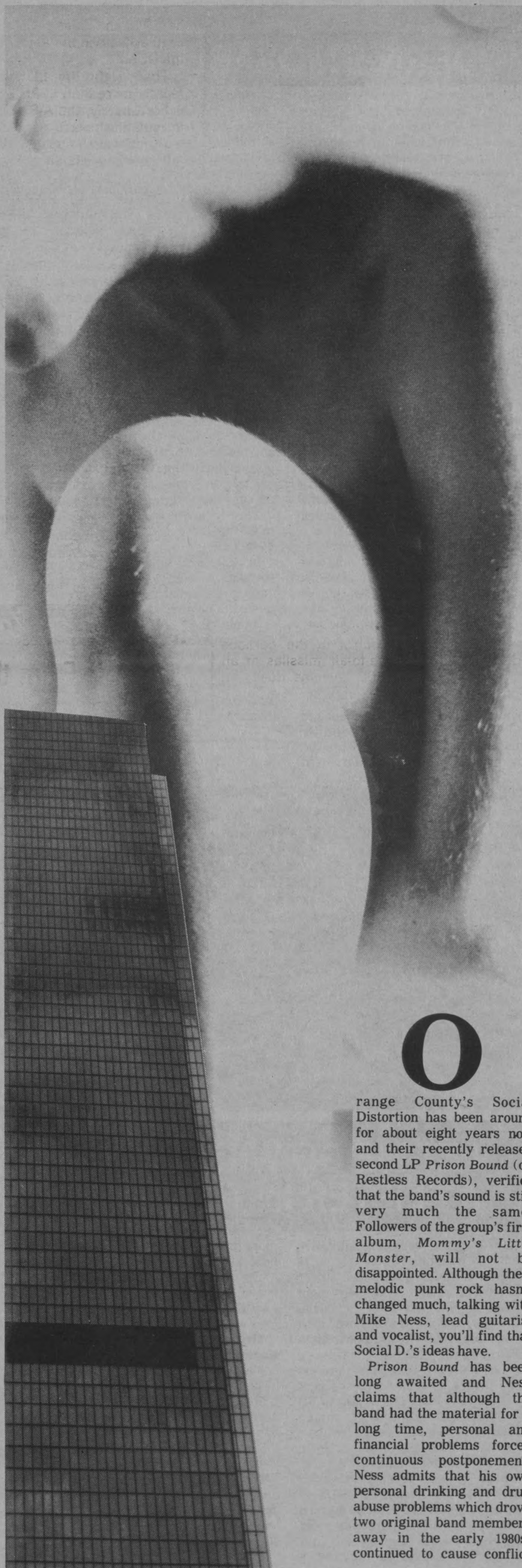


# ARTS

# DISTORTION

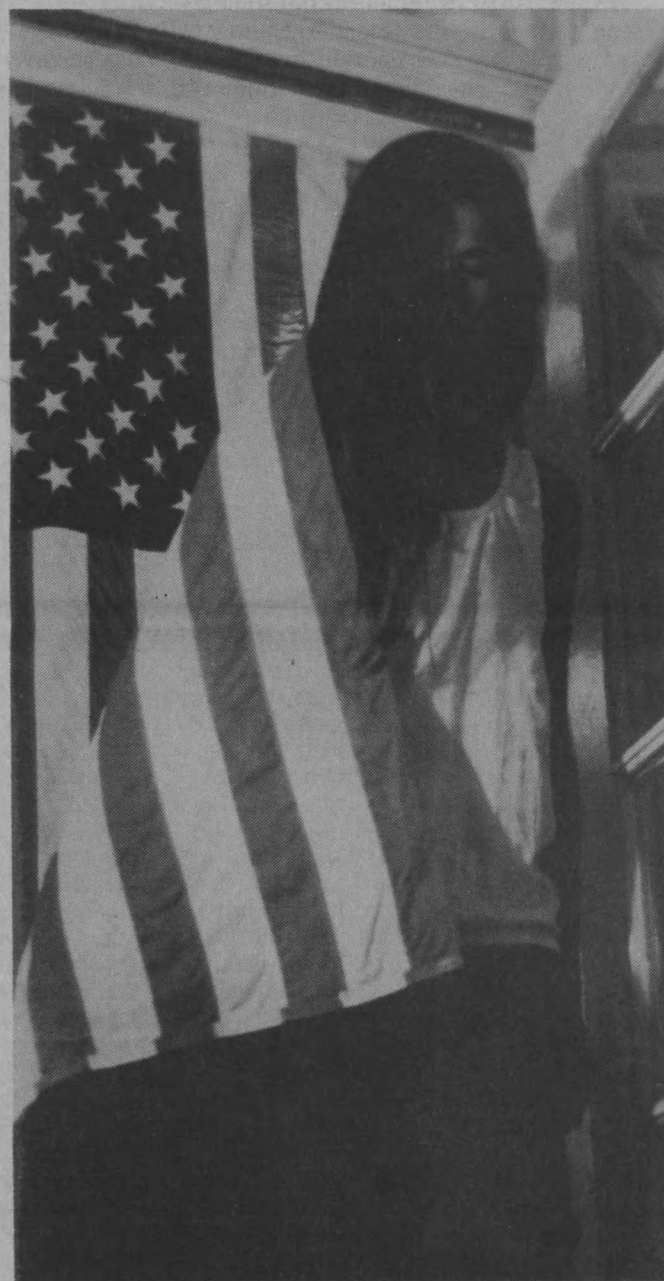
interview



with the newer bassist and drummer. "I was strung out on drugs.... It was hard enough for us to show up for gigs, let alone put out a record," Ness said sniffing and coughing from L.A. last week. Labeled a former heroin addict, Ness claims he really has converted his lifestyle and cleaned up his act. "I was in and out of county jail almost 10 times.... I had a \$100 a day habit so I had to get money somehow.... I had to do crimes ... this involved burglaries, receiving stolen merchandise.... I've also been arrested for being under the influence." All the felonies he was arrested for were brought down to misdemeanors, with the longest stay he spent in jail being two weeks. Yet at these times, Ness claims that "when forced to kick heroin cold turkey (in jail) even five days is an eternity...." Finally, he'd had enough of it, and decided it was time to alter his ways. The band members had always been good friends and Ness says, "ever since I got clean, all our attitudes have started to change."

On their first album, Social Distortion mentioned "a special thanx to the punk scene who we helped build and who helped build us." Ness says those days (represented in a song, "Kids of the Black Hole," by a brother band, The Adolescents) were "a bitchin' period of my life. I have no regrets or remorse of my past; it was necessary to get where I am today." But.... "Things are different now" for 26-year old Ness, who says "it's hard for me to relate to slam dancing in 1988." When Social D. plays shows, the kids "can dance on the floor all they want. But we don't let the kids up on stage — it's as simple as (Open cover to back page)

