

RECORDS



Starting Over
Raspberries
Capitol ST 11329

By Ken Barnes

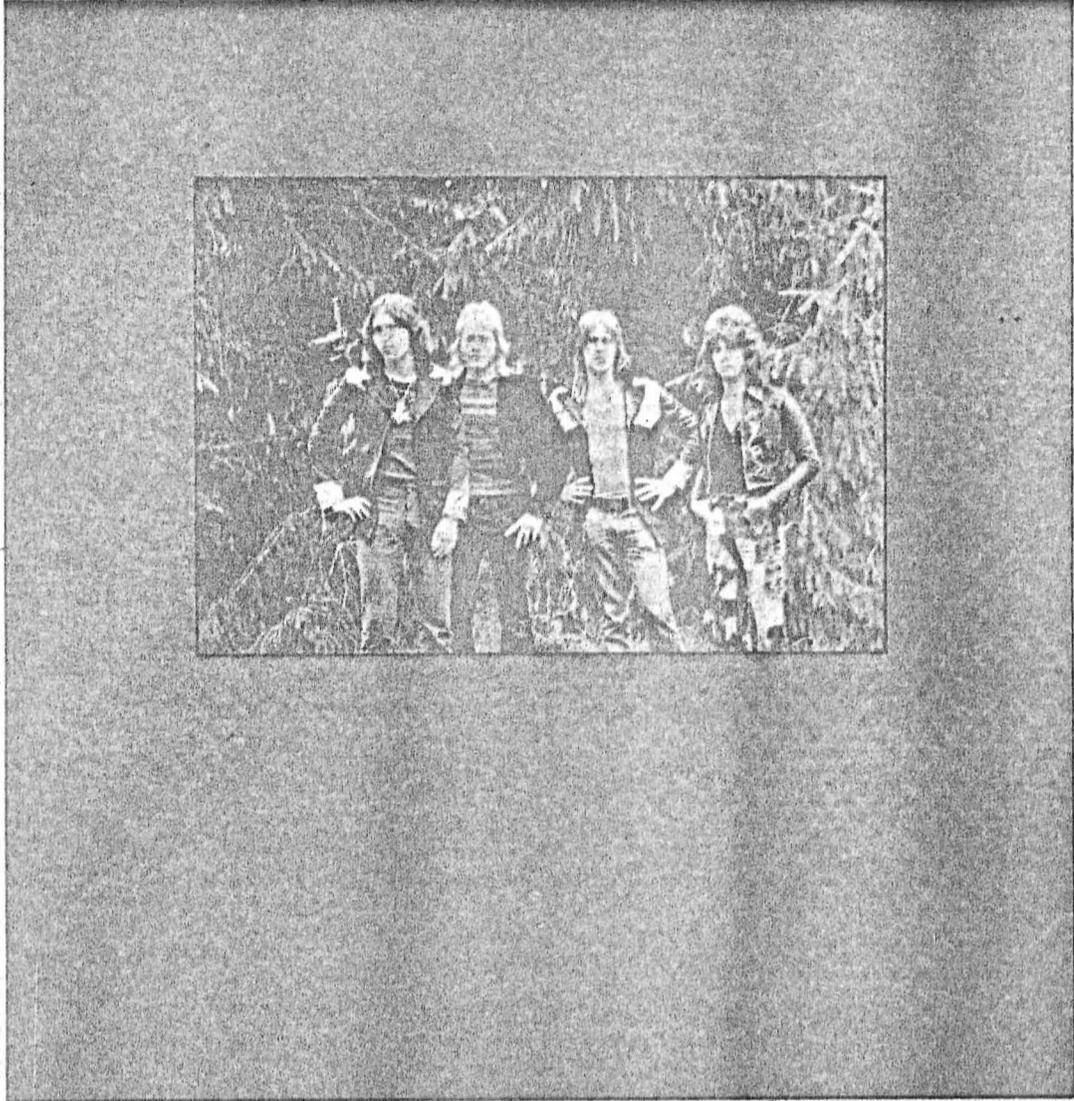
The Raspberries have at last realized their potential. They've clearly become the premier synthesizers of Sixties pop influences extant. Even more importantly, the end results of their adroit collages of musical knowledge often equal or surpass their models' original creations.

As illustrations there are two perfectly astonishing tracks on *Starting Over*. "I Don't Know What I Want" is the ultimate Who tribute, a superbly integrated pastiche of Who styles, 1965-71. Fragments of Townshend melodies surface here and there, and Eric Carmen's vocal is an uncanny Roger Daltrey imitation. Yet the song stands on its own merits as a modern teenage frustration classic.

"Overnight Sensation (Hit Record)" boasts a stunning production, combining an ultra-complex Beach Boys approach with Phil Spector techniques. Lyrically it's a refreshingly frank confession of the band's number one goal. Unlike those sensitive, questing souls who profess to disdain their gold records, the Raspberries want that hit on the radio. And they know what it takes to get it—"If the program director don't pull it/Then it's time to get back a bullet" is a far cry from the naive "Please Mr. DJ play my record" complaints of a decade ago.

Though the Beach Boys and the Who are historically my favorite artists, I'd have to admit that "Overnight Sensation" and "I Don't Know What I Want" eclipse anything either band has done recently. They also overshadow the rest of the album, which is almost uniformly excellent and contains three other tracks which likewise outshine most of the available product. "I Can Hardly Believe You're Mine" is a gorgeous rockaballad, "Play On" has captivating harmonies over high-voltage rocking and "Cruisin Music" is a consummately produced Beach Boys-style tribute to the car radio.

