

SUN RA & HIS ARKESTRA
Live At Montreux (*Inner City*)

If you happened to tune in to Sun Ra's appearance on *Saturday Night Live* and had him pegged as some trendy jazzman who picked up on *Star Wars*/*Close Encounters* fever and figured to cash in big, you're wrong. Sun Ra and various editions of the Arkestra have been patrolling the outer reaches of the musical cosmos since the pre-Sputnik era. Hell, when the space people want to communicate with us, they'll probably use Sun Ra as their emissary. If they haven't already, that is—the melody to "Lights on a Satellite" (first recorded in 1959) ain't exactly light years removed from the "Close Encounters" theme, you know.

Sun Ra and his twenty strong Arkestra are an avant garde big band that touches a staggering number of bases. The music is often atonal, frequently swelling from a single instrumental solo to a full Arkestral exercise in controlled chaos that is invariably fascinating. This is hardly easy listening music but well worth the effort demanded.

D.S.

TALKING HEADS

More Songs About Buildings and Food
(*Sire*)

Talking Heads are caught between two poles: too wedded to song structures to qualify as part of the experimental rock axis, yet

too unorthodox to be truly accessible on a pop level. This paradoxical situation can lead to some strange combinations of elements—witness "The Good Thing," where a marvelous hook is matched with lyrics that describe passion in the technocratic terms of a computer read-out. This is the modern world, I guess.

Produced by Brian Eno (virtually a fifth member of the band here), this second Heads album sounds much more like the band does in live performance. All the trademark elements are here—David Byrne's half-strangled yelps and neurotic lyrics, the textured repetitious melodic riffs and a rhythm section firmly grounded in the Memphis soul school. There's something interesting in virtually every song—"Thank You for Sending Me an Angel," "The Good Thing," "The Girls Want to Be with the Girls" and a cover of Al Green's "Take Me to the River" are particularly good—but nothing that grabs you with the power of "Psychokiller." The Heads intrigue but rarely captivate. I like this album but certainly don't go around humming the songs.

D.S.

WAR

Youngblood (*United Artists*)
LEE OSKAR
Before the Rain (*Elektra*)

Very rarely does a member of a popular group record an album that surpasses the

name group's latest work, but in the case of War and their harpist supreme Lee Oskar, Lee's second solo effort upsets the norm.

Oskar's career is an odd one. A 30-year-old Jewish Dane from Copenhagen, Lee has been playing harmonica for War since their Eric Burdon blues days eight years ago. As the white kid in the soul band, he took an unenviable role and turned it around. Oskar added a presence to the War sound that was distinctive. Whether he doubled with a sax or keyboard riff or hung in the background with the rhythm section, his harp always stood out and gave the arrangement an extra bite.

Though most of the rhythm backing on Oskar's album resembles War's syncopated street pulse, Lee has managed to free his harmonica to finer solo effect than the War ensemble allows. As a result, Oskar's LP is a step out of the stiff mold War has become trapped in.

Before the Rain is, for the most part, an instrumental album with sound effects thrown in to illustrate the musical theme (a rain shower ends "Before the Rain," street car bells open "San Francisco Bay"). Lee sings some rather idiotic lyrics on "San Francisco Bay," and leads the chants on "Feelin' Happy" and "Haunted House," but the real reason to buy this album is the harp work: the chordal phrasing on the title cut, the haunting high squeals on "Sing Song," and the bluesy feel of "Steppin'."

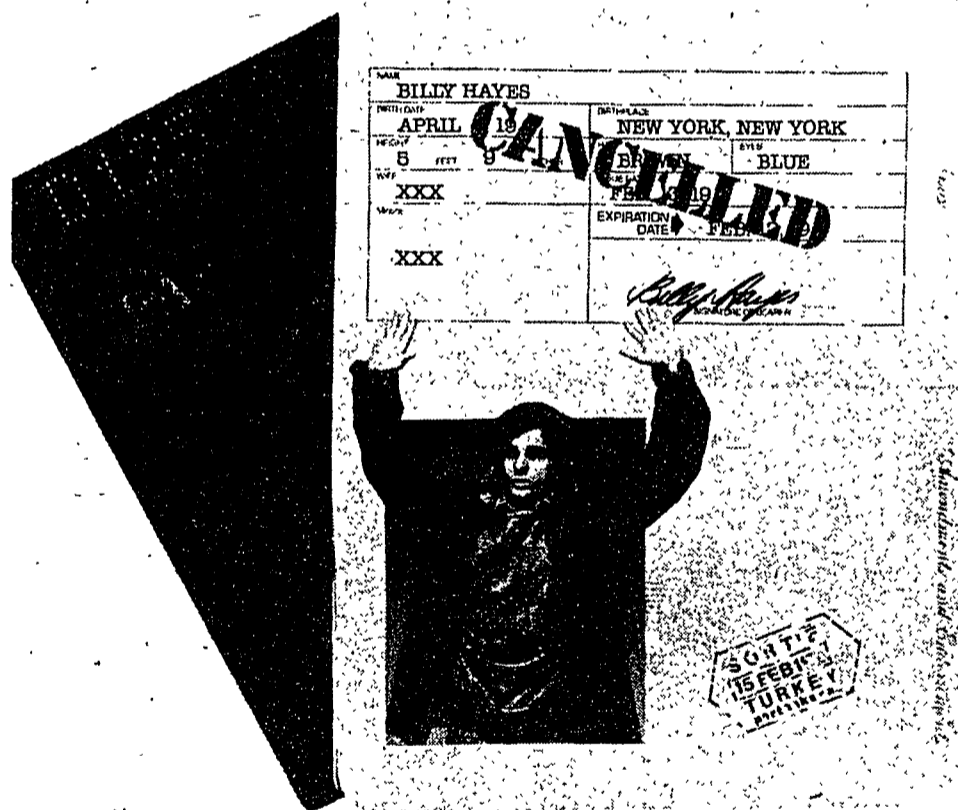
Oskar is one of the most original harp players ever to pick up a Hohner. Though there are brief moments that drag in a somnambulist groove, the overall effect is a strong, varied set of tasty blowing.

War's *Youngblood* is another story. The album is a soundtrack for the feature film currently in release. The title track has the patented War street beat, but unfortunately, the rest of the LP is strictly Sominex. Aimless funk grooves and jazz riffing may seem powerful behind some screen action, but it doesn't hold up on the home stereo.

At least two tracks are marred by movie dialogue spoken over instrumentals which aren't even that interesting to begin with. Others are potentially hot grooves that aren't developed and thus bog into endless riffing of the obvious "soundtrack" school. The one exception is "Flying High (The Chase)," a tasty jazz number that transcends the soundtrack flaccidity by showing War's fusion sound in full meltdown.

War may have been feeding old riffs and Geritol rhythms to their old record company in the form of this soundtrack. Whatever the reason, it wasn't a very smart or creative one, especially since their last album, *Galaxy*, was a step forward and a strong seller. War may be down for the count, but they're not out yet. Oskar, meanwhile, is a talent worth watching, and if *Before the Rain* is any indication, he may eclipse his fellow soul mates.

Tom Vickers



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Music Created by GIORGIO MORODER Based on the true story of Billy Hayes from the book "Midnight Express"
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