

J. Geils' grad scores as solo

by MICHAEL LAWSON
The Canadian Press

All material on Peter Wolf's new solo album, *Lights Out* (EMI America), is original and any similarity to hits current or dead is purely coincidental.

The disclaimer is ours, not Wolf's, but it's the sort of thing one feels compelled to provide in anticipation of critiques to the editor from the most astute rock fans.

Just to clear the air, Wolf's leadoff cut — the title track — uses the line "dancing in the dark" no fewer than 12 times. And that line, as astute fans can tell you, is the title of a current single by one lauded rock force who's currently setting America afire with a major tour and a top-selling album. (For the less-than-astute, that's pronounced Springsteen, not Jackson.)

Peter Wolf borrows little else from The Boss, unless you consider the good-time spirit inherent in both artists' work. Wolf's many years as vocalist with The J. Geils Band accounts for the spunk and originality he brings to *Lights Out*.

And if it's not apparent by now, we're committed in spades to his first solo release.

The album overflows with a good funky feel, so much so that the bulk of it will find favor in the dance dens. But it's also undercut with a spirit of party rock of the sort that made The J. Geils Band's *Showtime!* one of the most infectious live recordings in memory.

Wolf is clearly comfortable on his own turf, and he uses *Lights Out* as a sort of resume of his diversity.

He pays brief homage to the pop fossils (fans and bands) with the cut *Baby Please Don't Let Me Go*, which harks back to the pre-Beatles '60s.

But he keeps current with such tunes as *Poor Girl's Heart*, featuring the kind of plaintive, slightly nasal delivery you've heard on more than one Boy George track, and *Oo-Ee-Diddly Bop*, which even makes use of the quirky scratch technique.

Wolf camps it up as crooner on the atmospheric *Gloomy Sunday*, and even goes the klutz route with the novelty *Mars Needs Women*, an aural cartoon of no special merit.

Guest appearances by the likes of Adrian (King Crimson) Belew and Mick (take a guess) Jagger amount to album prestige alone. This is really Peter Wolf's show all the way.

What's J. Geils going to do without him?

★ ★ ★

Heavy metal is hardly his game, but Billy Squier might even get the nod from rabid head-bangers in this current climate of manic metal music.

A no-nonsense rocker, Squier has the kind of feverish pitch that wouldn't be out of place in the ranks of Priest, Maiden, Crue and others. But his tunes also feature a touch of originality and considerably more depth than so much of that empty froth calling itself metal.

The new *Signs of Life* (Capitol) has plenty of teeth, and at least a couple of tunes are unabashedly commercial. Best of the bunch his (Another) 1984, complete with a stylish guitar solo from Queen's Brian May. *Reach For the Sky* is also notable.

Jim Steinman doesn't let his usual lavish production get in the way of Squier's fire, but he does seek out each tune's dynamics and hits its right between the eyes with them. (Check out the cut *Rock Me Tonight*).

On the down side, Steinman could have taken more care with Squier's vocal tracks which, as they stand, have a certain gauzy quality not quite up to par with the ultra-clean music production.

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RECORDS from ROLLING STONE

by DAVE MARSH

ELVIS COSTELLO AND THE ATTRACTIONS: *GOODBYE CRUEL WORLD* (COLUMBIA) — Two Stars

Dubious as I have been about Costello's career since he insulted Ray Charles and began making retrograde music to make up, Imperial Bedroom and Punch the Clock were encouraging, with virtues both musical and lyrical. But this album seems to be taking its title literally, a suicide note to American marketplace expectations (which aren't as unreasonable as the British would have us believe). Costello's phrasing is arch, his sharper lyrics hampered by music that is murky and stiff, and there's not a single track here that really takes off. If you're interested in him as some sort of art song type, you might even get around to liking this. If you think his greatest moment was *Armed Forces*, as I do, you have to wonder what he thinks he's up to. (As for the duet with Daryl Hall — what a waste of talent!)

R.E.M.: *RECKONING* (I.R.S.) — Three Stars
O.K., I think they're sufficiently airheaded to qualify as the Grateful Dead of the postpunk generation, and Michael Stipe's vocals, reaching the level of half-intelligibility, are as obscure (to me) as ever. But there is an undeniably attractive quality to their arty posing and the best tracks on this album, such as *So Central Rain* and *(Don't Go Back To) Rockville*, have an intensity and meditative magic that's damn near as exciting as it's cracked up to be. I think the next one will tell the tale but this is pretty encouraging, if you listen long enough.

