

The Ever Popular Tortured Artist Effect

On his latest album "The Ever Popular Tortured Artist Effect," Todd Rundgren, the music industry's resident class clown, makes it known that there's nothing wrong with being an optimist. The nine upbeat songs on the new album are alive with Rundgren's visionary views about how the world should be.

There's no reason why this album shouldn't be all over the top-40 radio dial- it would be a welcome relief from average pessimistic "don't break my heart"- songs that dominate the pop-radio airwaves.

Rundgren is definitely one of the rock world's most productive artists- the public can usually look forward to a new Rundgren album every six months or so. In addition to his solo efforts, he also moonlights as a member of Utopia, and has produced albums by various

DISC - USSION

By Michael Markle

bands (most noticeably, the Psychedelic Fur's "Love My Way" E.P.).

The "Tortured Artist Effect" was recorded in Rundgren's own state-of-the-art studio in Bearsville, N.Y. - all the songs being produced, engineered, and performed by Rundgren himself, guaranteeing him total artistic control over all the songs.

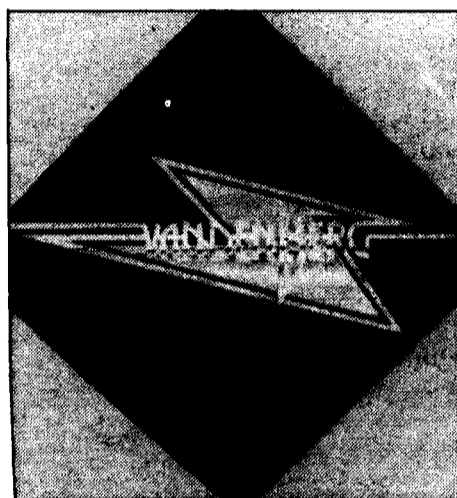
Side one opens with the album's powerhouse cut "Hideaway"- a light-hearted power-pop tune driven along by a throbbing bass and drum section that won't quit. Rundgren's boyish voice lends itself perfectly to the hopeful mood of the song, stating that-

Everybody's looking for a heaven on earth
A slice of paradise where nobody gets hurt
Someone to put the pieces back together again
When your daydreams die.

Rundgren's offbeat humor shines through on "Emperor of the Highway"- Rundgren being the "royal prince of foreign sports cars," who blows off all the "regal road hogs" on the highway. Equally as humorous is "Bang the Drum All Day"- Rundgren's paean to the pleasures of making music all day instead of working.

The remaining songs on the "Tortured Artist effect" are

just as spontaneous, placing Rundgren's latest effort above the many image-conscious, calculated, hit-making bands that dominate the record charts.



Vandenberg

On their debut LP, Vandenberg uses up virtually every hard-rock cliché known to the world, making one wonder what they will use for material on their next album. The song titles tell it all "Back on My Feet," "Ready For You," "Nothing to Lose," "Too Late," etc. - These songs have all been heard many times before in

slightly different variations rendered by countless hard-rock bands.

Vandenberg, Holland's answer to the Scorpions and Van Halen, throw melody to the wind, aurally assaulting the listener with hammerjack guitars and thunderous drums. The "wall of sound" production on this album would make even Phil Spector take notice. What Vandenberg lacks in lyrical content or dynamics, they compensate for in the sheer force and volume of the songs.

While their debut LP will surely satisfy many hard-core rockers, one can't help but notice the absence of any real tasteful guitar riffs- such as those of Judas Priest guitarists, Glen Tipton and K.K. Downing. Most of the guitar work consists of blatant power chords that lack any real substance. The drumming is destitute of any real pyrotechnics- the twin bass drums sounding like a herd of wild buffaloes on a rampage.

"Burning Heart" is the sole salvation on the album, containing one of the best lead guitar solos heard in recent memory. Lead wailer Bert Heerink pines for his lost love while guitarist Adrian Vandenberg slams a few well-timed crunch- chords to back him up.

"Ready for You" is a typical banal rocker that exhorts the listener to pledge allegiance to the heavy-metal army. "Lost in the City" is a real thought-provoking tune that is about- you guessed it- driving around and getting lost in the city.

Vandenberg's debut LP is admirable in its formidable approach, but it is ultimately devoid (except for "Burning Heart") of any real musical value- this one is best left in the bins of your local record store.

Farmer victim of circumstances

By Pat Carthy

No Frances Farmer is not the "Fanny Farmer" of candy fame. She was "a star" of film and theatre in the late 1930's and 40's. The film "Frances" is the biographical sketch of the destruction of a human spirit by an ambitious, vindictive, mother and the psychiatric institutions of the time.

The late show premier audience seemed unprepared for the events that unfolded with each new scene, as an occasional "gasp" or "oh no" broke the silence of the theatre. Jessica Lange portrayed Frances as a beautiful, defiant, vibrant person. This pre-institutional Frances rages her way through scenes set, on film location, a jail scene after her arrest, and through a court

hearing. The impact of Lange's performance is riveting, awesome yet, the character of Frances gains sympathy from the audience. Frances is a misunderstood frightened woman, her punishment far



outweighs the deeds.

The scene of Frances confronting the psychiatrist upon her first committal to an institution would have been funny if the results of her insolence weren't so horrifying. The insulin injection

she is given throws her body into convulsive shock and as Frances is contorting her strapped-down body, the audience begins to witness the awful destruction of a human essence.

The film doesn't address the issue of whether Frances Farmer was mentally ill or if the combination of alcohol, drugs, and long work hours were responsible for her erratic behavior. That they contributed to her downfall isn't in doubt.

The institutional scenes with women chained to filthy bare mattresses, or wandering around in a daze has a nightmare quality. The condition of horror is heightened when the hospital orderlies let soldiers into the room at night to rape the women. Frances is one of the victims. The audience, like Frances, isn't given



Graphic by Pat Carthy

a reprieve from this hell as she is subjected to a transorbital lobotomy. This is a polite way of referring to an ice pick type instrument driven behind the eyeball into the brain and manipulated to sever certain nerves. The only relief from the gruesome events is in the character of Harry York (Sam Sheppard), in the guise of a romantic interest but this too is doomed to fail.

The post-institutional Frances is docile, serene, empty. The audience leaves the theatre shocked, angry, quiet.