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BADFINGER: “Ass” and “Badfinger”

Noel Coppage

It's a real moving experience, Badfinger leaving Apple and signing up with Warner Bros. and sorting through references to it in their last Apple and first Warners recording is, as such pastimes go, much less boring than the double crostic in Saturday Review/World. And the music isn't bad either. Badfinger always struck me as the favorite puppy dog figure in the house of Apple, the house the Beatles built, but I gather from the cover of *Ass* that they took a slightly different view of themselves there. It shows a jackass wearing earphones and being tempted by a giant carrot in a giant hand reaching down from heaven – Somebody in the Sky with Carrots, let's say...

The first song in that albums says, “You are the apple of my eye, you're the apple of my heart, but the time has come for us to part.” The second song goes on at length about how the writer (listed as all of Badfinger) just has to get away. Then the first track of the Warners album is “I Miss You,” which doesn't actually say anything directly about Apple or the Beatles but makes a body think, particularly when it is followed by a title like “Where Do We Go From Here?” or by the lyrics of “Matted Spam” (Pete Ham) that say a frame of mind has “locked me outside of my rock and roll.” And then you probably think I'm making this up – back on *Ass* there's a fine rocking song called “Constitution” whose words seem to apply nicely to the music game: “I could sing the blues anywhere I choose, if I wanted... I could join a race, I could paint my face, if I wanted...” What makes this poignant is the fact that Badfinger still sounds like the late early Beatles.

And it's still a good little band, and the thematic stuff is encased in good, fairly light rock-and-roll in both albums, the last Apple one

being more tuneful and the first Warner Brothers album being a little more imaginative. The latter has some steel-band backing in one cut, a beautiful multi-acoustic guitar treatment in a pretty song called “My Heart Goes Out.” And other small suggestions that someday Badfinger may try to sound a little less like the Beatles – but there’s “Shine On,” a lovely song written and performed just about exactly the way George Harrison, probably the focal point of all the father-figuring of the past few years, writes and performs. *Badfinger*: does, however, have the first “flash forward” I’ve ever heard in a record album: sound effects of someone walking down a sidewalk or across a parking lot and entering a building in which we hear the final moments of Badfinger’s recording of “Why Don’t We Talk” being played on a radio or jukebox or other low-fi device. Then we flash to the present and hear Badfinger’s recording of the song firsthand. Maybe it won’t dazzle Robert Altman – maybe it won’t even dazzle Mike Nichols – but it does show that Badfinger is staying loose and continuing to practice on the old footwork. Happy housewarming, lads.