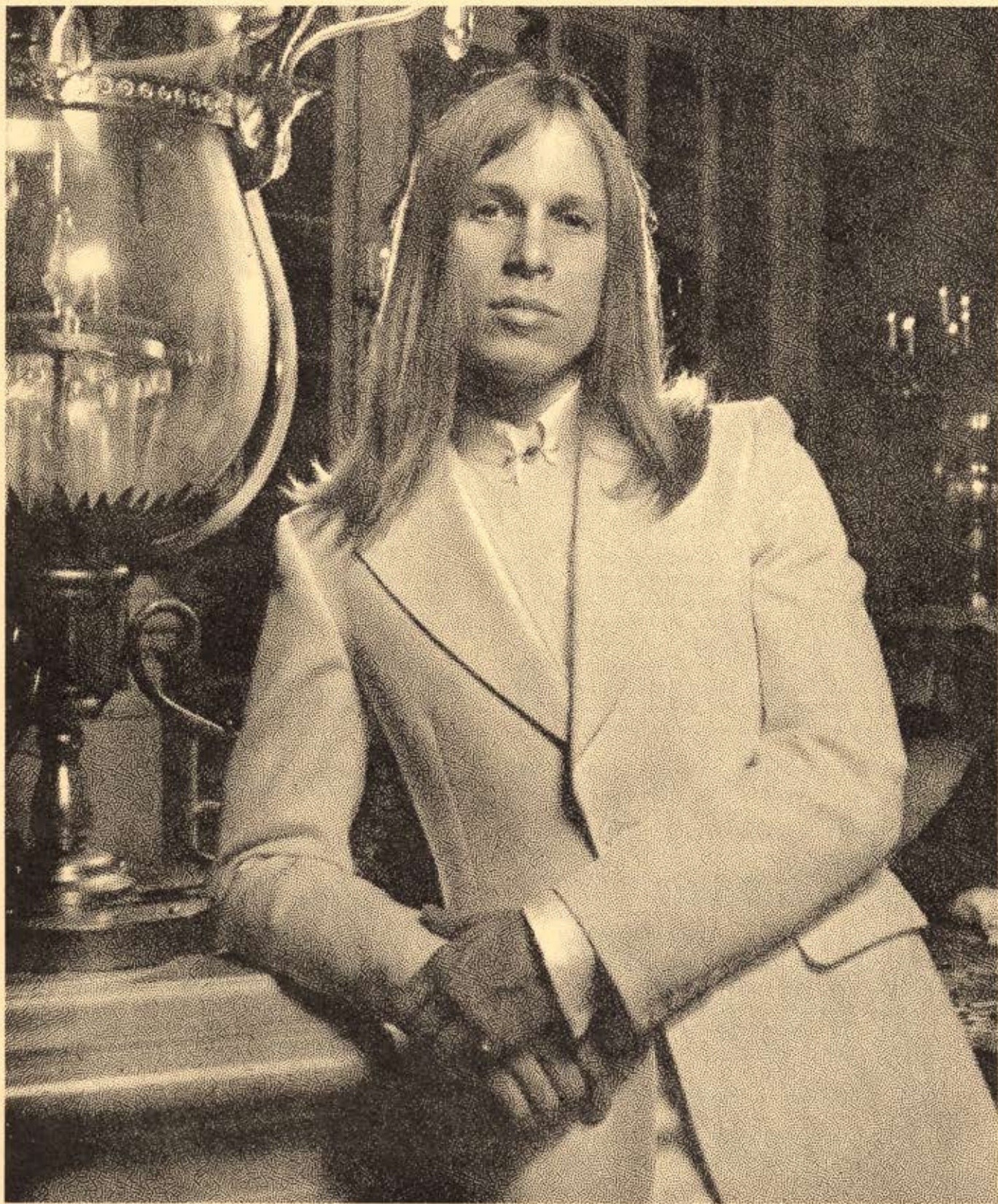


# elliott murphy

AQUASHOW



## A Rock-Singing, Surfing, Teen-Idol Suburban Identity Crisis

Unlike the everyday American pop star, Elliott Murphy doesn't need to demand attention when he enters a room; he just walks in, and he's got it. His ash blond hair and his silver sunglasses, his snow-white pants and shirt, set off perfectly by a Levi jacket and snakeskin boots, make Murphy look like he has just been returned from the dry cleaners.

