

# Allman gets king's ransom for playing the fool

Review by Doug Weil

Everybody plays the fool.

That doesn't mean that you and I and everyone else are always fools. Being a fool is state of being that comes and goes. But each of us makes a fool of himself, at least once.

Ah, but some people have a real talent for playing the fool. Raise the curtain and enter Gregg Allman.

First Allman has opted for an extended period of foolishness rather than the episodic lapses that most of us endure. It appears that Allman is sitting in for the vacationing village idiot in exchange for national publicity and hopes of exorcising all future foolishness.

Most of us are fortunate enough (though we don't think so at the time) to make a fool of ourselves in the company of friends, relatives and working associates. These people know us, understand us, and realize that our behavior is just a short-lived thing.

But not Gregg Allman—he is poised on the National Enquirer tightrope of life, a lampshade over his head, ready to dive into a shot glass of Jack Daniels whiskey. He thinks he hears cheering but he is floating so far up in the clouds he can't distinguish cheering from jeering.

Of course Allman hasn't really joined up with the Circus of the Loonies but he has made quite a name for himself.

Allman's behavior and lifestyle may seem to be the norm to the "younger generation" but to housewives browsing Hollywood gossip rage while waiting to file through the express lane at Safeway this long-haired driggie is most puzzling. Why, they ask, would a nice girl like Cher want to have anything to do with "that"?

Finally to complete this melange of murky madness Allman has also managed to infuriate his peers and fans by fingering his former manager as a "narcotic supplier". In exchange for this ratfinking Allman was given immunity from a possession of cocaine charge.

Allman's squealing finally precipitated the breakup of the Allman Brothers Band which would just about bring us up-to-date except for *Playin' Up a Storm*, the debut album by the Gregg Allman Band. (I knew there was a review in here somewhere.)

The most striking aspect of *Playin' Up a Storm* is the slick character of the music. The album leans heavily on the use of plush string and brass arrangements which provide a sort of pop balance to Allman's basic blues-Southern

boogie roots.

And while there is no questioning the overall success of this approach it does tend to sound a bit too stylized and too effortless in spots. This is a direct result of taking a good idea and wearing it down through misuse and overuse.

A good example of the misuse of this approach is evident on "Come and Go Blues", the album's opening track. "Come and Go Blues" was originally recorded on the 1973 Allman Brothers album *Brothers and Sisters*.

By comparison the '78 version makes the newest rendition look just plain silly. Dominated a shrill acoustic guitar hook, the song sounds more like the theme song from Rhoda than it does any blues tune that I can recall. It's obvious that Allman has spent too much time hanging around the backstages at Television City in Hollywood waiting for Cher to finish her daily taping and rehearsals.

Another song "Let This Be A Lesson to Ya" is so mindless that the only thing that can be said about it is that it illustrates very well how rock 'n roll music can seem to stab and pierce the eardrums.

"Cryin' Shame" was just that—a hurry up effort that can be most kindly labeled as a space filler. But enough of the negative. *Playin' Up a Storm* has several bright moments.

"Matthew's Arrival, a catchy funk and sway rhythm track, is one of those songs that just won't let your feet sit still. A progression of moods and instrumentation, "Matthew's Arrival" showcases the talents of Allman's back-up band that includes, guitarists Steve Beckmeier, John Hugg, and Ricky Hirsch, drummer Bill Steward, keyboardist Neil Larsen and bass player Willie Weeks.

And while the backup band turns in a strong performance throughout the album, center stage is reserved (and rightfully so) for Gregg's excellent vocals.

Backed by some classy piano work Allman sings especially well on "The Brightest Smile in Town". He also turns in strong performances on "Sweet Feelin'" and "One More Try".

In light of all of Allman's recent publicity and the emergence of "the new Gregg Allman sound" this album should attract a new audience of Allman loyalists in addition to the old die-hard Allman Brothers fans.

All things considered *Playin' Up a Storm* is a fine album and should enjoy good sales success. And don't be surprised if *Playin' Up a Storm* yields Allman his first hit single. Yes, everybody plays the fool but not everyone gets paid a King's ransom for it.



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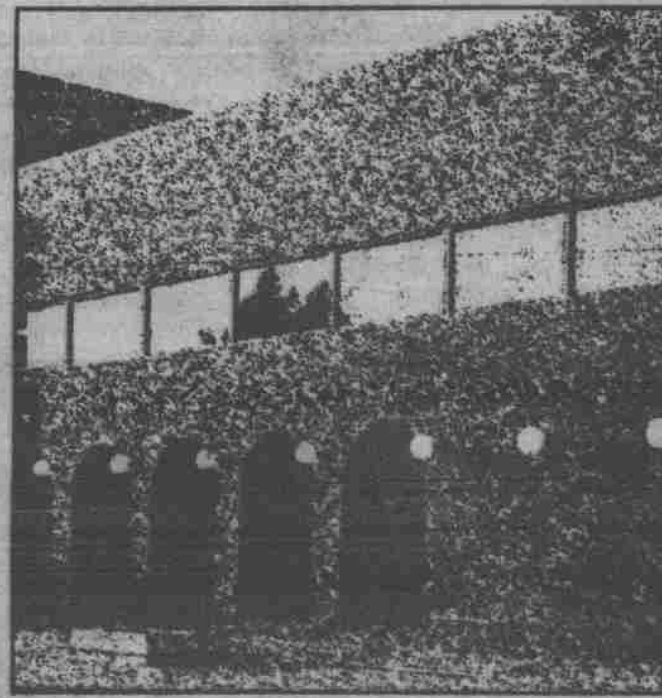
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