

'Chicago' Still Intact, Working on Another Album

By PETER J. BOYER
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The life expectancy of most rock groups — even good ones — is about five years. After that they seem to either retire to some Southern California canyon or take work on the bowling alley lounge circuit.

But Chicago, a group whose identifying brassiness once seemed sure to make it a collective timepiece, has endured for more than a decade, and with a surprising amount of vitality.

The eight-man band's last album, "Chicago XI," was double platinum, signifying more than 2 million units sold. Only a relative handful of groups ever have a double-platinum album. Chicago has nine of them.

Chicago sells out concert halls as consistently now as it did in 1970, when the band was considered the hottest thing since Blood, Sweat & Tears.

Creedence Clearwater Revival, Grand Funk Railroad and Three Dog

Night were among the 1970 Chicago contemporaries who have since fallen by the wayside. For that matter, whatever happened to Blood, Sweat & Tears?

With its customary regularity, the group is now at manager James Guercio's Caribou Ranch in Colorado, recording Chicago XI. Before they sequestered themselves in the Rockies, the band members answered a few questions, including: Why hasn't your music gone out of style?

"We just keep workin' at it," says drummer Danny Seraphine. "You try to become what the music scene is. You just try to keep at the forefront of the mainstream of music, you know? You've just got to keep ahead."

"That's our philosophy — look ahead, look ahead. Once you get com-

placent, it passes you by so fast, you're in trouble."

"There have been some lean moments," Seraphine adds. "But we always seem to pull out and hit another peak. It's a real strange kind of a thing."

"I think anybody hits lean moments," adds singer-trumpeter Lee Loughnane, "It's a matter of riding them out and keeping your confidence."

"Our music is diversified, so it keeps your interest up. We don't get

stuck in a rut."

The original members of the group are still there — Seraphine, Loughnane, Robert Lamm (keyboards), Walter Parazaider (winds), James Pankow (trombone), Terry Kath (guitar) and Peter Cetera

(bass). The only change has been the addition of Brazilian percussionist Laudir De Oliveira.

Success often does funny things to pop music makers; the most common being a sudden desire to leave the mother group and strike it rich solo.

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Chicago is still going strong after many contemporaries have faded.

'New Grass' Is Good But May Irk Bluegrass Fans

NEW GRASS REVIVAL: When the Storm Is Over

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The New Grass Revival, a group of Kentuckians playing now, continue to explore bluegrass-country possibilities on this, their most commercial album.

"When the Storm Is Over" was recorded in Nashville and produced by Garth Fundis, Chuck Cochran and the group's Sam Bush (from Bowling Green). Band members bring bluegrass instrumental virtuosity to some pure country tunes and the resultant brew might inspire country music lovers as much as it might infuriate bluegrass purists.

But all the group is working for is some sort of sincerity, and the formula — excellent banjo, mandolin, guitar-driven treatments coupled with "new grass-style" vocals — succeeds.

The group includes: Bush on fiddle and mandolin, John Cowan (a Louisville-area resident) on bass, Courtney Johnson (Hitesville) on banjo and Curtis Burch (Glasgow) on guitar.

Songs by Rick Roberts (of Firefall), Townes Van Zandt (who appeared recently at the Jefferson Davis Inn), Bob Lucas and John Hartford are included along with collaborations by local songwriter Steven Brines and Bush and Jim Smoak.

The band included a traditional song ("Tennessee Wagoner") and a traditional-sounding Hartford tune ("Vamp in the Middle") just to keep

their bluegrass fingers nimble, we suppose.

The gem of this collection is a gospel-sounding number, Bob Lucas' "When the Storm is Over." The banjo then guitar backing drives the gospel vocals to country-pure heights. At 2 minutes, 40 seconds, it's much too short.

The considerable talents of Brines are embellished with almost-too-fast a treatment of his "Like a Child in the Rain." Drums (cover your ears, bluegrass fanatics!) are added and a fine song is given a New Grass treatment that includes a short-but-fine dobro solo by Bush.

A slowed-down treatment of this tune (with weeping pedal steel guitar, perhaps) could suit any of a number of Nashville's country music elite.

The problems faced by any of the so-called "new grass" bands are many. Bluegrass purists won't listen to anyone who uses an electric bass. Country fans are too-used to the Nashville formula that goes heavy on the tears and orchestration. The high vocals are sometimes too much for pop fans.

But good playing can win over any music nut so the choice of songs are that much more important for bands like the New Grass Revival. It will be interesting to see whether they begin choosing more country-oriented tunes or delve into the pop-rock field.

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