

INTROSPECTIVE/PET SHOP BOYS

"Mister Tickle") and a whole lot of rough mixes. How much did Africa change those rough mixes?

"It changed them dramatically, of course, not to mention the spirit of things... but those voices, those tones and what that actually did to the songs, it really, really... it made it very powerful."

What makes a choir in Zambia or Swaziland any different?

"The realness of who they are as people. Their innocence and their excitement... and the textures of their voices."

Getting a little emotional there.

Words, it must be said, do tend to fall short of *Union*, and the choral work on tracks like 'Let The Rain Come Down' and 'Zimbabwe' becomes a sensual tattoo that fleshes out Childs' vague lyrics. *Union* works on an instinctive and romantic level; things get very emotional. Where the words fail, the music takes over, and on tracks like 'Zimbabwe', 'Where Is The Ocean' and 'Walk And Talk Like Angels' the result is an incantatory,

the Cow Palace in 1972. In 1978 she was busted for drugs and spent three months in jail with (wait for it) "a couple of Manson girls" and Patty Hearst. Then came punk, and a whole new set of rules; Childs fronted Berlin for a short stint, then formed Toni & the Movers in 1979 and released a single, 'Bitches and Bastards.' In the 70s or the 80s, the song remains the same: garbage in, garbage out.

"Well," says Childs, "I've been around for a long time, writing and playing and trying to expand and really go outside of myself. I tried to go very left of centre, and then I was really right for a while, and my attitudes have changed this way and that before I ever got a record deal. But if I put out stuff earlier, I may never have evolved to this point."

One of the best tracks on the album is 'Zimbabwe.' It's untainted with the usual media cliches. How come?

"The music, the piano which was the basis of that song, it was pulling out this word 'Zimbabwe,' this

private diary thrust into the marketplace?

"Scary. It was scarier, though, just after it was finished and sent to the record company. You realise: these are all my feelings, this is how I feel, these are all my colours that I like — is anyone going to like it? Is anyone going to be able to relate to it? It's going to be *judged!*. And I was sad about it. You've done the best work that you've ever done and the record company has to decide whether or not they find it *worthy* enough to support... it's like parent approval."

How hard is it to stay real in Hollywood?

"A lot of people here aren't working on that level. There are writers and musicians here, it's a mixture. A lot of people having a lot of different life experiences. There are a lot of people finding what they want in their life is success and money. People are really going for that fast buck. I don't really live in the city anymore. I don't care for that side of it. From my house I can see a naked mountain top. I don't have the feeling that I'm really living in the city."

Do the people going for that fast buck get you down?

"If I want to go to those places and get down, I can do that. I can focus in on the negative stuff till the cows come home, but it's not gonna help me one bit."

Childs' attention is waning. She decides to break off the phone conversation and talk to her cat. I wanted to ask about the sensual arithmetic of *Union*, the religious thrall, when she will tour, does she like Peter Gabriel's shirts, but I guess that's all we've got time for. Toni found her cat when she went jogging once.

"Helloooooo bayy-beee... He's all sleepy."

Why?

"He just got back from getting neutered..."

Toni Childs lives in California. People get a little emotional there. CHAD TAYLOR

"You realise: these [songs] are all my feelings, this is how I feel, these are all my colours that I like — is anyone going to like it?"

almost religious thrall.

Toni Childs was born into a deeply religious family. Her mother was a member of the Assemblies of God, and her maternal grandparents were missionaries from the same church. As a young girl Childs forbidden to listen to contemporary music or sample much of the pop culture on which nearly all are raised. It was an infringement of liberties but, in retrospect, a sheltering from pulp culture's cacophony that must have contributed to her originality as a musician.

When Childs did break away from her parents, however, her wanderings were a copybook checklist of 70s cred. She lived with California hippies, sang blues in an "artisans community," and dropped acid at Pink Floyd when they played

country. I had to pull it out of my subconscious and ask, what is this, what is going on here?

"The song was about peace existing in the world. There's a lot of talk about visualising world peace, about disarming the world and I think, where do I stand in all that? Zimbabwe is a metaphor, a country that in its history has had two factions warring against itself for hundreds of years, two basic tribes, and I seem to have that same kind of thing, that duality, within myself. That's the place that I wrote it from."

Above all, *Union* is a private album, its themes of intimacy and loss drawing from Childs' relationship with Ricketts just as her singing draws from his songwriting and production talents. How did it feel to have that

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