

Reviews



Spy Vs. Spy

Photo by Fred Cole

Spy Vs. Spy
Malcolm Welbourne, guitar, vocals; Stanton, bass, keyboards, vocals; Shaft, drums, vocals.
Eastgate Live, Saturday, Sept. 24
★★★★

Judging from their fine performance at Eastgate Live Saturday night, Spy Vs. Spy could easily challenge the Killer Bees' title of Austin's best reggae band. After splitting from Michael E. Johnson's hive, guitarist Malcolm Welbourne and keyboardist/bassist Stanton teamed with drummer Shaft to form the new band.

In contrast to the Killer Bees' six-piece, jazzier form of rasta music, Welbourne describes his new band as "a reggae power trio."

The band performs some songs from Stanton and Welbourne's days with the Bees, a few covers and a load of new originals. Welbourne, Stanton and Shaft all share vocal chores, with each one getting a turn at the microphone.

The audience acceptance of Spy Vs. Spy was immediate as the crowd danced to the band's

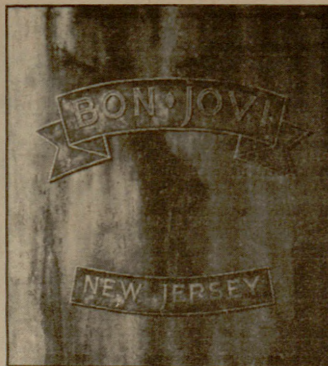
reggae/African/calypto groove. Every song the band played was greeted with wild and enthusiastic applause.

The band shaved some whiskers off the moldy oldies "Wild Thing" and "Hang On Sloopy" with their rasta versions of the 1960s hits. Best song of the night, however, was the Killer Bees' standard "Holy Smoke," Stanton's tribute to the American Indians.

Individually, the members of this dub trio are highly talented. Stanton, characterized by blond dreadlocks reaching well below his shoulders, keeps busy playing two instruments. His left hand strikes bass chords on the synthesizer bass while his right skips across the keyboards in front of him. Welbourne, a versatile guitarist able to rock on demand, never strays from a true reggae sound. The African-Caribbean rhythms of Shaft provide an irresistible beat necessary for great reggae.

With Spy Vs. Spy, Austin now has two great reggae bands. It will be interesting to see if the Spies achieve the same success the Bees have. If there is any justice, they will.

Review by Shane Hall



"New Jersey"
Bon Jovi
Polygram Records
★★★

For a band whose previous album is a multi-million seller, making one that will top it seems a nearly impossible task. Bon Jovi, however, has met the challenge. Two years after the release of "Slippery When Wet," which sold more than 13 million copies worldwide, the shaggy-haired quintet appears to be headed down the platinum-paved highway once again with their fourth album, "New Jersey."

The record marks a return to

familiar ground for Bon Jovi. While retaining the combination of pop melody and heavy-metal firepower that propelled "Slippery When Wet" to the top of the charts, "New Jersey" also contains songs that are sure to appeal to fans of earlier Bon Jovi material.

The band's influences are clear in "Homebound Train" and "Born to Be My Baby." Guitarist Richie Sambora's Zeppelinesque power chords give "Homebound Train" the force of a speeding locomotive. On "Born to Be My Baby" vocalist/songwriter Jon Bon Jovi sings Springsteen-style lyrics of hard living that combine with the drive of the band for another solid rocker.

The ballad "Living in Sin," with vocalist Bon Jovi's cynical view of marriage, and the rock anthem "Stick To Your Guns," a call to stand one's ground, are good songs as well.

"New Jersey" is not without its flaws, however. "Bad Medicine" is the main one. No, it isn't about drugs; this song is

another in a long history of songs where bad medicine, addiction and so forth are used in reference to love. Nothing new here.

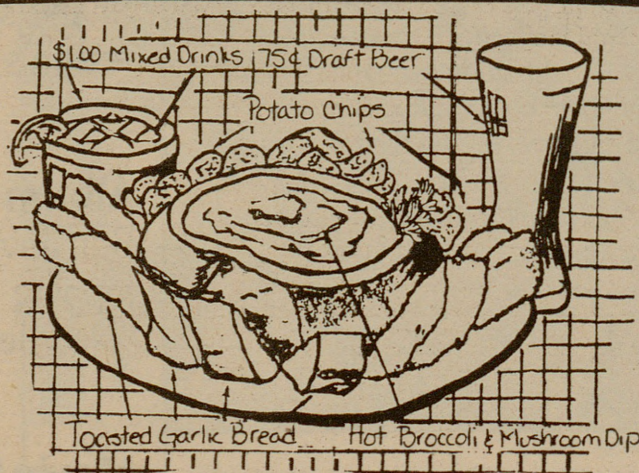
"Wild is the Wind" and "99 in the Shade" are songs that utilize the pop-metal formula of "Slippery When Wet." Neither song is especially interesting.

However, two unusual tracks, "Love for Sale" and "Ride Cowboy Ride" are interesting. The latter is a gritty country blues track with Bon Jovi on acoustic guitar and harmonica while the boys sing backup. Admittedly, Jon Bon Jovi is no John Lee Hooker, but one gets the impression that this song is one of the band's lighter moments. Both songs are enjoyable, but fans of songs such as "Living On a Prayer" and "You Give Love a Bad Name" may be scratching their heads.

The album is average overall, but despite the weaknesses, "New Jersey" is Bon Jovi's most satisfying effort to date.

Review by Shane Hall

"STRICTLY PLEASURE"



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Rating Key

- ★★★★ — A classic. Not to be missed.
- ★★★★ — Excellent.
- ★★★ — Some flaws, but good overall.
- ★★ — Fair.
- ★ — El stinko.