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ELTON JOHN
PHOTOGRAPH BY KEVIN MAZUR

Here comes the fun



★★★★

TRAVELING WILBURYS: VOLUME ONE
WILBURY/WARNER BROS.

THIS IS THE BEST RECORD of its kind ever made. Then again, it's also the only record of its kind ever made. A low-key masterpiece, *Volume One* marks the auspicious debut of the Traveling Wilburys – Lucky Wilbury (a.k.a. Bob Dylan), Nelson Wilbury (George Harrison), Lefty Wilbury (Roy Orbison), Otis Wilbury (Jeff Lynne) and Charlie T. Jr. (Tom Petty) – one of the few rock supergroups actually deserving to be called either super or a group.

With tongue placed firmly in cheek, the author of the album's liner notes (which are credited to Hugh Jampton, E.F. Nort-Bitz Reader in Applied Jacket, Faculty of Sleeve Notes, University of Krakatoa, East of Java, but sound suspiciously like Michael Palin, who is thanked elsewhere in the notes) explains the band's origins thusly: "The original Wilburys were a stationary people who, realizing that their civilization could not stand still for ever, began to go for short walks – not the 'traveling' as we now

BY DAVID WILD

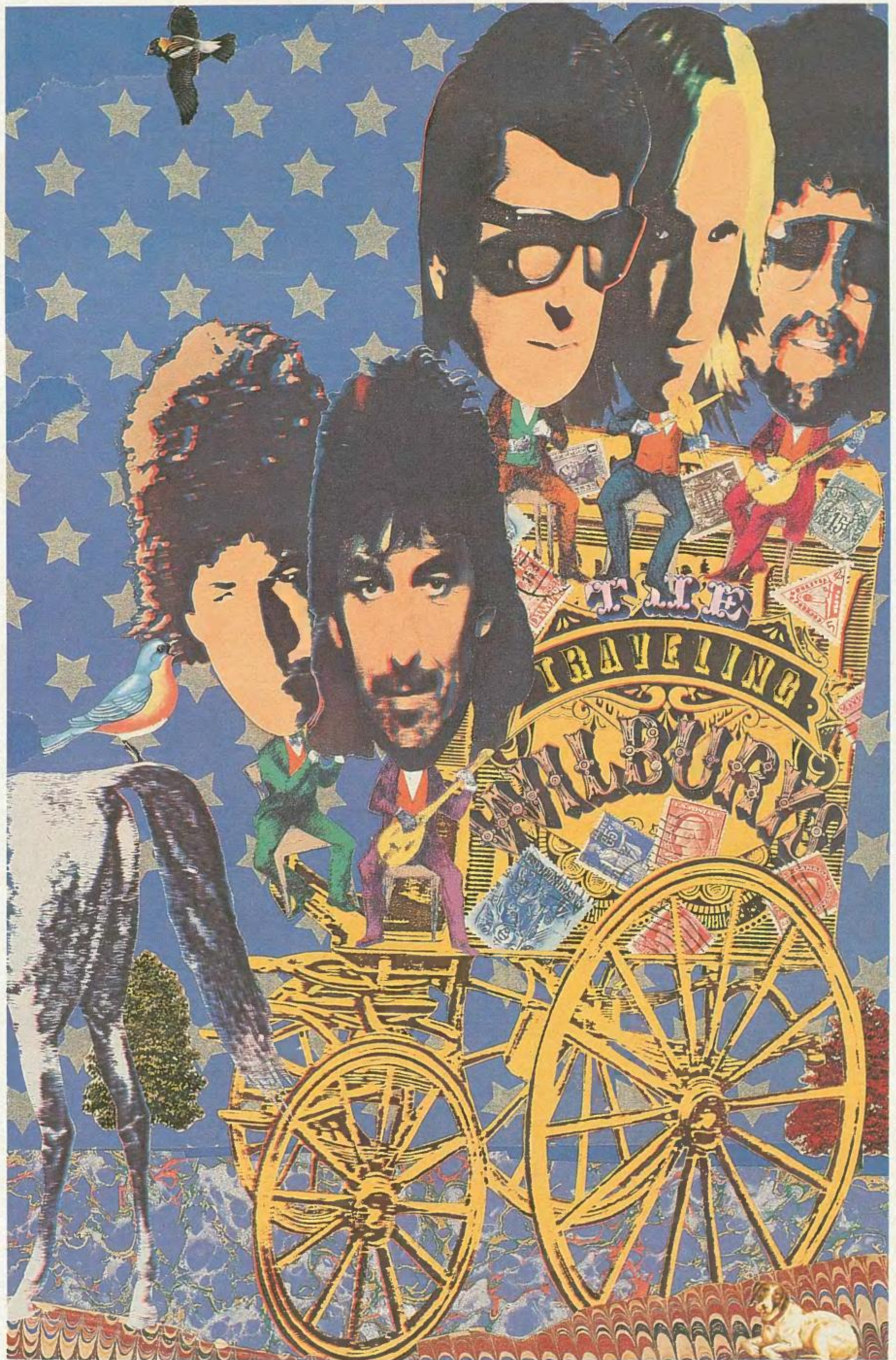


ILLUSTRATION BY MELISSA GRIMES

RECORD RATINGS

★★★★★ A CLASSIC
★★★★ EXCELLENT
★★★ GOOD
★★ FAIR
★ POOR

Ratings are supervised by the 'Rolling Stone' editors.

know it, but certainly as far as the corner and back."

In reality, this record came out of a dinner conversation in Los Angeles this spring between Petty, Orbison, Lynne and Harrison. (Former ELO leader Lynne, who was behind the boards for Harrison's comeback album, *Cloud Nine*, was producing tracks for upcoming albums by both Orbison and Petty.) Harrison mentioned that he needed to record a new song for the B side of a European single and suggested they all pitch in and cut a number together. Harrison also suggested having Bob Dylan join in, and the next day they all wrote and recorded "Handle with Care" (now the album's first single). When Harrison played the track for Warner Bros., both the company and the group realized it was too good for a throwaway track and decided the Wilburys should keep recording.

And it's a good thing they did, because for all its off-the-cuff sense of fun, *Volume One* is an unexpected treat that leaves one hungry for *Volume Two*. Produced by Harrison and Lynne, the album has a wonderfully warm sound that is both high-tech and rootsy. Recorded at the home studios of Harrison, Dylan and Wilbury family friend Dave Stewart, *Volume One* has little in common with most recorded "supersessions," which tend to be less than the sum of their parts; rather, it recalls the inspired mix-and-match musical fellowship found in the best moments of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame jam sessions.

