# The Boston Globe

## BIG DADDY BIG DADDY RHINO

The gimmick here is that Big Daddy is purportedly a band captured by Laotian guerrilias in 1959 and held in isolation until last year. So, when they tackle modern material such as the Cars' "You're Just What I Needed," they can only do it in the context of '50s-style rock 'n' roll. The result is howlingly funny but also makes a sagacious point. The stylistic source is clear in every tract. Devo's "Whip It" is done as if it's "The Jet's Song" from "West Side Story." The theme from "Star Wars" is an uncanny reproduction of the sound of the Ventures' "Telestar." Survivor's "Eye of the Tiger" is done in perfect a capella doowop. "Hotel California" sounds as if it was done by Del Shannon, and Elvis Presley seems to sing "Betty Davis Eyes." And in the record's dizziest but most inspired moment. Little Richard takes on "Ebony and Ivory." True, it's hilarious but the point being made is that, occasional lyric content aside, these tracts could pass themselves off as originally having come out of the dashboards of '57 Chevies parked in drive-in hamburger joints. While you're laughing, this record makes you realize just how much style has come to dominate over substance in so much of rock 'n' roll.

- Richard Cromonic

THE BOSTON GLOBE - 9/83

MELODY MAKER, March 16, 1985

ENGLAND 1985

#### BIG DADDY

#### **BIG DADDY**

Making Waves THE scam goes something like this. The five big men who make up fab Fifties rock who make up tab Fittles rock in roll outfit Big Daddy go AWOL on a tour of Northern Lass towards the end of 1959. They are saved from certain and horrible death by posing as fellow revolutionaries with a passing interest in cray. passing interest in crazy American music and they spend the next 25 years as the living soundtrack for some pretty wild Commie parties

parties.

Now, thanks to the intervention of Stewart Copeland's father and his pals, our boys eventually came home sometime late last year and were immediately packed off to the Camp David recording studio for some serious debriefing. While they were there, the Daddies decided to try their hand at some of this strange pop music of the strange pop music of the

Seventies and Eighties.
Sadly, they only know how
to play in their original basic
style and most of their style and most of their contemporary efforts are totally unrecognisable. But being rather threatening-looking individuals, nobody has the heart to break the news to them and this bizarre mix of styles is syddenly reported to an

news to them and this bizarre mix of styles is suddenly released to an unsuspecting world.

The main effect of the Daddies' prolonged isolation has obviously been to make them play traditionally-fast songs at a very slow pace and vice versa. Thus, "Bette Davis Eyes" is transformed into a frantic doo-wop extravaganza, while the manic "Whip It" is reduced to near-ballad status. "Super Freak" is also closer to Percy Sledge than Rick James, and as for "Eye Of The Tiger", well it's certainly the classic come-uppance that the whole Rocky/Foreigner school of grossness so richly deserves. Perhaps the best of all, however, is the re-working of

Perhaps the best of all, however, is the re-working of the Cars' "Just What I Needed", showing yet again just how good Ric Ocasek could be if he managed to really steer clear of the overly rockist expectations of his unnatural audience.

The best thing about Big Daddy is their air of inspired irreverence. And the word is that their brand new single is none other than a suitably pedestrian version of Bruce's "Dancing in The Dark"

Is nothing sacred any more? Let's hope not.

BARRY McILHENEY



BIG DADDY won our hearts with their hilarious doc-wop treatment of Springsteen's 'Dancing in The Dark' on the 'Whistle Test'. Barry Mcliheney treats them to a greasy cup of tea . . .

