

By Kirby Ferguson

*Astral Weeks* was best summed up by Lester Bangs; "It sounded like the man who made *Astral Weeks* was in terrible pain...; but like the later albums by the Velvet Underground, there was a redemptive element in the blackness, ultimate compassion for the suffering of others and a swath of pure beauty that cut right through the heart of the work." Man, that's perfect. *Astral Weeks* gives pain and loneliness the dignity and beauty it seldom seems to get in real life. Sting once said he does his best work when in terrible pain (somebody better put him on the rack then) and the same definitely applies to Van

Morrison, just listen to *Tupelo Honey*, recorded during his marriage, and then *St. Dominic's Preview*, which was after his divorce. In reference to Van's earlier work, his ex-wife, Janet Planet (How could he marry someone with that name?) states in the liner notes of *His Band and the Street Choir*; "He was sickeningly alone, afraid and ranting to be neither." Yeah, so? Who wants to hear some guy blow-off about how fucking happy he is? Art is not for happy people (wooo, nice quote).

When I first heard *Astral Weeks* I thought it was sloppy, self-indulgent, long-winded and unrealized. Now it's perfection, and a fixture in my car stereo. So what does this marvellous creation sound like? Well, there isn't one electric guitar on the entire album. No synthesizers. No other singers. Generally, there aren't even any drums. There's some horns, some flute, some improvised bass playing and lots of strings, acoustic guitars and unbelievable singing. Think of "Feels So Different" from Sinead's last one, especially when she sings "The whole time/I'd never

seen...'", and you've got the general idea. Four of the eight songs clock in at around seven minutes. Sounds pretty weird, eh? It probably will seem that way to most. Like I've said before, *Moondance* is the one to start with, then try this one.

Van's voice is what elevates the album to transcendence; his singing gives the lyrics meaning beyond words, he's never overwrought, never repeats himself and the music perfectly compliments it. It's the most soulful vocal performance ever waxed.

The lyrics are often impenetrable, but the imagery is always beautiful, and the way he sings it he leaves no

## VAN MORRISON *ASTRAL WEEKS*



doubt that he means every syllable.

Actually, the most beautiful lyric on the album is also the most simple ("Sweet Thing").

Amongst the more obscure references are glimpses of aging ballerinas, drag queens and beautiful fourteen-year olds (yes, fourteen).

This all may sound pretty tasteless but believe me, it's quite the opposite. The soundtrack)

the love-sick, lonely slob. Not that I'd know, it's just that I have a very highly developed sense of empathy. Yeah, that's the ticket.

I am this album, this album is me. *Astral Weeks* is close to a religious experience as I've ever gotten, and I strongly recommend it. If you've gotten this far through my ranting you must have some idea of what I'm talking about, so go out and buy this. I haven't seen the album around here, but you can get it through Columbia House so subscribe; it's worth it just for this album. ACTUALLY, (here comes the