

## The bromides of March

*A potpourri of sidelights on the pop music scene*

BY DR. TANTALUS

**No wonder Dr. Welby had Consuelo at the front desk:** Dr. Tantalus finally heard the 1987 release by the Pet Shop Boys, *Pet Shop Boys*. Actually after *Time* magazine featured them in a recent article. Given *Time*'s generally conservative musical outlook, this is the equivalent of Maggie White scooping Mike Wallace, George Wallace joining the Urban League before Jesse Jackson, and Oregon State University scoring a touchdown on anybody.

So along with uttering a thousand *mea culpa*s the Doctor strongly urges his readers — at least those who are even slower than the Doctor — to listen to this album. Afterward one may be

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surprised to discover that the Boys are known as one of England's gay bands, an observation that is difficult to discern from the album's lyrics.

Evidence of the Boys' lifestyle does not appear to be a matter of public record in this country, at least not judging from the *Time* article. They were referred to as a gay group, however, by our local bastion of conservatism, *The Oregonian*. The Doctor, who is always willing to invent double meanings in album lyrics even if none exist, has had difficulty in determining the truth. The Doctor can only direct fans to the line, "Which do you choose, the hard or soft option?" in "West End Girls," and the presence of Dusty Springfield on "What Did I Do to Deserve This?" as indications of the Boys' true feelings. Even Dusty's reputation as a lesbian hinges on speculation, rumor and gossip. Putting aside such sociological overtones, one may simply enjoy the Boys' catchy danceable tunes, inventive synthesizer riffs and sly commentary on modern love and life in the United Kingdom. Meanwhile, the Doctor promises not to fall asleep at the operating table again.

**Oh yes you can can:** Those gay apostles of change, the Communards, have released yet another retread of a 1970s disco song, "Never Can Say Goodbye," which originally was popularized by Thelma Houston. Their previous "hit" was "Don't Leave Me This Way."

This is especially disappointing considering that lead singer Jimi Somerville started his career with the two original gay dance classics, "Smalltown Boy" and "Why?" when he was with Bronski Beat.

**Some call it performing, others call it sleepwalking:** After being inducted into the Rock-and-Roll Hall of Fame, Beach Boy Mike Love challenged the remaining Beatles and Mick Jagger to perform as often as the Beach Boys do — about 180 concerts a year. At the rate of one concert every two days, it's not difficult to believe that there must be little time left for creative songwriting. Perhaps that's why the Beach Boys have not had many hits during the past 20 years.

**That's why they invented lip synching:** On the American Music Awards, Lisa Lisa and Cult Jam performed live at the exact moment when the television decided to go out of tune. Fortunately the television was back in working order when Whitney Houston, her mother, Cissy, and her brother performed a rousing gospel number.

**Backstage must be more fun than we thought:** Julie Brown, MTV video-jockey, told her co-presenter at the American Music Awards that if he really wanted to get a laugh, he should take out his "willie."

**They must have been listening to Lisa Lisa:** Elton John's 1973 classic, "Candle in the Wind" (a tribute to Marilyn Monroe), received a Grammy Award nomination for 1987, thus demonstrating once again the Academy's concept of modern music. And you thought the



Detail from The S+M Marilyn Collection (Lester Burdett)

Doctor was slow!

**But what minutes they were!:** Thelma Houston performed complete with tape-recorded backup for 45 minutes at Sanford Director's 50th birthday party. This is typical fare from imported disco singers. Her reported fee for the evening's work was \$2,500, or approximately \$55 per minute.

Thelma gave the crowd what they were looking for — an excuse to dance their hearts out — and she provided a class act to boot.

**Spawning-spawning-spawning on a river:** Salmon Dave, the opening and closing act at the Montgomery Park bash, took few chances and ground out great renditions of favorite hits from the '60s and '70s for a wildly enthusiastic crowd that had been primed with the extra-strong drinks served up at the bar stations. The Doctor thought he'd arrived in heaven by the time Salmon Dave cranked up the number-one hit from 1965, "Back in My Arms Again." Hot, hot, hot!

**Here comes the rain again:** Two recent concert movies rate an "A" for rock fans in general and fans of Prince and the Eurythmics in particular. Prince finally released a concert movie, *Sign o' the Times*, the first since his recent "dramatic" releases failed at the box office. After seeing this film one wonders why Prince bothers with acting when he is such a dynamic stage performer.