STRANGE days indeed on the once old and grey but now bright new "Whistle Test" Just a few weeks back, for example, we were all treated to a rather different angle on the show's well-known canonisation of Sir Bruce Springsteen. Instead of Sir Bruce Springsteen instead of Siroocce crying tough on top of a piano, we had the highly unlikely sight of what appeared to be the fathers, or perhaps the sons, of Sha fathers, or perhaps the sons, of Sha he big man's chartbusting "Dancing In The Dark". Naturally enough, it was a quite brilliant performance, and to quote the autocue-watching Kershaw. It sure beat the pants off. The men with the warble in their throats were called Big Daddy which is, of course, better known as the name of the wreatler our boys in The on his American cousins, I decide to treat two of them to a slap-up cup of coffee in Hammersmith's greasiest caff Gee Baz, you sure know how to impress the stars, but at least it gets that the started off playing back home on a stage about twice the size of this table," says Bob, the smallest of the five singing Daddies. "That was in in a bar, just doing versions of other people's hits. Then a few of us got together and started playing Sha Na

Na type stuff for a bit of fun at the weekends. It only became an idea for a serious career about two years ago.

serious career about two years ago.

serious career about two years ago.

of the serious as good a time as any to mention briefly the alleged 'official' history of Big Daddy, a tall tale even by my own extreme standards of how they were captured in Northern Laos in 1959, freed last year by the CIA, and then locked inside a recording studio to thrash out of lew contemporary hits.

But shock horror, they could only play style of the Fittest Bon't believe you, chaps.

'We've asked wrestler Big Doddy to be our minder. We originally threw out a challenge to him but changed our minds!'

"Well, it depends which story you want to hear "says second singer Marty. "We re got so tired of telling the official version that we'll maybe give you the alternative story okay." "After we all got together at the clubs, we started doing some recording which eventually materialised as the first album, the one we have on sale here now. It's a really that close to what we are doing in the present live set. For instance,

Dancing In The Dark' isn't on the album, nor is 'Billie Jean' or 'Purple Rain' all of which we play live.' 
"Purple Rain"! Hope you guys have got good life insurance. any flask for sany of our covers so far, but we'll probably get into trouble for that one. And that's why we've asked your wrestler Big Daddy to be our minder. We originally threw out a challenge to him but then realised that might not be such a good idea. The country pretty soon so he won't be able to find up.

What, going away diready? "Well, we've got some shows lined up in the States, and the possibility of a TV series with the producers of the Sha Na Na programmes. Obviously, if 'Dancing In Thanke' to come back real soon. But at the moment, we're packing our bags for LA."

And with that. Big Daddy

come back reas soon.

I and with that. Big Daddy
vanished off towards Hammersmith
tube station, where they would soon
get on a train and shock lunchtime
commuters with their impeccable
harmonies and spot-on impressions
of the bone. If you missed the
Dingwalls, try stepping into the ring
with the album. As Peter Walker
might say the Flying Pickets will
never seem quite the same again



MELODY MAKER - London, UK, 3/16/85



DISCS AND TAPES
REVIEWED BY
CHRIS ALBERTSON
PHYL GARLAND
ALANNA NASH
MARK PEEL
PETER REILLY
STEVE SIMELS
JOEL VANCE

ABC: Beauty Stab. ABC (vocals and instrumentals). That Was Then but This Is Now; Love's a Dangerous Language; If I Ever Thought You'd Be Lonely; The Power of Persuasion, and eight others. MERCURY 814 661-1 \$8.98, © 814 661-4 \$8.98; © 80146 612, no list price.

Performance: Stingy Recording: Good

ABC's debut, "Lexicon of Love," wedded kid-glove strings and a tails-and-top-hat disco beat to a romantic posture that was all moonlight and shattered crystal. Their second album finds them on an austerity budget: the strings have been largely replaced by guitars, the debonair wordplay by blunt one-liners, the gay pace by a heavier, less playful beat. Even Martin Fry's vocals are stingy—there's less vibrato, less melodrama, less emoting. It's like the difference between a Parisian cabaret and a Brooklyn social club. Trouble is, ABC belongs back in that cabaret. They're glamour boys, not punks or roughnecks. And they wouldn't last a minute in Brooklyn.

M.P.

