

ON DISC

DAVID BYRNE
*Songs from the Broadway
Production of The Catherine Wheel*

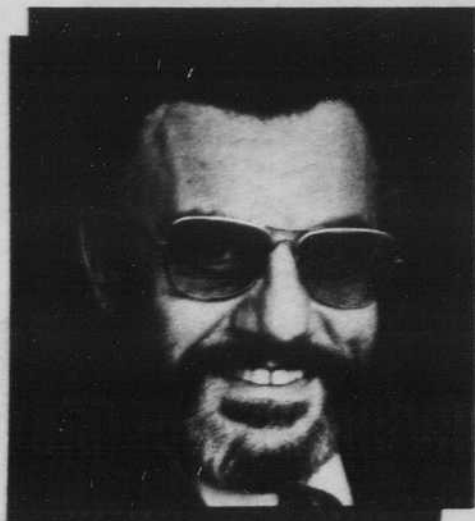
(SIRE) David Byrne's sometimes stark, sometimes sonorous compositions for modern-dance maven Twyla Tharp's *Catherine Wheel* project represent a logical extension for the head Talking Head's recorded work to date. At various times on this ambitious effort, Byrne recalls the wired-tight anxiety of his early Heads songs, the strident Afro-rock rhythms of *Fear of Music* and *Remain in the Light* and the spacey minimalist doodling that mark his many collaborations with Brian Eno. (Eno, along with Heads keyboardist Jerry Harrison, guitarist Adrian Belew and percussionist John Chernoff, are the core of Byrne's *Catherine Wheel* ensemble.) A handful of tunes here feature the wailing, worried trademark Byrne warble: "His Wife Refused," probably the LP's most Talking Heads-ish track; the emphatic, repetitive "What a Day That Was"; "Big Business," with its "fierce and high" and "galloping" guitars (Byrne's liner note descriptions); and "Big Blue Plymouth (Eyes Wide Open)." Others are rich, aural abstracts: the Byrne/Eno piece, "Two Soldiers," "The Red House" and the ethereal "Light Bath." Through it all, *Catherine Wheel* resonates with fast, fluid movements and an almost sensual ambience. There's a vibrant sense of the physical at play here, a physicalness that Byrne explores with wit and intelligence.

Steven X. Rea

JOHNNY OTIS
The New Johnny Otis Show

(ALLIGATOR) If the history of rock & roll is the blending of white and black styles (and it is), then Johnny Otis is one of its greatest exemplars. The son of Greek immigrants, he grew up in the black ghetto of Berkeley, California and went on to lead a mostly black swing band at the Club Alabam in Watts in the late Forties. His 1958 hit, "Willie and the Hand Jive," is as much a favorite of musicians (Eric Clapton is one of many who've covered it) as his moody late Forties waxing, "Harlem Nocturne," is of choreographers and strip-tease dancers. Anchored with a cross of Bo Diddley and cha-cha rhythms, "Willie and the Hand Jive" is still a treat — either a nonsensical rebellion song or a rebellious nonsense song, it's hard to say which.

The New Johnny Otis Show, from Chicago's independent Alligator label,



echoes the old days when Otis led a band and a passel of eager young singers in a touring revue.

Kicking off with the New Orleans warhorse "Drinkin' Wine Spo-Dee-O-Dee," Otis fades the tune out with some characters talking about merging their loose change for loose wine. One thinks he spies a dime on the pavement; "That ain't no dime, man, that's spit," instructs his companion. After this rhythmic silliness, guest vocalist Charles Williams makes it lovely with a version of "Every Beat of My Heart," Otis backing him on the vibraphone. Then comedy returns with "Jonella and Jack," a war-of-the-sexes duet backed by a vamp similar to that on Otis Redding and Carla Thomas' "Tramp." Jack says he plans to leave Jonella, citing her "evil right cross" and her big feet that deliver a kick "like a Clydesdale horse." Jonella hips Jack that he isn't going anywhere, and that he'd better. "Pay some attention/To all that I mention/Cause boy, I'll snatch you right outta your shoes!"

All the tracks, which were recorded in May of 1981, have a live feel to them — skillfully, but not painstakingly laid down; witty, but loose. Worth plenty of note is the guitar playing of Shuggie Otis, Johnny's son by a marriage to a black woman.

