

The Allan Holdsworth: Road Games

by Steve Painter

Allan Holdsworth is somewhat of an enigma in the music world. Considered by many (including Edward Van Halen and Neil Schon) to be the foremost electro-jazz guitar technician, he is all but unknown to the mass public. His vibrantly velocious soloing abilities have graced the works of such fusion and avant-garde underground groups as U.K., Soft Machine, Jean-Luc Ponty, Gong, and Bill Bruford, among others. Associations with these musicians, far removed from mainstream music, have contributed to Holdsworth's anonymity, but there are basically two other reasons for this situation. One is that he rarely gets a chance to record (he has been featured on only two albums in the last six years!) being he is simply not a big name act. The second reason is that any listener who does not play guitar or at least understand how a guitar is played could never grasp

Holdsworth's technical proficiency, stylistic subtlety, and overall innovative approach to fusion.

By 1979, Holdsworth became tired of playing in other people's bands and formed a band of his own, I.O.U. (named so because interest was practically nil when the band was in its embryonic stage, almost paying clubs to perform) with Gary Husband on drums and Paul Carmichael on bass. Calling upon veteran British vocalist Paul Williams (no, not the short geeky guy from Hollywood Squares) to provide what little vocals this instrumentally oriented trio would need, the resulting album, I.O.U., became a fascinating masterpiece of modern fusion without becoming an over-inflated ego trip.

Holdsworth has just released his second solo recording, a six-song EP entitled *Road Games*. I.O.U. now consists of Holdsworth on guitar, Jeff Berlin on bass (a veteran of Zap-

pa, Bruford, etc.), and Chad Wackerman on drums (another Zappa alumnus). While the cover depicts a dadist/cubistic version of a guitar fretboard, Holdsworth is more of an impressionist offering glistening chordal swirls in broad strokes of watercolor washes. The back cover bears the legend, "There is no synthesizer or keyboards on this record," a fact made more amazing by a listen to the title track.

Opening with a unison guitar-bass lightning scale run, "Road Games" leaps into a metallic chord progression with vocals courtesy of Paul Williams. Drawing stunningly piano-like tones from his guitar, Holdsworth bursts into a solo that virtually shreds speakers. In the background, a two-handed arpeggio ripples with

the tone of synthesizer. "Three Sheets to the Wind" launches into a mellow jazz progression of soft, arpeggiated crescendos. Demonstrating his understanding of the tension-and-release principles in soloing, Holdsworth delicately embroiders the melody before climaxing in a two-handed harmonic explosion.

Misty chords are overlapped by short melodic phrases in "Water on the Brain-Part II," a showcase for Jeff Berlin's fluid bass playing. He demonstrates his virtuosity through the slippery bass solo, while Holdsworth's icily chiming chords beckon in the distance.

Appropriately titled, "Tokyo Dream" overlaps gentle arpeggios, amazing orchestral sounds, and street-scenery textures to produce the opium-

induced imagery of Oriental nightlife. The mercurial solo trickles into an exposition of Holdsworth's lyrical passion. An abrupt contrast, "Was There?" (featuring Jack Bruce from Cream on vocals) resolves its chaotic, dissonant verses into broadly sweeping chords. Ablaze with Hendrixian fission, Holdsworth tucks wonderfully abrasive solos into corners with a wailing urgency.

The final tune, "Material Real," opens with a cloud-like spaciness similar to "Shallow Seas" from Holdsworth's previous solo outing, I.O.U. It then leaps into a Jack Bruce vocal with I.O.U. simply providing a rhythmic accompaniment before dissolving in a single ominous chord.

Eurhythmic Touch

by Antonette D'Orazio

Touch is an excellent follow-up album to Eurhythmic's 1983 lp *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*. Annie Lennox's voice is in top form despite reports that she was having problems with her vocal chords late last year. The music continues to combine innovative synthesizers with traditional slide guitar. The lyrics, as on the first album, are esoteric, allowing the listener to get a feeling rather than an exact meaning from the songs.

On the single, "Here Comes the Rain Again," Lennox is moody and dark. On "Regrets" she warns, rather convincingly, "I've got a delicate mind/I've got a dangerous nature/And my fist collides with your furniture." Although endowed with a fast beat, "Cool Blue" has menacing undertones. The title seems to fit the mood of the entire album; blue with subtle tones of black. For all this seriousness however, Eurhythmic do have a sense of humor: a chorus of voices in the song is heard singing "How could she fall for a boy like that?" Each time the line is sung, the voices sound more and more like the chipmunks. It sounds funny,

but it exemplifies the gossip that so often accompanies our personal relationships. Not surprisingly, the last cut on the album is a song called "Paint a Rumor."

