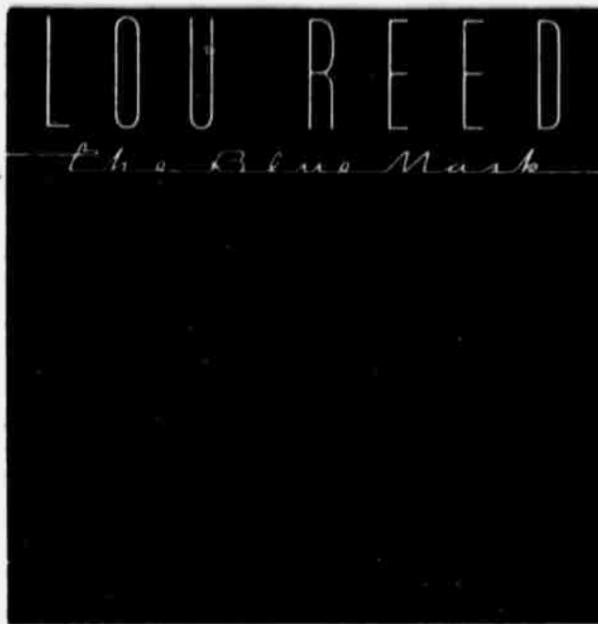


Arts & Entertainment

New Lou Reed takes a walk on the 'mild' side



By Pat Higgins

Lou Reed/*The Blue Mask*/RCA

Lou Reed is in love with his wife, which is one of several surprises on his new album, *The Blue Mask*. First of all, Reed is apparently rejecting the nihilism and sleaze which have been the foundation of his persona ever since his days with the Velvet Underground.

As they say in junior high, Reed has a bad attitude, which is one reason I always liked his style. He was also a perfect artist to get vicarious kicks from, because no matter how wasted one could get, there



was always Lou Reed's lifestyle to use as a comparison. Plus, he has a solid body of work comparable to Bob Dylan's, and some of his songs are literary enough to pass for short stories (eg. *Sweet Jane*). *The Blue Mask* is his best record since *Street Hassle* several years ago.

This is the sensitive Lou, even romantic. No more songs about the seamy side of life. This is a major turnabout equivalent to Dan Fogelberg singing about junkies on the streets of New York.

Spontaneity

The Blue Mask was recorded with only one instrumental overdub, which adds a feel of spontaneity to Reed's approach.

The sound on most of the songs could pass for one of those sensitive folkies' kind of approach, but big Lou's vocals are too cynical to ever bore. Guitarist Robert Quine does have some hot licks on a few of the cuts, though, to add some rock and roll flash.

"My House," the first song, is dedicated to the poet Delmore Schwartz, whom Reed acknowledges as an inspiration and a teacher. On this song, Reed mentions his wife Sylvia for the first of many times on the record. She designed the album cover and her name is included in many of the songs.

"I've really got a lucky life

My writing, my motorcycle, my wife"

This is the first indication that Lou is becoming sentimental. Is he going to move to the suburbs next?

The next song is "Women," where Lou salutes the distaff side of humanity with complete sincerity, I think. Since his sex life was always held to be a little unusual by the media, this is kind of a surprise. Here is Lou, singing about buying flowers and serenading his baby. This is so wholesome that it is hard to believe but excellent nevertheless.

Against alcohol

"Underneath the Bottle" is a rocker about boozing it up, but papa Lou is not endorsing alcohol abuse as he used to condone other substances. He actually comes out against alcoholism, no less.

"Average Guy" is another winner, where Lou declares that he is just a regular fellow with many of the same attributes as the typical insurance salesman. Again, Lou sounds so sincere that he has to be taken at face value, but this is definitely getting a little weird.

The most mind-boggling tune and also an unqualified masterpiece, is a song called "The Day John Kennedy Died," which is truly an affecting work. Reed recreates



Lou Reed

Photo courtesy RCA Records

how he heard about the assassination Nov. 22, 1963, when he was in college. Lou must have been a college liberal because this is a sad and touching tribute.

The Blue Mask is a great record which shows that Lou Reed is continuing to grow as an artist. Reed has rejected nihilism — good for him.



By Bob Crisler

Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark/Architecture & Morality/Dindisc-Virgin-Epic

Possibly the best description of this band lies in its name. Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark, henceforth "OMD", is basically a two-man outfit heavy on synthesizers, with a musical bent toward heavy, brooding works of symphonic movement and scope.

