

# Nick Gilder sings Rock America

by Gisèle Marie Baxter

Caught between romance and the computer age, between passion and fear of dehumanization, Nick Gilder takes his recognizable sound into a sharp, energetic (if at times annoyingly trendy) new album. **Rock America** is uneven and seems unnecessarily derivative in places, but has some moments of distinctive value.

Through his solo albums, Gilder's voice has toned down from the snarky little whine of his days with Sweeney Todd; by now it has a quirky vulnerability reminiscent of Bob Geldof or Gary Numan, who is also reflected in the themes of this record. Derived or not, some of Gilder's best vocal work to date is here, and the production, though sometimes excessive, has a tight energy and flair. This is definitely a Nick Gilder album, but the sound has echoes of the Boomtown Rats' last effort and the Cars' first.

As usual, there is good use made of background vocals, and Gilder is accompanied by some fine musicians. The coordination of the keyboards and synthesizers (handled by Jamie Herndon) and the percussion (Jimmy Hunter) is extraordinary, and gives the best songs a special electricity.

The future approaches Gilder with a growing power to

dehumanize, and he searches for the possibility of human action and excitement ("Wild Ones"), and love, even obsession ("Night Comes Down"). Music becomes his image for this future shock in the title track, which indicates that the tension between passion and the future menace exists because both have a sort of electricity, and electricity seems quite attractive to Gilder. He is most at home on the city streets at night—lovely women might travel in chic society, but their world is too plastic, too trendy, and too conformist.

There are songs on this record which convey all this quite effectively, and are entertaining as well: "I've Got Your Number" is a strong, clean rocker with a perceptive lyric, and "Catch 22", quite unexpectedly, counters powerhouse drumming with a neat, scratchy, ska-flavoured guitar line which, at the end of the song, backs Gilder's hollow, desperate rendition of the chorus very well. However, there is one truly exceptional track, which is also the first single.

"Wild Ones (Feeling Electric)" is Gilder's best song of the night streets since "Watcher of the Night", from "Frequency". This song attempts to convey a tension which falls between the epic

glory of Bruce Springsteen's "Born to Run" and the beautiful icy terror of Gary Numan's "Down in the Park". Maybe it's not perfectly successful, but it has at times an almost surrealistic sense of vision, and employs excellent, evocative synthesizer lines throughout, with fine drumming and the most successful lyric on **Rock America**: "Action! Action! / Wherever it takes you / The feeling's electric . . .

I'll take another step forward and fade into time / There might be nothing else anywhere but this moment, it's mine / And I'm taking it.

Nick Gilder and co-composer/guitarist James McCulloch have mastered the problem of finding a sound which causes instant recognition in the listener, and "Wild Ones" (and a couple of other tracks) indicate that they can develop within that sound. Yet they need more variance: other than "Night Comes Down" and "Catch 22", the songs are inevitably tight, hard, rock 'n' roll numbers. The lyrics need more of the stark, strong sense of image found in "Wild Ones"—they tend to veer dangerously close to bubblegum pop. All the same, I have a sneaky feeling Gilder's going to surprise us with the next album—and we'll find the electricity quite attractive ourselves.

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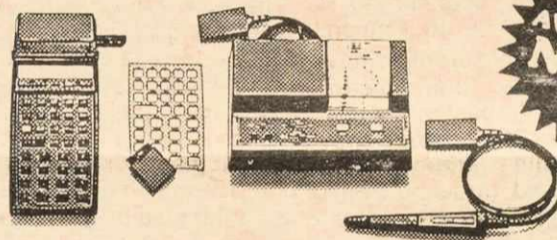
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# Surprise beyond the stars

by Michael McCarthy

**Battle Beyond the Stars** is a surprisingly well-made and entertaining movie of the science-fiction genre currently popular thanks to the success of **Star Wars** et al. If you like this type of film, then this movie should be right up your cosmos. A low-budget enterprise, it is not as glossy as the recent million dollar blockbusters nor is its plot very original, but the special effects are good enough that probably only a true aficionado (which I am not) would find them appreciably less realistic, and the retreaded story lines are borrowed from so many different predecessors that it is unlike any of the originals, and almost seems new.

The cast features several figures who, alone, are only marginally remarkable, but who together make an interesting and quite capable unit, although the acting is less important than the plot and the visual offerings.

Richard Thomas gives an amiable characterization of a youth in search of mercenaries to defend his war-ignorant

planet against an invasion. He avoids sentimentality but is thorough enough to be more than just a superfluous cardboard figure, and the script calls for him to demonstrate his inability to convey extreme emotion only once. Aging, paunchy George Peppard is amusing as an off-beat, alcoholic, anti-hero space-cowboy who becomes unwillingly involved. Robert Vaughn gives the best performance of the movie as a terse, fabulously wealthy but universally hunted paid assassin who joins up for a meal and a place to hide, and almost attains a tragic person. Shallow, mechanical John Saxon, who makes a living out of these bargain-basement films, almost hits the mark as the evil antagonist Sador. Tossed in are a number of humanoid creatures such as a lizard-man, a fascinating quintet of clones with one consciousness, two little chaps who communicate by giving off heat from their little bodies, and an onslaught of other lifeforms which appear frequently enough to keep things inter-

esting and other-worldly.

There are variously designed spaceships, including one that thinks; a world-destroying weapon; multiple battle scenes with ray-blips, disintegrations and heroics; and even a mildly funny android. Not only is the result visually captivating, but the dialogue is usually intelligent and the script includes several meaningful social issues which complement the visual effects. In fact, it is almost impossible to believe that Roger Corman and New World Pictures finally managed to produce a film that doesn't reek of reused film footage, blatantly mimicked plots, laughable acting and ludicrous props/effects. But here it is, in ethereal colour.

If you didn't like science fiction before, you probably won't be swayed by this movie: but if you are a fan, or are looking for a diversion for the children, **Battle Beyond the Stars** will give you an engaging 90 minutes of enjoyment. □

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