

Starship far cry from original Airplane

Back in the late 60s (oh, so long ago) I discovered a group called the Jefferson Airplane and was completely knocked out. What they had to say about drugs and emotions and the political climate of the times made a deep impression on my newly emerging consciousness. I haunted record stores, anxiously awaiting each album.

Around 1970, when *Volunteers* came out, I became aware of rifts within the Airplane. Marty Balin left the group and I was worried. But then Kantner came out with a "solo" album, *Blows Against the Empire*, using members of the Airplane plus a few others. My fears were, for a while, dispelled; Kantner had merged the diverse talents of the rapidly splintering Airplane into a single vision of excellence. This was also the first time the name Jefferson Starship was used.

The album *Sunfighter* followed and, while not quite as good as *Blows*, I was still in awe of what the Airplane could do when they focused themselves.

Then came *Bark and Long John Silver* and, with the exception of a few songs, by Grace Slick, the best thing I could say about them was that they were packaged well.

One bad album I can forgive, two in a row my wallet won't stand for. Ergo I stopped listening to the Jefferson Airplane.

Apparently they were dissatisfied as well. Diverse interests became, rightfully to be sure, more

important than auld lang syne and the group, for all intents and purposes, was no more. Balin formed his own band, Slick and Kantner recorded several solo albums and Jack Casady and Jorma Kaukonen formed Hot Tuna.

The Starship's last two albums went platinum (one million sales). *Earth* is commercial enough to do the same. With but a few exceptions, the album is mostly Top-40 pap.

Marty Balin, whose sentimental-

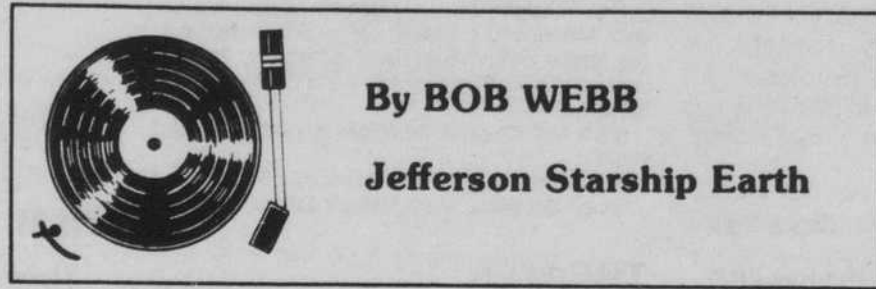
departments. I will admit, however, that I've always been swept away by the sharp quality and acidic edge of her voice, as well as the strong phrasing she usually gives it. No matter what words she's singing, I could listen to her voice all day. It just so happens, however, that she's the most consistently strong lyricist in the group. This is especially true on two of her songs on this album: "Show Yourself" (a political song with a good bite to it which asks to see who really runs this country; she also provides some excellent vocal pyrotechnics which grow organically out of the lyrics) and "Skateboard" (a fast-paced and epicly chorded homage to the sensation of freedom involved in skateboarding, including a healthy respect of the dangers of the sport).

Paul Kantner's contribution to the album is small but well done. He seems to be chiefly responsible for the final cut, "All Nite Long" (a good rocker and roller, with a solid drive and sense of direction).

I've always felt that Kantner had a strong hand in the musical direction of the old Airplane. But he was also the more militant revolutionary in the group, and the late 70s don't seem to be strongly revolutionary times, compared to the early 70s at any rate. Therefore, Kantner seems to have taken a back seat in the Starship. However, regardless of his politics, I miss his touch and his musical sense and I think *Starship Earth* suffers for the lack of direction he has in the past provided.

The other musician/writers on the album (Pete Sears, Craig Chaquico, John Barbata and David Freiberg) perform their respective tasks competently if not too imaginatively.

So, if you consider three or four decent songs and a good package to be worth around \$5, then go ahead and buy this album. You won't be disappointed. Otherwise just turn on an AM radio. I suspect you'll hear a good deal of the album there.



