

## Records

### Passion is no ordinary word

**Graham Parker and the Rumour**  
**Squeezing Out Sparks**  
*Vertigo*

It's over three years now since Graham Parker, ex-petrol pump attendant and full-time nobody, made his break. It's also three years since the hallelujahs that were heaped on Parker's first two albums — *Howlin' Wind* and *Heat Treatment* — dried up into the critical indifference that greeted his subsequent projects.

*Squeezing Out Sparks* then marks a significant chapter in the can-Graham-Parker-and-the-Rumour-find-true-happiness-in-rock'n'roll-saga, as it represents the first new material from GP in over a year and a half and a further attempt to establish him as the major artist so many know he deserves to be.

Well the news is both good and bad. For while *Squeezing Out Sparks* is the best album since the first two, it is I suspect less than the album it ought to be.

One of the problems here seems to be with the production work of veteran studio-man, Jack Nitzche. On paper he would have seemed an ideal choice — as an arranger with Phil Spector and later as producer on the Mink de Ville albums, he seemed to have a foot in both the grand Spector style and simple small scale production work.

With Parker, however, he has aimed for simplicity and a unity of sound rather than the subtle interaction of instruments that was the feature of the best sounding Parker album, *Heat Treatment*. As a result *Sparks* seems to be built around Martin Belmont's choppy rhythm guitar work — an idea which works fine on the upbeat songs but which robs the more dramatic numbers like "Passion is No Ordinary Word" and "Love Gets You Twisted" of a great deal of their authority. The Nitzchean production method has also buried Bob Andrews keyboards to the point of inaudibility, apart from some obtrusive in doodlings on "Protection".

Indeed it's those songs which I'm most familar from the tour last year that I find the most disappointing here. The single, "Protection", is literally a failure — Parker's singing seems curiously detached and the arrangement only falls into place when Steve Goulding's disco drum pattern hauls it together in the chorus. And "Passions" and "Twisted"

seem to suffer from a crisis of confidence. These are emotional songs that deserve to be played in the technicolour, larger than life style in which Parker delivers them on stage. Here they seem underplayed and it's only by reaching for the ridiculous that you can sometimes achieve the sublime.

But my criticisms arise out of my own high expectations. For me, Graham Parker has been one of the artists of the last few years, uncompromisingly clawing his way out of the rubble of 70's rock'n'roll on his way to the next decade. And *Squeezing Out Sparks* is his strongest collection of songs in some time.

From his package tour view of the Orient in "Discovering Japan", till the album pulls off with his ode to indifference in "Don't Get Excited", Parker is prepared to cauterize his wounds on vinyl in a way which reveals his humanity and connects to our own.

This is the best new Graham Parker you're likely to hear this year and that's almost enough. I wouldn't live without it.

**Alastair Dougal**

**The Rumour**  
**Frogs Sprouts Clogs and Krauts**  
*Stiff*

The Rumour, along with The E Street Band and the Blockheads, are everyone's dream rock backing band. They ventured alone in late '77 with *Max*, a straight-shooting honest blend of R & B and Band influenced rock'n'roll, but they showed few signs of being able to achieve greatness in their own right, even if they wanted to.

The heart of the band was formed from the remnants of Ducks Deluxe (Belmont) and Brinsley Schwarz (Schwarz and Andrews) and back then they had little opportunity to develop any distinctive songwriting mode under the egotistical Tyla and the copious talents of Nick Lowe. On *Frogs* Schwarz displays (or maybe just shows) understandable heavy Lowe influence on "Euro" and "Frozen Years". Good songs but they would have been more appropriate on *Jesus of Cool*.

Belmont's songs have always been orderly and level-headed veering towards tough love emotions and "Loving You" is no exception, but on "Leaders" and "One Good Night" even he falls prey to Lowe vocal phrasing.

If the Rumour are to evolve their own songwriting identity then their best chances lie with Bob Andrews. On the album he sounds as if he's just discovered the synthesiser which gives *Frogs* the desired European feel as opposed to the American leanings of *Max*. His songs, particularly "Emotional Traffic" and "We Believe in You/New Age" are definite and full of good ideas, mostly his own.

*Frogs* is an enjoyable album of borrowed music, glossier than *Max* but posing a few problems for the Rumour if they ever attempt to make it on their own.