**O**range County's Social Distortion has been around for about eight years now and their recently released second LP *Prison Bound* (on Restless Records), verifies that the band's sound is still very much the same. Followers of the group's first album, *Mommy's Little Monster*, will not be disappointed. Although their melodic punk rock hasn't changed much, talking with Mike Ness, lead guitarist and vocalist, you'll find that Social D.'s ideas have. *Prison Bound* has been long awaited and Ness claims that although the band had the material for a long time, personal and financial problems forced continuous postponement. Ness admits that his own personal drinking and drug abuse problems which drove two original band members away in the early 1980s, continued to cause conflict



by Beth Allen

photography by  
Jennifer Ellis-Nolte



## IMMIGRATION LAXATIVE

Eddie Murphy suffers from his own invincibility. In films like *Beverly Hills Cop* and *Trading Places*, the audience never has much doubt that in the end, Murphy will prevail over all his opposition. It's nice to have a capable hero, but Murphy's characters are generally such all-around studs that they strain the credibility of the movie. The scenes that best exemplify this problem were in *Beverly Hills Cop*. Murphy was a scrawny man who could clobber pugnacious goliaths. He was a street cop who had better aim than glamorous Beverly Hills marksmen. The filmmakers, and perhaps the star, were never satisfied to allow Murphy simply to be the funniest man in the frame; he had to be the baddest character conceivable.

