

Satriani steps to the mike

Guitar wizard adds vocals to his music

by Rob Farnham
Collegian Staff Writer

Guitarists seem to think that Joe Satriani can play a little. In a recent reader's poll in one of the metalhead magazines, he was voted Best Overall and Best Rock Guitarist, and his Grammy-nominated 1987 release, *Surfing with the Alien*, came in second only to Van Halen's debut in the voting for Best Guitar Album of the Past Twenty Years.

He teaches too: On occasion, Satriani has given lessons to such illustrious chord-crunchers as Metallica's Kirk Hammett and Whitesnake's Steve Vai. Yes, Joe knows guitar. But does he know vocals? That's the question raised by his new album, *Flying in a Blue Dream*, on which he sings lead for the first time in his solo career.

Satriani has some previous experience around microphones, as he sang backup on Crowded House's first album and played several years with the Squares, a Berkeley-based power-pop group, before going solo as an instrumentalist in 1986. But is he sacrificing the strength of his powerfully melodic compositions by setting words to them?

Guitar purists can take some comfort in the fact that only six of *Flying's* 18 tracks contain vocals. Satriani is easing cautiously into more conventional song structures, with varying, but generally positive, results.

The first single, "Big Bad Moon," runs on a hard-distortion blues-rock riff and some squalling slide guitar and harmonica leads by Satriani. Think of it as CCR's "Bad Moon Rising" on steroids.

Lyricaly, Satriani sticks mostly with standard hard-rock

topics. For instance, he twice sings about driving fast, first in a car ("Can't Slow Down") and then on his motorcycle ("Ride").

"I Believe" is a statement of humanistic faith ("I believe/We can change anything"), redeemed from the saccharine sweetness of its lyrics largely by the sincere intensity in the chorus. He gets away with some cliched imagery in "Strange," thanks to a stuttering funk-jazz guitar and hesitation beat that provide an appropriate sense of oddness.

The funniest lyrics are those of "The Phone Call," a bizarrely bitter breakup song featuring the couplet, "Well, you look like a yuppie and that's too bad/Yeah, it used to be funny but now it's sad," and a chorus which makes a declaration of unapologetic selfishness, "You know I don't want what you want/I want what I want."

Satriani's voice, while unspectacular, is at least pleasant, although he could benefit from improvements in his phrasing. His singing seems strongest when he pushes himself a little, as on the chorus of "I Believe." Thankfully, though, he avoids the ear-piercing upper-register histrionics to which heavy-metal vocalists often succumb.

Meanwhile, the best of the twelve instrumentals, especially the soaring title track and the cryptically titled chordal-fuzz workout of "The Mystical Potato Head Groove Thing," are as good as anything on *Surfing*. However, the nearly 65 minutes of *Flying* do contain some filler, such as "Day at the Beach (New Rays from an Ancient Sun)" and "The Forgotten (Part One)," both essentially finger exercises with echo, and "The Feeling," a pointless 52-second banjo

instrumental. The weakest cuts tend to be the shortest, though.

Satriani is not an overwhelmingly innovative player, and there's no single technique he employs that hasn't been heard elsewhere, but he is a gifted synthesist. He borrows from players in all genres, combining styles from jazz, funk, metal, classical, and blues into his own imposing wall of sound. He plays with intelligence and in control, rarely slipping into the trap of speed-for-its-own sake in his solos, and usually resisting the temptation to bury a melody beneath the flash and filigree of undirected technique.

While his lyrics aren't terribly distinguished, he has incorporated vocals into his new work better than most guitar-slingers are able to. If he ever becomes as accomplished a songwriter as he is a guitarist, he'll be quite overwhelming.

For the moment, *Flying in a Blue Dream* is a tremendous success as a guitar album, and a fairly auspicious introduction to Satriani the singer. This collection can be enjoyed both by six-string wizards and those who don't know a fretboard from a surfboard.

Roadhouse Theater offers triple bill

(continued from page 9)

successful.

Another minor problem was the way-too-exaggerated plot of the soap opera. "African sleeping sickness" and "mystery fetus" are perhaps distracting, and I felt forced-in only for the comic value that has already been zapped from such exaggerations by countless sitcoms and comedians.

However, don't get me wrong. This was a very strong play, definitely the one worthy of the top billing that "Buck Fever" ultimately received. This middle-aged fear worked but was not undercut by the comedy. The lines were genuinely funny, but the looks the actors gave each other were the real script. I don't want to set this up too big, but I cannot imagine laughing any harder at an innocuous line like: "Do you want a doughnut." McClelland really nailed the timing and look.

This play was a fresh turn on the *pop vs. art* motif and the *mid-life crisis run away and dream* plot. Sid gets a note that a big Hollywood director wants to talk to him. She loves "Quest for Eternity" and read a screen play

that Sid wrote on a day he was home sick. The plot was all commercial, and Sid hopes that she left the message because she wants to make it into a film.

This is where Ken gets involved. We learn that this is not the first wild scheme that Sid has dragged him into. Sid wants Ken to help him make the movie script something more than commercial fluff. The parallels between what is going on in the play and the actual play are unavoidable. Is playwright Bill Bozzone just writing plays like "Buck Fever" and "Breakdown" for entertainment, or is the message enough to make the plays important?

A few people left after the second play, and that may have been a good decision. The director, Kim Mc., should have axed the third play, "Good Honest Food," for many reasons. It didn't fit the theme of the first two, it made the whole set of plays run too long and it lacked any social value at all. It was a double poke, insulting both poor and rich without the kind of compassion that a play like that needs.

Liner Notes

(continued from page 8)

begin in early September. The movie, scheduled for completion by May 1991, will return Sigourney Weaver to her leading role.

- Pop icon David Bowie will receive a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame on March 16.

- Wrestler Hulk Hogan has negotiated a deal with Disney to appear in feature films. Before you laugh, think about the possibilities: How about a film in the style of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* in which Hogan takes for the seven dwarves in a cage match?

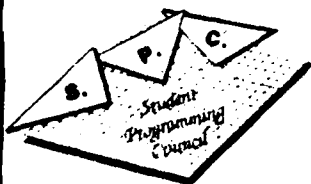
- The Rolling Stones hope to return to *Aliens* director Ridley Scott to make a film about their upcoming European Tour. The 90-minute piece will include concert footage and backstage interviews as well as a graphical presentation.

- The nominations for the 62nd annual Academy Awards

should be announced today. Look for the nominations to focus around the films *Born on the Fourth of July* and *Driving Miss Daisy*. Tom Cruise should anchor the competition for Best Actor, while Jessica Tandy and Michelle Pfeiffer should figure prominently for the Best Actress award.

- Rumors abound that the marriage between entrepreneur Donald Trump and his wife of 12 years Ivana is about to end. Ivana might be acting just a little greedy, considering she has refused a settlement which would have entitled her to \$25 million and a Connecticut mansion.

- Rob Lowe's first film since his summer videotape success, appropriately titled *Bat Influence*, will open on March 9. In other news, Lowe and fellow co-stars Demi Moore and James Belushi have expressed interest in a sequel to *About Last Night*.



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