By **BOB WEBB**

Jefferson Starship Earth

After the release of Slick's solo album, *Manhole*, she and Kantner decided to put together a new band utilizing the name Jefferson Starship. They came out with *Dragonfly* in 1975, *Red Octopus* a year later (Balin rejoined the group on this album), *Spitfire* in June of 1976 and now *Starship Earth*.

As stated earlier, I stopped paying much attention to Kantner, Slick, Balin, et al around 1971, other than a cursory listening here and there. As such, I don't know where they are immediately coming from and where they are going except to say that if *Starship Earth* is an indication, it will be another six or seven years before I buy any of their other albums.

Not that the album is garbage. Far from it. Most of the music is well structured and competently played. It's just not very exciting.

ity and lyricism used to soften the harsh edges of the old Airplane, here becomes merely well-controlled Middle-of-the-Road. Granted, he may not have picked the songs for which he supplies lead vocal, but the one song on the album he wrote is not much better.

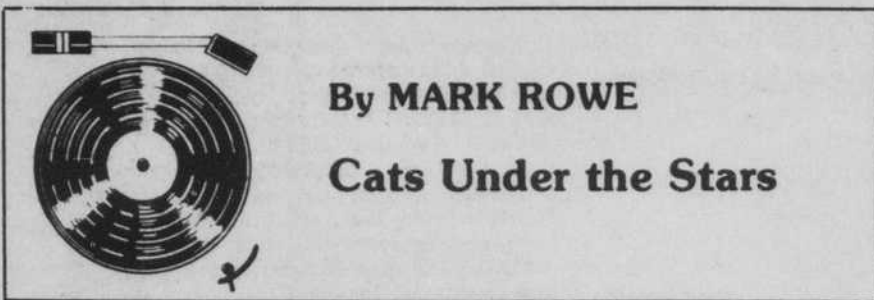
Grace Slick comes off much better in both the vocal and writing

Garcia's new album regains spirit of old

by the Jerry Garcia Band
Engineering: Bob Matthews & Betty Contor-Jackson
AB 4160, ©1978 Artista Records

Cats Under the Stars may be just what the favorite sons of San Francisco need to revive the flagging interest of record buyers dismayed by the elaborate production, the commercial quality, in short the un-Dead attitude portrayed in a couple of recent releases. Neither the latest Grateful Dead album, nor Bob Weir album made the kind of impact that they might have had they stayed a little closer to the old, familiar formulas that have endeared the Dead to, at least, a fanatic few.

The problem with the old, familiar formulas is that they tend to produce the same old stuff and over the past few years the Dead, and especially Jerry Garcia, have been trying out some new musical directions. *Cats Under the Stars* is another step in that broadening of horizons, but at the same time it manages to incorporate a spirit of earlier work.



By **MARK ROWE**

Cats Under the Stars

It is, in any case, the most consistent work that has come out under Garcia's name since his first solo album. Building his band around the John Khan/Ron Tutt rhythm section and adding a few Godchauxs, Garcia is once again working with people who know him, know his music and know how to make it just a little different and a little more interesting.

"Rhapsody In Red," for instance, is a fine, straight-ahead rocker that should please most any devotee of Garcia's hot guitar; and to contrast that there is a Khan/Hunter tune, "Love in the Afternoon," that could only be described as "reggae Jerry Garcia Band."

In between these polar opposites the music on *Cats Under the Stars* has an edge of loose, moody jazz to it that comes out best on the songs "Rubin & Cherise," and "Gomorrah." Part of this is due to Robert Hunter's unusual rhyme schemes; his lyrics are, as usual, vivid, but they work with the music here in such a way that the vocals have a more continuous, fluid quality than the sometimes choppy Grateful Dead compositions — more like a light, rhythmic dance than a hoedown.

In looking at and listening to this album it is important to keep some distinction in mind between a band album like this and Garcia's previous solo work, although the line between may be a fine one indeed. Overall, *Cats Under the Stars* is a fine effort; it shows the Garcia Band as an independent musical entity and paves the way for some tasteful further excursions into new musical territory.

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