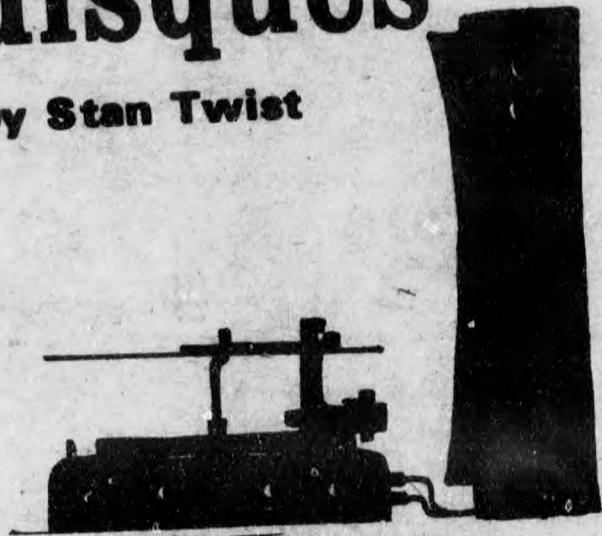


disques

by Stan Twist



FACING FACTS ABOUT BLIND HORSES

The Faces have become a major rock band in the last few months, owing greatly to the success achieved by Rod Stewart's single "Maggie May", one of the biggest selling records of 1971. As soon as the kids realized that Rod Stewart was also the lead singer for the Faces, concert attendance for the band went up and up, till now they're among the biggest, if not the biggest, touring rock group in the world.

The Faces, judging from all reports, give an excellent live performance, dressing gaudily and dancing spontaneous jigs all about the stage. Their concerts never fail to bring down the house and most of the critics love them, if only for the good feeling they project. But alas, the Faces have yet to put out an album worthy of their concert reputation.

The Faces were known as The Small Faces for years till Ron Wood and Rod Stewart, both ex-members of the Jeff Beck Group, replaced Steve Marriott, who is now leader of Humble Pie. The Small Faces were always highly regarded in Britain for their well written songs, usually by Marriott and Ronny "Plunk" Lane, and their great live performances. When Marriott left the band, they lost more than just a great singer and songwriter, they lost a leader. And they've yet to find one.

If it's one thing that the Faces music has lacked on any one of their three LPs it's a sense of direction. All members of the band are extremely talented, no doubt about that, but the music just seems to wander about with no purpose of

ultimate goal. Rod Stewart's solo albums don't suffer from this ailment, with Stewart and/or Wood in complete control of proceedings on them. So it's not as if Stewart or Wood lack the ability to be leaders, it seems more a case of wanting to be a leader. Stewart has always expressed the opinion that the Faces are a very loose band and that there is no need of a leader, but I beg to differ. A leader doesn't have to be a domineering egotist, as the myth goes, but a leader should serve as a focal point, a gatherer of opinions, an organizer. And from all the indications in the Faces music, their sense of direction is about equivalent to that of a blind horse in a maze (perhaps the significance of the title of their latest).

Another major problem the Faces have had on their three LPs is production. Muddy would be a mild word in describing the clarity of the sound on their First post-Marriott LP "First Step". Despite the deplorable production, there were a couple of great tunes, such as "Flying", "Wicked Messenger" and "Around the Plyth". On their next LP the production was improved slightly and there were the isolated gems on it too, namely McCartney's "Maybe I'm Amazed", "Bad 'n' Ruin" and "Sweet Lady Mary".

Most people I know have been holding their breath, hoping that the next Faces LP would be THE one, but this too has its share of flaws that keep it out of the elusive "classic" category. "A Nod is as Good as a Wink...to a blind Horse." (WB BS 2574) is most certainly the best Faces album to date, but it disturbs me to listen to it knowing damn well that they've capable of better... much better.

The LP opens strongly with a Wood-Stewart composition entitled "Miss Judy's Farm". Wood chords his way fiercely through this one, just letting us know that the Rolling Stones don't own the raw, Chuck Berry guitar sound exclusively. Ian McLagan's electric piano reinforces Wood's guitar nicely and for the first time anywhere on record, ladies and gentlemen, it's Kenny Jones' drums being on the same decible level as the rest of the band. Yes, we actually get to hear the drumming on this new Faces album, a first for the band. Jones is a pretty good drummer too, I wonder where he's been hiding (behind the wall of sound on the previous Faces albums, perhaps?) Stewart's lyrics take the stance of a black, southern farm laborer much the same as Dylan did in "Maggies Farm". Stewart's words are almost as revealing as Dylans when he sings "last summer, we was

restless. We're gonna make a stand and burn down your farm, but it was all in the hay, cause there in the yard, Miss Judy had the National Guard".

The next tune, "You're so Rude" is sung by Ronny Lane, as are three of the records nine tunes. Is our darling Rod gently phasing himself out of the Faces in view of better things? Hmm, I wonder. Anyway, Lane certainly isn't any Rod Stewart in the vocal department, his voice being weak and not all that exciting. It suits this song, however, and the lyrics are pretty amusing with their tongue in cheek references to sex (the main theme of the LP as best I could figure).

"Love Lives Here" is another of those soft love songs that Stewart so often does. This one isn't as good as most he has done and Wood's distorted guitar doesn't fit the song at all. I find I like the song much better when I turn off the right channel on my stereo and eliminate Wood's guitar. It sounds much nicer.

