

Records In Review

Hoodoo Gurus ho hum

By SIOBHAN McRAE

The Hoodoo Gurus are a fairly new Australian band whose first album, *Stoneage Romeos*, has been picked up by A&M for North American distribution. *Stoneage Romeos* isn't a bad record but it does have one major problem, one that is all too common on major record labels—the music has been obviously tailored for a commercial radio market. Not that Hoodoo Gurus are as bad as your typical radio fare. The band has the potential to become a good, although not great, pop band.

Supposedly the Hoodoo Gurus started out with a fairly raw and noisy sound that got their first single some airplay on "alternative" radio stations.

Then they were picked up by a prominent Australian label and subsequently acquired Alan Thorne as a producer. Thorne made his name as an engineer with such bland Australian bands as Air Supply. With that sort of background he was obviously wrong for this type of band.

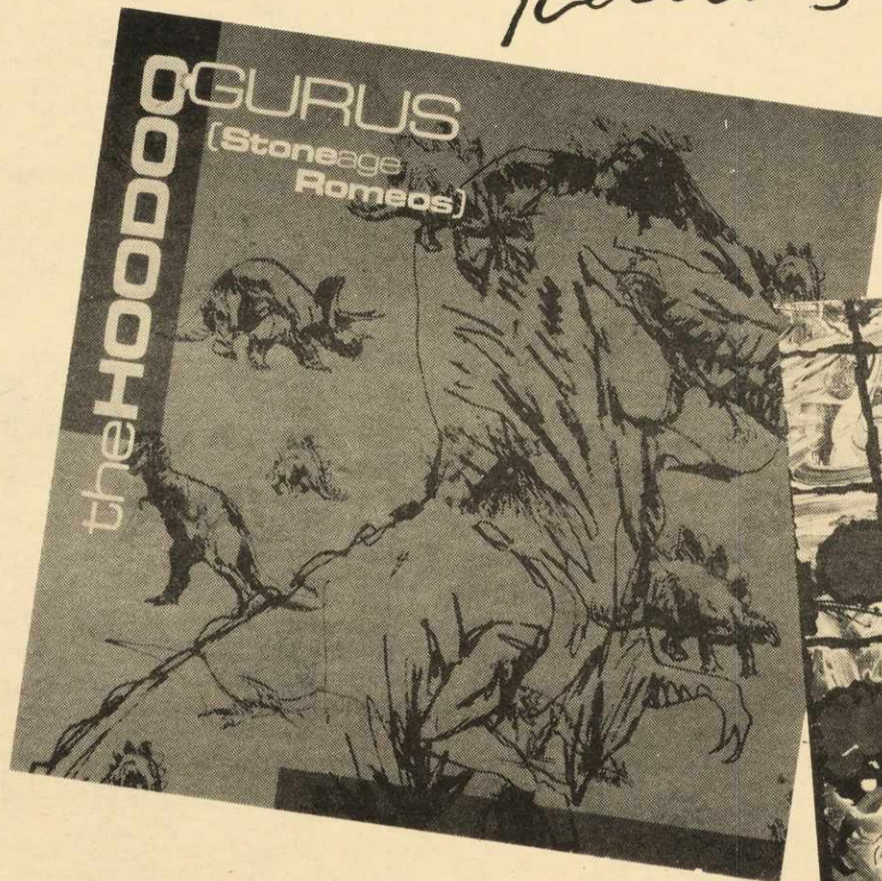
The production is too clean and smooth and, at times, quite overblown. It's only on a few cuts on the album that we get a hint of what the Hoodoo Gurus must have originally sounded like, most notably on "In the Echo Chamber" where the band breaks loose a bit from the controlled studio sound.

The Hoodoo Gurus discount any comparisons of their music with that of other bands but there are some very obvious and direct influences present on this record. Their strongest influence is that of mid-sixties American east coast and mid-western garage bands (i.e. The Blues Magoos, the McCoys). Another, more regrettable, influence is that of early commercial glitter rock and power pop music (i.e. Gary Glitter, Suzi Quatro).

