

ARTS

V O L. 6 8 N O. 1 3 9



blues beyond belief ■ *UCSB drama: dead in Paris* ■

stormy monday ■ *babette's feast* ■ *prisoners* ■

gaby ■ *midnight crossing* ■ *art studio honors*

■ *camping with beethoven* ■ *ccs senior art show*

■ *the gospel*

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BEYOND GOSPEL

They packed the audience like sardines into Lotte Lehmann Concert Hall. Mobs were turned away at the door. Spare tickets proved a hot commodity. The show was sold out before the ticket booth even opened.

You would think Prince Dixon was performing on campus.

The cause of all this commotion, however, was none other than UCSB's own Gospel Choir. Under the direction of Michael McCurtis, this extraordinary group sang, danced, stomped, slithered, and grooved its way into the hearts of the lucky people who got in to see it. From the moment when brilliantly day-glo clad performers spilled down the aisles and onto the stage, the choir vibrated a contagious, kinetic energy which had the audience dancing in its seats.

Any group which can bring a Santa Barbara theatre going audience to its feet three times in one evening has got to be pretty incredible. Delegates from the choir won the 1987 McDonalds Gospel Fest, inspiring audiences away from home as well. In a nutshell, these kids are a batch of "real bad dudes."

School Days served as the theme for this gospel musical. Skits illustrating various aspects of college life were effectively interspersed between musical numbers. These vignettes dealt with a spectrum of emotions from the fervor of a gospel meeting to the painful loss of suicide. Written by McCurtis, Karen Parks, and students in the choir, the success of these skits lay in their simplicity and the pure honesty of untrained actors. Dramatically, the show bore the hilarity and charm of a campfire skit or a Christmas pageant.

McCurtis's original gospel compositions,

rebounding off the walls of Lotte Lehmann despite a mediocre sound system, proved the high points of the program. "Revelation," featuring a memorable performance by soloist Karen Parks, reminisced about those Sundays when we spent all day in church. Parks possesses a commendably strong soprano voice. The chorus, clad in their thrift store Sunday best, gave an animated portrayal of a congregation "filled with the spirit."

The entertainment peaked with the ensemble's rendition of *Don't Let Life Get You Down*. McCurtis's piano performance and singing reflect a irrepressible vitality and love for life which left the audience cheering, and garnered a well-deserved standing ovation.

Also memorable was "Cloud Nine," featuring a quintet of slick "steppers" and a strong choral performance. Aside from a few lengthy pauses between numbers, there wasn't a bad moment in the show.

At one point, McCurtis came out and illustrated his philosophy of gospel music to the audience. He doesn't limit gospel to churchgoers raising their hands and singing to God. Gospel, to McCurtis, spans every facet of everyday life. It's always there to lift you up when you're down and help you celebrate the good times.

The heart of the UCSB Gospel Choir's success lies in McCurtis's philosophy. Its music celebrates not only religion but the pure joy of being alive. Both religious and nonreligious audience members are drawn in by the intense energy this group radiates. Its message is both simple and universal.

■ Cris Carusi

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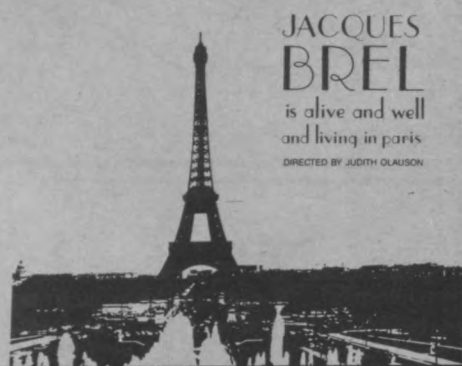
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FILM ■ FILM

Moody Monday

Too cool. That's a compliment to some, and it's a mood that *Stormy Monday* evokes so completely that I'll use the word too many times in describing it. Stylish but not quite slick, it's a perfect example of a movie you have to like at least partially because there's nothing wrong with it. Not subtle, not minimalist, but not too much going on. Cool and smooth, like classic Jazz. Maybe it's unfortunate, but thrillers are kind of like a Chinese dinner: you only hope it's as good as something you've already had and don't expect to be satisfied long after it's over.