The Great Rock 'n' Roll Gatsby carries his five-foot, eight-inch frame with such nonchalance that it suggests arrogance. But not the manipulated arrogance of a David Bowie or an Alice Cooper: Elliott hasn't contrived his identity, it's just the one he's stuck with.

Murphy is the most interesting thing to happen to Garden City, his hometown, since Doran left Doubleday. He's a walking, suburban-rock identity crisis, too literate for his own comfort, a former surfer, a bit player in a Fellini movie, so much the archetype for peers that he's thoroughly alienated from them. The best thing about the alienation, he's the first to admit, is that it gives him room to write about what others only experience.

His father was Elliott Murphy, of Elliott Murphy's Aqua Show, and later, proprietor of the Sky Club Restaurant. The senior Murphy's death, eight years ago, shocked his son, not only because of their personal relationship, but because it threw the family out of the upper-middle-class opulence to which it had become accustomed.

"We use to be rich," Murphy says, with more wry humor than rancor. "There were two Cadillacs in the garage, and I was surfing every day and not thinking about very much else. And then one day it was gone." As a result, he thinks, honestly and openly, about money quite frequently: "The rich fascinate me. They're not like us, as Fitzgerald said . . . But I'd like to be rich again, someday."

More than any other singer or songwriter I have heard, Elliott Murphy's music reflects the

teenaged suburbs. That may be because his is the classic suburban story: On the skids with money in your pocket. His high school yearbook calls him the "Pioneer Surfer of Garden City," and in 1966 he won the New York State Battle of the Bands with a group called the Rapscallions, which, he says, "had a girl lead singer and sort of played surf music."

After high school, he made the usual adolescent bohemian junkets—to the Virgin Islands; to Europe, where he "played in a lot of cafes in Switzerland, and helped this girl escape from her private school on Lake Geneva. She's still with me," to Key West, Fla., for an unusual reason: "I wanted to know what Hemingway found down there. But it's at the bottom of the country and you can imagine what slides down." Previously, he'd hung out in Greenwich Village and gone to Nassau Community College.

Why did he leave Garden City? He's wary of the question, for a moment. "I dug Long Island for a long time. . . until I knew anything else," flashing a smile that can't help but remind you of Robert Redford. "But there's something about suburbia that can strangle you. It's almost like science fiction: Everything's happening in a shopping center."

As a result of this "I Led Two Lives" scenario, his first album, "Elliott Murphy's Aqua Show," ("Maybe I'll name the second record "Elliott Murphy's Sky Club," he mused) is doubly schizoid. Part of it is about the culture from which he originally escaped; part of it is about his European adventures, which to hear him tell it, he barely survived; and part of it is about the seedy rock and roll life he found in Manhattan, where he presently lives in an upper East Side apartment "that used to belong to my sister."

This record is caught in a time warp. Parts of it sound like Bob Dylan's "Blonde on Blonde," with music meant for a majestic circus and abstract lyrics



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He sings quickly, punching out the lines in a nasal voice that grows on you in the classic rock and roll mold. "I dreamed I saw the king in a '53 Chevy," says one of the songs. "He rolled down his window, I guess to say 'Hi.' He was born to be the king, he was born to be the man, but I doubt he'd understand, when I say, "Who is the last of the rock stars?" "

If that's the stuff your dreams are made of, the obvious answer to the question can only be, "me." Murphy has the dream, and he lives his life surrounded by its accoutrements—there are songs about the Great Gatsby and Marilyn Monroe on his albums, posters of F. Scott and Marilyn in his apartment, and he has the talent. The rock business doesn't necessarily disagree: When Paul Nelson, who discovered the Dolls for Mercury, heard him, he immediately wanted to sign him. Two days before the Mercury contract was to be signed, he walked into Polydor; producer Peter Siegel gave him a next-day audition and he signed him.

