



THE LINER NOTES on "Moby Grape '69" (Columbia CS 9696) promise that the group has put aside all hypes, egos, and gimmicks and fallen back on the only thing left—good, pure music. Producer Dave Rubinson hints a tale of greedy talent, seduced and destroyed by the twin

sirens, fame and fortune. Finally, corruption-weary, hard-knock lessons learned, the group recoils from it all and starts clean and simple—like learning to walk all over.

Minus second guitarist and fine songwriter Skip Spence, the reformed Moby Grape is still a good, tight, and accomplished group. But they've lost more than their innocence. The new album suffers in two areas. That old contrapuntal texture of the guitars (that Buffalo Springfield also had) is gone. Jerry Miller, whose snarling lead is one of the best,

*Continued on next page*



*Continued from preceding page*

valiantly double-tracks for fullness, but one person has only one style.

What's hurting most is the starkness and predictability of the material. It fails to build where it should, so there is no tension or suspense, just monotony. In its good moments, this record is wispily poignant or compellingly abandoned, as in "Seeing," which alternates hard and soft like a mind parfait. For a group that's starting from scratch, this is a healthy renaissance. But for someone who remembers the Gospel Grape, it's disappointing. There is no "8.05" or anything approaching that lilting sigh. Maybe they went too far back. Maybe they needed to. Grape, you may now take three baby steps forward.

THE KINKS' new album is a good album, not a great one, with a pain in its aspirations. "The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society" (Reprise RS 6327) tries too hard to be a classic. It gropes for different directions

to go in and only succeeds on four or five of the 15 cuts; trying on liturgical rock, Greek-bouzouki roll, blues calypso.

Ray Davies, who wrote and produced the entire record, seems to have a Penny Lane complex; but it never duplicates that experience because the Kinks are not a poetic group. Happily, he is writingsongs, not a "total listening experience" that emerges as psychedelic trash. Succulent melodies and Davis's funky voice combine wistfully and pleasantly tremulous.

They've wandered too far away from what the Kinks really are, which is sweaty and coarse. This record is much too deodorized and "Dandy." Startling as a completely blues-hard rock group, they were the most down-home of the English first wave. Musical violence generated a powerful sound but that roughness and energy are missing here and so is the excitement. The best songs are the ones that come closest to that old violence ("Picture Book," "Wicked Annabella") and even they are subdued.

On this record, they've become a funk Gilbert and Sullivan ("We are the Village Green Preservation

Society/ God save Donald Duck, Vaudeville, and Variety/ We are the Desperate Dan Appreciation Society/ God save strawberry jam and all the different varieties"). The lyric is up front framed by a sparse instrumental. In this time of interpretive virtuosity, all the Kinks are adept enough to take off on the bare framework of a tune, but only drummer Michael Avory does.

The lyrics are clever but they don't really deserve all that stress. Spinning long, patently fictional stories, Davis has switched to the third person. Very impersonal. And the Kinks are really best when they breathe hard down your neck and croak right to you that "you really got me."

—Johanna Schier