Monday is a solid tribute to the classic style thriller. Not even vaguely original, this flick is above the current average because it doesn't screw itself up by throwing in a bunch of ideas that upset the formula. As most thrillers go, it must rely on the virtue of proximity; the good method is when people seem to keep running into each other, the bad is when bullets seem to keep missing the heroes by inches. New stud Sean Bean, just moved to Newcastle from Ireland, knocks into Melanie (*Something Wild*) Griffith, then finds himself working for jazz club owner Sting who is refusing to deal with cool and cruel American shady businessman Tommy Lee Jones, who has Griffith working for him.

It's not very confusing, and neither is the movie. That's bad if you need tons of suspense and intrigue, but you should know that newer thrillers that try to be too thrilling can never figure a decent way to work out their nasty little messes; the endings usually leave you hating a flick that was 90 percent good. In other words, it's not as bitchin' as *No Way Out* or *Fatal Attraction*, but you don't get all worked up just to get let down.

This movie is just bitchin' looking, with cool characters and cool lines creating a slow, sultry mood that makes for great diversion. Sting is the coolest, tightly brushing off everyone while never failing to catch and react perfectly to anything that might affect him. Bean is the romantic interest, though, and the girls will love him for his sweet and sweaty mind once adjusted to his deep eyes and toned pecs. Jones is solid as the heavy — evenly delivering each vicious order easily enough to work for Coca-Cola or the CIA. After *Something Wild*, I was so in love with Melanie Griffith I knew I couldn't be satisfied until I met a girl that wild with legs that long. Here she's not as kooky or as blatant, yet just as sexy, thereby embedding her image more deeply in my heart. Those lips, those eyes, those hips, those thighs; she's tough and tender, the not-even-innocent girl who's a bigger prize because she's been around and needs to stop, and you keep begging "Stop here!"

Between all of them you start to wonder if everyone can always speak with such smooth assurance; it's just a very cool, very British movie, with classic style and grace. I liked it better than most people I know, who can't agree with using the word cool eight times in one review. I say sorry, but I say check it.

■ Jesse Engdahl

Imagine This

Gaby: A True Story could be considered a stepping stone effort. As filmmaking, director Luis Mandoki's movie breaks no new ground — but the subject matter itself is revolutionary enough to be called bold. Film producers have a hard enough time raising funds for mainstream crash-and-burn or comedy flicks, but the fact that *Gaby*, about the life of a brilliant woman living in a body made near functionless by cerebral palsy, even made it to the wide screen is further proof that age-old Hollywood barriers to originality and so-called 'touchy' subject matter are tumbling down.

Gaby is a triumph for the physically challenged in particular, a group of people historically made social lepers in Western culture. Even main character Gabriella Brimmer mentions that in ancient Roman culture the handicapped or disfigured were cast off high mountaintops, thus 'eliminating' their presence in society. In *Gaby*, the main character's search for love and equality in a world not much changed in such attitudes is an almost impossibly uphill struggle.

The story takes us to the upper-class Brimmer household in Mexico City where, we assume, all life had been quite ordinary. *Gaby's* mother and father (Liv Ullman and Robert Loggia) had one child that was not afflicted by disorder. But days after *Gaby's* birth, it was discovered that she was not the "perfect little girl" she appeared to be. Although the child's cerebral palsy had not affected her intellectually, she would grow up mute and with control of only her left foot. The mounting costs of doctor bills and therapy lead the father to exclaim to his wife: "We don't have a child. We have a problem."

