

Benson LP soars, new band scores, Bowie bores

By STEVE HALVONIK
Collegian Staff Writer

"In Flight" (Warner Bros. BSK 2983) finds George Benson exploiting the easy listening jazz format that made last year's "Breezin'" such a huge success. Although the new album is based on "Breezin'" success formula, Benson has made several noticeable refinements. The string arrangements are more subdued and the music has more of a jazz flavor. Benson's guitar and Ronnie Foster's keyboards, virtually smothered by the string arrangements on "Breezin'", are more prominent on this album. On several songs, such as Foster's "The Wind and I" and War's "The World is a Ghetto," Benson and Foster alternate lead work in some "breezy" interplay. "Everything Must Change" typifies Benson's return to his pre-"Breezin'" musical style. It's a cocktail-jazz piece that finds Benson's clear, straightforward vocals supported by a tinkling piano and surrounded by a lush string arrangement. A change in tempo is marked by a funky instrumental passage during which Benson seats with his guitar. The return of strings and piano signals another tempo change

near the song's conclusion. The adaptation of R&B music to a jazz format has made the rhythm section the heart of Benson's albums. Stanley Banks' bass work and Harvey Mason's drumming are a solid rhythm duo, but the addition of percussionist Ralph MacDonald on songs such as "Nature Boy" gives the music a shifting, exotic rhythm section.

record review

Benson's Stevie Wonder sound-alike vocals again are present, appearing on the single, Morris Albert's "I'm Gonna Love You More," and "The World is a Ghetto." Benson also does some high speed scatting with his guitar on the latter number. "In Flight," then, is a high flying album that will never make the listener "sore." Unlike Benson, a traditional jazz musician who converts R&B music into exquisite jazz mood pieces, today's black jazz artists are attempting to fuse jazz and soul, moving jazz into the mainstream of contemporary music.

Musicians such as Herbie Hancock and Stanley Clarke are several exponents of this movement.

A second generation of artists, inspired by musicians such as Clarke and Hancock, have taken this idea one step further, blending jazz, soul and disco to create a new genre: "disco jazz," as Brick calls it. Much of Stevie Wonder's material from "Songs in the Key of Life" is an example of this fusion.

Man's Theory, a band composed of former Baltimore sessionmen, is yet another example of this burgeoning musical trend. Although much of their session work was logged with jazz artists such as Herbie Hancock and Roy Ayers, Man's Theory's debut album, "Just Before Dawn," (MCA 2250), is a synthesis of Hancock's jazz and Brick's disco soul.

The opening cut, "Hard Times," is a disco song with an African rhythm section, accenting a syncopated rhythm and a punchy brass section that bears more than a faint resemblance to Stevie Wonder's recent work.

"Great Expectation," "The Party" and "The Creek" are funky jazz in-

strumentals that reflect the band's session experience with Hancock. All feature plucking bass lines, funky keyboards and prominent rhythm guitars that have become the trademarks of Hancock's music.

Chuck Gentry displays his guitar versatility on the heavy funk piece, "You Talks a Good Talk." His rhythm guitar on "Great Expectation," for example, resembles guitarist Wah Wah Watson's work on Hancock's "Secrets" album. But on "You Talks," Gentry's guitar is huskier, more like the sound Ernie Isely gives to the Iselys' recent compositions.

"I've Always Needed Someone Like You" and "What Can I Do" recall the syrupy ballads of the "old" Philly sound popularized by vocal groups such as the Stylistics. The lead vocal is mixed out front, surrounded by a gushy string arrangement and a "shoo-wop" chorus.

The thinness of the material is overcome by the musical virtuosity and the sheer energy of the band. Man's Theory is a new band to watch.

A relatively new trend in pop music has been the emergence of "blue-eyed

soul," — white musicians playing R&B music. While Hall and Oates and Boz Scaggs are the current apotheoses of this trend, one of the first white performers to gain recent success in the R&B field was David Bowie, whose "Young Americans" album produced his first — and only — number one single, the disco hit, "Fame."