#### RECORDING OF SPECIAL MERIT

BIG DADDY. Marty Kaniger, Tom Lee (vocals, guitars); David Starns (vocals, guitar, keyboards); Bob Wayne (vocals, keyboards); Gary Hoffman (vocals, drums). I Write the Songs; You Don't Bring Me Flowers; Bette Davis Eyes; Ebo-

Explanation of symbols:

- digital-master analog LP
- © = stereo cassette
- © = digital Compact Disc
   ® = eight-track stereo cartridge

ny and Ivory; Super Freak; Star Wars; and six others. RHINO RNLP 852 \$8.98 (from Rhino Records, 1201 Olympic Boulevard, Santa Monica, Calif. 90404).

Performance: Excellent Recording: Excellent

Satirical albums are rare enough in rock, and this one is not only very funny but Shannon. Every Fifties doo-wop cliché is lavished on *You Don't Bring Me Flowers*, exposing the song's pompous, fatheaded mediocrity. Possibly the most hilarious burlesque is of *Super Freak*, which is sung as a whining, innocent ballad.

Cheers for the musicians, for the concept, for Rhino Records, and for the wonderful cover JV



Angela Bofill: a skilled "Teaser"

deadly accurate. The premise is conveyed by the album cover, which parodies the front page of a sleazy tabloid newspaper. The lead story is about a band on a USO tour in 1959 that was captured by Communists and held in captivity for twenty-four years. Now back in the United States, they are given sheet music by the State Department so that they can play current popular songs.

The result is the richly deserved skewering of a dozen modern tunes, many of which deserve euthanasia. I Write the Songs is cheerfully destroyed with a triple layer of stylistic anachronisms from the Marcels (Blue Moon), Danny and the Juniors (At the Hop), and the Monotones (Book of Love). The Star Wars theme is done as a Duane Eddy/Ventures-type instrumental, revealing just how weak a concoction it is without a full symphony orchestra playing it. Hotel California is treated as if it were Runaway sung by Del

ANGELA BOFILL: Teaser. Angela Bofill (vocals); vocal and instrumental accompaniment. Call of the Wild; Nothin's But a Teaser; Still a Thrill; Crazy for Him, Penetration, and four others. ARISTA ALS 8198 \$8.98, © AC8-8198 \$8.98.

Performance: Very good Recording: Excellent

Angela Bofill has grown from a teenage sexpot into an adult sexpot right before our very ears. She has, in the process, become a much more skilled performer without losing any of her natural fiery attack and superb rhythmic sense. She's in fine form here, racing from track to track, making perhaps her best efforts and effects in Nothin' But a Teaser. Much of the credit for the sustained excitement level must go to producer Narada Michael Walden. The by-now compulsory duet with another pop star is You're a Special Part of Me with Johnny Mathis. P.R.

**MARCH 1984** 

79

### STEREO REVIEW - 3/84

Girl" pokes its nose into that region of urban sentimentality that Willy De Ville has made his own. Moe doesn't have the chops to challenge De Ville on this turf, but there's a simple conviction in his delivery that allows us to suspend comparisons and bask in the stylized heartbreak of this

Of course, likeability and enthusiasm aren't always enough. "The Phantom" has the band trying to show a rockier face, but it never rises above its heavy, trundling inertia and blustering blues-isms. "Crazy Mad" is an essay into rockabilly whose basic ordinariness resists all the band's energy B.B. Spin will be no nine-day's wonder—as Johnny Moe says, they "advocate the long relation." Those in search of the novel, the ingenious or the intense must look elsewhere. But Try to Beat the Heat is a pleasant reminder that sometimes the best stuff can be found right back in the old neighborhood. (Cactus Records, 975 Webster Lane, Des Plaines, IL 60016)

> **JERKY VERSIONS OF** THE DREAM **Howard Devoto**

Duncan Strauss





not particularly widely-circulated, rock resume: With Pete Shelley, he founded the Buzzcocks and after leaving that group formed Magazine, an outstanding outfit that never received its proper acclaim.