Otis *fills* knows several tasty fills, mostly pentatonic and subtle, stylistically somewhere between B.B. King and T-Bone Walker. With all the change-ups of rhythm, song style and vocalist in *The New Johnny Otis Show*, Shuggie Otis' guitar work is the needle and thread that sews together one of the best party-and blues records in many years.

Byron Laursen

Ocean Drive
Vols. 1-3

(BEACH BEAT RECORDS) The authentic Carolina coastal item is an infectious kind of easygoing soul music that two generations of Southerners have danced and romanced to on their waterfront holidays. It's largely black music and its chief trait is its all-encompassing tolerance rather than its exclusivity. As featured on *Ocean Drive*, beach music includes everything from rutting Fifties rockers (Joe Turner's "Wee Baby Blues") to early Sixties pop cookers (Doris Troy's "Just One Look") to the subtle soul of "Ms. Grace" by the Tymes (1974). The common characteristic is an inviting, loping gait that seems to pop up in most of these tracks; relaxation and unrushed energy seem to be the keys.

Since the beach music scene is a phenomenon unto itself, it has built its own traditions, sired its own stars and charted its own hits. Some of them you'll recognize instantly — Vol. I features the Drifters' "Up on the Roof" and the Trammps' "Hold Back the Night" among others; Vol. II offers Bruce Channel's "Hey Baby" and the O'Kaysions' "Girl Watcher" while Vol. III includes Mary Wells' "My Guy" and Archie Bell's "I Can't Stop Dancing."

But the series' real joy is that it presents plenty of opportunities for discovery. Edwin Starr's incredibly "up" "S.O.S." and William Bell & Judy Clay's "Private Number" turn up on Vol. III, and Vol. II gives us the chance to hear Arthur Alexander's original "Anna," covered by the Beatles on their Veejay lp. And, as the TV mail order ads say,

there's more, much more.

Whether for a cost-efficient way to corral several solid R&B hits in one place, or discovering lost gems from a regional music scene remarkable for its vitality and variety, *Ocean Drive* is a great avenue. You can cruise past or park, meet old friends or make new ones. There's always something going on down there.

Gene Sculatti

ABBA
The Visitors

(ATLANTIC) Times *must* be getting hard if even a band like Abba, the heretofore-carefree Swedish pop rockers, releases an LP of heavy sentiments. Yet that's what the foursome's new album, *The Visitors*, apparently is meant to be: a serious look at broken romances, parental guilt and other less-than-upbeat themes. There's a bit-

tersweet taste to Abba's current brand of bubblegum here.

"The Winner Takes It All," the group's fatalistic single of last year, was the tip-off that Abba was changing direction. Building its remarkable international success upon joyous hits like "Waterloo" and "Dancing Queen," the Scandinavian quartet in the past excelled in creating sugary but irresistibly catchy pop songs. Critics disdained their lightweight lyrics and cheerful manner, but the public world-wide responded to Abba's easy appeal again and again.

The Visitors is something else again. The title track is a slice of modern-day paranoia set to a chilly synthesizer line, kicking off the LP in a disquieting manner. A sombre tone likewise is found in "Soldiers" (a look at impending war) and "One of Us" (a self-condemning lament). The melodies for most of the songs are moody Europop pieces, huffing and puffing to

a singsong beat that's more unsettling than infectious. Abba has taken its trademark style and reworked it into dark, oversentimental cabaret music, full of regret and foreboding.

When they were an effervescent escapist group, Abba could be appreciated as good clean fun, if nothing more. *The Visitors* doesn't offer any such quick highs, yet fails to entertain on a more intellectual level.

Barry Alfonso

JOAN JETT
I Love Rock n' Roll

(BOARDWALK RECORDS) Power chords attack us right off the bat and then, enter The Tough Attitude — a must accessory for any heavy rocker worth his or her salt. The title track is reminiscent of Leslie West and Mountain, a heavy metal pop band from the

ON TOUR

Joan Armatrading

WARFIELD THEATRE, SAN FRANCISCO

JUST outside the Warfield the main drag was jammed with a frenetic scene: cars paraded up and down, horns blared, passengers leaned out flashing "We're Number One" signs while pedestrians swarmed onto the street to contribute their own whooping and hollering in celebration of the San Francisco Forty-Niners' Super Bowl victory that afternoon.