Siegel was fortunate. Maybe it's only my taste speaking, but I think Murphy will be big. He's got the songs, and they're about things the rock market knows about. Who else is going to document people like "the girl that's home on Friday night, the boy who's out to play (and) that boy who knows he's gotta pay?" He could be just another pompous punk attacking the suburban, middle-class privileges he's abusing, but I think he's honest. The experiences he writes about strike too close to home too often to be anything less.

But I'm impressed by intelligence, and a world view that is as cynical—or at least, as full of crushed idealism—as my own; maybe his fetish for '20s novels, and his almost-sneering ability to deflate hip myths ("Max's Kansas City and (London's) The Hard Rock Cafe, it's all the same," he sings), his self-conscious awareness of the power rock stars hold over their audiences ("and never use," he adds with some amazement) are too weighty for what rock is buying (or selling) this year. If so, that's rock's loss. Win or lose, Elliott Murphy's still the last of the rock stars. So far.

By David Marsh



A POLYGRAM COMPANY

Polydor Incorporated, 1700 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10019

7 November, 1973

Gary Sperrazza  
35 Knox Avenue  
Buffalo, N.T.

Dear Gary:

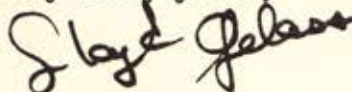
Many thanks for your recent inquiry about Polydor's reviewer service.

We would be delighted to include your name on our mailing list for you to receive release information and selected product. To catch you up on some of the things you have missed, I'm sending you copies of several of our recently released albums, along with related publicity material. I hope you enjoy them.

It goes without saying that we are interested in what people are saying about us. We would, therefore, appreciate it if you would extend the courtesy by including my name on your mailing list, or by sending to my attention original tearsheets of any reviews concerning Polydor albums.

Once again, thank you for your kind cooperation.

Very truly yours,



Lloyd Gelassen  
Director,  
Press, Public and Artist Relations

LG/tjg

16 November 1973

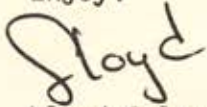
Dear Reviewer:

New York based singer/song-writer Elliott Murphy, whose debut album, "Aquashow," was just released by Polydor, will be appearing at the Bitter End, 147 Bleeker Street, from 28 November through 3 December.

His band includes his brother Matthew Murphy on bass, Phil Lowe on drums, Jay Acuff on piano and George Gates on guitar. Elliott performs lead vocals and plays guitar and harmonica.

Show times are at 9:00 and 11:00 on Wednesday, Thursday, Sunday and Monday, and at 8:30, 10:30 and 12:30 on Friday and Saturday. If you wish to attend, please call Linda George at Polydor for reservations.

Enjoy!



Lloyd Gelassen  
Director,  
Press, Public and Artist Relations

LG/lg



# ELLIOTT MURPHY

Please credit: Polydor/Mitchell

Exclusively on



Records and Tapes

# ELLIOTT MURPHY

## "Aquashow"

Polydor PD 5061

---

### Suggested cuts:

- Side 1, band 1 Last of the Rock Stars
- band 2 How's the Family
- band 3 Hangin' Out
- band 4 Hometown

Like father, like son. If showmanship can be said to be hereditary, it would seem that the Murphy's have cornered the market. Elliott's father ran the original Aqua Show at the '64 World's Fair, and emerging phoenix-like from the ashes is a new Murphy and a different dimension of show business.

