

FOCUS ON: REVIEWS

Cheap Trick album takes a step back

By Geoff Hackett

Battalion Reporter

Cheap Trick certainly is a strange bunch. Its popularity in the United States came at a time when the bands that were reaching the top were all of the new wave persuasion. Its sound was almost archaic compared to the new breed of rockers. But still the group pushed onward.

With the new Epic release, "All Shook Up," this Northern Illinois-based band takes a giant step backwards. While they have often been compared to the Beatles musically, this time Cheap Trick attempts to convince themselves that they are the Fab Four.

Part of this sound is attributable to their coupling with long time Beatle producer George Martin. Recorded at George's Air Studios in Montserrat and London, the band also uses former Beatle engineer Geoff Emerick. The band has taken on a new sound unlike any of their previous albums.

The opening cut, "Stop This Game" begins with the same brooding note that closed "A Day in the Life" from the

"Sergeant Pepper" LP. It's almost as if nothing has happened since that album's release 15 years ago. "Stop This Game" also has the overlapping, re-recorded sound that was noticeable on the Beatles' mid-sixties releases.

Whether or not vocalist Robin Zander is attempting consciously to sound like both John Lennon and Paul McCartney, the fact remains that in doing so he has lost a lot of his own style that matured with "Dream Police." This is particularly noticeable in "Stop This Game," "Can't Stop It But I'm Gonna Try" and "World's Greatest Lover." The latter tune is particularly Beatle-like, both in production and musical style. What does it all mean?

Rick Nielsen, showman-guitarist extraordinaire, still shows his virtuosity on the new album, but his solos and breaks are a little more refined than previous efforts. There are no "showcase" tunes a la "Gonna Raise Hell" and "Need Your Love." Some of his work still borders on the maniacal but he fails to take that one step over into weirdness.

There is one exception. "The High Priest

of Rhythmic Noise" takes the prize as most bizarre. Above a complex musical track, Nielsen intones a vocal line augmented with the metallic fuzziness of Kiss' "God of Thunder." Again, what does it mean?

Tom Peterson's farewell appearance with the band (he left upon completion of this album) is more of the same stuff that he was noted for on earlier Cheap Trick releases.

RECORDS

His eight- and twelve-string bass lines provide most of the rhythm tracks that Nielsen and Zander noodle over. This is in evidence on both "Love Comes Tumblin' Down" and "Go for the Throat (Use Your Imagination)."

Bun E. Carlos, the chain-smoking drummer, is the member of the band who has changed in style the most. At one time content to lay down basic back beats, on "All Shook Up" Carlos has become somewhat of

a Rick Nielsen type scene stealer. The final cut "Who D'King" gives Carlson the platform for performance that he never got on record. Still, with its jungle-like syncopation, "Who D'King" is remarkably stale — almost a throw away.

The best numbers on "All Shook Up" are "Baby Loves to Rock" and "I Love You Baby, But I Hate Your Friends." On these two songs Cheap Trick returns to their tried-and-true formula of somewhat adolescent lyrics over a brain-pounding instrumental track. This is what Cheap Trick should stick to. While it is true that formula can lead to stagnation, in this case no other band has ventured into Cheap Trick's niche. There is no need for them to recover the Beatles' familiar territory.

Cheap Trick's main problem is with the critics of the so-called "rock press." Their fans love them and, more often than not, the critics despise them. They are called infantile, boring and classless. With the release of "All Shook Up" their originality is now in question. But as long as people buy, what does it matter? What does it mean, anyway?

Together again: Pryor and Wilder

Actors deserve talent showcase

By Kathleen McElroy

Battalion Staff

Gene Wilder and Richard Pryor, separately, are the two funniest movie comedians since the death of Peter Sellers.

However, their reputation as a team may suffer due to the weak plots of two movies they recently co-starred in: "Stir Crazy" and "Silver Streak."