*Coming to America*, Murphy's latest offering, tries to resolve the comedian's problems by making him a relatively simple, straightforward character. Murphy plays Akeem, the Crown Prince of Zamunda, a small, fictional and astonishingly prosperous African nation. Akeem has recently turned 21, and that means he will meet his prearranged bride (Vanessa Bell), a woman raised with one purpose in mind: serve Akeem. Akeem, however, has somehow developed a sense of humility and modernity during his formative years. He's tired of living in what looks like leftover sets from the Liv Ullmann remake of *Lost Horizon*. He doesn't want to be obeyed; Akeem wants a modern, thinking woman as his loving companion on the throne. With this in mind, Akeem sets off for Queens, NYC with his faithful but snobbish sidekick, Semmi (Arsenio Hall). There, the Zamundan twosome masquerade as poor students working at a McDonald's clone and living in a slum. Needless to say, Akeem finds true love through various misadventures.

The messages of *Coming to America* are pretty banal: money isn't everything, love conquers all, etc. Then again, nobody goes to an Eddie Murphy film in search of spiritual enlightenment. People do go to Murphy films for displays of the star's erratic but very real talent. In *Coming to America*, there's very little of that talent in evidence. Murphy is so intent on playing a

nice guy that he rarely pushes himself to be funny. He speaks in a soft-spoken version of an African accent and lets quasi-jokes collapse all around him. Unless hearing Eddie Murphy quote Nietzsche is your idea of fun, there is little to enjoy in his portrayal of Akeem.

Besides Murphy's sleepwalking performance, there are aspects of *Coming to America* that are just plain disturbing. The film has received some notice for letting Murphy work with a predominantly black cast. However, there are nasty overtones of racism in the Zamunda segments. In addition, the black people in Queens are seen as grasping (Murphy's boss, played by John Amos), lazy and dishonest (Murphy's romantic competitor, Eriq LaSalle), and manipulative (the boss' promiscuous daughter, Allison Dean). The film also tries to make some oblique statement for feminism: women should have opinions, not just serve men. However, there are few scenes where Director John Landis doesn't let the cleavage parade fill the screen. There is, in fact, one protracted sequence where the audience is asked to laugh while Murphy makes his prospective bride bark like a dog. If Landis and Murphy really felt that women deserve respect, why would they try to squeeze laughs out of such degradation? And, even if *Coming to America* pretends to tell the audience that money isn't everything, one can't walk away from the film without thinking that even Akeem's true love, Lisa (Shari Headley), was bought off. The film's platitudinous sentiments are just vehicles for baser concerns.

*Coming to America* is saved from the disaster by one factor. It is (surprise!) the improvisational genius of Murphy and Arsenio Hall. These two comedians, who cut their teeth in clubs, were probably as frustrated with their boring characters as the audience is, and thus took on small supporting roles. Through the magic of modern makeup and editing techniques, Murphy and Hall appear as elderly black barbers, an old Jewish man and other colorful characters. Murphy pulls off one of

by Michael Singer

his greatest triumphs as a mimic when he portrays Randy Watson, a Barry White-style crooner with a year's supply of Posner products on his head, belting out a hilarious rendition of "The Greatest Love of All" while fronting his four-piece, Sexual Chocolate. It's a great moment, a powerful reminder of Murphy's abilities. It's not, however, enough to sustain a lifeless movie like *Coming to America*.