The lyrics on the album are frivolous and unconvincing. Quite often they're on a "teenage" theme but they lack the youthful energy of bands that have taken that road before them (i.e. The Buzzcocks, The Undertones).

If you wanted to lump the Hoodoo Gurus into a "new music" category you could put them in with such bands as the Dream Syndicate, R.E.M. or the Violent Femmes. But they can't really be put in the same class.

However, if the Hoodoo Gurus acquired a better producer, focused their musical interests and added a bit more originality and energy to their material then they might be a band to take note of. □



Hollywood Holiday rough diamond

By BARRY WALSH

When Georgia's R.E.M. burst upon the music world in 1983, critics, consumers, and radio programmers all seemed to eagerly embrace the return to the basics that R.E.M. and others like them seemed to represent. The guitar-oriented approach was a welcome change from the world of synthesizers, drum machines, and monotone vocals that permeated the playlists previously.

While R.E.M.'s back-to-the-basics approach is working quite nicely for them, there are still other bands who maintain the same direct, no-nonsense approach to making music, yet take it one step further. These bands retain the hard-edged sound that made them distinctive in the first place. They stay true to their 'roots', yet go beyond them. One such band is True West.

True West is one of the finer bands to emerge out of the West Coast since 'X'. All of the members of the band were leading figures in the underground pop scene that was centered in Davis, California, in the late 70's.

Starting with the Twin Keyz, the Davis underground scene began to flourish as new bands such as The Mumbles, The Suspects, and Permanent Wave came to be. Out of these bands, True West emerged. Each member of True West was a prominent figure in the California underground music world before True West, yet it is with this band that the initial ripples of success are being created.

Judging by their debut album on Passport records, *Hollywood Holiday*, I'd say that it won't be long before those ripples become waves.

It is interesting to note that Tom Verlaine of Television—perhaps one of the most prominent groups

to emerge from the New York underground circuit of the mid-70's, recorded three tracks with True West prior to this album. Indeed, the spirited songs on *Hollywood Holiday* share the abrasive quality that was present in Television's finest works. The rough edges are kept intact throughout each and every cut on the album.

In fact, certain songs sound perhaps a bit too rough. On *I'm Not Here*, Gavin Blair's vocals sound as if they were phoned in from the next building. However, this does not detract from the song—indeed, in some peculiar way, it adds to the rough beauty of the song and makes it a true standard cut.

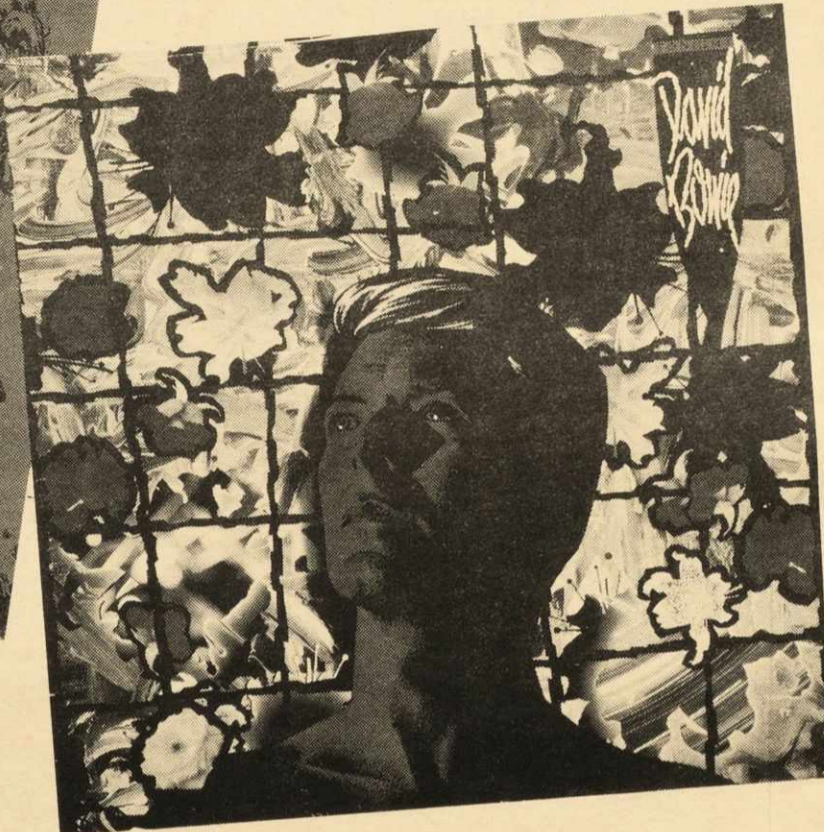
True West's influences shine through on this album like sunlight through a curtain. One can detect shades of The Yardbirds, Television, and even Pink Floyd. As a matter of fact, True West performs a fine cover of Pink Floyd's *Lucifer Sam* which may be worth the price of the album itself—well, maybe not that much.

