

MAKING TRACKS: LISTENING TIPS FOR BOY GEORGE AND THE REST OF US

by Adam Block

The Pop Music Desk is in a predictable state of disarray — holed up in Seattle, preparing for imminent departure on a savage mission to the orient to track down the **Elvis Presley** cults of Thailand, and scurrilous sex clubs where young men perform acrobatic impossibilities and women juggle bananas to the strains of **Johnny Horton's** "North To Alaska." Getting equipped is not that easy. Bless **Memphis Mark**, the surly young stud who provided me with a priceless pack of The Best of Elvis playing cards (each featuring a different color portrait of a frighteningly bloated Presley) to trade with the natives, packs of matches from Her-

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nando's Hideaway (Jerry Lee Lewis' favorite white-knuckle roadhouse), fool-proof talismans against the most cold-blooded bandits, and condoms that he swears were purchased at the same gas station restroom Elvis always patronized.

The preparations are complex, but paramount amongst them has been gleaning breaking news and parting recommendations for readers of this column. After all we may not be back until **Michael Jackson** and **Whitney Houston** have released their new LPs. Isn't that special.

On the Trail of the Platinum-Throated Homos

The observant will find a recent rash of news on that small but sterling group of gay pop singers, **The Communards**. After hitting the top of *Billboard's* disco/dance

charts with their cover of "Don't Leave Me This Way," the song broke into the Hot 100, and their debut LP entered the Top 200 chart... **Sylvester** is undoubtedly hoping to follow suit, as his 12" of "Someone Like You" (Megatone/Warner Bros.) headed to the top five of the dance charts, without making any showing on the pop charts... Over in England, **The Communards'** second single, "So Cold the Night," broke the pop Top 10, edging their LP into the Top 40... Also in England, **Erasure**, featuring brazen **Andy Bell**, roared up to the #2 spot in the pop charts with a new single, "Sometimes" (Mute/UK), their follow-up to last summer's dance staple, "L'Amour." May the year 1987 prove to be the year of *The AD-VOCATE's* cover-boy! (See Issue 451.)

John Sex, one of the greatest performers of the 20th Century, got his start doing his "boy-and-his-snake" strip acts at bombed-out gay clubs on New York's Lower East Side, progressed to getting on-stage blow jobs from Leo Ford on the downtown circuit, and finally emerged as a gonzo-camp lounge singer: sort of a Pee Wee Herman-blessed cross between

Liberace and Prince. Well, Mr. Sex has finally released a 12", featuring his anthem, "Hustle with My Muscle," and backed with "Bump and Grind It." Sex also conned Tom Rubnitz into directing two videos — so finally his message can be consumed! Forget Buster Poindexter. Go to your local record store and demand Sex!

Fans of **Soft Cell**, or those who missed the great fey duo, will want to find the recently released collection of their English singles, from "Tainted Love" to "Say Hello, Wave Goodbye." It's an English import on Some Bizarre Records. The band's former lead singer, **Mark Almond**, has a freshly pressed solo LP out in the U.K. that is getting advance raves and also ought to be worth tracking down.

There is *no* new solo LP from **Boy**

George, though one has been in the can for some months. A spokesman for Virgin Records told *Rolling Stone* that they didn't want to release it until George was well enough to support the disc with videos, performances and talk-show appearances. Amidst rumors that George was back on drugs, no one wanted to name a date. The ink was hardly dry on that story when George was arrested in London Dec. 21 (with two others) for possession of marijuana. All three were released, but the next day one of them, 20-year-old **Mark Golding**, turned up dead of a methadone OD. George has been staggering through a string of

tragedies that would read like some dated, homophobic soap opera if anyone filmed them as fiction.

On a brighter note, **Tom Robinson** (the only out, major-label gay *not* to sing in falsetto) is back (after a two-year absence) with a very real triumph, *Still Loving You* (Ariola/RCA, UK); it's the most accomplished and winning album of his career. A decade back, Robinson was a left-wing, agit-rock and a darling of the British pop press. After his rapid fall from grace, his solo LPs often seemed studied and awkward. This disc turns the jinx around — but not with a radical assault.

The music is a deceptively dated pastiche of Philadelphia disco, Sade jazz, acoustic flamenco and Celtic folk, dosed with dollops of rap, ska and skiffle. Robinson marries this motley style with the wit of a music hall trouper playing his crowd. The lyrics cover some treacherous territory: turning on the failures of love, and the hunger to find it. The themes are invitations to bathos and banality, but Robinson is suddenly playing and singing with a sly confidence that is both unexpected and beguiling. Yet he's still out to upend pop expectations of what is or isn't desirable.

The album opens with "Feels So Good/Hurts So Bad," a disco vamp that (instead of celebrating the promise of sex) confronts the disappointments of jacking off. Robinson's buoyant delivery excludes self-pity, while the lyrics claim the loneliness that disco's promises of instant ecstasy exploit. The record closes with "The Wedding," a chanted narrative (that owes more to "Spill the Wine" than to "Why D'ja Do It?") — a nifty account of attending his lover's wedding — carried off with understated rage, hurt and pride. Between the two are gems like the gay elegy "You Tattooed Me" (with Peter Gabriel's Celtic-synth influence glowing behind the chorus of this romance between two gay refugees that confesses "I hardly knew what hit me when you came") and the open-throated skiffle "This Little Romance."

