

British rock band continues its search for Oriental influences

by Gisele Marie Baxter

The cover of **Tin Drum**, Japan's fifth studio LP, features a lovely, grainy black-and-white photo of David Sylvian, eating rice at an austere table in an austere room with a poster of Mao peeling off the wall. The music inside is another step forward for a unique young British band which has found new musical possibilities in its Oriental journeys.

As on **Gentlemen Take Polaroids**, Japan emphasizes rhythms, with influences now ranging from jazz and rhythm-and-blues to Chinese traditional music, which is translated through rock and folk instruments. The Oriental influence, beautiful and never overstated, becomes an integral part of this exquisite music, which is serious, delicate and captivating. The band seems to have shed virtually all of its cabaret-romantic image, growing more innovative and developing individual talents in the process. And David Sylvian's voice is in incredible form -- edgy, seductive and intriguing.

Though individual band

members contribute more to the musical end of things, Sylvian writes all the lyrics. While this is never a **Polaroids**-style depiction of nightlife adventuring, a few songs still deal with his old concerns of private dilemmas and social disguises, but side two is a subtle and ironic treatment of modern politics. **Tin Drum** seems to use images of Communism in China to explore the maintenance of tradition and the discovery of permanent value in this modern world, both East and West. "Cantonese Boy" quietly and poignantly depicts a young civilian, conscripted to march and bang a tin drum for the Red Army. Sylvian's voice moves away from the music as the song's final lines close the album in terse condemnation.

Gentlemen, you've heard the score
Raise your glass and call for more
Only young men broke the war

Musically, this album has some lovely arrangements.

"Canton," an instrumental co-written by Sylvian and drummer Steve Jansen, is an electronic rendition of Chinese music, colouring a repeated keyboard motif with percussive touches and Mick Karn's bass lines. Richard Barbieri proves again that he's an exciting and mature keyboardist. "Sons of Pioneers" is **Tin Drum**'s most eloquent track, sustaining, despite its length, a fascinating, hypnotic mix of percussion, synthesizer effects and bass runs. Sylvian's voice is an instrument in itself, drawing from his simple yet evocative lyrics apprehension and disillusionment.

Although Japan can still produce fine, immediate, pop-oriented material, such as "Still Life in Mobile Homes" and the jazzy "Art of Parties," **Tin Drum** finds them more experimental than ever. They're an enigmatic lot, neither blatantly political nor obnoxiously esoteric. They've enjoyed more success in the U.K. in the past few months than in all four years of recording, and while I can't see **Tin Drum** broadening their popular appeal here, maybe it will.



Japan can be a surprising band. Whatever happens, this is an important record; this meshing

of Eastern and Western music is intricate, compelling, and extremely promising.

Guys and Dolls, a rousing Broadway fable at the Neptune Theatre

by Gisele Marie Baxter

Neptune Theatre's production of **Guys and Dolls** is a wonderful theatrical event; a rousing presentation of a musical comedy which has been delighting audiences for more than thirty years. If you have the chance to see it during these last few days of its run, you have a real treat in store.

Guys and Dolls was adapted from a Damon Runyon story by Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows, with Frank Loesser supplying the incredibly tuneful collection of songs. The play is a brash, witty, romantic fable of Broadway, set in the late 1940's amid a world of small and big time gamblers, nightclub dancers, missionaries, cops and gangsters. Neptune captures this brilliantly, thanks to Robert Ainslie's choreography, Robert Doyle's fabulous sets, Gary Clarke's lighting, Rick Fox's musical direction, John Neville's assistance and, of course, the acting, singing and dancing of this most capable cast.

Keith Dinicol portrays Nathan Detroit marvellously; his agitation is hilarious as he paces the stage in his oversized striped suit, struggling to find a venue for his famous floating crap game and to keep Adelaide, his fiancée of fourteen years, on his good side. Wanda Wilkinson is a terrific Adelaide -- blond curls, New York accent, psychosomatic colds and all -- whether she's dancing at the flashy club where she works or pleading with Nathan to marry her.

As Sky Masterson, the professional gambler who inadvertently falls in love with a

dedicated Salvation Army girl, Victor A. Young is cool, flippant and elegant, while Marie Baron plays Sarah Brown with charm and a lovely, energetic personality. Their scenes together are both comical and poignant, and there is a romanticism in both which makes the outcome of their reluctant love story convincing.

Besides, there are some striking minor characters, such as the raspy-voiced Nicely-Nicely Johnson and the loveable, dopey Benny Southstreet, played by Stan Lesk and Tom Gallant as a Mutt and Jeff of Lower Manhattan. Even characters who have no more than a few lines, or only walk across the stage now and again, are made memorable.

A small band, consisting of piano, bass and percussion, provides the music; this brings to the forefront the high quality of the songs and the talent of the singers and choruses, for nobody can hide behind heavy orchestration. There are some truly outstanding numbers -- Miss Adelaide and the Debutantes perform a vibrant semi-striptease as they belt out "Take Back Your Mink," some excellent choreography backs up Sky Masterson's gripping, elegant "Luck Be A Lady" (that entire scene is a breathtaking gamblers' ballet) and Nicely-Nicely Johnson leads a spirited chorus of sinners and salvationists in "Sit Down, You're Rocking the Boat."

The staging allows the play to move seamlessly, with the backdrops shifting quickly from the red curtains of the nightclub to the grey walls of the Save-A-

Soul Mission to a wonderful collage of buildings and neon signs and night sky overlooking the sidewalks and alleyways of Manhattan.

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