

# 'Lincoln' provides ingenious lyrics; good diction

By Mark Lage  
Staff Reviewer

## They Might Be Giants "Lincoln" Bar None/Restless Records

If, as it was written in this paper not too long ago, Game Theory's songs would be radio hits in a perfect world, then They Might Be Giants could surely be called upon to provide sitcom themes for this imaginary land.

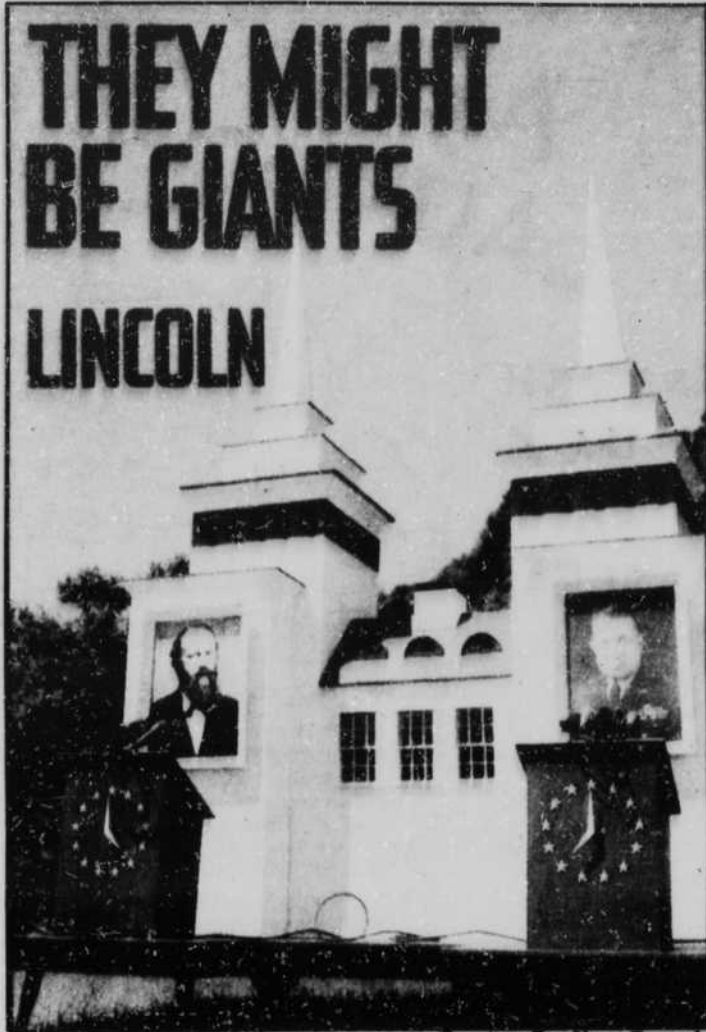
"Lincoln," their second album, is full of songs, which, similar to "Don't Let's Start" from their debut album, will often make you forget you're listening to a band, but are instead ignoring the opening credits to this week's adventures of your favorite TV family. It probably has a lot to do with the Giants' bubble gum pop sound, and their twerpish sense of humor.

They Might Be Giants are John Linnel and John Flansburgh, and these kinds of surface qualities to their music may actually deflect the listener from making more important observations. Like the fact that they employ pop chord structures often resembling the Beatles, or even early Elvis Costello. Or the fact that their lyrics are not only consistently funny, but also have bunches of ingenious word plays, and will give you plenty to think about. Although you won't necessarily get very far by doing that.

Thankfully, They Might Be Giants is an aberration from the current underground tendencies to call long, overblown exercises in aura and style good songs. The songs on "Lincoln" are short -- there are eighteen of them on the album -- and the focus seems to be on interesting music, words and thoughts.

Their basic sound features chopped up, chunky bursts of power chords, laced together with a wide variety of keyboard and horn swirls, mostly simple bass lines, and some form of makeshift percussion, topped off by the slightly off-key, detached sounding vocals. With just two members, and a little modern recording studio technology, They Might Be Giants manage to mix up rhythms, tempos and textures more often and more effectively than just about any band with a real live rhythm section.

The results of this vary from the fairly straight-forward pop of "Ana Ng," and "Purple Toupee," to eerier songs like "Where Your Eyes Don't Go," to the simply bizarre,



Courtesy Bar None Records

like "Cowtown."

On a few songs they add more familiar sounds, like polka or night-club music, into their mix. On "You'll Miss Me," they adopt a style which might be described as nightclub-power-bubblegum-rap.

They Might Be Giants make some bizarre lyrical connections as well. "Purple Toupee" begins "Remember the year I went to camp/I heard about some lady named Selma and some blacks/Somebody put their fingers in the President's ears/It wasn't too much later they come out with Johnson's Wax." This is typical of their lyrics, as some of it very definitely makes sense, while some of it just seems like silly weirdness.

They also often create lines of lyrics in which the words and meanings seem to actually swirl around. "Lad's gal is all he has/Gal's gladness hangs upon the love of Lad," from "They'll Need a Crane" is just one good example of this. Another is found in "Mr. Me" -- "So take the hand of Mister Me

and Mister, make him glad to swim the Mister Misty sea and cease the Mister Mystery that Mister, made him sad."

In "Where Your Eyes Don't Go," one of the album's best songs, Linnel sings that "Every jumbled pile of person has a thinking part that wonders what the part that isn't thinking isn't thinking of." One of the amazing parts of their music is that Linnel is able to sing lines like these fluidly, and they can create musical structures that can contain them. Linnel actually uses the word "arboreality" in one song, without sounding awkward at all.

One thing that the lyrics of just about every song will do is to make the listener laugh out loud. But often you'll immediately feel as if you maybe shouldn't have. "Kiss Me, Son of God," the final song of the album, begins with "I built a little empire out of some crazy

See GIANTS on 10

by Brian Shellito

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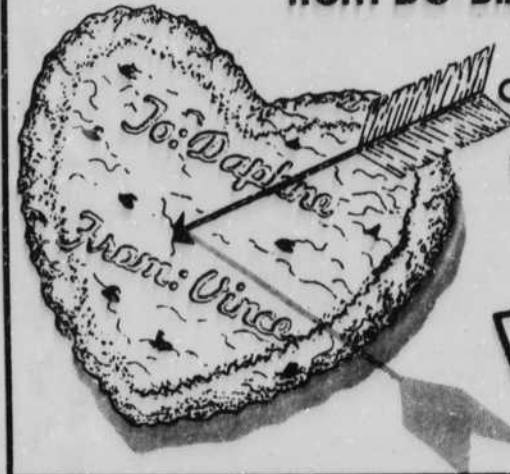
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