

Arts & Entertainment

vinyl analysis



The Name of this Band is Talking Heads
Talking Heads
Sire

For more years than there have been rumors that Talking Heads are breaking up, there have been rumors that they have a live album in the works. Let these matters of hearsay and speculation now be put to rest.

Gossip about a breakup is moot now. The Heads are together in the studio again. And as for a live album, *The Name of this Band is Talking Heads*, a two-record set, is available at record shops.

The live album apparently has been a bee in the Heads' bonnet for some time, judging from the studio-quality sound of the recordings that span from 1977 to 1981. Only the intervening applause and a negligible loss of effects give away the songs as live takes.

The Heads' entire four-album opus is covered. All their biggies are included: "Psycho Killer," "Take Me to the River," "Life During Wartime" and "Houses in Motion." Taken as a live greatest-hits retrospective of, I think, the most progressive dance band on the planet, *Talking Heads* is exquisite.

Plus there is the bonus of two songs, "A Clean Break" and "Building on Fire," that previously were available only on bootlegs. Both come from the 1977 to 1979 era covered on the first disc.

The second disc, 1980-81, is all performances of the extended band the Heads enlisted for their last album, *Remain in Light*, a polyrhythmic masterpiece that changed the history of white funk. (Excuse the effusion, but I love the band.)

Side one was recorded in 1977 and features the songs from the first album, *Talking Heads '77*, "New Feeling," "Don't Worry about the Government," "Pulled Up" and "Psycho Killer." Of any of the songs on *Talking Heads*, these are the most similar to their original versions. Still the Heads seem incapable of playing a song the same way twice. There are stylistic, instrumental and vocal variations on every cut.

"Artists Only" and "Stay Hungry," from the second album, *More Songs about Buildings and Food*, appear on side two. That album was more experimental than the first, and, likewise, the 1979 recordings show greater improvisation in the extended renditions.

Fear of Music, the Heads' third and best-selling album, was transitional for them. Appropriately, its songs are represented on both discs of *Talking Heads*. "Air" and "Memories" are interesting early versions of the songs before they were committed to vinyl.

"I Zimbra" was the song that foretold the texturally complex rhythm extravaganzas of the next album, *Remain in Light*, and it deserves its spot on the nine-member-band second disc. Like "Life During Wartime," it is faster and more elaborate than the original.

The fourth-album songs, "Houses in Motion," "The Great Curve" and "Cross-eyed and Painless," are exciting, restyled, funkier, somewhat looser tapestries of sound for brain, ears and feet. But Nona Hendryx, who sang all over Jerry Harrison's solo album, appears vocally too much in the fabric for my tastes. On the concluding song on side four, "Take Me to the River," her soulful voice harks backward to the Al Green original.

If you have all their albums, you are a Heads-ophile anyway and should enjoy this one. If you don't have their albums, tsk, tsk. These greatest hits are a must buy.

David Wood



Jools Holland and His Millionaires
Jools Holland and His Millionaires
I.R.S.

Jools Holland, formerly of Squeeze, and His Millionaires released a single in 1981 on the A&M label to European markets. The A-side, "Bumble Boogie," leads off side two on this LP.

Since then, the band has dropped the producer of that single, and there are now five Millionaires instead of three — female vocal backup from two women credited on the album as "The Wealthy Tarts." Jools Holland and His Millionaires and the Wealthy Tarts. Quite a mouthful.

For this debut disc, the formidable talents of producer Glyn Johns (mostly known for his work with The Who) have been enlisted. He softens up the drums and bass, and brings Holland's voice to the fore, which might be an acceptable strategy with many other artists, but Holland sounds like he's got an artichoke stuck in his throat.

Holland's lousy voice doesn't really detract, though. It just makes this record come off sounding like a period piece — like the stuff Steve Martin "sang" in *Pennies From Heaven*.

Actually, this is one of the more interesting vehicles to come cruisin' down the new music turnpike in quite some time.

Rock 'n' roll this ain't — what it is is a schmaltzy mix of swing, gospel shouting, rockabilly and big band (hope I haven't missed anything) dominated by a curvaceous saxophone and a linear Hammond organ. The Millionaires don't even have a full-time guitarist, and when the instrument is occasionally heard, it maintains a discreet background presence.

Side one opens with "Like I Do To You," which is mostly dismissable except for its big rhythm.

