

Rolling Stone

January 20, 1972

BADFINGER: "Straight Up"

Mike Saunders

Straight Up is a big disappointment coming after Badfinger's previous superb album, *No Dice*. I remember reading a quote by drummer Mike Gibbons saying that *Straight Up* would be a "natural progression" from the previous album – as is usually the case with supposed progressions, the result here is self-consciousness in place of spontaneity, solemnity in the place of formal exuberance and a general all-around deadness where infectious energy was previously the rule.

Most often of all, the first of former virtues to fall by the wayside is that of unabashed rock and roll energy, and that's what has happened here. The result is a barely decent album, one which is the poorest of Badfinger's three LPs and by far the least likeable.

It's hard to say where the blame lies. The quality of the songwriting (split up evenly here between Pete Ham, Tom Evans and Joey Molland) is down all-around; the melodies that Badfinger had previously excelled at are just not anywhere as plentiful here. The production – Todd Rundgren; some George Harrison – is decidedly inferior to what Badfinger have had in the past, particularly in the atrociously muddy sound of the vocals. Peter Ham's great guitar work, one of the factors that made him so prominent on *No Dice*, seems to be already a thing of the past.

Most of all though, and it really hurts to say this; there just isn't any rock and roll spirit on this album: that magic scooby-doo, whatever you want to call it, is gone. *Straight Up* is completely devoid of the handful of energetic ravers Badfinger have included on previous albums and which act as keys to the music's overall vitality; added the lack of Badfinger's former lightweight pop virtues, this is the

worst thing that could have happened to the group

Basically *Straight Up* shows the case of yet another talented but directionless group, one that somehow convinced themselves that they have to do something more serious, more polished, than just plain old rocking out. The mystery is that *No Dice* was so good, and yet this album so lacking in the qualities that made Badfinger's first two albums so engaging. And Badfinger seemed to have so much potential. Few groups have ever combined the joyous spirit of pop-rock and roll with a real hard rock sound – the Small Faces and Flamin Groovies looked as if they were about to do it in a never-equalled fashion, both unfortunately to break up at their peak – if anyone ever does completely it'll be a real milestone of an event, and Badfinger seemed to have the right ingredients to give it a shot in a lightweight rock sort of fashion. Well, as the saying goes, *kaput*.

There were many comparisons made of *Magic Christian Music* and *No Dice* to the Beatles *Help* period, and the analogies were apt. With *Straight Up*, Badfinger seem to have already reached the Beatles' *Revolver* stage: a stultifying self-conscious artiness, a loss of previous essential virtues, and far too much general farting around. Which goes to show, I guess, that the 1964-5 days of regular AM hits and an expected output of three LPs a year from name groups were a lot healthier than we had ever dreamed. It sure is disheartening to wait a whole year for an album as disappointing as this one.