Bowie's new album, "Low," (RCA CPL-2030) finds his flirtation with soul music on the wane, replaced by a more experimental sound. Unfortunately, "Low" is an aptly titled collection of undeveloped, poorly structured ideas whose execution leaves the listener bewildered.

The first side consists of seven pop tunes while the second side is composed of four extended surrealistic pieces. The divergence in material prevents the album from possessing any continuity.

The first side, I hope, is not a portent of things to come in soul and pop music. While the music is reminiscent of his disco work, Bowie has failed to realize that the adaptation of electronic instrumentation destroys the visceral quality of soul music.

Side one opens with "Speed of Life," a mesmerizing, spacey soul number with a strong synthesizer providing the backdrop for Bowie's caliope-like melody line. Dennis Davis' drums are mixed high, while Carlos Alomar's guitar darts through like a shooting star.

But the rest of the album is all downhill. "Sound and Vision" opens with a nice guitar chord change that is ultimately smothered by Bowie's string synthesizer and space-warped vocals; "Always Crashing in the Same Car" is a head-on collision with tedium.

The second side is even worse. "Warszawa" is a synthesizer drone with vocal chants that sound like chamber music emanating from the chamber pot; "Weeping Wall" ticks like a watch with a broken mainspring; "Subterraneans" has an off-key sax that sounds like a bad attack of gastritis.

Pseudo-intellectuals please note: This album is not avant-garde, it is art-deco drivel for the masochistically inclined.

Rumor has it that "Low" is the soundtrack of Bowie's next film, "The Man Who Fell From Grace With RCA." It's a long fall from Ziggy Stardust.

Cafe accomplishes usual with unusual flair

European style atmosphere evoked at Cafe Batjak

By KATHLEEN PAVELKO
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Cafe Batjak, 237-6003; on Hiester Street across from the Deli; open daily from 11:30 a.m. to 11 p.m., Fridays and Saturdays till 1 a.m. Local checks, but no credit cards, are accepted.



A cafe is both more and less than a restaurant. In Europe especially, a cafe is more intimate than a restaurant but with a less varied menu. In America, a cafe is more likely to be a sandwich joint.

The Cafe Batjak has avoided many of the usual pitfalls and the result is a place very much like a European cafe.

It is small, only about 30 seats, with wooden booths, wire chairs and brown and white tablecloths. Burlap coffee sacks have been draped over the windows to prevent passersby on the street above from watching the patrons like goldfish in a bowl. The effect is also to give a beige glow to the place which is at once chic and cozy.

Only a radio, tuned to a loud commercial station, spoils the congenial atmosphere.

The menu, mostly hearty sandwiches and light entrees, has been constructed with an eye to the unusual. The sandwiches are usually open-faced, with toppings of cheese and vegetables.

What most distinguishes the Cafe Batjak is an intelligent use of seasonings. Evident especially in their soups, the seasoning is neither bland nor overwhelming and speaks well for the kitchen's guiding hand.

The soup de jour one day this week was cream of potato, a rich, thick, brown puree with bits of carrot and chunks of potato. A judicious use of pepper made an ordinary soup an extraordinary one.

The French onion soup also showed a knowledgeable touch; the chef at the Arena would do well to walk down the street to sample Batjak's rich beef broth and sweet onions covered with chewy mozzarella cheese.

The sandwiches, too, are unusual variations on standard fare; the addition of cheese and vegetables makes them hearty enough for a supper. The Batjak steak sandwich (\$3.65) is especially good, a strip of tender, pan-fried steak on a toasted roll.

The turkey sandwich (\$2.05) was a disappointment, however; too much cheese and not enough turkey on disreputable white bread.

Batjak has three entrees: a quiche, chicken cordon bleu and a diamond steak dinner. The quiche (\$2.25) had too much coarsely chopped onion in a too-soft custard filling. The crust disappeared beneath the collapsed wedge.

The chicken cordon bleu is a boned breast of chicken rolled around cheese and ham, covered with bread crumbs and then deep-fried. The Batjak's chicken was badly overdone and as a result was terribly tough.

