

**CHAGALL GUEVARA**

(Self-titled)

MCA

review by Beverley White

So I was hanging out in the choral room, after the Brunswick St. Baptist choir concert, with Heather Fyffe, see, and we bumped into Greg Page. Conversation sort of meanders until Greg says, "Go buy the Chagall Guevara tape." Me, I thought it was some sort of dictator's confession or a videotape of some painting. So I ask, "Cha-cha whoziwhatzis?" Never heard of them, see. Greg says, "It's Steve Taylor's new band." Well, I just about had a cow, people. Steve Taylor has got to be one of the best contemporary Christian artists around.

Hold up, secular folk! I know, I know, that category doesn't always call the best thoughts to mind. At this point, we have three or four artists that seem to rule the "gospel/contemporary Christian" racks: Sandi Patti, who appears to be owned by Disney; Amy Grant, who thinks she's Madonna; Micheal W. Smith, who thinks he's Amy Grant; and Petra, who (despite their high-quality melodies and highly touching and expressive lyrics) insist on defying their Eric Clapton-esque old sound ("Layla" and softer stuff alike) and evolving into Nelson. Occasionally, a rockin' bunch like One Bad Pig will meander in and release some overtly evangelistic items that make it out of the local bible bookstore and into the Radioland pop section, but they don't seem to go anywhere on the charts or into the secular record collections of typical mainstream youths who choose to follow other paths in life. You out there, you the agnostic with the Jane's Addiction fetish, tell me: would you go out and buy an overtly preachy album of your own accord? No? Didn't think so.

Steve Taylor has never fallen into the "let's swagger like Swaggart" music. Well, he did once, but everyone skips that CD track now anyway. His lyrics are far more metaphorical and more dangerous than the conservative would like to hear. Back in '89, for example, with Some Band on his *I Predict 1990* album, he assaulted us with some pretty interesting items that sounded like INXS with an edge: there was the story of the ice cream man who blew up an abortion clinic for dubious reasons, the student who learned to "Save face, nip and tuck/Praise yourself and pass the buck/And don't forget the best advice/Everybody's got a price" in the real world, the young woman who got addicted to psychoanalysis, and the souvenir hound who worshipped Jim Morrison. I don't think Amy Grant would go near this stuff.

With Chagall Guevara, Steve has adopted a new musical sound but retained the same bite. Chagall's is (I'm begging CHSR to forgive the label) the "alternative" guitar thing that more and more people are getting into, the punk thing tinged with good old Athens, Georgia rock. Remember when Men Without Hats turned their back on "Safety Dance" and the cheesy old synthesizers, only to pick up Rickenbackers and record "I Am The Walrus (No You're Not, Said Little Nicola)?" Same idea, only better. Virtually every blessed thing is electric guitar and driving drums. This is quite different for Taylor, the obvious central influence of the group, who previously showed a dependence on the old 100-voice tone bank.

Taylor himself is showing some newfound nuances. Where he would previously change vocal styles with EVERY SINGLE SONG (an inventive trick that occasionally got tiresome, like trying to sound like an inner-city gangsta in "Bad Rap" on his debut not-quite-LP, *I Want To Be A Clone*), now he sticks with the make-you-or-break-you raspy tenor that Bon Jovi's Jon, Petra's John Schlitt and (prepare to vomit) Bryan Adams have managed to exemplify (though Taylor, thankfully, does not stoop so low as to do everything he does for you). Though this

step could be misconstrued as OMIGOSH, AN ATTEMPT TO BREAK INTO THE MAINSTREAM, it serves him quite well for this material. Would you sing Faith No More's "Epic" with a mellifluous operatic intonation? Hope not!

Even with a bedreaded transfer to a \*heart attack\* secular label (from Myrrh to MCA), Taylor and company manage to maintain their integrity and faith, as shown in varied lyrics. Though some songs display an evident lack of spirituality (such as "The Wrong George," a primarily instrumental piece where band member David Perkins is overheard taking a call from an old lady who thinks he is Little Davie Perkins who grew up in Nashville), from every "George" there are umpteen songs like "Murder In The Big House," (an allegory to Planet Earth's imminent destruction of sorts and inevitable rebirth) and "Monkey Grinder," which alludes to Satan "swallowing...even a full grown fat man" like a snake. There is so much here with a scriptural basis that does not overwhelm you with standard cliches. They remain as accessible as ever (Taylor, even while on the Myrrh label, was very listenable for the non-spiritual person) but still make you think as much as ever.

Chagall Guevara has got to be the answer to all of this "candy-coating" that we seem to find in Christian music nowadays. They have wit, humor, meaning, and pretty rockin' music to boot. If you can find a copy, I don't care what faith or nonfaith you are, GET THIS TAPE.

Lest you still be doubting as to whether you want a tape by a Christian group, ask yourself: do I listen \*at all\* to U2 or Midnight Oil?

The stigma should dissipate if you answered "yes."

**Cliffy's Little-Known Facts and Statistics**

(Hey kids, you won't find these in the Guinness Book of World Records)

...eehh it's a little -known fact that:

- 1) The male of a particular species of whale has a penis approximately three feet wide at the base.
- 2) In New York City last year, the second largest source of bites sustained by citizens were given by other citizens. Dogs lead as the number one source.
- 3) If you took all the ball park franks sold in American and National League baseball games last year, there would be enough hot dog to spread a 1/2 inch thick meaty paste over the entire state of New Jersey.
- 4) If collected, a persons lifetime accumulated nocturnal pillow drool would be sufficient to fill an average bathtub, the trunk of a large Buick, and 147 pairs of tennis shoes.
- 5) If Elvis had lived, and continued to eat at the same rate of food consumption as before his death, he theoretically would have exploded by the age of 46 according to Weight Watcher's Journal.

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CHAGALL GUEVARA

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