

CRUSADERS
RHAPSODY AND BLUES
MCA

Rhapsody and Blues is structured in similar fashion to last year's *Street Life* — one extended piece with a guest vocalist and five instrumentals. Format hasn't yet become formula, and *Rhapsody and Blues* merits more than passing attention.

For the song "Soul Shadows" the Crusaders employ Bill Withers, who once promised much. Not since "Ain't No Sunshine" has Withers sounded so good. The bitter-sweet mood of the eight-minute "Soul Shadows" gives way to Wilton Felder's turkey strut, "Honky Tonk Struttin' ". I don't know if I prefer Felder playing bass or blowing sax. On either instrument he has an individual, infinitely sad-infinitely happy tone. To lavish praise on Felder is not to diminish the efforts of Joe Sample and Stix Hooper who do sterling work, as always.

The title track, by Sample, is an epic (nearly nine minutes) mood piece, ranging from gently simmering funk riffing to synthesised string sections which suggest ambitions toward "serious" artistry. To his credit, Sample plays an electric piano solo of some power. His acoustic piano work on "Last Call" is worth noting, too.

Some may mourn the absence of Wayne Henderson and Larry Carlton, but (on record, at least) I feel the diminished Crusaders are the better group.

Ken Williams



Mental As Anything

MENTAL AS ANYTHING
ESPRESSO BONGO
REGULAR

Doesn't it annoy you the way the British Music press adopt such a condescending attitude towards Australasian bands? Even Mental As Anything, whose first album received rave reviews, are regularly referred to as a bunch of Bruces. Still, for an English reviewer to understand the Mentals must be as big a problem as that faced by Americans trying to come to terms with the Jam.

Espresso Bongo, the band's second album has most of its subject matter provided by that great Australian institution, suburbia (even the Members were reportedly amazed at our suburbs, and referred to Australia as one never-ending suburb). The hooks are just as subtle, but growing songwriting expertise ("Come Around", "The Girl") and excellent production (Regular co-owner Cameron Allen) mean that the sound is smoother, and the band no longer wear their influences like badges.

Fortunately, they've retained their sense of humour. "Cannibal" must be one of the strangest love songs ever:

*If I were a cannibal
You'd be the first to go*

To me, it seems that there is some sort of renaissance in Australian music, with a kind of verve that's been missing since the mid-sixties. *Espresso Bongo* is representative of it.

Simon Grigg

B.B. KING
NOW APPEARING AT OLE MISS
MCA

B.B. King cut what is widely regarded as the best live blues album ever, the 1964 *Live at the Regal*. It is one of those rare "classics" which more than equals its legend. Musically, it's top notch; the blues guitar master delivers the goods to an impassioned audience, and the extraordinary reaction of the audience is as much a part of the show as King himself.

The passing years have made B.B. King's name known to a new — white — audience. He has recorded with rock musicians and with funky jazzmen. He remains one of the world's best (some would say *the* best) blues guitarists.

His new double live album presents all the faces of B.B. King, for while Riley B. sings and plays with great emotion and commendable economy, he can also be self-indulgently talkative on stage. He is much given to lengthy monologues, mainly about troublesome women or his guitar, Lucille (and who doesn't know that story?). While they are flavoured with flashes of wit and, more importantly, flashes of that breath-taking guitar, a lot of the time they are just a drag. A lot of Side One is taken up with monologue — and, to be fair, some great guitar — but if that's not your thing scrub around it and move on to Side Two where the real homecooking starts.

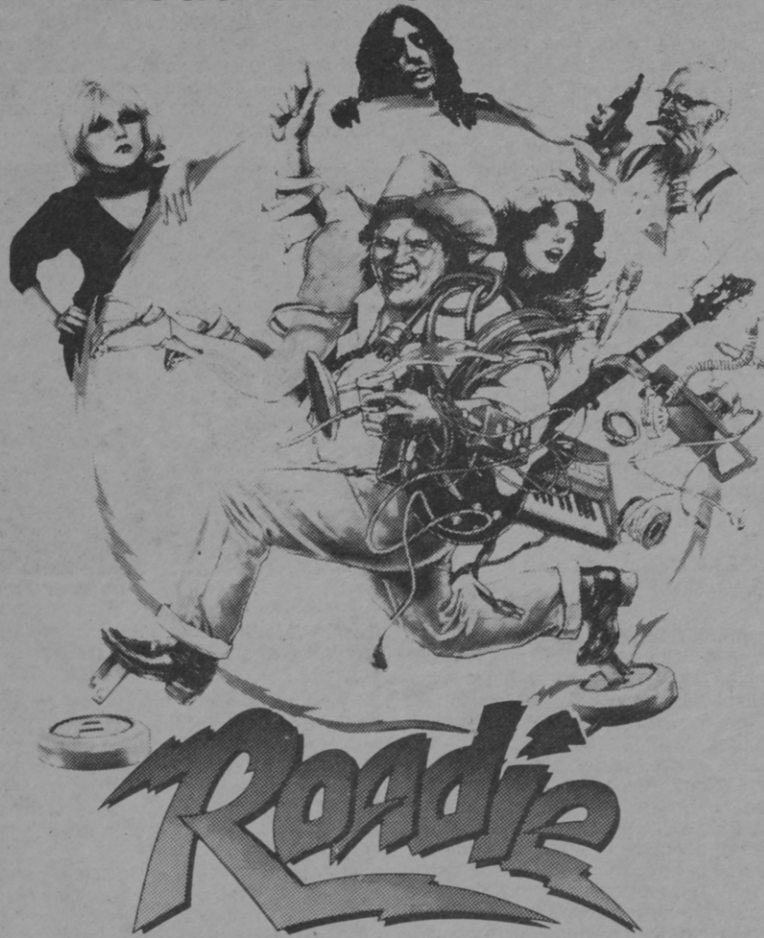
The album mixes the new (three tracks which appeared on the Crusaders' collaboration, *Midnight Believer*), the old ("Three O'Clock in the Morning", King's first record, 1950) and the timeless ("The Thrill is Gone" — always one of King's best songs, this 11-minute version is a stunning tour-de-force with B.B. battling licks at a steamrolling wall of a rhythm section).

Inevitably, not everything is perfect. "Never Make a Move Too Soon", for example, gets off to a lumpy start. But in overall terms, the reservations are few. This is B.B. King in top form, and that is something to experience.

(A sour note: beware of dodgy pressings. Mine was decidedly so.)

Ken Williams

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