

TALKING HEADS 77



Though they were the most highly touted of the new wave bands to emerge from the CBGB's scene in New York of the mid-'70s, it was not clear at first whether Talking Heads' Lower East Side art-rock approach could make the subway ride to the midtown pop mainstream successfully.

The early indication provided by the non-LP single "Love Goes to Building on Fire" suggested that the group might be too willing to compromise for mass acceptance, while the record's commercial failure suggested that might not work anyway. The lead-off track of the debut album, Talking Heads: 77, "Uh-Oh, Love Comes to Town," was more of the same, a pop song that emphasized the group's unlikely roots in the late-'60s bubblegum sound of Buddah Records groups like the 1910 Fruitgum Co., Motown, and Caribbean music. But the "Uh-Oh" gave away the group's game early, with its nervous, disconnected lyrics and David Byrne's strained voice. All pretenses of normality were abandoned by the second track, "New Feeling," as Talking Heads finally started to sound on record the way they did downtown: the staggered rhythms and sudden tempo changes, the odd guitar tunings and rhythmic, single-note patterns, the non-rhyming, non-linear, non-narrative lyrics full of aphoristic soundbites that came across like odd remarks overheard from a psychiatrist's couch, and that voice, singing above its normal range, leaping into falsetto and from there into strangled cries like a madman trying desperately to sound normal.

Amazingly, "Psycho Killer" made the singles chart for a few weeks, evidence of the group's quirky appeal, but the album was not a big hit, and it remained unclear whether Talking Heads spoke only the secret language of the urban arts-types or whether that could be translated into the more common tongue of hip pop culture. In any case, they had succeeded as artists in that old effort -- using existing elements in an unusual combination to create something new in the world that still managed to be oddly familiar. And that made Talking Heads: 77 a landmark album. Tracks:

- Uh-Oh, Love Comes To Town- New Feeling- Tentative Decisions- Happy Day- Who Is It ?- No Compassion
- The Book I Read
- Don't Worry About The Government
- First Week/Last Week...Carefree
- Psycho Killer
- Pulled Up