

Arts & Entertainment

Did Burton record an album or what?!?!

By Bob Crisler

Is That Charlie Burton . . . Or What?!?!/ Charlie Burton & the Cutouts/Wild

To set the record straight, I've been a Charlie Burton fan ever since I overcame puberty.

In those post-adolescent years, for want of something better to do, I'd hang out by the door of the Drumstick or Zoo Bar as Rock Therapy rattled the windows to get the aural fix that kept my rock 'n' roll zygotes alive.

In time I acquired all three Rock Therapy singles, which are, incidentally, either great or very good.

Since I turned 19 a few years back (with a special "inhale my exhaust" to one Ralph Kelly), I've been part of Charlie Burton's loyal local following.

It is because of these allegiances that I wired a polygraph (lie-o-meter for non-engineers) into the sensitive nerve tissue of my earlobes to write this bit of rock 'n' roll arbitration.

So every time I inscribe some outlandishly adulatory comment about *Is That Charlie Burton . . . Or What?!?!* the needle leaps like a spastic kangaroo, and I "X" it out. Honest. So here goes nothin'.

Cutouts vs. Rock Therapy

The first subject that must be addressed here is the obvious and inevitable comparison between the Cutouts and Rock Therapy.



Basically, the difference lies in two guitarists and two styles of guitar playing.

Butch Berman gave Rock Therapy its chops in a hot, prickly style that lent a certain nostalgic rockabilly flavor to their sound. Berman's still a force to be reckoned with locally, fronting the Excessives.

Phil Shoemaker, the Cutouts' lead axeman, was once drummer for the Boys, a formulaic local band with a false-superstar aura. Shoemaker is a fine guitarist, providing a downhome, but nonetheless heavy metal sound easily more accessible to the masses than Berman's.

Bassist G. "Otto" Spalti and drummer Dave "Rebel" Robel are thankfully still slapping in the solid bottom and back that is the foundation for everything else here.

Comparison to Jim Morrison

In the area, Burton's impassioned vocal style and manic stage demeanor are legend. Not too surprisingly, the national rock press often compares him to Jim Morrison, an exercise which is not totally off base. Both exhibit(ed) an almost electric presence, but where Morrison was self-aggrandizing, Burton is self-effacing; he at least



Charlie Burton

Photo by D. Eric Kircher

doesn't sound like he is taking himself seriously. Of course, subject matter may have something to do with that. Morrison's songs were moody, mystical hymns, whereas Burton's are always spiced with a shot of humor, no matter the topic. They sprout from his heart and take root in the breadbasket of the Bible Belt.

Textbook rock 'n' roll

If there was a textbook definition of rock 'n' roll, Funk and Wagnalls might well run a photo next to the entry in one of



their future editions. Because he's a born-and-raised Midwesterner, his music lacks the pretensions of big city Megalopolis, and is rock as folk music.

Everything here burns. "All Gone" delivers a hellish thrust in a chunka-chunka chuckwagon style, which leads into the country love song authenticity of "Even As We Speak".

What makes this the record that it is an exhibition of many styles; sometimes on their own, sometimes in combination with other scraps of musical history and innate creativity.

"Rabies Shots" slows the band down a bit for a flourishing flamenco guitar from Phil Shoemaker that perfectly comple-

ments the lunacy of the song.

"Breathe For Me, Presley!" is an epic. A tongue-in-cheek story of the death of the King, it features some of the best lyrics ever. One of my fave lines is this: "Deep fried food made Elvis sick/And too many drugs from Dr. Nick!" The intent here is not to make fun of Elvis; he did an adequate job of that himself in his later years.

Though most Burton songs germinate in his imagination, "Rattle OK!" concerns a current social issue. The song is about blue collar America and going nowhere in laborious factory jobs.

When he writes a "love song", it's not a ballad about drippy teenage romance or any other tired theme. "I Found My Baby At A Garage Sale" is not a scenario that comes to mind immediately when yours truly thinks of "love", anyway.

The band's signature song, "Rock 'N' Roll Behavior", doesn't sound quite as primitive as it did on Rock Therapy's first 45, but its driving power is not diminished.

A bonus here is the enclosed lyric sheet. Burton's songs are invariably witty and intelligent, but the raw energy he and the Cutouts radiate live sometimes serves to muddle the words.

Great concentration is evident on this recording to make the pronunciation as comprehensible as possible.

