

ART «» ENTERTAINMENT

ROCK MUSIC

By Bruce Dancis

WIMMIN AIN'T GOT NO Kick was the title of an early 20th century feminist pamphlet by American socialist leader Kate Richards O'Hare, but it might also have described the relationship between women performers and rock music.

Until recently, few women in rock have been able to escape stereotyped roles such as what critic Robert Christgau once described as "the virgin, the sexpot and the sufferer." The same restrictiveness has also generally applied to the kind of rock women made—soft and mellow rockers predominated.

The women's movement and the New Wave has started to change all that. By the late '70s many women rockers were no longer willing to accept sexist limitations on their creativity, and the New Wave's return to basic rock'n'roll and "everyone a musician" ideology provided an exuberant and relatively democratic opening. (See Georgia Christgau's interview with four women in the New Wave, *ITT*, Dec. 6, 1978). Increasingly, women have been writing songs, playing instruments, and working on production in addition to their more established and accepted position as vocalists.

Linda Ronstadt, the most popular female vocalist of the 1970s, serves as a cultural barometer. After building her career on country rock, torchy ballads and covers of Buddy Holly, Everly Brothers, and Motown hits, Ronstadt began the '80s sporting a punky haircut and releasing a predominantly New Wave album—*Mad Love* (Elektra/Asylum Records)—that strikes me as the best work she's ever done.

Since she doesn't write her own songs, Ronstadt's musical direction hinges on the material she chooses to borrow. Three of the songs on *Mad Love* were written by Elvis Costello, three more by Mark Goldenberg, guitarist for an L.A. New Wave band called the Cretones. Ronstadt's voice, invariably strong, but not always triumphant over her song selections in the past, never sounded more exciting, and her excellent band complements her newfound power.

Still, Ronstadt's conversion is only partial. Her lyrical personae remains essentially suppliant and self-pitying, even on her wonderfully buoyant single, "How Do I Make You." But other women vocalists have broken through that barrier with a vengeance.

Faithful forever.

Nothing in Marianne Faithfull's career—with one exception—prepares a listener for her new album, *Broken English* (Island Records). The daughter of an Austrian baroness, Faithfull met the Rolling Stones as a 17-year-old convent school student, had a big hit in 1964 with Jagger/Richards' "As Tears Go By," and lived with Mick Jagger for about five years. Following an undistinguished singing and acting career, two sensationalized drug busts with Jagger and several suicide attempts, Faithfull was eventually hospitalized for heroin addiction.

It recently became known that



Above, Marianne Faithfull. Left, Linda Ronstadt. Right, Chrissie Hynde.

Beyond the virgin, the sexpot and sufferer

Linda Ronstadt, Marianne Faithfull, the Pretenders and the Raincoats all show women rockers' strengths.

Faithfull wrote the unforgettable lyrics to the Stones' "Sister Morphine." (Faithfull's contribution was not acknowledged on *Sticky Fingers*, though she has always received royalty payments.) "Sister Morphine's" brutal imagery and shattering honesty made *Broken English* less a shot in the dark than it would otherwise seem. Though the level of songwriting and musicianship runs quite high throughout, it is Faithfull's voice—quavering, almost breaking, yet extremely forceful—that leaves an unshakeable chill hours after one first hears it.

Her voice, fragile though it may be, has lost the innocence of her earlier recordings. In its place comes tremendous anger, harshness and emotional resiliency.

"Why D'Ya Do It" brings together sinister, pissed-off music that more than meets its match in Faithfull's intense wrath and

scatological bitterness. Reworking a poem by British playwright Heathcote Williams, Faithfull and the band tell a tale of sexual jealousy peerless in the depths and explicitness of its rage. All of her fears, possessiveness, resentment and spite pour out, egged on by a most menacing twin guitar intro, dangerous reggae rhythm guitar chops, a haunting organ drone and a strident guitar break.

Most of *Broken English* meets the standards set by "Why D'Ya Do It." The title cut, driven by an intriguing modified Eurodisco bass line, features lyrics inspired by Faithfull's reading of *Hitler's Children*, a book about West Germany's Baader-Meinhof Gang. It may not be a profound statement—neither is "Guilt," another fine cut—but Faithfull's voice seizes everything in its path.

There's a part toward the beginning of "The Wait" on the

Pretenders' self-title debut album (Sire Records) in which group leader/vocalist/guitarist/songwriter Chrissie Hynde listens to her band's opening power chords and rolling drum and bass line, coughs loudly, clears her throat, listens some more, and then proceeds to launch a truly devastating vocal.

Hynde's coughing and throat clearing as the band kicks into high gear helps prepare a listener for the coming onslaught. As "The Wait" hops along to a rapidly twitching beat, Hynde keeps up with a tremendous assortment of scats, screams, and simply superb singing.