The first song on side two, "The First Cut," is similar to "Cool Blue" in that it has a fast beat. However, "The First Cut" is not menacing; instead it simply describes the pain and stark memory of being hurt by a lover for the first time. Perhaps the tune with the darkest and deepest felt images and tones is "Aqua." The title seems to refer to a line from "Jennifer" on the *Sweet Dreams* album: "Jennifer — where are you tonight?/underneath the water." In fact, that line appears on the inside sleeve of *Touch*. Sounds vanish in and out of "Aqua" as if the listener is only semiconscious, which is probably the desired effect. It's almost as if Annie and Dave (Stewart, the other half of Eurhythmic) are taking you through their own private trip: "Don't touch me/Don't talk to me ever again/I don't feel anything/All sensation is closed to me/I saw you put the needle in/I can still see everything."

Simple Minds: Sparkle in the Rain

by Antonette D'Orazio

Steve Lillywhite has added *Simple Minds* to his impressive list of productions. Although the hollow sound that is Lillywhite's trademark has hindered studio albums of bands such as U2, it is well suited to the vast, echoing sound of *Simple Minds*. The percussion is reminiscent of Larry Mullen, Jr. of U2, and exemplifies the muffled drumming that Lillywhite seems to like. However, where the percussion was not prominent enough on *Simple Minds*' last album, *New Gold Dream* produced by Pete Walsh, it is comfortably noticeable on *Sparkle in the Rain*.

The music is crisp and catchy, but not annoyingly poppy like "Promised You a Miracle" from *New Gold Dream*. It is all upbeat except for the beautiful and haunting "East at Easter," which contains lines like, "We'll

go walking hand in hand/We will walk you, walk you little child . . . They're gonna lighten up the sky . . ." It is comparable to U2's "Drowning Man," both lead singers, Bono Hewson of U2 and Jim Kerr of *Simple Minds*, drench the songs with emotion and mystery. The constant motion of the music in both tunes is also similar.

Simple Minds seems to be a multi-dimensional band. On "Waterfront" they offer an invitation to "Step in, step out of the rain/I'm gonna walk on up to the waterfront . . . Come in, come out of the rain . . ." And they are surprisingly sentimental: "Thank you for the pictures of living . . . Some say we'll be together for a very long time" (*Book of Brilliant Things*), and "Just my imagination . . . You go to my head/With the flames that go higher and higher . . . Speed your love to me" (*Speed Your Love to Me*). Yet, they can be rather explicit as in *Street*

Hassle. They also explore the various aspects, negative and positive, of time in "White Hot Day." Unlike *Culture Club*, *Simple Minds* does it in a more original way.

Some people may write off *Simple Minds* as a mellow, keyboard-based band. However, "The Kick Inside of Me," with its hard, solid rocking, heavy baseline, and rough vocals shows *Simple Minds*' versatility. Kerr's voice varies from tough, to smooth and clear, while always remaining strong.

The final cut on the album is a calming instrumental called "Shaking Off the Ghosts." It ties in with "The Kick Inside of Me," which contains the line "Shake off the ghost inside of me," and forms a nice contrast.

Sparkle in the Rain does not have one weak track on it. *Simple Minds* has grown and improved while continuing to give us great music.

Immediately following this song is "No Fear, No Hate, No Pain (No Broken Hearts)," whose introduction leads you to believe it's going to be just like "Aqua." Don't be fooled. The song seems to almost literally break as Lennox's vocals cut through the music clearly and strongly. She varies her voice on successive words, through multi-tracking, between octaves. This adds a dramatic effect to possibly the best cut on

the album. The emotions that come through vary from fear of being hurt, as Lennox begs, "Give me no pain!," to putting on a tough sort of air: "You've got the killing gun/Held in your hand/It feels like cold, cold steel . . . You say shoot, shoot, shoot it up." Here, her voice is hard-edged, almost bitter.

The only cut that is entirely out of place and uncharacteristic of not only the album, but the band itself, is

"Right By Your Side." It sounds like "Eurhythmic go jungle — yeah!" Lennox includes monkey sounds and the line, "I need to swing from limb to limb . . ." Eurhythmic have more integrity and intelligence than this. However, don't let this one song discourage you from getting this otherwise superb album.

You can catch Eurhythmic in concert at the Tower Theater on Saturday, March 31.

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