Coming on the heels of *Cloud Nine*, *Volume One* is further proof of Harrison's complete return to form. Throughout, Harrison not only sounds great, he also sounds happy, thrilled to be playing once again with a witty, wonderful band — albeit one with a rather unorthodox lineup: five lead-singing rhythm guitarists. (The Wilburys' fellow travelers on *Volume One* include Jim Keltner on drums, Jim Horn on saxophone, Ray Cooper on percussion and Ian Wallace on tom-toms.)

But Harrison isn't the only rock great who seems revived on *Volume One*. Never one for overdoing things in the studio, Bob Dylan is well matched to the Wilburys' informal, fast-paced schedule — they wrote and recorded a song a day. And as on his recent stripped-down tour, Dylan sounds extraordinary, singing with the expert

phrasing and wit of his best work. (Unsurprisingly, his tracks sound less collaborative than the others.) On "Dirty World" and "Congratulations," his voice is loose and relaxed, free of the mannered whining that has marred some of his recent recorded work. Best of all is "Tweeter and the Monkey Man," a convincing little rocker that playfully parodies Bruce Springsteen's lyrics. Littered with references to stolen cars, mansions on the hill, Jersey lines and a certain Thunder Road, the song comes off as Dylan's wonderfully bitchy way of asserting who's really the Boss.

Totally boss is the best way to describe two other Wilbury gems, "Not Alone Any More" and the closing "End of the Line." The former is a gorgeous pop ballad on which Roy Orbison — assisted by some wonderful backing vocals from Harrison and Lynne — hurts as good as he ever has. It proves that Orbison has lost none of his tremendous vocal prowess, and makes one eager to hear Orbison's upcoming solo album. "End of the Line" — which features vocal turns by all the Wilburys save Dylan — is a movingly upbeat ride-off-into-the-sunset song for these middle-aged rock & roll cowboys: "Maybe somewhere down the road a ways/You'll think of me and wonder where I am these days/Maybe down the road when somebody plays/Purple Haze."

Petty acquits himself well on "End of the Line" and "Last Night"; he and Orbison share lead on the latter song, a shuffling tale of good love gone bad. Jeff Lynne shines a little of his own electric light on "Rattled," a romantic, retro-sounding rockabilly number reminiscent of some of the tracks he produced for Dave Edmunds a few years back.