Is That Charlie Burton . . . Or What?!?! is the best record I've heard in recent history, maybe all history. Is this a great album . . . or what?

Value emerges from third side of XTC import

By David Wood

XTC/English Settlement/Virgin

The pepped-out pop of XTC retains its shape and color in repeated washings. Five albums later, it comes out fresh. For XTC, to mature and to remain progressive have not been separate directions. *English Settlement*, a double album, attests to that fact.

Much of the music seems to be sprucing up earlier ideas — fine stuff, but sometimes predictable. But jump to side three. These four songs show a studied sensitivity to many modern styles. XTC magically fuses it all neatly into the distinct style that certifies every song XTC — good, choice and prime.

This stamp on the music doesn't define the songs or limit them. Rather, the songs define it. Their quality adds to its value. And with the release of *English Settlement*, shares should hold steady or rise.

XTC's first album made a big splash in small circles. When the second album came out, the group had a regular following, because of the cerebral artistry and neighborly vivacity of the music, some considered XTC to be England's Talking Heads.

But with the third album, the comparison ended. Talking Heads, expanding, broke through on their third take. XTC meantime contracted. The music became so obsessively clever it lost its relevance. It didn't speak.

When the time was right, XTC missed and remained cult. But the next album, *Black Sea*, pushed the group closer to breakthrough success, and *English Settlement* should do the same.

Side three should be made side one verbatim. While I'm at it, "Melt the Guns" — a six-and-a-half minute anthem, complete with dub dissolves and rap breaks — should be a hit single, too.

As much as any song, "Melt the Guns" shows a turn for the better that that's heard throughout *English Settlement*. It speaks. It voices a medieval secularism and guns-and-butter political stand along the hard lines of the Band of Four. But instead of sharp-toothed dissonance, XTC's fatigues are melody and flow.

Two other songs show a second political allegiance, this one to English favorites, the Specials. "Leisure" shambles into the issue of unemployment — "So now I'm permanently drunk like the rest of the race with Leisure" — while "Knuckle Down" takes on racial tension with disarming good nature. The ska beat kicks perfectly in step with the XTC stamp of excellence.

Weaving in another brand of new beat, the global polyrhythms of Talking Heads' last album, is "It's Nearly Africa." Jungle drums carry the message of apocalypse — "Our civilization car is running wild/Who did you give the wheel to?/The fat man driving us over edge of the nearest cliff-face."

Tush sparks life, laughs into early morning TV

By Pat Clark

Bill Tush is back where he belongs, on early mornings on WTBS Atlanta (Channel 8 on the Lincoln cable system).

Television Review

You probably don't know very much about Bill Tush; there's no particular reason why you should, except that he is a better entertainer than his anonymity would suggest. Tush has been the resident gadfly on Ted Turner's Superstation for several years now. He is in the curious status of being the man that Ted Turner likes too much to get rid of, but not enough to leave at a steady job.

His current project is *The Lighter Side*, a Sunday morning stew of comic vignettes, a little bit of news, an old movie, and just about anything else Tush wants to do (and that Turner will let him do).

Insomniacs will recall Tush as the guy who a few years ago read the early morning news for the Superstation. By early, I mean 6 a.m. Atlanta time, 4 a.m. Lincoln time. Tush lacked the grave demeanor and deadpan delivery associated with the news, however. When it was mentioned to him that he should have a co-anchor, like most news shows have, he got a dog. Gave it a little suit and everything.

Next came a nighttime effort called *Tush*, which was kind of a poor man's *Saturday Night Live*. It wasn't a bad show, but it suffered from head-to-head confrontations with Sunday night homework, Sunday night dinner and *60 Minutes*. So, Tush metamorphosed as a master of ceremonies on the ill-fated *Atlantic City Alive* variety show.

From there he rediscovered morning work on *The Lighter Side*.

With *The Lighter Side's* format, Tush might have finally found his niche. That shouldn't be too surprising, because he writes all of the material for the show. He has the rare advantage of knowing what he can and cannot do. Tush is best playing a kind of everyday, straight man character opposite a series of fringe lunatics; or, conversely, as a character who for all intents and purposes looks and acts like a straight man, but whose words and thoughts belie a subsurface lunacy. He is also best off when these characterizations don't last very long; he would not, for example, be able to parlay this character into a half-hour show. With *The Lighter Side*, he doesn't have to, as the format turns him from spotlight performer to traffic cop before things get too bogged down. But it's hard to tell whether he will be given enough of a chance to succeed with this one, either.