

Record review / Dan McMillan

Year's best record has drive, brilliance

Little Steven and the Disciples of Soul
Men Without Women
EMI Liberty

There is something about rock 'n' roll that is both majestic and powerful and soothing and contemplative. But most importantly, rock 'n' roll has emotion.

That's why Duran Duran will only be technically adequate — Rio is about as emotional as sleeping — but the Stones will always great. From

"Satisfaction" to "Start Me Up" their great songs have been emotionally vivid.

The great rockers possess a passion and commitment to music. Whether it is the Beach Boys passion for girls, sun and surf, or the Who's commitment to thrashing out Pete Townsend's problems on record, the emotion and commitment have to be there.

Along with emotion, passion, and commitment good rock 'n' roll needs a certain intensity. But today's intensity is all screwed up. Fast, loud and hard music is in-

tense; soft, mellow music is nice — but not intense. Of course that's bullshit to anyone who listens to much music. Smokey Robinson can be as intense as Led Zeppelin because intensity is an element of passion, not volume.

With all these good things going for it why has rock 'n' roll lost much of its importance? It's still popular, but the social importance rock once had is losing ground to a tide of indifference.

Magic is what's missing. Rock today is dependent on the mood, which is what

elevator music was created for. Sure, rock 'n' roll should be entertaining, but it should also have that feeling of magic when a phrase, a guitar solo, or a chorus catches and holds the listener in a time warp of music.

The Beatles had lots of magic moments but were also entertaining. Groups like Journey, Duran Duran and Flock of Seagulls are entertaining, but the magic isn't there. I really can't explain what I mean by magic, but I can give examples — the scream in "Won't Get Fooled Again," the guitar introduction to "Sweet Jane" and the way the organ slams into the rest of the instruments and Smokey's voice just takes off on "Tears of a Clown."

Now that the groundwork has been set for what I think rock 'n' roll should be, it's time for my favorite album of the year. This is not the best album but the album that I think best exemplifies what rock 'n' roll is all about, Little Steven and the Disciples of Soul "Men Without Women."

Little Steven, in reality Miami Steve Van Zandt, is the chief disciple and one of the last of the great rock 'n' rollers. In a way it is fitting that the album is named after a Hemingway novel, because Hemingway was the epitome of the gutsy intense writer.

The band is the best

amalgamation of rock 'n' roll talents assembled in a long time. Steven plays guitar and sings with a voice like Keith Richards and Bob Dylan (although he claims to sound like Sam Cooke); the Plasmatics' Jean Beavoir is on bass; ex-Rascals Dino Danelli and Felix Cavaliere are on drums and keyboards respectively; and La Bamba's Mambo is on horns.

Everything on this album sounds perfect to me. The way the guitar builds into the horns on "Save Me" and all of "Under the Gun" are magic moments of particular distinction.

What is most impressive is Little Steven's consummate understanding of rock 'n' roll. From the swaggering "Under the Gun," to the up-tempo soul of "Angel Eyes," to the melancholy ballad "Princess of Little Italy," the Disciples don't miss a trick. But this isn't just a fan's bloodless homage to his heroes.

"Under the Gun," the standout cut, builds from wood blocks, to guitar, to bass, then explodes into the keyboards and horns. The song has an undertone of violence, not from Little Steven, but from the forces that threaten us all — "We're running out of heroes/So what you gonna' do/Can't wait forever I got bad news/They're all waiting for you."

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