

# Pop poll produces zero agreement

*Editor's note: With our regular columnist, Jim Zebora, taking a week off from his typewriter, we asked some Record-Journal staff members to discuss their favorite recorded music of '81.*

By PETER GRAD

It was a lean year for good music. Perhaps it was the anguish musicians felt over the loss of John Lennon, or maybe the despair over the elevation into power of the most anti-humanitarian, anti-poor, anti-environment and



Tom Petty

anti-consumer administration we've seen since the worst days of the Nixon-Agnew regime.

But thanks to the efforts of a couple of veterans and some of the more industrious groups that emerged in the late '70's, the year was not a complete disaster.

Following are five of the most impressive releases of 1981.

**James Taylor, DAD LOVES HIS WORK** (Columbia) — An album from James Taylor is always a welcome event. It is interesting to note that while so many tunes by the daddy of the post-Beatles folk-rock era are familiar to rock enthusiasts, there have been but a mere seven albums to his credit since 1969. Now we can add to that list "Dad Loves His Work." Along with the relatively mediocre hit "Her Town Too,"

Taylor offers a forceful version of "Stand Up and Fight," which he performed during the recent No Nukes concert series. Outstanding cuts are "Sugar Trade" and "Believe It or Not," Taylor at his best — simply orchestrated yet piercing ballads. "London Town" is a sleeper — listen for its compelling refrain; "That Lonesome Road" represents a departure for Taylor, a black spiritual put to three-part harmony which closes the album on a memorable note.

**Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, HARD PROMISES** (Backstreet, MCA) — Tom openly professes his admiration for the Byrds and the Roger McGuinn influence on the group's work is far from subtle. Nevertheless, this is one of the most exciting groups recording today. "A Woman in Love," a haunting acoustic composition, is destined to become a radio classic in the mold of Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Free Bird," the Zep's "Stairway to Heaven" and Pure Prairie League's "Aimee." "Letting You Go" and "A Thing About You" are also extremely catchy. They're clearly a group to keep an eye on, with albums consistently strong and getting better.

**Billy Joel, GLASS HOUSES** (CBS) — OK, it's cheating a little — the album was released in '80, but we really began to savor it in early '81. Joel doesn't merely make albums, he makes hit singles and strings them together on two sides of 12" discs. The first half of this album is unquestionably among the best A-sides ever released. The chunky "You May Be Right," "It's All Rock and Roll to Me" and "Sometimes a Fantasy"; the taunting "Don't Ask me Why" and the delicate "All for Leyna." "C'Etait Toi" on side 2 is Joel's beautiful reply to the Beatles' "Michelle" and "Through the Long Night" an interesting ballad with extraordinary chord shifts and harmony blends. Joel hasn't had a bad album yet and he makes it seem effortless.

**Police, GHOST IN THE MACHINE** (A&M) — An uneven effort by the best new wave group out of Britain. The group thrives on repetitious musical themes wound around elementary lyrics — the formula works superbly for the trio on such songs as "So Lonely," "Message in a Bottle" and "I Can't Stand Losing You" from earlier albums. Their sound is similar to the defunct Zombies (the most under-rated group from the '60s who may have been second only to the Beatles for their consistently outstanding productions) and

they have incorporated compelling reggae rhythms to tight, seductive harmonies which have succeeded in garnering tremendous sales among an unusually wide range of fans. But here, for the first time, the group falters, and on no less than four cuts. Just the same, the successes, such as the single "Every Little Thing She Does is Magic" and the mystical "Secret Journey" and "Invisible Sun" make up for the deficit and the album upholds the group's genius.

**Hawks, HAWKS** (Columbia) — A new group with a lot of energy and strong writing. Four of the five members contribute compositions, and most of the tunes are strong rockers with catchy refrains. Best cuts are "It's All Right, It's O.K." and "American Girls." They're not the most profound lyrics to be heard, but then again, it's only rock 'n roll and we like it. The Hawks can establish themselves if they follow up with an album of equal excellence.