Paul Humphreys and Andrew McCluskey, the nucleus of the band (three other musicians contribute on *Architecture & Morality*), are artists on a classical scale.

OMD's debut record met with enthusiastic reviews internationally, with the single "Enola Gay" receiving extensive airplay in the United Kingdom.

1982's major musical export from Britain thus far has been a revival of synthesizer-based groups, a genre which was pioneered in the mid '70s by Germany's Kraftwerk, a band that had an American hit single in "Autobahn".

OMD is certainly one of the best of these new bands, most of whom seem to hide behind the impersonal mask that the style affords. Ultimately, the initial fascination with the synthesizer tends to wear into boredom with most of these new releases.

OMD beats this by not relying solely on synthesizer, but by bolstering its aural transparency with conventional acoustic instruments.

The production of *Architecture & Morality* is so thick, awash with icy tides of synth, that it fails to really get under the skin.

Literally, the record is a bit ambiguous. "The New Stone Age" comes off Side One crackling like a Geiger counter gone haywire, with a remorseful vocal: "Oh My God — What have we done this time?" Is this a look at a post-Armageddon Earth?

"She's Leaving" wails from the heart of every hopeless romantic — a brooding song with the texture of velvet.

Notable on side two is "Architecture & Morality," which begins like the soundtrack of an old Boris Karloff movie — Bela Lugosi trampling through a foggy cemetery in the dead of night.

The only seriously upbeat song on the LP is "Georgia," which has a strong sense of unity and accomplishment on top of a spunky beat, complete with Sgt. Pepper-ish dubs of lunatic gibberish in the background.

Architecture & Morality is a record of more depth than can be readily understood in the few times I have listened to it. The great thing about it is that it's a record that continues to unfold, thereby retaining its freshness long after most other records

either have been memorized or become redundant.

Albums by dB's score with critics but not labels



By David Wood

dB's/Repercussion/Albion

In a 1980 poll, the dB's were voted the new band that New Yorkers most wanted to hear cut on vinyl. They now have two albums.

Repercussion and *dB Stands for Decibels* have impressed the critics but not the major labels, and neither of the fine albums is available for less than import prices.

One may be tempted to read into these facts that the dB's music is esoteric, experimental or extreme. It's not. It's pop. It's eloquent, emphatic and expert. It is the precocious, not prodigal, sound of youth.

Don't be mistaken. They aren't mainstream. Mainstream should be so lucky. The dB's have some of the flavor of earlier popsters. But the taste is definitely from a later generation.

Labeling the unique blend of music is like dividing apples by oranges. The sum isn't in the units of the parts. The dB's have the songmanship of the Only Ones, the vivacity of Sylvain Sylvain and the Feelies' respect for their instruments. Yet the composite picture distorts the distinctive character of the band's handsome music.

Comparisons are only jumping-off points in describing *Repercussion*. "Little a Lie," with its accompanying horns from Graham Parker's Rumour, easily could pass for Sylvain. So could the vocals on "Storm Warning." But the song's calypso keyboard and Spanish guitar is another matter entirely.

The Only Ones, if they were high on life, given cow bells, played faster and sang higher, might sound like "Neverland" and "Ups and Downs." Vocally, "Happstance" also is like the Only Ones. Yet lyrically, it is like the Feelies. And when psychedelic organ, cricket chirps and Feelies-like strumming are tossed in, it's an excellent song.

"Amplifier," which is perhaps the catchiest, most danceable song on the album, has the silly, loose spirit of Tom Verlaine. The brandished guitar on "In Spain" likewise is reminiscent of Verlaine. But its vocals strangely evoke Nilsson and Jackson Brown, despite the reckless beat.

"We Were Happy There" starts out like Patti Smith's "Ain't It Strange," breaks into calliope choruses and ends with articulate surf guitar and stomping drums. "Ask for Jill" could be a song from a pop musical.

Three of *Repercussion's* 12 songs are ballads. And two are great. Acoustic guitar, viola, bongos and electronics make "I Feel Good" superior to similar tunes by the Boomtown Rats. And "Nothing Is Wrong" is exquisite, as beautiful as a sea of sing-along by John Lennon.

The Beatles were clearly an inspiration for the dB's and the exuberant, yet pared-down music of the dB's, as much as any band's, is helping pop melody-making to keep fresh in the face of modern styles and stylistics.