

## 'London' is an antidote to rock armageddon

### Concrete Blonde

Walking In London

I.R.S. Records

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If rock and roll had a story about the End of the World, it'd probably be unfolding right about now. I mean, when one has the Four Horsemen of the Music Apocalypse — Warrant, Firehouse, Winger and a reunited Spinal Tap — on the charts, it must be the end of something. At the very least, taste.

Thus, it's a comfort to see a really good rock album released just when one has had all the "Cherry Pie" or "Love of a Lifetime" one can handle. Concrete Blonde's *Walking in London* is the record that will spare you the live Poison album.

Concrete Blonde — three accomplished musicians who play in a tight cohesive groove — have influences beyond the one or two Led Zeppelin albums which always seem to be responsible for spurring onward roughly a dozen questionable musical careers.

On *Walking in London*, one can hear the traces of Black Sabbath ("Walking in London"), Aretha Franklin ("Woman to Woman"), Lou Reed ("City Screaming"), and the Beatles ("... Long Time Ago," "Somebody?").

These moments suggestive of other performers do not come because the band sat around all day painfully trying to replicate some riff or chord. (Or, God help us, not even working at all and just sampling it.) They are sounds which come naturally from talented people who play as well as those by which they are influenced. Johnette Napolitano plays heavy bass lines to give the rock-solid Sabbath crunch. Napolitano also can play a melodic bass line which effortlessly emulates a Paul McCartney composi-

### ALEX DEGRAND

### Album

tion. Napolitano, pulling double duty as the lead singer, has a voice which can growl and soar at the same time. The aggression she can convey in her voice is equalled only by the pure harmony she can take up from the low rumblings made a moment earlier.

The guitar work is done by James Mankey, who plays a grungy style that complements Napolitano's hardbitten vocals.

On the song "... Long Time Ago," just like Napolitano's singing, Mankey can change around completely from the plodding wail of "Walking in London" to a fast, radiant solo. The guitar work on "City Screaming" is also pretty cool. Check it out.

If one listens to this album and gets the idea Napolitano is running the show, however, that wouldn't be too inaccurate. In addition to the vocals and bass, she wrote all the songs on this album, except for the traditional cover — this album's being James Brown's "It's A Man's World." Past albums have had covers of George Harrison's "Beware of Darkness" and Thin Lizzy's "It's Only Money."

Napolitano's songs are pretty literate and do rock the immeasurable service of offering subject material beyond the tired woman-hating/lusting. The other blessing of these songs is that there is nary a power ballad amongst them. And if that doesn't seem like a great relief, then you're probably one of those people who made Warrant's "Heaven" a big hit. And if that is true, I hope you live long enough to suffer like I did seeing it on MTV every other Paula Abdul video.

Concrete Blonde broke out of the confines of being "just some college



Concrete Blonde releases 'Walking In London,' their followup to the successful 'Bloodletting'

band" with their last album, *Bloodletting*, due in large part to the single "Joey." Their success was a well-deserved reward. But "Joey" was not representative of the bulk of Concrete Blonde's work (i.e., for those of you who rushed out to buy Extreme's *Pomograftiti* — "More Than Words" bore no relation to the majority of the album's Van Halen wanna-be material).

If *Walking in London*, a good balance between hard rock and pop, does as well as the last, Concrete Blonde won't be some one-hit wonder

but a keeper. And what a relief they'll be to have around when Motley Crue pumps out its lame re-write of *Dr. Feelgood*.

## Alice satisfies in short order

### Alice In Chains

Sap

Columbia Records

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This five-song set from Seattle's Alice In Chains is the follow-up to the band's platinum debut *Facelift*. Four of the five songs are acoustic numbers and they feature guest stars galore.

The first number off *Sap*, "Brother," features Ann Wilson of Heart sharing vocals with singer Layne Staley. "Brothers" is a nice, mid-tempo song with strong singing from Staley and Wilson, and is followed by "Got Me Wrong," which features more electric guitar but is anchored by strums on a

### MIKE LONG

### Album

12-string. The uplifting chorus on "Got Me Wrong" makes it the standout song on this collection.

Soundgarden's Chris Cornell and Mudhoney's Mark Arm come on board to round out "Alice Mudgarden" for the song "Right Turn." The two guests share vocals with Staley, and Cornell's wailing is unmistakable in the song.

"Am I Inside" is a very downbeat song and reminds one of the gloomy sound of *Facelift*. The final song is a "surprise" song not listed in the credits. A voice at the beginning calls it "Love Song, Take 1." This is a bizarre combination of piano and guitar, backed by moaning, wailing, farting

and grunting. The song ends with drummer Sean Kinney saying "kiss the midget" over and over. Some love song.

The most surprising thing about this EP is that it doesn't sound like Alice In Chains. Like Guns N' Roses with *Lies*, Alice In Chains must be trying to prove that they can play more than headbanging music, as well as offering their music to a new audience.

Whatever the motivation, *Sap* is a satisfying, if short, listen.

### THE RATINGS

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