



photo by A. S. Lamb

## Bloomin' best of the British Blues

by Alex Cramer

An American t.v. commentator once said that the only Britons in the United States were actors and Jaguar mechanics. Now we must consider the influx of British blues musicians to this continent.

Getting to the Point (Parrot) is actually Savoy Brown's second album, but the only one released in Canada. This band has been reformed with several personnel changes. The new Savoy Brown is somewhat funkier than the original group, and its name (which comes from an English mustard) pretty well describes the pungent blues it offers.

Of the nine selections on the album, the best one, Give Me A Penny, features a searing but brief guitar instrumental. Flood in Houston, while an original, resembles somewhat Hooker's Natchez Flood. The final number, You Need Love, ends an lp worth hearing.

Another excellent British blues group is Chicken Shack (Epic). Though consisting of only four musicians including a girl vocalist-pianist, this band gives us a rich sound. The blues Chicken Shack presents has been influenced primarily by Freddy King. Lead singer and guitarist

Stan Webb plays remarkably in the King fashion, and indeed he does three of the latter's songs.

In addition, Webb has such a high-pitched voice, that at emotional peaks he can outreach Buddy Guy or B. B. King. Christine Perfect, the pianist, sings two moving songs which she wrote. Her singing is more subdued than that of Janis Joplin and very bluesy nonetheless. There is not one mediocre song on this flawless album. Stan Webb's guitar, especially can change a mournful mood to something that scorches your ears off.

The King of British Blues is unquestionably John Mayall, who has had the greatest impact on white blues. Indeed without Mayall it is difficult to imagine where we would be at now.

With his latest album, Bare Wires (London), Mayall makes the most dramatic departure from his earlier approach. Side one consists of Bare Wires, an autobiographical suite of songs which are linked thematically and chronologically to a period in Mayall's life.

On this album he has extended the range of traditional blues. The lyrics are truly extraordinary and reach a new height of artistic creativity. If you've ever wronged a girl, then watch out,

because by the second number of the album, I Started Walking, you'll break. After Mayall peels off your skin, guitarist Mick Taylor goes to work on you, stitching you with a torrent of notes that seem like needles aimed at your heart. It is a form of punishment, made all the worse by saxophones that blow your guts out.

Side two is just as good as the Bare Wires suite and the main theme of the numbers here concerns the feelings Mayall sends out to girls who don't pick them up. In laying bare his soul to the audience, Mayall seems to be saying "Look at me; now look at yourself." So powerful is his poetry and music that we can't escape it. The Bare Wires album is like a mirror we must face if we want to get a glimpse of ourselves. Buy it and look, and remember what Mayall says: "But don't stare at the mirror too long — or you'll get cut by the pieces of splintered glass!" It reminds me of Bergman's Hour of the Wolf, and indeed that is exactly what you'll experience when listening to Bare Wires.

This winter no fewer than four British blues bands, Ten Years After, Fleetwood Mac, Savoy Brown and John Mayall himself will be at the rock pile. You can't afford to miss them.

## Theatre Toronto premieres Edward II

by David Schatzky

Take an unimportant play, direct it sloppily, design it badly, and perform it mediocly, and chances are you will come up with Theatre Toronto's Edward II.

This underwritten play, by Christopher Marlowe concerns a homosexual king and his fall from power. Theatre Toronto neglects to play that theme. William Hutt, an admirable actor, has chosen to portray Edward as a sincere, rather dumb man, whose "sexual" is "a" rather than "homo."

The object of his affections, Peter Marinker, gives a spotty portrayal, sometimes fawning, sometimes snotty, occasionally fiery, sometimes degenerate, but these facets spring at us undeveloped and unconnected with the previous action.

Robert Christie, who usually makes his living as Sir John A., is disappointing as Lancaster (perhaps he had the flue), but more successful later in the play as the comic Gurney, the treach-

erous executioner's aide. He must have taken an aspirin in the intermission.

Joseph Shaw, one of Toronto's most experienced and genuinely talented men looks only funny as Mortimer and is one-dimensional.

Brian Petchey, recently well-known because of his work in Black Comedy continues to show promise with a solid performance, as does Susan Bell, King Edward's attractive niece.

Richard Monette, since starting his professional career as Hamlet at the Crest a few years back, still lacks presence.

The two most effective contributions to this production are made by Moya Fenwick as Isabella, Edward's ignored wife, and by the terrific Heath Lamberts, always first-rate, as the Executioner. Miss Fenwick is stylish and touching, but more important, provides some electricity in the scenes which she plays with her husband.

The costumes and scenery are ugly, impractical, and unevocative. The men wear hush-puppies. An anachronism, wot? The lighting is pedestrian, and sometimes

not even that. The music: too obviously recorded and not alive or dramatic. All in all, the design hinders the mood and reality of a play that could have a simple grandeur sliding into slimy decay. All we get is tattiness.

The direction failed to bring out the tension, the irony, or the subtle overtones of a degenerate power structure. Taken that Edward was a blazing faggot, and that he lost his throne for mainly that reason, why didn't the scene in which he meets his end (if you'll pardon the expression) have more chilling guts? His death comes at the hands of a paid Mr. Joyboy assassin who rams a hot poker down the royal anus. So Edward dies as he lived. Unfortunately, my description has 100 times the power of the performance.

