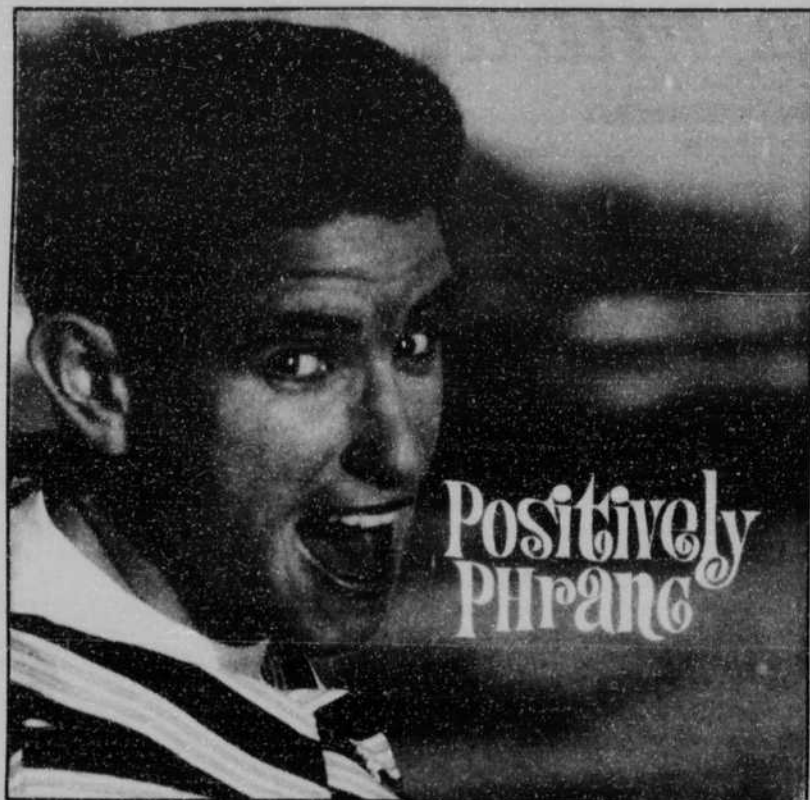


Album interesting, not great

Phranc LP's concern for issues uncommonly honest, rebellious



Courtesy of Island Records

By Carter Van Pelt
Staff Reporter

I really didn't have any idea what I was getting into when I picked this album from the A&E editor's stack of promotional CDs. I was in for a big surprise.

Some of you may already be familiar with Phranc, but I wasn't. The first thing that hit me when listening to "Positively Phranc" was Phranc's very high voice. After about three songs and a little reading of the lyrics on the liner notes, it hit me: Phranc is a she.

Lesbianism is an important theme in all of her work.

Phranc's music is nothing to scream

about from a technical point of view. Most of the tracks feature Phranc strumming an acoustic guitar and singing. If one were forced to categorize her music, it would fall under lesbian folk surfer music, an obscure category to be sure.

Her music initially reminds one of the Indigo Girls, but Phranc fails to capture the quality vocals and guitar playing found in the Indigo Girls' music. The strength of the album is in the honest lyrical content. Phranc's outspokenness of her lesbianism may turn off the record-buying public, but it is that outspokenness that is the album's main strength.

She deals honestly with her feel-



"Positively Phranc"
Phranc
Island Records
Rating: 2 1/2

Ratings are 1 (bad) to 5 (excellent).

ings about other women on tracks such as "Hitchcock," where she compares the woman she loves to actress Kim Novak from the classic film "Vertigo."

One touching song is a ballad to Billy Tipton, who was a "woman who lived as a man." Phranc's admiration of Tipton is shown with such lines as "Billy, Billy Lee, Billy/God you were brave," and "I know how people judge/and the mean things that they say/and how being a woman can stand in your way."

Another interesting song is the openly rebellious "Dress Code" in which Phranc commands, "Don't tell me what to do/... Don't tell me what to wear/... Because I know who I am/... And I'm outspoken and say that I'm a lesbian."

The album also contains an amusing tribute to writer/feminist Gertrude Stein and a beautiful all-vocal cover of the Beach Boys "Surfer Girl," which takes on new meaning when sung by Phranc and her harmonic accompanist.

All things considered, "Positively Phranc" as a musical work is not necessarily great, but it is definitely interesting. Phranc deals with issues in an honestly rebellious way that most modern rocksters don't even approach. This is admirable.

Crossing

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the club seen in Prince's "Purple Rain" and has played host to the likes of U2 and The Church. At Seventh Street, they discovered that a band was needed to play that evening, and they agreed to fill the spot.

At the show, their sound was mixed by Hüsker Dü's old sound man, who told tales of Grant Hart's heroin use and the band's demise. The show impressed the club's management, and their booking agent asked them to come back and play a show with his band.

Guitarist Adams said he felt Seventh Street "was the best gig, because it was such an energy rush (to play on the spur of the moment)."

After spending Thursday in Minneapolis, they departed for Milwaukee in the evening and arrived early Friday morning with a full day before gig at the Unicorn that evening. The band wasn't as pleased with its performance that night, which Adams said was hurt by a combination of exhaustion and too much Mexican food. Irvin blamed the free drinks.

Despite the mediocre showing, the management was impressed enough to want them to return.

The last date was set for Saturday night at Chicago's famous Medusa's. Adams said he felt it was the most interesting show mainly because of the culture.

"There were a lot of W.O.B.s (wearers of black)," Irvin said.

Most of the crowd was there to dance to recorded music and didn't

— 66 —
I know everything I need to know about how to get along with the other guys. It was a lot of hard work, but it was the good kind of hard work.

