

Although "Misunderstood" sounds like it could be a *Who By Numbers* outtake, Pete Townshend's writing on this album is fresher than it's sounded in a long time, especially on the sprightly hymn, "Keep Me Turning," and on "Heart to Hang On To," which might be the most beautiful song that he's yet written. The latter is a sober statement of life purpose, a refinement of the message of "How Many Friends Have I Really Got." But here, no longer remorseful, Townshend strikes a hopeful pose as he catalogs a few souls who try so hard to have a good time that they don't even see it pass them by. When he cries, "Give me a heart to hang on to," he makes it sound like an anthem.

But Pete Townshend's not the whole story—Ronnie Lane's songs are every bit as important to the record. "Nowhere to Run" and "Annie" set the tone for *Rough Mix*, a tone that is happily resigned and, in a way, eerily fatalistic: "It's bad news but I heard what he said . . . / There's nowhere to run."

Lane was the creative force in the Faces, and you can hear elements of that band's cheeriest moments in his playing on the title track and on an uproarious drinking song, "Catmelody," that features a line that Rod Stewart would have savored in a moment of abandon: "This old trash can's seen it all before."

Pete Townshend and Ronnie Lane form a great combo—a little more slapstick and a lot less deadpan than Townshend's running number with John Entwistle—and I like the way that it feels. Just think, if it weren't for Meher Baba, this album may never have been possible.

Stick to Me—Graham Parker and the Rumour (Mercury)

by Mitchell Schneider

No matter how angry and defiant Graham Parker may come across on *Stick to Me*—at times a raging rhapsody for a stormy night, a loud howl at the crack of doom—his gutsy, sometimes harsh vocals also manage to exude a great degree of fear. If Parker's arms are long enough to box with God—"Hey, Lord/Don't ask me questions," he threatened on *Howlin' Wind*—he also sounds like someone's holding a bayonet to his throat. The resultant nervous energy, probably inspired by Eric Burdon's vocal twitches on the Animals' mid-Sixties classic, "It's My Life," spectacularly launches Graham Parker's music, and immediately separates him from the British nouveau punks. With those dark sunglasses that probably conceal eyeballs as fiery as meteorites blazing through space (*has to be*: the singer's recorded and onstage

exorcisms can really be blood-bubbling), Parker doesn't sink, he swims, in much the manner of Patti Smith ("Break It Up" from *Horses*) and Jackson Browne ("Before the Deluge" from *Late for the Sky*). Amid the Rumour's hellbound instrumentation on the title tune, fired by clipped guitar playing and insistent horns, Parker declares, "We won't drown," evincing an unbreakable will to survive.

If the new record, in its entirety, doesn't quite match *Heat Treatment* for commanding melodies and introspective fervor, it represents Parker and the Rumour's most forceful, muscular R&B/rock & roll to date. Producer Nick Lowe has apparently encouraged the boys to unzip their skins and rock out. Consider "Clear Head," whose brash lead vocals, raw chording, and aggressive harmonica fills deliver the dynamite that the Rolling Stones were once capable of exploding. *Stick to Me* keenly combines passion and drama with genuine musi-



You feel the heat in Harlem everywhere on Parker's 'Stick to Me.'

cal interest, too. The romantic conflict of "I'm Gonna Tear Your Playhouse Down" is dramatized through Indian war rhythms, horns, and upfront percussion. The sweaty delirium of "The Heat in Harlem" derives power from gospel sisters, pointed guitar playing, and restless reggae/soul rhythms.

Scattered throughout *Stick to Me* are images of vampires biting, bats caught in hair, birds circling aimlessly, lightning crackling, and someone banging his head against concrete. Broadly, the album is about control: being trapped by it ("Soul on Ice," "The Heat in Harlem"), fighting it ("Stick to Me"), almost surrendering to it ("Watch the Moon Come Down"), and, finally, taking it yourself ("I'm Gonna Tear Your Playhouse Down").

What hauntingly charges "Watch the Moon Come Down," arguably the best song that Parker has ever written, are his neurotic vocals. Right after the despairing "Everyone's been blown out/Everyone's been thrown out," he tenderly sings, "Baby, baby, baby . . . / Watch the moon come down." To these ears, the artist evokes a scenario of lovers huddling together on some backstreet while the earth shakes and the planets collide. For Parker, romance is the only possible way to survive the

apocalypse (even if his "fool's gold" is a temporary "hotel chambermaid," as he related on *Heat Treatment*). However much Parker might doubt this philosophy on "Thunder and Rain"—"Lovers get caught just the same/In the thunder and rain," he snarls—he still realizes that he needs romance to function. Against melodic, blistering guitar leads and punchy rhythms, Parker bravely (and fearfully, too) machine-guns the lyrics right into the storm:

*Lightning cracked
I fell back
Hail dropped like bullets through
the air
Pull me in
By the skin
Give me the strength to go out there.*

Stick to Me comes with several disappointments, unfortunately. The rampant emotional power of "Soul on Ice" is weakened by the band's hastily tacked-on harmonies. The reggae of "Problem Child" fails to spring the song properly. And the LP ends abruptly, apparently in mid-air, with a good-time rocker, "The Raid." That said, *Stick to Me* still reasserts Graham Parker and the Rumour's enviable position as obvious heirs to the Rolling Stones' throne. Surely, that's high enough praise to bestow on anyone.

One night a few months ago, I was riding in my car along Manhattan's FDR Drive when the Parker/Rumour remake of "Hold Back the Night" (found only on "The Pink Parker" extended-play single) came on the radio. As Parker steamed his way through the song, his voice caught somewhere between euphoria and agony, I wanted to accelerate, drift out of my lane, crash into the divider, and go into an eternal spin-out over the East River. Make no mistake about it, Graham Parker makes you dream of night moves like that.

Show Time—Ry Cooder (Warner Bros.)

by Ariel Swartley

On last year's tour, Ry Cooder realized the intentions that never quite came off—or only in patchy, brilliant moments—on *Chicken Skin Music*. But that makes sense. Cooder was trying to meld still-living traditions—gospel, Tex-Mex—with the music that spawned and paralleled them: blues, topical songs, and dance tunes. The experience of playing with representatives of different traditions night after night under the pressures of performance made for a fusion more complete than any studio arrangement. Few musicians inspire the kind of respect Cooder does—a mixture of awe and almost patronizing affection, due to the gentlemanly relations he maintains with traditional music. In its presence, he is at once masterful and