

ROCK MUSIC

HARD ROCK FROM OUT OF THE PAST

by TONY CATTERALL

PHENOMENON, UFO, Chrysalis Records, released by Festival.

UNLESS my memory serves me badly, UFO is one of those magic English bands I used to read about in underground newspapers sent me by friends in the Motherland. That makes it a fairly old band — how long is it since we called things "underground?"

So, UFO would be one of the original heavy rock bands and even today would have to one of the best. I don't know if there've been

any changes in the line-up but I doubt if there has: the four have a tightness and economy that speaks of a long association.

Their music breaks no new ground, even though nine of the ten tracks are originals (the tenth is a Willie Dixon blues, 'Built for Comfort', that is a perfect example of hard, British blues playing).

The band is essentially a Cream-like power trio — guitar, bass and drums — with a vocalist. But where Cream achieved its power with histrionic solos — each instrument playing against the other — UFO plays as a tight unit.

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At times it's hard to tell if

Michael Schenker's clean, searing guitar sets a pattern for Pete Dinklage's bass and Andy Parker's drums to back up, or whether they set the pattern and Schenker weaves around it. They're that tight.

And this is what hard rock is all about; no frills, no pretensions, just good clean, biting music that's listenable to at all volumes. 'Phenomenon' should be required listening for all would-be heavy-metal bands (and many existing bands could learn something from it too).

NO OTHER, Gene Clark, Asylum Records, imported.

'No Other' is an example of an artist branching out, widening his scope, and not quite making it. Gene Clark, with the late Gram Parsons, began country rock when they joined the Byrds and directed that band into 'Sweetheart of the Rodeo'.

He then joined up with Doug Dillard to form the Dillard and Clark Expedition, which was more into the country side.

Now he's on his own and seems to be using 'No Other' as a vehicle to rid himself of frustrations caused by Dil-

as a vehicle to rid himself of frustrations caused by Dillard's rustic simplicity. While still soft rock, it's an attempt at a "big" production — a mass of (excellent) musicians,

lush strings and background choirs.

But in his revolt Clark has gone overboard at times. Many of his lyrics, once delightfully to the point, show the present fashionable quality of "mystery": they sound deep but really say nothing.

The background vocals are too often not that, threatening to strangle Clark, and where the strings invade the songs turn to mush. Which is a pity because his slightly quavering voice is still as sweet as ever and his music-writing talent is still very much evident.

If this has got rid of his frustrations and he can get himself in hand, Clark's next album should be a honey.