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Black Sea murky

by G. Forsyth

XTC is a popular English new wave-punk-pop band who started out in 1973 as the long-haired **Helium Kids**, playing local clubs in their native Swindon, about 80 miles west of London. The band changed its name to **XTC** in 1976 during the nascent burgeoning of the English punk music scene. They released two well-received albums in Britain—**White Music and Go 2**.

Their first U.S. release was **Drums and Wires**, last year's immensely popular album that boasted the sinister single "Making Plans for Nigel". Other stand-out tunes included another single "Life Begins at the Hop", the euphoric "Ten Feet Tall", and "When You're Near Me I Have Difficulty", the closest they've come to a love song. **Drums and Wires**, like so many third albums, consolidated, refined, and thus defined the band's musical style—quirky, sprung rhythms, smooth vocals, and enough

buried melodic hooks to please the most ardent McCartney fan. And, wonders of wonders, all in a punk new wave band! The music critics here gushed over **Drums and Wires**; at last, here was a punk band that appealed to rock critics' sensibilities, music that was slightly intellectual, cold, aloof, socially conscious, and yet tuneful to boot. In other words, **XTC** is, in North America's eyes, eccentric but palatable punk.

I think fans of **Drums and Wires** will be disappointed with **XTC**'s newest release, **Black Sea**. The new album sorely lacks the pop highs of songs like "Making Plans for Nigel", probably because the author of the best songs on **Drums and Wires**, bassist Colin Moulding, only contributes two tunes here, neither of which are up to past standards. None of the songs on this album has the pop melodiousness and accessibility that jumps out at you on first listen. Instead, **Black Sea** is distinctly downbeat, the music is dense, moody,

gloomy, and pessimistic on several numbers, particularly the apocalyptic "Travels to Nihilon". The upbeat songs sound deceptively cheerful, as if the smiles are forced and the words sung through gritted teeth. This is **not** a fun album.

However, the fact that **Black Sea** is not as immediately likeable as **Drums and Wires** does not mean it isn't as good; it's just **different**. Rather than pursuing the more commercial sound of **Drums and Wires**, **XTC** has instead decided to accentuate its eccentricity with a more honest but painful follow-up album. I doubt **Black Sea** will sell as well, and I see no potential chart-topping singles here either. As an owner of **Drums and Wires**, I wouldn't buy **Black Sea**, especially at the ridiculous price of \$9 that Kelly's is selling it for. I'd wait until it goes on sale, at least.

By the way, the black shrinkwrap on the album is just an artsy conceit—it's not hiding any porn pics on the cover a la Roxy Music's **Country Life**.

The Concert for Bangladesh



by Ian Holloway

Today, the field of pop music literally abounds with concerts for charity. One need only witness the recent no-nukes extravaganza, and 1979's concert for UNICEF. As is to be expected when dealing with pop music though, it was a Beatle who pioneered this idea.

The idea for such a concert was first put to George by his sitar mentor, Ravi Shankar. Being from what was formerly East Pakistan, Shankar was deeply distressed by the rampant famine and disease ravaging his homeland. He asked Harrison if there was not anything he could do about it, and George replied with the concert.

Like all post-breakup Beatle happenings, rumours abounded of a reunion. Unfortunately, this served to reveal the seamier side of the Beatles' affairs. McCartney would only agree to perform if the other Beatles would agree to a quick settlement of their

court case, and the whole thing fell through. Only the ever faithful Ringo managed to appear. Oh well, it was thought, two Beatles were better than one.

Harrison more than made up for his mates' absence, however, in his stellar presentation. It featured such greats as Eric Clapton, Billy Preston (who had played with both the Beatles on "Let It Be", and the Rolling Stones), the white blues master Leon Russell, the Apple group Badfinger, Klaus Voorman, the aforementioned Ringo Starr, and the demigod Bob Dylan.

The album, a triple record set, opens with a side of Indian music as performed by Ravi Shankar and friends. Unfortunately, most of his fans didn't share Harrison's love of the sitar and tabla, and he had to exhort the audience to be serious and to try to get into the music.

Side 2 is a pop gospel side with Harrison playing three of his own compositions, 'Wah-

Wah', the immensely popular 'My Sweet Lord', and 'Awaiting On You All'. It ends with Billy Preston playing 'That's The Way God Planned It'. The third side opens with what some argue to be the best post-breakup Beatle cut of all, Ringo's 'I Don't Come Easy'. It is also on the third side that Harrison introduces the performers. He mentions that quite a few of the players had cancelled previous engagements to make the concert, **for no pay at all!** Understandably Ringo draws the biggest applause.

Side five is without a doubt the album's climax. To the surprise and delight of the audience, George announces; "I'd like to bring out a friend of us all, Mr. Bob Dylan". Totally unexpected, Dylan performed what is arguably the best live Dylan ever. He took the audience back in time as he played 'A Hard Rain's A Gonna Fall', 'It Takes A Lot To

Continued on page twenty four