

RECORDS

The Sally who danced with Picasso's mistress can't dance no more

"Sally Can't Dance"
Lou Reed
RCA CPL1-0611
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Lou Reed's "Sally Can't Dance" is an album of change.

It marks changes in Reed's musical style. The production is getting more precise. The musicians are tighter. The words are more concise and are avoiding the Warholish camp-triteness of previous work. The lyrics are even sticking tighter to the melodies, and augmenting, rather than struggling against, the music.

The subject material of this fourth solo album is also concerned with change. The album talks of people changing, surrendering their past identities usually for socialized self-conceptions which Reed equates with death.

Backed by haunting, ghost-like voices, Reed sings in "Ennui:" "Look at them, they jump out of windows, and now they're just

dead." The album is full of such death. "Kill Your Sons," with a drawling, metal background, talks of the murder of marriage — "Don't you know they're gonna kill, kill your sons." Backed by a lone sax and himself on acoustic guitar, Reed recounts the story of "Billy," a boyhood friend who made it big as a doctor while Reed dropped out. At the end of the subdued narrative, which strangely resembles Joni Mitchell's "The Last Time I Saw Richard," Reed wonders, "I wonder which one of Us was the fool."

The changes Reed describes are not all so morbid. He makes an almost sarcastic commentary in "Sally Can't Dance," the story of "the first girl in my neighborhood to wear tie-dyed pants." But the Sally who "danced with Picasso's illegitimate mistress," can't dance no more. Instead, she "goes up to St. Mark's Place and eats natural foods in my place."

The hard rock beats of "Animal Noises."

and the smooth, melodious "Ride Sally Ride" give respite from the album's deathly pulse. It is the tense, imprisoned beats of songs like "Baby Face" and "N.Y. Stars," however, which dominate this album put out by "Anxiety Productions."

But "Sally Can't Dance" is an album of change. While he maintains the gay, big-city, hard-guy image, Reed is changing. The album continually projects a feeling that this change is not yet crystallized. Consequently, "Sally Can't Dance" lacks the crystallized unity of "Berlin." Though the music and production is decidedly better, the album does not hold together as well as the almost operatic "Berlin."

"It's not your time, it's just your confusion," Reed says to himself in the album's first song. This confusion does not give the album a solid, clear perspective. It is both the cause of the changes, and the only mar in an otherwise intelligent and well-made album.

Randy Shilts



Drawing by Robin Brisker

'Woman to Woman' is a sly song

"Woman to woman"
Tammy Wynette
KE 33246
© 1974

If you think adultery is a pretty laughable business, you'll get a barrel of chuckles from "Woman to woman." If you're worried sick every time your favorite person is out of sight, you'll worry yourself to death listening to this album. Either way, it will probably do you a lot of good.

But if you have a basic dislike of twangy female country singers, the message will get hung up in the steel pedal and too often melodramatic twang of Tammy Wynette's voice. I was wary when I brought this one home. I like it, but so far I've had to play it when nobody else is around. Not everybody likes twang.

A country album that is about half adultery songs is nothing new. Add a divorce song ("For the kids"), a ramblin' song ("Please come to Boston") and an earthy love song ("I've been loved before, but not like this") and you've got your basic country album.

Tammy Wynette, however, is better than average singer, and Billy Sherrill is a much better than average producer. Sherrill, who had a hand in writing "Almost persuaded," "Stand by your man," "The most beautiful girl in the world" and "My elusive dreams," discovered Wynette years ago. They are hard to beat as a studio team.

The only disappointing part of the album is that too often a real country sound is sacrificed for the commercially appealing but tripe "beautiful music" violins. Give me an honest fiddle any day, but violins are an abomination. Sherrill is one of those guys who can make an album by himself, turn all the knobs, play all the instruments, do all the recording and mixing. He has an eye for great performers and hit songs. You hate to see him using violins like that.

The title cut, written by Sherrill, is a wonderful example of its genre. The lyrics get right into the heart of what some people figure adultery is like, and why you should be afraid of it. Wynette's voice drips with insecurity, fear and desperation. A steel pedal cries in the background, a piano plunks melancholalongs, building tension. In "Talking woman to woman,"

*If you think you've got your man in the palm of your hand,
And if you think you got it made and his love will never fade,
you'd better listen good.
She's out there too and she's a whole lot better lookin' than you
and she does things to a man you never dreamed a woman could
do."*

*Great, huh? And there's more: You'd better listen good,
If you think you can kick your man with the gold wedding band
and if you're sitting home thinking how good you turn him on
She's sweet when she talks, and she bounces all over when she
walks
And she's forgotten more about a man than your sweet mamma told
you."*

Country lyrics always lose a lot after you get them off the vinyl and onto paper. Playing "Woman to woman" over and over to get the words, the voice of Tammy Wynette paining away, the heartbroken steel pedal worked away on my subconscious and suddenly I'm insecure, distrusting, illogically jealous. "Where is she?" I cry. "Woman to woman" is a sly song.

Which is completely insane. Adultery ought to be fun. If you can't enjoy a little discreet illicit affair, chronic madness would set in. Jealousy is dumb.

If you want to avoid chronic madness and have some fun, don't buy this record. And if you do, don't take it seriously.

Don Chapman

Thursday, December 5, 1974

Drawing by Alfred Li

