

No Laughing Stock

by Eric Alper

Back in 1981, Talk Talk were a laughing stock. Branded as the "new Duran Duran" due to their catchy pop songs like "Such A Shame," "Today" and the dance-club smash "It's My Life," the band was a tad bit uglier than their fellow Duranites, but their videos were just as compelling to watch.

music

Talk Talk
Laughing Stock
Capitol Records

viewer, "...dissonance is king, silence is golden and instruments are used *au naturel*."

The search for something is still here. From songs such as "Life's What You Make It" to "Happiness Is Easy," there are religious overtones and a strong theme of mystery on *Laughing Stock*. "Ascension Day" contains the lyrics "Bet I'll be damned/I'll burn on Judgment Day" and "After The Flood" shows us the story of "...The crowd/ Spurning step by state/ Blame something else/ How they run/ Stain in number."

Hollis is as elusive as ever in detailing a story, or what exactly he is trying to say. Unless one has the lyric sheet, the songs won't be easy to make out — like R. E. M.'s early work. But one would want to; his voice is an instrument in the richest sense of the word.

"Myrrhman" speaks of faith and love in an elegant setting with violin and aching guitar. "Ascension Day" works to a peak in energy with the Hammond organ and jazz drums. But Hollis' finest achievement on this record is the minute long one-note guitar solo in "After The Flood."

The ideas of sin, dying and regeneration recur in almost every song, with images of love and damnation casting a shadow over the musicians, a mood reinforced by Hollis' mournful delivery or tremulous near-whisper.

The album is organized, but chaotic. The 18 musicians play subdued harmonium, clarinet, sax and mouth organ, drifting in and out of a loosely melodic structure. It can be called "free-form jazz," but that is the least of it. Jazz enthusiasts should note that the old jazz label, Verve, has been resurrected by Talk Talk to bring comparisons with noted influences from the 50's and 60's.

This album is as far away from Talk Talk's original roots as George Michael is to Metallica. *Laughing Stock* hit me the first time I heard it, and gets better — more personal — with each listen.

Sadly, the only way you'll hear any of this album is if you buy it. I can't imagine anyone (save CFNY — thanks Dani) playing it. Without a doubt, those who have bought only their *Greatest Hits* or *The Remixes* package will stick with that. I'll take this any day. And that's no laughing matter.

Material Issue, immaterial music

by Ira Nayman

People under 30 should not write music. Let's face it: they don't have enough experience to work with, and they don't have the maturity to make interesting art from what little experience they do have.

They should especially not write love songs.

Chicago trio Material Issue's first album, *International Pop Overthrow*, is a good example. Jim Ellison and Ted Ansani's guitar work is sharp, with lots of interesting hooks; otherwise, the album is totally forgettable pop.

Twelve of the 14 tracks are love songs. The writing is so uninspired, you won't be able to tell them apart after several listens.

The title track isn't about love. But, it isn't about overthrowing anything, either. In fact, it isn't about much more than adding some old pop music effects to meaningless, but rebellious-sounding, lyrics.

music

Material Issue
International Pop Overthrow
Polygram Records

"Trouble" contains similar adolescent macho posturing, but it stands out simply because it isn't about...you know.

According to the press bumph, Material Issue has "a single goal in life: to write an album full of singles." The formula is quite simple: "all you need is a song structure simple enough to seem immediately familiar, but complex enough to satisfy after repeated listens; a catchy chorus; and hooks piled up on top of riffs piled on top of more hooks."

Welcome to the machine.

Robertson's latest has integrity and style

by David Kuswanto

In an age of instant disposability, it's a treat to find something with a bit of integrity. A good example is the latest offering from Robbie Robertson, *Storyville*. Moody and eclectic, it's a beautiful album that serves to reaffirm Robertson's musical ability and staying power.

A respected veteran of the music industry, Robertson has played with the best of them, most notably Ronnie "The Hawk" Hawkins, Bob Dylan and his own outfit, The Band. Following the dissolution of The Band in 1977, Robertson virtually dropped out of the music business, just scoring a few films by Martin Scorsese.

It wasn't until 1987 that Robertson emerged from obscurity with a stunning self-titled solo debut. Four years later, his second solo effort is even more spectacular.

There are two main differences between the new album and its predecessor. First, *Storyville* swims in atmosphere. Robertson is moving further and further away from his roots-oriented rock and into territory that can be loosely described as "the thinking person's music."

Second, there is no doubt as to who is in control of this album. Whereas Robertson allowed guest musicians such as Peter Gabriel and U2 to dominate certain tracks on his first solo album, *Storyville* makes no such concessions. Despite a fairly



music

Robbie Robertson
Storyville
Geffen Records

impressive roster, including the Neville Brothers and Neil Young, *Storyville* is Robbie Robertson through and through.

A mature and highly enjoyable work, *Storyville* makes a refreshing change from the usual "flavour of the month" pop. Although it is doubtful this Canadian talent will see much commercial success, *Storyville* is an impressive addition to an already illustrious career.

The main characters in their clips happened to be animals crawling about, looking for their next meal — a hint of things to come. Getting back to nature...searching for something. Yes, Talk Talk knew that even videos were an important vehicle for getting a message across.

Two years after their *Greatest Hits* album, and a year after their distinctively uncommercial but extraordinary *Spirit Of Eden*, comes the latest offering from Talk Talk.

The band has grown beyond its progressive rock roots. They don't play Songs, they perform Numbers. They don't do LPs; they make Albums and Albums have Tracks. ("We'd like to do another Track from our Album now...")

With Genesis or Yes, there would be no Gigs, but Concerts; then, they would do Tours instead of Concerts and the Tours would be named after the Albums, as would the T-shirts. Thus, Merchandise was born.

Expect no Concerts from Talk Talk. The ability to perform the Numbers on *Spirit Of Eden* and *Laughing Stock* on record was hard enough.

Laughing Stock is a natural follow up of *Spirit Of Eden*, continuing the band's relationship with producer-collaborator Tim Friese-Green. Both contain just six lengthy tracks. The music adheres to no recognizable form. There is no pop style of verse/chorus here. There is structure, but this is a world where the beauty of the mistake is celebrated.

Main man Mark Hollis supposedly recorded a choir of about 20 people to sing backup with the musicians for a whole day, only to erase the entire tape 24 hours later. It just didn't work to his liking. According to one re-

45 rpm
side B