

David Bowie still experimenting, growth continues on new album

By Jeff Taebel

David Bowie has proven himself to be a versatile performer. In his illustrious career, he has successfully undertaken a number of diverse musical endeavors, going from the sci-fi rock of *Space Oddity* to the quasi-R&B of *Young Americans*. In addition to performing his own music, Bowie has produced and played for Iggy Pop and starred in the movie, *The Man Who Fell To Earth*.

Bowie sings well throughout the album, in addition to playing keyboards, guitar, saxophone and koto (a Japanese stringed instrument). He also co-produced the album with Tony Visconti.

Side one contains five songs, the best of which are "Joe the Lion" and "Sons of the Silent Age." "Joe the Lion" is the hardest rocker on the record, with its powerful guitar lines driving Bowie on to a very inspired vocal performance.

album review

Yet despite the fact that Bowie has experimented so much already, he seems unwilling to settle into one style. One could guess that Bowie's latest release "Heroes" would be another departure from his previous work by looking at the album cover. The photo features Bowie posing in a black leather jacket, looking as though he just stepped out of a Brooklyn tenement. However, the music inside is not what the picture might lead one to expect.

For starters, Bowie has assembled a fascinating band. The core of the group is composed of Dennis Davis on drums, George Murray on bass and Carlos Alomar on rhythm guitar. To this solid foundation, he has added the bizarre British musical duo of Robert Fripp and Brian Eno.

Distinctive style

Fripp, the former lead guitarist for King Crimson, has a very distinctive style of playing, to say the least. Synthesizer wizard Eno has achieved some commercial success in England, both with his solo recordings and his collaborations with Fripp.

While these two do not challenge Bowie for the spotlight, reserving their talents primarily for embellishments, they do give the music a dark, dreamlike quality, reminiscent of the early Pink Floyd or King Crimson.

"Sons of the Silent Age" is much more subdued. It is a bitter tribute to the sons of the silent age (whoever they are) with Bowie working in a customarily detached vocal style.

Side two different

Side two is a different story altogether. It starts off with a rocking instrumental entitled "V-2 Schneider" and settles into a very slow three-part suite that is bound to upset some Bowie fans. The three songs in the suite, "Sense of Doubt," "Moss Garden" and "Neukoln," are more mood than music, although Bowie does play some hot licks on koto and saxophone to spice things up.

There certainly will be some who will dismiss the suite as nothing more than some sounds to take sedatives by. But the same could be said of the extended ramblings of Pink Floyd if they were not listened to carefully. However, there is enough going on musically to sustain interest in it.

And it is refreshing to see an artist of Bowie's stature unafraid to move in musical directions which might be unpopular, rather than being content to rest on his laurels as so many other stars have done, and regardless of whether "Heroes" is a commercial success or not, Bowie certainly will have grown musically from recording it, just as his fans might by listening to it.

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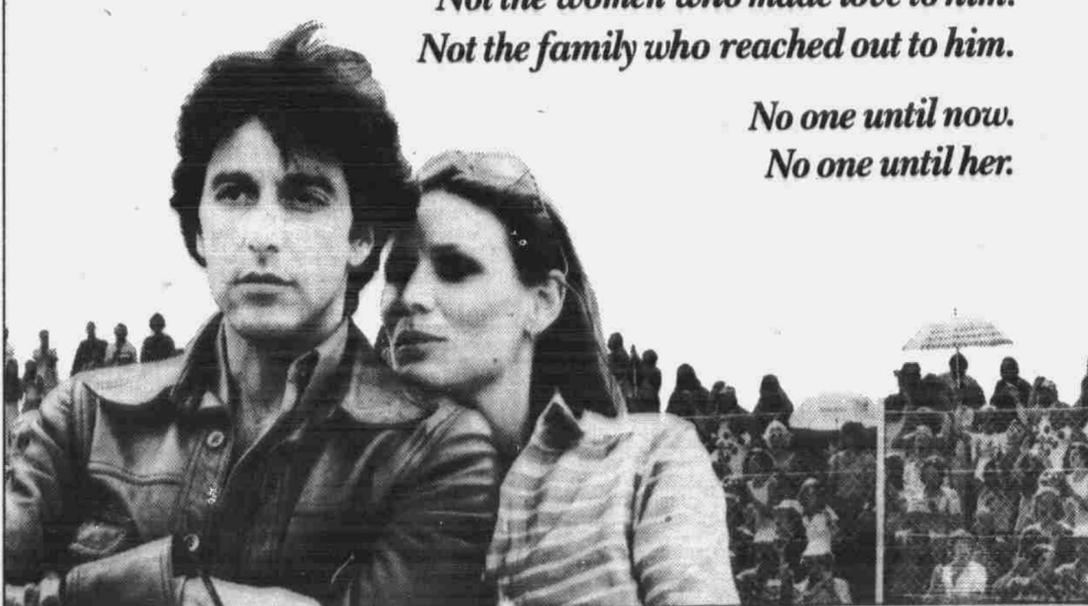
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