

record can't be too far behind. For despite their widely scattered points of origin, Cooder's songs somehow add up to a smooth, coherent concert repertoire. An estimable musicologist, Ry Cooder never forgets that he's a performer: Depression ballads from Woody Guthrie ("Do Re Mi") and Blind Alfred Reed ("How Can a Poor Man Stand Such Times and Live") get tasteful rearrangements that put their musicality up front.

On "Do Re Mi," for example, Flaco Jimenez' athletic accordion and Cooder's blustery vocal turn Guthrie's bitter lament into a campfire hoot. (Richard Manuel's rolling piano helped Arlo Guthrie do likewise in a recently released 1970 concert tribute to Woody.) And—not to twist the peg too tightly—it is a mark of Cooder's artistic certitude that both of the above songs, plus "Alimony," also appeared on Side One of his debut album seven years ago.

Yes, the man gets you thinking historically, and that doesn't have to be dull. Having done an instrumental take of that grand incunabulum, "The Dark End of the Street," on 1972's *Boomer's Story*, he now hands the song to his three backup singers. Eldridge King, Terry Evans, and Bobby King give this adulterer's ballad a throaty, lustrous reading which Cooder's slide accompaniment ornaments wonderfully.

What a barroom song—it could make you blubber in your beer. But, listening on the home phono, some may call it overblown, just as some would say that "Jesus on the Mainline" tips too far into parody, and that "School Is Out," cut in the studio, lacks vocal oompah.

But this band played on Cooder's last record, *Chicken Skin Music*, and, like him, they represent too valuable a resource to be carpied at. *Show Time* could qualify as a fine party record, and appreciating it as such may help stifle the complaint that Ry Cooder has left us once again somewhere between paradise and lunch.

### IV Rattus Norvegicus— The Stranglers (A&M)

by Mitchell Schneider

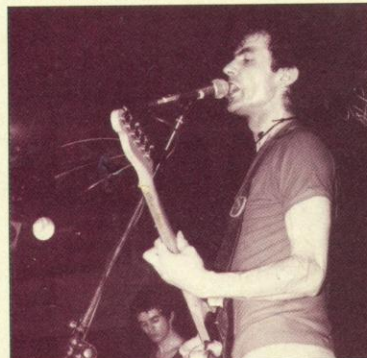
Deviation, nihilism, and safety pins through your ear lobes and cheeks, buddy, because this is 1977, not *Where the Boys Are*, starring Connie Francis. It's dark out there, and there ain't no hope, bitch, so we're taking England down the drain and into the sewer with us:

*I'll tell you what I'm gonna do  
Gonna make love to a water rat  
or two  
And breed a family  
They'll be called the survivors  
You know why?  
'Cause they're gonna survive.*

So say the Stranglers on "Down in the Sewer" from *IV Rattus Norvegicus*, their debut album which trotted to number four on the British charts only 10 days after its release. Definitely not a press release for the Queen's Silver Jubilee, this seven-minute, four-part song is a marvelous shot of rock & roll. Out of the speakers and into your home comes a snarling voice intoned over clipped, prowling rhythms with hypnotic organ drones and a mechanically thumping bass.

The Stranglers, whose New Wave\* transatlantic counterpart is Television, are probably the most musical of the British punk groups—which means, for better or for worse, that they don't sound like birds shrieking from the inside of a running engine. Borrowing freely but discreetly from the Doors and from Roxy Music, the group's sound has power and depth. Throughout, aggressively stubborn rhythms are repeated endlessly, while trebly guitar leads and eerie keyboard noises dish out labyrinthine melodies and counter-melodies. On top of all of that are the half-sung, half-spoken, always snotty vocals of Hugh Cornwell and Jean Jacques Burnel, who take enormous pride in their ennui, frustration, and abject failure. For the Stranglers, a day at the beach ("Peaches") doesn't consist of surfing and sipping Ocean Spray Cranapple over ice: "I can think of a lot worse places to be . . . down in the sewer/Or even on the end of a skewer."

But for all of the Stranglers' assets—gale-force instrumentation, melodic



**The Stranglers: popularizing low-grade social disorders.**

clarity, and often wonderfully sordid lyrics—*IV Rattus Norvegicus* runs into two major problems. Except for "Down in the Sewer," the vocals generally lack the necessary incantatory power of, say, Lou Reed, Patti Smith, or John Caie at their most heroically delirious. And, perhaps most of all, the band's foolish obsession with brutally misogynous lyrics not only becomes pretty obnoxious, but keeps the album from rising beyond mere novelty status. Less than 30 seconds into the record, a gruff, truculent voice announces, "Someday I'm gonna smack your face." The voice returns later on, more

hostile, and it's not Barry White but the guy who gagged and knifed Theresa Dunn in *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*: "Is she trying to get out of that clitoris?/ Liberation for women/That's what I preach."

Anyway, one thing's for sure: *IV Rattus Norvegicus* makes the perfect Christmas gift for that mass murderer right down the block.

### Caught Live + 5—The Moody Blues (London) Paradise Ballroom—The Graeme Edge Band (London) Natural Avenue—John Lodge (London)

by Michael Bloom

When I was in high school, I used to play in all sorts of local rock bands—strictly garage stuff, but because my ear was better than anyone else's in the neighborhood, our jukebox copies sounded more authentic than most. We sailed through Stones and Who and Byrds songs (we even did a Zappa number), but the sound of the Moody Blues always eluded us, and I couldn't figure out why.

Listening to *Caught Live +5*, I now know the story. It should have been obvious all along: The Moody Blues were the first of the ultra-produced pop legends, with a zillion guitar overdubs and all sorts of orchestral noises on every one of their favorite tracks. For them to reproduce all of that in concert would have taken a platoon of guitarists and pianists. Needless to say, since they brought none of the above onstage with them, their live sound was as full of holes as any garage band's.

They did possess one quality that no garage band had, though: their ultimately serene and mellifluous aah's. This was the heart of the Moody Blues' appeal: their aah's and ooh's transmitted more pure sybaritic delight than a school of whales lolling at low tide or harem night in any Arabian court. Even when they did it onstage, that sound bypassed the brain's intellectual circuitry and nestled up in the pleasure center like a kitten in one's lap.

Only two of the five dead dogs tacked onto *Caught Live +5* are worth a second listen, and, predictably, they're both by Justin Hayward. Hayward has always been the master of the joyous moan because his voice is the warmest and his compositions the least preachy. This double set is for hardcore fans only.

*Paradise Ballroom* is the latest documentation of an ongoing con game by guitarist Adrian Gurvitz, who may be the stupidest man in rock but who always manages to rope some drummer into taking him in for a few albums. When Ginger Baker, his last employer, wised up, Gurvitz made a beeline for