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**Record roundup: a mixed bag  
 Patti Smith's super but Linda Ronstadt's not**

by George Basco  
 Features Editor

From a vast wealth of new albums, we  
 have selected several diverse recordings to  
 review. Hopefully, you will find one of your  
 favorites somewhere among this mixed bag.

"Horses," Patti Smith (Arista Records)  
 Patti Smith, respected poet turned rock  
 singer, defies labeling. She is a human  
 anachronism, a throwback to the days when  
 Lou Reed's Velvet Underground was the  
 future of music, Andy Warhol was art and  
 spikes and suicide were chic.

But Patti Smith is more than a just-  
 discovered poet priestess of the punk era.  
 She is the first visionary to successfully  
 combine poetry and the primitivism of rock  
 into a marketable product. Reed and his  
 chanteuse Nico failed because they were not  
 believable—Smith is the skinny tomboy and  
 girl next door, always in love but never  
 loved, suddenly successful.

Produced by John Cale, a war-scarred  
 veteran of the Velvet Underground himself,  
 Smith's *Horses* is a hypnotic combination of  
 relentless rhythms, street-punk strutting  
 and intellectual vulnerability. Her best songs  
 are recreated oldies given new lyrics, punch

and a musical facelifting.  
 Smith's incredible live energy is captured  
 on *Horses* by Cale. Tracks like "Free  
 Money" and "Gloria," the old Them song,  
 are sexy, blistering rockers, while "Land"  
 and "Birdland" are haunting visions and  
 deeply affecting.

Patti Smith is an immense talent—she will  
 be called the next Bob Dylan, or at least the  
 next Bruce Springsteen.

"Prisoner in Disguise," Linda Ronstadt  
 (Asylum)

Linda Ronstadt's new album should be  
 titled *Prisoner of Success*. Ronstadt's  
*Heart Like a Wheel* combined excellent  
 material with solid musical performances.  
*Prisoner in Disguise* attempts to follow the  
 same recipe (a mixture of country, folk,  
 R & B and funky rock). Ronstadt is also  
 reunited with her ideal producer Peter  
 Asher, string arranger David Campbell and  
 talented multi-instrumentalist Andrew  
 Gold. But the combination fails to click this  
 time around, primarily as a result of  
 lackluster material.

Ronstadt possesses a sweet, sad voice  
 which she uses mainly in low-register. But  
 she is not a songwriter nor a song  
 interpreter—only an excellent singer. That  
 should be enough, but not in this case, so  
 Ronstadt's singing is compromised because  
 of songs that do not suit her.

"Heat Wave," the LP's single, is a formula  
 repetition of "You're No Good" and simply  
 lacks the sexy, soulful drive of the Martha  
 and the Vandellas original. Ronstadt's  
 vocals are also merely perfunctory on  
 Smokey Robinson's "Tracks of My Tears."  
 She simply is not a soul singer. Her  
 straightforward style is best suited for white  
 country, such as Neil Young's "Love is a  
 Rose" or J.D. Souther's title track. As a  
 result of poorly-chosen material, Ronstadt's  
 attempted sequel is only an  
 uninspired compromise.

"Gratitude," Earth, Wind and Fire  
 (Columbia)

Primarily on the basis of the hit singles  
 "Head to the Sky" and "Shining Star,"  
 Earth, Wind and Fire have broken through  
 to white audiences to become the biggest  
 thing in R & B. *Gratitude* is a specially-  
 priced double album which consists of new  
 material and live recordings of Earth, Wind  
 and Fire standards.

If you have never been fortunate enough  
 to witness a live performance of the group,  
*Gratitude* will serve as a pleasant  
 indoctrination to the high-spirited brand of  
 musical magic of the band. From the  
 powerful opening melody of "Africano" and  
 "Power," Maurice White and company  
 effectively present their many polished styles  
 of rock and soul. The group is at once a  
 chorus of angels, a funky dance band and the  
 closest thing to heavy metal in R & B.

Although, with the notable exceptions

"Sing a Song" and "Celebrate," the new  
 material is less than spectacular, the live  
 performances, especially the group's  
 renditions of "Yearnin' Learnin'," "New  
 World Symphony" and the aforementioned  
 medley, make this album a must for Earth,  
 Wind and Fire fans.