The album was terrific, but the music recorded live for the film soundtrack is even better. The singing is superb, the guitar playing is orgasmic, the dancing is an unexpected pleasure, and the band is so hot that the screen almost melts. From among the talented members of the band, Sheila E. stood out with a dazzling drum solo.

In truth, Prince wouldn't know a plot if he found himself six feet under one, so there is no use in describing the antics that occasionally distract from the music. Instead, the focus should be on the guitar solo in "I Could Never Take the Place of Your Man" and other equally amazing musical highlights.

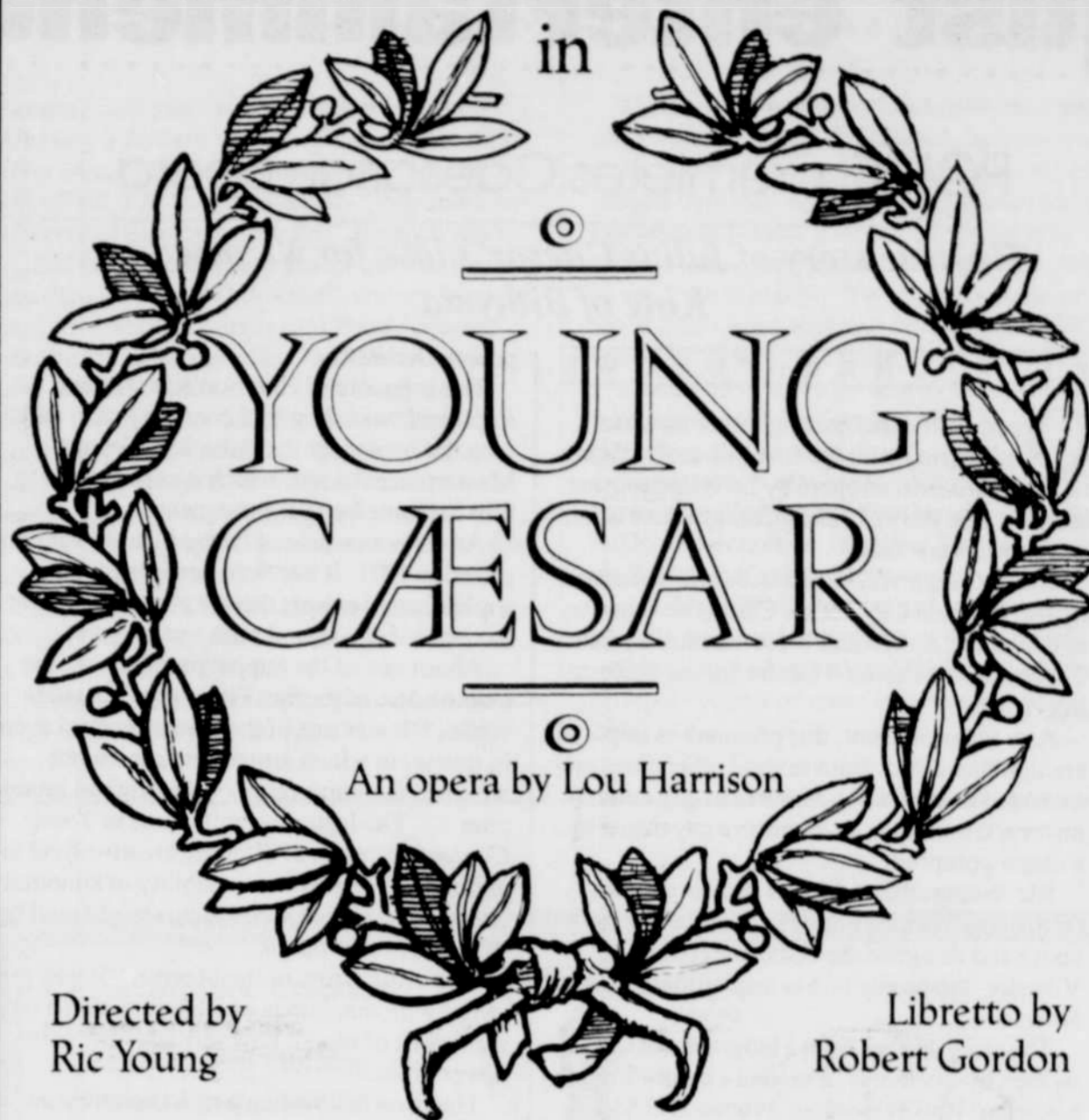
The Eurythmics concert movie *Live* also packs a powerful punch. Annie Lennox, looking mysterious and charismatic throughout in leather trenchcoat and pants, is the champ for most of the performance, but the band and tunemeister Dave Stewart also weigh in with a strong showing.