All of this will probably not deter Murphy's minions. There are funny moments in

*Coming to America*, and you may find yourself repeating a joke or two for the benefit of friends. Your friends will no doubt have heard the best jokes in a commercial or preview, so don't waste your breath. The humor is generally packaged and dead on arrival. Giving Eddie Murphy, the biggest star of his generation, an element of vulnerability is a worthy goal. Watching comedic emasculation like *Coming to America*, however, makes one wonder if it's possible.

## MODERN'S MOVABLE FEAST

*The Moderns*, the most recent creation of director Alan Rudolph, is yet another example of the film genius of one of the greatest working American film makers. It is a film of both wit and style, accomplishing the rare feat in cinema of being able to effectively combine the sublime with the ridiculous. Especially now, in the midst of the summer glut of big studio and big production movies, a film such as *The Moderns* is like a cool (and I mean hip) breeze; it neither talks down to you or tries to merely dazzle you with pyrotechnics.

Unless you are a cineophile, you may not have seen or recognize any of Alan Rudolph's other works. Most notable of his creations is *Choose Me*, an unusual piece which used ensemble-style storytelling reminiscent of Robert Altman's *Mash* to explore high-minded and non-commercial concepts of lost identity and contemporary lovers' inability to commit. More recently he entered into the mainstream with the overlooked *Made In Heaven*, a film worth viewing if only for its surrealist images of the inner-workings of Heaven. What sets Rudolph apart as a great film maker is the intelligent humor and sexiness with which he develops his plots and characters.

*The Moderns* is a definitive example of Rudolph's talent and is probably his best work to date. Set in 1926 Paris, it follows the struggles of some of the lesser known members of the 'movable feast', the bohemian artist clique whose members included Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway. The time was one of those rare spots in history which is self-contained by its unique style and burst of creativity and passion — something akin to the '67 summer of love, a time you get to read about and wish you could have been part of. The center of the story is the love triangle between the struggling artist (the underworked Keith

Carradine) and the industrialist (*The Last Emperor's* John Lone) over the woman who loved and betrayed them both (Linda Fiorentino). It's one of the sexiest and most photogenic love triangles to ever grace the screen.

And yet they are only part of the bigger story as director Rudolph creates a collage of a crowd who liked to call themselves modern, but who were ironically being swept away by the force of time. The camera pans across the scenes, catching bits and pieces of conversations of the famous and the not so famous; from Hemingway trying to decide if he should coin the phrase 'portable picnic' or 'movable feast' to Parisian wannabes wondering if they too are one of the hip. The juxtaposition of those who are on the inside with those who are not raises the issue of validity; who is valid and who do we in turn begin to consider invalid in a media-crazed world? Rudolph frames the characters' actions in a highly artificial style with documentary film from the 20s filling in the geography, and modern art paintings making up backgrounds out of windows. But the artificiality is more than a clever way to make up for a less than Hollywood-sized budget.

In choosing a story based in a time that thought of itself as the peak of history, calling itself modern, Rudolph seems to be making a comment on our own time. In one instance the film becomes a mirror, allowing the audience to see their own self-conceits when the crowd of a cafe in 1926 is transformed into a crowd from the 80s, a group who might be so self-conscious as to call itself post-modern (whatever that means).

By Adam Liebowitz



## LET ME GO WILD LIKE A BLISTER IN THE SUN

It was blistering this week at a club called The Cover Girl posed on Sunday nights as Lectisternium in middle-of-nowhere Culver City. On the end of the week holy night troops flock to this haven of industrial music. And this week it was to see two Santa Barbara acts who make more appearances in L.A. than at home.

Because of the ugly conflict of interest code ARTS dearly upholds and respects, I can only describe A POLITIQ as two UCSB students, synthetic noise, drapery, paints, slides, and a knife. But last week's featured poet LA LOCA called mover Keith York, who's regularly featured on the ARTS' rock-roll last page "the very best of his kind."

