

Eikhard — more than just jazz



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SHIRLEY EIKHARD
Taking Charge
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by Scott Neily

Shirley Eikhard, one of Canada's best "musical Sybils", is back with a new album, *Taking Charge* (Eika Records/WEA). The record marks a progression for Eikhard. A long-time country singer, she has developed her songs and overall sound over the past years to encompass jazz, rock, R&B, and pop. While *Taking Charge* is an excellent representation of her commercial potential, she maintains, like British musician Sting, a healthy influence of jazz on many of her songs. "I spent a lot of my time during the seventies listening to a lot of instrumentals. I guess you'd say jazz influenced artists, or actually jazz artists period. I guess it's just a stroke of luck that those natural influences I've had for so long are finally coming out in a commercial way," Eikhard said in a recent interview.

The jazz influence is clearly heard in the opening track, "Roll

That Rock", a metaphorical song about the trials and tribulations of modern existence. The second track, "The Night of No Return", like others on side one, has a commercial tinge to it but upholds the high standards of professionalism that have led Eikhard to be known as a greatly respected musician.

Side two kicks off with an uptempo pop/rock song that is scheduled to be her next single. Although no video is planned as yet, "While We're Still Young" has been remixed for an edgier sound, and it should prove to be a bit of a surprise for older Eikhard fans. The harder sound on the song came about as a result of Eikhard's attempt to trap the essence of her live sound. "The thing that I wanted to capture was a very live kind of feel vocally. The way that it was produced was, we did most of the tracks live off the floor with drums, bass, and keyboards laid down with a computer. I went for the scratch vocals, the vocals

you do with a live band, because they seem to have the most intensity."

The remainder of side two is quality pop, but a shining gem appears in the song "It's Understood". A powerful ballad, the song shows off the vocal talents in a big way, not to mention her thoughtful songwriting abilities.

As a pop album, *Taking Charge* is thankfully devoid of the blatant commercialism of other female singers (not mentioning any names, but for some reason, Whitney Houston springs to mind). Although the album itself may be a bit too intelligent for Top 40 mass acceptance, it stands to mark another advancement in the career of one of Canada's most talented musicians, and is highly recommended for any music lover who has grown tired of shopping-mall rock.

Shirley Eikhard is playing at the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium on January 16 at 8:00 p.m.

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ON-U SOUND RECORDS

pay it all back compilation

The *Pay it all Back Volume 1* compilation album is available from On-U Sound Records, an English com-

pany that plays host to a large variety of groups, all of whom interchange both musical ideas and members. The best way to become acquainted with this large umbrella organization is to pick up this sampler, or the previous one, *On-U Compilation*. The music can be described as funk, varying from heavy funk to dub funk to reggae to hard-edged political dub to dancefloor fantasia.

Some of the more celebrated

groups appearing on the album are The Maffia, Mark Stewart and the Maffia, the Dub syndicate, and African Headcharge. Only Tackhead is missing (but only in name, as all the members feature on many of the tracks). Actually, the members are the interesting features: much of the music is guided by Adrian Sherwood, a dub master and ace producer considered by many as the indispensable element in all of these groups. Apart from the English members, there are three core American contributors: bassist Doug Wimbish, drummer Keith LeBlanc, and guitarist Skip MacDonald, the former house rhythm section for Sugar Hill Records.

The compilation should appeal to a good cross-section of people. The funk, for example, is sophisticated: It's remarkably musical, but hasn't lost the essential edge, the mean backbone of funk. The sound sources used by Sherwood are also amazing: he uses anything from white noise and high-frequency hydraulic drills to samplings of Gregorian chants. As he says, he hopes to "frighten one minute, soothe the next, give 'em a laugh, all in the same two bars". This is long-term pleasure-giving music. Hopefully a North American distribution deal in the near future (possibly with a Major) will make this music easier to find.

Jayn Ritchie

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