'Ear ye!

Bob Stark

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The idea of getting a lot of great musicians together to work as a back-up band for a featured artist on rock recordings is almost as old as rock itself.

On most of these, the back-up people were lucky to get mentioned conspicuously on the album jacket. But somewhere along the line people began to really care about who played what.

Al Kooper produced and sold the first "Super Session" album on the reputations of the musicians more than on the quality of the music. And then things began to get out of hand.

Any sort of old tape could be sold as long as the people who played on it had big reputations. Albums like Joe Cocker's where the sessions worked hard for the most part to fight a losing battle against musicians whose reputations wouldn't let them stay in the background and critics who'd immediately class it as "another of those." So the trend reversed itself.

The list of people who played on Martha Velez' "Friends and Angels" reads like a who's who of the British underground pop scene yet their names don't appear anywhere on the album jacket. This is Martha Velez' album and the others are there to make sure it works, not to take the credit. And because of them all the instrumental tracks are uniformly great.

The vocals then are forced to make it on their own. Most of them do. Martha's voice reminds me much of Mick Jagger on the early Stones' albums; she hasn't yet gotten herself an individual style.

She cops most of her mannerisms and phrasing from other singers, but even so, her own distinctive personality always seems to come through. She's not just another white chick imitating Bessie Smith. She's Martha Velez and given a year or two to work it out, she will need no more recommendation than that.

The final WABX free concert of the summer was an event, a "happening" for lack of a better word, far more than a musical show and as such defies criticism.

If you were there, you know, and if you missed it, any attempt to be there vicariously will have to be fulfilled by reading Sharon Cassidy in the Detroit News, Just remember STP means Serve the People.

Around 1966 when a lot of people who had gotten into the habit of seriously questioning anything they got involved in began to really dig rock and roll, they brought to the music a new dimension—serious criticism. On the East Coast it manifested itself as *Crawdaddy Magazine* and the point of view was strangely cosmic and metaphysical. The first great surge of the acid generation.

In California it was Mojo Navigator and the point of view was politics and people. The turned on, yet committed, generation.

Always short of funds, Mojo Navigator never looked as good as it was. But its influence in the San Francisco-Berkeley community it served was enormous. Mojo died a natural death, but was soon replaced by the San Francisco -Express-Times (now the Good Times) and a short while later, Rolling Stone took the same idea and made it work.

Now, Griel Marcus, who is on the staff of both *Rolling Stone* and *Good Times* has put together a book of articles, many of them reprints from the *Express-Times*, one from Mojo and several originals which try to give a thorough perspective on the music through the people and the politics. For the most part he succeeds.

Most of the articles are worth reading because they deal with tangibles, with events we know about, written at the time they happened. They don't "explain today's turned-on youth" or "explore the strange world of the hippie." They explain why some people would rather listen to the Rolling Stones than vote for Richard Nixon.

John Angelos and Son Ray are still looking for a bass player for their new group, the Cosmic Rooster. They've already got 3 new songs worked out as well as new arrangements on several of John's older originals.

Musicians interested in trying out can leave their name and phone number for me at the *Fifth Estate* office.