Aquashow, his first for Polydor, is a very personal sequence of music renditions—incidents and images, faces and places, efforts and expectations, and that something evermore—where a man's life or a moment of experience is summed up briefly and preserved for posterity.

"Last of the Rock Stars" sets the tone for the rest of the album by glorifying an obsession—that inexplicably enticing Loreli-lure of stardom. It recalls the late great Jimi Hendrix in a purple-hazed dream fragment which only awakens to the strange, sad reality of a plaintive Dylanesque harmonica and "a messy desk drawer full of broken strings."

"How's the Family" is a poignant slice of life—the broken dreams, indecisions, immeasurable loneliness laced with a lazy harmonica that ends each verse and asks the almost rhetorical question, "How's the Family?" Some pretty evocative poetry.

"Hangin' Out" is distinguished by a rifle-like rhythm which lives up to the fast paced life-style the song describes. Making the scene involves prostituting one's values but Murphy's not judging or condemning. Elliott, recently described by Newsday critic Dave Marsh as a "rock-singing, surfing, teen-idol Suburban Identity Crisis" has done a lot of hanging out and makes it known in an unrelenting staccato burst of verbiage and electric guitar exhibition.

"Hangin' Out" is followed by its antithesis, "Hometown." The pervading theme of small town suffocation is evocative of another Eliot, Thomas Sterns—in its depiction of coffee-spoon, butt-end existence.

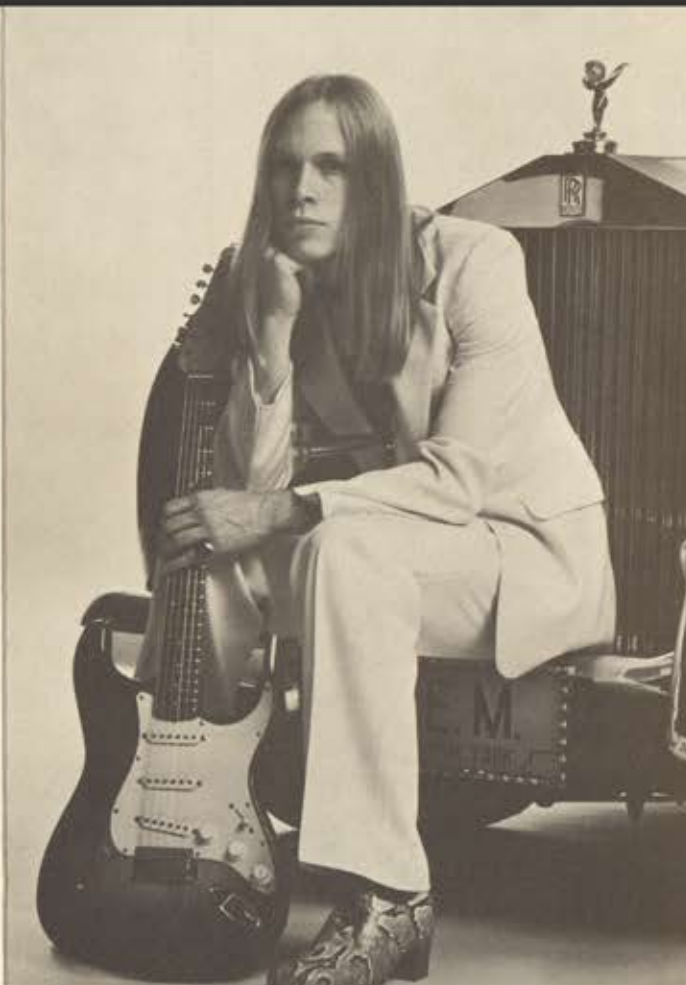
Murphy is a satirist who is able to achieve a rare and delicate blend of the tragi-comic: his keen perception hits at the very heart of social truth but his comic conscience provides a means of extricating himself from the inanities he uncovers.

In "Hangin' Out" he says, "I guess my business is show." Evidently, and Aquashow is no watered down version.