Inside the classy, old-fashioned Warfield, the atmosphere was equally festive, but for a different reason. Joan Armatrading, the vital West Indies-born British singer-songwriter, was providing the audience a stirring, stunning 85-minute set.

Armatrading, dressed head to toe in white, opened the show just like the new record: simple, heavy synthesizer lines gathered attention to frame the singer chanting "I'm lucky, I'm lucky..." From "I'm Lucky" she and her backing band moved into "Down to Zero," then "I Wanna Hold You" and "Rosie."

While the set emphasized songs from *Ladders*, Armatrading drew from all stages of her career, which, ultimately, was both a blessing and a curse. This range of material afforded an opportunity to trace her steady progress as a songwriter; it also lent considerable musical diversity to the proceedings — a jazz-tinged passage here, some folk-based tenderness there, mixed in with the Jamaican strains and snappy rock she currently favors.

But a few times the blend of styles chipped away at the cohesion and pacing of the performance, particularly toward the end when Joan, playing acoustic guitar, and her superb band — guitarist Gary Sanford, bass and stick player Jeremy Meeks, keyboardist Dean Kluzate, drummer Justin Hildreth, multi-instrumentalist Julian Diggle — locked into a long, pointless jazzy-jam.

However, this was an isolated flaw within a triumphant presentation. Armatrading's vocals were forceful and marvelously expressive, whether belting out a sinewy rocker like "Is it Tomorrow Yet," or crooning the gentle, poignant "The Weakness in Me."

She rendered these and other numbers with sufficient clarity and emotion that even those audience members unfamiliar with some compositions found it easy to connect with her lyrical themes, which can convey vulnerability one moment ("And I need you") and independence the next ("I sit here by myself/And you know I love it") — somehow avoiding a stumble into contradiction. As acutely as any active songwriter, Armatrading understands the quirks of romance and everyday emotions.

Duncan Strauss

Nathan Milstein

ACADEMY OF MUSIC, PHILADELPHIA, PA

One of the most striking phenomena of musical performance in this century has been the dominance of classical violin playing by a handful of Jewish virtuosos who were born and given their early training in Tsarist Russia. But although their influence can still be felt in the playing of some of today's younger violinists (Itzhak Perlman, for one), the masters themselves are now mostly silent; the most famous of these, Jascha Heifetz, is now past 80 and has not played in public for nearly a decade.

Nathan Milstein is the last of this school to hold the concert stage, and he continues to hold it like a vise. At 77, his technique shows little sign of the deterioration that normally besets colleagues who are 15 to 20 years younger, and his phrasings are more thoughtful and elegant than ever. That elegance, coupled with the sheer *jolie de vivre* that he brings to his playing, still makes for a unique listening experience.

The highlight of his Academy recital

was Bach's solo Sonata in G minor, which he seemed to dash off with the greatest of ease even while striving to project as many of the mysteries of Bach's musical thought as one man can. I think his interpretation has become subtler and more understanding than even the one included in his prize-winning mid-Seventies album of the Bach solo works. Brahms's D minor sonata, by contrast, gave him the opportunity to show that he is still capable of high drama as well as high musicianship.

After intermission, fireworks. Seemingly effortless renditions of two of Paganini's man-killing Caprices were followed by Milstein's own brilliant reworking of Liszt's thoroughly pianistic *Mephisto Waltz* into a solo-violin showpiece. Two Tchaikovsky pieces closed the program, the *Meditation* providing a bit of repose with a closing high D which seemed to float to infinity before the *Valse-Scherzo* brought it to a rousing finish. There were two encores, by Bach and Liszt, and if the audience had had its way there would have been more.

Sol Louis Stiegel

Jaco Pastorius

DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION, LA

JACO PASTORIUS' rather formidable reputation (Weather Report, Joni Mitchell) as a bassist and composer preceded him. But no one attending his two-night stand at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion (home of the Los Angeles Philharmonic) was quite prepared for the phenomenally musical performances he generated there. On the first leg of a brief national tour (which included shows in Chicago and NYC) to promote his new Warner Bros. album, *Word of Mouth*, Pastorius gathered a dozen of LA's top studio and jazz men — trumpeters Snooky Young and Chuck Findley, trombonist Bill Reichenbach and reedplayers Marty Krystall and Gene Cipriano among them — in addition to friends from Florida (steel drummer Othello