Let's hope, for the audience's sake alone, that Theatre Toronto starts to think in terms of quality and style, and rejects stodginess and uninspirational plodding. Theatre has enough competition from film, even when it's good. It hasn't got a chance if it forgets to take its Geritol.

## MAUD'S

### R. reviews riotous religious rock

by Richard Levine

R: Maud, seductive girl in the mauve minidress, this week I want to play some religious rock music.

MAUD: In Founder's coffee shop?

R: Of course, it has a stereo. I've got two overlooked albums here by the Electric Prunes, Mass in F Minor, and The Kol Nidre, both on the Reprise label.

MAUD: Are you kidding?

R: No. You recall the Electric Prunes' 1967 hit, "I Had too Much To Dream Last Night." Unfortunately, their first album was bad. The tunes were jarring and the voices were even out of tune. But their two recent albums are excellent. They are a very exciting innovation in rock music. The albums have the traditional quality of sacred music, the spontaneity of jazz and the modern, vital feel of rock.

MAUD: (mildly bouncing) Well, let me have them. Here, I'll just go behind the coffee counter, take off "Solid Gold Soul" and play "Mass in F Minor."

COFFEE HOUSE CROWD: Hey you, girl, turn off that lousy religion music.

R: (undaunted, raising his hand) My friends, let her be. Let he who is without sin cast the first donut.

CROWD: Mutter, mutter.

R: Musically illiterate mob...

Maud, the brilliance of this rock mass lies in an exceptional use of electric guitars and a rock beat. Listen to Kyrie Eleison:

Kyrie eleison

Christe eleison

Throughout the album, the melody lines are basically the same as in the original hymns. In this hymn, violin and guitar start out slowly, then bam-bam, a drum lays on a strong, simple beat that pulls you into the music. And the organ is never as overpowering or egotistical as in the Procul Harum. How does it sound to you?

MAUD: It sounds sacreligious.

ADAM APPLE: (suddenly appearing with a chocolate doughnut) I heard that! And for once, R. is right. I've been listening to this music, and I think that the Prunes do attempt to uplift the listener. Certainly, it is possible to write pop songs that ridicule religious feeling. The Fugs parodied Christe Eleison, you know.

But sarcasm is cowardly because the perpetrator protects himself from scorn. After all, he's in on the joke. A sincere re-telling of the Catholic mass, however, is an act of faith. And since it leaves the musician open to ridicule and hurt, it's also an act of love.

MAUD: Sniff. Oh, Adam, you say it so beautifully.

R: Very interesting, Adam. Perhaps that's why some people say that the best of pop music is like that, and deserves to be in churches and synagogues, because the musicians are playing what they really believe in.

MAUD: R, there's dust on the record.

R: Sorry. Anyway, I don't

want to discuss the philosophy behind all this, just the reasons the music is good.

You'll hear what I mean on the Kol Nidre album. This prayer is the most sacred part of the Jewish New Year service. This part is from the Closing Hymn, one of the best things on the album. The beginning consists of simple chords, slowly repeated on viols and an organ. Then, the lead guitar works its way around the leading and tonic notes, then takes off in an exciting leap from tonic to dominant, reproducing exactly the soaring heights and changes of the cantor's voice. I'd play it on Founders piano — here but I still couldn't reproduce the subtle note changes possible on an electric guitar. Powerful, masculine music, the guitar plays an unadorned melody line, moving from one unresolved note to another. It has the onrushing force of Beethoven.

MAUD: Beethoven?

R: That's not a bad comparison. Beethoven took the Kol Nidre for one of his Adagios, you know.

The best thing is the single-minded beat of the drum. It's never pervasive, but the rhythms are always there to unite the disparate elements of the music. Even the occasional drum solo plays an integral part, not like Ginger Baker's drum-work on the Cream's "Wheels of Fire" album. His solos were simply vehicles for his virtuosity, and the music suffered.

MAUD: Wait, before you put them away, I noticed something in that last hymn. Let me play it.

We have sinned

Help us

C'mon and help us.

Yes, that's it. Did you notice the slang?

R: Yes, that's the pop music language in a religious setting. You could even listen more closely to the pop songs on the radio. Some people say that the Bee Gees latest song, "I Started a Joke," is about Jesus Christ. The line

I finally died

And started the whole world living reflects the maning of the crucifixion, and

I fell out of my bed

Hurting my head

With things that I said

means the fall of man. It's certainly a macabre way of explaining the motives behind Christianity (starting it as a joke). But it's a religious song, nonetheless.

MAUD: Well, R, I'd better be going now.

R: And furthermore, Maud, the Doors' song, "When the Music's Over," on the "Strange Days" album, contains the clear plea,

Save us, Jesus, save us!

(thinking) Say, maybe there's more to this than I thought. Don't you agree, Maud? Maud?

The Electric Prunes, Mass in F Minor, R 6275 (Reprise)

RS 6275

Kol Nidre, RS 6316 (Reprise)

