

Yngwie Malmsteen's guitar: Lots of smoke, but no fire

A list of my favorite guitarists would have to include Chet Atkins, Jeff Beck, George Benson, Chuck Berry, Michael Bloomfield, Peter Buck, John Cale, Eric Clapton, Eddie Cochran, Brian Daves, Dave Davies, Ray Davies, Bo Diddley, Bob Dylan, Duane Eddy, the Edge, Dave Edmonds, John Fogerty, Robert Fripp, David Gilmour, Steve Hackett, George Harrison, Jimi Hendrix, Buddy Holly, Tim Howard, B.B. King, Mark Knopler, Leo Kottke, Robby Krieger, Leadbelly, John Lennon, Gordon Lightfoot, Nils Lofgren, Andy Fairweather Low, Pat Methaney, Sterling Morrison, Muddy Waters, Jimmy Page, Karl Pallmeyer, Carl Perkins, Anthony Phillips, Lou Reed, Keith Richards, Robbie Robertson, John Sebastian, Snakefinger, Bruce Springsteen, Andy Summers, Richard Thompson, Pete Townshend, Merle Travis, Miami Steve Van Zandt, Jimmy Vaughan, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Dru Wilson, Neil Young and Frank Zappa. You may have noticed that Yngwie Malmsteen didn't make the list.

Yngwie Malmsteen has been called rock's newest and most brilliant guitarist by his record company. Since it's the duty of Polydor Records to sell Malmsteen's records they're liable to say anything. To be truthful, Malmsteen is technically good and incredibly fast, but his music lacks any soul or originality. Malmsteen is a lot of smoke but no fire.

At the age of 22, Swedish-born Malmsteen has already made a name for himself in the world of heavy metal. He played with bands such as Alcatrazz and Steeler before going out on his own. Malmsteen is obviously influenced by the electric-psychedelic blues of Jimi Hendrix, the classical-rock pretentiousness of Emerson, Lake and Palmer, the art-rock ostentatiousness of Jethro Tull, and the heavy metal b.s. of Deep Purple.

Malmsteen chose to ignore the *real* roots of rock 'n' roll and work from third-hand sources. On his albums he gives thanks to his parents, his favorite classical composers (Johann Sebastian Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven and Nicolo Paganini), his favorite fantasy writers (H.P. Lovecraft, Rod Serling and Stephen King), and even the companies that make his guitars, strings and picks. The only rock heroes he mentions are Jimi Hendrix and Richie

Blackmore. If Malmsteen knew something about the blues, his music might have more soul.

"Rising Force," Malmsteen's first album, saw its American release earlier this year. The album features Malmsteen on guitar and bass, ex-Jethro Tull member Barriemore Barlow on drums and Jens Johansson on keyboards. Due to Malmsteen's inability to speak English, American Jeff Scott Soto does the vocals on the two songs on the album that aren't instrumental. "Rising Force" featured songs with such neo-classical/mystical/sci-fi titles as "Icarus' Dream Suite Op. 4," "Evil Eye," "Black Star" and "Far Beyond the Sun." Most of the album is Malmsteen doing heavy metal Bach impressions. It would make good background music for watching tropical fish bang into the sides of their bowl.

"Marching Out" is Malmsteen's newest album. Vocalist Jeff Scott Soto and keyboardist Jens Johansson are still with the band, now called Rising Force. Rising Force also features Johansson's brother Anders on drums and Marcel Jacob on bass. "Marching Out" has only one instrumental, a heavy metal Mozart piece, "Overture 1383." Soto gets his chance to scream all kinds of heavy metal garbage like "Diciples (sic) of Hell" and "I Am A Viking." The overabundance of vocals on "Marching Out" makes "Rising Force" look good in comparison. "Marching Out" would make good background music for a head bangers' Halloween party.

Yngwie Malmsteen's music is just another example of why most heavy metal is so bad. Heavy metal music is usually a dull, loud roar. Heavy metal lyrics rarely deal with anything except drugs, sex, violence and the occult. Heavy metal is distasteful because of the childish and ignorant way it deals with drugs, sex, violence and the occult, not because of the subject matter itself.

I firmly disagree with attempts by the PMRC and other watchdog groups that want to put warning labels on heavy metal albums. I don't like what the heavy metal bands say but they have the right to say it. The PMRC should realize the First Amendment gives everyone the right to make fools of themselves. Most heavy metal bands make full use of this right. □

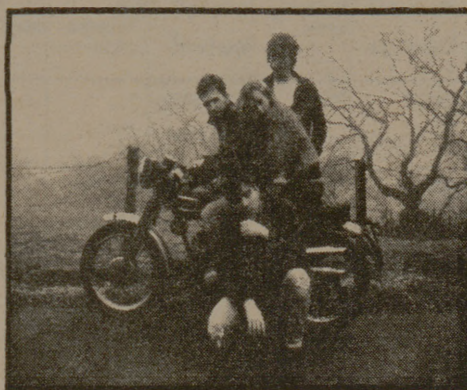
—by KARL PALLMEYER

British Prefab Sprout isn't store-bought health food

Prefab Sprout is the oxymoronic name of a intriguing four-piece British pop combo. As its name suggests, the band is an unlikely mixture of the man-made and the natural. With the help of Thomas Dolby as producer, the band manages to meld the hi-tech world of synthesizers with the expressive strains of jazz on "Two Wheels Good," their second album.

Singer/songwriter/guitarist/keyboardist Paddy McAloon, and his bassist brother, Martin, formed the original Prefab Sprout duo in 1980. By 1983, the band had two hits in the U.K. singles chart, as well as a new member, vocalist Wendy Smith. This was the line-up on the band's debut LP, "Swoon," which was released on this side of the Atlantic in late 1984.

For "Two Wheels Good," the band brought in drummer Neil Conti to round out its sound. Dolby supplied a couple of the keyboard parts. When this album was released in the U.K., it received critical acclaim from the majority of the British music press. A review in *New Musical Express* puts the group on par with The



PREFAB SPROUT

Beatles. I wouldn't go that far, although the band definitely is talented.

Side one opens with "Faron Young," a twangy tune that addresses the inadequacies of country music. Paddy McAloon uses the song to show that while country music is supposedly the people's music, it usually doesn't reflect the dreams and desires of the average person in every-day life.

Love, as in most pop music, surfaces as a predominant theme. But this love isn't the ordinary, straight-out-of-the-box love. In "Hallelujah," McAloon delivers the following line to his sweetheart(?): "I swear at you 'cos I believe that sweet talk like candy rots teeth."

And where there's love, there's usually equal amounts of discord. "Goodbye Lucille #1" consoles a young love-lorn lad, while "When Love Breaks Down" warns about the destructiveness of self-pity. "Blueberry Pies" tells of the walls people build in relationships.

While this album's subject matter isn't upbeat, the musical content is lively. Although nothing's danceable, it's all listenable. Dolby created an extremely open, airy atmosphere on the record. It's not a Spartan sound, but rather a tasteful musically restrained sound. The energy of the music is there, but luckily it's never brought to a full boil. "Two Wheels Good" reaffirms Prefab Sprout's position on the up-and-coming pop stars list. □

—by WALTER SMITH