"Last Orders Please" another song written and sung by Ronny Lane could just as easily been left off the LP.

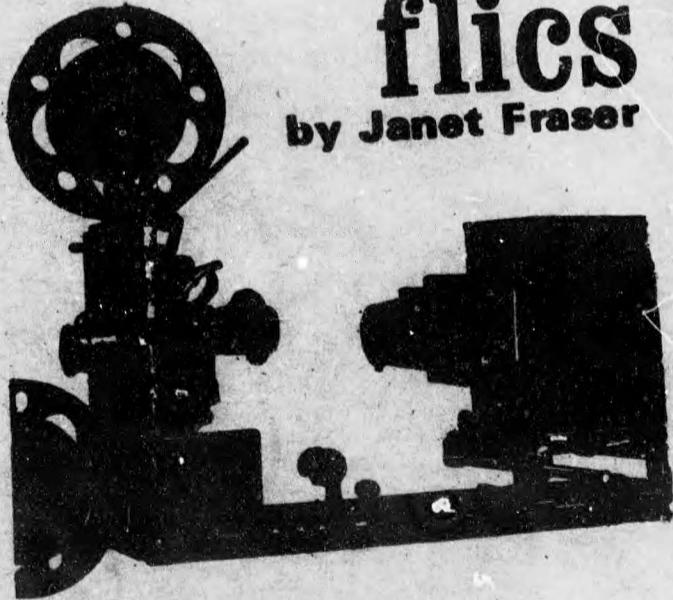
Side one ends in the same fashion with which it opened up, with "Stay with Me", an unadulterated rocker in the classic sense. This is the kind of tune the Faces do best and album should contain more of the same, but unfortunately doesn't. The Women's Lib Movement should pick up on some of Stewart's lyrics about a chick he just picked up; "Yeah, I'll pay your cab fare home, even wear my best cologne, but don't be here in the morning when I get up".

Side two sees the Faces go through; "Debris", a nice song if you can ignore the fact that Ronny Lane sounds like Davy Jones; "Memphis" a nice solid reworking of the Chuck Berry classic that we've all heard one time too many. Actually the Faces do a fine version, but personally I had my fill of the song years ago; "Too Bad", a fast little rocker about the boys trying to crash a party.

"The Ball You Need" is the finest song the Faces do on this LP. Wood's bottleneck is a stoned gas and I wish he would play more slide guitar than he does. Stewart and Wood dominate this song, as they do with the other two high points on the LP. Perhaps this is where the Faces hope lies. If Wood and Stewart, or either one of them, assumed leadership of the band maybe we could expect a string of great records, instead of the half-baked, 50-proof discs the public has come to expect from the Faces.

flics

by Janet Fraser



Mad Dogs and Englishmen

"Mad Dogs and Englishmen" covers Joe Cocker and his band's sensational tour of North America a few years back. While the film is a documentary, it nevertheless has a magical quality to it primarily due to the brilliant photographic tricks and changes of rhythm both of sight and sound. The movie not only reflects the humour and spontaneity of the

entire "music machine" but also the band's reactions to the American lifestyle. Not only the band but also the viewers are assaulted with diverse impressions ranging from the sterile atmosphere of plush Hilton-type hotels, to the noise and "madness" of the audience during one of Cocker's shows, to the peace and serenity of a group of freaks and friends at a picnic in the countryside.

However the movie is essentially a backdrop for the talents of Cocker himself. If the viewer does not enjoy his sort of music, it is not likely that the movie will seem worth the time and money spent. In his low, rasping "white blues" type voice, he screams out many old favourites such as "Something", "A Little Help from My Friends", and "She Came in through the Bathroom Window". Like Joplin or Hendrix, Joe Cocker exudes such vitality and interprets his music in such an intense manner that he is worshipped by masses of people. He is not merely a performer but rather a leader of a growing cult. His presence in a concert seems to have a hypnotic effect on everyone around him as fans are enveloped in this presence with every fibre of their being. However, perhaps the movie seems rather passé as Cocker has lost much of his popular appeal to folk-rock artists and certain rock and blues bands.

The viewer has a glimpse of Cocker's personal

life and ideas. Offstage he seems to be a very unassuming and introverted man. Like many great stars we see him as a loner but unlike many of his stature he is not a tragic figure but rather seems to have an enigmatic inner peace and confidence. We see him moving along in a somewhat artificial world: the insincere men and women do not seem to bother him at all, or if they do he learns to accept them all. However, in my opinion, most of the people look very unreal by the end of the movie—the band, the fans, the bureaucrats all seem like characters in a bad play. I can't help resenting the mindless fans most of all for living vicariously through another man. One can see very easily how they have killed artists greater than Cocker by impossible demands and their own weaknesses. The entire movie seems to be an attack on the consumption-oriented North American Society. One can't resist romanticizing about Cocker and trying to see these elements of Society through his eyes.

Although "Mad Dogs and Englishmen" lacks the nightmarish quality of "Gimme Shelter" in which the Rolling Stones' tour ended in violence, it nevertheless contains certain disturbing thoughts. The film, however, is leavened with humour and optimism although the only time we see any real expression of happiness is during one of Cocker's concerts.