Off the Beaten Groove

The return of the twang bar king

Adrian Belew on Island Records

Adrian Belew in concert at the Paradise, Thursday through Sunday.

Fate smiled upon Adrian Belew. Plucked out of an obscure Nashville band by that inestimable talent scout, Frank Zappa, Belew soon proved his talent. His stint with Zappa attracted the attention of David Bowie, who asked him to perform on his upcoming Lodger album, on which Belew recorded the most innovative solo heard on vinyl since Jimi Hendrix played "The Star-Spangled Banner." Belew contributed concise explosions of feedback, snarled, unearthly howls and screams: solos that immediately fulfilled his considerable promise.

Beloved Guitarist's Heaven: He was offered a touring and recording position with Talking Heads, then on the verge of becoming a major act, but Bowie's production manager, Chris Frantz, urged Belew to stay with Davy, and the musician was offered a touring and recording position with Talking Heads, then on the verge of becoming a major act. He accepted the position,

Contributing to other artists' records did not satisfy Belew's need to express his own ideas, so he returned home to Springfield, Ill., and formed Ga-Ga to help him realize his music. The results can be heard on last year's Lone Rhino LP, Belew's first solo effort. Although it fairly bristles with clever ideas and manic playing, it is marred by an absence of a fully realized, imaginative talent scout, Frank Zappa, Belew meet Robert Fripp, who asked Belew to contribute to his new album.

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Rip Kasem smash burn up a fret

Q: How did you write "She is Not Dead"?

A: The whole band played the melody, we're from "Man in the Moon," we've got a religious overtone to it. I use the language of industrial terms by taking different saxophone. I've realized by trying different voicings that you can get something that approaches a horn section sound. I think the key is if you have a natural instrument in the mix, like a saxophone, it trumps the ear.

Q: Why did you use a vocoder for a day?

A: I had borrowed a vocoder for a day, and was trying to get that typical Barry White "walrus of love" type voice, and just threw it on the album - I thought it was kind of fun.

Q: How else does your music have a religious overtone to it?

A: I'm sure, I'm sure we've recorded a great portion of the album already in London, and we're going to side aside November for finishing it. I have to finish the lyrics to three or four songs.

Q: What's the current status of King Crimson?

A: We've recorded a great portion of the album already in London, and we're going to side aside November for finishing it. I have to finish the lyrics to three or four songs.

Q: Do you plan to do any more work with other artists?

A: I find myself now really trying to focus in on my own music more than anything else. I've been very selective about my outside work. I haven't worked on anyone else's records in more than a year. I really see that as a point in us having to work all my effort into this band and King Crimson.

Q: Is there anyone you would like to work with that you haven't yet?

A: Yeah, that would also depend on the circumstances. There are a lot of people whose music I respect a great deal — most of them are people who have been around for a while, you know, Joni Mitchell, any of the Beatles — but it would depend upon the circumstances. I tend to want to have a deeper involvement than just being a soloist — that's the appeal for me. I've done a lot of that now.

Q: On the other band, if somebody wants to collaborate with me, and it's the right person, I'd like to do that. I guess if I could work with anyone I'd want to work with John Lennon and Jimi Hendrix — but I guess I'm going to have to wait to work with them.

Q: What gave you the idea for "Sexy Rhino"?

A: I had borrowed a vocoder for a day, and was trying to get that typical Barry White "walrus of love" type voice. I used it as a sound to put in "Twang Bar King" at the end I wanted it to go "Oooh, bah, bah, bah, bah," which I did — and it sounded terrible. We laughed about it and said, "Well, this is so typical." Then I started singing "sexy thing," sexy thing... and finally arrived at the "I fight rhino." That's the way we used the vocoder.

"Twang Bar King" is a humorous lyrics. "She is Not Dead," a London's intricate stickwork provided the perfect background against which Belew's playing exploded. The synth makes sure the pieces on every cut, often acting as a horn section, as in "I Wonder," and also as a full orchestra in "Ballet for a Blue Whale."

Crimson lessons for "Paint the Road," a three-and-a-half minute adenalin-surge fueled by Belew's startling performance on guitar synthesizer. The synth makes sure the pieces on every cut, often acting as a horn section, as in "I Wonder," and also as a full orchestra in "Ballet for a Blue Whale."

Despite the advanced technology, the fo-

Twang Bar King, Belew's new solo album, shows he is very much in control of his influences, to the point where he can wear them on his sleeve. He opens side one with a rip-roaring cover of the Beatles' "I'm Down," and borrows from his King

hunting free chant, is followed by "Fish Head," an old Ga-Ga tune that has finally been recorded. We are all singing along to "Man in the Moon." I guess I'm going to have to wait to work with them.

Q: Then will you be making an instrumental album soon?

A: Well, the way "Ballet for a Blue Whale" came about, was that it was originally intended for a guitar EP I have in mind, which would illustrate all the things you can cut out of guitars, put into an orchestral form. I went to write a lot of music in the mode of Stravinsky — fast, changing, fast paced orchestral pieces of music — that are really written out, based on what all the voices of a normal orchestra are taken up by guitar, even the rhythmic parts.

I got so far as writing "Blue Whale." I thought it was kind of fun. It was exactly the coded message on the inside cover of "Twang Bar King?"

A: No, because we might exploit it as a marketing play, you know. "Captain Belew secret decoder rings" or something. But I will give you this hint: it's a line from "Man in the Moon."

David Shaw