

U2 creates music for a generation that rattles, hums

By Rick Heyman
Emerald Contributor

U2 — Rattle and Hum

It's extraordinarily fitting that *Rattle and Hum* leads off with the Beatles' "Helter Skelter" because the new U2 album is the '80s equivalent of the "White Album," only better.

At least in retrospect, the '60s were the golden age of rock populism — critics' favorites were also the most popular bands. The Beatles, Dylan, the Stones, the Who, Hendrix. Who would have condemned

any of these massively creative artists for being also massively popular?

But as rock became a more elitist "art" form in the '70s, it

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lost its populist grounding. Success was suspect, and as rock entered the '80s — with its incredibly restricted radio playlists — by all rights it should have been.

U2 is one of the few bands of the '80s to make sensational records that have at the same

time broken new musical ground and garnered them a massive worldwide following.

They speak to this generation as the Beatles did to the baby boomers. We'll follow them down any experimental path and be the richer for it. Each subsequent release reveals both growth and a breathtaking clarity of artistic vision.

Rattle and Hum is eerily reminiscent of the '60s on several accounts — the '60s icons (covers of "Helter Skelter" and "All Along the Watchtower," a backing vocal by Bob Dylan, a

snippet from Hendrix's "Star Spangled Banner" and a sequel to John Lennon's "God"), the bluesy overtones, the social commentary, and the general feeling that they play their music as if it has a meaning far beyond its commercial potential.

The new LP also serves as the soundtrack of their soon-to-be-released concert film. Over half of the performances are live — a few are revisions of previously released songs, but most are new. U2 has now released three live albums over the past five years, and the extraordinary passion that they evoke while performing certainly justifies the existence of all three.

Although I'm sure other people dislike the extreme reworking of some of the old tunes, the addition of a gospel choir on "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" sends a shiver down my spine. Other interesting touches are the horns used to punctuate the Billie Holliday tribute, "Angel of Harlem," and the Stax-styled horn charts on "Love Rescue Me." It suddenly dawns on you that you have never heard U2 with horns before, and how they add a warmth and brightness to the tracks that helps keep the overall tone of the record from becoming over-serious.

OK. Enough already. It's stinging, fervent, bluesy, unnerving, and chancy. It's the "White Album" unmarred by "Revolution 9." It's undeniably destined to be a classic. It's U2. Get it. Experience it.

Joan Armatrading - The Shouting Stage

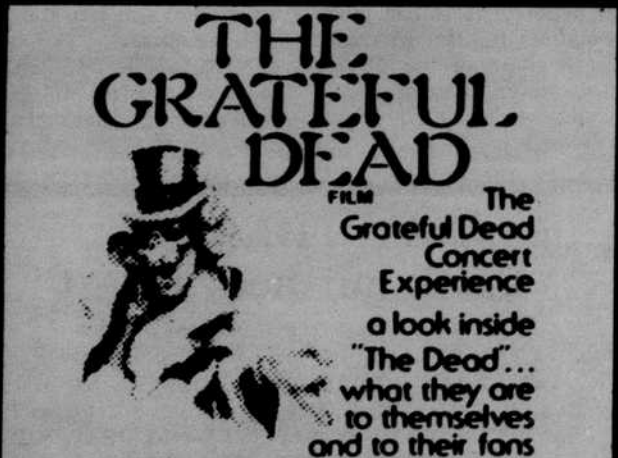
A sublime look at love's darker side. The lyrics are consistently fascinating ("Men/No self control/Says I'm all he wants/But I watch him prow/Yet if I should stray/I'm a wicked child/And he'd make me pay/The devil I know") and the tunes are eccentric but really work their way under your skin.

Armatrading's production sense is laudable, from the crispness of the sound to the interesting arrangements to her refined taste in sidemen — Mark Knopfler, Pino Palladino (Paul Young's peerless fretless bassist), Mark (Big Country) Brzezicki, Manu (Peter Gabriel) Katche, et al.

The Shouting Stage is Armatrading's finest work, a beautiful collection of songs that say something.

Big Audio Dynamite - Tighten Up Vol. 88

Forgettable dance music. Mick Jones' old band, the Clash, used to be called "The Only Band That Matters." How did he become so irrelevant? It's got an OK beat, you can dance to it, but it's not even New Order (intoxically memorable dance music) let alone the Clash. To say that B.A.D. stands for big audio dynamite is a laugh — the mix is far too thin and wimpy. Maybe it's really an acronym for Beatbox And Dried-up-talent, because that's the way it sounds from here.



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