Wilder was best in his first major film, a Mel Brooks comedy called "The Producers." Brooks also featured Wilder in other comedies such as "Blazing Saddles" and "Young Frankenstein." His outstanding lead role was that of Willie Wonka the candymaker in the movie of basically the same name. The film was a commercial and artistic success because of Wilder's breezy personality as Wonka, making the film worth seeing in spite of that idiotic song, "The Candy Man."

Pryor, who is lucky to be alive after suffering major burns over most of his body last summer, is a better actor than most critics give him credit for. Although "Live in Concert" was his best film, Pryor also excelled in "Bingo Long and the All-Star Players," when he played a black pretending to be Cuban.

Together, Pryor and Wilder have a comedic force equalled only by Walter Matthau and Jack Lemmon. But where Matthau and Lemmon had a non-physical, cold relationship on the screen, Pryor and Wilder display a platonic relationship that includes grabbing, hugging, and physically protecting each other from the outside world. It's refreshing to see men actually act like close friends, instead of making the dialogue indicate it.

But Matthau and Lemmon had one gigantic advantage over Wilder and Pryor. Well-written scripts

like "The Odd Couple" and "The Fortune Cookie" consumed every bit of talent Matthau and Lemmon had, making the films almost flawless in intent and execution.

But poor Wilder and Pryor.

MOVIES

Once again, another movie I believed produced only to showcase the comedians' talents, has fallen short. Not by much, but still definitely not as great — not even as good — as it should have been.

The first time the comedians acted together the result was "Silver Streak," in which Wilder and Pryor tried to protect themselves from killers who were after letters that would prove an art dealer was selling forgeries. Somehow the letters fall into Wilder's possession.

I've seen that movie twice and I never remember the plot because it's stupid. But I can recite all the lines and imitate all the gestures Wilder and Pryor used in the funny, pure comedy scenes.

Now it's "Stir Crazy." This time Wilder and Pryor leave New York to go west. But when they stop in an unnamed Sunbelt state and find jobs as woodpeckers, our heroes are arrested, arraigned, tried and sentenced to prison — all in one day. The plot doesn't get any better.

"Stir Crazy" is still an extremely funny movie. Crisp New York scenes nicely establish the characters: Wilder as Skip Donahue, who sees good in everything. He's protected by Pryor as Harry Monroe, who sees good in living a long life.

The movie is only funny in parts. After a hilarious sequence in which Wilder proves how tough he is to the prototypical Southern prison guard, the whole second

half of the movie is glacier-slow. Any minute an avalanche of good humor is expected, but the film still drags on. Writer Bruce Jay Freidman has given director Sidney Portier an incidental plot constructed as if to satisfy some rigid convention of drama. And Portier is almost obsessed with unnecessary detail, while persisting with obviously unworkable scenes.

The reason people go to this movie is to see Wilder and Pryor — not to see a prison breakout that takes more than twenty minutes to develop.

Both movies starring Wilder and Pryor have been commercially successful, and I hope they have a chance to act in a third joint performance — only not another unbelievable plot that just gets in the way of their talents. Give them character studies or psychological developments.

Or preferably, just let them go stir crazy.

FOCUS

Editor Cathy Saathoff
Assistant Editor Susan Hopkins
Staff Writer Kathleen McElroy

Focus will accept any items submitted for publication, although the decision to publish lies solely with the editor. Deadline is 5 p.m. the Thursday before publication.

Aggie Cinema has lined up a batch of films and packaged them as the **International and Classics Film Series**. See what's in store for your Wednesday evening viewing.

By Stephen Bonin 45

The Taiwanese Club of Texas A&M University celebrated **Chinese New Year** a bit early this year. The festivities included traditional foods, dances and a dragon.

By Susan Hopkins 8

The **Shake Russell/Dana Cooper Band** is planning a new album. The group will be in Bryan next week, performing some of their new songs.

By Sharon Renfrow 35

On the cover: Taiwanese children from local elementary schools bring in the new year with a papier-mache and cloth dragon. The dragon is a traditional symbol of the emperor or king, but today's democratic China sees it as a symbol of prosperity for the Chinese people. Cover photo by Craig Atchison.