Batjak serves ratatouille with its entrees and many of its

sandwiches. This mix of pureed tomatoes, green pepper and mushrooms is native of Provence and is often a restaurant choice because it can be made in advance and still retain its quality.

The Batjak's ratatouille seemed more Italian than French (too much tomato), but the highly-seasoned dish was a good accompaniment to sandwiches and entrees.

In their desserts, the Cafe Batjak once again takes one step further for pleasing results. Although the "deep dish apple pie" was not the American dessert that name implies, the Batjak's pie was delicious nonetheless because of its flaky, brown crust and hot spicy apples.

The caramel custard showed that the kitchen still has a way to go in producing good food consistently. Their custard had curdled and was almost gritty, instead of the silken delight a creme caramel connoisseur friend of mine had expected. The waitress acknowledged the kitchen's failure and did not charge us for it.

Both the Cafe Batjak and The Candy Cane have a single owner and so it makes sense that Batjak offers a bewildering array of imported coffees and teas.

The house coffee is an excellent, rich brew (50 cents for all you can drink) and every day a different coffee is on special for 60 cents per cup. (I can recommend the French roast and the Java coffees; for those with a taste for milder brews, try the special blend.)

The tea lover is in paradise, with traditional teas at 60 cents per two-cup pot and herb teas at 65 cents. Indian and Chinese teas are represented in the traditional category and peppermint, comomille and orange spice are among the herb

teas.

For those sworn off caffeine, Perrier and Vichy waters are available, along with non-alcoholic malt beverages and sodas.

The Cafe Batjak earns two stars for its interesting food because it tries to do the unusual when so many establishments content themselves with the merely average.

Service, however, on a recent visit was rushed; courses had barely been eaten when the dishes were whisked away. Batjak's waitresses are uninformed about the food they serve, and for a new cafe with an out-of-the-ordinary menu, this lack of information is frustrating to the inquisitive diner. One waiter is the rating here.

One gets the impression that the Cafe Batjak, now a good place to eat, will improve with experience and experimentation. That's something to look forward to.

Restaurant Ratings

Service	Food
★ Acceptable	★ Acceptable
★★ Good	★★ Good
★★★ Outstanding	★★★ Outstanding

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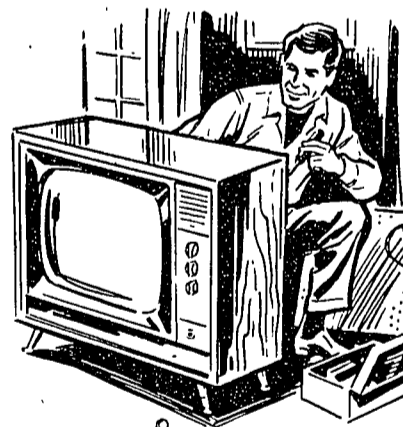
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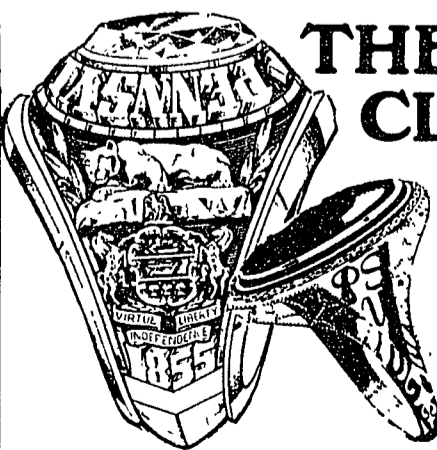
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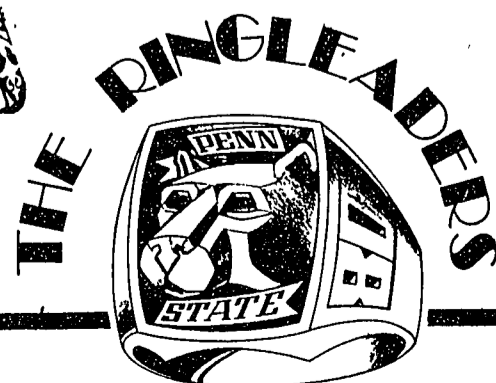
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