Rachel Levin is cast in the title role, a woman herself once paralyzed by a rare disease but since completely



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recovered. Levin portrays such a convincing c.p. victim that she would most certainly convince any person with or without this affliction, and herein lies one of the film's greatest feats. Levin is a woman striving for what "normal" people take for granted: affection, a love life, treatment equal and vital to any other human being. One of the film's greatest accomplishments is the true depiction of the sexual needs of handicapped people. Seeing Gaby with her boyfriend during an intimate moment in this film should be an eye opener for those people that may not have even considered the fact that the handicapped have all the emotions of healthy people. It is a revelation, I believe, the film makers most desperately wanted to convey.

All this does not mean that the film is perfect. Some of the supporting roles were marred by spotty and halting acting, and director Mandoki's use of the wide-angle and deep-focus lens sometimes keeps the viewer away from some of the actors. Some viewers may not even like the acting styles of Ullmann and Norma Aleandro, who plays Gaby's constant companion and nanny. These characters are extensions of Gaby: silent, communicating with emotion surfacing in controlled facial expressions. Yes, these are "deep" actors that don't play favorites with mainstream movie audiences. For me, though, Aleandro is wonderful in her portrayal. Enough questioning about its necessity; this movie is good enough to check out.

■ Tim Hoffman

Don't Stay Up

Q: What do you get when you put big name celebrities such as Faye Dunaway and Daniel J. Travanti in a movie that has a terrible script, hazy cinematography, multiple close-up shots of healthy breasts, gallons of stage blood, and inane editing?

A: *Midnight Crossing*
Midnight is past my bedtime.

■ Matt Klein

Free Minds

The life that we lead in this beautiful beach town can sometimes be restricting. The hustle of being a student is one of schedules and responsibilities. Where is the freedom? In *Prisoners*, a documentary by Jonathon Borofsky and Gary Glassman, the dream of having the freedom to be and do as one pleases is addressed by 32 inmates at San Quentin State Prison, the California Institute for Women and the California Rehabilitation Center. These people, a term that is often ignored when talking about rapists and murderers, reveal how they live both in and out of the prison walls. This is an innovative film because it portrays prisoners as artists, a shocking realization for the viewer who considers criminals as purely unintelligent and uncreative.

Borofsky and Glassman have brought their cameras to these facilities to create a portrait of the people who live behind bars. The politics of crime are avoided to talk to the prisoners, many who feel that the life they lived before entering prison "was a fantasy rather than a reality." For these prisoners the experience of being incarcerated has provided an opportunity to examine their lives. The movie shows the positive and creative alternatives that are available to all of us. The prisoners are depicted as painters, poets, and musicians rather than criminals. The artwork of these men and women, as good as anything produced on the streets, offers a valuable look at the cruel world that they are part of.

Prisoners addresses the problems that result in the detention of these people. Drugs, parental neglect, child abuse and the lack of positive role models are reasons for rebelling against the system. Each of the prisoners interviewed is aware of the situation they are in, many feel trapped in this system and use their prison time for the same type of growth that college life takes for granted. Borofsky and Glassman show that the people in prison are the same as those outside of prison.

The freedom to live is the impetus behind this film.

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of the prisoner

FILM ■ FILM

Foreign Oscar

You are invited to a feast consisting of turtle soup, caviar and sour cream accompanied by champagne; for the main course, *cailles en sarcophage* (quails in a coffin for the French-impaired). Don't worry, these culinary delights won't break your diet. *Babette's Feast* is a non-caloric yet delectable film, justly deserving the honored Oscar for best foreign film.

Taken from a story by Isak Dinesen (the woman who wrote *Out of Africa*), *Babette's Feast* is the tale of two pious Danish women, Martina and Philippa (Birgitte Federspiel and Bodil Kjer) who, through bizarre circumstances, acquire a French servant named Babette (played with precision by Stephane Audran). Director Gabriel Axel has adapted Dinesen's tale into a light, yet cerebral cinematic fable: When Babette wins ten thousand francs in the lottery, she decides to prepare a feast for the village parishioners as a parting gesture. The old prudes equate this feast to a "witches Sabbath," and Martina even has tortuous dreams about the wine which will be served. But, since they love Babette, the sisters decide to keep their mouths shut and "join together and pray that their tongues will have not taste" for the sinfully (literally) delicious food.