"Goodbye World" is a different story — a contemplation of methods of exit from earth for a human with suicidal neuroses. Bridge jumping, self-inflicted gunshots, roasting under the sun mummified in tinfoil — it's all here. Somehow this retains an upbeat flavor, if only because he is prevented from committing the act by friends he didn't know he had.

Holland is very much alive on the next song, "Dynaflow," a song about racing down uncharted roadways presumably in the Corvette on the album cover. This even includes some hot piano hammering in the general style of Jerry Lee Lewis, albeit without the mark of pure genius.

"Waiting Game" mulls over an unsuccessful romance, with Kim Lesley and Maz Roberts (The Tarts) tossing in some biting vocals.

"Let Me In" is a jumpy, handclapping song about a lifelong sinner who, in his twilight, is reborn — as much from fear of hell-fire and eternal damnation as through a true change of heart.

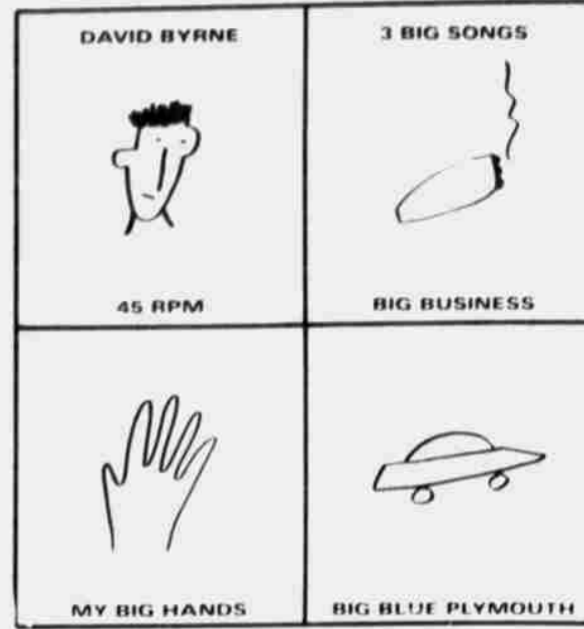
"Driven to Drink" explores the realities of the morning after a night on the town. The percussive element reminds me of the throbbing dirge that my pulse makes in the inner ear on such an occasion.

"Bumble Boogie" is a mishmash of musical clichés turned into a swinging, driving instrumental. It emerges as one of the hottest cuts on the record.

"First Drink of the Day" includes some hot harmonica to close out the album.

Jools Holland and His Millionaires will most likely never be heard on American radio — if you want their refreshing change of pace you'll have to buy the album yourself.

Bob Crisler



Three Big Songs
David Byrne
Sire

For those of us unfortunate enough to be without Walkmans, this EP is excerpts from the cassette of *The Catherine Wheel* previously not to be found on record. The same songs were on the album but these versions are longer and remixed.

Three Big Songs is similar in sound to (Byrne's once and future band) the Talking Heads' work on their last studio LP *Remain in Light*. The sound is multi-layered and textured as Byrne's unmistakable yelping vocals are on top of a funk rhythmic approach and spacey synthesizer. He plays more guitar than usual, too.

The theme for this EP is Bigness as the songs are "Big Business," "My Big Hands" and "Big Blue Plymouth." "Big Business" is basically a long dance track which thankfully doesn't mention much about the entity of big business.

I've been suspicious of Byrne's attitude toward politics ever since he wrote "Don't Worry About the Government" on *Talking Heads '77*. The Heads and Byrne in particular have always seemed like the Young Republicans of "New Wave" (if anybody has a better term for this stuff contact me immediately c/o Daily Nebraskan).

Since this record was commissioned by Twyla Tharp it is appropriate that it is a dance record. What really is rather astounding is the way a mild-mannered art school grad has become an expert on funk. This marriage of electronics and funk makes dance music that should appeal to just about everybody.

"Big Blue Plymouth" is the only track with a significant amount of vocals and it is reminiscent of *Fear of Music*.

Despite the high quality of *Three Big Songs* and the appearance of the new live Heads album, it has been two full years since their last studio album. During that time the band members have done a series of solo projects, all successful. Byrne has chosen to work with artists such as Brian Eno and Twyla Tharp. Meanwhile Heads' Tina Weymouth and Chris Frantz have released the Tom Tom Club which has spawned the single "Genius of Love," a tribute to James Brown, which is the number-two song on the soul charts.

Let's put those concepts together. Byrne is the top banana of the Heads but he should go back and collaborate with the others again. We need an album of all new Talking Heads.

Pat Higgins