"Face the Music," the Electric Light  
 Orchestra (united Artists)

*Face the Music* is another solid effort from  
 Jeff Lynne and the Electric Light Orchestra.  
 Although not a concept album like the  
 group's brilliant work, *Eldorado*, *Face the  
 Music* is held rigidly together by the  
 tightness of the band and Lynne's  
 adventurous yet consistently top-notch  
 melodies.

ELO has succeeded in fully integrating  
 strings into a rock format without  
 succumbing to the pretensions of most  
 classical rock groups. Cellos and the strong  
 violin work of Mik Kaminsky do not just  
 embellish the group's sound but play a vital  
 role in its development and realization.

All eight Lynne compositions are strong,  
 particularly the singles, "Evil Woman,"  
 "Nightrider" and "One Summer Dream."  
 Once again, ELO have shown that they can  
 produce complex, original music that will  
 still satisfy die-hard fans of rock'n'roll.

"A Night at the Opera," Queen (Elektra)

With the release of their debut album,  
 Queen hinted at their heavy metal potential.  
*Queen II* was a less popular but more  
 complex, multi-textured work, while *Sheer  
 Heart Attack*, which included the hit single  
 "Killer Queen," proved to be the group's  
 most successful record. *A Night at the  
 Opera*, however, is Queen's most  
 adventurous venture; thus, it has the  
 necessary failings but also contains the  
 band's best work.

*A Night at the Opera* is a variety show,  
 with constant tempo and thematic changes  
 to surprise the listener. The album's best  
 cuts, with the exception of side two's "Love  
 of My Life," can be found on the all-  
 expressive first side. From vicious rockers  
 ("Death on Two Legs") to ballads ("1030")  
 to twenties' tunes ("Lazing on a Sunday  
 Afternoon"), *A Night at the Opera* finds  
 Queen finally fulfilling many of the promises  
 made in the form of the best material from  
 their previous LP's.

"Ommadawn," Mike Oldfield (Virgin)

*Ommadawn* is Mike Oldfield's third and  
 perhaps best recording. Whereas *Tubular  
 Bells* succeeded primarily because of its  
 sparkling originality and tonality, Oldfield's  
 second work, *Hergest Ridge*, failed  
 miserably due to its muddled complexity and  
 droning nature. *Ommadawn* however, is  
 Oldfield's most radical and yet most  
 accessible composition.

Although his latest effort shows Oldfield  
 progressing as a composer, it also reveals his  
 inadequacies as a lyricist/poet. The album's  
 concluding piece is a merely maudlin, albeit  
 humorous, poem about horses framed inside  
 an early Moody Blues-type tune which  
 deserves better lyrical accompaniment.  
*Ommadawn* is progressive, visionary  
 music, but still an album for special tastes  
 which can be appreciated only under a strict  
 set of circumstances—perhaps this is what  
 Muzak will sound like in the year 2000.



Joni Mitchell and Peter Frampton headline two big area concerts. Backed by the L. A. Express, Joni will perform in Duke's Cameron Indoor Stadium Feb. 7. A few tickets are left—try the Union Desk, Buffalo Records or the Record Bars. Frampton and Styx play Greensboro Jan. 18. Tickets at the Record Bars.

**Film director Huston  
 recovers technique**

by Michael McFee  
 DTH Critic

*The Man Who Would Be King* is John  
 Huston's royally enjoyable reworking of the  
 Rudyard Kipling short story. In Huston's  
 hands, Kipling's yarn becomes not only a  
 fine adventure story rich with the mythical  
 mystique and excess of the East, but an  
 unabashedly moral tale on the consequences  
 of overreaching ambition and greed.  
 Kipling himself serves as a frame for his  
 narrative. At the beginning of the movie he  
 inadvertently has a hand in causing the  
 drama which is retold to him at the end of  
 the film.