Curt, tough, and nasty ("Stop snivelling, you're gonna make some plastic surgeon a rich man," she spits on "Tattooed Love Boys"), with a sneer that makes Tom Petty's look like a smile, Hynde possesses a tremendously forceful self-confidence.

Her vocal beauty and vulner-

ability also gives her band a remarkable versatility. "Stop Your Sobbing," the group's first single, immediately follows "The Wait" and changes the mood completely. Hynde brings great tenderness—as well as an interesting role reversal—to this Ray Davies song, recorded initially by the Kinks in 1964. Similarly, her lovely vocal on "Kid," which includes Hynde singing double-tracked harmony with herself, reveals an affectionate dimension to her songwriting.

Although the Pretenders are a young band, formed in England late in 1978, the Akron-born Hynde has been performing since 1974. Her past work included a short stint in a Cleveland group featuring Devo's Mark Mothersbaugh, and backup singing for Johnny Thunders, Chris Spedding, and Mick Farren. The rest of the Pretenders—bassist Pete Farndon, guitarist James Honeyman Scott, and drummer Martin Chambers—are capable veterans of various British bands.

But this is Hynde's album.

Raindrops keep falling.

All the members of the Raincoats, a new British band, are women and they took part in virtually every phase in the making of their first album, *The Raincoats*, for Rough Trade Records, an adventurous and progressive independent label in Britain. The band members—violinist and guitarist Vicky Aspinall, bass player Gina Burch, vocalist Ana Da Silva, and recently departed drummer Palmolive—wrote most of the songs, co-produced the album, and played the instrumental parts.

Although the Raincoats don't consider their group to be a feminist band, and differ from other all-women groups such as Jam Today (for whom Aspinall once played) in their desire to perform for both men and women, a feminist consciousness can be seen in some of their songs. The harrowing "Off Duty Trip" was based on an actual case in which a British soldier committed a brutal rape and received only a light punishment from a judge who wanted to save the soldier's career. Part of it goes:

*Seaside town, off duty trip
Taking flesh, going to let it rip
With rings on his fingers,
Sharp like the taste that still lingers.*

*Join the professionals, save one of our professionals,
No, no jail for a professional!*

The overarching impression of *The Raincoats* is how original the band sounds. Burch's flowing bass frequently becomes the lead instrument, carrying the melody line as violin and guitar build chords and other textures beneath it. Similarly, their harmonies depart from convention. For instance, on "Black and White," someone sings a relatively clear melody, only to be joined by a jarring monotone functioning formally as a harmony part but actually serving to create dissonance.

Right now more women are rocking—and rocking harder—than at any time before.

■ *The Raincoats is available for \$7 plus \$1.25 postage from Systematic Record Dist., Berkeley Industrial Court, Space 1, 729 Heinz Ave., Berkeley, CA 94710.*

BOOKS

Breaking the silence about unemployment

NOT WORKING:

By Harry Maurer
Holt, Rinehart & Winston,
\$12.95

By Rachel Kranz

Harry Maurer's oral history collection, *Not Working*, gets unemployment out of the closet. Not working in America is seen as so completely personal a problem that, as Maurer's book shows, even men and women who lose jobs in massive layoffs or shutdowns see themselves as responsible.

"It's the wrong attitude to have, I guess, but sometimes you get to a point of wanting to give up. You know you can't give up. But when you can't do anything, you have a feeling of total worthlessness. You're just worthless," says Jim Hughes, a 34-year-old welder.

For the unemployed men and women in *Not Working*, there is no way not to take unemployment personally. Maurer has interviewed truck drivers and stockbrokers, secretaries, ad-work producers, union members, former professionals, Hispanics, Indians, blacks and people over 55.

Some have a political consciousness about an economy that

A woman fired from her job in publishing said, "It feels like rape—you're violated and helpless." And it's your fault.

locks them into the boom-bust cycle, some are born-again Christians, some are cynics, some feminists. But all report the same human damage, the same sense of responsibility for the condition that keeps them from feeding their families, facing their friends, taking an active part in the world around them.

"I was persuaded that I must be not only as bad as the company thought I was to fire me, but much worse than that. Probably the world's worst. Probably I didn't deserve to live," says Grace Keaton, fired almost without warning from her publishing job of 12 years. "[Being fired] doesn't simply take away your self-confidence. It destroys you. Utterly. It may be more like rape than death. Being brutalized, violated, and being helpless."

The analogy to rape is significant. In the early days of the

women's movement, rape was the hidden crime, the offense for which the victim was expected to shoulder the blame. If women did not follow the elaborate rules set down for their protection—don't go out alone, don't dress provocatively, don't let them know there's no man at home—they were considered at least partly responsible for what happened to them.

