

Records in Review

ONLY HUMAN
By Amon Duul 2
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Ever since I bought "Wolf City" back in my high school days, Amon Duul 2 has been one of my favourite German bands. Spawned in the halcyon days of the late 60s, Amon Duul quickly rose to become one of the largest German underground acts along with other memorable bands of the time, Can, Ash Ra Temple, Guru Guru Groove, Agitation Free and the Tangerine Dream. About a year after Amon Duul formed, the band became so crowded with musicians, friends and ideals, that it split in two and went in two different musical directions. "Amon Duul" went virtually nowhere with its sludgy acid rock operas. Albums like "This Is" and "Disater" were truly terrible. The other half of members of the original band simply called themselves "Amon Duul 2" and took a musical direction similar to that taken by the English band Hawkwind, being "space and acid rock". In fact Amon Duul 2 and Hawkwind are comparable in many ways besides music. Both bands have gone through several different members (bassist Dave Anderson played with back band at one time or another) who have dropped out and returned for later albums (Bob Calvert for Hawkwind and Peter Leopold for Amon Duul 2). More important however are the changes in music of the two bands over the years. What I consider the "core" of Hawkwind, Bob Calvert and Dave Brock, has changed from two chord shuffles to a more involved "thinking" style of music (so much so they now are called the "Hawklords") Similarly Amon Duul 2 has changed their style of music. Early lps like "Teti" and "Dance of the Lemmings" were "heavy" and spaced out in nature (sample titles: "Halluzination Guillotine" and "Dehypnotized Toothpaste"). Subsequent musical changes, beginning with "Vive La Trance", resulted in some of the most unique and interesting brand of "space music" and "social commentary" of the mid 1970s. Europe. However since the "Pyragony X" lp in 1976, Amon Duul has lost key members of the band and at present their music is just another variation of the Camel - Triumvirat - Alan Parsons style. I'm not saying I don't like these bands, but I am saying that at one time Amon Duul 2 had an edge over these bands. This edge was their original and cryptic observations of post war Europe and its mix of technology and social problems. With lps like "Hyack" and "Made in Germany" Amon Duul 2 was helping create a modern mythos of the continental European and at the same time providing us with excellent music. However, since "Made in Germany" Amon Duul has lost its unique vocal qualities (Lothar Meid's deep, heavily accented voice and Renate Knaup - Krotenschwanz's sensual and soft whispery vocals) and on their new lp, "Only Human", John Weinzierl, master of guitars, has left the fold. These losses have definitely hurt the band. Of the original members only Peter Leopole (drums) and Chris Harrer (guitar, saxophone and violin) remain. Since 1976 Stephan Zauner (keyboards, vocals and synthesizer) and Klaus Ebert (bass and guitars) have filled up the other positions in Amon Duul 2.

Ebert's and Zauner's Triumvirat-

style music and lyrics are, to my mind, very unimpressive and unimaginative, especially on their first Amon Duul 2 lp "Pyragonyx". "Almost Alive" in 1977 (which was Ebert's and Zauner's second Amon Duul excursion) was a very promising and excellent work but only because of the power of the Weinzierl-Karrer-Leopold core in the band. Now that core has been decimated even more with the loss of Weinzierl. Long time Amon Duul 2 followers can notice the lack of guitar work and finesse on "Only Human". Thus since "Made in Germany" not only have the lyrics and vocals suffered in Amon Duul 2, but now the cementing guitar work of Weinzierl has gone. Unlike the shift from "Dance of the lemmings" to the more popular "Wolf City" and eventually "Hyack", I don't like the present direction Amon Duul 2 has taken (i.e. that of the synthesizer-keyboard styled bands). But no doubt, Amon Duul 2 will continue to change in the future and hopefully its old members will once again populate the band. I must sound like an old man lamenting for the good old days!

In as few words as possible, the present Amon Duul 2 is much too slick and unadventurous for me as well as the fact that Zauner's vocals are goo soft and "wishy-washy" (although actual lyrics are quite good). If "Almost Alive" gave me hope for the Karrer-Leopold-Ebert-Zauner crew, then that hope has rapidly diminished with "Only Human".