The beauty of this feast lies not so much in the response Babette will get from the village's old crogies, but rather in her own desire to express herself as an artist. We learn that, in Paris, Babette had been a master chef. Circumstances beyond her control forced her to leave Paris and thus give up her life's passion. If she were a dancer, the feast would be like her last great performance. With the fulfillment of this dream comes eternal gratification, for "an artist is never poor."

Obviously, *Babette's Feast* would not be palatable for those who can only be entertained by action and adventure. Instead, the film moves gently forward to the climactic "feast scene," with a funny absurdity making it well worth the wait.

A major part of the film builds upon a subtheme based on the question of whether spiritual peace or worldly success is more important. The film does not offer an easy solution, which is realistic in this grey world of contradictions and uncertainty. What *Babette's Feast* does teach us is that, whatever your choice, "mercy is infinite;" it "imposes no conditions." This leaves us free to live as we please. The choice is ultimately up to you. Bon appetit!

P.S. Bring your glasses because, yes Virginia, there are subtitles. (This does not apply to those who are fluent in Danish and French.)

■ Lisa Ornelas

Borofsky states "Why did I go to talk to prisoners?...They make us lock our doors...and worry about our own safety as well as the safety of the people we love. They create fear. But I know these people are human beings — not that different from myself. It is a problem that can be corrected through communication. "If you understand...there is a better way, a right way, a correct way, then you can apply that" states one prisoner.

Prisoners presents a positive view of criminals by showing that prisoners are not all psychopathic, many are just victims of the harsh system they were raised in. For these people prison is a place where they can actually grow; energy is used creatively rather than focused on personal and social destruction. As one prisoner sings at the end of the film, you can't find peace without love and that love can either be directed toward people or material treasures. Borofsky and Glassman show that people want a lot of things; the freedom to create being the most valuable possession of all. This is one thing that we can have in or out of prison, it's just a matter of finding that freedom.

■ Matt Klein

"If you give up, it's just as well — you never would have made it anyway."

James Coco
(SPY Magazine)

"Don't try."

Charles Bukowski
(SPY Magazine)

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PEANUT BUTTER ART

art studio honors and ccs senior show

The abstractions of this century's art has created a twofold dilemma for the art student. Nothing is shocking and new is an irrelevant term coinciding only with the date. How do you define and give significance to the compounds of freedom and individuality in art that the age of shockless has created?

With student art, the problem of relativity is easier to pass off as the immaturity of a "growing" artist. Hence, we have the current art studio Honors Exhibition at the UCen Gallery. It's not that the first part of this two-part show, which will be up until the end of the month, is particularly bad — worse, it's rather noteless.

Charles Kern's large nude figure studies are perhaps the most distinctly talented of the exhibit. Though his drawings are referable emblems of an art nude figure "study," Kern does attempt to get at the psyche

of his models, particularly the "Figure Platforms (Short Fight)" and "(Isla Vista Ghost)." Using a chalky white crayon with the traditional blacks and sepia colors in the figure platforms, which are set projected off the wall, and brilliant garish hues of lemon, lime, reds and flesh for the movement studies, Kern's larger than life-like pieces are simply bold.

I've never liked Sonya Knapp's largely tacky symbolic oil paintings, but her layered color photo work in this exhibit is an interesting progression for her mixture of thought and reality. It is less the treatment of the medium that is distasteful about Knapp's work, for her painter's hand is often lively and her figures' faces often infused with light. Rather, it is her ultra-symbolic subject matter of horses with im-

pressionistic melting manes and repetition of doves representative of the attempt to imply a psychological impact to an emotionless realism that represents a typical force of blatant California art.

