

Vicious dark sound in or disappointingly out?

by Gary P. Leblanc

Since the **Stranglers** have never played in Halifax, it can hardly be expected that anything much is known about them here, so an introduction is in order. London born Jean-Jacques Burnel, with a degree in economics under his belt, met Hugh Cornwell, a bio-chemistry grad. They decided to form a band, acquiring ice cream truck driver Jet Black for the drum spot. An ad in *Melody Maker* procured Dave Greenfield, who'd played keyboards for several bands before. So, with JJ on bass and Hugh on guitar, the band started playing pubs in '74.



The **Stranglers** were controversial right from the start. Their sexist ravings and hard line stance against the music biz met with strong reactions. The debut album, **Rattus Norvegicus**, came out in 1977. They really established their footing when they played support for the **Patti Smith Group** at the Roundhouse in London later that year. The punk movement aided in bringing the **Stranglers** into the limelight, although the "punks" criticised them for being educated and too old (over 20!). Nonetheless, they gained a fanatical following. The **Sex Pistols** were among their

first fans.

By the third album, the sexism succumbed to philosophy and politics, the band assigning a lot of attention to the **Men in Black** (UFO entities) over the third, fourth and fifth albums. The sixth album, **La Folie**, was a theme lp, a study of love. By then the **Men in Black** had disappeared, political over-tones were kept and the **Stranglers** took a turn for the more melodic and commercially accessible. 'Golden Brown', one of the singles off that lp, did very well in the British charts, much to the delight of **Stranglers** fanatics there.

'Golden Brown' seemed to pave the way for things to come. 'Strange Little Girl', a non-lp follow-up single, also charted well. It too was middle of the road and dreamy. Something new was happening. The **Stranglers** lost their savage bite and became darlings of the straight Brit media.

'European Female' is the single off the new lp, **Feline**, and preceded the lp by about a month. It is an adulation of (European) women and clearly shows the **Stranglers** are no longer interested in making provocative music. Not that praising women is negative in any way, but it does contradict all previous material. It's also the only reference to cats on the lp, so why the name?

What says it all on **Feline** is a photo on the inner sleeve. It's not a band photo, mind you; there are six anonymous people ranging from 20s to middle age, five of them wearing **Stranglers** tee shirts, standing around in a library. At the bottom there's a brief listing of "official merchandise" and the address of the **Stranglers** Information Service, where it all can be bought from. In other words, an ad

replaces what could have been a band photo...a far cry from their initial anti-commercial stand.

About the actual record, the **Stranglers** sound like they're really going somewhere musically but haven't arrived yet. The push is toward melodic textures. Cornwell's singing is more ambitious here than ever but falls short of being inspirational. Greenfield again flaunts his masterful keyboard work, the most interesting point of focus. The overall result resounds of vague European

romanticism amid top notch production. 'Ships that Pass in the Night' has an acoustic blues touch and 'Let's Tango in Paris' is a brisk waltz.

There is a limited edition, one-sided free single with the first few thousand copies of **Feline**, called 'Aural Sculptures'. This bonus track is Cornwell reciting a poem on the creation of music. There is no music until the very end, which is too bad because it probably would have been the best track of the album had it been more of a

'song'.

This strikingly mellowed **Stranglers** effort is an about face that may well gather some new fans. It's not an intellectual album

and even has some tuneful love songs on it. **Feline** leaves long time fans empty-handed though. With the depth of their education and of their own thought, a study of cats

would have been awesome. Instead, the **Stranglers** appear to be studying at the Gary Numan school of planned obsolescence.

Sensible bizarre yet enjoyable

by Peter Rockwell

To be an innovative musician you almost always have to take chances with your career. Captain **Sensible** has done just that with his first solo release "Women and Captains First."

Sensible came up with the idea to create his own version of Rodgers and Hammersteins song "Happy Talk" from their musical **South Pacific**. Unfortunately his group, **The Damned**, gave the idea the thumbs down. The good Captain went on his own and sailed the song to number one in Britain.

Captain **S.** landed on our shores with another track from the album called 'Wot' which has gained quite a bit of popularity because of its dancable rap beat and memorable chorus. This selection really allows **Sensible** to showcase his extremely likeable voice.

The combination of Captain **Sensible's** vocal talents and originally humorous lyrics blend well

with the synthesized instrumentals and percussion rhythms his songs possess.

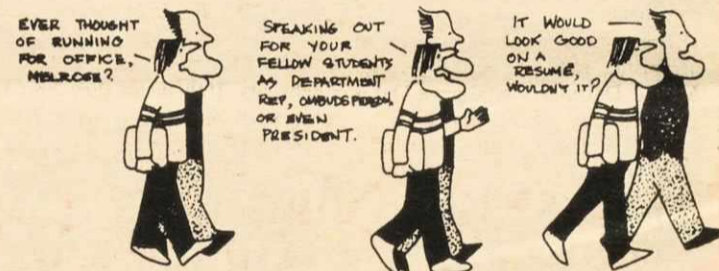
Quite a few song themes have been utilized in "Women and Captains first," and an appealing song selection has been created. 'Brenda' has a sound similar to **A Flock of Seagulls**, while 'Nobody's Sweetheart' comes across sounding like a **New Orleans Jazz** number.

Even though any serious side of **Sensible** is well camouflaged in his record jacket photos, the songs 'Yanks with Guns' and 'Gimme a Uniform' do try to throw a few

bricks at the glass barriers we hide behind.

The only small annoying detail about this album is the studio mumbling that **Sensible** sticks between each track. He must have thought it was witty; but it sounds more like arquing airtraffic controllers.

Captain **Sensible** is **New**, different and enjoyable, which are good qualifications for a bizarre musician. Though this is true never judge an album by its cover, as the Captain states if you buy his record "You won't regret it govnor."



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