True West takes elements from their influences and seemingly improves upon them. Gavin Blair's vocals can be airy and light (*Lucifer Same, You*), or they can be disciplined and menacing (*I'm Not Here, It's About Time*).

Guitarists Russ Tolman and Richard McGrath provide melodic lines and seem to have exacted the Yardbirds' sound with both the jangly, breathy chords and the piercing lead lines that made them one of the more distinctive bands of their day.

Unfortunately, bassist Kevin Staydohar and drummer Joe Beclar seem to have suffered in the final mix. To preserve the garage sound that is present, producers Tolman and Steve Wynn have opted to reduce the bass to a thudding reverberating plunk and the

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Bowie LP unimaginative

By JANICE WALSH

The question which inevitably arises in the minds of Bowie followers each time the man finishes one project and begins another is "What will he do this time?" He has been everything from the asexual Ziggy Stardust to the addicted astronaut, Major Tom. Usually his music has involved elements of his personal life, his love of the theatrical, and his unequalled creativity.

Note that the first word in the last sentence is "usually". This word has been used because with Bowie's latest album *Tonight*, none of the above statements describing his music are applicable. Basically the album is unimaginative, hardly theatrical in a musical sense, and if Bowie did draw from his personal life for material for this one, the life of this superstar must be getting boring.

The album does begin with a great song, "Loving the Alien", written recently by Bowie. The song deals with the man's negative opinion about religion:

*Torture comes and torture goes
Knights who'd give you
anything*

*They bear the cross of Couer de
Leon
Salvation for the mirror blind.*

This, as well as three later songs, are lyrically the only songs on the album fit to bear Bowie's name.

Of course, this can be explained by the fact that the two worst songs on the album weren't even written

by Bowie. 'God Only Knows' was written by Brian Wilson and Tony Asher and 'I Keep Forgetting' was written by two other 'fine' lyricists, Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoeller. Although Bowie's voice is one reason to listen to the former song, it is not enough to excuse the waste of album space for which these songs are responsible.

Two of the other mistakes on the album are 'Don't Look Down' and 'Tonight'. Both songs were chiefly written by Iggy Pop and both sound like Bob Marley assisted in writing the music (they were written in the 1970's). There is an evident reggae sound to these songs which is not Bowie's style. If he is again attempting to develop a new style in his music, he should pan this one. Anyone who can play a marimba could imitate this style. Actually, Bowie and Iggy themselves seem to be imitating, to a certain extent, an already worn and much-copied form of music. Even Tina Turner's presence on 'Tonight' does not give the song any punch.

'Neighborhood Threat', written by Bowie and Pop in 1977, is the only return of the old Bowie on the album. The urgent synthesizer background, Bowie's raw voice, and lyrics such as:

*You're so surprised he don't run
to catch your ash
Everybody always wants to kiss
your trash.*

make this one of the exceptions on this basically bad album.

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