

KING APPARATUS- King Apparatus (Raw Energy)

By Kirby Ferguson

Wow, my first freebie! I wasn't expecting much but this is good stuff. King Apparatus recently won a CASBY (Canadian Artists Selected By You) for Favourite Ska Band, but labelling them as ska isn't quite accurate; they sound more like party rock to me. When they do revert to straight ska (and this is rare) they sound...well, white. But most of the time the tunefulness and good-time vocal interplay make this loads of fun. Even the band's sophomoric humour can't sink the high spirits here. So, hey, they're Canadian, they're independent, they're good and they need your money. Take it from the boys themselves: "Buy our stuff/Make us rich/Buy our stuff/And all your friends will think you're really cool." Who wouldn't be convinced?

MAGIC AND LOSS- Lou Reed (Warner) By Kirby Ferguson

First I want to ramble about Lou for awhile, if you want to hear about MAGIC AND LOSS just skip this paragraph. I cannot believe how Lou Reed has mutated over the years. Believe it or not, Lou actually sang with The Velvet Underground, and while his voice wasn't technically impressive, he knew how to work with a rhythm. After going solo, Lou put out some good songs and loads of dross, never coming near the quality of his work with VU. During this period he did some really insane stuff: rotting his brain with tons of dope, porking out then shrinking back to skin and bones, shaving his head, flirting with bisexuality, claiming he no longer had a dick, but rather a syringe had been surgically implanted in its place. This is the man who released the notorious METAL MACHINE MUSIC (a cult item in the most extreme sense), a two record set of feedback, which I have actually heard; it sounds something like this: FZZZZZGLIKSSSSSSHHH etc.. This is the man who claimed he had 863 albums -no more, no less, 863- in the can, one to be released every two months after his death. But all this insanity distracted from the fact that on vinyl the man was a bore.

But like Neil Young, Reed has been revitalized since 1989, releasing NEW YORK, one of his best albums, after the sterile product of albums like MISTRIAL and NEW SENSATION. NEW YORK saw Lou open new doors lyrically and musically, opting for political statements (!) using New York as a microcosm, and presenting a new, guitar-oriented sound. Reed continued his winning streak in 1990 with the haunting Andy Warhol tribute, SONGS FOR DRELLA, a collaboration with former VU bandmate, John Cale. MAGIC AND LOSS combines the dreamy, haunting artiness of DRELLA with the more rock-oriented NEW YORK, while returning to Lou's classic themes of, well, magic and loss. It also runs Lou's winning streak up to three.

One of the strengths of Lou's new material is his distinct, animated guitar tone, which -since the voice can't- carries the songs. The guitar interplay always keeps the album musical, something Lou has had a problem with in the past. However, sometimes there aren't melodies, as in "Dreamin'," which is the sonic equivalent of just that, and "Harry's Circumcision," which is merely a backdrop for the song's old-style Reed horror story. The whole point of the Lou Reed experience is the words, and, in this case, they stand up as Lou's basic philosophy of life. The sound is sometimes ethereal, sometimes haunting, and at other times, raw and epicly abrasive, reflecting the two themes of magic and loss. I won't claim to know poetry, but I know Lou Reed's lyrics present a uniquely honest view and are bluntly penetrating. If there are any great rock poets (which I'm really not sure of) Lou Reed is certainly one of them.

MAGIC AND LOSS is even better than DRELLA and NEW YORK; it combines the best of both and does away with the weaknesses (like the unconvincing and sometimes trite politics). MAGIC AND LOSS is a work whose seriousness demands you think about it. Musical street-corner poetry at its best.