

MUSIC

REVIEW

By Victor Sylvia

Michael Murphy — *Peaks, Valleys, Honky-Tonks and Alleys*

If you were fortunate enough to be in attendance at Michael's April 4 concert in Bryan Civic Auditorium, you know that Murphy is a true performer. He is the Neil Diamond of the Texas Sound. At the concert he did various songs featured on his new album, *Peaks, Valleys, Honky-Tonks and Alleys*, which is half studio and half live.

Side one was recorded live at the Palomino Club in North Hollywood. It contains the classics "Cosmic Cowboy," "Backslider's Wine," and "Geronimo's Cadillac" plus two newer songs "Years Behind Bars" and a show-biz tune "Another Cheap Western." Side two contains the new single, "Chain Gang," a remake of the old Sam Cooke song.

One new song "South Coast" relates the interesting story of a man who wins a bride in a card game, they leave to the mountains, he's hurt in a landslide and she's killed by a mountain lion. Murphy's always writing songs about everyday occurrences like that. Most of the songs are about traveling, drifting from town to town, and the joy of coming home. In one of the album's finest moments, Murphy sings:

*Cactus Jack likes his coffee black
And he says, "Boy, this is your lucky day"
Outside the sun is up
And the wind blows me like a paper cup
Down the highway.*

Van Halen — *Van Halen II*

As a hard rock group, Van Halen has great potential. Their first album was awesome and very nearly perfect. Unfortunately, *Van Halen II* is a bitter disappointment. The songs are uninspired, and there's nothing to compare with "Ice Cream Man" or "You Really Got Me." Instead, a curious collection of tacky sexually-oriented songs like "Beautiful Girl," "Women in Love," and "Bottoms Up" make this album both tasteless and monotonous. Also the production is poor compared to the first album, with some of the songs sounding like first takes. Too many stolen guitar riffs indicate a general lack of ingenuity, and without the characteristic Van Halen scream, this album could pass for a UFO album, for example.

Side one opens with "You're No Good." Yes, it's the same Clint Ballard tune that Linda Ronstadt recorded, except she did it better. At one point, vocalist David Roth groans "Do What You Want To" in a surprisingly good Jimi Hendrix imitation. "Dance the Night Away" (not a disco song) follows, with the Stones' "Honky Tonk Women" as an intro. At any rate, you can't dance to it, but it's good for drivin'. Then the album starts to degrade, with only a few highlights here and there. For instance, the beginning of "Outta Love Again" sounds like a killer bee attacking.

Side two is both frantic and boring. Only one song, "D.O.A.," stands out. This time D.O.A. stands for "Dead or Alive" and is probably the best song on *Van Halen II*.

*We were sittin' ducks
For the police man
They found a dirty-faced kid
In a garbage can*

From this point, ideas begin to deteriorate to ineffective and age-old lurid suggestions. You'll have to hear them to believe them. I only hope that it's all tongue-in-cheek. By the way, the album is literally sealed with a kiss, so listen for it. If you really love Van Halen, forget this album and pick up a copy of their first, since your old one is probably scratched by now. Van Halen could be a great group, but not if they keep this up. By the time *Van Halen III* comes out, they'll probably be writing like Bob Welch.

Sally Oldfield — *Water Bearer*

Recently it has come to my attention that many of you question the validity of my craft. Down through the ages, critics have been strongly criticized, its only natural. Something inherent with the human condition brings forth torrential waves of protest, each gaudily painted with individual preferences. And certainly it should seem obvious that any complaint that arises is flavored with as much personal bias as my review. Putting it more simply, never try to please more than one person at a time.

At any rate, to approach the problem at hand, it seems that Sally Oldfield (Mike's sister, I believe) has her own album out now called *Water Bearer*. This album is good only if you're deaf, or if you like listening to forty minutes of mantra-like nonsense lyrics and insectinal humming. This is muzak to trainalpha waves by. It's boredom set to music. It's not good, to be polite. Buying this album would only be an incentive for Sally to release another one like it. And we wouldn't want that.

Doobie Brothers — *Minute by Minute*

Take a look at the Top Ten at any moment and you'll find a few albums that have no right to be there. This is one of them. Everyday people purchase albums because they like one particular song that they hear on the radio. This is a dangerous practice.

If you like "What a Fool Believes," buy Kenny Loggins' *Nightwatch*, because his version is better. Give it a listen before you disagree with me. The only other good cut on *Minute by Minute* is "Minute by Minute," which should indicate something to you. I'm not saying that the other songs are garbage, they're just not that good, that's all.

Particularly, Doobie Brothers' albums since *The Captain and Me* and *Vices* have become increasingly sparse in good material. So if you like the Doobie's, buy their *Greatest Hits* and a single of "What a Fool Believes." You'll be doing the right thing for a change. Trust me.

Supertramp — *Breakfast in America*

Supertramp's new album, *Breakfast in America*, is really a feast. It's one of the better concept albums to emerge in recent months, dwelling on the tribulations of a modern man, looking for love and hoping that it's around the corner. Every song tells a story, moving through feelings of depression to a denouement of positive elation. These are songs of hope set against blind skies of fortune.

Breakfast begins with "Gone Hollywood," a song that describes the frustrations a Hollywood-hopeful, and follows the depression-to-hope formula perfectly. At first the character admits that there "Ain't nothin' new in my life today, Ain't nothin' true; it's all gone away."

That's some advice we can all follow, because sooner or later, we all have to face rejection. "There are times when all the world's asleep," and loneliness can cut like a cold steel blade. And we all have to say goodbye. Sometimes, though, the goodbyes are easier to handle, as in my personal favorite, "Goodbye Stranger." Listen to the chorus and you'll hear strains of George Harrison's "All Things Must Pass." Again, the expressions of hope are there.

It may sound like something you'd find in the back of a high school yearbook, but there's a lot of innocence in wisdom. The title track is a song about Texas millionaires and beautiful Cornia girls, and once again hope. But I won't tell you what the millionaires are hoping for. "Oh Darling" finishes side one, and is a simple song whose idea is timeless: "See that girl, I'm gonna make her mine."

Side two, though not as impressive as side one, still carries on with the theme that "struggles are rewarded." This is evident in the first song "Take the Long Way Home" which means "Don't Take the Easy Way Out," "Nothing Good Comes Easy," or "Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained." Take your pick. The remainder of the album more visual. That's because the resiliency of the characters against insurmountable odds becomes a tad farcical.

And the deliberate reiteration hope theme causes one to pay closer attention to the album cover artwork and less to the contents of the grooves. Sadly enough, the last four songs pass by unnoticed, except for the occasional bright moments. One is found in "Casual Conversations" when its characters exhibit an interesting relationship: No matter what he says, she ignores him. She only likes casual conversations, and they bore him.

And the album ends with a bright moment, "Child of Vision," in which a successful man, who has risen up the ladder to lie in the sun, realizes the irony of it all. Sure, it's a good life, but not a very productive one. If you don't help others, you hurt yourself. It's one of the little tricks that life likes to play on people. If it's happened to you already, buy Supertramp's *Breakfast in America*. If it hasn't, it will.



Sally Oldfield

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by PETER SHAFFER

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