

# Teenage Heads on Old Shoulders

## The 21 Year Career of the Flamin' Groovies



Cyril Jordan (in sunglasses) and the Flamin' Groovies.

Risen from the dead, the Flamin' Groovies are back. The last that was heard from them on vinyl was 1979's *Jumping in the Night*, and then nothing. Seven years later and founding member/writer/guitarist Cyril Jordan is talking through the wires from Sydney in the middle of a Groovies' Australasian tour.

### Back Pages

Jordan and vocalist Roy Loney formed the Groovies in the mid 60s in the Bay Area of San Francisco. In 1969 they recorded *Sneakers*, later re-issued on Epic as *Supersnazz*, and in the early 70s they came up with *Flamingo* and *Teenage Head*, the latter being a classic raw'n'rawl snorkel when everybody else was drowning in drippy shit. Cyril:

"Our current set stretches back to *Teenage Head* but not *Flamingo*. I've never related to that album. We

cut it in six days in the worst recording studio. I like the songs but I have a bad taste in my mouth from that period. *Supersnazz* was too bloody versatile. I don't think we got our own guitar sound until *Teenage Head* and from that point on we began to mature."

*Teenage Head*, with its Robert Johnson blues licks and slide guitar action, has often been credited as having out-done the Stones in their *Sticky Fingers* period:

"When the reviews came out I

was amazed that some people compared it to *Sticky Fingers*, but I was very pleased and that helped me get over the failure of the album. But how the hell can you get on the charts if the company doesn't print more than 2000 records? And we never had the hype or the lighting crews, all we had was the music.

**"I have a theory that rock 'n'roll is not contemporary, it's like sex and Mickey Mouse, it's timeless. . ."**

That's always been our problem — we've never been on a label that's taken us seriously."

After *Teenage Head* Roy Loney left and was replaced by Chris Wilson, but for three years the band was without a contract or major label until the 'You Tore Me Down' single on Greg Shaw's Bomp label prompted Sire to sign the band for the album *Shake Some Action* in 1976. This was the beginning of the Groovies' Byrds/Beatles phase:

"We were always influenced by the Stones, Beatles and the Byrds. We went through phases. Back around *Teenage Head* we weren't physically capable of doing three-part harmonies. If we'd had Chris Wilson on that album then 'Please Please Me' would probably have been on it. So we went from a Stones thing to a Beatles' thing on *Shake Some Action* because we were able to. *Jumping in the Night* was an attempt to get back to the raunchiness that we had with *Teenage Head*.

"The Byrds/Beatles influences on *Shake Some Action* and *Now* were experimental. And people asked why didn't you do all your own songs, and the answer is that song-

writing has never been easy for me, it is now, but back then I would throw out more songs than I'd keep. And we did covers because it's always been traditional for rock bands to do songs from 10 years earlier.

"I have a theory that rock'n'roll is not contemporary, it's like sex and Mickey Mouse, it's timeless and taking songs out of the 60s is part of this timelessness. Plus in the studio we got a lot of fun doing a version of something like 'Feel a Whole Lot Better' that blew my mind. So there was a selfishness about us."

By Groovies' standards 1976-9 was a prolific period with the release of three albums — *Shake Some Action* with its classic title track and numerous other pop goodies, the patchy *Now*, and the trouble-packed *Jumping in the Night*:

"Dave Edmunds had committed himself to producing *Jumping* after we had completed a 48-date tour,

**"I can only say (our sound) is like Jeff Beck and Keith Moon meets *Rubber Soul* because there's a lot of harmonies and the melodies haven't changed much."**

but Seymour Stein of Sire refused to let us do the album, even though we were contracted to do it. But when he pulled that one on me I tried to get another record deal and Radar was really interested.

"We went ahead and did the album in 11 days, but Seymour Stein wouldn't pay the studio bill, so we couldn't leave with the cassette and that was painful. We didn't hear that album until a year-and-a-half later, when Seymour was forced by his superiors to pick up the option and the album was put out.

"Record companies have got to give you 90 days notice before the

end of your term if they're not gonna pick your option up. If they are, they send you a letter saying you're still with us for the next year, which means you'll be doing an album. We

**"To me the cult status we have is unique. I'd rather have the okay from a bunch of heads than from street jerks who buy Prince records!"**

did not cut an album that year, and he picked up the option the next year. So for two years we waited and the band fell apart. And that's why I was so reluctant to put another band together before it was economically feasible."

### Return of the Groovies

After six years of silence the Groovies are poised to make a comeback. And during those years?