Alma Lorena Lopez applies a similar concentration on symbolism as Knapp, though her study of jalapenos is less obvious. In a large wall memorial to a grandmother figure cutting the vegetable in a kitchen, Lopez uses a repetition of the jalapenos and candles in paintings as well as mounted on the wall. It's rather ambivalent if jalapenos don't mean anything to you, though their reflective representation to Lopez can't let go of the work. Unfortunately, the painted, texturized background works against the scratchy texture of the black monotypes which are more individually

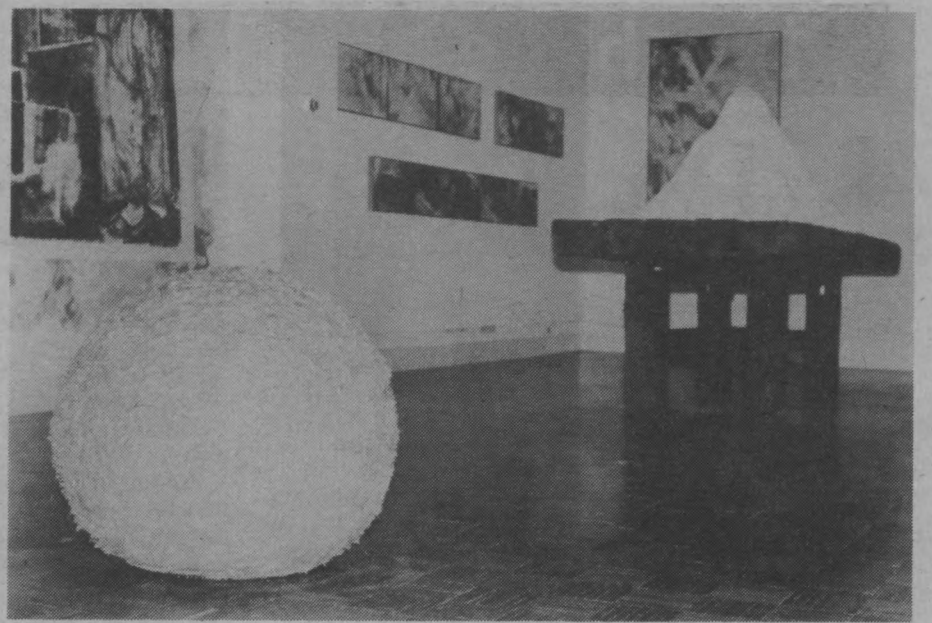
appealing than on a repetitious whole.

Like the movement of Kern's ultra-lifelike colored figures, Clint Yamaoka's art reverberates the sounds and impressions of Isla Vista. What kind of art student covers a beach ball with peanut butter or dumps a poundage of flour on top of a

by Laurie McCullough

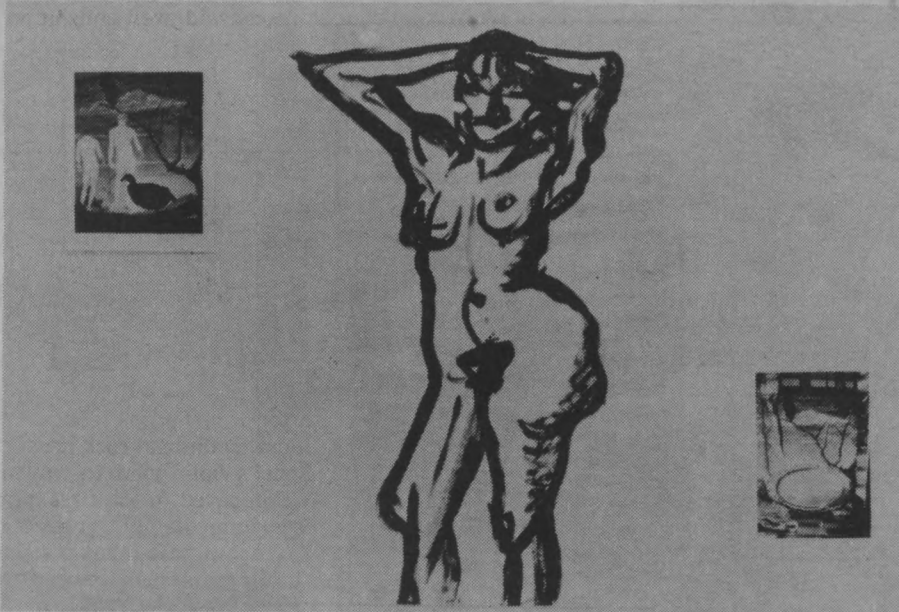
table made with railroad ties and doesn't live in I.V.? The creation of the here and now (see photo) is what I love about Yamaoka's work in this exhibit. The very absurd nature of peanut butter art blocks out any questions of relevance here, though Yamaoka's other works are close enough to an unconnected reality to be almost problematic.

