

SIMPLY XTC



XTC
Drums and Wires
Virgin

To be honest I thought XTC had peaked with the unparalleled cleverness of the first side of *Go 2*. Keyboard player, Barry Andrews, had left earlier in the year and took with him (or so I thought) an important facet of the band's sound. The decision to replace him with a guitarist was greeted with consternation as it appeared to be a self-imposed restriction, a move backwards and a relinquishing of their status as the fastest most inventive group around in favour of a more conservative bid for chart popularity. How wrong could I be? And looking back now over their two previous albums it's quite obvious that beneath their endless rhythm changes there lurked the fettered makings of one of the best beat groups of the seventies. And *Drums and Wires* reveals the best.

The single that preceded this new album by a few months was a Colin Moulding song, "Life At the Hop", released after Andrews' departure and an indication that XTC were invading rockland proper:

Prepare yourself for the boys in the band at the hop

The cheap guitars, too young for the bars at the hop.

Effervescent, exuberant, youthful sixties' energy and dash. Moulding emerged as a potent songwriter in his own right on his trio of

Andy Partridge
Colin Moulding

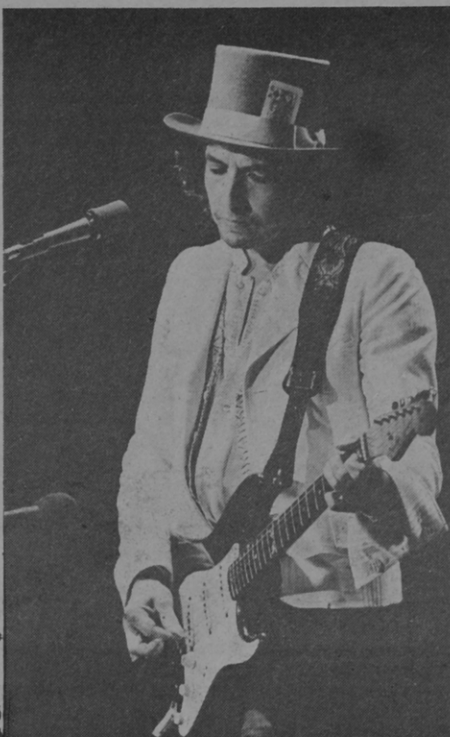


greats on *Go 2* — "Buzzcity Talking", "Crowded Room" and "The Rhythm" — all on the first side. On *Drums and Wires* he does everything but steal the limelight from Partridge with his brilliant flashes of conventional insight, "Making Plans for Nigel", "Ten Feet Tall" and "That is the Way".

The album though ultimately belongs to Partridge who has retained much of his highly charged electric fidgeting especially on "Helicopter", "Scissor Man" and the irresistibly love-sick "When You're Near Me I Have Difficulty", but he has expanded his ambitions on the slow, amorphous "Millions", and on "Roads Girdle the Globe".

After listening to the greatness of *Drums and Wires* (the title probably refers to the fact that the band have now three guitarists and a drummer although new-comer Dave Gregory does contribute keyboards) it's apparent that XTC had reached the height of their particular style on *Go 2*. It's probable that a *Go 3* would have been greeted with a series of catcalls and comments like "marking time" and it's with this in mind that you must view the new album. Dave Gregory has added a desirable edge to the band without subtracting anything from their original qualities or causing the band to abandon their essential style. XTC have not only become one of the most inventive guitar bands around, they have also emerged with one of the best albums of '79 to boot.

George Kay



ROLLING BRIMSTONE

Bob Dylan
Slow Train Coming
CBS

A good many stones have rolled around this world since the release of a new Bob Dylan album hustled up a storm — either in the critics' dens or amongst the buying public. Dylan's recent albums are not ignored; but no longer are they met with the automatic deference once deemed due.

Now, as if to put the lie to possible tales of aged decrepitude, back the old boy has come with *Slow Train Coming*, probably his best and most consistent album in years, and providing lots for all concerned to chew upon.

Musically it is distinctly redolent of older Dylan. Coming out of the studios at Muscle Shoals, the album was made under the direction of Jerry Wexler, a producer responsible for Ray Charles and many others in the past. The backing band is small and includes Mark Knopfler and Pick Withers from Dire Straits, along with a horns section and a good-sized choir of back-up singers. Even so, the feeling is spare but powerful.

The real push is coming from Dylan himself,

and his emotive singing of a bunch of heart-felt lyrics. For Dylan, you see, has converted from non-practising Judaism to evangelical Christianity and he's not letting one song slip by without pinning a message to its back.

The single from the album, "Gotta Serve Somebody" starts Side One. With the modest use of gospel singers in the background, Dylan runs through a multitude of options for life — whether you're rich, poor or ugly, pretty or weak, powerful. Still like every page of The Bible will tell you "It may be the Devil/It may be the Lord/But you're gonna have to serve somebody."

"Precious Angel" is a beautiful song delivered in aching devotion — seemingly to both God and the woman who'd introduced the pair. His voice, in this song especially, harks of a return to the days when every strained muscle was audible; it's strong and gnarled and quite superb.

Throughout almost all the album Dylan is in fine voice, but it's weighty stuff he's preaching. Starting off Side Two with "Change My Way of Thinking", he announces the "golden rule": "There's only one authority and that's the authority on high." To be soon followed by "Jesus said to be ready/For you know not the hour in which I come ... he said/Who's not for me is against me."

"When You Gonna Wake Up" is similarly harsh, painting a grim world of seduction and fakery by the evil and corrupt. The message is never clearer: "There's a man on a cross/And he's been crucified for you/Believe in his power/That's about all you have to do."

Such righteousness will be unacceptable to some. So too will Dylan's preoccupation with retribution. But lyrically — looking beyond the obvious religious aspects — Dylan is still hitting targets for derision with the same accuracy as in his early days of protest. And, from Arab oil interests ("deciding America's future from Amsterdam and Paris") to the hippies of yore ("I don't know which is worse/doing your own thing/or being cool") no-one avoids the arrows.

Mercifully a couple of tracks escape the Old Testament tinge. "When He Returns" is positively devotional, but unthreatening for the non-believer; "I Believe in You" is about withstanding persecuion for religious beliefs; and "Man Gave Names to All The Animals" — the only track on the album which I really don't like — is a silly song of stories making fun of mankind's reasoning.

But these are the exceptions. Elsewhere Dylan comes on like the sledgehammer/cross wielded on the album cover. It may be a slow training coming, but *he's* certainly not shunting.

Nor, God be praised, is he really *selling* his conversion to his audience; he's not crazy. Rather, he's telling them what he believes in the best songs he's written and played for many years.

Louise Chunn

HOTEL CALIFORNIA WAS A LANDMARK IN SEVENTIES ROCK MUSIC. NEARLY THREE YEARS LATER COMES THE LONG RUN ANOTHER MASTERWORK BY AMERICA'S GREATEST BAND



EAGLES THE LONG RUN

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