By DAVID JACOBSON

**Rickie Lee Jones, PIRATES** — Subtle and emotionally intelligent. It's great stuff thanks to rich lyrics and flawless, clever production that includes the best horn section conceivable — Tom Scott, Randy and Michael Brecker. Ms. Jones' second album is more jazz free-form and less be-bop than her debut with the pluses and minuses that such creative stretching implies. But the few flat stretches are more than compensated for by such extended triumphs as "Livin' It Up" — the saga that brings together Eddie (who has "one crazy eye that turns him into a cartoon when a pretty girl goes by") and Louie (who "speaks fluent blonde") and Zero (a woman who wears "a black-and-blue dress").

Ms. Jones' continues to forge a fine vocal style that is an admixture of Van Morrison, Laura Nyro, and her own anxious soprano. The phrasings and range of her singing are consistently surprising and rewarding even given repeated listenings. This latter point is particularly important since this was the only new album that I could afford to fork out for this year.

By Howard Glazer

Being a devotee of AM radio, and not having a 1981 album numbered among my 1981 record purchases, I am singularly unqualified to pick a top album. However, I can and will submit a listing of my five favorite singles of this year.

**Rick Springfield, JESSE'S GIRL** — Hey folks, the soap opera pretty boy

can sing and his band can play. If this one didn't get you drumming on your steering wheel this summer, check the obituary listings because you're probably among them.

**The Commodores, LADY (YOU BRING ME UP)** — Another summer song that made the miles fly. As joyous a song as has been heard since the Emotions' "Best of My Love."

**Carly Simon, JESSE** — Two songs about guys named Jesse in the same year, and both were killers. Her best song since the classic "You're So Vain," it should have been a bigger hit.

**A Taste of Honey, SUKIYAKI** — The awful title is a holdover from its previous life as a Japanese novelty hit, but A Taste of Honey makes the song work as a slow lament of lost love. My only objection is to the corny "Sayonara" at the end.

**Rod Stewart, THE YOUNG TURKS** — The man's never made a bad single, but this one is exceptional. Not a vintage Stewart screamer, but plenty of opportunity for that throat-full-of-razor-blades voice to soar.

By SCOTT HAYES

**Bob Seger and the Silver Bullet Band, NINE TONIGHT** — "Nine Tonight" offers listenable, energetic music that fits in whether at home, driving along an interstate, or out at a club.

By JOHN KWOLEK

**Frank Zappa, YOU ARE WHAT YOU IS** (Barking Pumpkin Records) — Frank Zappa is a sick puppy, I've always loved animals; therefore, I can't help but be enthralled by Zappa's new "You Are What You Is" album, especially since it's on the Barking Pumpkin label.



Rod Stewart

## D.J. rebels against radio's robot hit choices

By MARK SCHWED  
NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UPI) — It was like a segment from the television show WKRP in Cincinnati — a disc jockey locked himself in the control room to protest the "depersonalization of radio."

Captain Midnight, the night disc jockey at WUSW FM, a country music station based in Lebanon, Tenn., refused to conform to management's wishes. He was fired.

The incident underlines a problem in radio stations across America — the same "hit" songs are being played more frequently, more stations are using pre-programmed tapes and some stations are using computers instead of disc jockeys. The

result: you hear less and less new music and "radio personalities" are disappearing.

Radio stations — whether they're rock, pop, country or easy listening — have a list of songs which may be played by the disc jockeys. These "playlists" go so far as to define how many times a song must be played in an hour, and even the order the song must be played.

Disc jockeys are relegated to the task of naming song titles and making announcements of public service or station promotion nature. Deviation is considered grounds for dismissal.

That's what bothered Roger Schott, 50, better known in radioland as

Captain Midnight.

The 25-year radio veteran has gained a reputation for being a "Gonzo Disc Jockey," refusing to stick to playlists and shunning restrictions on his on-air style. His trademark is outspokenness.

It came to a head Oct. 23

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when Midnight nailed shut the door to the control room in protest of restrictions placed on his style by management.

The station pried the door off its hinges, and

gave Midnight two days to cool off. Two weeks later, however, Midnight slipped back into his old ways of "too much talk and playing his own records" and was fired.

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