

Arts & Entertainment

vinyl analysis



Success Hasn't Spoiled Me Yet
Rick Springfield
RCA

At the risk of eternal embarrassment, I must admit: I liked "Jessie's Girl," this *Tiger Beat* pinup's major hit of 1981.

Seriously. Adolescent innocence has the decided upper hand over mechanical "love" songs of the lovin'-touchin'-squeezin' variety. There's something catching in a tale of juvenile unrequited love. There's something very cold and lifeless in today's anatomical "love" songs. The perfect middle ground comes from Johnny, Joey, Marky and Dee-Dee, but for the next hour or so, Rick Springfield will have to do.

Right now, *General Hospital's* Dr. Noah Webster is the hottest thing in jailbait rock — his face can be found on the cover of every teenybopper fanzine in print, if it doesn't upset your ego to risk being seen looking at them.

Springfield is not just a catalyst for the emerging hormones of wild-eyed young nubile, though. He's a sex symbol from the word go — millions of *GH* viewers have been licking their chops for years.

Housewives will undoubtedly rush in droves to the neighborhood K-Mart to pick up on *Success Hasn't Spoiled Me Yet* in a fit of vagary. "It's my daughter's birthday," they'll explain to the uninterested checker.

With earlier bubblegum boys such as Leif Garrett, Rex Smith, or the unforgettable Cassidy brothers, it was in doubt that they were possessed of even a tatter of talent. They sure were pretty, though.

There are hits galore on this record, including "Don't Talk To Strangers," the album's lead-off single.

On side one, "I Get Excited" starts off sounding like "Jessie's Girl," with a subdued electric guitar, and Springfield carefully enunciating the lyrics:

Well you admit you like a game, but you're not gonna play/You just ignore what your body is tryin' to say/I got the feelin' that you're playin' and we're both gonna win/And I think this angel's about to sin.

You know the rest of the story. Ricky and his baby miss homeroom at the local junior high the next morning.

After a dumpy little ballad, Springfield breaks out the stun guitar for "Kristina," a guaranteed mega-hit on all fronts.

"Tonight" is a sequel to "Jessie's Girl," with Springfield standing on the sidelines while the woman of his dreams makes the tie that legally binds.

Standouts on side two are "How Do You Talk To Girls" and "The American Girl." The guy has a heart, too. "April 24, 1981" asks unanswerable questions about afterlife in the context of his father's death.

Anybody who gives his lopsided-looking terrier an everyday name like Ron and prominently displays a pair of Converse All-Star hightops on the inner sleeve can't be all bad. He certainly eclipses his bubblegum competitors.

Springfield's a rarity in his idiom. At 32, he could pass for 20. Old enough to write contagious, smart pop songs, he's pretty enough to sell them.

— Bob Crisler



Drums Along The Hudson
The Bongos
PVC

Readers of the *New York Rocker* are a cultural bunch, I'm sure. That they voted the Bongos the best unrecorded band of 1981 must mean something.

The yearly people's poll has steered me straight in the past. The *Rocker's* readers' favorite band without a record in 1980 was the dB's. In 1979, it was the Feelies. Both are excellent.

New York nightclubbers have well-weathered tastes, for every year the bands they pick are fresh-sounding, exuberant, youthful, upbeat and pop. The dB's and Feelies are prime, semi-obscure albums that I pull out for neophytes when I want something unobtrusive but winsome. *Drums Along The Hudson* is no exception.

These unrecorded bands, once recognized, don't stay record-less long. And going national brings nice surprises, such as the Bongos' lightly-attended performance at the Drumstick last Thursday. I can't say they blew me away live, but I was impressed enough to pick up the album. It was the better buy.

The Bongos have a tidily-crafted style, akin to U2 or early Talking Heads, which they rip through at an adrenalated clip. Yet to preserve the inner coordination amidst the exterior haste, studio production is apparently crucial.

Drums is as exciting as any debut album I've heard in 1982. The music is buoyant and tuneful like U2, but more minimal. It is crisp and oblique like early Heads, but more maximal.