Starting Over is still not the ultimate Raspberries triumph,



Giff Moore

but its highest points are as lofty as any heights rock music '74 has scaled.



Broken Rainbows
Michael d'Abo
A&M SP-3634

By Ken Emerson

"The Mighty Quinn," the original Manfred Mann's last substantial hit in the States, introduced Michael d'Abo to American ears. He was the lead singer, having replaced Paul Jones (who had departed to take up acting). But shortly thereafter the group broke up, and since then d'Abo has dabbled in theater, penned several numbers popularized by others ("Build Me Up, Buttercup" and most notably, Rod Stewart's "Handbags And Gladraggs") and intermittently pursued a modest career as a singer/songwriter. His last A&M album, *Down at Rachel's Place*, was quite British and very pop. It sold poorly, which may be why *Broken*

Rainbows is very American, an odd mix of country rock and Randy Newman.

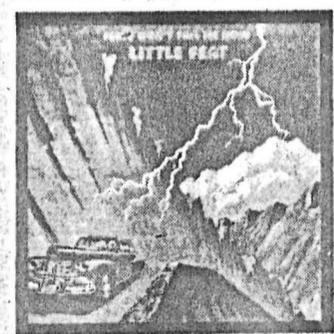
The Americanization of Michael d'Abo has been to the detriment of his imagination. *Broken Rainbows*'s simple, moving rendition of "Handbags And Gladraggs," written seven years ago, has a forceful integrity and uniqueness missing in the more recent material—in the banal melody and sentiments of the title track (until the closing seconds, Michael Bloomfield's guitar is equally cliched), in the trite country tune of "The Last Match" and in the commonplaces of "I Go Where My Spirit Leads Me." On *Rachel's Place* d'Abo's slant was quirkier and more interesting; here he's a very capable journeyman.

After a promising beginning, the jaunty "Fuel To Burn" (which boasts the Jordanaires' harmonies, Ben Keith's pedal steel, a banjo and Graham Nash's merry harmonica), *Broken Rainbows*'s countryish first side quickly runs out of steam. It perks up again only on the last cut, "I Go Where My Spirit Leads Me," where a sweet melody and d'Abo's lovely piano overcome the unremarkable lyrics. This is also one of d'Abo's finest vocals, although his easy tenor, which can rise to an effective falsetto or shift to a gruffer lower register, is appealing and convincing

throughout the album.

On side two Randy Newman's influence, or the influence of Alan Price's interpretations of Randy Newman, is too conspicuous for comfort. D'Abo's singing as well as his tunes and piano playing become imitative, and the combination of arch sentimentality, drunken humor and comic irony is all too familiar.

Its derivativeness does not make *Broken Rainbows* unlistenable. Elliot Mazer's unobtrusive production, the variety of arrangements and musicians and d'Abo's skills add up to an agreeable album. Unfortunately, it lacks that spark of originality or character that makes a record more than merely nice.



Feats Don't Fail Me Now
Little Feat
Warner Bros. BS 2784

By Ben Gerson

Little Feat began as a writers' band, the writers being key-

boardist Bill Payne and slide guitarist / singer Lowell George. By the group's second album, *Sailin' Shoes*, George's voice and guitar had progressed to the point where Little Feat was no longer just a writers' band: Material, performance and production were held in equipoise through that album and its successor, *Dixie Chicken*. On *Feats Don't Fail Me Now* that perfect tension has slackened. Now the band's strength has driven out the quirky but affecting vision that made Little Feat unique and worth cherishing. The outfit is a superb, well-oiled machine but with some of the impersonality which such a characterization implies.

Little Feat has had a terribly checkered history, with near breakups occurring not quite as frequently as damaging rumors said they were. George hopes he has finally achieved a measure of stability: He is not quite as dominant as he once was—he has consciously down-played his own authority—but this may not be the root of the problem. It is almost as if once he decided to cede responsibility to the others, he also decided to make his writing less reflective of his own slant than of the new, corporate Little Feat, a group that he no longer commands. Nearly the same can be surmised of Payne, whose earlier efforts were as original as George's.

The group's prismatic, L.A.-dominated view of culture first gave way to *Dixie Chicken*'s earthier, less frenetic, but still witty approach. *Feats*, in a further reduction, turns out to be almost pure funk, situated squarely below the Mason-Dixon line (the first three songs make reference to the State of Georgia). But the songs on *Feats*—though within the group's chosen specialty—do not evoke the frenzy of their counterparts on *Dixie Chicken*, like "Two Trains" and "Fat Man in the Bathtub." The syncopations of "Rock and Roll Doctor" are riveting but the tune's overall format is too choppy to be uplifting. Yet along with the title song, "Down The Road," and guitarist Paul Barrere's "Skin It Back," it qualifies as fine dance music. The latter two also boast some fabulous guitar interplay—between the tricky and the breathtakingly simple. George's whining slide, which hasn't diminished a bit, is on a level with Ry Cooder's or Duane Allman's but is instantly distinguishable from either.

Little Feat's deviations here from their standard are "Spanish Moon" and "Wait Till the Shit Hits the Fan." "Spanish Moon" is a bayou trance, with growling voices, growling clav-