

Rolling Stone

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BADFINGER: "Wish You Were Here"

Bud Scoppa

Up to now, the big singles, "Come And Get It," "No Matter What," "Day After Day," and especially "Baby Blue" have provided the obvious high points along the way for this veteran English quartet. Now, at last, they've made an album (their sixth in five years) that derives a general style from what the band constructed on those singles: the captivating melodies, melancholy vocals and big bell-like rhythm guitars outlining a stirring, full-bodied sound. While the final Apple album, *Ass*, contained the energy without the melodies and the first Warner LP, *Badfinger*, had pretty but punchless tracks, *Wish You Were Here* is loaded with songs that are catchy and electric. Strategically placed horns (by the Average White Band's sax duo) and strings enlarge the guitar chordings to symphonic proportions, giving this record a creative fullness and making it a wonderful album to play right through.

Most immediately striking among the 11 songs are Pete Ham's "Know One Knows" and "Just A Chance." After six albums, Ham's McCartneyisms are now fully integrated into a distinct style that is lyrically more conventional but melodically as attractive as his progenitor's. It's hard to recall a single resonant lyrical phrase from any Badfinger songs, and these new Ham songs are (aside from "Dennis," a father's song to his little boy) as anonymous as any in terms of language; but in terms of melody and sentiment they're awe-inspiring.

Joey Molland, not as sweet of voice or sentiment as Ham (he sounds less like McCartney than the other three), has become Badfinger's most consistent writer and rocker, as he shows on each of his four tracks here; of these, the roaring "Some Other Time" and the desperate "Got To Get Out Of Here" are the equals of Ham's very

best songs.

Badfinger has been in the shadow of the Beatles so completely and for so long that the idea of the group as an autonomous unit takes some getting used to, even now. But – lyrically slightness aside – they’ve always been a joy to listen to for their compositional and arranging invention and for their vocal attractiveness. *Wish You Were Here*, their most fully formed album, makes it clear that Badfinger – despite never having won a substantial audience for themselves – have lost none of their unity or their determination. And they’re still one of the best singles bands in the business.