The stories in *Not Working* suggest the widespread acceptance of a similar set of rules popularly expected to keep the newspaper's figures of 6 percent, 7 percent, 8 percent unemployment from ever applying to you. "You start going over your life: I did this wrong; I did that wrong. I knew that advertising wasn't secure, but when you're young, you don't listen to people. Now I think they were right," says Dorothy Feiberman. "Why didn't I listen?"

Feiberman was in her 40s when she decided to resign from her company rather than transfer to another state. Unsuccessful at finding another job, she muses, "I go through this business about whether I should dye my hair. That's a big thing I think about. If I dyed my hair, maybe I'd look younger. I asked some of the people (at an unemployed executives self-help club) what they think. They said it would only harden my face and the employer's going to find out how old I am anyway. But then it occurs to me, maybe I should get my face lifted. If I could get my face lifted, then I'd dye my hair because then the whole thing would look right."

Feiberman talks eloquently of her belief in herself. "I'm capable of handling problems it would take a younger person years to know how to handle." She compares her awareness of age discrimination to how she imagines black people must feel when they walk into an employer's office and see his face tighten. Yet the only way she can cling to her hope of someday being employed again is to look for the way that she can accommodate.

"Sometimes I think it's all my fault. I should have opened my mouth at such-and-such a time. I should have taken such-and-such a job when I had the chance. I shouldn't have listened to that teacher when he told me to aim high," says Eddie Vargas, a 24-year-old machinist.

Vargas is in the population category most susceptible to unemployment in America—minority youth. The current rate of that group's unemployment approaches 40 percent. Whether or not Vargas is aware of that statistic, he knows that several times he turned down a \$3 an hour job because of the teacher

who told him to "aim high." What he prays for is never to make the same mistake again.

"It'd be easy for me to start taking all the rejections personally, especially if I'm feeling low," says Julie Jacobsen. "I get real naive, and I think, 'By golly, I'm going to put more energy into it and really go out and attack the job market.' And then when I still don't find anything, I put the fault on me."

Jacobsen was fired from a high school counselling job because she is bisexual. She responded to the firing with a widely publicized lawsuit and a subsequent 150 applications to local schools. "You have no way of knowing whether the employers are aware of the case—which they very well could be—or if they just call to check on references from your former employer and hear about the non-renewal," says Jacobsen. She is aware of widespread homophobia, of the extent to which the power of employers can deny her a chance to work. But somehow, in moments of depression, her knowledge, her experience, become invisible even to herself.

"I went to Alcoa in Vancouver at about 5:30 in the morning for an interview at 8:00," says Ken Dutton, a black man in his 20s living in Seattle. "When I got there, there were already 20 people and it just so happens they take 20 applications a day... Came back the following Monday because they do it once a week...that time at 3:30 in the morning. There's 20 people there. O.K., the next week I went back again...at 2:10 in the morning..." Finally Dutton arranged to camp out at the plant the night before. The result? An application, an interview and a physical—but no job.

