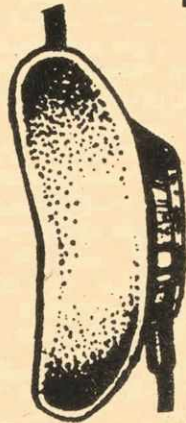


# SOUND TRACKS



by Mark Teehan

## "New Wave" Southern Rock: A General Survey

Amidst an otherwise relatively stale American rock "scene", the growing number of talented groups emerging from the deep South stand out like a beacon in the night. Following along the path laboriously carved out by the now legendary Allman Brothers, Southern groups like Lynyrd Skynyrd, Marshall Tucker, Wet Willie, Atlanta Rhythm, and Hydra are creating some strong, viable music that stands on its own merits. Definitely worth gettin' into. Aside from possessing a sense of natural earthiness and reflecting the regional culture/milieu in which it is created, Southern rock has an innate integrity or honesty about it that is also endearing. While these groups naturally want success and are now, to varying degrees, starting to achieve it, they generally refuse to sell out or make commercial compromises. No corporate-media type involved here - all these groups have worked their asses off touring and built up fiercely loyal regional followings: Another point to be made: the label "Southern rock" is only used in a loose, general sense, and is **not** meant to convey the impression that a) all the newer bands slavishly copy the Allmans, or b) all Southern bands sound the same. Nothing could be further from the truth. The music may have a common general origin and similar influences, but each group has undergone its own unique musical evolution. It's this stylistic diversity that gives the Southern "scene" its vitality.

Leading the "new wave" of Southern outfits is Lynyrd Skynyrd, who hails from Florida and are only the second band from this area to garner a gold record (for their 2nd LP). They're the most blues-oriented of the bunch, and operate mainly in a raunchy boogie groove with 3 guitarists (Gary Rossington, Allen Collins, and Ed King) giving the group their distinctive laid-back sound. True bar room boozers who habitually chug 'em while playing. And their code of ethics or outlook is traditional Southern: a male should be a Man on his Land; Washington can buzz off (why worry about Watergate?); and Androgynous glitter doesn't cut it. Oh yeah, and the South is a great place to live. But all that's more or less expected, and the boys have a way of speaking their mind so casually that it never gets offensive; besides, they know where the bad deals are goin' down and are wary of mass society's space-age philistinian techno-robots. Anyway, the key man in this aggregate would seem to be Ronnie Van Zant, who not only holds down the lead vocal spot but is also involved in writing all the group's material, either alone or with any of the three axemen. What emerges is usually dependable, if unspectacular, embellished by the most rudimentary of arrangements. Concentrate on the essentials.

Lynyrd's first album was an auspicious debut, and while having the expected weak spots, it still reached some moving highs on the Free-ish "Tuesday's Gone" and "Simple Man," a song that consistently gets to me. Touring with the who, plus getting some FM play helped, and when "Second Helping" came out last Spring more folks were ready for it. What really broke things wide open for the group was the surprise success of the single "Sweet Home Alabama" that sent the LP shooting up the charts. "Helping" is an honest progression from the first album, and is more consistent (through at the expenses of earlier highs) than its predecessor,

with a much more confident tone. The single, the only tune recorded in Georgia, sets the tone: after the guitar intro, Ed King bellows "Turn it up" and the band ploughs into a Southern rebuttal to Neil Young's "Alabama" (tho it should be mentioned that the group has nothing but respect for Young). Other songs of note are "I Need You," a slow impassioned ballad sung with meaning, and the "Ballad of Curtiss Loew," a touching tale of an old dobro player. The band really cuts loose on "Swamp Fox," and turns in a credible performance on J.J. Cale's "Call Me The Breeze." The whole LP makes it though-loose spontaneity brings it home.

The most "progressive" (musically) of the new wave of rebel rockers is the Marshall Tucker Band, a 6-man outfit originally from Spartanburg, S.C. recording on the growing Capricorn label. Their music defies facile labelling, and comes across as a finely-honed blend of blues-flavored country rocked up a bit, with a close affinity to the land. The band's vision is akin to a rural utopia, close to nature and the earth, peopled by folks with pure hearts and uncorrupted minds; there's also a fair bit of the "gotta git back to my woman in Georgia" routine in the lyrics. While the tunes are simple enough, it's the way that the band explores every nuance, alley, and riff so thoroughly, and the way in which they do it instrumentally, that makes their music so engaging and worthwhile. Toy Caldwell (all kinds of guitars, chief writer) is the mainstay of this pack; his brother Tom keeps the rhythm section honest with his solid bass work. The sound on their first 2 LPs is wide-open and "equalized" - all instruments blend well, nothing predominates.

Released back in early '73, the first M.T. album is notable for its outstanding first side. With flutist Jerry Eubanks leading the charge, the band pull out all the plugs on "Take The Highway" (a truly memorable tune which some Virginia friends have informed me is a virtual anthem below the Mason-Dixon line), "Can't You See," and "Losing You." No matter how many times I listen to those tracks, they always sound fresh and full of life- great "screw the blues" music. "A New Life" is Tucker's 2nd album, and like Lynyrd's follow-up it's a more refined affair, shades of the debut reworked. It's also a more consistent album, with Side 2 working especially well. The group have a recently-released double album out now (studio and live), "Where We All Belong" which I haven't heard yet, but which oughta merit checking out.

Finally, we've got Hydra (the 3rd Capricorn group). A real surprise this bunch. Totally unlike any of the preceding bands, these 4 guys hit with a hard power-chorded rocker assault on their debut LP with scarcely a let-up. Incredible. Must be shades of the urban South-no fat cows or green pastures for this lot. Hard-edged guitar sound made distinctive by raw grits. Material fairly solid too, tho tends to run down a bit on flip side. "Glitter Queen," "It's So Hard," "Goin' Down" (by Don Nix) and "Let Me Down Easy" stand out as first class high energy ravers, while "Feel A Pain" and "Miriam" introduce some slower-paced subtlety into the fireworks. Watch out-this band's smokin'.

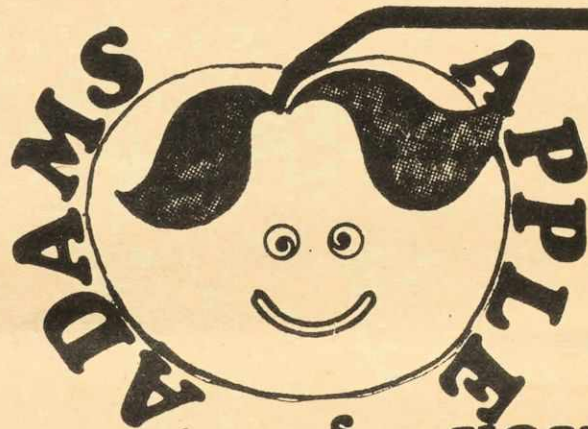
So there you have it-something good's happening down South rock-wise and it's catchin' on. With reason. All these bands have something to offer and deserve the recognition they're starting to get. And all are now due for new albums, which I'd guess should be hittin' sometime this Spring. Keep on smilin'.

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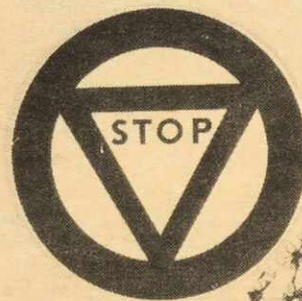
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