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Summertime Blues

Changes One combines best, worst of Bowie

Review by Deb Gray

David Bowie, *Changes One*;
RCA Records

Yeah, great hits collections are a cop-out. Sure, performers and record companies are hitting us up for something they went to comparatively little trouble to produce. But still, if you only buy one David Bowie recording, this is the one to have. Here we have a capsulized progression of Bowie's rock career, ups and downs included. When Bowie is good, he's exquisite and exciting. When he's bad, he's pretentious, more obviously weird than anything else.

"Diamond Dogs", the title cut from what is generally considered Bowie's worst album, begins with rock crowd bedlam and Bowie shouting, "This is rock 'n roll! This is genocide!" Indeed...what with its wolf-howl vocals and guitar instrumental which sounds as if it was played from inside an iron lung.

"Rebel, Rebel" is based on a weak melodic theme, rivaling "Smoke on the Water" for a place in the Most Endlessly Repeated Guitar Riff Hall of Fame. "John, I'm Only Dancing" and its twanging guitar parts becomes mildly irritating.

Other songs are interesting largely because of their uniqueness. "Space Oddity" delves into an astronaut's mind as he walks in space. "Ziggy Stardust", a rock star who "sucked up into his head like a leper messiah," is the story not only of Ziggy's success, but Bowie's also. "Fame" has interesting rhythmic interplay between instrument and vocal parts.

If nothing else, Bowie usually leaves you crying for a lyric sheet. Even though much of what he says makes no reasonable sense, at least he creates intriguing images. Who else could rhyme laser with razors with waiters (like he does on "Jean Genie") and carry it off?

The remaining cuts are some of Bowie's best songs, among them, his recent hits "Young Americans" and "Golden Years". "Changes" is as near to perfection as anything in rock. "Suffragette City", which has the dubious honor of being massacred by thousands of young rock bands, is Bowie at his outrageous, speaker-peeling best.

Bob Seger and The Silver Bullet
Band, *'Live' Bullet*; Capitol

The Michigan crowd on this double album set is going bananas. You'd think that Bob Seger, who is still struggling against obscurity, was a star of Mick Jagger proportions. "I read somewhere that Detroit audiences are the greatest rock 'n roll audiences in the world," he says. (The crowd screams approval.) "But I've known that for 10 years."

Seger wrote most of the songs on this album. He also co-produced it. But the first thing you notice is his amazing vocals. He sounds like David Clayton-Thomas at times, but his heart belongs to Chuck Berry and Mitch Ryder.

Side one is the mellowest of the four sides. Seger gives world-whiney vocals on "Travelin' Man" and "Beautiful Loser", which has a lovely melody carried by the keyboard.

Side two is funky. The star here is woodwind player Alto Reed's haunting soprano sax solo on "Turn the Page" and his alto solo on "Bo Diddley."

The Silver Bullet Band, as Seger himself, are Michigan musicians. It's a tight band. Drew Abbot provides the flash with his blistering guitar solos. Keyboard player Robyn Robbins is a good supportive player, but not that dynamic a soloist.

Seger is at his best with unadorned rock 'n roll. He gives burning performances on "Katmandu" and "Get Out of Denver."

Some of this music, while it attests to Seger's ability to rouse an audience, does not translate well into vinyl. "Heavy Music" and the final cut, "Let It Rock", suffer from the jamming, jiving-it-up-with-the-audience scene.

But, all things considered, especially the high quality that carries through the two-record set, this is an important success for Seger. If anything deserves to make him famous, this is it.