

Queen and BTO; Are the changes enough?

tracks '77

roger simmons

RATINGS

* A LOSER
** POOR
*** FAIR
**** GREAT
***** A WINNER!

(*****) A DAY AT THE RACES -QUEEN (ELECKTRA RECORDS)

Queen established themselves as one of the world's three major bands with their Night At The Opera effort of 1975. The cover of their follow-up, Day At The Races, makes it evident that Queen are willing to stick with what sells. After a couple of listens, Races does sound like a copy of Opera. By the third and fourth listens, though, the differences do start appearing.

"Tie Your Mother Down" is the first song on four albums that returns to the hard and fast-rocking style found on Queen I still my favourite. It is also the only song Races that features Brian May with some straight-ahead unadorned guitar solos in it. The rest of his guitar work on the album is as distorted as a Right Honorable Brian Walsh argument.

In contrast to the hard-hitting opener, the second track is "You

Take My Breath Away", a Freddie Mercury song all the way. Besides being blessed with one of Mercury's best vocal performances, it also points out his capabilities on the piano. This is definitely the ultimate ballad from Mercury and Queen.

Although both of these songs could be singles, I'm putting my money on either "Long Away" or "Good Old-Fashioned Lover Boy". The former would be the first hit single written by Brian May if it was released. May's material tends to be more in the rock format, giving Queen albums their heavy edge. Mercury continues his obsession with the 1920's and 1930's with "Somebody To Love", "The Millionaire Waltz" and the fore-mentioned "Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy". "Lover Boy" is the fastest of these, propelled by a steady beat and highlighted by Mercury's outrageous vocals. John Deacon bassist, says writing comes hard for him, but he wrote the ultimate AM hit of the 70's, "You're My Best Friend". His offering on Races is "You And I", which also has possibilities as a single.

Obviously, with all this surmising about possible

singles, you get the impression the album is completely dedicated to the AM market. This is not which are as varied as you can get. "White Man" is Queen's answer to Zeppelin's "The Immigrant Song", both lyrically and to a certain extent, musically. "Drowse" is drummer Roger Taylor's effort, with very peaceful moods created by the down-tempo beat. "Teo Torriatte" is a sentimental Brian May singing about parting with his lady while at the same time telling the world to "cling together" and not follow his example on a global scale. May even throws in a Japanese verse, from which the title is extracted.

This album, as a whole is much more rounded musically than their first three albums, features improvements of the songs on Night At The Opera. Queen, with Races, proves once and for all they are the rulers when it comes to combining rock ("White Man", "Tie Your Mother Down") and AM classics ("Long Away", "Good Old-Fashioned Lover Boy"). A Day At The Races has given us just enough progression to keep us interested in the Queen sound.

(*****) FREEWAYS-BACHMAN-TURNER OVERDRIVE (MERCURY RECORDS)

Most critics find it easy to criticize BTO, usually harping on the fact that BTO's sound never changes, the musicianship is terrible, and they always write about the music industry. For once, the critics will be totally wrong if they try to use these reasons on Freeways.

The album opens with "Can We All Come Together", a reggae music and it is well in evidence on this cut. It'll be a great dance number even if it isn't released as a single. Thus right from the start, BTO gives notice that they are capable of changing their musical style and changing it with finesse.

The following song, "Life Still Goes On (I'm Lonely)" is more in the usual BTO vein, although it doesn't have that ultra loud, sharp guitar work that got Not Fragile and Four Wheel Drive branded as noise. All of Freeways rock songs are in this more mellow framework that was first evidenced on the preceding elpee, Head

On. "Lonely" is also the only tune written by C.F. Turner and only one of the two he sings. As a result, Randy Bachman wrote the rest of the of the album and sings lead on all the others.

The third cut, "Shotgun Rider", is my early favourite of the album. It is a mini-ballad recounting the tale of a guy "riding Shotgun" over a whole town. This type of song is also a new format for BTO, who have never touched upon ballads before. For the first time in a BTO album, the lyrics have been about the fierceness of the music industry, the down-heartening job of touring, or the shortcomings of stardom ("Lookin' Out For #1", "Take It Like A Man", and "Average Man" respectively from Head On).

The other song Freeways that is a completely new approach for BTO is called "Easy Groove", featuring for the first time, strings in the background. The strings arranged by Ben McPeck, add a classy touch to a song that is a slow disco love ballad, if there's such a thing. Actually BTO has created a whole new form of song with this one.

The typical but toned down BTO classics on this album are "My Wheels Won't Turn", "Down Down", and "Freeways". The musicianship is above anything they have previously done, making for some great rocking.

BTO has obviously tried to broaden their musical spectrum. Without a doubt, they have done this. As a result, they have turned out an excellent album. It remains to be seen how it sells and whether the changes have been effective.

(***) LEAVE HOME-RAMONES (SIRE RECORDS)

I was playing a record on the turntable when a guy walks in and asks me what I'm playing.

"Ramones' new album, Leave Home", I said.

"I kinda like that guitar part. Can I hear it again?"

I replied, "Don't have to play it again, You'll hear it again in the next song, and the next, and the next....."

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