



Ross: Where was Michael Jackson when she needed him?

► PEARLS VS. SWEAT

On the back of her new album, **Eaten Alive**, Diana Ross can be seen biting a string of pearls while hugging a dead tiger (who is also gnawing on the pearls). There is a handwritten note from a friend: "You are truly Supreme, good to be with you again. I love you. Michael J." The fact that no one else's name appears on the jacket, and that Michael Jackson was playing with a baby tiger on the gatefold of *Thriller*, may lead purchasers to think Michael had something major to do with this. Not true. He makes only a cameo appearance on the title track, and this LP is an altogether different animal: Michael had a live tiger with *Thriller*, Diana has a piece of furniture with *Eaten Alive*.

Above all, Ross needs strong songs and sensitive production to create any impact these days, and here she receives neither. Bee Gee Barry Gibb did the tiger's share of the producing, and the Brothers Gibb wrote most of the

material. It's a grab bag of current pop styles—pockmarked with those chirpy, Munchkinesque background vocals that the Bee Gees have made infamous and undermined by an anemic-voiced Ross straining to sound as glamorous as she looks. *Eaten Alive* is mostly just mediocre, but at times, as on the torchy ballad *More and More*, it rises to the level of extravagantly bad.

Sam Cooke was another R. and B. singer who, like Diana

Ross and the Supremes, was groomed to play the suave swinger, the cabaret sophisticate who could appeal to the (white) masses. His record company always emphasized his mellifluous, polite side. But there was another Sam Cooke—one that played for black audiences on endless tours of the chillin' circuit, sending the women into tumult and the men twisting and shouting. This was the Sam Cooke that showed up for work on the night of Jan. 11, 1963, at a large club in North Miami, to stir the crowd and cut a recording. The record never came out, and after Cooke was shot to death in a Los Angeles motel in 1964, the tape lay dormant.

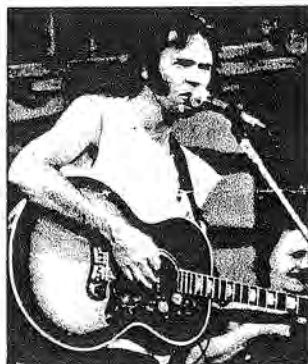
Now, at last, the goods have been released. **Sam Cooke Live at the Harlem Square Club, 1963—One Night Stand**, reveals a singer at the height of his powers, ripping through classics like *Bring It On Home to Me*, *You Send Me* and *Cupid*. Cooke, who influenced vocalists from Otis Redding to Smokey Robinson, Al Green to Aretha Franklin and Rod Stewart to Steve Perry, here blends graceful, refined phrasing with a raw, nasty emotional undertow. Long overdue, *One Night Stand* gives us all the passion, the lyricism and the fierce, sweaty beauty of Sam Cooke.

MURPHY'S FLAW & LIVE AID II

► **Eddie Murphy** has made his long-threatened move into pop music. Yet despite the writing and production help of buddies Stevie Wonder and Rick James on a few tracks, his *How Could It Be* is pure star's indulgence. Murphy proves to one and all, but probably not to himself that, as a soul singer and a serious lyricist, he is a good comic . . . ► Wanna feel old? *I Got You Babe*, the quirky new smash by **UB40** and **Chrissie Hynde**, was a Top Ten hit for Sonny & Cher 20 years ago this month . . . ► On Oct. 22, **Ken Kragen**, the man who organized the USA for Africa effort, will announce plans for what he calls "a spectacular . . . the single largest private, personal participation event ever in North America." The inside word is that the extravaganza, due next spring, will involve, literally, 10 million people in an effort to alleviate poverty and hunger in the U.S.

► STRANGE BREWS

Neil Young *Old Ways*. Riding into town on his old hippie horse to save the sagging commercial fortunes of the Nashville sound, Young whines over saccharine strings, Jew's harp, fiddles, pedal steels and twanging acoustic guitars. Fortunately, his scarred, hol-



Young: A hippie cowboy?

low voice can carry the load—it's both authentic and ironic, the aural equivalent of a Jack Nicholson smile. Young's dusty tunes, by turns humorous and elegiac, are well sketched, and he has the good sense to share five with Waylon Jennings, and one, *Are There Any More Real Cowboys?*, with Willie Nelson.

Herbie Hancock & Foday Musa Suso *Village Life*. After the robotic clamor and coldness of Hancock's techno-funk excursions (*Rockit*, et al.), this record feels like a clearing in a field of electronic clutter. Suso is a musical storyteller from Gambia, a master of the 21-stringed kora, on which he plays melody, harmony and rhythm much in the manner of a sitarist. He also sings and occasionally plays an African talking drum, while Hancock accompanies him on a state-of-the-art digital synthesizer and a drum computer. A delicate, soothing fusion of primitive and modern, African and American, the music seems to almost float. ♦