The Eurythmics have more of a rhythm-and-blues feel in concert than they do on their polished albums, and they are able to offer fresh versions of old classics. "Here Comes the Rain Again," for example, was stripped down to Dave Stewart's acoustic guitar and Annie Lennox's strong vocal.

The concert, filmed in February 1987, does not contain material found on *Savage*, their most recent release, and was by some accounts fairly close to their last show here at the Coliseum in 1986. The film, however, captures the Eurythmics looking their best.

**Even slower than Dr. Tantalus:** Julie Brown's American Music Awards co-presenter, waiting until Brown completed the introductions, finally sputtered: "Well, I'd have to take a step back first." Right: you and Trigger. •

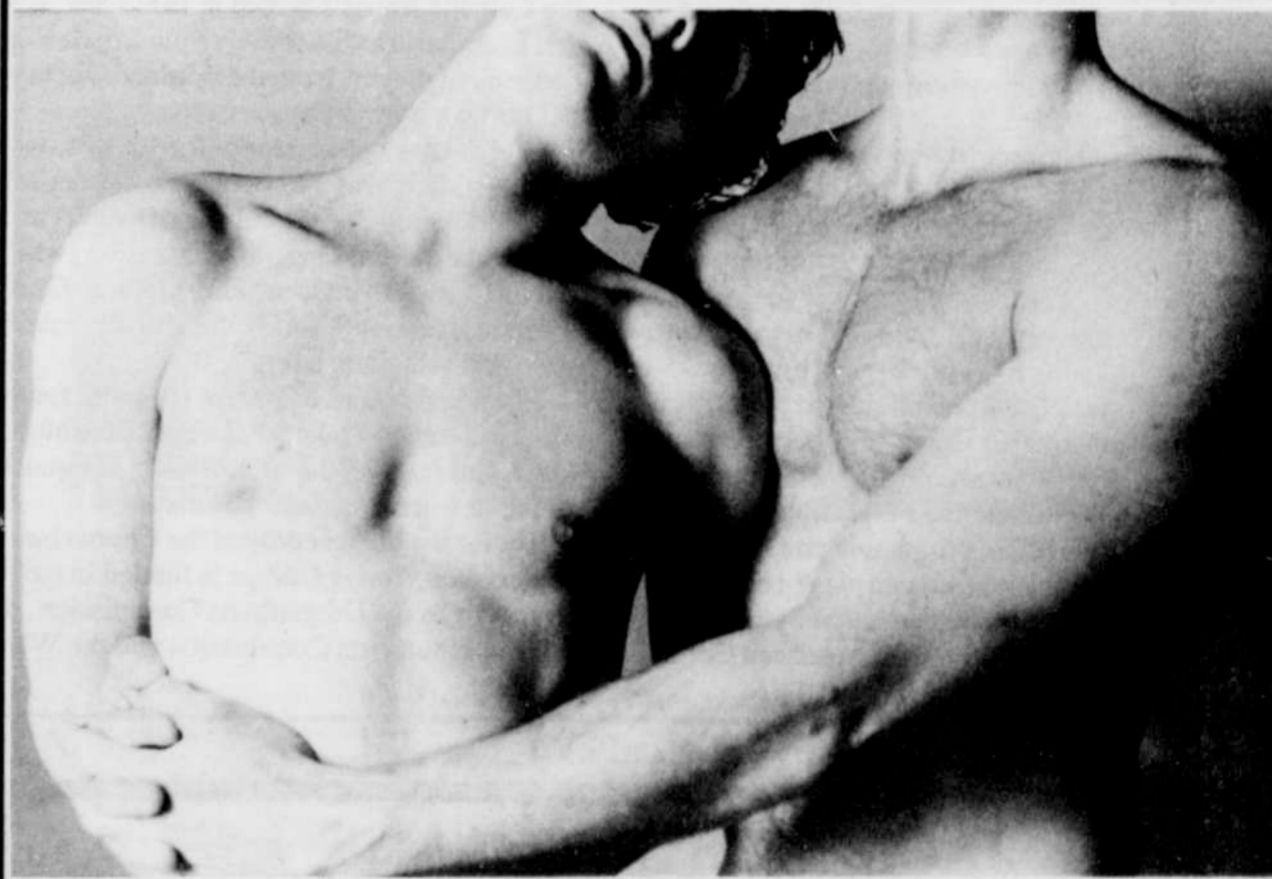
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