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by Mark Teehan

**MOTT the HOOPLE "LIVE"** [columbia]. When these guys came out with "Mott" in the Fall of '73, it looked like they had put it all together. The English band that has started out synthesizing Dylan and the Stones had evolved into a finely-honed outfit capable of putting out excellent pop-rock with a hard edge. Paydirt at last. One of the best rock LPs of that year, "Motto" featured solid material, incisive lyrics, spirited playing, and sterling production (some folks think it's *too* perfect). With vocalist Ian Hunter firmly in control, the band chalked up rocker delights like "All The Way From Memphis", "Drivin' Sister" and connected just as effectively on softer ballads like "Ballad of Mott the Hoople." The extended instrumental improvisation featured on "I'm A Cadillac/El Camino Dolo Roso" and the Dylanesque flair of "I Wish I Was Your Mother" made the album's end a memorable one. Thematically, the album dealt cleverly with the ironies, hassles, and anxieties experienced by rock groups, but at the same time managed to transcend them, to see beyond it all. Their ability to communicate this thru the medium of an album was of course derived from the band's checkered career during the previous 4 years, when they had struggled thru 4 LPs and almost broken up before the Bowie-produced savior, "All The Young Dudes."

Since "Mott" things have not gone all that well for the group. First there was the departure of guitarist Mick Ralphs and organist Verdon Allen; both split because of Hunter's growing domination of the group, on record and stage, and in the case of Ralphs, because a "flashier" guitarist was wanted to counterpoint Hunter's concert antics. So Ariel Bender joined up, but all his flash couldn't hide the fact that something had been lost - Ralphs could (and still does with Bad Co.) impart real feeling with his playing.

Then came last year's late-Spring release of the group's 7th LP, "The Hoople." (clever titles, huh?). Definitely an unlucky disappointment. While Side 1 fared OK, floating above the surface on the strength of cuts like "Marionette" and "Alice" (again with a strong dose of '66 Dylan), the second side sank badly under the weight of Hunter's self-conscious posturing and the mediocrity of the material. One could better understand why Ralphs and Allen had split. Now, for the past few months the group has garnered all sorts of news coverage with Bender's departure and replacement by Mick Ronson; in mid-Nov. Hunter suffered a physical collapse/breakdown (too much "rock star" craziness?) and at last word was confined to bed-rest for about 6 weeks. Although the band was forced to scrap their UK winter tour, plans for a new studio album in Jan. were reportedly unaffected. Which all means that right about now, something should start to happen. Hopefully Hunter will recover OK, but only time will tell if they can put the pieces back together (assuming the whole outfit doesn't disband, as some people have been suggesting).

But in the interim we are left

(confronted?) with this "Live" album, one of those strange beasts to be suspicious of. Sniff carefully. To be honest, I was looking forward to this, having heard how incredible the group was live and how heard (admittedly in slightly clipped form) good things from Hunter and Co. on "Rock Concert." OK, we'll lay it on the line: "Mott Live" is **disappointing** in the sense that it doesn't really capturing the spirit and energy which the group is supposedly full of on stage. Maybe the group wasn't in top form when these gigs - at Hammersmith (Side 2) and on Broadway (Side 1) - were recorded. But you can bet your loose booties that the sound system they used, and the ensuring mix-production job leave a lot to be desired. A "Full House" this is not. The **sound is muddy-sluggy**, with little bottom and not much distinction. And, as English reviewers have pointed out, Bender's axe work is nothing to rave about and should have been buried a little deeper in the mix on a few occasions. But all this said (aside from squabbles over selections and other fine points), the LP is not a total loss, and with careful cue-cutting could make an OK party record. I've heard worse so-called "live" albums. It's just that Mott are capable of so much more, and most of the time they don't improve much on their original performances. So what's the point of it all? Sniff sniff.

Side 1 is strange. It could have been a killer-except for "Sucker," the choice of material is good. But either the sound falls apart (like on "Memphis") or the band's performance adds almost nothing to the original version (as in the case of "Dudes" - that could have been a real highpoint). The only tracks where the group sounds halfway alive/together are "Rest IN Peace" (simple enough slow ballad, but Hunter's vocals and Mick Bolton's cascading organ work make it interesting) and "Walking With A Mountain" (slashing Chuch Berry - styled rocker).

Side 2 is where you get your rocks off, thanks to the spirited Medley ending the whole affair. You'll probably be better off though skipping the first 2 cuts: "Sweet Angeline" is ruined by some Hunter jiving with the audience (the version on "Brain Capers" cuts this by a mile) and "Rose" is just a weak tune-lousy selection. But all is saved on the 16-min. Medley, a continual high energy rocker assault where the band really clicks. On "Jerkin' Crocus," "One of the Boys" and "Rock And Roll Queen" the goods are delivered (though I prefer "Queen's studio cousin). With "Get Back" and "Whole Lotta Shakin'" things falter a bit, but that just makes the hard-charging "Violence" sound all the better.

For Mott though, that's cutting it too close. Mott freaks will probably eat this up, but unless you've got some loose bread to burn, you're better off taping "Mountain," "Peaches," and the medley from a friend. Otherwise, if you want a superb, natural-sounding orgy of hard-edged rock, dip into the group's "Brian Capers" album. I guarantee that you won't be disappointed. If you want more finesse, then "Mott's" the answer. "Mott Live" most certainly isn't.