

Music Naked: Talking Heads event

Naked
Talking Heads
Sire

review by Mike Spindloe

A new Talking Heads album is something of an event these days, not because it's an especially rare occurrence, but because the band has been on the verge of mass public acceptance for so long that it seems a mere matter of time before they garner the level of public support that their talent and accomplishments should warrant.

In other words, they are The Next Big Thing, the latest ten year overnight sensation and so on. Actually, their audience has been expanding steadily since they emerged from the energetic New York City punk/new wave scene in the 1970's, and they are now one of a few, if not the only outfit from that era which is still extant and, more importantly, producing music which justifies their existence.

Naked, then, is an event, especially for the already converted. It isn't perfect, but neither is it disappointing and (knock on wood) this could very well be the album that...

While everyone has their own favorite Talking Heads album, this one stands out as one of the best, if not the best one yet. The refinement in songwriting skills which has been a constant and important aspect of Talking Heads' evolution continues here. David Byrne and company have combined some of their most satirically pointed lyrics ever with memorable melodies and a seething percussive groove to create an album which will not only require many listenings to appreciate fully, but should also age well through that process. You can also dance to a lot of it.

Lyrical speaking, *Naked* keeps tongue planted firmly in cheek for the most part; a vehicle for David Byrne's rapier wit. "The Democratic Circus" comments, using an effective allegory explained on the title, on

the upcoming American presidential elections and the accompanying hoopla, but the sentiment is equally applicable (try attending the SU election forum next year!)

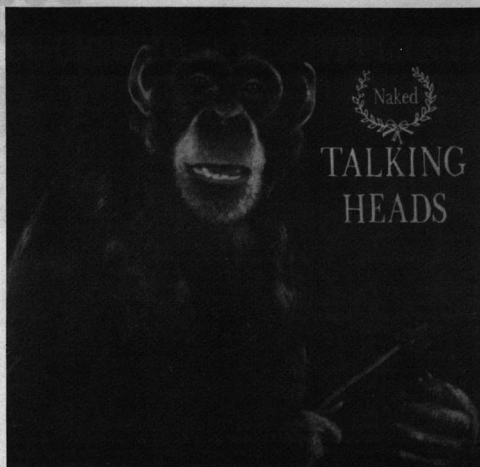
"(Nothing But) Flowers" turns around the oft-heard wistful reminiscences of a world unspooled by the ravages of modern consumer society; the narrator yearns for his "microwave/Now we just eat nuts and berries," and concludes: "Don't leave me stranded here, I can't get used to this lifestyle." "Mr. Jones," could easily have fit into last year's *True Stories* concept, which turned the mundane into a "celebration of specialness."

Musically, Talking Heads have not so much progressed as consolidated, although this is certainly the most ambitious album they have ever attempted instrumentally. The song structures on *Naked* are built around funky rhythms which are often reminiscent of earlier albums. These sometimes overwhelm the melodies, which are mainly developed through Byrne's offbeat yet effective vocal stylings.

As part of the band's continuing search for inspiration, Talking Heads recorded basic tracks in New York and then took these tracks to Paris for expansion by various guest musicians, including guitarist Yves N'Djock and keyboardist Wally Badarou. The process was completed back in New York, where Byrne improvised vocal melodies and wrote lyrics to go on top of what had already been recorded. The songs thus evolved gradually, with no initial conception of the finished product.

The results emphasize rhythm, driven by a wide variety of percussion instruments and complex horn arrangements on several tracks. "Ruby Dear", for instance, updates the basic Bo Diddley rhythm with oil drum, maracas and leg seed pods (whatever the hell they are).

Surprisingly, though, Talking Heads seem to run out of steam just past halfway through the set; if this album has a weak point, it is the



Naked could make the Talking Heads the Next Big Thing

grouping of all the uptempo numbers together at the start. Since these also contain many of the most interesting lyrics, side one emerges as clearly the better of the two.

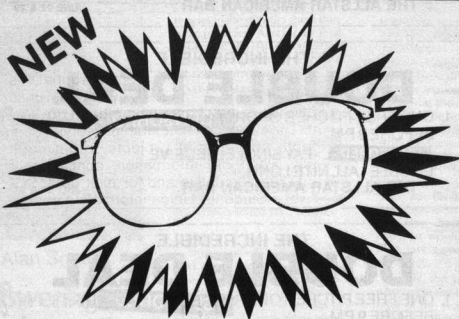
This does not pose a serious detraction, thankfully. If side one is classic Talking Heads, then side two is merely very good Talking Heads. The album also clocks in generously at just under 50 minutes (the CD includes an

extra track) and so qualifies as excellent value, if that is to be a consideration.

In any event, Talking Heads have once again proven themselves to be one of the truly innovative and intelligent bands in popular music, as well as one which manages to succeed without pandering to image-making. In their case, the music is the image, and that is enough.

**THANKS to all Entertainment Writers.
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is editor!!! Good luck, Mike!**

—Elaine



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