

We need more than this!

"Lennon and McCartney are the greatest songwriters since Schubert," or so wrote T.V. producer and music critic Tony Palmer when considering the *Sgt. Pepper* album in 1968. For many years Palmer has lamented that popular music is deemed culturally inferior, "not worthy of proper analysis", and consequently has been earnestly seeking to rectify the situation by providing "a higher standard of appreciation."

His major attempt at cultural edification to date is the T.V. series *All You Need is Love* currently screening on T.V.1. He has also written a book as companion to the series.

Now while all this is a highly laudable activity, Palmer does suffer, as the opening quotation demonstrates, from a lack of balance. The trailer to the series boasted having shot almost a million feet of film and acquiring as much again in archival material, 300 interviews, and specially commissioned essays. Yet with all this available, Palmer has failed to achieve fresh insights into his subjects and has often plainly misused his resources.

The episode on Rhythm & Blues provides a typical and (considering that this is a Rock paper), pertinent example. On the

credit side we saw performances by Wilson Pickett, Stevie Wonder, Aretha Franklin, the Meters, rare film of Buddy Holly and an equally rare interview with Phil Spector. For this we are grateful. However, other material was, as elsewhere in the series, either spoiled or wasted in the pursuit of slick, filmic effects.

Much time and good film was wasted through editorial imbalance. We spent four minutes while a white gospeller peddled religious knick-knacks and then gave us a tour of her mobile home but had barely 1½ minutes devoted to the whole of Tamla Motown.

Editorial imbalance was also responsible for several glaring omissions. Any program on R. & B. should include such seminal figures as Bo Diddley, Little Richard, Muddy Waters, Ray Charles and Fats Domino. Yet only Bo Diddley appeared. Furthermore, we had to suffer Pat Boone's milk-sop rendition of Richard's "Tutti Frutti" only seconds after being told that R. & B. caught on because people were "fed up with bland faceless music." Irony upon insult.

Such important omissions are symptomatic of what is perhaps the series' (and

book's) central flaw: that Palmer seems to lack a clear conception of what he means by "popular". He recognises that popular music is a totally capitalistic enterprise yet, at the same time, despises obviously manufactured pop (eg. Osmonds) and admires those artists who "express themselves" without selling out to commercialism. Palmer, it seems, is an elitist on the side of the underdog, a white liberal purging his guilt over the manipulated black.

If the series (and book) does contain a thematic argument it lies only in the recurring motif of commercialism, manipulation and exploitation: whites exploiting blacks (minstrels, ragtime, blues etc.), whites exploiting whites (the music business), blacks exploiting blacks for whites (Motown etc.)

So don't expect any critical enlightenment on popular music from *All You Need is Love*. All you get is the chronological, production-line treatment. But stay tuned anyway. There's always some good film clip... and wait till the final episode when Palmer presents Mike Oldfield as the future of pop!

Peter Thomson

ant surprise of the month with "Take Me, I'm Yours" (A&M). One of those quirky little minor-key melodies, a bouncy beat with a clever little synthesiser line and smart lyrics; sort of like 10cc on acid. Coming from a radio speaker, it can only do good.

REO Speedwagon have been knocking around the American gig circuit so long they've probably forgotten where home is. They've yet to crack the big time, despite a solid following in the Midwest, where they go for heavy metal histrionics. Their new single, "Roll With The Changes", won't do much for



Sharon O'Neill with 12M's Alan Beagle

them either. Plenty of attack but very little substance. *Thin Lizzy* walk all over them with a sizzling version of Bob Seger's "Rosalie" (Vertigo). Taken from their forthcoming live album, it's guaranteed to destroy stereos and wake up neighbours everywhere. One of Ireland's better products.

For those still unexposed to the earthy pleasures of Ian Dury, "What A Waste" (Vertigo) is as good a place as any to start. Sleazy, cheeky funk as delivered by a master. The flip is the sublime "Sweet Gene Vincent" and it is quite capable of speaking for itself.

Local girl Sharon O'Neill makes a strong debut and lives up to all expectations with "Luck's On Your Table" (CBS). Though slightly spoilt by indifferent production, Sharon's voice and the strength of the song carry the day and the future looks bright.

Richard Wilde, on the other hand, falls flat on his face as he tries his hand at Spencer Davis' "Gimme Some Lovin'" (Polydor) and manages to remove everything from the number that made it so exciting in the first place.

And the last word goes to "I Think It's You" by Mother Goose (Mushroom). The word was made popular by The Sex Pistols. Only I said it this time.

Duncan Campbell

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SINGLES

Best news in the singles market this month is provided by a re-issue. Island, in their infinite wisdom, hath said to the Melodians: "Go forth, and sing ye one more time thy 'Rivers Of Babylon', which thou didst, after all, do first."

And so we have another chance to hear an immortal song the way it should be done. Taken from the soundtrack of *The Harder They Come*, it is backed by Jimmy Cliff's gospel-tinged ballad "Many Rivers To Cross" and is thus very good value. The Boney M backlash begins here.

Second-best news is Bruce Springsteen's "Prove It All Night" (CBS), which escaped last month's batch and is already making its presence felt. All I wish to do here is to command people to repeat after me: "I will buy Bruce's new album... I will buy Bruce's new album..."

British band Squeeze give the most pleas-

Bryan Staff

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