

Reviews

Biography cites David Bowie's use of stylistic poses

By LEAH TALLEY

On David Bowie's most recent album, *Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps)*, he revives the tale of Major Tom in the song "Ashes to Ashes." In this song, Major Tom, now a junkie, faces reality. "I've never done good things/I've never done bad things/I've never done anything out of the blue." These lyrics reflect Bowie's controversial distance from his rock and roll career. In *David Bowie: An Illustrated Record*, authors Roy Carr and Charles Shaar Murray give the positive interpretation of this aesthetic distance.

Carr and Murray label Bowie and Marc Bolan of the group T. Rex as saviors of pop rock in the early 1970's. Their glitter rock was welcomed relief from the proper musicians with beards, or what was then an increasing emphasis on progressive rock, heavy metal, and the album over the single. The age of the earth shoe was over. Bolan broke ground on this stuffy music scene, and Bowie took over in 1972.

Aesthetic distance is Bowie's major contribution to rock according to Carr and Murray. Bowie celebrated artifice, elevated it. This becomes evident in 1972 with the creation of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars. Here, Bowie re-defined rock as performance art. Bowie was Ziggy, on stage and off. But all good things must come to an end, and Bowie ended Ziggy's life and moved on to yet another pose.

This ability to strike any pose for the sake of the creation of music is seen by Carr and Murray as Bowie's greatest quality. Bowie as Ziggy Stardust, The Thin White Duke, or a Young American is really Bowie refusing to "limit himself to any one set of stylistic devices, any one role, any one persona, any one audience, any one attitude."

The authors find this ability inherently more stimulating than the music of, for example, the Rolling Stones or Bob Dylan. These established musicians are always playing slight variations of themselves, according to Carr and Murray, while Bowie is constantly breaking new ground.

Many critics disagree with this interpretation, however. Again consider the lyrics from

"Ashes to Ashes." Bowie may be constantly innovating, as Carr and Murray boast, but his innovations often seem too calculated, certainly not out of the blue. Critics propose that "Bowie is a hollow man, that there is no True Face behind his succession of masks."

The authors find such a vision of Bowie's career too simplistic. Bowie is not a proper rock and roller, one in love with the rock and roll dream. Instead he is in rock and roll because he is good at it, and this attitude allows him to change his face in search of entertaining music.

Carr and Murray recount Bowie's career in a detailed discography that covers his first single as Davie Jones up to his latest work as well as his acting career in theater and film.

This section of the book is informative and entertaining as the authors sharpen their wits to make potentially dry material hilarious.

This book also is blessed with an abundance of photographs. And Bowie has always been photogenic, especially during his days as Ziggy Stardust, complete with spiky orange hair and "skintight catsuits in hard, metallic colors."

David Bowie: *An Illustrated Record* doesn't reveal any hidden secrets on the life and career of David Bowie. Instead it presents Bowie as an artist who rises above the trap of cliché, time-worn rock and roll. He does this by standing back from his career, creating a world to play his songs in,

and becoming a character within that world. This is what Bowie has done to re-define rock and roll, according to Carr and Murray, and what has made Bowie the most interesting rock personality of the last 10 years.

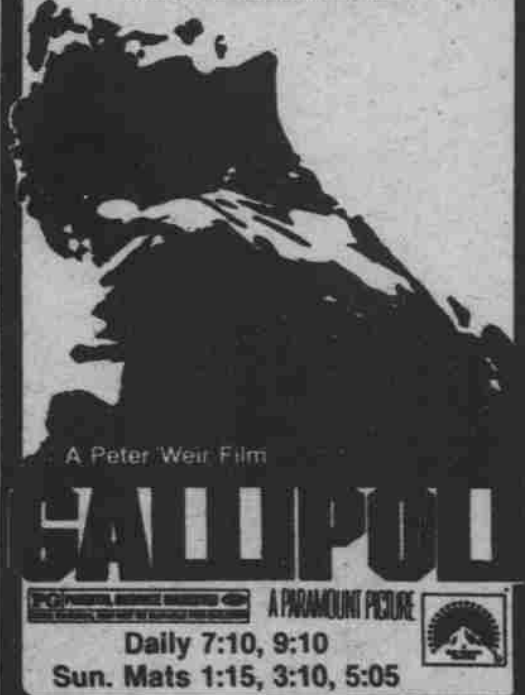
Leah Talley is assistant arts editor for The Daily Tar Heel.

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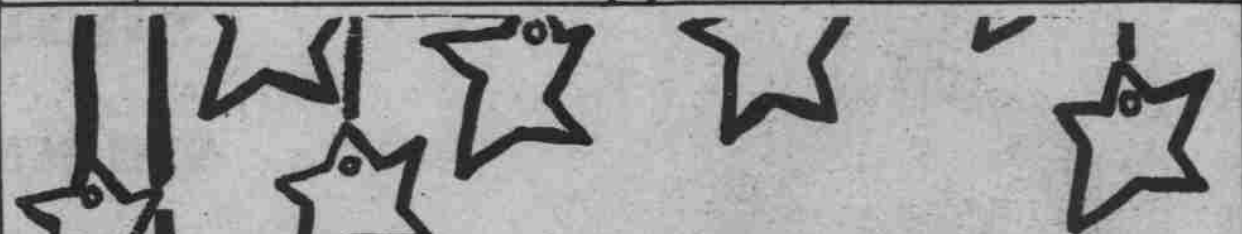
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Noon in the Pit

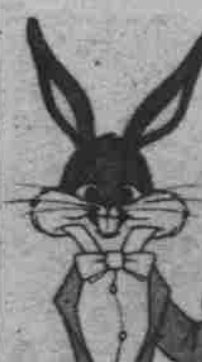


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