Changing the subject for a moment here, I'd like to mention a problem associated with most European rock bands, that being poor and late distribution in North America. "Almost Human" was released in 1978, about a year ago so technically speaking, this is an old album I'm listening to. Nevertheless, to the North American audience it is a "new" lp and thus worth some sort of critique. Its something we have to live with (i.e. the late releases) but its really too bad because there is a gold mine of talent and music on continental Europe just waiting for the "slower" North American music buying culture to catch on to it.

Well I guess I complained and lamented enough in the above passages and its now time to get down to business. "Almost Human" opens up with Another Morning, an average Camel-styled tune with its smooth piano, guitar and bass lines. Its a song of "death and hell" with these lyrics sung in a most unoffending whispery voice (Zauner). For me, such a mix of smooth voice and lyrics dealing with death and hell simply don't mix well. The music is itself pleasant and similar to mid 1970s Stevie Wonder in parts. But overall the music does not explore new areas but it is a good deal better than recent Camel and Triumvirat lps and their so called "progressive rock" (How I hate that label but it can impart some sense of musical style). "Another Day" is just a song, with little memorable in it. Karrer's guitar is interesting but buried by bass and keyboards. This would never happen in the "good old days" when Weinzierl's guitar played such an important and interesting role.

"Don't turn to Stone" is a sort of slowed down disco style of song. Flickery guitar notes and a slow plodding bass line operate throughout this song. Karrer's mystic saxophone and guitar work save this song for memory.

Although Ebert's vocals are excellent on this song, I can't help but feel Renate Knaup's voice would be so much more appropriate (I guess her voice spoiled me back on the old Amon Duul 2 lps) The fact that Zauner's voice and keyboards are relegated to the background makes this song an improvement over "Another Day". Somehow for those of us who like to compare music (in order to understand the unheard better), "Don't Turn to Stone" is remotely similar to Manzanera's "Cuban Crisis" in texture and mood. I should add that Zauner does add a nice touch with the synthesizer in spots where a deep crashing noise like distant thunder is heard.

"Kirk Morgan" a story of the rise of a young rock star, is livelier than the songs preceding it. Karrer's guitar is very "clean" immediately reminding one of Dire Straits. Karrer's overdub of acoustic provides a neat twist to the song and he really cooks with an electric guitar solo near the end (too little and too late). For me the song is too smooth and predictable to be really noteworthy and its sedative like qualities are great only for relaxing or sleep. Despit all of Karrer's guitar work, Zauner and Ebert still manage to dull this song.

"Spaniards and Spacemen" is one of the best tracks on the lp. There is no vocal accompaniment but only a few spoken words halfway into the song. The piece opens with Wakeman-like keyboard music mixed with European-styled radio identification tones. The music quickly develops into a roll along number (similar to "La Krautnoma" on "Made in Germany") that is very gentle on the ears (unlike "Lakrautnoma"). "Spaniards and Spacemen" has excellent guitar overdubbing and near the end, Karrer's Spanish guitar playing is interesting. Stephan Zauner's keyboards and synthesizers are some of his best yet (better in my opinion than anything he did on "Prisms and Views", his solo lp). The Spanish flavour mixed with space age synthesizer is very good to the ears and this song alone makes up for any shortcomings the rest of "Only Human" may have.

Side two opens on another promising note. At first I thought "Kismet" was being done by Klaus Schultze (another German synthesizer master) because the opening was that good. However the acoustic guitar and Triumvirat-style synthesizer soon ended the Schultze style and I came back down to Earth. The song, "Kismet" is however, quite good. Karrer's vocals are well matched with his acoustic guitar and Zauner's string synthesizers. Well into the song, Karrer provides some haunting violin music that lasts all too short a time. Eventually "Kismet" becomes quite "heavy" but near its end, the Mid East-Arabian theme has taken over.

Its too bad that I can't help compare Amon Duul 2's new lp to their older ones. Standing alone, "Almost Human" is a very acceptable album. I hate criticizing one of my favorite bands but I can't help saying what I think about the new Amon Duul 2 "Almost Human" can definitely stand by itself as an above average lp, but for once, I'm going to "live in the past" and say the "good old" Amon Duul 2 is better.