Yamaoka succeeds because he uses the everyday symbol of peanut butter — I mean in one thought how many connections can you make with that unique stuff — rather than attempting to create the representative with Greek statues, birds and fruit. Nancy Hanover's senior show at the College of Creative Studies (on exhibit until Saturday) suffers from the same overly symbolic attempt. The most interesting aspect of the show is the actual presentation of groups of painted and photographed still-lives. Stale in its tradition and medium treatment, the most evocative works of Hanover's are the self-portraits which must say something about the life of the student artist.



Peanut butter lush and table with flour are edible at UCen Gallery.

Nude in black paint is part of Nancy Hanover's senior exhibit.



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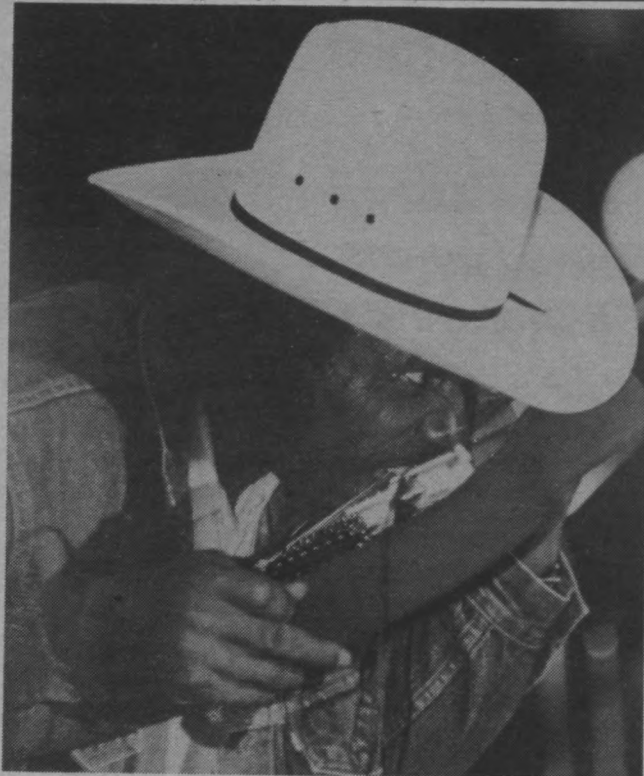
I.V. BLUES FESTIVAL

What happens when the poor blues get rich?

The rise of the blues in pop culture has signaled its own demise as could be clearly seen at the Graduate Blues Festival on Tuesday night. The price of success is often the loss of integrity and the blues will rue the day they played under the track lighting and air conditioning of the Grad.

In the olden days of course, the blues were played in the proverbial smoky bar or at a small county fair or at a jam session in somebody's living room. Whether it was the sad bluesy blues or some kick out the jam good time music, it always captured some damn strong emotions. The blues were (and are) a powerful expression of down to earth people struggling to survive in a hostile environment: the poor and black in America. This has all been said before.

