

# Off The Record

**Is That It?**  
by Bob Geldof (Viking, \$32.99)  
James Joyce wrote that to survive as an Irishman the only answers were Silence, Exile and Cunning. Well, Bob Geldof doesn't live in Ireland anymore, his achievements show a wealth of cunning, and he's never been silent. Condemned in his own country for being in the "Irish Sex Pistols," darling and then whipping-boy of the music press, he is now one of the most respected human beings of all time.

Geldof had a tough childhood in Dublin; his mother died when he was very young and he only saw his salesman father at weekends. A misfit at school, he has suffered throughout his life from a directionlessness. Only when he finds a purpose, as in social work during his teens, music journalism in Canada, the rise of the Boomtown Rats, and the Ethiopian famine, does he really reach his potential. That's also when this rollicking, dictated autobiography gets going. When he's up and going for it, the hits are happening or Band Aid is snowballing, the pages fly by.

In between are valuable passages of self-doubt, the most perceptive inside story on the rise and decline of a minor-league rock band since Ian Hunter's *Diary of a Rock and Roll Star*, behind-the-scenes accounts of the politics of Live Aid, and a lengthy account of the problems of Africa.

From this account, one senses that the reason the music press turned on Geldof in the fading days of the Boomtown Rats was that he threatened them. He knew how to play their game, and it didn't suit them to have someone else calling the shots. So "Modest Bob" he became, a perennial running joke, sometimes justifiably. It is undeniable, however, that the hits of the Boomtown Rats, 'Looking After Number One,' 'Rat Trap,' and 'I Don't Like Mondays,' deserved to be hits.

Geldof is typically Irish. He displays the traits which are the most endearing — but also damaging — of the Irish character. His gift of the blarney and flaunting of conventions gets the job done, but also gets him into deep water.

One thing this entertaining, thoughtful book does is put the

importance of the pop music world in perspective. Bob Geldof gets up the noses of a lot of people, but one has to admire him. As the Irish statesman Edmund Burke said, "Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could only do a little." I only hope Geldof now finds something the equal of Band Aid to occupy his talents.

Chris Bourke

**More Dark Than Shark**  
by Eno & Mills, with  
commentaries by Rick Poynor  
(Faber & Faber, \$63.49)

*More Dark Than Shark* is essentially a collection of interpretations by illustrator Russell Mills of the songs of his friend Brian Eno. These are supplemented by statements, quotes and commentaries on their working methods and motives by both Eno and Mills, and a handful of longer pieces by Eno's biographer Rick Poynor.

At first I suspected something slightly askew at the very heart of this intriguing and unusual work. I doubted its premise that Eno's entirely novel and, at its best, quite magical alloy of intellect and pop could be crystallised graphically to produce results as similarly affecting as the music itself.

Eno's first few post-Roxy albums were a revelation to me personally (the later and ambient music I respect but feel little compulsion towards), and I was half expecting this lavish book to be an opportunistic and unconvincing conceit, but not so. *More Dark Than Shark* is a fascinating exercise, imaginatively carried out. Mills's contention that his illustration for 'Tizma N'arki' is "probably the least reverential to the song of the whole set but, partly for this reason one of the most successful," points to the impetus his work has to work at a tangent to the music rather than lean on it.

And so a growing sense of this book's own validity has largely dispelled my misgivings. If it sounds at all interesting to you, the chances are that you will find it a real treat. The accompanying text is enlightening, the design by Malcolm Garrett appropriately eccentric, and the printing superb.

Terence Hogan



Lookin' after No 1: the Boomtown Rats on the rise, 1977.



On the seventh day he rested: Paula Yates and Bob Geldof.

**Elvis Costello**  
by Mick St Michael (Omnibus)

A fairly perfunctory run through the career of Declan Patrick McManus. The back cover claims, with some justification, that Elvis is the most talented British songwriter of the last decade, and, as such, you'd be right to expect a little more depth. This however is little more than a compendium of

facts from back issues of the NME. Neither Elvis, or anyone close to him, have been interviewed, unacceptable considering the enigmatic nature of the subject, and few opinions are expressed save the bizarre one that *Goodbye Cruel World* is a much better album than *Imperial Bedroom*, a violent reversal of my view. Pass.

Simon Grigg

# Film

**WETHERBY**

Director: David Hare

There's a strong element of the paradoxical in *Wetherby*, a film which manages to give us an intensely bleak yet emotionally charged picture of England and the English through the eyes of playwright David Hare. This paradox is seen mainly in the balance of the political and personal which, as in Hare's *Plenty* (recently filmed by Australian director Fred Schepisi), is at the core of the movie.

On the political level it's difficult to ignore the crucial issue of Britain's involvement in South East Asia which hangs over the flashback sequences in *Wetherby*, paralleling as they do the colonial dilemma of Mother England satirised so gleefully in the later scenes of *Plenty*. More central in the later film are the personal issues, based around an emotional repression that many see as peculiarly English — what Hare describes as "how hard it is for the English to say anything or to get anything out."

This is reflected in most of the relationships from Judi Dench's and Ian Holm's bickering couple to the hesitant and suppressed moments between Vanessa Redgrave's bitter school-teacher and the mysterious young man who turns up on her doorstep uninvited one night, joins in a dinner party, and shoots himself in her kitchen the next morning.

As a director, Hare is much less intrusive than Schepisi was with *Plenty*: he avoids the picturesque and instead dissects his characters in unsparing detail. The players are subjected to probing close-ups, revealing a gallery of superlative performances. Redgrave is magnificent in one of the finest roles of her career.

Hare is a fiercely political playwright (his credits include the magnificent *A Map of the World*, a play which takes as its subject the "opposition" of various political systems at a poverty conference). We might well expect some astute political commentary from his pen, even in asides. One of the highlights of *Plenty* was a viciously

funny scene in which a drunk Meryl Streep went awry at an Embassy party and proceeded to single-handedly get her diplomat husband deported to the Middle East. In *Wetherby*, Ian Holm enlightens a dinner party with his explanation of Thatcherism ("it's as if she's taking some terrible revenge for some deep damage — for crimes behind the privet hedge").

*Wetherby* is, without a doubt, one of the most riveting British films of the year.

William Dart

**MY BEAUTIFUL LAUNDRETTE**  
Director: Stephen Frears

Pakistani writer Hanif Kureishi has written a script for *My Beautiful Laundrette* that shows an equally disturbing view of contemporary Britain: that of a society torn apart by violence and deep-rooted racism. He doesn't see the current social taboos as Death and Sex, but rather Money and Thinking.

It's basically a fairly harsh vision, although it comes with its own spry sense of humour. Kureishi takes great delight in showing the Pakistani contingent making the most of capitalistic corruption whilst the Thatcher sun is still high in the sky. Young Omar's success in transforming a run-down South London into a gleaming, neon fantasy palace is merely carrying on a family tradition of which his irrepressible Uncle Nasser (a sly and immensely likeable performance from Saeed Jaffrey) is the unchallenged master.

Much of the publicity for *My Beautiful Laundrette* is bound up with its presentation of a gay romance between Omar and a young ex-National Front Londoner Johnny (Daniel Day Lewis in a very different guise from his foppish Cecil Vyse in *A Room With a View*). However, using the immediacy of television techniques (it was originally made for Channel Four in Britain), we are also given vivid insight into a broader spectrum of British life: we can feel the rejection of Shirley-Anne Field's discarded mistress, the tremendous sexuality and anger of Rita Wolf's Tania and, above all, the ominous threat of Johnny's alienated former young colleagues, whose attack on the laundromat provides the climax to the film.

William Dart

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