According to Wilbury legend, all the Traveling Wilburys have different mothers but the same father. Yet none of the Wilburys knows the current whereabouts of Charlie T. Wilbury Sr. Chances are, though, that wherever the big guy is, he's proud. ■



★★★ 1/2
TALK IS CHEAP
Keith Richards
VIRGIN

BY MOST STANDARDS, A RECORD THIS loosely arranged, casually executed and

at times downright sloppy wouldn't even pass muster as a demo. But Keith Richards is the Glimmer Twin with the garage-rock heart, a Rolling Stone for whom rawness isn't just a virtue, it's nirvana. Would he have it any other way? The funky whack of real-time, real-life drumming instead of digital imitations of Charlie Watts, flying scraps of raw-meat guitar instead of a fashionable coating of ice-cream synths, backup vocals that could have been provided by the Hangover Tabernacle Choir — Mick Jagger's recent solo may be high on style and sass, but it's tough to beat *Talk Is Cheap* for real primitive cool.

Indeed, Richards's first solo album is a masterpiece of underachievement. He does nothing more or less than what he's always done on Stones records, slicing and dicing classic blues and Berryesque motifs into junkyard-dog guitar growls, singing in a shaky tortured-tonsil yelp that makes Jagger sound like Metropolitan Opera material. Half of the songs are really just licks and skeletal chord changes cribbed from the Rolling Stones' riff manual and jammed into sing-along shape. "Big Enough" is basically "Hot Stuff" spiked with loopy bass by Bootsy Collins and squealing alto sax by James Brown vet Maceo Parker. "Take It So Hard," with its tough, staccato chords and boys-in-the-barroom backup vocals, is a chip off the old *Exile on Main Street* block.

Admittedly short on ambition, the album — written and produced by Richards and drummer Steve Jordan — is deliciously long on grooves like the lazily swinging "Rockawhile" and the overtly Stonesy "Whip It Up." "Make No Mistake," a copycat slice of Al Green erotica, finds Richards, in a surprisingly credible croon, and former Labelle singer Sarah Dash lighting a nice little bedroom fire, which is fanned by the Memphis Horns.

A little ambition would have gone a long way, though. In his open poison-pen letter to Jagger, the voodoo-blues stroll "You Don't Move Me," Richards complains that "you made the wrong motion/Drank the wrong potion/You lost the feeling/That's so appealing." But stepping out of bounds is what solo albums are for. Although Richards surrounds himself with top-drawer players on *Talk Is Cheap* — among them, Bernie Worrell, Ivan Neville, Joey Spampinato, Waddy Wachtel and zydeco superstars Michael Doucet and Stanley "Buckwheat" Dural — he concentrates so much on familiar motions and feelings that the whole record starts to sound like an unfinished Stones platter.

Make no mistake, this album is a joy to behear in a pop era where too many records are ten-percent inspiration and ninety-percent remixing. But if *Talk Is*

Cheap has a major flaw, it's only that it is an all-too-simple pleasure, great grooves in search of a vital purpose, just as Jagger's own solo trips were hip concepts lacking that randy Keef edge. If Jagger and Richards have learned anything from each other's records, it's probably that their greatest assets are each other. —David Fricke



★★★
EVERYTHING
The Bangles
COLUMBIA

THE 1986 ALBUM 'DIFFERENT LIGHT' was the commercial breakthrough for the Los Angeles hard-harmony quartet the Bangles, but it was also the sound of their careers getting away from them. All of the hits were written by outside writers; many of the instruments were played by session players; and the slick sound was different from — and softer than — the sharp, harmony-laden power pop of their earlier records. But the album's success gave Susanna Hoffs, Michael Steele and Debbi and Vicki Peterson the leverage and the confidence to do more of the work in house. Bangle members wrote or co-wrote everything on *Everything*, and new producer Davitt Sigerson, who helped David and David make their dark visions palatable to the masses, encourages the Bangles to kick hard into their songs.

Not that they're doing this all themselves. Hired guns Billy Steinberg and Tom Kelly helped Hoffs write three songs, most notably the insouciant, inviting "In Your Room." But by taking more chances, the Bangles sound more comfortable than they have since their 1982 EP *Bangles*. On numbers like "I'll Set You Free" and "Make a Play for Her Now," their harmonies are the clearest and most evocative they've ever been — their voices float, coalesce and soar. The only problem is the lyrics. The Bangles are indeed comfortable on *Everything*, but the flip side to being comfortable is being complacent. The words of "Bell Jar," "Glitter Years" and several other songs circle around ideas without zeroing in, settling for cliché when they give up on precision. But the lyrics are balanced by the strong music, which is everything the quartet wants it to be. —Jimmy Guterman