The reason I rehash the past is because things seem to have changed for the worse in recent years. Somewhere in the 80s that irrepressible baby boom generation glommed onto blues as "the next big thing." Blues festivals became hip, blues clubs were overrun by yuppies and college students and money started flowing into the scene. Crossover bands like The Fabulous Thunderbirds and Robert Cray made it to the top 40 and beer companies jumped on the band wagon. All of a sudden every Coors, Miller and Bud jingle had that "authentic" sound and Bruce Willis tried to associate himself



by Christopher Scheer

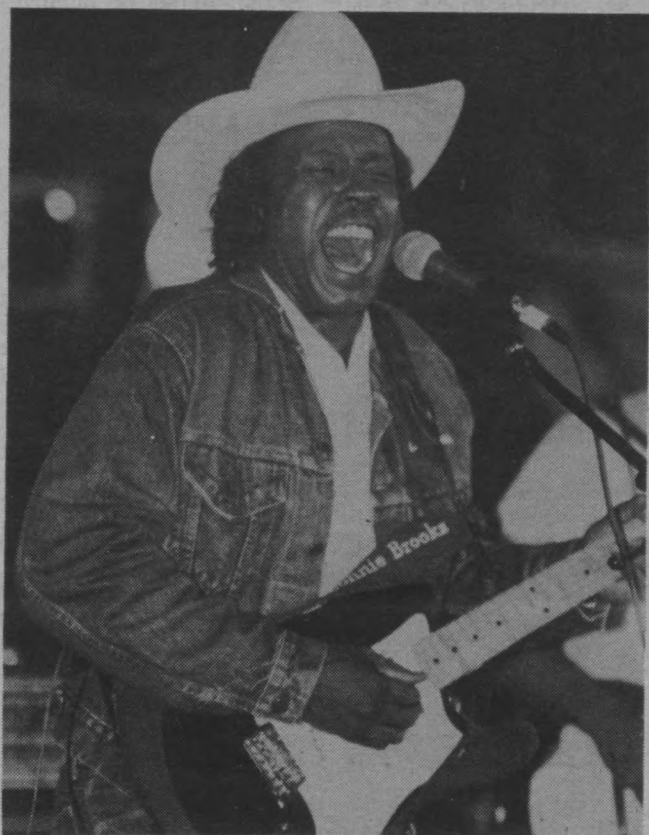
white people can't play the blues, in fact the mysterious white woman who jammed with Hooker's band turned in some of the finest moments of the night. Just not these particular white people. I mean I'm sure the Pontiacs have felt pain or some other emotion but they certainly weren't conveying it to me. I felt like playing foosball, that's how wrought up the Pontiacs got me.

Not everything can be blamed on the new found semi-wealth of the performers and the catering to a new young and whitebred audience. Part of the problem rests on the narrow little shoulders of the Graduate. The blues are inexorably connected to the setting one sees them in. It doesn't have to be a cliched blues bar but it should have some character, some soul, something to make you feel comfortable. The Graduate is a former bank for god sakes. Its antiseptic bigness, its overzealous bouncers and the video games lining the walls take away the underlying power of the blues. The idea of "soul" leaves the stage and echoes back with a shallowly boisterous "party."

The point is that some no-name band in some no-name bar with heart can pierce a moment so good and true in a way that Johnny "Clyde" Copeland didn't do despite his credentials and despite playing for the "biggest dance floor between LA and San Luis Obispo." The Blues are a transient mood, not a familiar series of chord changes. Somewhere that mood survives and you'll know it when you see it.

Photos by Laura Jelliffe

Lonnie Brooks (far left, left) and Johnny "Clyde" Copeland (below).



with Blues legend Albert Collins. The blues have cashed in and the Grad reeked of cold cash money on Tuesday, a distracting smell which fits right in here in Santa Barbara.

I'm not going to condemn Johnny "Clyde" Copeland and Lonnie Brooks for their shameless hustling of Miller Genuine Draft. I won't whine endlessly about Johnny Lee Hooker's feel good party set designed for a Grad style crowd, a set which gave short shrift to the wonderfully painful boogie sound Hooker practically invented. I'm not a purist. Hooker's keyboardist can flashily play with his elbow if that's what he's into. After years of laying in semi-obscurity for very little money these guys all deserve a piece of the lime light. They're owed something.

