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by Don Nigro

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LPs



Time Passages
By Al Stewart
© 1978 Artista Records
AB 4190

It seems logical to expect something special out of Al Stewart's latest, *Time Passages*. After all, isn't Al Stewart the musician who put out *Year of the Cat* — an album that has become a classic?

And the producer, Alan Parsons — isn't he the guy who produced Pink Floyd into being Pink Floyd?

Correct on both counts. But neither Stewart nor Parsons have put anything dynamic out this time. *Time Passages* is solid, pleasant music with more or less solid, pleasant lyrics. It borders on begin easy listening, but Stewart's talent as a writer and as a musician generally keeps it from going too far.

Well, almost. Sometimes Stewart does tend to overdo his colorful, symbolic lyrics. A prime example would be the "Valentino Way," wherein the writer goes so far as to describe a woman as having "devious lies and chameleon eyes." Somehow this description just doesn't fit in with the driving backbeat and seemingly happy melody of the song. Lyrics aside, it's a nice tune.

"Song On The Radio" is pleasant, too; the saxophone solo picks up here where it left off in

"Year of the Cat." The words are the most down-to-earth of any on the album — and after concentrating hard on "Stewartese" for a side and a half, the simplicity of this song comes as a relief.

Stewart's most interesting effort on the album is a historical song, "The Palace of Versailles," which deals with France between the revolution and Napoleon. Here, Stewart attempts to catch the mood of the time, and his lyrics do it nicely. Unfortunately, there's a polyphonic synthesizer working in the background, which takes away from the mood set by the words and the guitar strumming.

It's hard to say whether or not producer Parsons is responsible for the synthesizer in "Versailles," but on "Life in Dark Water," he leaves an unmistakable stamp. He takes Stewart's answer to Ringo Starr's "Octopus's Garden" and stirs the water up a bit with electronics, the result being a cloudy murk that just flows without going anywhere. The guitar solo sounds too suspiciously like Floyd's David Gilmour, and on an Al Stewart song, it's out of place. In fact, Parsons seems to do best when he isn't trying to repeat with Al Stewart what he did with Pink Floyd.

The album's title cut is such pure Al Stewart that it gives the listener the impression he's heard the song before. Again, the good sax solo is here, as is the light beat that Stewart uses so often. In spite of the *deja vu*, the song's easy on the ears.

"Almost Lucy" is Stewart's portrait of a show girl; its lyrical theme is put to a rapid, steady pace that gives the song a sense of urgency. "Timeless Skies" offers sparkling guitar riffs, a folksy-European accordion background and lyrics that convey an appropriate sense of reminiscence.

For heavy material, "A Man For All Seasons" seems just a bit too chock-ful of meaning, and there's nothing grabbing about the music — all the heaviness just seems to burden the progress of the album.

When the listener arrives at the last cut on the record, he's been through some ups and downs that, in general, come out on the positive side for Stewart. It is at this point that Stewart and Parsons get genuinely insulting by putting "End of the Day" on at the finish. This is music everyone's heard before — in a dentist's office or a supermarket. It seems unfair to end an overall enjoyable album like *Time Passages* with honeysweet pap — it deserves better. **By Steve Rodgers**



A Single Man
By Elton John
© 1978 MCA Records
MCA-3065

It's been two years since Elton John released a major LP — *Blue Moves* in October 1976. Now we have a new Elton — contact lenses, a hair transplant, and *A Single Man*. Whether the fact that The Dynamic Duo of Elton and Bernie Taupin has dissolved prompted the title, *A Single Man*, has yet to be revealed. But don't hold your breath, the music mags will soon have the scoop.

Another peculiarity of the titles is that out of the album's 11 cuts, Elton has singularly written only two. On the other nine we read "Words & Music by Elton John & Gary Osborne." I confess... I really don't know who Gary Osborne is, but he has collaborated (and does backup vocals) on some fine new music.

Not only do we have new music, but new names also. Only Ray Cooper remains from Elton's original band of musicians. Others have gone on to assist such folks as Kiki Dee and Daryl Hall and John Oates. But Paul Buckmaster remains as the orchestral arranger producing more of the same as on *Madman Across the Water* and *Blue Moves*.

Part of the success of *Blue Moves* included its list of famous names lending Elton a hand (or

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