Since Magazine folded in 1981, little has been heard from Devoto, though he did collaborate on a recent album by French avant-garde artist Bernard Szajaner. Now the enigmatic British singer-songwriter further updates his credentials with this solo debut, Jerky Versions Of The Dream.

Supported by a solid backing unit that includes ex-Magazine keyboardist Dave Formula, Devoto sculpts enticing pop operas. The music on Jerky sounds at once foreign and familiar: Devoto takes some standard rock traits, gives them a twist, then goes a step further by adding novel textures and melodies.

This approach yields a range of winning material, from the gorgeous, propulsive "Rainy Season" to the pulsing, cinematic
"Topless" to the languid Lou Reed-ish "Out Of Shape With Me." The other music here is likewise intriguing and refreshing upon first listening-more so after repeated spins.

But where Devoto really distinguishes himself is with his lyrics. He is a gifted

wordsmith whose observations demonstrate an acute understanding of people and relationships. With innovative, occasionally bizarre images and metaphors, Devoto chronicles every thing from the quirks of romance to the workings of a very fragile psyche: "Just keep this paradise between you and me/An excellent mystery to consume" or "You're like a mirage I could learn to hate" or "You've been knocking what you need/Your unhappiness is guaranteed."

It's nice to have Devoto and his jerky versions of music around as a reminder that rock can still be irresistible, delightfully offbeat, probing, and essential.

. . . . . . . . .

**BIG DADDY Big Daddy** 

INQUIRER

By Dan **Forte** 





the debut release by the Los Angeles quin-

tet Big Daddy, Rhino may have stumbled

upon a bonafide hit. At the very least, this will become a cult classic. With so many contemporary artists scoring with cover versions of '50s and '60s material, Big Daddy has reversed the trend with a collection of twelve '70s and '80s hits played and sung as they might have been in 1958 or '62. "I Write The Songs" is sung to the tune of "At The Hop." "Hotel California" is given a Del Shannon cum Gene Pitney treatment, "Whip It" is done in a street-corner, finger-snapping doo-

perfect pounded out a la Little Richard. The band's most imaginative interpretations are the ballad rendition of Rick James' "Super Freak," the Duane Eddy-twanged "Star Wars," and a ballsy rocka-billy romp on "Bette Davis Eyes" that sounds more appropriate for Jackie De-Shannon's lyrics than did Kim Carnes'

wop style, and "Ebony And Ivory" sounds

But Big Daddy is no mere gimmick record, though that would be enough to immortalize it. The band is composed of first-rate players and outstanding vocalists. The a cappella arrangement of "Eye Of The Tiger" ("Eye-yi-yi of the tiger .") sounds as soulful as most of the Persuasions' recorded material. Keyboardist Bob Wayne's production respects the

genre without being too reverential. This is more than a '50s parody or a '70s satire-Big Daddy is a marriage of new and old, of sophistication and innocence, of self-consciousness and reckless abandon.

> COLD BLOODED **Rick James**

Bv Anthony **DeCurtis** 





mony in the punk-funk field with Rick James, sex is vision, the primal fact informing and unifying all experience. For the literal-minded Slick Rick, sex is purely and simply sex. It doesn't underlie experience, it is experience and requires no interpretation. More is better than less; kinky (but always hetero, please) better than straight.

For this reason, Prince is clearly the more subversive of the two. Despite his much-vaunted "freakiness," James trades on traditional-even conservative-notions about sexuality. His titillation in "Super Freak," for example, by "the kind of girl you read about in new wave magazines" is little more than an updated take on the leers of '60s' straights anxious to bed 'hippie chicks.'

But like many mucho macho men. James brings an appealing boyish enthusiasm to his projects, and when his energy and blustering sexiness come together with material that grips him emotionally-as on 1981's Street Songs, his largely autobiographical rock-funk milestone-the results are powerfully good.

