

# The Gang of Four grows up

by David Lutes

Transition is the name of the game on *Hard*, the Gang of Four's latest release. A lot of what made the Gang the original post-punk band and a great critical success has faded. What has replaced the old, however, is interesting and sometimes exciting. I'm not saying that everything is changed. Their sound is still anchored by heavy bass lines and the guitars of Andy Gill remain the instrument of choice. But the fundamental changes that were made will surprise many old followers and will attract new ones.

The major musical change is in the rise of the vocals as a musical instrument. On *Hard*, John King's voice is often left to carry a song, and in this he gets help from an expanded back-up group. King's vocals have evolved from an angry sneer to something more coldly melodic. This, plus the addition of the back-up singers, means that the band often seems to take on a synthesizer-pop sound. This is not quite the case.

In fact there seems to be a deliberate avoidance of anything approaching an electronic base. What has really taken place is that the Gang has taken the semi-soul sounds of singers like

Heaven 17's Glenn Gregory or Tom Bailey or Thompson Twins and superimposed it over their own pseudo-funk sound.

This new vocal dominance had meant that other things have been toned down or faded out. On most of the cuts, the tough guitar sound which dominated in earlier releases, has become background filler, always there but never in charge. There are cuts on which the guitar comes to the foreground, though. This is most obvious on something like "I Fled," where the guitar competes with the vocals for the prominent position.

With the departure of drummer Hugo Burnham, the drum parts have also faded out. What used to drive the sound along now serves more as a pace-setter. This leaves more room at the bottom of the music for bass stuff. Always an integral part of the Gang's sound, the bass comes more to the front on *Hard*. Sara Lee turns in some excellent performances and Jon Astrop also shines on a few cuts.

The place that the band's new direction is most clearly seen is in the lyrical content. On *Hard* we see an almost complete disappearance of a political stance. For a band that made its reputation

on its loudly proclaimed socialist views, this is quite a switch.

What we see instead, are songs of a more personal nature dealing more with sexual politics than anything of a more global nature. This is apparent through titles like "Woman Town" or "A Piece of My Heart". Fittingly, the one song that contains much more than a hint of the political anger of old, "Independence," is also the one whose sound resembles the Gang's past.

Why all these changes? Last year's *Songs of the Free* gave us a hint that maybe we shouldn't be expecting things like "Armalite Rifles" anymore. Could it be that the Gang for Four are growing older? The toned down political stance shows signs of a more jaded view of life, with personal problems becoming more important.

There are hints all over *Hard* that the Gang may be seeking more commercial acceptance. If they can achieve this without a sell-out, as they've done here, they deserve it. If you're a fan, give it a listen, you'll be fascinated. If you're not a fan, give it a try, you'll like it.

For an in-depth review of the album, tune into CKDU Monday, October 10, at 8 p.m.

## Seige

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But seriously, folks, "Seige" could easily fall into that class of film that might be called 'the overachievers'; films like "High Noon" or "Deliverance" that, by concerning themselves with limited scenarios, manage to transcend the situation and comment upon the human condition itself.

Personally I'd prefer these 'little' action films to a whole boatload of Bergman's balefully blathering about life and death. Let's face it, if it hasn't got a coherent narrative and a developing plot, most people aren't going to like it. "Seige" is successful in presenting a gripping situation that demands your interest right up to the dénouement.

## quadrivium

Quiz 835 - ALTER-EGOS

What is the true identity of the following?

1. Venus Flytrap \*
2. Dr. Johnny Fever \*
3. Sting (of The Police)
4. The Shadow
5. Gonzo (of Trapper John, M.D.)\*
6. The Scarlet Pimpernel
7. El Kabong
8. Zorro
9. The Lone Ranger
10. Tony Curtis

\* - not the actor's name

Answers to Quiz 834

1. Mozart's Quintet for Clarinet and Strings

2. Ponchielli's *Dance of the Hours* (from *La Gioconda*)
3. Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 2*
4. Leonard Bernstein's *Glitter and Be Gay* (from *Candide*)
5. Mouret's *Rondeau*
6. Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries* (from *Die Walkure*, Act III)
7. Pachelbel's *Canon*
8. Richard Strauss' *Thus Spake Zarathustra*
9. Johann Strauss' *Blue Danube*
10. Rossini's *William Tell Overture*

Our winner is Colin Mann who will receive a double pass to *Victor Victoria* which plays in the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium Sunday, Oct. 9.

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