Kipling, played with precise bemusement  
 by a brush-mustachioed Christopher  
 Plummer, has a cursory encounter with two  
 enterprising rascals who are Freemasons like  
 himself. Danny Dravot (Sean Connery) and  
 Peach Carnehan (Michael Caine) feel that  
 India is not big enough for them. "So we're  
 going away to be kings," they tell their  
 brother with the self-assured imperialistic  
 tone of royal Britishers among bloody  
 heathen.

Danny and Peachy's promised land is  
 Kafiristan, a city in a remote corner of the  
 Afghanistan mountains. Only one of them  
 survives to tell the astounded Kipling the tale  
 that transpired "three summers and a  
 thousand years ago."

An amazing tale it is, as the provincial  
 swindlers compound luck with good fortune  
 and actually seem well on their way to  
 becoming kings.

That is, until Danny is shot with an arrow  
 and miraculously escapes injury. As a result,  
 the natives honor him as an avatar, the long-  
 awaited son of that ancient Freemason,  
 Alexander the Great, who had conquered  
 the area thousands of years before.  
 Gradually, the man who would be king  
 would be more: he would be God, and thus,  
 the perfect partnership of luck dissolves  
 before Danny's destiny.

Although conceptually within the realm of  
 a fairy tale, director Huston keeps his feet  
 firmly grounded in cinematic reality. He  
 does not inflate the story into a ludicrous trip  
 to Shangri-la nor does he slyly deflate the  
 spirit of Kipling's romantic quest.

Instead, Huston confines himself to the  
 humorous detail of character and setting  
 inherent in the narrative. The result is a film  
 suffused with affection, honest sentiment  
 and an abiding code of honor which prevails  
 over his characters' trickery.

Take for example, the rogues' approach to  
 Kafiristan. From afar the holy city does not  
 look so much like Nirvana-in-the-clouds as it

does a dusty Acropolis. Danny and Peachy,  
 in their military red and light Brigade  
 helmets, bear no resemblance to  
 incarnations of Alexander, especially in an  
 assembly of the ascetically robed and  
 shaven. But the two maintain their pluck  
 anyway, Danny tucking the mythical arrow  
 he was shot with under his arm like a riding  
 crop, with Peachy at his elbow guiding him  
 on.

Such small, unspectacular touches and  
 unapologetic coincidences are especially  
 abundant before Danny receives his divine  
 connection with power. The military  
 training scenes, where Danny and Peachy  
 teach the natives to wield rifles and  
 "slaughter the enemy like civilized men," are  
 whimsical and rich in their embarrassment  
 as humble brown men try earnestly to learn  
 to count in time or stand at attention like  
 their proud leaders.

At times the provisions of the tightly-  
 written script (by Huston and Gladys Hill)  
 become a bit much, as when the pair's  
 laughing calls down an avalanche by an  
 impassable crevice, allowing them to  
 continue their journey.

Likewise, Huston's dramatic up-angle  
 shots at "the white rams of mountains" or the  
 one-eyed Masonic God of Kafiristan, edited  
 over an equally stirring soundtrack of  
 ominous chants, seem unnecessarily thick in  
 light of his prior restraint.

Although these slight indulgences might  
 contradict the even and appreciative, almost  
 loving nature of Huston's film technique, the  
 acting he receives is characterized by  
 anything but an intricate texture of browns  
 and dusty reds. The performances of  
 Connery and Caine are in the romantic  
 tradition of Kipling, not Huston, and they  
 seem to enjoy the bombast as much as the  
 viewer.

The duo revel in deception, with  
 Connery's Danny being slower and more  
 brusque and masculine than Caine's smart-  
 alecky but highly perceptive Peachy. The  
 loyalty between the two is refreshing and  
 unaffected, bearing out to the literal end the  
 camaraderie of a working-class dream run  
 amuck.

That dream is ended long before the tale is  
 told to Kipling when the priceless lucre of  
 Alexander disappears in a landslide, just as  
 the gold dust blew away in Huston's  
*Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1947). From  
 the opening shots of snake charmers and  
 scorpion eaters in the dust of a native street  
 to the final incredulous stare of Kipling, *The  
 Man Who Would Be King* is a likeable and  
 worthy recovery of theme and technique for  
 the John Huston of old.

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