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BADFINGER: “Ass” and “Badfinger”

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Two Badfinger albums in one month! What more could a fan ask for after a two-year drought? If only it were so... actually, the fans will be asking plenty, and Badfinger has a lot to answer for, because these two mediocre albums are already one of the biggest disappointments of the new year.

Let's start with the Apple album. Nobody knows why it exists. It was never explained why Badfinger mysteriously stopped recording right after “Baby Blue” and “Day After Day”, the two biggest smashes of their career, when Nilsson was hot with their song “Without You” and it seemed they were on the verge of becoming truly huge. The most believable story I heard was that they were just sick of Apple, and that their contract was due to expire. Maybe, somehow, they were being forced to put out one more album before ending the relationship, but how stupid to have it come out the same time as their first release on Warners!

If the Warners album were any good, it would have nothing to fear from the Apple one. *Ass* sounds like what it probably is, a collection of out-takes and practice tapes. There is a rough, unfinished aura about the album and a lack of really distinctive touches even in the best songs that goes against everything we've come to expect from this polished band. Once known for their exquisitely crafted singles, the best they could do here is “Apple Of My Eye”, easily their worst single ever. My choice would have been “When I Say.” But that's no big deal. One thing's sure, there's no three or four hit singles on this album – especially not the eight-minute “Timeless”!

There are always excuses to make for a bad last album. Not so when you've taken over a year putting together your debut album for a

new label. And actually, the Warners album is a bit more encouraging. “I Miss You” is an engaging McCartney-esque ballad, “Shine On” and “Love Is Easy” make for tolerable listening, “Why Don’t We Talk” almost makes it, and “Island” would be really good if it weren’t so aimless. That seems to be their problem throughout the album – melodies and song structures are simply not as strong as could be, so that songs like “Where Do We Go From Here?” and “Lonely You” emerge as pleasant where they might, with some effort, have been as striking as the group’s previous work.

Once we’ve faced the fact that Badfinger has not given us a proper sequel to *No Dice* and *Straight Up*, it’s possible to derive considerable enjoyment from this album. Most of the songs are very nice: only “Matted Spam”, which sounds like Buddy Miles, can actually be called bad. This is a good example of minor Beatle-rock, definitely worth having, but nothing Grapefruit didn’t do as well four years ago. And that’s the shame of it, because I was really counting on Badfinger to bridge the gap between mere Beatle stuff and a new level of pop altogether. I believed that they, of all the groups who were trying, had it in them. And maybe they do. But the proof of that will have to come later – if Badfinger can manage to survive the double blow to their career these albums unfortunately represent. For what it’s worth, I’m still hoping.