



Brother's Keeper

Neville Brothers

The Neville Brothers have always been known as infectious live performers, one of the best-

kept secrets of New Orleans. But they have never reached the popular audience that their immense talent deserves.

After some misguided attempts at delivering something commercial, the Neville Brothers gave up. They wrote a batch of overtly political and religious tunes with an eye on their roots instead of the charts. The album was called *Yellow Moon* and it became their biggest critical and popular success.

The band has returned with *Brother's Keeper*, another album that draws strength from the culture that spurred

them. It opens with "Brother Blood," a striking mid-tempo number in which each of the four musicians takes a turn singing lead.

The combination of their different voices adds a level of strength and meaning to the song of unity.

Throughout, they chart a steady course past spiritual tunes like "Steer Me Right" and implicitly political story-songs like "Brother Jake."

In fact, when they sound like the party band of old on "River of Life," it turns out to be the album's dullest moment. Aside from some weak lyrics on "Jah

Love" (co-written with Bono), the album rarely missteps again.

"Witness" manages to testify to the power of God's love, as well as the talent of such musical predecessors as Professor Longhair, without missing a beat. "Bird On A Wire" is an over-produced but still enjoyable cover of the Leonard Cohen classic.

And "Sons and Daughters" is a striking centerpiece. Backed only by stark drums, Ari Neville quietly chants the story of a young man wrongly imprisoned, then moves on to sing about the political situation.

"Now they've got us hypnotized and hysterical/ Screaming for blood and justice/ They show us the faces of haired over and over — a new one every week/ Could be Manuel Noriega . . . Any old scapegoat 'll do."

Then slowly a guitar chimes in and — almost as an afterthought — Ari begins to sing a melody, as if it were improvised on the spot. It's a beautiful illustration of how the events happening around the Neville Brothers influence and shape their music. So, indeed, is *Brother's Keeper*.

BY MICHAEL GILTZ