"We wrote songs and rehearsed and I invented the 10-string guitar completely by accident. In fact three-quarters of our set is on 10-string and 16 out of the 22 songs we play live are originals, we've never had so many.

"Also in 1980 I broke up with my girlfriend whom I had been with for nine years, and I was just saying to a friend of mine that if you ever see any pain, it's not from rock'n'roll but from rock'n'roll destroying my relationship. So what with that and Lennon's death, 1979 to '81 were bad years, and I didn't get back on my feet until about '82."

The current line-up is Jordan and Jack Johnson (guitars), Paul Zaul (drums) and another founding member George Alexander (bass): "I've never been so happy with a Groovies' line-up," says Jordan.

But no record contract? "We're with an independent and we've got a single out called 'Way Over My Head' with 'Shake It' on the flip, they're both mine. I've been cu-

rious to see whether the old fans who like *Teenage Head* would like the new stuff because it's not that much different. Although there's a contemporariness to the sound that isn't synthy. I can only say it's like Jeff Beck and Keith Moon meets *Rubber Soul* because there's a lot of harmonies and the melodies haven't changed much."

And what brought the band to this part of the world?

"I got a call from Peter Noble in Australia, and what with all the terrorism in Europe and Libya, the last thing they wanna see is a bunch of Yanks. So Peter's call was a godsend."

Dear readers you've probably got the picture by now that the Groovies have been jinxed by bad luck and bad management. Does Jordan resent the fact that they haven't had

**"I got into rock'n'roll as a teenager because I wanted to blow Keith Richards' mind. But when you're younger you have great expectations. . ."**

the success to break out of cult status?

"No, to me the cult status we have is unique. I'd rather have the okay from a bunch of heads than from street jerks who buy Prince records! (Laughs)

"For me, if it ends, it ends, but just when I'm about to hang it up I get a phone call from somewhere around the world which says, 'Hey, there's an interest here, would you like to come and do it again?'"

"I got into rock'n'roll as a teenager because I wanted to blow Keith Richards' mind. But when you're younger you have great expectations, now I'd be satisfied with just being able to continue this and get by. Being flash doesn't mean anything to me anymore."

George Kay

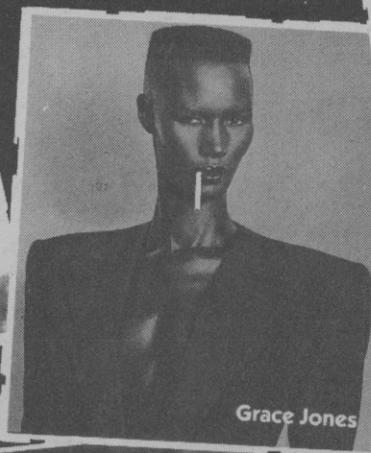
# SISTERS

## Top tracks from the women who make the hits

AS SEEN ON T.V.



Patti LaBelle



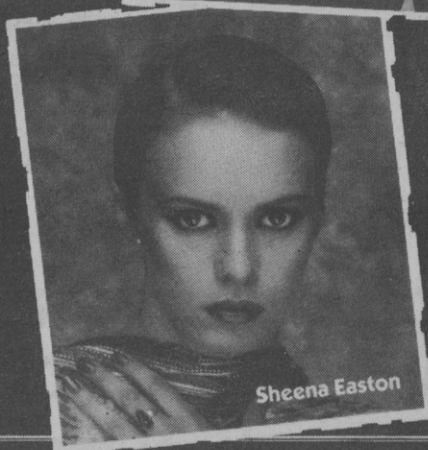
Grace Jones



Tina Turner



Pat Benatar



Sheena Easton

**BETTE MIDLER**  
Beast Of Burden  
**PAT BENATAR**  
Love Is A Battlefield  
**JOAN ARMATRADE**  
Drop The Pilot  
**PATTI LABELLE**  
New Attitude  
**SHEENA EASTON**  
Strut  
**POINTER SISTERS**  
Jump  
**BONNIE TYLER**  
Total Eclipse Of The Heart

**MARIANNE FAITHFUL**  
Ballad Of Lucy Jordan  
**GRACE JONES**  
Walkin' In The Rain  
**EARTHA KITT**  
Where Is My Man  
**TINA TURNER**  
What's Love Got To Do With It  
**KIM CARNES**  
Crazy In The Night  
**SHARON O'NEILL**  
Maxine  
**DENIECE WILLIAMS**  
Let's Hear It For The Boy

