

Perfection in a Wrapper

By W. Dart

First things first, and I suppose the first question is whether we should take rock music seriously anyway. It is a music that is riddled with negative aspects — the role of commercialism, for instance, and coupled with this commercialism, the part played by all the 'middle men' (record industry execs and radio personnel).

The concept of genre is fairly central to the whole aesthetic of rock music. Take a classical symphony for instance. In such a work the form itself is so complex that the composer can concentrate on a complex and highly developed working-out of the musical content. In the slighter musical forms, the content is limited and the composer may place more emphasis on style, within the piece's particular genre — Chopin's *Waltzes* are a notable example. And this is really much the same as a film director working with a form like the western or horror film.

The use of genre may favour a stressing of style rather than content — in the film world, perhaps Sternberg is the ultimate example here. In rock music this deliberate imbalance can be something of a mercy. Who would not rather have Tom Robinson doing a neat little piece of auto-rock in "Grey Cortina" than the rather naïve political rhetoric of "Power in the Darkness". I often find a bit of a credibility gap when successful rock stars pull out a soapbox — Phil Ochs must have been one of the few who did not compromise his beliefs and he came to a rather sorry end.

Anyway, let's leave the murky waters of politics and go somewhere where genre is everything, and where commercialism is almost an aesthetic touchstone.

Bubblegum music. A difficult term to define, this one. Lillian Roxon avoids a straight definition and the best she can come up with is "music that sells to subteens and sub-subteens". As a rule it is refreshingly commercial music utterly stripped of any preten-



sions, put across with humour and a strong sense of genre. When the 1910 Fruitgum Company gives us a social message in "The Year 2001" they walk a delicate tightrope between the naïve and the archest camp.

The 1910 Fruitgum Company must be one of the doyens of the phenomenon. Even Meltzer in *The Aesthetics of Rock* admits that they are, with the Beatles and the Stones, "unassailably the finest". Taking their name from an old chewing gum wrapper in someone's suit pocket, they were the biggest bubble in Buddah's blowjob.

Their first hit, "Simon Says" set the pattern with its driving mindless beat, tinny organ and repeated guitar riffs all backing a nursery-rhyme message of conformity. And a characteristic rose-tinted philosophy comes through in most of their other songs such as "Bubble Gum World", "Happy Little Tears" and "Magic Windmill".

Bubblegum is conscious of its genre. If Peter Wollen ever turned his attention to rock music, bubblegum would have to be his first research area. 1910 Fruitgum

Company's "The Song Song" is completely built upon titles of other bubblegum and related songs — in a kindred spirit to "You Can't Do That", Nilsson's pot-pourri of Beatles' songs. And Bubblegum was never afraid to beg, steal or borrow. The internal borrowings in 1910 Fruitgum Company's recordings would even make Handel blush.

Whither Bubblegum? Is it just a late sixties phenomenon, like psychedelia, these two areas of music are closely inter-related. Perhaps it is a clearly defined musical period, although Dave Laing argues for such British exponents as Jonathan King, Marc Bolan and Sweet. Certainly Abba hit a peak with their "Dum Dum Diddle" and lines such as "You're only smilin'/When you play your violin".

Anyway, viva Bubblegum! Your chewing gum may lose its flavour on the bedpost overnight, but those old bubblegum records that your mother still has kicking around your old wardrobe at home are as fresh as they ever were. If you cleared them out for her she could probably take in a lodger and have some fun herself.

William Dart

Montreux Jazz Festival

The Twelfth Annual Montreux International Jazz Festival kicked off on July 7th with an evening of European jazz-rock, starring Jan Ackerman and friends, and finished on July 23rd with a night of Country Rock, headlined by rapidly rising American bands, Dixie Dregs, and Sea Level; in the two weeks separating these two events, more than 30,000 people saw some 500 musicians performing in concert and taking part in impromptu jam sessions. Almost every type of popular music was represented with, naturally enough, the onus being on jazz.

Despite the unusual venue for the festival, it has now taken over both the longer-running Newport and Monterey Festivals as the pinnacle on the jazz calendar. Rock music doesn't have anything to compare to the Montreux Festival. Besides the nightly concerts and jam sessions, there are daytime musicians' workshops, drum clinics, "New Orleans" boat rides, and three separate venues where one can see up-and-coming stars performing free.

Montreux is a small town (pop:17,000) set in the heart of Switzerland on the edge of Lake Geneva. The festival is the brain-child of Claude Nobs, whose interest in music is paralleled only by his commitment to give young musicians from all nations a chance to prove themselves to their peers at the festival. As well as appearing at the "Free Entertainment" venues during the day, nine of the visiting big bands (from the States, Canada and Japan) recently had the

privilege of performing under the direction of Clark Terry, Harry Edison or Bill Evans.

The three week programme this year boasted a history of 20th Century music: Count Basie, Milt Jackson, Buddy Rich, Mary Lou Williams, Stan Getz, Oscar Peterson, Sonny Rollins, Pharoah Saunders, Etta James, Brecker Brothers, Freddie Hubbard, Junior Wells & Buddy Guy, Taj Mahal, Stanley Clarke, Billy Cobham, and Larry Coryell amongst others.

There were also four "World Exclusives" at the festival. Ray Charles put together a special band for the occasion including Dizzy Gillespie, "Fathead" Newman, Kenny Burrell and guest singer Esther Phillips. Xanadu was a ten-piece band put together by drummer Frank Butler; musicians included Blue Mitchell and Ronnie Cuber. John McLaughlin premiered the third Mahavishnu Orchestra, mainly comprised of new musicians. But the highlight of the festival was "Viva Brazil", a night of almost all-Brazilian musicians headed by master percussionist Airtio Moreira and wife Flora Purim. The event drew the largest crowd ever assembled at the Montreux Festival.

With the festival over and preparations well on their way for the next, one can only hope that, with the ever-growing development of accurately capturing live concerts on celluloid, someone may decide to film a future festival so that the rest of the world can share some of the highlights of this unique festival.

John Dix

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