

Brandy-soaked voice of Rod Stewart

by Doug Wavrock

Rod Stewart-Atlantic Crossing [W.B.-BS2875] Rod Stewart recently crossed the Atlantic to record an album for his new record company (He's now with Warner Brothers) to follow up his highly touted **Smiler** released last year. The result is an album recorded entirely in the U.S. and appropriately enough called **Atlantic Crossing**. It's Rod Stewart at his best; the familiar Brandy-soaked voice, his phrasing as well as the familiar mandolin coupled on this album with the string arrangements of Arif Mardin on what Rod calls his slow side. In a departure from past efforts, Rod has placed all his up-tempo pulsating rockers on one side of his album called the 'fast side' and all his ballads and Arif Mardin's composing help on what he's called his 'slow side'. And indeed it adequately describes the two sides of Rod Stewart. In giving credit where credit is due, a lot of it has to go to his backups containing some of the better known studio greats around in the persons of such notables as Jesse Ed Davis, Steve Cropper, Roger Hawkins and the Memphis Horns.

His **Atlantic Crossing** is highly similar to **Smiler** in many respects, first of all in the range of material presented and secondly in the feel that Rod and his cohorts have for the music they are presenting. From a reggae-flavoured "Alright for An Hour" to his fifties' rock'n' roller, "ALL in the Name of Rock'n'Roll" to his "Three Time Loser" which has my vote as a successful single if W.B. &/or Rod decide to release it to the A.M.'ers.

In the slow tempo category Rod features the slickness of such numbers as Barry Goldberg's "It's Not the Spotlight" to "This old Heart of Mine" a rhythm and blues inspired piece. The album closes with "Sailing" a rather poignant selection that features among other things, the topic of home-sickness and the desire to be back home. The album featuring a complete side of lush ballads is one of the high points of the album and each selection lends itself to the next so much so that if an up-tempo rocker was placed in their midst it would destroy the effect that had been created here. All in all **Atlantic Crossing** seems best to sum up the musical versatility of Rod Stewart who's come a long way since his days with Jimmy Powell & The Five Dimensions in 1964.

Ritchie Blackmore's Rainbow (Polydor PD6049) From the playing ranks of Deep Purple emerges Ritchie Blackmore, one of the two founding members that stayed with the Purple from its embryonic days to its present-day fame. In a stab at solo success, Ritchie Blackmore has emerged with an album called **Ritchie Blackmore's Rainbow** named after his group. The question that now logically emerges is, how does Blackmore sound as a leader of his own group compared with his role in Deep Purple? We must remember that Blackmore has spent so many years with one group that he may actually sound like a carbon copy of Deep Purple with no hope for his own talents to emerge from a veneer of Deep Purple musicianship. For many musicians this is the case when they move out on their own.

Ritchie Blackmore opens **Rainbow** with "Man on the Silver Mountain" that for all intents and purposes sounds like "Smoke on

the Water" with respects to the pulsating guitar and the vocals of Ronnie James Dio that sound all the world like Ian Gillan. But the first selection only appears to be an illusion for the next three selections take us away from his stereotyped image as a Deep Purple guitarist. It's almost as if he wants to tease us for this notion we have of him being unable to play anything but D.P. guitar; he doesn't. For many people who'll see this album and buy it, they'll be under the impression that they'll have bought another Deep Purple album, they'll be mistaken as the album progresses. It no doubt it will take awhile for the Deep Purple tag to disappear from Blackmore's name but if he perseveres and expresses his individual idiosyncracies in his music this tag should eventually disappear.

The album contains a couple of good-blues-based rockers' "Self Portrait" and "Temple of the King" as well as a '50's rocker called, "If You Don't Like Rock n Roll". But such cuts as "Snake Charmer" & "Sixteenth Century Green-sleves" still contain remnants of the Deep Purple sound coupled with Blackmore's & Dio's musical compositions. But then maybe part of D.P.'s sound came from Blackmore's influence for he was with them from the beginning as was John Lord. Overall, **Ritchie Blackmore's Rainbow** is not a fantastic album for first efforts of any artist associated for many years to world famous groups are seldom standouts. But given time, Ritchie could become fairly successful on his own.

Ken Hensley-Eager to Please [W.B.-BS2863] Ken Hensley to most people is as much a part of Uriah Heep as apples are to apple pie. Known in the early days as the person who wrote the greatest bulk of material for the Heep, Ken Hensley has become something of a mainstay with U.H. Ken has had a rather long and storied career before he settled down with the Heep, having been a member of such early noteworthy English groups as the Jimmie Brown sound, The Gods (also featuring Greg Lake & Mick Taylor) and Toe Fat where he was an organist before he joined U.H. on David Byron's urging.

The style of Hensley on **Eager to Please** sounds a great deal like Uriah Heep but then some people have equated Ken as Uriah Heep. **Eager to Please** does contain some significant differences from U.H. material and this is where the true character of Ken Hensley emerges from the 9 album layer of U.H. material. His own individuality is noted on such selections as "Part Three", "Secret" & "Through the Eyes of a Child" which are slow tempo ballads of a different nature.

Ken is talented, no doubt about it and "Winter or Summer" indicates this. It reminds me of early U.H. material combined with some of the musical ideas picked up in his tenure with other groups back in the days when he was just starting to develop his talents. A pleasant surprise as well is, "Longer Shadow", a fine melange of acoustic guitar, percussion and Ken's voice. "In the Morning" again features Ken's individuality, with the sax of Ray Warleigh in a bouncy cut that has possible commercial value if Ken so desires. Hensley has worked hard at creating this album to show that he is not a stuck-in-a-rut destined to

live out his days playing organ with the Heep. This album beyond a doubt shows that he has the ability to try it as a solo artist. This is not his first stab as a soloist for he released **Proud Words on a Dusty Shelf** several years ago to see how the public would accept him as an individual. **Eager to Please** by its title indicates an artist who wants to create something different and to

take his proud words off a dusty shelf, to dust them off and apply them to his musical compositions. **Eager to Please** seems to show to me anyway that maybe Ken is ready to go solo and move out of the orbit of the Heep. And what about Uriah Heep's future? They'll survive as they've always had for people have left them before and they've still continued to sell well.

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