

SINGLES

Reviewed by JOHN PEE



CURVED AIR'S Sonja Kristina no direction.

CURVED AIR LACKING LOGIC

"Sarah's Concern"—(Warner Bros K16164). Record opens with disconcerting screams and moves into a somewhat muffled song which seems to meander along rather aimlessly and inconclusively before sliding into what I take for VCS 3 synthesiser noises, which I like, and the record only really comes to life during the last twenty seconds of its length. Certainly this is no "Back Street Luv" and seems to lack the vital energies that attracted me to Curved Air when I first heard them.

There's no logic to it—it doesn't actually go anywhere—and would have made a better LP track than it does a single. It's been a long time since I saw the band live and I wonder, after hearing this, what they're getting up to. Previously what they've done has fairly crackled with power and by comparison this is quite turgid. Not likely to bound into the charts, I suspect.

JOAN BAEZ

"Song Of Bangla Desh" (A & M AMS 897). With my confidence shaken by reading this very second that the Aretha Franklin record reviewed above is clambering up the American chart I move with reluctance on to very tricky territory indeed. Let me establish immediately that I have never been keen on Joan Baez either in her days as Dylan's lady or during the period when her husband's imprisonment seemed to be the foundation on which her work was based. Her Woodstock performance did little to lessen my antipathy and so we come to this single, the proceeds from which go to the "victims of Bangladesh."

Now for me to say anything against the record would smack of uncaring and insensitivity—or at least might appear to do so. But honesty forces me to say that I think this is a very poor thing indeed. I won't go so far as to say that the very motives for making it are suspect but listening to it repeatedly I find myself left with a faintly disagreeable taste in my mouth. It's ten seconds short of five minutes long and a lot of the lyrics seem to be more concerned with finding a rhyme for Bangladesh than with establishing any ideas.

George Harrison's "Bangla Desh" spoke in very general terms of his grief and confusion in the face of an unstoppable tragedy and was totally believ-

able. This record, far more specific and even detailing atrocities of which I've never previously heard, just doesn't ring true. It's over-stated and... well, how the hell can I convey what I'm trying to say? Imagine Hammer Films doing a documentary on Ulster—that's as close as I can get to it. This is one you must judge for yourselves. I'm copping out.

THE BUNCH

"When Will I Be Loved"/"Willie And The Hand-Jive" (Island WIP 6130). There was a fair amount in the papers about the sessions that produced this single and the forthcoming LP, "Rock On," from which this is taken. I wasn't perhaps as enthusiastic about the concept as were others and, consequently, the single doesn't come as a disappointment. This is a bit difficult to review because all of the musicians are people I admire hugely.

Richard Thompson for example I rate as perhaps the most eloquent player of the electric guitar I've heard—certainly the most tasteful. Then I've loved Sandy, both as singer and person, for years. Not that there's actually anything wrong with this record—it's well played, well executed—but it just ain't rock-n-roll. It lacks the bite and drama of the originals really. Sandy's voice isn't entirely suited to the staccato style required by the great rock classics and the whole thing lacks the essential vulgarity of the Everly Brothers/Johany Otis hits. It's all a bit too polite, too controlled—and too long. "When Will I Be Loved" is three minutes, ten seconds and "Willie" is 15 seconds longer. They'd both benefit from being two minutes long and looser.

ARETHA FRANKLIN

"Day Dreaming" (Atlantic K10154). This seems to be a weak for records which, while they aren't by any means poor, aren't as good as they should be. This is taken from the "Young, Gifted And Black" LP and seems a strange choice for a single. It sounds rather supper-club; dimming the lights slowly over the intro and then a blue spotlight—that sort of thing. Aretha wrote it and it's not that outstanding a song and moves

along in a faintly bossa-novaish manner. Aretha is a vocal Steve Heighway though, and the nature of the song and backing, which includes rather horrid flute, can't eclipse entirely her voice which, with its unexpected swoops, curts and body-swoerves, is always daring and exciting. It's all immaculately done, naturally, and there's some nice guitar shading from time to time. Ultimately I'm forced to recall the superb Betty Wright single of last week and the comparison, perhaps irrelevant, is interesting, with Betty W. winning easily.

