

OUT OF THE CLOSET

SAXON: 'Strong Arm Of The Law' (CAL 120)

By Dante Bonutto

IT'S NEVER easy to follow a classic. Boston, Montrose and Van Halen, for instance, after superb debut albums all found the killer touch sadly lacking next time they took to the studio but Saxon, thankfully, have not suffered the same loss. With 'Strong Arm Of The Law', their third LP to date, they've succumbed to neither pressure or complacency and followed the much-lauded 'Wheels Of Steel' with an album that, whilst not as immediately captivating, proves with repeated spins to be of equal if not higher merit.

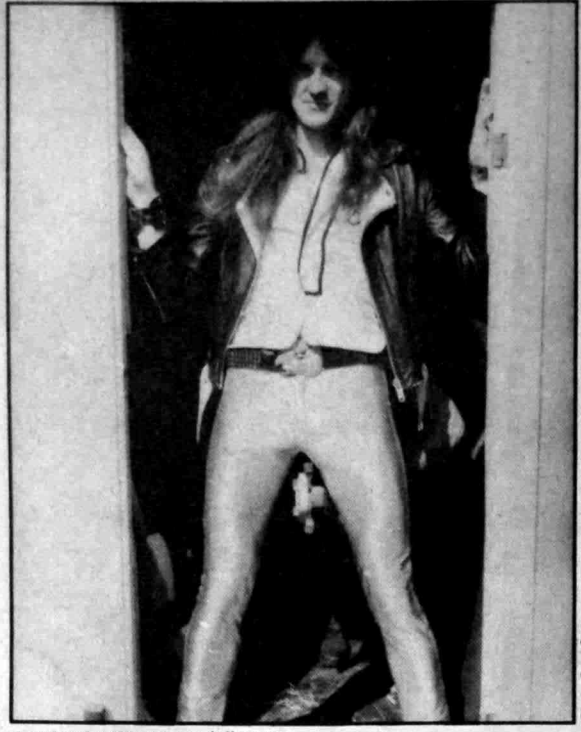
Really, the band could have veered in one of two directions with 'SAOTL', developing either the smooth melodic approach displayed on '747' or opting for an altogether heavier sound and I'm pleased to report that they've plumped for the latter, a choice that renders each of the eight songs here highly unsuitable for the faint of heart. Bassist Steve Dawson and drummer Pete Gill make their presence felt in vigorous fashion, forging a sturdy base from which guitarists Graham Oliver and Paul Quinn unleash a combined axe attack more lethal than anything in 'The Shining', whilst Biff, the band's vociferous frontman, adds the vocal icing with more power and purpose than ever before. And lyrically, too, the band are progressing along strong lines. For whilst they've never been content to fuel their lyrics with stock-in-trade hedonism the topics found here are far and away the most ambitious they've ever tackled, ranging from a Presidential assassination ('Dallas 1pm') to the

thoughts of a man on death-row ('To Hell And Back Again'). But on to the meat of the matter.

After a brief burst of thunder and rain the album makes an instant grab for the throat with 'Heavy Metal Thunder', an anthemic opener that has just about everything.

'To Hell And Back Again', a number with more than a hint of the epic, features Biff's finest vocal performance to date, the title track and current single boasts a nicely progressive guitar riff and a chorus delivered with all the restraint of an out-of-sorts Sergeant - Major while 'Taking Your Chances', which closes the side, drives along in a furious staccato fashion.

And side two is equally recommended, opening with Biff's personal fave '20,000 ft', a lightning paced paean to the wide blue yonder and the thrills to be had therein, and continuing with my personal fave 'Hungry Years', a delicate intro brutally assaulted by a muscular riff that fair shakes the fillings from the teeth, and 'Sixth Form Girls', a song that outlines some - er - interesting extracurricular activities over a tearaway guitar assault before the curtain finally drops with 'Dallas 1pm', the band's most adventurous composition to date. With it's throbbing bass, layered guitars and scene-setting vocal it's a tightly wound atmospheric number with the actual shooting (of J F Kennedy rather than J R Ewing) vividly described by a contemporary radio commentary, a play that works supremely well particularly as it's followed by the album's prime guitar solo. And there you have it, another Saxon shot in the arm, superbly played, packed and produced. + + + + +



Pic by Paul Cox.