Solo soul Plecid who lives in SB as David Woodard played a soaring guitar to his own mixed backing track of whispering synths and enthroning rhythms. He sings as well in a kind of David Sylvian pain, but the air was

more truth than sorrow or morbidity. Why is he locked up on State Street?

The more visible Woodard brother was one of only two to show up in what became Less Household at Joseppis last Wednesday. Less was less fun.

The real star of the week was Joachim Kuhn, European connoisseur of the jazz ivories. Banging, twirling, and symphonic he and players of his trio, with sax star Dave Liebman, were a small example of the wealth the Society of Jazz and World Music has brought to SB.

See the stringy comedy Tampopo this Thursday and brilliantly hilarious Hope and Glory Sunday as this week's A&L giveaways. You can't buy a filled seat late so don't be like the hundred plus disappointed who couldn't get in to last week's feline space adventure.

—Ilm  
arts editor

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## PUBLIC'S ENEMY

Think, for a moment, about the end of the world.

The sirens blaring, the official notices to keep calm, the streets empty.

Public Enemy's new album, *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* is the soundtrack for the end of the world — music that makes you think and feel and stomp while all becomes panic.

Each of the album's 16 songs ties into the theme of impending Armageddon, and the need for society, and black Americans in particular, to become aware of the situations we all face, socially and politically — while there is still time.

Public Enemy raps, but there is a world of difference between them and, say, the Fat Boys. They are not content to merely pose with thick gold chains; the only things they wear around their necks are clocks to remind people of how time is running out. They are radicals, in their music and in their political outlook.

The members of Public Enemy, rappers Chuck D and Flavor Flav and DJ Terminator X, consider controversial black Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan a "prophet who ... you all should listen to." They make no excuses for this involvement, and at several points they clarify that they are not racists. And while several may cringe at their affiliation with Farrakhan, it is only one of a number of issues the group touches upon.

On the album's introduction, "Countdown to Armageddon," from their live performance on England's BBC Television earlier this year, Flav quotes Gil Scott-Heron: "This time around, the revolution will not be televised."

"Countdown" is followed by "Bring the Noise," which first appeared on the soundtrack to *Less Than Zero*. The cut has almost

nothing to do with the movie, and is instead an indictment of black radio, which is one big reason why most listeners have never even heard of Public Enemy. The rationale given is that Public Enemy's music is too strong, too black. "I don't understand what they're saying but little do they know they could get a smack for that, man," Flav remarks.

There is a gray area between what is noise and what is music, and Public Enemy venture into the territory fearlessly. Digital samples of bombs falling are looped and constantly repeated against a backdrop of aggressive scratching and slicing. On the album, Terminator X borrows from such diverse sources as Bowie's "Fame," and Bob Marley's "Get Up, Stand Up," weaving them into a surprising fabric of original and found sound. While other rap artists are concerned about airplay and cracking the top 10 (and their sound and subject matter reflect this), Public Enemy has an uncompromising sound to match their political radicalism. One one cut, Chuck D. accuses: "You singers are spineless/As you sing your senseless songs to the mindless/Your general subject, love, is minimal/It's sex for profit."

One of the highlights of the consistently surprising and challenging album is "She Watch Channel Zero," a criticism of soap opera watchers. The L.A. heavy metal band Slayer provides the grunge-speed-garage-metal sound that melds almost perfectly with Chuck D.'s rapid-fire delivery. While the combination of metal and rap has been tried several times, by groups

such as UTFO and Anthrax, and Run-DMC with Aerosmith, Slayer's sound has not been tailored to a pseudo-hip-hop beat.

The other standout is "Night of the Living Baseheads," which has to be the coolest anti-drug song ever recorded. It takes the double-entended line "Base (or is it bass?), how low can you go?" and expands into a scathing indictment of crack culture.

