



ON THE ROAD AGAIN: BOYS WILL BE BOYS

by Adam Block

Seems like they finally unmuzzled **Boy George**. Sort of. I made that discovery during a molar-loosening thunderstorm in Austin, Tex. My brash little sister lured me into that maelstrom. She doesn't take no for an answer, and decided she needed company on a demented 22-hour drive down to Texas from Boulder. I was supposed to tend to the maps, while she kept her cassette deck playing the complete works of **Jackson Browne** as we rattled across barren stretches even Hands Across America would disdain.

I sustained myself with the soothing ministrations of aged bourbon, the wondrous revelations of **Peter Guralnick's** new chronicle of Southern R&B, *Sweet Soul Music*, and visions of awesome barbecue soon to be shared with sun-swacked cow-punks, and UT frat-dogs. My sister was more realistic. When things got ugly she would just slam in her cassette of *Running On Empty* and mouth along with the lyrics: "It isn't for the money. And it's only for a while." We arrived to a tornado watch.

I was holed up in this lovely bungalow when the storm cracked, in a downpour of sufficiently Biblical proportions to quash any idle fantasies about tracking down locales or locals. A foundling puppy, who my soft-hearted lesbian hostesses had rescued from the storm and christened Phranc, was played forlornly on a newspaper. In the flat next door a lesbian combo was rehearsing—or actually several lesbian combos. Dykes rule the girl groups of Austin, and in dizzying combinations.

Gretchen is one third of **Two Nice Girls** (who come up with lyrics such as, "I spent my last 10 dollars on birth-control and beer./My life was so much simpler when I was sober and queer") but this afternoon she was rehearsing with Theresa (until recently the drummer with the **Butthole Surfers**, she sings the savaged version of "American Woman" on their new *Rembrandt Pussy Horse* LP [Touch 'N' Go]). The rehearsal was a dull thud through the wall, so my friend Liz pulled out *Huge* (Wrestler), the new LP by locals **Glass Eye**—who sound like a back-porch version of the Gang of Four on mushrooms—and put on their anthem, "I Don't Need Drugs to be Fucked Up." The afternoon was coming together, but what

sealed it was flipping through a pile of new magazines to find the latest issues of *The Face* and the *New Musical Express*; both featured interviews with **Boy George**, who had been unnaturally silent of late. Perfection. Phranc peed quietly on his newspaper.

George has had a tough year. Culture Club's last album flopped; the press began openly discussing his affair with the group's drummer, Jon Moss, which was on the rocks; his nightclubbing escapades with pop's professional male-bitch, Marilyn, earned shoddy gossip.



Heartache: a tough year for the Boy

George pressed his luck and the press turned nasty. When it came time to release the new LP, *From Luxury to Heartache* (Epic), Boy George was not available for interviews. Other members of the band would talk. After a brief ride with the disc's first single, the LP fell off the charts.

The album is unfocused and busy. Flimsy trifles such as "God Thank You Woman" and "Reasons" sound totally phony, despite David Lasley's breath-taking vocal filigrees. George has called the record "a celebration of misery," but it sounds more like an uneasy retreat from the cheeky flamboyance that first made him so winning. It felt a little sad—when they finally let George talk—to find him sounding chastened, almost peevish.

He told *The Face*, "Sex is a wonderful pastime, I enjoy it more than eating. I wish I could say more but you know I

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can't. . . I don't believe in bisexuality; people use that word just as an excuse." So then how does George put it? "There are certain types of women that I fancy and there are a hell of a lot of men that I fancy."

He told the *Melody Maker*, "On a personal level, I was trying to make some kind of sexual statement [working with Culture Club]. There are a lot of things that I wanted to do that I was prevented from doing, because of my sexual tendencies and because I'm a bit of a fairy. I wanted to make statements and I wasn't allowed to."

"It was probably a good thing because it would have probably got in my way a lot more than it did. We all want to get laid occasionally and if you act like a fairy and start broadcasting certain things you lose out. So everything is a compromise and it's really annoying. There is a part of me that wants to hop-skip across Red Square in a skirt. But what's the point? . . . You push yourself into a corner and you become a victim."

I wondered if Gretchen or Theresa, thundering away gleefully next door, would ever have those problems. I doubt that **Romanovsky and Phillips** ever will. These two lovers began performing at gay clubs in San Francisco in 1982, and have since gone on to become the most successful openly gay cabaret duo in the country. They haven't gotten rich yet, but their sexuality is so tied up in their work that it would be madness for them to try to conceal it. Their second LP, *Trouble in Paradise* (Fresh Fruit Records/send \$9.50: 2269 Market #30, San Francisco, CA 94114), offers 12 cuts, road-tested and produced by Teresa Trull. Their choice of subjects, acute observations and wry wit are peerless. Unfortunately, clever novelty numbers that are wicked fun in a live show can pale at home. Worse luck: Their music and vocals seem to veer inexorably towards the cute-cute and precious. When the two sing on "What Kind of Self-Respecting Faggot Am I?": "Don't own a single record by Barbra, Bette or Judy. Heard of Bette Davis but I've never seen her movies," I don't believe it for a minute. Not with that delivery. The one powerhouse exception to this twee tone is the disc's only cover, Larry Hauluck's comic barnburner, "Must've Been Drunk." There the pair cut loose. My choice for a video!

I jetted into San Francisco in time to catch **Prince's** surprise show at the 3,200-seat Warfield, and caught him moving away from his cartoon fuck-monkey cum Jesus-screamer routines that were getting out of hand. His astonishing

2½-hour set was a prop-free, R&B review, featuring an 11-piece band that stopped and started on hair-trigger cues, weaving old and new material in routines that ranged from vaudeville dance/jive to jams that sounded like Weather Report by way of P-Funk. Prince ignored his hits from 1999 and played only the title cut from *Purple Rain*. He concentrated on his new LP, and his funk-oldies like "Head" and "Controversy"—but when he plays and sings, "Am I straight? Am I gay? Controversy!"—you know he's made sure folks aren't confused. The man outplayed his crack band in solo turns on guitar, piano and drums, and tore through stunning dance moves like an over-amped James Brown. Prince shed the smoke bombs, purple robes, salacious camp and MTV hits for this show and proved that he doesn't need any of them! OK. Scary! Now will you play a little more rock? Please?

Count as my pick of the month *So* (Geffen), **Peter Gabriel's** first new studio LP in four years. Any fan of Miami Vice's propulsive atmospherics, or Phil Collins' poignant Motown cops, needs to hear this wonder. Imagine discovering Elvis by way of Pat Boone. I'm waiting on an LP from **Two Nice Girls**, and I grabbed myself a copy of *Huge*, by **Glass Eye**, but Gabriel keeps turning up on my turntable. I'm buying a cassette of the sucker in case my sister calls to invite me on any more road trips.

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