

Record Reviews

Teenage Head Electric Guitar



Teenage Head
Electric Guitar
Fringe

review by Mike Spindloe

Occasionally it is necessary to start a record review with a story. This is one of those times.

When I was growing up in Toronto, there were three bands that everyone (almost) loved: Max Webster (led by Kim Mitchell), Rush, and Teenage Head. Never mind that all three were miles apart in style; they were the nazz, as the expression goes. The last time I saw Teenage Head perform live was at the Ontario Place Forum, just about a week before I moved to Edmonton. There were two riots that night: one happened among the 12,000 or so people who didn't get in when police closed the gates at 5:00 in the afternoon — two and a half hours before the show started. The other riot happened inside the Forum when the band left the stage after their encores, with 15,000 rock'n'roll crazed adolescent delinquents screaming for more. The Forum has a rotating stage and a circular seating plan, with grassy

banks rising on all four sides for additional lawn seating. It's fairly large, but at 15,000 people, it's jam packed. Having arrived early (2:00 p.m.), my companions and I had real (bench) seats about halfway up the inner circle. When the bottles and other assorted projectiles started flying toward the stage we dived under the benches and stayed there for what seemed like a very long time. Rock shows were subsequently banned from the Forum for a couple of years.

This wasn't the band's fault, of course.

So here it is, 1988, and Teenage Head is 15 years old as a group. Perhaps they should be calling themselves Middle-Aged Head, but the funny thing is, despite multiple personnel changes, they still sound pretty much the same way they did back then, which is to say that they could very well be the best party band going. Their musical formula is simple: hyperactive, basic, stripped-down rock and roll.

Sure, the lyrics are often comically adolescent (both unintentionally and sometimes, I hope, intentionally), the licks are recycled recycles, but for these guys the party hasn't stopped yet.

accidental oversight.

The lyrics include some true gems of cliché wisdom, as in the line: "fool me once, shame on you, fool me twice, shame on me."

A mysterious bit of biographical info from the press kit accompanying this record about Seals' "intensely spiritual" nature seems to be an attempt to justify the cretinous moralizing in the lyrics on this album, like the lines from "Those": "If those who are feeling stronger now should help those who are about to fall/Then the world would be a better place to live/More forgiving everyday." Forgive me if I sound cynical, but that's about as insightful as saying that if more people had more food to eat, there would be fewer hungry people.

The musicianship is about what one would expect from an album this bad. The band seems largely soporific, probably befuddled by having to sit in a studio for a long time with a man whose only change in inflection is when he goes from monotone to whine.

The addition of a synthesizer to a country band is not necessarily a welcome one, and combined with Seals doing his own background vocals, turns the mix into an amorphous blob; like white bread soaked in warm milk.

In fact, this music resembles country

Blue Oyster Cult
Imaginos
Columbia

review by Greg Pohl

The Blue Oyster Cult, originally known as the Soft White Underbelly, slithered out of New York about 1970. Their crunching guitars and soaring vocals on songs like "Don't Fear the Reaper" and "The Vigil" pioneered the 'arena rock' sound which was to become popular in the early '80's. Now, after a couple of horribly uninspired albums, BOC are attempting to regain their former popularity. Actually, Sandy Pearlman, their longtime producer, gets primary writing credits for every song on the album, so I have to wonder if they weren't just dragged out of retirement to be technicians on Pearlman's project. At least it fits into BOC's particular version of reality.

These boys have always used UFO's and aliens as their schtick, and *Imaginos* is no exception. This album is a collection of vignettes about a being from a parallel world. The alien, Imaginos (how did you guess?), appears in human form at various

times throughout earth's history to shape major events. In fact, the band pretentiously tries to weave itself into the mythology in a cut called "Blue Oyster Cult."

There's nothing really new here in terms of instrumentation, but the arrangements deviate considerably from basic pop structure. The rhythm section really cruises along, helped by clear production, lots of power chords, and layers of screaming guitars that never quite lose sight of the melody. One cut, "Astronomy", originally appeared on BOC's 1974 LP *Secret Treaties*. I always thought that the old version was full of potential, but never quite soared out of the grip of a plodding rhythm. However, they've shifted the arrangement a notch here, so it really flies.

The only complaint I have is that all the songs deal strictly with physical plots. It's as if these guys are too macho to dig into their emotions. No mental artifacts to pull out of the cerebral rubble for study: But if you grew up with the sounds of Boston, Triumph, and Def Leppard, and miss that stuff, then you'll probably find something you like here. And with over 54 minutes of music, you certainly get your money's worth.

Crowded House
Temple of Low Men
Capitol

review by Mike Spindloe

This is Crowded House's second album. Or, if you prefer, it could be regarded as Split Enz's umpteenth. I've never quite understood why the name change took place, although it seems to have worked quite well; while Split Enz was a spent force commercially (if not creatively), Crowded House has been tearing up the charts using slight variations on the formula established in their former inception.

"Better Be Home Soon", the first single, is a perfect example. It fits into the Split Enz legacy like a glove, complete with nifty harmony vocals on the singalong chorus and a simple, instantly recognizable tune. Into this category also fall "I Feel Possessed" and "Never Be The Same", both love songs featuring Neil Finn's unique lyrical approach to the subject;

when boy meets girl the result is not bliss but rather all sorts of complications, which constitutes a refreshingly realistic approach. But then, a simple "I Got You" wouldn't quite cut it after all this time, would it?

Two of the album's less obvious highlights are "Mansion in the Slums" and "Sister Madly". The former contains some interesting yet indefinite observations on material wealth and its possible effects, including a jab at The Gloved One: "I'd much rather have a trampoline in my front room than an isolation tank." The latter features a too brief guitar solo by Richard Thompson (who was recently signed to Capitol) and a shift in rhythmic styling to what could be described as a swing shuffle groove.

Finally, while Crowded House will probably shift a lot of units (that's industry jargon, folks) with *Temple of Low Men*, they don't really stand out far enough from the most crowded house of all, the ranks of all the pop bands vying for space on the charts, to be more than an eventual memory from yesterday's hit parade.

Dan Seals
Rage On
Capitol

review by Randal Smathers

Once upon a time, there were two singer/songwriters who had mastered cheap, artificial, pop formulas. Their names were England Dan and John Ford Coley.

Five years later, "England" Dan Seals has achieved the same level of spectacular mediocrity that was ED/JFC's trademark, only he is now doing this in country music instead of Top 40.

On an album called *Rage On*, you dread what is to come when the title song is aural Valium; after all, the name creates expectations which remain entirely unfulfilled here.

The songs are written by a variety of people — a few by Seals, with and without co-writers, and a few by other people, most notably K.T. Oslin. Only one song shows any potential — "Five Generations of Rock County Wilsons", by John Scott Sherill. The rest are standard country and western fodder, including "Big Wheels" (oh boy, another truckin' song) and "Factory Town", a song about workin' for a livin'. Yep, his album contains every cliché known to Nashville except train songs, and I'm sure that was merely an



less than it does the bad pop which Seals produced in his previous incarnation. Obviously by-passed musically even by AM radio, Seals has laid claim to country music as a refuge from oblivion. Unfor-

tunately, country radio being what it is, Seals can probably wallow around for years, putting out this horrible dreck and sully the name of country music even further.