SAXON'S BIFF: strong follow up.

because this band, with a run of 14 consecutive Top Five singles, never release anything less than perfection. + + + + +

KOOL & THE GANG: 'Celebrate!' (De-Lite Records 6359 029)

By Philip Hall

KOOL & THE GANG sound as though they are slipping smoothly into the chic high life. Once they were the underground funksters of the mid-seventies now their new album proudly shows off their sophisticated progression. Kool's Gang play penthouse-suite

disco music. Every song gives off an air of easy affluence. There's no soul sound on this album just plenty of precise modern dance music.

It's certainly easy to see why this Jersey City band have attained their golden disco touch. Tracks like 'Love Festival' and 'Take It To The Top' show off perfectly the bands infectious sense of rhythm.

Though I admire Kool & The Gang for the way they effortlessly create light and airy dance rhythms, the overall feel of the album left me feeling untouched. This is highly efficient, automated disco music designed to keep the nightclubbers of the world happy. It's predictable, unemotional, and very profitable. At least Kool's Gang have the

honesty to admit on the back of the album that they've gained 'a new degree of consumer awareness'. In other words they think they know what you want to hear and on 'Celebrate!' they are serving it up in an easily digestible, and almost tasteless form. + + +

'Flaming Schoolgirls' is a compilation album of the original and more potent Runaways and includes 50 per cent live cuts. The production standards cannot be expected to be on a par from track to track because of the different producers, different times recorded and the live content. However, I didn't expect the live cuts to sound better.

The inclusion of two small production Beatles numbers, 'Strawberry Fields' and 'Here Comes The Sun' only serves to baffle the listener. + +

RORY GALLAGHER 'Stagesruck' (Chrysalis, CHR 1280)

By Phang

A COLLECTION of the finest moments from Rory's recent world tour, 'Stagesruck' is a consolation for those who didn't get to see him, and a souvenir for those who did. The album makes it blatantly apparent what it is that keeps the man constantly ticking in the past, present and undoubtedly the future. It is his ability to maintain a feeling of freshness and originality in his songs, however many years they've been a part of his make-up.

A perfect example is 'Moonchild', which closes the first side - it doesn't lose it's sensibility although, as a live number, its immediate projection is light and heavy.

As opener to 'Stagesruck' (and usually his live set), 'Shin Kicker' rips open the album revealing images of Rory's screaming antics as he hops across the stage reaping increasing energy from his battered guitar. And planned in accordance, the LP closes with the customary conclusion of live act number - the classic 'Shadowplay', which always leaves Rory's audience emotionally exhausted. + + + +

THE ALAN PARSONS PROJECT: 'The Turn Of A Friendly Card' (Arista DLART 1)

by Paul Sexton

ALAN PARSONS and his fellow researchers on the Project must be asking themselves how many more false starts they're going to have in Britain. Four times, in the past four years, the rest of the world has co-operated, and yet here, four of the most accomplished concept albums - each concept a little looser than the one before - have been refused house room. 'The Turn Of A Friendly Card' hardly a concept at all but loosely based on the gambling theme, is as full as usual with the advanced invention and musical accomplishment that usually gets termed AOR - pejoratively, I might add.

It's always interesting to see who Alan Parsons and Eric Woolfson, the chief protagonists of the AOP, have managed to sign up as guest vocalists. This time, making all the difference, it's the extremely underrated Chris Rainbow, leading on the title track, which forms most of Side Two.

Back on Side One, Eimer Gantry pops up on the marauding 'May Be A Price To Pay', Woolfson does a touch of the Floyd on 'Time', and Lenny Zakatek, ex-Gonzalez, makes a return appearance for the mainstream 'Games People Play' and 'I Don't Wanna Go Home'. Sure Parsons doesn't get the names that Jeff Wayne did, but he doesn't really want to. As Woolfson says, the policy of employing different singers for different songs is that 'They get one meal a day'. It's time they were all dealt a friendly card. + + + +

THE RUNAWAYS: 'Flaming Schoolgirls' (Cherry Red Records B RED 9)

By Mark Hinchcliffe

ALL-GIRL bands make this frail male body shiver with soul-searching apprehension. A wrong or ambiguous word here could incur the warmth of a certain awesome group within our society. But I crawled out from under the table when I heard some of the banal, sexist lyrics on this album.

For most of the album, the girls dig deep into their West Coast heavy metal bag of tricks for some pretty woeful songs dedicated to boozing, boogeying and boys. These three get together for a good of 'nosh-up' on 'Hollywood Cruisin'

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