BOBBY WOMACK: *THE POET II* (BEVERLY GLEN MUSIC) — Two Stars

Womack is a great guitarist and singer when he wants to be, and if he ever felt motivated for two albums in a row, he might become a superstar. But as long as he makes music as lackadaisical as this in following up his previous year's success (*With The Poet*), he will remain a cult item who annoys hell out of non-believers like me.

SOUNDTRACK: *BACHELOR PARTY* (I.R.S.) — Two Stars

This flimsy soundtrack from a movie that promises to be seen almost solely on videotape when everything else is rented for the week-end, features some of the most annoying music ever recorded, thanks to Oingo Boingo, Adrian Zmed and a cast of L.A. flimsies. But it also has two tracks that make it worth a peek, at least in the bargain bins: A raving *Crazy Over You* by Jools Holland and a zippy zany *Alley Oop* by Darlene Love, the world's most perfect female rock & roll voice.

JAMES BROWN: *THE FEDERAL YEARS, PART ONE AND PART TWO (SOLID SMOKE)* — Five Stars

There have been so many excellent Brown repackagings in the past year that it seems almost superfluous to have another. But this is historically well organized, released on a domestic label which should make it simpler to locate, and Lee Hildebrand's annotation is good, is dry. Highly recommended music.

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I'M NOT THAT HOT'

Fame a mystery to Axton

CARVEN, Sask. (CP) — It's one of the hottest days of the summer in this tiny Saskatchewan community, but Hoyt Axton is wearing a heavy black suit topped with a leather vest and jacket, brown fedora and snakeskin boots.

He's just given an energetic, 90-minute performance in the blazing sun before more than 50,000 people at the Big Valley Jamboree. By the time the singer ambles into a dark, wooden media shack — which resembles a sauna at midday — and plunks his large frame on to a tiny wooden chair, his breathing is heavy. The sweat almost seems to spurt from his forehead.

"I'm a 300-pound Oakie and I have a good time doin' what I do," he announces in his drawling, rocky voice.

Somehow, it's not hard to believe him, even as the sweat creeps from beneath his heavy clothes to soak an unlit cigarette held in one massive paw.

Axton is enthusiastic as he talks about his

many interests, from drawing cartoons and acting to politics and music.

His latest movie role is in the film *Gremlins*, in which he plays the kindly father whose purchase of an unusual pet for his son unleashes havoc in his home town.

Himself the father of three children, Axton hoots with laughter at complaints the movie is too gory for children.

"If it were somethin' that was based on what could be reality, I wouldn't feel the same way," he says. "But this is all fantasy. There's no way that a gremlin's ever going to come out of the closet and bite anybody on the knee for real."

"It'll probably scare kids, but I don't think that'll hurt 'em. Any kid that grows up in any major city today is seein' worse than that on the streets."

Fame is a mystery to Axton, who is uncomfortable talking about his own, which has come from writing such songs as *Three Dog Night's*

Never Been To Spain and *Joy To The World*.

"I'm not that hot," he protests. "I've been lucky, been in the right place at the right time. Man, it could go down the tubes in a hurry."

But a grin triggers his massive dimples as he stops to correct himself, admitting there is one achievement for which he will likely be remembered a long time.

"I have to admit *Joy To The World* is my all-time favorite song. When I wrote that, I thought, man, that's hot."

Axton considers his talents a genetic gift from his mother, who co-wrote Elvis Presley's

Heartbreak Hotel. The family is still integral to Axton's career: his mother runs his record company and handles public relations, his father deals with radio stations for him, and his wife plays piano in his band.

Only his brother John chose to forgo the music business for a career as a lawyer, but even he writes and sings as a hobby.

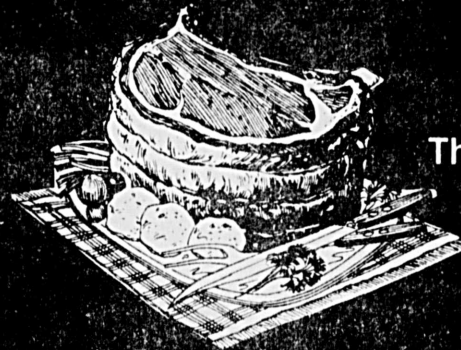
Axton has a new album, *American Dreams*, coming out in August. He will perform a duet with Willie Nelson and Linda Ronstadt will provide background vocals on several cuts.