On several levels, *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* is an unqualified triumph. It is a giant leap forward for rap music and a jolt of conscience and consciousness for an increasingly anesthetized public.

by Doug Arellanes

## XXX triple death

Excerpt from the movie *The Decline of Western Civilization: Exene (of X)*:

"We're Desperate" ... John wrote that song.... And it's really weird because at one point I started thinking there's going to come a point where we're going to keep performing this song and people are gonna be going, 'Sure they're desperate, I just paid six dollars to see this band, they're not desperate....'"

X, **THELONIOUS MONSTER, THE HANGMEN**  
Ventura Theatre July 3 \$13.50

I missed The Hangmen, who ended up playing before the advertised 9 p.m. starting time, but heard from a friend they were "fast and refreshing" and described by a few people I talked to as "cowpunk." Apparently, they weren't too happy about being "the warm-up band" and about not getting veggie plates backstage like the other groups. I only saw the last part of the **THELONIOUS MONSTER** set, and although I'd heard big things about these guys, I wasn't much impressed. Rather slow and kinda dull. Flea from The Red Hot Chili Peppers came out to do some horn solos but even those weren't too interesting.

Waiting for X to come on, I stared at the crowd and remembered the first time I'd seen them ... the smokey atmosphere, the mohawks and leather and their guitarist Billy Zoom, legs

spread wide, grin plastered on his face.... Nowadays, the band draws a more diverse (to say the least) crowd and Zoom is gone. Latest guitarist Tony Glikvson lacks Zoom's style, but I must give him credit for attempting to have his own, rather than being a copy. His numerous guitar solos, however, lacked depth. A large crowd had shown up to see X, and quite a variety — of punks, college kids and even a few dead heads. There are a lot of mustaches at X shows these days, not only in the crowd but on John Doe — the band's bassist/vocalist is now sporting one himself. X stuck to newer material for most of their one-and-a-half hour set but played a few old favorites like "Blue Spark," "Nausea" and "Los Angeles." (They didn't do "We're Desperate"...) Most songs were off their latest album, complete with the title cut, "See How We Are," and Doe even dedicated one song to his "wife and child." A new song, "Prisoner," was introduced — wonder if this means more vinyl soon? At one point, John and Exene

show ended with a classic old X tune, "Johnny Hit and Run Pauline," but I'm afraid it was played too late in the set to keep old X followers like myself happy. Seeing **HOW THEY ARE**, I doubt I'll ever see X again, since I have to admit I liked **HOW THEY WERE** better.

— Beth Allen

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Who Framed Roger Rabbit? (PG) 3, 5:15, 7:45, 10 Sat & Sun also 1 No passes or group sales

**FAIRVIEW**

251 N. Fairview, Goleta 967-0744

Coming to America (R) 1, 3:15, 5:30, 8, 10:15 No passes or group sales  
Big (PG) 12:45, 3, 5:15, 7:30, 9:45

**GRANADA**

1216 State St., S.B. 963-1871

Big Business (PG) 12:45, 3, 5:15, 7:35, 9:50

Who Framed Roger Rabbit (PG) 12, 2:20, 4:45, 7:10, 9:30 No passes or group sales

License to Drive (PG13) 1:15, 3:30, 5:45, 8, 10:15

**FIESTA FOUR**

916 State St., S.B. 963-0781

Crocodile Dundee II (PG) 1, 3:10, 5:15, 7:30, 9:45

Short Circuit 1 (PG) 1:15, 3:30, 5:45, 8, 10:15

Red Heat (R) 1:30, 3:45, 6, 8:15, 10:15

Big (PG) 1, 3:15, 5:30, 7:45, 10 Friday Midnight "Rocky Horror"

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Great Outdoors (PG) 3:30, 5:30, 7:35, 9:40