J. GEILS BAND

"Looking For A Love" (Atlantic K10099). This comes as a heady draught after what has gone before. The J. Geils Band is an incredibly tight, cohesive, driving band and their music is never lazy or self-indulgent. This track from the "Morning After" LP just rolls and whoogles along beautifully. My only small reservation concerns Peter Wolf's vocals which can sound strained and uncomfortable at times. Magic Dick's harmonica playing is exemplary and proves that you can do a lot more with the machine than the British blues boom evidenced.

For an example of the economy, drive and musical skill of the band hear the short instrumental break on this track where guitar, harmonica, organ all have their say in a very few seconds and there are two perfect little flourishes on the harmonica to re-introduce the vocal. Great. The "B" side is a feature for Magic Dick and is another dandy. Listen for the way the other instruments come in after Dick's intro. A superior band and it grieves me to think that this record is unlikely to be a hit.

JACKSON 5

"Sugar Daddy" (Tama Motown TMG 809). I've always been a great believer in the commercial

value of the clap. The hand-clap, that is. The great rockers were never above a bit of rhythmic clapping on their waxings and Marc Bolan has recently given a new lease of life to the form. For another example of how the single hand-clap can score hugely, listen to "Happydaystoytown" on the Small Faces' "Ogden's Nut Gone Flake" LP.

The reason I mention all of this is because the highlight of this now Jackson 5 single is contained in a brief flurry of clapping. Very tasty indeed. Having said that I'll have to opine that the rest of the work is somewhat below standard and lacks the brushness and exuberance of the earlier hits by the group. It sounds as though they're being weaned away from the streets and being groomed for the Las Vegas circuit. Perhaps I'm eight-years behind and they're all ready at it and that right successfully. It takes several listens for the melody line to establish itself and the vocals are still as full of the unexpected twists and turns as ever. There's the usual brass, strings, piano, wah-wah guitar and strong bass backing but the overall effect is one of less than the usual strength.

It'll probably get a handful of radio plays but Tone and the boys would be better employed giving the folks a taste of the J. Geils Band. It seems that Tam's artists, even the best known, do not score automatically this side of the sea and they have, in a sense, to re-establish themselves with every record. I'll be surprised if this does a great deal for the Jacksons here.

DAVID CASSIDY

"Could It Be Forever" (Bell 1224). From the daily press I glean that David Cassidy is the latest beautiful American youth to set the teenies hearts a-flutter. His fan club, I find, is headquartered at 58 Parker Street, London WC2, and if I know anything about fan clubs an unkind word here will unleash a torrent of vituperation on my elegant head. Suffice to say that

this record is achingly wholesome, clean and toothpaste-y.

David has a fashionable, breathy sort of voice and this builds into a fairly common-place big ballad thing which is tinged with the hint of a superior Eurovision song. Pretty conventional stuff although thought on first hearing that he'd burped at one stage—which would have brightened my day a bit—but investigation showed that it was just his delivery of the word "but." As a rule I resent the confidence and parent-reassurance factor of these sort of super-American boys-next-door but I expect that David is a lovely fellow and he has nice teeth. Giggle, giggle, tee-hee, wow.

MUNGO JERRY

"Open Up" (Dawn DNX 2514). This would seem to be a critically important record for the Mungo Jerrys, coming, as it does, after the group halved itself, their previous maxi-single was a smaller-than-usual hit and Ray Dorset's excellent "Cold Blue Excursion" got lost in the heap. It grieves me therefore, because I like Mungo Jerry and have done ever since they turned the Hollywood festival on it's ear, to report that "Open Up" really isn't all that great.

For a start it doesn't sound much like Mungo Jerry—a bit John Lee Hooker-ish in spots actually—and it's a somewhat mournful, overdrawn thing in comparison with earlier efforts. I hope it goes well but I have my doubts. The other tracks are good though and that'll help. There's some fine piano on the stomper "Going Back Home" which is much more Mungo Jerrified. The first track on side two is the great Gary "U.S. Bonds tradition of school thing—"I Don't Wanna Go Back To School." Finally there's the excellent "No Girl Reaction" which sounds rather as though Edgar Broughton was singing with the Doors. Good stuff.