Adams, guitarist about first tour

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take much interest in a live band. "Depeche Mode could have played there live and people would have rather been listening to recorded music," Adams said.

However, the show went well enough and by that time the band had already accomplished what it set out to do. As an added bonus, they met a guy named Terry who was a former member of The Ministry, U.K. Subs and Broken Bones.

Guitarist Arsenault said he thinks the confidence level of the band has increased a lot, and all band members said they were pleased at how well they got along over the six days on the road.

"I all of a sudden noticed that we had been together four days and didn't hate each other," Irvin said.

Adams said he was encouraged by the band's tour.

"I learned a lot," he said. "I know everything I need to know about how to get along with the other guys. It was a lot of hard work, but it was the good kind of hard work."

"I definitely see a future in it, now that we know we can do it."

Morrison

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ballads to be recorded in a long time. This is great tonsil massage music.

As good as the first side is, the second is even better. Morrison's arranging is fantastic, as is his playing. These tracks contain some of the cleanest big band sounds to be laid down. One would think it would be easy to do that with overdubbing, but it really isn't. It's actually harder to get separate tracks to match up attacks and releases than it is to get a group to do it at once. Knowing this, it makes the big band tunes sound even better.

Again, Morrison demonstrates his versatility and virtuosity, soloing on many different instruments. He also plays many different styles within the big band genre. Starting off with "Le Belleclair Blues," he demonstrates great understanding of the limits and potential of the big band, using several traditional motifs from the swing era. Morrison also adds a very swinging tenor sax solo.

When Morrison switches to the big band ballad, he produces a smooth sound, second to none. His piano and alto saxophone solos are right at home and play to his strengths in the "ensemble."

The third cut on this side, an original arrangement of Antonio Carlos Jobim's "No More Blues," is just incredible. Morrison creates a euphonium "choir" to create a full, yet smooth sounding backing for his solo

work. Nothing like this has ever been heard.

On the final track, "Old Rugged Cross," Morrison perfectly re-creates the sounds of a New Orleans funeral march band. His soloing is unobtrusive, and the brass choir plays with incredible melancholy without being depressing.

Morrison's ability to solo on all the different instruments is amazing. Many people can play more than one instrument, but few can attain adequate confidence and ability to feel comfortable soloing as Morrison does. However, Morrison is most at ease when he is soloing on trumpet, as evidenced by his ability to stick a screaming G to open the album with "You Are My Sunshine." Throughout the album, the trumpet licks are more impressive and noticeable than the other instruments — but Morrison plays so well, it doesn't matter.

Maybe what makes this album work so well is that Morrison stays within himself. He never tries to do things that are beyond his ability, especially when he tries other instruments. Many jazz players seem to think that to play well, they have to have perfect technique and be able to play extremely difficult licks. Morrison realizes that the beauty of jazz is feeling and getting inside of the music, not playing higher, faster, louder.

This album has something for everyone. Morrison truly understands jazz, and he understands technology. He has embraced both, and brought them together to create a superb album steeped in tradition — but only possible in the '90s.

Arb

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makes this song scary.

Whoever told Ko Ko she should do the raps on "Cuttin' Like Jason" was wrong.

The best dance track on the album is definitely "Bump 'n' Grind." The lyrics get a little bit racy as Ko Ko raps about doing a bump and grind dance. Besides being danceable, the band uses some jazzy horns to make the tune more enjoyable.

The final song showcases band member Idris Muhammad's talents. He is otherwise known as X-Calibur. And the boy can rap. "X Marks the Spot" is made up of a great dance beat and flowing rhymes.

But once again, ARB borrows a line. Remember the old Batman series when the announcer says "the same Bat time, same Bat channel?" Well, X-Calibur alters this to "the same X time, the same X channel."

ARB's "The Hard and Soft" is an upbeat and very danceable album. Its elements come together to create a work that is, at most times, very enjoyable.

China

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soldiers on the joys of communism.

Then the trouble really begins. She is accused of being a Christian, a charge she never effectively rebuts. So she gets kicked around a bunch, almost loses the baby she's pregnant with and is forced to write a lengthy rebuttal of her Christian upbringing.

Lam is granted a visitation visa to go to Hong Kong. To assure his return, Neng Yee is forced into a labor camp until he comes back. The rest of the movie details her efforts to escape to Hong Kong with her remaining child.

The story, which probably was interesting when it first happened for real, translates poorly to the screen. It's a good idea that is poorly executed.

An entirely subjective and overused complaint about any movie is that the acting was bad, but never has such a judgment been more appropriate. "China Cry" re-defines the arena of miserably acted films. There is scarcely a believable performance in the whole movie.

Nickson-Soul and Wong are perhaps the best two actors in the show but that's not saying much. Choosing the best actor in this movie would be like choosing the best pimple on your chin. To say the acting was stilted is almost a compliment when compared to the film's other performers.

Like most American movies that involve foreign locales and foreign languages, the dialogue is in English. The problem is that the background dialogue is almost always Chinese. This results in scenes where two major characters are chatting along in English while the people around them are

speaking Chinese. This inconsistency is distracting.

The movie drags and drags, making its point far too well. It becomes obvious that some bad things happened during the revolution but the movie seems intent only on proving just how bad it was.

There are several scenes that are entirely irrelevant to the development of the main story line. In one such scene, we see an army commander fighting with one of his soldiers. Sure, he kicks the hell out of him and maybe it's really cool, but the scene has absolutely nothing to do with the rest of the movie.

The two-hour movie (though it feels like four) plods along to its totally lame ending and is entirely unsatisfying. If you desperately need to waste \$5, start that bonfire — but do not go see "China Cry."

"China Cry" is playing at the Plaza 4 Theatres, 201 N. 12th St.

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