Bull Durham (R) 3:10, 5:20, 7:40, 9:50 Sat & Sun also 1 No passes or group sales

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**PLAZA DE ORO I**

Arthur 2, On The Rocks (PG) 3:35, 5:45, 8, 10:05 Sat & Sun also 1:30

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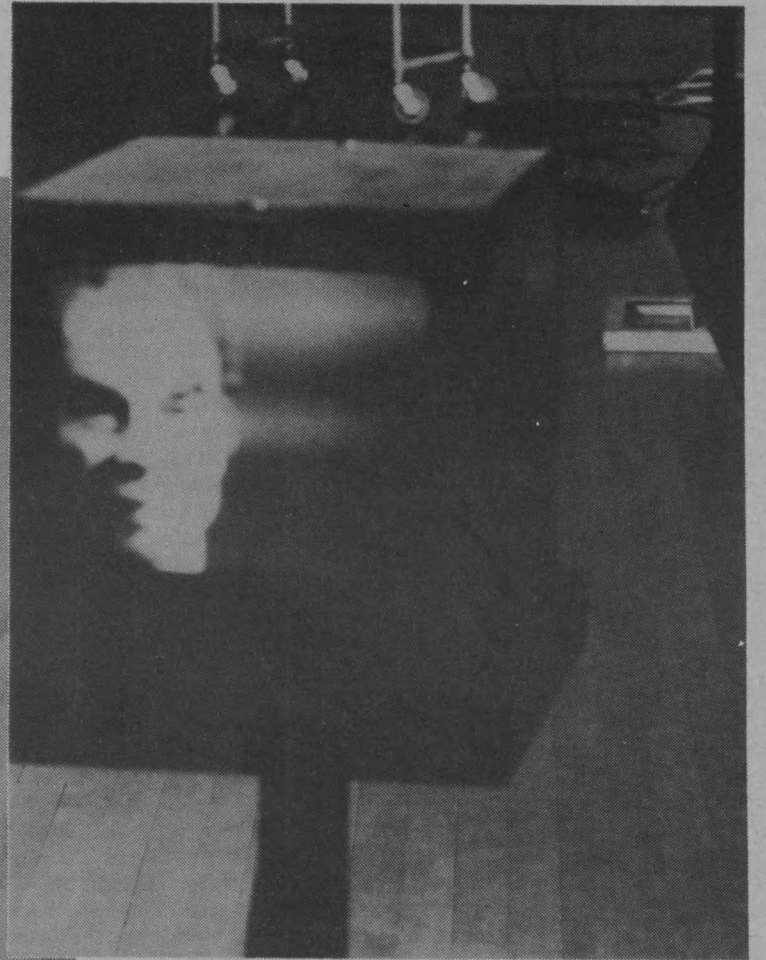
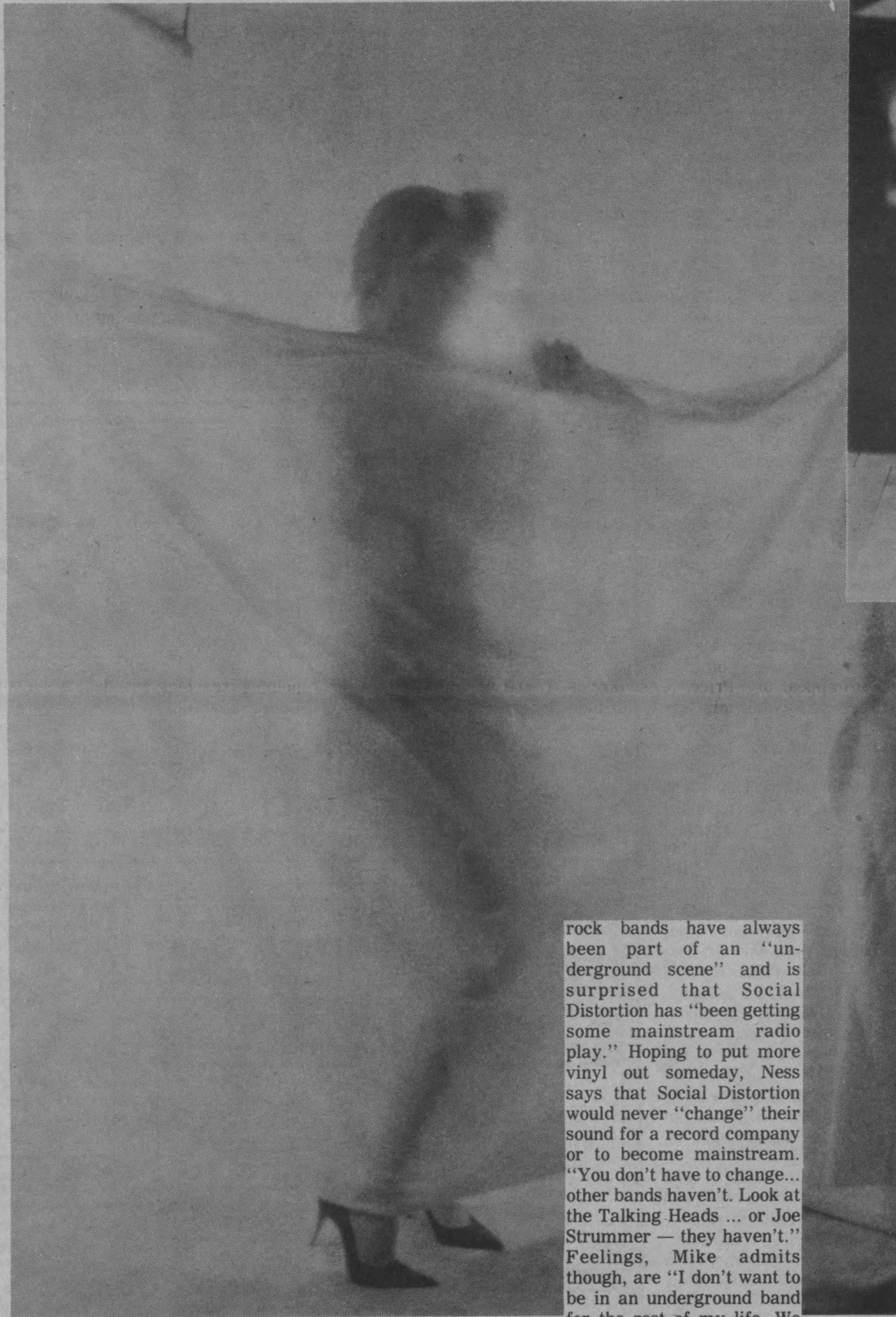
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## S O C I A L