Cold Blooded, James' latest effort, doesn't rise to quite that height and breaks little new ground, though it has much to recommend it. "U Bring the Freak Out" effectively reworks the proven James formula of riffing synthesizers, muscular guitar chords, punchy horns, a commanding vocal, and lyrics about a girl who (she's so nasty) wants it even more than you do. "Ebony Eyes," featuring a characteristically elegant vocal spot by Smokey Robinson, and the touching "Tell Me (What You Want)" find Rick in his balladeering mode, which he handles with always surprising success, though the latter tune is nearly destroyed by Billy Dee Williams' unbearably cloying whisper-vocal cameo.

"New York Town" paints a street-level portrait of the Apple, while "1,2,3, (U, Her and Me)" is a pitch for a threesome (the slick one and two ladies-not another guy, please); and "P.I.M.P. the S.I.M.P" hauls in Grandmaster Flash to help James mourn the loss of a friend who walked the

### **RECORD MAGAZINE - 2/83**

### **BIG DADDY: "WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO THE BAND OF '59"**

- Selected Album Reviews -

# Mainichi Daily News

Dedicated To International Understanding

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#### THE MAINICHI NEWSPAPERS

Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, Kita Kyushu and Sapporo, Japan

## MUSIC BEAT: Raves and Waves

By Stan Gold

### Records: Big Daddy Blends New and Old

Looking for a great record to spin at your next party? The fun will start when you begin to read the album jacket of Rhino Records "Big Daddy" LP, which sets a mood of satire or parody. It says: "Early rock group held captive 24 years releases album of current hits performed in 1950's style." The "incredible" story of how Big Daddy, "a popular 1950s rock 'n' roll combo," escaped and managed to return to the U.S. "after being held captive for more than two decades by communist revolutionaries in northern Laos" is told in hilarious detail on the back cover of the album.

However, the music on this album is no joke at all. Big Daddy is a Los Angeles-based quintet consisting of five crack musicians — rhythm guitarist Marty Kaniger, lead guitarist David Starns, keyboardist (and the record's producer) Bob Wayne, rhythm guitarist Tom Lee and drummer-percussionist Gary Hoffman. Kaniger, Starns and Wayne also demonstrate considerable talent as lead yocalists, and Lee is just fine as Big Daddy's "Mr. Bassman"

The hit charts always have a few contemporary revival recordings of hits from the '50s and '60s, but Big Daddy reverses the process. What they have done is to take 12 hit songs from the late '70s and early '80s and irreverently perform these songs as they

might have been done in the late '50s or early '60s.

Side One starts off with a souped-up version of a Barry Manilow song which I had never enjoyed hearing until now. "I Write the Songs" is converted into a fast-paced rocker, a cross between Danny & the Juniors' "At the Hop" and Dion & The Belmonts' "I Wonder Why." Next up is Kim Carnes' super hit "Bette Davis Eyes." Big Daddy turns it into a raving rockabilly number. Jerry Lee Lewis should rush into a studio and cut a cover version! Rick James' frenetic funk-rock hit "Super Freak" is given a fantastic Everly Brothers-type ballad interpretation. Check out the slick harmonies of Big Daddy! "Star Wars" is done instrumentally with an exciting twangy guitar sound a la Duane Eddy. Devo's "Whip It" is given a finger-snapping Little Willie John-type treatment, and the Paul McCartney-Stevie Wondér sweet duet on "Ebony and Ivory" is transformed into a stomping Little Richard-influenced rendition. "Oh, my soul," shouts Big Daddy.

The pleasant surprises keep on coming on Side Two. The opening cut is the Barbra Streisand-Nell Diamond ballad "You Don't Bring Me Flowers," which romps along here with a blending of influences from the work of Gene Pitney, the Velvets and Curtis Lee. Pat Benetar's "Hit Me with Your Best Shot" is performed as a southern soul singer like Barbara Lynn might have approached the tune. Look out for Mr. Lee's bass vocals!

