

# Toronto has troubles

by Michael McCarthy

You may know Toronto from their two hit singles "Looking for Trouble" and "Even the Score," both of which exhibited considerable explosive musical force. That force is conspicuously lacking on this, their second album, a fact which largely reduces to minimal interest what could have been an audience-enlarging effort by a fledgling rock band. Instead, those fans the group did acquire through their earlier work will probably be cooled off by a derivative and unexciting recording by people who seem to have the wherewithal to do much better.

Toronto is a band which approaches heavy metal in content, with a strong leaning toward melodic vocals, much in the line of Heart. This is an attribute which bodes them no praise on this album, since on several cuts lead singer Holly Woods lets out some high notes so reminiscent of Heart's Ann Wilson that it's hard to believe she's not imitating her. The problem is that her vocals lack Wilson's emotive qualities. Woods plays at belting out the songs like one of the great interpretive singers, a Joplin or Slick, but while the control and volume are there, the sincerity is not. Most of the lead vocals are delivered with artificial feeling, and instead of carrying the listener along, leave him feeling cheated and left out. Woods seems to have great pipes, but she never really extends her voice to the limits of intense emotion one feels she could convey if she left off posturing or imitating and let it rip from

her guts.

For that matter, none of the band (which, incidentally, has only one Canadian member) stretches their capabilities very far on this album. What guitar work there is (by Sheron Alton and Brian Allen) is quite good, with appealing range and flow, but it lacks energy and direction, the cathartic amplified release associated with most bands of this genre who are worthy of any notice whatsoever. Keyboardist Scott Kreyer at times adds rich treble patterns above and behind the main instruments, creating moments of very rich sound, but these are all too few and not built on sufficiently.

In fact, the perplexing thing about this album is that there are moments of good work throughout, in just about any area of expertise one could name, but these moments are lost in, to be blunt, pap. The songs are terribly inconsistent in themselves. For the most part, they are four minute tunes built around twenty second instrumental breaks which are often pleasing but not adequate to carry the other three minutes and forty seconds. Thus, tracks like "Head On," "Someone Will Play the Blues," and "Master of Disguise" have smatterings of creative, almost energetic music, buried among repetitive and cliched chord progressions, meaningless lyrics, and forced singing. "Enough is Enough" parodies itself in its own title, as like many of its companions, it goes on far too long considering its weak substance.

Only two of the nine tracks on the album hold forth any of the



promise of the earlier singles. "Silver Screen" is a bouncy, well constructed tune which is infectious despite its familiar rhythm patterns, and includes some good guitar work. "Blackmail" on side two presses hard towards rock and roll, with an occasional surge of real fire which never quite breaks through the turgid format of the song. Woods' vocals are almost believable, and the richness of

the sound hints at a much better potential than is achieved here.

There are enough power chords here that if you turn up the volume, you can still get a heavy metal jolt, albeit an unoriginal and undistinguished variety. The main problem appears to be the songwriting. A struggle to blend melodic vocal harmonies a la mainstream pop and power chords a la heavy metal may have resulted in

neither form being satisfactorily performed.

With stronger, better directed material Toronto may yet arise and become a powerful, exciting rock band. However, if they keep on in the direction of this album, they will disappear into the same quagmire of dull, schizoid, unsatisfying music such predecessors as Heart, Kansas, and Styx have already deteriorated into.

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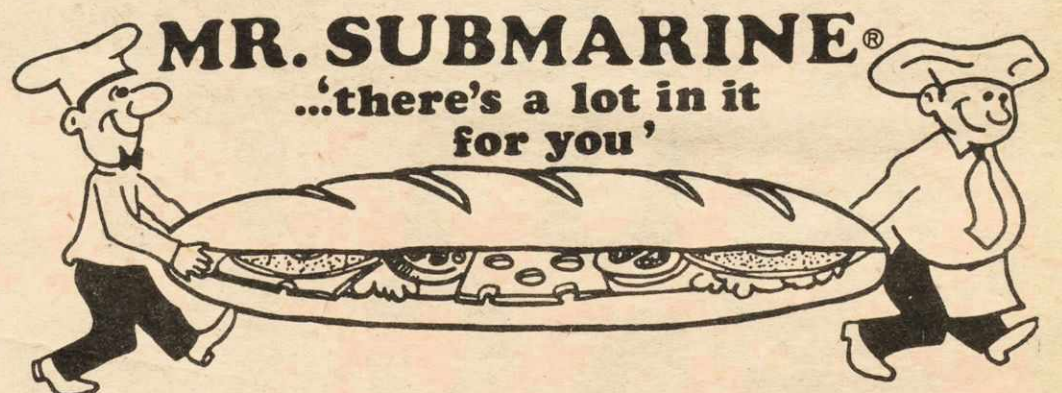
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