Through it all, Axton maintains a life-long philosophy he picked up as a child from a Little Orphan Annie comic strip.

"Startin' out to make money in life is the worst thing you can do. Do what you enjoy doin', what you have a flair for doin' and if you get rich, hurray. But even if you don't get rich, you're doin' what you want to do with your life. I think that's the secret."



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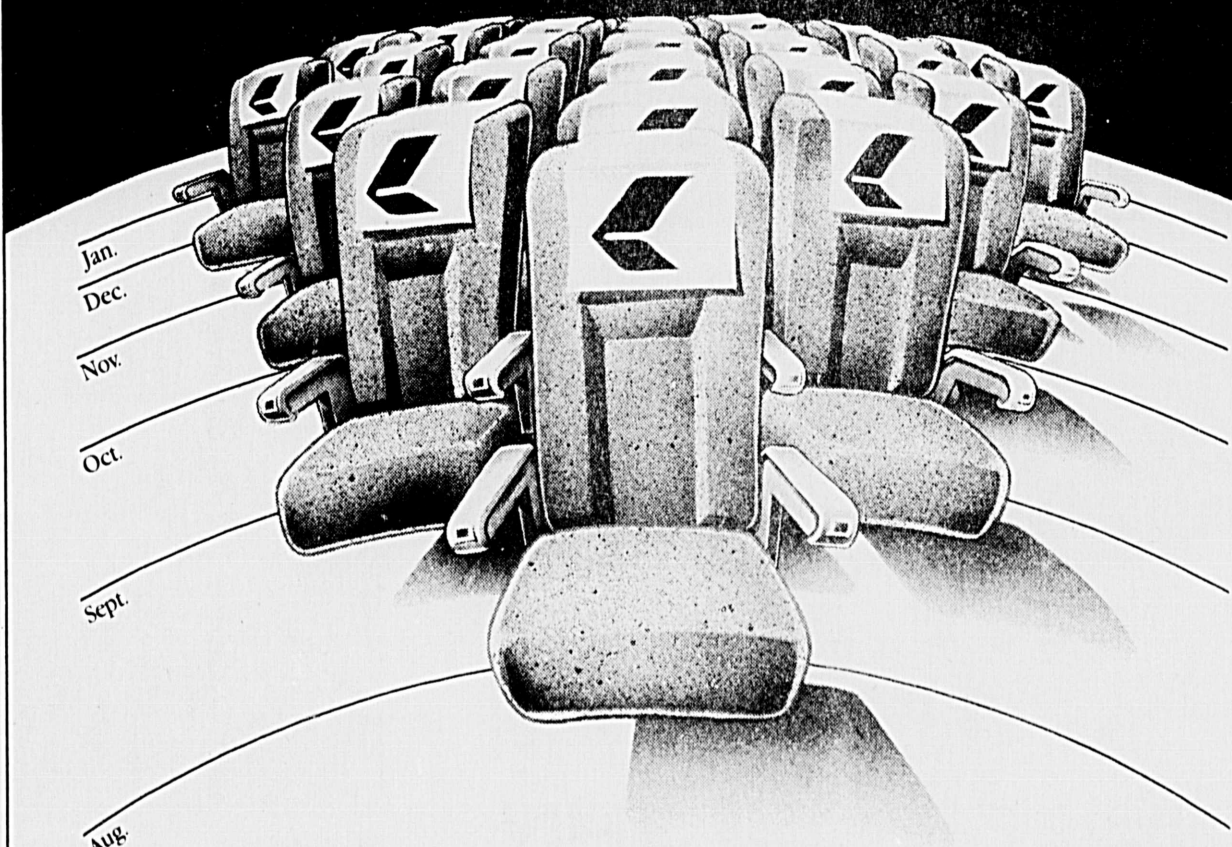
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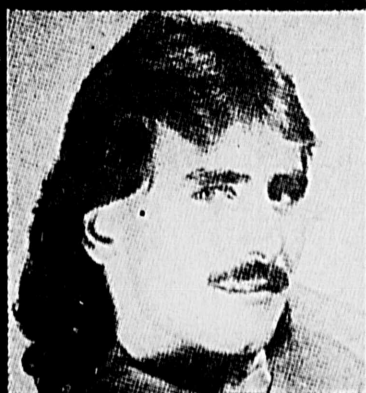
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