Bette Midler's "The Rose" is turned into a Gene Vincent-Eddie Cochran type of number, and the Cars' "Just What I Needed" is reworked as a Fleetwoods-style sweet harmony ballad. The Eagles' "Hotel California" is done up the way a Del Shannon might have handled it. The Big Daddy LP closes with an a cappella arrangement of Survivors' rocker "Eye of the Tiger" with shades of the Four Preps and Four Freshmen.

The album is full of surprises and inspired by a keen sense of musical imagination. The performances are laudable. If the import record stores here don't have it in stock, they can order it for you. Alternately, you can order it directly from Rhino by sending \$8.98 + \$1.50 in postage for sea mail (\$3.50 airmail) to: Rhino Records, Sears and Rhinobuk Catalogue, 1201 Olympic Blvd., Santa Monica, Ca. 90404.

Big Daddy, Big Daddy (Rhino Records) Rating - A

MAINICHI DAILY NEWS - TOKYO, JAPAN, 3/15/84

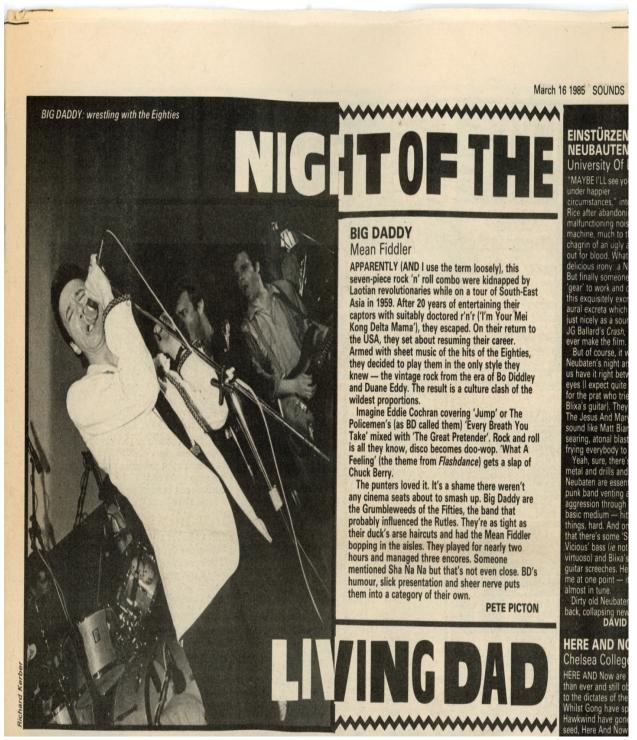


## □ BIG DADDY Big Daddy

The usual procedure is for pop music groups to play a standard tune in a new idiom. But on this delightful time warp of an album, five Los Angeles-area musicians cast recent hits in the styles of popular artists of the 1950s. Survivor's 1982 smash Eye of the Tiger, for instance, is performed a cappella as the Coasters or another of the black groups of the New York doo-wop school might have done it. (It sounds much better, incidentally, than the Survivor version.) The McCartney-Wonder hit Ebony and Ivory is offered as a sort of Jerry Lee Lewis-Fats Domino duet. The Star Wars theme sounds like a Duane Eddy instrumental, Pat Benatar's Hit Me With Your Best Shot, done as a ballad, brings back echoes of Gene Vincent, and Rick James' Super Freak is rendered as the Everly Brothers would have crooned it. Big Daddy has not—liner notes notwithstanding—been held captive by Communists in Laos for 24 years. Marty Kaniger, David Starns, Bob Wayne, Tom Lee (who does a mean bom-buh-buh-bom vocal bass line) and Gary Hoffman joined forces to record this first album, though Kaniger and Wayne originally got together in 1973. As good-natured and implicitly respectful of the rock 'n' roll pioneers as Sha Na Na (which usually performs old material), Big Daddy is both musical and funny. It's a perfect album for a surprising change of pace at a party

PEOPLE MAGAZINE - 8-29-83

#### **SOUNDS MAGAZINE -**



LONDON, UK, 3/16/85



THE ABSOLUTE SOUND - SPRING, '85