Robert Fripp exposes his new music


Some History

From 1969 to 1974 Robert Fripp was the leader and guitarist for King Crimson, a pioneering progressive band. Following the demise of Crimson, Fripp collaborated with Brian Eno, producing two albums and a series of guest appearances on Eno’s later projects. More recently Fripp has acted as producer for a variety of artists, including Daryl Hall, Peter Gabriel, Blondie, and the Roche sisters. This May saw the release of Exposure, Fripp’s first album in five years and the first ever to bear his name. Unfortunately, at times Exposure sounds like the first effort of a new solo artist instead of the work of a highly respected progressive avant-garde musician.

The flaw is not in the material or the production; rather, it is the attitude with which the material is presented that disappoints. It would have been expected that Fripp, in his usual passion for perfection, would have painstakingly produced every note until it met with his satisfaction, but this is not the case. As an experiment Fripp chose to do each tune in one take; in addition, he wrote no melodies — he just handed the lyrics and the chord changes to a computer, including a tape conversation (Exposure is rife with these ambiguities) in which Fripp asks someone to listen to some of his recent work which might be “more commercial” and proceeds to present one of his most uncommercial efforts, closing the album by stating (again, on tape) “It’s all a big hoax.” This is not the best way to make one receptive to a new release.

No amount of mind games can obscure the moments of brilliance that surface, all of them instrumental. “Breathless” is a chugging-crusher that sounds like a variation of “Red,” a tune from the Crimson album of the same name. “Breathless” features Fripp solosing on a “skywauk” guitar which produces an amazing hollow sound. (The “skywauk” is a modified guitar developed by Eno and used on the tune “Sky Sux” from his Another Green World album.) The other instruments, “Urban Landscape,” “Water Music I” and “Water Music II” are the opposites to “Breathless” in the mood they present. Utilizing a system called Frippertronics (two tape recorders and a long tape loop used to produce a long repeated delay, enabling Fripp to play along with what he recorded ten seconds before) the “Water Music” cuts and “Landscape” come across as very soft, meditative pieces. The harmonies and rhythms follow naturally from each other, creating a very pleasing (but not boring) sound.

The tunes with vocals do not always fare as well as the instrumental pieces, but there are still interesting ideas. The improvise-your-own-tune experiment produces two excellent results. The first is Peter Hammill’s forceful screaming rendition of “Disengage,” and the second is Terre Roche’s contribution to “Mary,” a simple pretty tune that benefits from Ms. Roche’s spontaneous innocence. Hammill and Roche trade off lines of “I May Not Have Enough Of Me But I’ve Had Enough Of You,” however, their improvisations do not save the piece from repetitiveness.

Daryl Hall (of Hall and oats — remember them?) sings “You Burn Me Up I Am a Cigarette” and “North Star” — the two weakest tunes on the album. “Cigarette” is a dumpy three-chord rocker with insane lyrics (the only words penned by Fripp), while “North Star” makes a poor attempt at imitating early Hall and oats, complete with synop instrumentation. The phrase best describing the tune is found in the middle of “Husden Two,” in which Fripp describes something as “an absolute-ly dismal, horrid chord sequence.” How ironic, Hall originally sang all the vocals on the album, but corporate executives had all but two of his contributions deleted, hence the presence of Hammill and Roche.

“Chicago” is an unmixed, off-the-cuff, twelve-bar blues sung by Hammill, which is followed by “NY3,” a rather startling piece. The vocals are provided by an anonymous family argument Fripp happened to hear and record while in New York. Backed by frentic string instrumentation, “NY3” is a frightening expression of various emotions. The remaining songs, “Exposure” and “South End Night Ride,” are Fripp’s arrangements of two tunes from the Peter Gabriel solo albums. Fripp’s instrumenta-

Exposure is better than Fripp’s previous album, but it is easy to accept this statement — in Fripp’s words — “of some of my recent ideas.” Exposure is to be the first of a trilogy that will include Frippertronics and Discontentions (scheduled for release in a year), so I will allow Fripp some inconsistency this time in the hope that he will prove himself with his next effort.

— David Shaw

North Dallas Forty

is simple entertainment

By Gordon R. Half

When I left a sneak preview of North Dallas Forty several weeks ago, I was pleasantly surprised. The film had been enjoyable although it certainly wasn’t great. The publicity had given me a sneaking suspicion that it was yet another “B” sports film — replete with busty women — concocted just for those dyed-in-the-wool football fans who can’t even wait for their first exhibition game.

In fact it wasn’t half as bad as I expected. The acting on the whole was fair. The stars, Nick Nolte (who some may remember as the Swede in Rollerball) and Mac Davis, were even pretty good. The social commen-
ta- tion was even a little absurd and just plain bad as it could have been. But in fact it’s when the film stops being about football and pain and starts trying other things that it gets weak.

I guess the best summation I’ve heard came from the person I saw the movie with when she said “That wasn’t bad for a sum-

This past summer particularly when I thought it would be absolutely terrible.”

However, the film is enjoying a popularity out of all proportion to its merits. In Philadelphia, it seems that every other theatre is alternating between North Dallas Forty and a re-released Star Wars. In retrospect it probably isn’t all that surprising. Semi-Tough made it all the way to the cover of Sports Illustrated, albeit with the name of D.T. Reynolds behind it. It’s all part of the mystique which sur-

rounds American football, ironic in that North Dallas Forty exposes some of the real happenings behind that mystique. A lot of loopy football movies have done well in their day. By those standards, an above-average football movie should do very well.

And North Dallas Forty is above average. It effectively combines comedy with a scathing view of a pain-killing drug user called pro football. Even the peripheral characters are credible — a half-stereotyped — a hard-line coach, a big, dumpy linebacker, and lots of football groups.

So, in review, don’t be turned off by the ads that North Dallas Forty is a snobby movie, but don’t expect miracles either. Just look for a film, entertaining and better than most.

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-SEPTEMBER 7. 1979-

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