* QUICKSPINS on page 12

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PREL

MEETS THE CAPTAIN

So here I sit typing while the Pig drives a Land-Rover full of John Walters and Helen round to a neighbouring hotel. The weather's broken and it's become cold and windy but I can still see and hear the lambs in the field across the lane and this morning's rain brought the level of water in the stream up an inch or two.

Last night we sat and watched the Eurovision song thing and tried to assess which song would win. All four of us did well although Pig and I both thought that the Austrian song, which was the only one that sounded as though it might have been written after 1950, would do better than it did. The song contest, like the Miss World show, is one of those things that you really have to watch because memory dulls during the year and you start to wonder if it really is as dreadful as you remember. Neither of them ever let you down.

After that we watched "Match of the Day" and John and I debated my theory that it has become an unwritten rule never to mention Liverpool on television or radio. With the team running fourth, stomping Manchester City 3-0, Everton 4-0 and Newcastle 5-0 you'd think that they would come in for some consideration—or at very least a mention in dispatches, but no.

Thursday was a big day this week. Pig and I drove up from the cottage, after I'd changed a flat tyre amid curses, for a reception at the Spa-house for Don Van White, Captain Beefheart. Three years ago, when the good Captain last came here, I abandoned most of my regular activities, hired a small car and drove him to as many of his gigs as I could. In those days he and the

Magic Band were pretty much unknown quantities and yet the reactions of the audiences were strangely uniform.

At all of the performances I saw and heard, about half the audience would get up and leave, muttering or laughing, after about five/ten minutes, while the other half would stay and allow the Captain's music to flow over them and ultimately involve them. For the unwary he must have posed a lot of problems and I'm not really surprised that many people felt unequal to coping with the radical changes in taste and attitude that were required to absorb what he was doing.

He was then a very nervous and apprehensive man who saw potential enemies and villains lurking behind the most innocent of covers and, whilst enjoying the time I spent with him several years ago, I was apprehensive of meeting him again—especially at a reception. In the event the passage of time has wrought changes on him—changes I should have anticipated from the changes in his music—and he has become a happy and contented man. That was a joy to see.

Laughter is never far away and despite the certain knowledge that

he's playing a different game to most of the rest of us, the feeling that at least he's in sight now. He still full of puns and jokes, which often make no sense until you think your way laboriously through his thought processes when you have the time to spare later, and can spin such webs around people who insist on asking him weighty questions that they are pulled to a standstill.

In Bristol he whistled the theme from "More" when they called for "More" and laughed for a minute when telling the tale over the phone. In the world of contemporary music just about anyone can be called "genius" for what they do with what has been done before. Captain Beefheart is out there charting his own erratic way through the heavens and must be the only real visionary to have brought his power to our music. We should treasure him.

The same night we went to the Albert Hall to see Leonard Cohen and that was a bit of a disappointment. Leonard Cohen's bleak vision had never seemed more fitting to me than it did when we were driving slowly through the Black Forest in a fine drizzle and in the florid Albert Hall it seemed inappropriate. The sound system was less than clever also and, whilst disagreeing with friends who feel that the blasted landscapes and echoing empty streets he conjures up are unhealthy, I didn't feel that the concert was a great success. Leonard Cohen is the sort of singer you should come across unannounced in some deep pairing place. Later he said he remembered me and we were at reception in a Chinese restaurant which was attended by a torrent of smart and fashionable folk from TV programmes. I didn't see an other radio folk there at all. Later still when we passed him in the street he didn't remember at all but can hardly be blamed for the being lionized must be a tricky business.

The Pig and Gerry, who'd come with me, slept on the rocks on the Green Island on which Leonard Cohen once stayed and say he was a friendly and a happy man. He looked harassed and frustrated the other night. Perhaps he needs an application of what the Captain has found.