

Starship...

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Of course, this is strictly mainstream rock, as you can tell from the extended guitar solos popping up all the time. Guitar solos sound strangely obsolescent in an era in which Elvis Costello puts 20 songs on an album.

The band is predictably tight, as all of these guys are crafty veterans of the rock and roll business. They are all competent journeymen who have been associated with a veritable Who's Who of the industry. Of course they are all completely faceless, but they do their job.

Led by Kantner

The leader of the Jefferson Starship has long been considered to be rhythm guitarist Paul Kantner, a title he deserves almost as much as he deserves a gold watch for his many years of dedicated service. However, Kantner is clever enough not to dictate the band's overall sound into one bland homogenized sound. The Jefferson Starship has a key advantage over most bands in that they have remained a participatory democracy after all this time. Since everybody writes and contributes, a more eclectic style is obtained.

Because of this eclecticism the quality of the songs varies hugely. The current hit "Find Your Way Back" is totally undistinguishable from Styx, REO, *ad nauseum*. Luckily, it is the first cut, which conveniently allows one to cue over to song two, "Familiar Stranger." This is Grace's song and she sounds in fine form. It is kind of heart-warming to hear her back with her cronies once again.

The next song is "Wild Eyes" and it is Paul Kantner's turn to cut loose. This song appears to be about Grace and Paul's kid, China, with Paul recalling hoary old tales of the cultural revolution.

Most of the other songs are not unpleasant tunes that range from boy-girl, Moon-June, lyrics to the science-fiction imagery for which the Airplane/Starship have long been known.

Memorable cuts
Side two has a pair

of particularly memorable cuts, one of which is "Mary," which is as catchy as Abba with power chords added. "Mary" is already a hit on some FM stations.

The highlight of *Modern Times* is "Stairway to Cleveland" (We do what we want). Beyond the great title (although it is not as terminally cool as the underground cult fave "Stairway to Gilligan's Island"), this song features Paul Kantner rocking out more than one would have thought possible. Kantner, as radical as the next guy in the 60s, seems to be feeling a return to those roots as he rants a bunch of gibberish about the PTL club, the Consumer Price Index, the Draft, etc.—great stuff.

Sure, Kantner's politics are simplistic but his heart is in the right place. Another highlight of "Stairway to Cleveland" is Kantner taking a few swipes at smart-mouth rock critics with an almost, dare I say, punk attitude from Kantner.

I gave up on the Starship years ago, even before the Balin/Slick exodus, as they appeared to be living in a time warp. *Modern Times* has proved to be a pleasant surprise showing the Jefferson Starship is not irrelevant.

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