

# MORE BRITISH BEAT: CATCHING UP WITH THE BOY; OTHER BOMBSHELLS

By Adam Block

To hear Steven Simels tell it in his insufferably smug, inaccurate and self-important new book, *Gender Chameleons: Androgyny in Rock 'n' Roll* (Arbor Books, \$12.95), "Androgyny has become just another apt attitude... as devoid of any substance and insignificant as an empty can of Diet Coke." Perhaps he ought to tell it to **Boy George** (whom he dismisses as "quite transparently a nerd, a deliberate parody of Ethel Merman") and to the antigay demonstrators in Athens who recently drove Culture Club from the stage with a barrage of abuse and beer bottles. George's response was: "Those are the same peo-



Boy George, eminently quotable and audacious as ever, with Joan Rivers and Marilyn at a recent AIDS benefit

ple who hate blacks, Jews and Asians. If I'd had a crash helmet I would've gone back on."

What Simels never deals with is the potent, ugly specter of homophobia that androgyny exposes. While it's true that cross-dressing has become a marketable pose, it is charged with substance when it is celebrated as emblematic of the right of men to sleep together. Boy George hasn't lost sight of that. Between writing and recording the next Culture Club LP (which will feature gay hero David Lasley on back-up vocals), George has been giving some increasingly brazen interviews.

In last May's *Playboy* George spoke of the insecurity of people like the thugs in Greece who "think I'm promoting homosexuality." Asked, "Should they be worried?" he replied, "Of course not. You can't make someone a queer. It's not catching, not like herpes or a cold. You cannot make somebody gay... Remember, I'm not telling people they should be like me. I'm telling people they should be whatever they are." Later he noted, "I would never go to a march for hippies or blacks or gays or straights, but I would go to a march for human beings."

Asked about sex, he said, "Kissing and fucking are the ultimate, the most intimate. Think about it: putting your tongue in someone's mouth. You are going inside somebody; somebody is coming inside you." I can't think of another pop star—forget about actors—who would have the nerve to put it quite that way.

In an astonishing interview by Stephen Saban in a recent issue of *Details*, with Marilyn egging things on, George really let rip. Consider these two excerpts.

George: ... People love Liberace for his dishonesty—

Saban: You think he's dishonest? He'll let women in the front row touch his rings, because he tells them they paid for them.

I know. But what about his chauffeur!

Oh that. I'd forgotten all about that.

Didn't we. See, that's the clever thing. It's a bit like Elton John: They fooled us all. I just find the whole thing really hypocritical. He never sorta comes out and says anything about homosexuality.

But is that important?

I think it's important, because a lot of people think they're the only person in the world going through it. I think it's educating. In this country there are people like Jerry Falwell going around telling everybody that homosexuality is a disease, that it's a tragedy. And I think it is the job of Liberace and me to step out and say it isn't. And I happen to be very well-versed on the subject of abnormal sex. I happen to have had sex with men and Jerry Falwell hasn't.

The problem in this country is that people think that gay people fuck and straight people fall in love, which is a complete and utter lie. In America people don't wanna know what you do. They can think that you're a faggot, but the minute you tell them you're one, that's when it gets really tough. I find that very unnerving.

Is there anybody you'd like to meet?

There's lots of people I'd like to have sex with, but there's not many I'd like to meet.

Who'd you like to have sex with?

I'd like to get off with Matt Dillon.

Do you think you could get off with him?

Probably. Actually, I think Marilyn probably could. He's always better at seducing people than me. I'm too coy for that. I always get too embarrassed when it comes to the crunch.

Are you and Marilyn boyfriends?

You're joking, aren't you? I wouldn't touch him with yours! We love each other... It's more a question of sisters, know what I mean? Jane Russell and Marilyn Monroe.

Marilyn has been befriended by Diana Ross and by ex-Supreme Mary Wilson, and has suggested that each may be willing to duet with him on an upcoming LP, once CBS gives him a contract. Boy George, who claims that the only book he has read is a biography of Tallulah Bankhead, is currently penning a bitchy outrage of his own, to be titled *A Parade of Assumptions*; it will be published by Crown Books. Reasons to be cheerful.

Likewise, these three terrific LPs:

*Rock 'n' Roll Gumbo* (Dancing Cat) by Professor Longhair, brings together 14 cuts recorded in 1974 by the late Henry Roeland Byrd, the master of New Orleans' barrel house piano. Revered by wonders like Dr. John and Allen Toussaint, he died four years ago. The 'Fess was a true lunatic original, inventing a style that baffled and delighted even Art Tatum. Debonair, wry and extravagant, this music can make you laugh out loud.

Don't be put off by "Burning House of Love," which sounds like "The House of the Rising Sun" reworked by Molly Hatchet. That first single from *Ain't Love Grand* (Elektra), by X, is one of the weakest cuts from a triumphant album that anchors rustic harmonies against searing guitar. Check out the Patsy Cline meets Jim Morrison rack of "My Goodness (Just Left to Make Room for You)," the raging rockabilly triumph of "What's the Matter with You," and my candidate as the '80s' answer to "I Got You Babe"—"I'll Stand Up for You," with John and Xene promising in gorgeous bluegrass harmony, "Oh, what the hell/I'd take a Greyhound bus with you." Even if you never really liked X, give this disc a chance.

*Oil and Gold* (Island) by Shriekback is the real soundtrack for *Road Warrior III*: like some artifact from the future, hungering after smeared memories of wealth, beauty, love and desire, the music itself echoing all the strands that rock has become. From the terminal white funk of "Malaria" to the elegiac Gabrielesque instrumental "Coelocanth," this is an inspired effort. Check out the chillingly poignant "Faded Flowers," with its elegantly matter-of-fact vocal, "We had some good machines/But they don't work no more/I loved you once/Don't love you anymore." J.G. Ballard meets Bryan Ferry.

On a more wholesome note, Charlie Murphy, the gay male hero of the women's music circuit, has a follow-up to his *Catch a Fire* LP, and the noble West

Virginian goes New Wave (sort of). Murphy sings with real warmth and passion on the techno-gospel "Fool for the Cause of Love," the techno-reggae "Mean Spirit" and the anthemic-melodrama "Fierce Love," which comes complete with cello. He is ably backed by his seven-person band on this three-cut 12". If you'd like to hear a truly independent gay singer-songwriter, send \$6 to: Out Front Music, P.O. Box 12188, Seattle, WA 98102. To order records by Murphy and other independent gay artists, write to: Mid-West Music Inc., 207 E. Buffalo St. #545, Milwaukee, WI 53202.

Finally: a record benefiting a British AIDS information and counseling service, The Terence Higgins Trust. The duo Coil (John Balance and Peter Christopherson, former members of *Psychic TV* and *Throbbing Gristle*) have a 12", "Panic"/"Tainted Love" (Wax Trax). Unfortunately, if appropriately, the music is harrowing and dirgey. Now if Boy George could just get together with Elton, Jimi Somerville, Frankie, David Lasley, Freddy Mercury, Luther Vandross, Sylvester, Morrissey, Tom Robinson, Marc Almond, Pete Shelley, Johnny Mathis, Sam Harris, Peter Allen and any other sympathetic talents—hell, maybe even Liberace—and put out a blockbuster AIDS benefit LP (go ahead, ring up Donna Summer), that would be one hell of a Christmas present for the planet.

I wonder how well the damn thing would sell. I know I'd buy one. And I'd love to see the video.