

# STRANGLER

John France takes a look at the decline of the Stranglers.

With "La Folie", the Stranglers have reached their commercial zenith but also their musical nadir, for the trax on the vinyl owe their inspiration more to a Rivvy Barn disco than to the social rebels the Stranglers once were. With "Golden Brown", the meninblack are fast becoming new romantics and with their latest single, "La Folie", we hear JJB and his mates doing poor impersonations of pseudos. Whatever happened to the guys who "started singing songs as opposed to technical exercises". Their excuse for their massive decline in musical stature is that they are exploiting a new artistic direction - a veering towards Bucks Fizz and the Nolans. It's a bloody shame because the Stranglers started the punk scene, even though they were one of the last bands to get a recording contract and produced some of the



classic songs of the punk era: "5 Minutes" and "Grip" are paragons of excellence, and "Rattus Norvegicus" and "No More Heroes" display good soul-destroying sequences, even if they are as simple as early Hawkwind trax. However, with "Heroes", the Stranglers took a nosedive in quality, although "Wog", "Nubiles" and "Bitching" rank good enough to be included on their next and best album, "Black & White". Released on



United Artists, B&W contains only two poor songs: "Do You Wanna" and "Enough Time" whilst it contains several brilliant songs, especially "Tank", "Sweden", "Sleazy", "Curfew" and "Toiler on the Sea" (reminiscent of "Down in the Sewer"). The style is cleaner and less aggressive on B&W than earlier discs but the whole ethos of the

Stranglers hate ("Death and Night and Blood") is still there ("Home is a black leather jacket fitting sweetly too my brain") and the production of the album is simple but effective eg "Threatened".

The next slab of meninblack grooves, the Raven, is the natural follow up to B&W except for the fact that it marks the rise of Dave Greenfield as opposed to Hugh or JJB as the main musicians



on the album. Thus the rise of the synth can be seen even in the ranks of punk heroes and "Shah Shah" and "Ice" serve as pointers to the future when the synthesizer would dominate Stranglers' songs. Nevertheless, the Raven is a superb piece of work and sees the Stranglers on a musical plateau before their long decline into "La Folie" and has some remarkable vibrations upon it eg Jet's skins on the intro to "Genetit" and the title song ranks among the most creative and viable music the Stranglers have created. Certainly it is an album worth purloining.

With the "Meninblack", sorry, the "Gospel according to the Meninblack", the Stranglers seemed to have lost interest in decent songs. "Waltz in Black", "Turn the Centuries Turn", "Manna Machine" and "Hallow to our man" are laughable, and on "Two Sunspots" and "Second Coming", it's hard to tell whether Jet's place in the band hasn't been taken by a drum machine.