**George Kay**



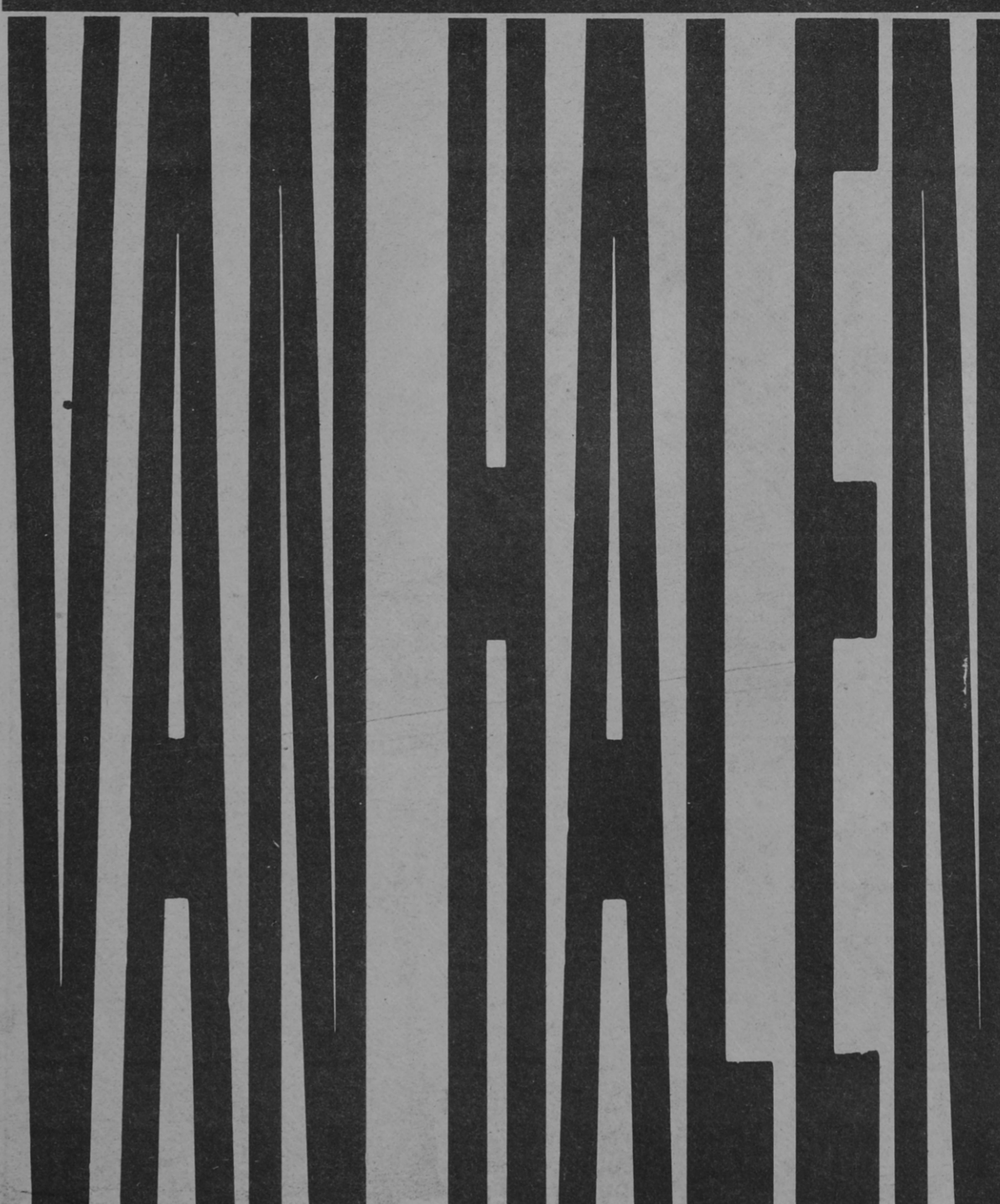
### Back in the Lounge

**Roxy Music**  
**Manifesto**  
*Polygram*

Although the title and title track portend something different, *Manifesto* is a relatively light album from the re-formed Roxy Music, and it might therefore be tempting to dismiss it as yet another half-arsed reunion effort that someone should have smothered in the mother. But that's too easy and wide of the mark. Any new Roxy Music album has a lot to live up to, following on stunners like *For Your Pleasure* and *Stranded* (..or you name 'em) and their last studio album *Siren*, a record of such lyric interest and instrumental power that any subsequent release would have to really jump to look it in the eye.

*Manifesto*, probably wisely, makes no pretence at being a trail-blazer and is instead a collection of largely pop oriented material some of which is couched in a subtly textured lounge-funk that reminds me a little of The Commodores, or someone like them.

The 'new' Roxy is Bryan Ferry, Phil Manzanera, Andy Mackay, Paul Thompson and ring-ins Gary Tibbs, Alan Spenner, and Paul Carrack. They play with little of the fire that ig-



**VAN HALEN II**  
**IS**  
**HEAVY**  
**METAL**  
**MAGIC!**