CHSR 700

Our latest CHSR Disco was again a success, even more so than our last one. If you haven't been to one of our discos this year, you're missing a great time. But - good news! We'll be holding one more disco this term, on November 30, so you'll want to be sure and make it there.

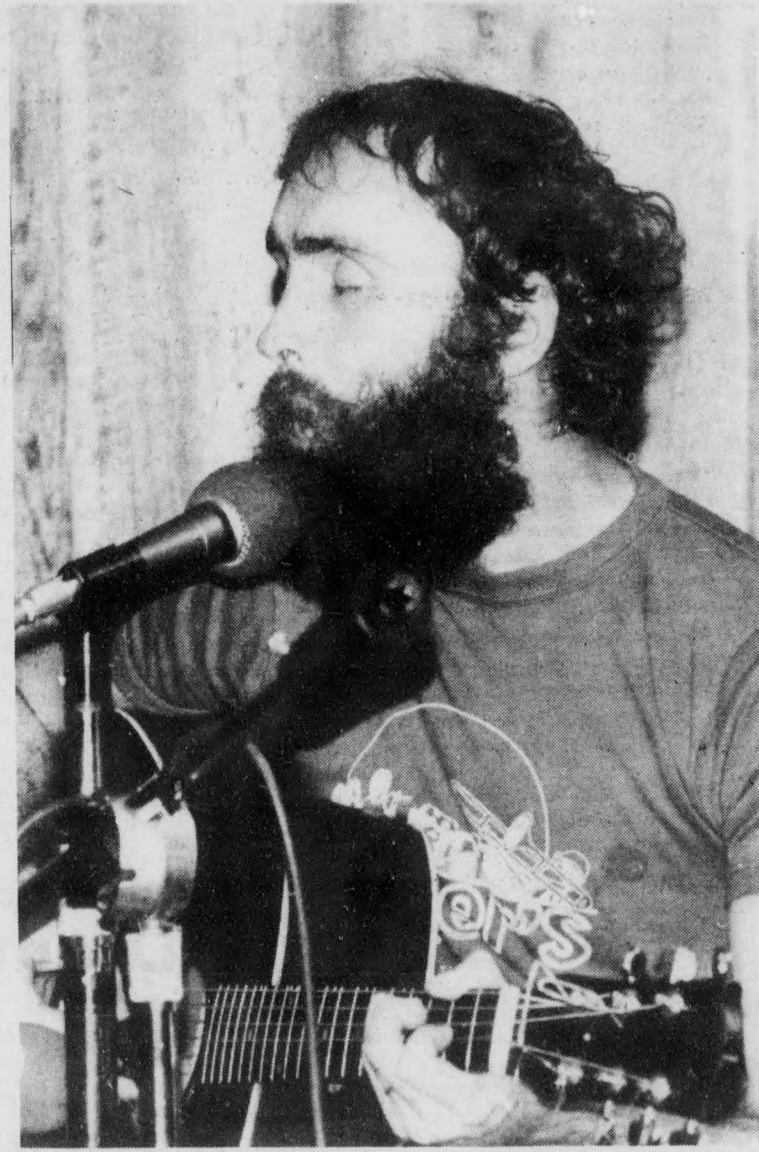
This Sunday, CHSR is presenting a FREE rock concert in the SUB Ballroom. "The Press" will entertain you from 8:00 until 11:00 on Sunday evening.

We've introduced another new program into our schedule in the past week. A BBC-produced program, PROFILE/IN CONCERT, which was a regular feature last year, is being aired once again, weekly on Saturday nights from 8:00 to 9:00.

Our Public Affairs schedule is now finalized and is as follows:

Monday-Science Magazine
Wednesday-Let's Discuss It
Thursday-From a Different Perspective
Friday-Happenings
Saturday-Round-Up

All of the above shows begin at 6:00 in the evening.



KEVIN BACKS Photo

Chris Rawlings at the Woodshed this week

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