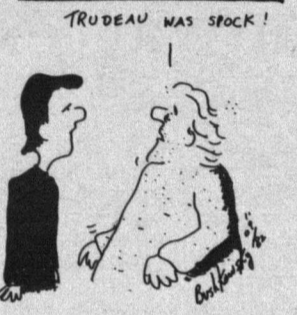


Gateway comix page

(The General's Message, Part 4)



THE WORLD WAS ABOUT TO END... SO I BUILT A SPACESHIP AND MANAGED TO ESCAPE WITH A HANDFUL OF CANADIANS...



Dire Straits' *Love Over Gold* ambitious and successful

by Nate LaRoi

My, are these chaps ambitious or what? Five songs and forty-two minutes of music - you can tell right off this isn't your ordinary pop album. "Dire Straits. Some things in life last longer than three minutes." That's the sales slogan. No kidding.

Back on *Communique*, Dire Straits learned an important lesson:

don't repeat what you've already done.

"A very naive person, namely me, tried to copy the first album," ex-English prof Mark Knopfler remembers.

Ever since, the venerable singer/songwriter/guitarist/producer has been shooting for the stars. The turning point was 1980's *Makin' Movies* where Mark took some

production tips from Jimmy Lovine and discovered keyboards through E Street Band pianist Roy Bittan. As drummer Pick Withers put it, "We wanted to pursue a more powerful, consistent, insistent course. It's a natural evolution (sic) from the polite little pocket we were in." "Having keyboards in the band has really opened things up quite a lot,"

bassist John Illsley adds. "It's made things much more interesting."

Mark Knopfler remains the focal point. But with Hal Lindes (rhythm guitar), John Illsley (bass), and Pick Withers (drums) providing a solid undercarriage and with new keyboardist Allan Clarke meeting Knopfler solo for solo, Dire Straits now sound much more like a band rather than a one-man show. Indeed, Knopfler and the boys have come a long way since the monochromatic R&B of *Dire Straits*, an album recorded in three weeks at a cost of only 15,000 pounds.

On *Love Over Gold* Dire Straits waste no time pulling out all the stops. The opening salvo - the 14 minute "Telegraph Road" - is a massive Springsteenish epic which romantically extolls the virtue of struggle against struggle, hope against hope:

But believe in me baby and I'll take you away

From out of this darkness and into the day

From these rivers of headlights, these rivers of rain

From the anger that lives on these streets with no name

Fourteen minutes is a long time to keep a song going but "Telegraph Road" turns the trick. From the rippling piano and magnificent orchestral textures that open it to the frantic drumming and "Free Bird"-like guitar jamming that close it, "Telegraph Road" equals or exceeds 1980's opus "Tunnel of Love".

Next comes the haunting "Private Investigations" where Knopfler's classical guitar sounds almost harp-like and where his husky Dylanesque voice drops to a whisper to take the part of an embittered detective:

I go checking out the reports-digging up the dirt

You get to meet all sorts in this line of work

Teachery and treason -there's always an excuse for it

And when I find the reason -I still can't get used to it

Understandably, side two of *Love Over Gold* suffers in comparison to side one. The leadoff cut, "Industrial Disease", is little more than a variant on "Solid Rock" and "Expresso Love" though it is at least chipper and playful ("Two men say they're Jesus/One of 'em must be wrong"). The placing of "Love Over Gold" back to back with "It Never Rains", also, nearly gets Knopfler and the boys in, er, dire straits. Both songs are so long and so similar that they sometimes slide out of focus (are these songs or a series of solos glued together?). What saves "Love Over Gold" is Knopfler's lovely jazz guitar which manages to squeeze every ounce of color and tone from every little note. "It Never Rains" is less successful, being somewhat annoying for its use of phase shifter (as if Knopfler needs such cheap use of technology!) and for its not-very-nice lyrics:

You never gave a damn about who you pick up

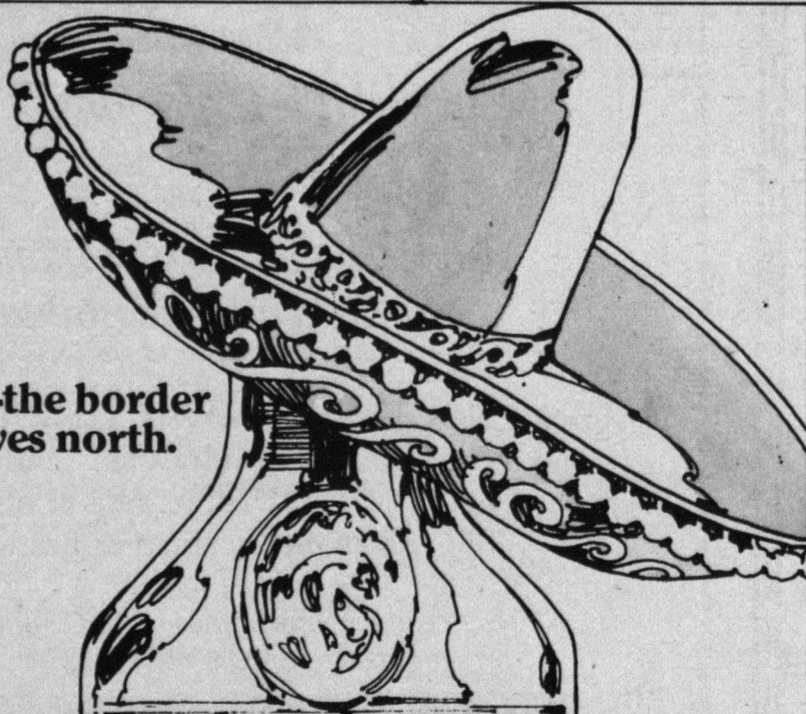
And leave laying bleeding on the ground

You screw people over on the way up

Because you thought you were never coming down

Sounds like something out of Dylan's "Positively Fourth Street". If you think comparisons to Springsteen and Dylan are going too far, that's your problem - as an all-around talent Knopfler is in the same league. Is *Love Over Gold* Dire Straits' finest album? Could be. Certainly it's their most daring, their most elaborate and their most uncompromising. To some extent I do miss the optimism and catchiness of *Makin' Movies*, however. In any case, I suspect that Mark Knopfler's real masterpiece is yet to come. In the meantime, though, *Love Over Gold* cuts through just about everything else on the radio like a bolt of lightning.

The south-of-the border taste moves north.



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