that changes into a harder crunching sound as the pace quickens. "Morning Blue" is simply a fine soft tune with just the right touch of organ. From here we are treated to "A Fools Fantasy" (raunchy level rocker) and the closer, "Fishin' In The Dark" (Kay-penned, mid-tempo rocker with funky organ and horns, catchy refrain and good solo from Cochran). The first side is a little de-railed by that clunker already mentioned, stuck as it is right smack in the middle, but the other tracks come off OK. "Children of the Night" uses the old uptempo change refrain Wolf trick while asking what happened to the "Summer of Love" dream (down the proverbial drain, well winter came). "Get Into The Wind" is a real biker raver, complete with ignition keyed engine noise that opens up to a full-throttle rocker sparked by some synth plugs. And "Jeraboah" is quite interesting, unique, coming on in "Ladies" style (dominant organ, mellow guitar) and then developing along funky lines into an extended instrumental (dig that distorted/echoplexy solo).

Oh yeah, one more thing, this elpee does grow on you with repeated listenings - just give it enough time. Welcome back, gang. They need ya.

**JOE COCKER - "I Can Stand A Little Rain" [A&M].** Good for you, mate, but that don't mean you have to drown us in a downpour. Actually this is about the best of this week's stampede of solo artist-type LPs (more to come too). It's good to see the white blues bruiser back in action, but the quiet, restrained tone that dominates throughout is a real surprise. Except for "Put Out The Light" and "I Get Mad" (a real screamer) which are funky Cocker-rockers that sound like re-makes of some of his older stuff, everything else is slow, bluesy with emphasis on piano. That's all Side 2 consists of. And while most of these songs, written by the likes of Harry Nilsson, Jim Price, Jimmy Webb, Randy Newman, are decent enough on their own, taken together they make for a pretty one-sided album. No differentiation hardly. Downer depressive disillusionment rules supreme. As for Cocker's vocals, they're mighty weary, haggard-sounds like he went through a real meatgrinder (which I guess he sorta did). Can

you stand it? (the excellent title cut says it all).

**BILLY PRESTON - "The Kids & Me" [A&M].** The best thing that can be said about this is that it's gonna generate some bread to buy paint supplies for the children of L.A.'s St. Elmo Village - very charitable gesture. As for the music here, it sorta leaves me yawning: slick, superficial funkkaadellicc soullll. We know you can play those keyboards Billy, but how 'bout some decent varied material to hang your playing on. After the lead cuts on each side, it's all downhill.

**RICHARD BETTS - "Highway Call" [Capricorn].** Ho-hum. Lead guitar man for the Allmans decides that he too will do a solo (p)album with scores of friends to flash his country roots. Result: a nice pleasant, harmless schmaltzy collection of lame, indistinctive tracks. Good hybrid pasture music that lacks any real substance but sounds might puty with bits of steel guitar, dobro, mandolin. Somewhere down there is Dickie's guitar. And he drones on in true laid-back fashion just like he was signin' "Ramblin Man". The real killer is "Hand Picked" on Side 2 - 14 minutes plus of country improvisation (jazz?). Still, it is good background music if that's your cuppa tea. Even Allmans freaks might have problems with this one.

**CAN - "Future Days" [United Artists]**  
**AMON DUUL 2 - "Vivetrance" [UA].** There's not much to say about this dreck, 'cept that it's quite boring, inane, pretentious and contrived. Totally without redeeming value, and in the first case a criminal waste of vinyl. It's honestly a chore to sit and listen to, while these guys muck around and try to cover up their lack of talent with over-dubs ad infinitum, jams, electronic bullshit, and ham-fisted lyrics. The worst of the two, for which the above applies in full, are Can. This limey outfit is completely clueless, and slurps forth with what can only be described as electronic noise. On 1 20-min. (exactly) track called "Bel Air" they've got flies or bees buzzing around (can't quite tell which).

Amon Duul 2 are thankfully better, but that ain't sayin' a whole lot. Their music shows much more attention to structure/dynamics, borrowing heavily from such rock masters as Jefferson Airplan, Bowie, Crimson. It's much more listenable, and several cuts ("Im Krater Bluhn Wieder Die Baume" and "Apocalyptic Bore") are pretty good, actually likeable. But most of the time they just mess around with jumbled chords and silly lyrics.

I don't know what the problem is here - too much acid, a backward time warp? Pretty dismal stuff, and seems to be part of some kind of new-wave "kraut-rock" movement that's been pickin' up steam recently (yeah, Amon are German - don't laugh on the tag, some record label's been started with that name). Don't ask me why. But maybe it fits the mood of the '70s: sound (?) and fury (mediocrity) signifying nothin'. Zero man.

Notes: Latest info available makes it look extremely unlikely that Led Zeppelin will tour continent until later in '75, so reports about a Stampede's tour with them in MCQ must be false [the idea is absurd anyway]. Expect new albums sometime soon from Bruce Cockburn, Murray McLaughlin, and Painter. Also on the boards and in the can are future LPs by Bowie [new studio and live ones], Bill Wyman, Wishbone Ash, Eagles, Bee Gees, Arthur Lee and Love, Stray Dog, Deep Purple, Ringo Starr, Ozark Mtn. Daredevils, and The Image [Mike Pinera's new group] ... El Zimmola starting work on follow-up to "Planet Waves"; expect X'mas - Jan. release ... Mahogany Rush makin' strong waves in U.S. especially in Mid-West area - in Detroit they're headlining over bigger-name bands; "Novelty" album also breaking down there, about to crack top 100 ... when played before some English concerts [the album that is] as warm-up music, heavy stream of favorable inquires received from audience. "Who's thattt? ...



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