

Win Acclaim for Your Musical Genius!

#### 4 Risk is a necessary part of record-buying.

Musical sophistication requires a financial obligation in the form of albums. (Only the most popular artists are on prerecorded tapes, which rules them out.) Most of the albums I buy are not well-known when I buy them. Some of them never will be. But this risk must be taken. Buying only albums that are already popular is unthinkable. I am not a follower.

My preferred buying style is the five-album binge, similar to a Big Mac Attack but more expensive. I try to balance my selections (whenever I am being rational, which is not always). Some albums will be picked because I've heard one or two cuts on FM radio. Some will be selected because record reviews were favorable. And I buy some without benefit of either a hearing or a review.

Some risks turn out to be sleepers, some turn out to be dogs, and some are sleeping dogs. The losers are inevitable,

but the sleepers can make your reputation for foresight and taste. Two of my most prized possessions, the debut albums of Rita Coolidge and Dan Fogelberg, were bought on impulse. When you play for big stakes, you must accept a few losses along with winners.

I do not discuss the losers unless some tactless soul, thumbing through my record collection, presses the issue.

#### 5 When your taste is questioned, protect your credentials.

In explaining the presence of worthless albums in my otherwise sterling collection, I use one of three approaches:

1. *The Candor Gambit*—with a shrug of the shoulders I say, "That one's not so hot. It was a bad gamble."

2. *Pass the Buck*—with a laugh I say, "My kid sister gave me that for my birthday one year. It's awful!"

3. *Offense Is Defense*—with a sigh I say, "That record has its moments. Now there's an artist that really deserved a lot more attention than she got. But you know how it is with the popular taste." Then I quickly change the subject.

Most of the artists I support and promote eventually emerge from ob-

scurity into the spotlight of popular appeal. At that point I usually disown them. It is not essential to do this, but it is logical. I relish belonging to an elite, knowledgeable cult. Success wipes out the allure of obscurity. There is no satisfaction in being one of 12 million people who own copies of *Rumours*. There is no sense of being avant-garde when a former hero hosts a television special or graces the cover of *People*. When artists become successful, I lose interest. I still have work to do, and it does not include adding to the glory of the famous. The famous can take care of themselves. The unknowns still need me.

Sometimes my disinterest is expressed more actively. I accuse my former champions of lowering their quality standards and "going commercial." It's often true, and it's almost always easy to get away with saying it. Once even the most popular rock 'n roll stars were unknown to the older generation, and young people were an enlarged cult group of insiders; they knew something their parents didn't. Nowadays much of rock has gone mainstream pop. If our parents aren't buying Elton John records, they've read all about him, Rod Stewart, the Rolling Stones and the rest on the way to the supermarket checkout, and they see them on television all the time.

Lead the Way for the Masses!

#### 6 Do not denounce popular performers too soon or too harshly.

This is perhaps the trickiest part of musical sophistication. Timing is very important. Switching abruptly from promoting to denouncing an artist opens you to the serious charge of being fickle. You cannot promote Boz Scaggs to all your friends, then turn against him as soon as your friends take your advice and buy his album. This jeopardizes your reputation for consistent good taste. Wait at least six months.

Phrasing is also important. You must establish your own refined sensibility tactfully, without offending your friends who are still catching up with your trend-setting opinions. How do you tell them that you no longer share their enthusiasm for Jackson Browne, without suggesting that Browne fandom is passé?

I do it like this: "I really like his early stuff, but I find his newer material a bit \_\_\_\_\_ (repetitive, less profound, less interesting)."

A rare problem is recognizing those rare performers who should not be denounced. A few actually do *not* prostitute themselves for money and fame, do *not* repeat themselves endlessly and are always capable of surprises. These are not merely artists, but Artists. Nothing is as embarrassing as denouncing an Artist and being forced to recant later.

My worst mistake in this regard (not including writing off the Beatles, which was done prior to attaining the age of reason) was rejecting Joni Mitchell too soon. I bought her first solo album—a collector's item called *Song to a Seagull*—and I was enchanted by her weird guitar playing and her weird minor chords. But by her third album she was moving to piano and major chords and a catchy, upbeat sound. I decided Joni had struck it rich and sold out, trading in her sad, spooky, mystical material for jolly jive. "Liked her early stuff," I told people who raved about *Blue*, "but she's changed." That was a bad move on my part. She kept right on changing, and she obviously hasn't sold out to anyone. I came back, with apologies.

By the way, her latest album sounds a lot like her first.

Musical sophistication is richly rewarding. Nothing compares with the thrill of introducing new music to

people and seeing their enthusiastic response.

#### 7 Acknowledge other musical sophisticates and learn from them.

When two true sophisticates get together, it is heaven. One fine moment of my life began innocently enough in my living room, where a stranger and I were discussing our common passion for Lovin' Spoonful songs. I mentioned a few of my favorites. He asked me about a tune, "Never Going Back."

In this case the shock was mine. I knew the song, but I didn't realize that the Lovin' Spoonful had ever recorded it. "But as a matter of fact," I said to the stranger, "I have another version of that song on an album here, by the guy who wrote it."

"Who's that?" he asked.

"John Stewart."

"No kidding! You've got a John Stewart album?"

"Four of them."

We exchanged broad knowing smiles and I pulled a few dusty, obscure albums from the rack. It was a magnificent evening. 

Senior writer Don Akchin fancies himself a member of the musical avant-garde.

## 1978 FORD LTD II

### Get sporty looks with mid-size comfort.

Deep-cushioned comfort is part of the standard equipment in every LTD II. With this Sports Appearance Package option you also get tri-color tape stripes, magnum 500 wheels with trim rings and raised white letter steel-belted radials. Standard equipment includes V-8 engine, power front disc brakes, power steering and automatic transmission.

Test drive LTD II at your local Ford Dealer. It's the trimmer, sportier LTD at a trimmer price—the LTD of mid-size cars.

**FORD** When America needs a better idea, Ford puts it on wheels.



**FORD LTD II**  
FORD DIVISION