## DISTORTION

(Continued from cover)

that. Kids don't realize that amps get knocked over and it's hard to play guitar and drums with people knocking into you. Besides, they're paying good money for tickets and want a good show — and that's what we're trying to do."

Social Distortion's influences are "early '76-'77 punk and the roots of rock and roll," yet their sound is distinct, with bluesy, even country undertones. One thing Ness mentions the band doing is "trying to get back to our American roots. We're an American band. And it's important for American bands to stand up for that. I like it in America — our history, our heritage." He realizes also, that punk

rock bands have always been part of an "underground scene" and is surprised that Social Distortion has "been getting some mainstream radio play." Hoping to put more vinyl out someday, Ness says that Social Distortion would never "change" their sound for a record company or to become mainstream. "You don't have to change... other bands haven't. Look at the Talking Heads ... or Joe Strummer — they haven't." Feelings, Mike admits though, are "I don't want to be in an underground band for the rest of my life. We want to grow and have our audience grow too." The band is looking forward to a big tour planned for September. Mike remembers all the partying from their first big tour in 1982, and says "it'll be different this time."

On answering my question, "What's the meaning of life?" Ness expressed, "Not to take life too seriously. To have fun and enjoy yourself ... just enjoy life around you the best you can. But life involves work, and I believe anything good in life takes some work. And life is rough at times too — walking through fears and pains can be rough sometimes." And all of this, Mike Ness and Social Distortion know it well.

*Social Distortion will be playing at the Ventura Theatre this Friday, July 8.*