For tighter comparisons, I again refer to its poll-winning predecessors, the dB's and Feelies — particularly the latter. All three bands keep a fine, delicate balance between musical text and context in their songs.

All have a knack for using simplicity complexly, for using acoustic techniques electrifyingly, for using headlong energy with restraint, a knack for using roots originally, for using adolescence maturely. Collectively, their music is arguably the most viable, respectable neo-pop around, clean and refreshing as it's meant to be.

Not all fifteen songs on *Drums*, which were written over the last two years, are above par. But even the weakest of them, say, "Clay Midgets" or "Glow in the Dark," are inoffensive and eventually likeable.

Some songs, like "Video Eyes" or "In the Congo," with its Devo-esque guitar and bongo beat, race by before you know it. On others, pop pieces like "The Bulrushes" or "Zebra Club," you can forget who you're listening to sometimes.

The instrumental cut, "Burning Bush," is excellent by virtue of being Heads-like. "Three Wise Men" is very much in the Feelies' style of fast strumming and drumming and quarter-note vocals, though a tousled cornet is thrown in on top.

But bongo congo, that's the place to be. Songs like "Question Ball" or "Mamba Sun" are the most distinctive on the album. With simply a bass, acoustic guitar and bongos, "Question Ball" has a refined taste with the flavor of tropical beatniks.

And "Mamba Sun," the only redo on *Drums*, is totally infectious with beachside bepop fever. It's the greatest remake of an oldie since "Working in the Coal Mine." Joan Jett take note.

Hoboken's Bongos, the drums across the Hudson River from New York City, may not be the next big thing — or even as hot a find as the dB's or Feelies. I nevertheless look forward to their next album, as well as to the *Rocker's* next poll.

— David Wood



Kihntinued
Greg Kihn Band
Beserkley

The Greg Kihn Band has a knack for cute album titles and good catchy singles. "The Break-Up Song" from last year's *Rock Kihn Roll* was one of the pleasures of summer radio cruising. "Happy Man," the first song on the first side (the perfect location to attract attention), has hit single written all over it. It's a real grabber as it builds in intensity until you start screaming along with the chorus. Handclaps, the guitar solo and the inspired singing add up to a perfect pop song. The lyrics are a thumb-your-nose-at-the-world teenage arrogance that doesn't really mean anything. On the other hand who cares because the song sounds so good.

The rest of *Kihntinued* doesn't match up to "Happy Man" high quality but there are a number of socially redeeming virtues that should lead album oriented radio to pick up on it.

"Everday/Saturday" has a real booming sound that isn't too far away from heavy metal. However, Kihn seems too refined and/or wholesome to fit in with that crowd. The greatest unknown band ever, the Dictators, had the theme "everday is Saturday," which sums up being laid back and laid off to perfection. Kihn doesn't quite have that anarchist approach towards the weekend, though.

"Tell Me Lies" and "Sound System" showcase Rasta Greg Kihn as he pretends that he's some ganja-inspired Jamaican playing reggae. Nothing like a little inauthenticity for a few good chuckles. Too bad that real reggae never got off the ground in the United States. "Sound System" has the same title as a Steel Pulse song but sure doesn't sound like those Rastamaniacs.

"Testify" should be the second single released as it is instantly memorable as the band and Kihn trade off on the vocals. Kihn just exudes wholesome sincerity. A real nice song.

The old soul chestnut "Higher and Higher" is also covered on *Kihntinued*. He sure sounds upper middle class to try to pull that off successfully.

Kihn is on Beserkley Records which has been picked up by Electra/Asylum for distribution. Beserkley is based in Berkeley so it's nice to see those hippies have got jobs.

Johnathan Richman, one of the original Beserkley artists, will be with the Morells the next time they are at the Zoo. Richman had a sound that recalled Lou Reed and the Kinks. Kihn should take some notes from Richman.

Kihntinued is a frustrating record because it is competent and pretty good but . . . This is a throwback to the era when an album would have a great single surrounded by dross. Anyway "Happy Man" will sound good over the airwaves.

— Pat Higgins