



New Music

Billy Idol "Whiplash Smile"

This ain't no "White Wedding..."
This ain't no "Rebel Yell..."
This ain't no "Midnight Hour..."
This is a "Whiplash Smile!"

Billy Idol fans have spent the last two and one-half years waiting for the release of this album. It's a pity that they

waited so long for so little. Idol has managed to take the worst aspects from his last album and combine them into a vinyl hodgepodge. This record is full

Review by Brett Bigham

of confused guitars, cluttered lyrics and shouting instead of vocals.

Idol's first two albums were

full of slick dance music, and his third and largest seller, "Rebel Yell," combined pop and Idol's punk music past to create a sound all his own. It is here on "Whiplash Smile" that this pop/dance influence has dissipated and left an angry-sounding Idol to try and recreate the magic he had.

The opening cut, "World's Forgotten Boy," has Idol attempting different levels of intensity that merely come out as different styles of slurring. Someone forgot to tell Idol that lyrics have a purpose. It is easy to picture him trying to sing with his trademark sneer as he recorded this song.

"To Be A Lover" is a better attempt at the music that Idol is known for, but the only time it rises above mediocre is when the female back-up singers drown him out. I doubt that, without Idol's reputation, this song would ever have gotten any radio airplay.

"Soul Standing By" sports great guitar riffs by Steve Stevens, and the song is more stylized than most on this album. Idol slides in and out of his higher and lower ranges, and it does make for an effective contrast.

"Sweet Sixteen" follows and is the best song of the side. It is a slower, more deliberate attempt at gaining radio airplay. Its countrylike sound offsets it from the rest of the album and makes it even more enjoyable for its differences.

"Man For All Seasons" finishes the A side, and of all the fast songs on the album, it is by far the easiest to understand. Idol chooses to bottom his voice out for most of the song, and in between shouting, it is effective.

"Don't Need A Gun" has a strong underlying syntho-pop sound and is one of the most effective on the album. It slips into "Beyond Belief," and as a

package, the two songs place the B side above the A side stylistically. They both have a rich sound and are the only two cuts where Stevens' guitar does not become overpowering.

"Fatal Charm" is a harder-sounding song with pounding guitar and drums. It is the only fast song on the B side that actually pulls out of cluttered mediocrity. The differences between the two sides of the album are immeasurable, however. Where the A side is almost entirely screamed, and the guitars are two decibels too loud, the B side has more artistic attempts and is closer to Idol's older style. It is not dance music, but it is listenable. The remaining songs on the side follow the same tactics.

Aside from the fact that the majority of this album sounds unprofessional and poorly recorded, there are a few slower songs that prove to be exceptions. It's a shame Idol didn't use his vacation from the music world to create what could have been the triumph of his career.

Alabama

"Alabama Greatest Hits"

There are people in this country who work hard everyday
And not for fame or fortune do they strive...
But the fruits of their labor
Are worth more than their pay
And it's time a few of them were recognized.

There are few country groups as popular as Alabama. Following hit after hit album they have released this, their greatest hits album, along with two new singles, "She and I" and "The Fans." Both singles are destined to be gold records.

"She and I" is an upbeat country dance song that praises the simple life of two people creating their own world. As a tribute to their followers, the band has recorded an emotional thank you, "The Fans." Sadly, the two new songs are the weakest on the album. But when put up against Alabama's greatest it's understandable.

"Mountain Music" begins with a short dialogue and quickly works into an ode to the American way of life. It is quick-tempoed and enjoyable. As the song begins to slow, fiddles yank the tempo up to a frenzy, and the song ends on an incredibly energetic beat. The following tune, "Feels So Right," slowly rolls in and is offset by the fast-paced fiddles as they fade out. It is a rich and beautiful song that has deep vocals and carefully supportive instrumentals.

"Old Flame" is a twangy song that contains excellent subdued guitars and simple harmonies to back up the lead vocals. The song has little build to it, however, and slips into repetition. "Tennessee River" and "My Home's In Alabama," recorded live, add another dimension to the album. It's hard not to get caught up in music where you can hear the audience and the performers enjoying themselves. These two, especially "My Home's In Alabama," are excellent examples of how live music can create new levels in today's recordings.

Side two begins with the hit, "Love In The First Degree,"

and it proves to be one of the most stylized and perfected cuts on the album. The vocals slide into new ranges, and the backups are especially strong.

"40-Hour Week (For A Livin')" is an upbeat salute to the workers of America. It has great lyrics, and its high energy is country at its best. "Why Lady Why" follows, and its slow, dreamy guitars pull the listener into another of the facets that Alabama creates. It is a sad, pleading song with supportive instrumentals.

With these songs in its repertoire, it is easy to see how Alabama has been a continuous source of country music favorites.

Everything But The Girl "Baby, The Stars Shine Bright"

Goodbye Bobby Kennedy
In the White House fast asleep
Goodnight Jackie Kennedy
America is free,
Cheap and easy.

In recent months the British have been exporting several groups that rely not only on female vocals but on rich orchestrated melodies. Everything But The Girl exploits Tracey Thorn's vocals to the utmost, and Ben Watt's musical composition is nothing short of extraordinary.

From the opening cut, "Come On Home," the listener is treated to an incredibly full-sounding precision album. This group has created a fully rounded and perfected style. It is not syntho-pop or blues...if anything it slides more toward a big-band-era sound. The cut, "Don't Leave Me Behind," is a musical plea not to be left in the past. Its incredible horn arrangements flank the lead vocals and ride it to an incredible height.

"Country Mile" takes Thorn's vocals and lounges with them at the bottom of her range. The emotions she packs into her voice pull this song through its thick musical backing. "Cross My Heart" is a slick dance number that became popular in the United Kingdom and has received some airplay in the United States. The horns again deserve mention as they put the music in a class above most popular music.

"Don't Let the Teardrops Rust Your Shining Heart" is probably the strongest cut on the album. The piano accompaniment weaves in and about the vocals and makes for a beautiful performance. This song could easily be a crossover hit (country and popular music airplay) in the United States if it got the station time it deserves.

"Sugar Finney" is a tribute to the late Marilyn Monroe, and the lyrics are poignant and sad. The song takes an upbeat tempo and almost slides into a disco sound. It is a good song but lacks the orchestral depth that this album sports. The lyrics, however, do not need strong musical support and almost could make the song alone.

"Come Hell Or Highwater" is the most country-styled song on the album. The lyrics would be right at home on a gospel album, and Thorn shows more range in this piece than any other.

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