The Mothers have an abortion

Just Another Band From L.A. — The Mothers (Bizarre/Reprise)

We used to look for Frank Zappa for a challenge. He always seemed to be pushing us to areas we didn’t know before. The Mothers of Invention had been one of the real underground groups when each band as Jefferson Airplane and Country Joe & The Fish were just starting to be played on the radio. Through social satire on Absolutely Free and We’re Only In It For The Money, and through great love songs in Freak Out and Rubber and the Jets, the Mothers were always distinguished from their counterparts in obscenity, the Fugs, in that the Mothers were a good band and could create interesting and sometimes complex music. Uncle Meat and Hot Rats showed Zappa as a strong creator, with good jazz feelings also. The Fugs eventually had nothing left but the obscenity and they faded out of popularity eventually having nothing left but the obscenity and they faded out of popularity.

Well, now the Mothers seem destined for the same thing. The re-formed group still contains Ian Underwood and Don Preston, two good musicians, along with Zappa. But the presence of Howard Kaylan and Mark Volman as vocalists and collaborators has had a terrible effect, coinciding with Zappa’s dry spell as a composer. All four albums with this band have been disappointing and losing us to areas we didn’t know before. There is approximate 10 to 12 songs of two-and-a-half to four minutes duration, he has opted for four songs total, two of which are of the fifteen minute variety. The keyboards have totally vanished on the title cut (all 16 minutes and 40 seconds of it) on the other cuts, they surface for only occasional rants. He has moved from the key instruments to guitar, even though his competence on guitar doesn’t approach his excellence on organ and piano. The songs amount to jams, barrage of sound, which are admiredly strong, solid, and powerful efforts.

It seems evident, right from the cover art, that Lee Michaels wanted to produce a different style album, a “spacey” one to break away from the old groove he was in. But the change leaves me uncertain; there’s a feel to Space and First Takes that prevents me from deciding if I like it or not. If you’re a Lee Michaels fan, this new bent might disturb you. If you want some heavy, strong music, then perhaps this disc is right up your alley. But for me, it leaves me torn between dismay, for the loss of those fine keyboards, and visceral pleasure, over those dense, massive exercises in sound.

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good or bad?

Space and First Takes — Lee Michaels (A&M)

Lee Michaels has long been, in my estimation, just a small notch below the best keyboardmen — Keith Emerson, Rick Wakeman, and Rod Argent. His albums have consistently put forth a guitar-lesss style of California rock and white blues that is readily distinguishable and quite unique in the music field. So Space and First Takes comes as more than just a little surprise. Rather than the usual 10 to 12 songs of two-and-a-half to four minutes duration, he has opted for four songs total, two of which are of the fifteen minute variety. The keyboards have totally vanished on the title cut (all 16 minutes and 40 seconds of it) on the other cuts, they surface for only occasional rants. He has moved from the key instruments to guitar, even though his competence on guitar doesn’t approach his excellence on organ and piano. The songs amount to jams, barrage of sound, which are admiredly strong, solid, and powerful efforts.

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