

Rock

February 28, 1972

BADFINGER: "Straight Up"

Toby Goldstein

... *Badfinger's core seems to have softened.*

It's that simple, sing Badfinger. Well, at least it used to be, say us. A bit more than a year ago, Badfinger sang a fresh song and put together brand new beats in tunes that captured fond old memories. One year is not very long, especially in Beatle-thinking terms, yet it is long enough to start the nostalgic juices flowing for *No Dice*. *Straight Up* contains enough of the spirit one expects from the pens of the group, but a sizable chunk of Badfinger's core seems to have softened.

They were the acknowledged reincarnation of a Beatle sound, not aping any one of the group; instead, recreating the essence of a time period and transforming that essence into their own time and set of experiences. *Straight Up* is straight out of that Beatle staple, but I feel it more an album of convenience. Instead of working out of the early Beatle unity, Badfinger borrow from separate Beatles, and restructure very little of this new album in those early-days, unique way. "Suitcase" uses the underlying shoop of "Come Together", "Sometimes" screams out "She's A Woman" with new lyrics, and though both tracks are good hard rockers, the resemblance to the particular is still too close for comfort. Pete Ham's "Perfection", strikes immediately as an extra song from John Lennon's first solo album, a bit unsure of itself, and is not the equal of Ham's considerable writing talent, especially compared to "Take it All" and "Name Of the Game", both elongated moody ballads on *Straight Up*.

As the Beatles "progressed", the tight harmonic sound of the early albums transmuted into more individualized vocals, gaining a new sound but losing an early spirit which they never recaptured. Badfinger seem to be following their mentor's progress in this area

as well, as “No Matter What’s” crispness and “We’re For The Dark”’s delicacy have their edges softened. *Straight Up*’s rock voices are moving toward the gravelly and the ballads have taken over the beginnings of a drone. The exceptions, as in the 1964 echoes of “Baby Blue” or “Sweet Tuesday Morning”’s Liver-folk lyrics and effects of bells, bouzoukis and accordions, recall memories of *No Dice* immediately to mind. When Badfinger do use their so very tight English harmonies on *Straight Up*, they are only brought out for special occasions, just for show.

Badfinger captures the joy of entertaining a lot better than most groups, even those more widely-experienced. *No Dice* was a memorable album and created great expectations. After the anticipation of one year without an album, I could accept *Straight Up* without qualifications from a dozen other artists on the fame and fortune level of Badfinger. But from Pete Ham, Tom Evans, Joey Molland and Mike Gibbons, I expected more. Perhaps the Beatle memories and inspiration are to blame, for they carry a magic that is impossible for mere mortals to perform with.

In 1970, four sweet-sounding young men brought out an extraordinary album with a lot of help from their famous friends. They played for a party, giving us songs to sing along with and dance to. This year, the party is a bit too quiet, too many strangers being awkward with new ideas. Let’s hope by the next gathering, everyone will have gotten to know each other again.