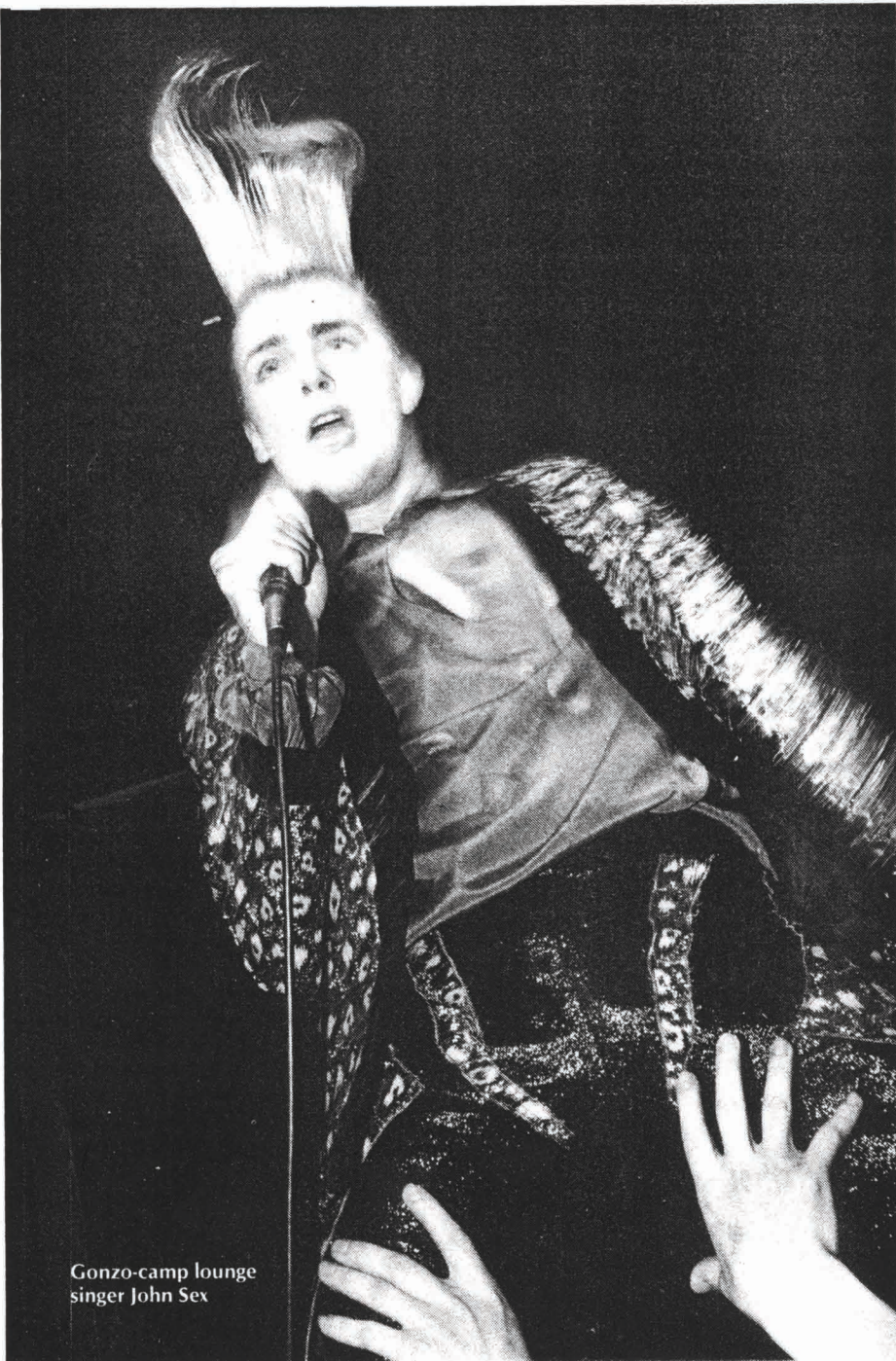
There isn't enough of the openly homo in pop for my taste, and anyone who cares about how one stubbornly forthright singer/songwriter has sustained the role and changed it will want this album. I wonder what Boy George makes of it? He might also gain some inspiration from these recent discs, all from indomitable wonders. Elvis knows I do.

Treacherous: The Neville Brothers, 1955-85 (Rhino): Art, Aaron Charles and Cyril get their due as the Crescent City's most spectacular siblings — from "Mardi Gras Mambo" in 1954 through the infectious jive of The Wild Tchaptoulis, Art's solo turn on "Zing, Zing" in 1958 and Aaron's 1966 classic, "Tell It Like It Is," on to nearly a full disc of the ensemble's Nawlins magic. This is music to make your feet, knees and butt happy.

30 Greatest Hits (1967-74), Aretha Franklin (Atlantic): The glory years, the glory cuts, from a singer as awesome as they come. Solid liner notes. An apt selection finds the lady bringing down glory from "Think" to "Until You Come Back To Me."

Play that last cut for the Pop Music Desk. And for Boy George, while you're at it.

MARC GELLAR



Gonzo-camp lounge singer John Sex