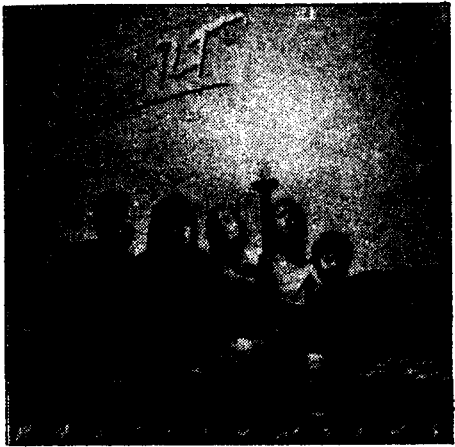


# DISC-ussion

By Mike Markle



## Passionworks

Heart's latest LP, *Passionworks*, follows the adventures of the Wilson sisters as they wax poetic about sour romances and lost love. Virtually all of the songs share the central theme of loneliness and broken relationships, making *Passionworks* a somewhat depressing album.

There are a few out-and-out rockers on *Passionworks*, but the majority are mid-tempo ballads full of somber, image-laden lyrics that become redundant and boring after repeated listenings. The songwriting chores are evenly shared by Ann and Nancy Wilson

and their high school friend, Sue Ennis, who all evidently share a pretty dim view of male-female relationships.

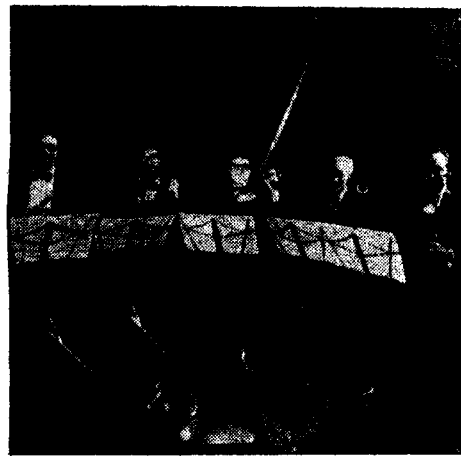
Forsaking the song's subject matter, Heart is technically an above-average band, particularly the vocal talents of Ann Wilson, whose three-octave soprano allows her to switch effortlessly from hard rockers to soft ballads.

Heart has gone through many personnel changes since they formed in 1975, with the Wilson sisters being the only original members in the current line-up, which also includes Howard Leese (guitar), Mark Andes (bass), and Denny Carmassi (drums).

*Passionworks* contains a few powerhouse tunes: "How Can I Refuse," "Allies," and "Blue Guitar;" but also offers a fair amount of sleepers: "Johnny Moon," "Together Now," "Ambush" and "(Beat By) Jealousy."

"How Can I Refuse" showcases Ann Wilson's melodic vocals, which alternate from seductive interludes to powerful blasts of emotion, while "Allies" (written by Journey's Jonathan Cain) features a strong chorus and the keyboard talents of Toto's Steve Paich.

Heart's latest effort, *Passionworks*, does contain occasional outbursts of passion on a few tunes, but the redundant subject matter (lost love) of the remaining songs make this an album for broken-hearted fools only.



## Drastic Measures

This is a tough time for Kansas. On their latest release, *Drastic Measures*, they retain their intricate cosmic sound in a time when musical simplicity equals mass acceptance. Let's face it, bands that offer elementary lyrics and melodies are getting more and more airplay. Kansas addresses the problem in "Mainstream:"

"Keep it simple boys, it's gonna be alright  
As long as you're inside the

mainstream

If you stay within the tried and true

You'll remain among the chosen few...."

Kansas doesn't necessarily "stay within the tried and true," but they're not entirely original either, often borrowing from older progressive British rock bands.

The Kansas sound is streamlined somewhat on "Drastic Measures" with the departure of keyboardist Steve Walsh and violinist Robby Steinhardt and the addition of lead vocalist John Elefante who, along with Dino Elefante, wrote most of the nine tunes on the album. Remaining members include Rich Williams (guitar), Kerry Livgren (keyboards), Dave Hope (bass) and Phil Ehart (drums).

Self-described as a "technical hard rock" band, Kansas utilizes odd time signatures and abstract lyrics on their complex compositions that require involved studio production techniques.

Side one opens with their A.O.R. hit "Fight Fire With Fire," a spirited tune driven along by Hope and Ehart's chugging rhythm section and Elefante's forceful vocals.

"Everybody's My Friend" follows, a tongue-in-cheek tune with Elefante relating how it feels to rise from obscurity to become lead vocalist for a major rock band.

Keyboardist Kerry Livgren contributes a few songs: "Mainstream," "End of the Age" and "Incident on a Bridge."

"Mainstream" attacks the corporate mentality of the music industry, which equates artistic achievement with *Billboard* chart positions. Livgren, a born-again Christian, offers an apocalyptic message for the future of man on "End of the Age," and furthers his reputation for esoteric lyrics on "Incident on a Bridge."

Kansas must indeed take some "drastic measures" to compete with the current crop of melody-happy synth-pop bands that permeate the airwaves. Their latest LP, *Drastic Measures*, may not be their best weapon, but it's a step in the right direction.

Albums courtesy FM 104

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