What one realizes though, is that to a certain extent they're still getting screwed. When Copeland sang the Miller theme song ("I gotta play it," he said in a resigned voice that captured the blues more than any of the music he was playing.) it was one of the saddest signs of slavery I've seen in a long time. Here was one of the great guitarists around — listen to his work on "Showdown" with Robert Cray and Albert Collins — forced to destroy the entire rhythm of his set to grovel through a squeaky clean version of "It's as real as it gets, no other reason for the way I feel... It's as real as it gets." He didn't have to do it someone said, well bullshit on that. He had to do it just as sure as he had to play the blues in the first place. It's the nature of things and it's fucking ugly.

It wasn't just the overt signs of prostitution — like Lonnie Brooks picking up his beer and going "wow, sure is time for some of that Miller beer, mmm delicious" — it was the more subtle signs of dilution of soul which permeated the whole night. The Pontiacs for example. I'm not of the opinion that



CAMP ON MY BEETHOVEN



We've got two vans now ...

My first listen to *Our Beloved Revolutionary Sweetheart*, (the new long-player from those darlings of the college/-alternative circuit, Camper Van Beethoven) was a confusing one. Having become accustomed to Camper's countrified, low-budget style splattered with liberal doses of intentionally fake ethnic music (courtesy of exhibitionist/multi-instrumentalist Jonathan Segel), the more straight-ahead rock production of *Sweetheart*, complete with a full-size recording budget and big-league guitar and drum sounds, just had me plain ol' perplexed.

Oh, here's the answer, on the back of the sleeve. They're now on Virgin Records and produced by Dennis Herring (Timbuk 3 and the Lords of the New Church). Why in the

world would Camper move to a major label when they have their own record label Pitch-A-Tent?

"(The reason) why I wanted to change," singer/guitarist David Lowery told me, "was because I felt we were getting kinda stuck in this little circuit, or rut, of the independent (record) stores. We wanted our records to be available (to the mainstream public). It's not like we wanna be big like U2, or even Midnight Oil."

The LP has a lot more depth and feeling to it than Camper's previous releases. The songs, as usual, span a vast range of styles, from a Zeppelinesque instrumental ("Waka"), to full-on experimental psychedelia ("She Divines Water"), to pure pop ("Life is Grand"), to a light-hearted

attack on Sixties' relics ("Turquoise Jewelry"). Though more traditional rock production values pervade the album, Segel's violin winds its way in and out like a snake.

Compared to the first album, *Sweetheart* is less simple, less immediately accessible. Says Lowery, "We tried to make it as difficult as possible to pick a single off the record. Our first record has more pop stuff on it than this one."

by Nick Krest

But he'll also admit to an interest in reaching beyond their current audience: "We've never considered ourselves completely an underground band. We've kind of also always appealed to other people, too." He discounts any theories of the band "selling out" in any way: "We're making exactly the music we want to make. It's not like we changed anything (about) what we're doing."

David doesn't have to justify anything to me; it took several listens, but I really like *Sweetheart* now. And that wasn't just an accident. Ultimately, the biggest difference between the new album and the earlier records is in the feel of the songs. The new LP doesn't have that one- or two-dimensional attitude, due to the way the Campers recorded it.

"We'd play all the songs (differently), every day, for a week (on tape), until we had absolutely bitchin' tracks. We had one version of every song that was great."

So, all said, the Campers begin the *Sweetheart* tour tomorrow, rolling into I.V. Sunday night for a CISPES benefit at Borsodi's. Don't look for a convoy of tour buses and equipment trucks, though: "We've got two vans this time. Last time it was a van and a station wagon. We're totally low-key about this touring business."

Low-key or not, don't miss the opportunity to see the debut of a dozen or so great new songs. And in the next week or so, a video for "Eye of Fatima, part one" should be popping up on MTV and elsewhere.

As for *Our Beloved Revolutionary Sweetheart*, it's already one of mine. I give it an eight (out of 10).



THE ONLY PLACE YOU CAN SEE BELLY DANCING IN I.V. IS BORSODI'S. CHANDRIKA Tomorrow, Friday, May 20, 9 p.m. Only \$3.50. (If we are incorrect and you can see it elsewhere please inform us here at aBe.)



