

1984: Princely year in music

BY MICHAEL GILTZ

1984 was a banner year for music. After the slump of the late '70s and early '80s, video stepped in to revitalize music sales and save the day. Whether it was on the movie screen, where a record 10 soundtracks went platinum (had sales totaling one million copies), or on the TV screen, where music videos became a permanent fixture, images clearly helped people get excited about music again.

One of the most recurrent images of the year was that of Prince. Besides engineering the success of Sheila E. and The Time, his album, *Purple Rain*, has sold over eight million copies and has held the No. 1 spot for 24 weeks. Enough has been said about Prince's brilliant ability to melt the sounds of funk, r and b, dance and pop into one, driving sound. Suffice to say that a fourth single, "I Would Die 4 U," is bulleting up the charts and that Prince is showing no sign of slowing down.

Another performer who didn't slow down in 1984 was Lionel Richie, whose *Can't Slow Down* album was a strong seller throughout the year. Richie certainly didn't receive the publicity that attended Prince, Bruce Springsteen or the Jacksons, but he sold a phenomenal eight million copies. By expertly mixing sweet love ballads like "Hello" with mildly upbeat romps like "All Night Long," Richie kept his voice on the airwaves and his album in the Top Ten for over 52 weeks.

While better known for his rockers than love ballads, Bruce Springsteen also had an excellent year. He managed to capitalize on his initial commercial success (1980's *The River*) with *Born In The U.S.A.* His writing has never been stronger, as songs like "Born In The U.S.A." and "Downbound Train" amply demonstrate. Springsteen also launched a mammoth tour in which he gives a 4½ hour performance that, according to fans and critics alike, is unmatched anywhere, ever.

Springsteen's tour was certainly unmatched by that of the Jacksons. Their Broadway show of a concert was quite entertaining, but considering the ticket, booking and managerial problems that plagued the tour, it had to sour the feelings of more people than it pleased. As for the *Victory* album, its name is simply a bad joke. While it did manage to sell two million copies, that was ac-

complished during the first week of *Victory's* release and largely due to Michael's presence. After people heard the generally poor music, it died a quick death.

The Pretenders also confronted death this year. The critically acclaimed group rebounded from a poorly received second album and the tragic death of two of its founding members to, remarkably, produce *Learning To Crawl*, a beautiful, transcendent album that reaffirms life and the musical gifts of The Pretenders.

Billy Joel delivered a gift to his childhood this year in the form of his album, *An Innocent Man*. Joel's homage to his musical roots ranged from doo wop to Philly soul. While the music was lightweight but charming, it managed to sell over four million copies.



EBIK LESSER/APPLAUSE

The Jacksons' Victory sold mainly on the strength of Michael's name.

Another group who matched Joel's success was Van Halen, who also struck quadruple-platinum with their album, *1984*. By employing synthesizers and winning videos, Van Halen created smart and funny music that filled the empty void in hard rock.

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Like Van Halen, the Cars invested heavily in videos for their latest album, *Heartbeat City*, which were a key ingredient in its multi-platinum success. Cyndi Lauper also carefully produced her videos and her *She's So Unusual* album resulted in one of the most popular debut albums of all time.

Furthermore, ZZ Top engineered their winning year with videos. Though *Eliminator* only had one big single, "Legs," it sold a whopping four million copies, due in large part to the Texas trio's antics in such videos as "Sharp Dressed Man" and "T.V. Dinners."

Another bright spot in videos was Culture Club, who supported *Colour By Numbers*, a pleasing mixture of r and b, soul and Caribbean rhythms, by making a string of popular videos. However, their success has amounted to a bit of overkill. Culture Club's new album, *Waking Up With The House On Fire*, has met with resistance and poor sales, despite being just as polished and creative as their last two offerings.

Eurythmics is another group fronted by

1984. He reunited with songwriter Bernie Taupin, who helped pen such classics as "Crocodile Rock," and ended up with two



David Bowie's disappointing *Tonight* has Bowie fans hoping for tomorrow.

chart toppers: *Too Low For Zero* and *Breaking Hearts*.

Breaking young girls' hearts was the group Wham! Along with newcomers,

an androgynous singer, and in 1984 they came out with the striking *Touch*. With its swirling synthesizers, *Touch* is a compelling, fascinating album. When listening to it, you feel as if you're falling into a trance and, at the same time, being urged to dance.

U2 also experimented with synthesizers, on *The Unforgettable Fire* with the help of producer Brian Eno. They created a moody, moving album that was a bold step away from their established sound. On the other hand, the Fixx delivered more of the same with *Phantoms*. They achieved the expected results, a gold album (sales of five hundred thousand), but disappointed anyone who hoped they might mature beyond a "singles band."

David Bowie delivered less of the same with *Tonight*. Though it contained some fine cuts, it was a major disappointment in light of the smashing success of *Let's Dance*, which had revitalized his career. He can do better.

Chicago did do better as they recovered from their slump once and for all. *Chicago 17* is one of their best-received albums in years and has won the group legions of new fans.

Elton John delighted his old fans in

John Waite and the Thompson Twins, they hope to gain a following with their music and Pepsodent smiles. In fact, as their album titles implies, Wham! wants to *Make It Big*.

More interesting than the newcomers were the oldtimers who resurfaced. With *Camouflage*, Rod Stewart came back with a vengeance, though without the consummate writing skills that graced his early albums. Yes, with the assistance of producer Trevor Horn, delivered their most consistent and focused album yet, titled *90125*. The happy result was that they had their biggest hit yet with "Owner Of A Lonely Heart." Still the most exciting comeback of 1984 was Tina Turner's, whose *Private Dancer* album wonderfully showcases her marvelous, gravelly voice.

Movie soundtracks also staged a comeback this year. Ten soundtracks went platinum in 1984, more than the next two highest years combined. Most were one-hit wonders, like *Ghostbusters*, which had the benefit of a smash movie and a great video. Despite the movies' bombing, *The Woman In Red*, *Eddie And The Cruisers*, *Hard To Hold* and *Two Of A Kind* all managed to go platinum.