

## ARTS

# Lou Reed celebrates twenty years in show business with release of new jury-rigged record 'Mistrial'

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The release of *Mistrial*, Lou Reed's first album in two years, marks his twentieth year in the music business. In view of his past work in the '60s and '70s and his notorious lifestyle, one would not expect an album as optimistic, as open, or as good as *Mistrial*.

In 1967, while the Beatles were experimenting with psychedelia and its themes, Reed and his band, The Velvet Underground, were assaulting the senses with excruciating distortion and chaotic noise. Reed's trademark became his vocal delivery, an expressive half-mumble that was not quite spoken but couldn't be called singing either.

Reed spoke of city themes at their hardest and sleaziest — perversity, despair and death — as the Velvets played a psychedelic rock 'n' roll dirge. The songs maintained a formal structure not unlike other bands of the day but were invariably interspersed with bursts of raw noise.

Like the Velvets' music, Reed's songs hinted that underneath the meanness, paranoia, brutality, and smothered pain there was still the possibility of some kind of redemption through love.

The Velvets ended with the '60s. Reed managed to continue as a solo act, supported by a small cult of

rabidly loyal fans, into the '80s. His second solo record, *Transformer*, produced by David Bowie, yielded the hit, "Walk on the Wild Side," and introduced him to a new generation eager to hear his bleak, ironic message. The hard core fans were convinced, and rightly so, that they were listening to Manhattan's greatest street-poet.

Reed's first album in three years, 1984's *New Sensations*, introduced fans to his new core group of musicians, Fernando Saunders on bass, Fred Maher on drums and Robert Quine sharing guitar duties with Reed. The record also introduced Reed to the young MTV audience with a couple of videos portraying Reed as poet-rocker, walking and talking on his home city streets with the same cool aloofness his music and performances always indicated.

*Mistrial* seems to recapitulate his dark wind swept city scapes and contrasts those themes with more optimistic still lifes. The album indicates that while he doesn't want to deny his past, he has come to terms with it. He wishes his audience would not really vindicate him, but allow him to continue without the baggage of his past sordidness.

In the title track, Reed explains that his past is no longer relevant to his new message and wants to be free of it.

"I want a *Mistrial*/ to clear my name/ I want to bring my case to the people of New York City."

The song "Outside" seems to reflect a change in his role from one whose message is a reflection of his life, to one who merely observes the world at large and finds it as harrowing as the themes he investigated in an earlier era. Finding little outside interests in these times, Reed seeks only love, preferring not to join the world at all. "Outside the politics of hate and greed Outside .../ Inside, no matter 'bout the world Outside."

Perhaps Reed is surprised to find a wider audience in this era via MTV, and his Honda scooter commercials show he does not hesitate to lambast the medium through which he views the outside world from more comfortable surroundings. "Video Violence" is a surprise to longtime fans, since it negates and criticizes dark themes which at one time may have been examined by Reed himself. "His heart is pounding, he switches the channel/ looking for something besides rape and murder/ but except for Walt Disney, it's a twisted alliance/ This is the age of Video Violence."

Overall, Reed is in top form in his latest incarnation as '80s street-poet-turned-social-observer. The lyrics rank among his most well



thought-out. Although nothing in particular stands out enough to expect single like "Wild Side," there are verbal gems throughout. Reed's vocals on this album are evolving beyond the confidence of *New Sensations*, away from the mumbling sing-speak of the past to something as near as he will get to actual singing. It is not, however, close enough to detract from the unique charm his vocal style has always had.

More surprising to casual fans is

Reed's guitar work on *Mistrial*. Once content to stand back and provide the rhythm, Reed, having apparently dropped Quine, now stands out front and blasts out near-feedback solos with an adeptness bringing a new dimension to his newest diatribes on the '80s. For example, on the irreverent "Spit It Out," Reed succeeds in giving a scathing vocal attack on the rat race and punctuating it with an equally

See LOU REED page 12

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