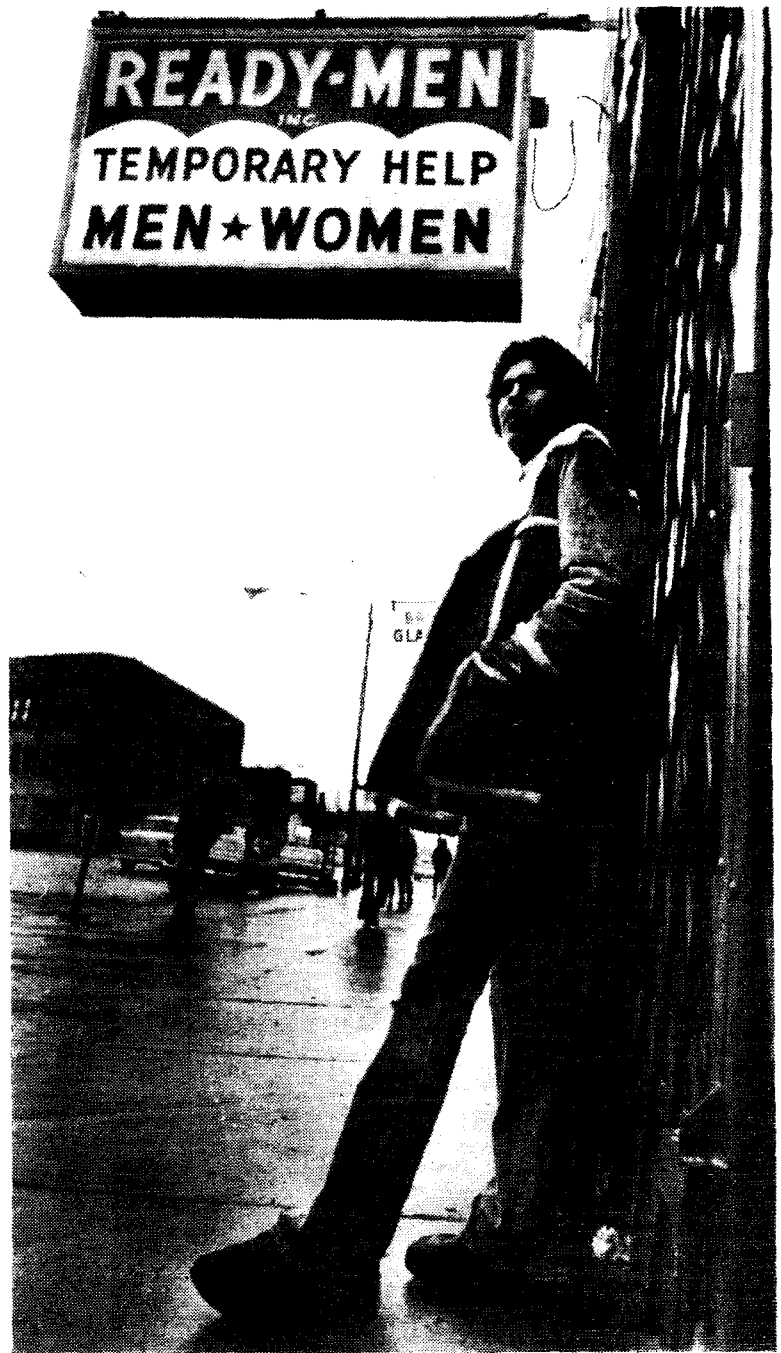
Julie Jacobsen's 150 applications, Dorothy Feiberman and her three painstakingly rewritten resumes, Grace Keaton and her endless round of phone calls to the contacts accrued during 12 years in publishing—the stories mount, and the reader becomes aware of her own efforts

to neutralize the painful facts. Surely this person was simply unskilled, that one simply unlucky. *Not Working* raises one's awareness of this disbelief at the same time that its stories contradict it, simply by the force of their sheer number and honesty.

Maurer himself confesses to a change of attitude during the course of compiling the book. In his well-written, helpful introduction he admits, "I wanted to measure the human damage, but from the point of view of people's success or failure to cope with it. Why do some families splinter under the strain while others pull together? The questions linger, but as I moved from town to town, interview to interview, my growing outrage told me the approach was faulty. By picturing unemployment as a sort of contest in which individuals succeed or fail, I had adopted the characteristic American tendency to blame the victim."

What surfaces most clearly in *Not Working* is how much the "victims" want to work, how much they are willing to pay in mental anguish and physical pain for the "privilege" of a paying job. Maurer adds a note of hope by including two additional sections at the end of the book, one on people who fought back against unfair firings and one on those who lost their jobs in a union struggle. He shows that people will fight back if given a chance, that despair and self-blame can exist side by side with collective action and a new self-image.

Studs Terkel's *Working*, to which Maurer's title pays tribute, was a major breakthrough in creating a vocabulary for talking about the experience of work. *Working* made accessible the stories of people rendered invisible by both newspaper statistics and popular culture. *Not Working* makes a similar breakthrough in revealing to us our experience of being unemployed. Rachel Kranz is a Boston writer and producer of a videotape on women and welfare.



Chilean singing group to tour U.S. and Canada

The Chilean folk group Inti-Illimani begins its U.S.-Canadian tour of the program "A Celebration of Pablo Neruda" on March 30. The group, one of the leaders in the New Chilean Song movement of the late '60s and early '70s, worked during the Popular Unity government in factories, schools, plazas and working class neighborhoods. During the 1973 coup the group was on tour in Italy, where Inti-Illimani has remained based. The tour schedule is still incomplete; in most cities of the tour, committees for a free Chile sponsor the event.

March 30 Los Angeles-Pasadena (Pasadena Civic Auditorium)
April 3 San Francisco/Berkeley (Zellerbach Auditorium)
April 4 Eugene, Ore. (So. Eugene H.S. Auditorium)
April 7 Albuquerque (King Auditorium)
April 9 Denver/Boulder (Glen Miller Ballroom, University of Colorado, Boulder)
April 11 Minneapolis (Willey Hall, University of Minnesota)
April 13 Austin, Texas (Rogg Auditorium, University of Texas)
April 15 Madison, Wis. (Congregational Church)
April 20 Chicago (Medinah Temple)
April 25 New York City (Beacon Auditorium)
April 26 Boston (John Hancock Hall)
April 29 Hanover, N.H. (Wartmouth College)
Arrangements by Associated Projects, (213)827-9883, 11880 Juniette St., Culver City, CA 90230.