

Red Rider gambles on Neruda

The alarming image of an urban mob's perverse fascination with death in *Power* (Strength in Numbers) opens *Neruda*, Red Rider's most lyrically powerful release to date.

Look . . . up on the building

See a Silhouette

Crowd looks hungry

Because he ain't jumped yet.

Although the pack-rule terror in the opening cut belies it, writer Tom Cochrane's theme is one of fierce individualism in a decaying world. The rage of a man trapped on an uncomfortably familiar future-world stage, like the imminent violence of the suicide scene, is ever on the verge of erupting. Battered, brooding, despairing, he nonetheless musters the spirit to fight and seek hope in the world around him.

Far-fetched subject matter for a rock and roll outfit to take on? Not at all, unless you haven't graduated from Sesame Street. *Neruda* demonstrates Red Rider's willingness to tackle lyric ideas beyond the boundaries of party-time pop. And at considerable risk, particularly at this stage of Red Rider's game, as Cochrane conceded in a telephone interview Friday. But it was a risk Cochrane felt bound to take.

Even potential singles for the



**ROMAN
COONEY**

album were sacrificed to achieve the full impact of the theme, Cochrane said.

Neruda is named for Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, who in turn took his surname from a 17th Century poet. *Neruda* is gypsy slang meaning movement under duress.

The album's protagonist has "bottomed out with nothing more to lose . . . but will keep moving."

Cochrane relates to the Nobel Prize-winning writer and diplomat, who championed the cause of the oppressed after his exile and until his death in 1973, on another, more immediate level as well, noting that

"what's happening in Latin America is kind of pivotal . . ."

"It's dog eat dog, but you've got to change it," Cochrane said.

Although the album was not patterned after the poet's work *per se*, *Neruda* shares with its namesake the impression of "one foot in mystery and one in reality."

Cochrane is not a strong vocalist, but in this instance his simple, direct style (in contrast to the vocal power of a classic rocker) strikes a personal, human chord.

That is, if the message is absorbed. Rock and roll fans are notorious for ignoring lyrics. Cochrane is not concerned.

"Number one I am a writer and number two I'm an entertainer — the two things can be compatible," Cochrane said. "Never synonymous, but compatible."

But will the listeners understand it? "But do I care," Cochrane replied, laughing. "I'm writing what I feel I want to hear." He loves rock and roll, but he also "craves to hear an album like *Neruda*." It may never be a commercial blockbuster, but Cochrane is proud of its "focus and intent."

Will listeners buy it? "Maybe they won't but that's the chance we took."

Neruda can't be absorbed or appreciated in a single listening. That's one strike against its chances for commercial success already. On the other hand, although *Neruda* is not as musically arresting as past Red Rider efforts — certainly not as powerful as *Lunatic Fringe* for example — rock is still the vehicle for the lyrics. (Cochrane disagrees with the musical assessment, feeling that *Neruda* is "expanding musical vocabulary" in quite a few areas.)

Rock and rollers might jump on for the thrill of the ride, even if they don't know what the man behind the wheel is thinking.

To Cochrane it doesn't matter. If he wanted to make a million, he wouldn't be in the business. If *Neruda* clicks, it will ensure Red Rider's survival. If not . . . "the element of risk is kind of exciting."

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RED RIDER

