

TOMORROW

By ED OCHS

WHEN THE ballots are counted for best white soul singer in rock, Van Morrison's name will not be among them. He is too private to be public. For Mick Jagger, the planet is his stage and half of humanity runs toward the sound of his beautiful outrage, but this Morrison sees the world through many stained glass windows, in Woodstock, and his stage is only the spinning wheel of the record player. He speaks to almost no one, because he is somehow not of this earth and that's where all the people are, for better or worse. Now, for better, Van Morrison is not too personal to be popular, and for varying amounts of money can be enjoyed by all earth people—Mick Jagger's people—who run toward the sound of "Moondance." Though his "Astral Weeks" remains one of rock's few real masterpieces, "Moondance" succeeds it, not by replacing it, but simply by presenting Van Morrison today; Van Morrison the artist, the one-man festival of feelings, glimmering suggestions and lingering associations. Influenced not by the homecomings of the Band and Bob Dylan, but by the indescribable Southern soul of the amazing Otis Redding. Van Morrison, so late, so far ahead.

Still Burning

Van Morrison in person, at the Gaslight, across the street from the Derby Steak House on MacDougal Street: Touching the music Braille-like through the visions in his fingertips, eyes closed, his mouth turned inside out like a disemboweled pocket. Empty, then full and over the brim again. For "Moondance," Van Morrison again puts on the mask of tragedy, from which joy and sorrow are spilled with the same pure, uplifting ecstasy. Only the music is different. "Moondance" is Van Morrison with a beat to keep, woeful, soulful, hopeful horns, and a chorus of soul sisters (Emily Houston, Judy Clay and Jackie Verdell). So you know Aretha Franklin could go all the way with Morrison's "Crazy Love," "These Dreams of You" or "A Brand New Day," his classic response to "I Shall Be Released." This is where Van Morrison's concession to form ends and Van Morrison's cosmic soul ascends, for the beat he lays down is still the mysterious and unobtainable punctuation of a man who "marches to the beat of a different drummer." Even within the limitations of rock and soul's familiar forms Morrison is free, free at least to wail, free as water, curbed only by nature's way. "Astral Weeks" was a self-portrait, overdrawn with neon, alcoholic preceptions at the failsafe point of catharsis. For what? For yesterday, and yesterday's gone. "Moondance" is full of tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.

Grey-Green Blues

Van Morrison is not British and should never be confused with what British rock has come to mean: Led Zeppelin, Ten Years After, the Who, et al. He is an Englishman, yes, but a Belfast boy, and he sings the "far and wee" Irish blues (or is it the greens?). Morrison and the Irish are not like other people, at least they seem to be different. Listen to the lilt and lament in their brogue! Hope, to the Irish, is a matter of good luck and fate, and their celebration of their own green, green earth, of constant sowing, reaping and the occasional harvest have made them tristful and half-smiling, subject to the same seasons and natural laws as the corn and grain. There is even something of James Joyce in the bleary-eyed blues singer; first, in his favor for feeling before form, and second, in his pursuit of egolessness, where the continent of the unconscious stretches like Atlantis. At this point it is all so elusive, so high and elated that "his earth is in heaven" and words blow like smoke from a fire. He is drunk and stoned and Irish, and his music depends on it. Blue is the color of Van Morrison's soul, and green is the color of his blood.

Vocal Frontiers

With Van Morrison comes the expansion of the voice in the "new music," the voice as a primary musical instrument. He plays his voice with the same ecstatic freedom and feeling as Leon Thomas' singing on Pharaoh Sanders' "Karma." And even with the minimum controls he has put on himself for the sake of a more "contemporary" sound, Morrison appears to be even more completely free. Freer than "Astral Weeks," too hard to pin down to wear out. On "Moondance" the lyrics are almost as clear as his voice, and more than ever he picks more words from the liquid flow, bleeding and reading them back into the feeling the words came from. Like ice dissolving back into water, into the essences of water. Despite the linear music, he still manages to explore the columns of vertical space, climbing over and under the words into a state of complete awareness where sounds are the lonely description of life before birth and after death. Not even Van Morrison knows the name of the place, only that it commands our presence, our being, our understanding. He is a diffuse cosmologist who expresses his "altogetherness" through the universality of the blues, so earthy yet so unearthly in the strange light of Morrison's vision. He "hums," wrote the late Bert Berns who produced Morrison's "Brown-Eyed Girl," and tosses darts at clouds . . . and still holds tight to the real of dust of bottles and heartbreak."

DAN MORRISON

R.D.1. Box 754
WOODSTOCK N. Y.

Dear Ed,

Just read a beautiful article
in Billboard that brought tears
to my eyes. Thank you deeply. I
am truly moved and my appreciation
goes out to you.

Van.