

Despite delusions, Jackson isn't the man

Record review by John C. Bilsland

After having great success with their debut albums, The Cars, Dire Straits, and Joe Jackson released second albums in the summer and early fall of 1979. The Cars' *Candy-O* and Dire Straits' *Communicue* were continuations of the styles established in their respective first albums. But, despite those albums' merits, both *Candy-O* and *Communicue* were disappointing for the lack of innovative and fresh music.

Joe Jackson's second album, *I'm the Man*, is also disappointing for the same musical stagnancy: after one play of the record the listener cannot help but think that this musical ground has been covered in Jackson's debut album, *Look Sharp*. One important consideration is that almost a year elapsed between the first two albums of the Cars and Dire Straits, while *I'm the Man* was released only five months after *Look Sharp*.

The first sign that Jackson has faltered with *I'm the Man*, is in the lyrics of the opening track, "On Your Radio". Unlike Elvis Costello's "Radio, Radio" in which radio is likened to an anesthetizing opiate, Jackson's "On Your Radio" is simply a smug retort aimed at his former skeptics. But in order to assert his own artistic success, Jackson allows himself terrific delusions of grandeur. As of yet, he does not have the superstar status that would make this song appropriate:

*Don't you know you can't get near me
You can only hope to hear me on your radio
On your radio
You're gonna hear me on your radio . . .*

Most of the music on the album seems to repeat the rhythms and chord structures of *Look Sharp*. The

album is further marred by the use of meagre, flat melodies which act as "filler" between the better cuts: "The Band Wore Blue Shirts" and "Amateur Hour" being the worst examples of this filler.

Nonetheless, the music of *I'm the Man* is, on the whole, quite good. The problems in arrangement which plagued *Look Sharp* — inadequate use of lead guitar and drums — have been corrected. Jackson's vocals and Graham Maby's bass have retained the strength and vitality that was present on *Look Sharp*. In addition, the album features some good harmonica work by Jackson. Three of the tracks, "I'm the Man", "Don't Wanna Be Like That", and "It's Different For Girls", rival the best of Jackson's compositions from his first album.

Despite the pretentiousness of "On Your Radio", the lyrics of *I'm the Man* sometimes offer imagination and eloquence. From the portrayal of the dissipated flower-child in "Friday", to his treatment of the clumsy dancer's plight in "Kinda Kute", Jackson shows that he is still capable of the sensitivity and perception that underpinned the lyrics of *Look Sharp*.

Jackson is in top form on the album's title track. In his hideous caricature of the advertising executive, Jackson provides a musical counterpart to Kliban's cartoon "The Birth of Advertising":

*Skateboards
I've almost made them respectable
You see I can't always get through to you
So I go for your son
I had a giant rubber shark and it really made a mark
Didja looka looka lookit alla blood . . .*



In view of the impending rush on children's toys, "The Birth of Advertising" is a most timely warning.

The release of *I'm the Man* is evidence that Jackson has been unable to keep up the momentum generated by *Look Sharp*. But given the short space of time intervening between the two albums, and the tremendous pressure upon Jackson to create another string of hits, it is surprising that *I'm the Man* has the quality it does. Jackson's next album should give a better indication of his capacity for artistic development.

Yanking sex across the water

Movie review by Hollis Brown

The biggest problem with *Yanks* is that most of its best parts seem incidental. Director John Schlesinger, who changed my life with *Midnight Cowboy*, has been unable to produce a movie of equal caliber in the last few years, and *Yanks* will soon join the ranks of *Marathon Man* as eminently forgettable.

Set in 1942 and 1943, *Yanks* is flimsily built around wartime England and its reaction to the thousands of American soldiers who were stationed there for various reasons during the war. Richard Gere plays a humble young G.I. who falls in love with a teasing young English woman named Jean, (Lisa Eichhorn), only to be wrenched from her by the times and by irreconcilable differences between Americans and Britons.

What the audience is left with is the idea that the two nationalities are incapable of sustaining a stable love affair. Eichhorn gets angry with Gere for not defending some black soldiers in a gang fight; Gere responds that the "American" solution is to avoid racial confrontations, for that is the way of the west. Eichhorn becomes upset and ends the affair when, after baring her British body to Gere, he refuses to consummate their relationship. His reason: he doesn't want to commit her to the relationship when he will soon be off to the front.

Cliches abound in *Yanks*. They also walk, however, in the character played by William Devane. As a commanding officer, Devane has a love affair with Vanessa Redgrave, roughly paralleling the Eichhorn/Gere fiasco. Of course, being an American C.O., Devane is worldly, wise, kind, fatherly, sage, gentle, romantic, courageous, stoic, and highly virile; all the things we know American military commanders to be. Redgrave, already married to a British officer, is swept off her feet by the quiet sexiness of Devane, and the audience is sent reeling by the audacious treatment of women in this movie.

If one ignores the weakness and simplicity of the movie's plot, several positive qualities emerge. Schlesinger includes a number of interesting minor characters, especially Eichhorn's mother, marvellously played by British actress Rachel Roberts. Always ignored by American movie people, Roberts is far and away the best actor in the movie, and she is always convincing, always interesting. Other minor characters fill out the movie and contribute to its main success, the depiction of wartime England.

In fact, Schlesinger's talents are best seen in the small things; the New Year's Eve party, the operation of a small grocery store, the British children, and the dress and manners of the times. He overdoes it at times, though, with his treatment of the wartime blackout as a good example. Gere, the unsuspecting American, trips and stumbles his way through the dark streets, because the streetlights aren't lit. Pretty blatant, but not that funny.

But all of the movie's qualities end up playing second fiddle to the love affairs, leaving the audience shortchanged. They aren't extraordinary love affairs, nor are they exceptionally realistic; they are, however, incredibly trite. The movie is redeemed somewhat by the last fifteen minutes that begin with a death and end with the departure of the American soldiers. But the preceding two hours are sometimes boring, sometimes ridiculous, and usually pretty light stuff.

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