PD 14217



**How's The Family?**

*Elliott Murphy*



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS CONTACT: Lloyd Gelassen

POLYDOR ARTISTE ELLIOTT MURPHY TO TOUR WITH  
STARSHIP AND WITH KINKS

New York City, 18 March 1974...Polydor recording "artiste"  
Elliott Murphy is about to begin his first major tour which begins  
on 19 March in Chicago with the Jefferson Starship. Appearances  
with the Starship will take Murphy and his band to Detroit, Cincinnati,  
Cleveland and Pittsburgh. On 3 April, Murphy will be performing with  
the Kinks at Hofstra University on Long Island, and will also appear  
with the Kinks in Boston, Passaic, Philadelphia and Richmond. On 16  
April, Murphy will tape a Midnight Special, and on 17 April he is expected  
to be at Max's Kansas City in New York City for a week.

Accompanying Murphy on the tour will be his four piece  
group which includes Jay Anguff, piano and organ; George Gates, guitar;  
Phil Lowe, drums; and his brother, Matthew Murphy on bass.

# # # P O L Y D O R # # #





ELLIOTT MURPHY ITINERARY

<u>CITY</u>	<u>AUDITORIUM</u>	<u>DATE</u>
Chicago, Illinois	Auditorium Theatre	3/19 (With Starship)
Detroit, Michigan	Masonic Temple	3/20 " "
Cincinnati, Ohio	RKO Albee	3/22 " "
Cleveland, Ohio	Music Hall	3/24 " "
-----	Taping Midnight Special -----	3/26
Hempstead, N.Y.	Hofstra University	4/3
Boston, Mass.	Music Hall	4/10 (With Kinks)
Passaic, N.J.	Capitol Theatre	4/11 " "
Philadelphia, Pa.	Spectrum	4/12 " "
New York City	Max's Kansas City	4/17 - 22
Roslyn, N.Y.	My Father's Place	5/8-12



A POLYGRAM COMPANY



polydor

# NEWS

/JULY 1973

## PENTHOUSE

### SOUNDS

The Dolls got moving during their frequent appearances at the privately owned Mercer Arts Center, on the eastern border of Greenwich Village. The Mercer itself is now looked on as a magic place by some. Some of the most contrived and inept groups ever put together have played there in recent months. But so have a number of really promising young bands. The most impressive of these was a quintet from Garden City, Long Island, known as Elliott Murphy's Aquashow (so named because Murphy's father ran a concession he called the Aquashow at the '64 World's Fair). On the night I saw them, Murphy, flaxen-haired and exuding confidence, stood in a baggy white suit holding a Fender Stratocaster and wearing a harmonica on a metal holder around his neck. The band was all in black, and when they all opened up, you couldn't help but think of Dylan in his most muscular moments on *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde on Blonde*. Murphy had neither the looks nor the vocal sound of Dylan, but his songs scattered images in machine-gun fashion, and he exuded an unshakeable self-assurance on stage that must have been styled on Dylan the rocker. The band, together about six months, sounded as tight and strong as almost any group on record, and Murphy demonstrated with raised arms, hand wiggles and body tilts that he was in complete control of them. He had a song about *The Great Gatsby*, another called *Graveyard Scrapbook*, and a third about *The Last of the Rock Stars*. Murphy was clearly preoccupied by myths, and he used his preoccupation consciously and often brilliantly.

—Bud Scoppa

## Melody Maker

October 6, 1973

**ELLIOTT MURPHY'S AQUA SHOW:** Elliott's father ran the original Aqua Show, about 30 years ago, out on Long Island, as a real water ballet number — you know, high dives, clowns doing belly flops, and some Channel swimmer or something, that could give thrills and chills to the pre-TV pre-rock crowd.

But Elliott, Jr. spent his summers listening to Bob Dylan and Lou Reed. This combination could go all the way, if Murphy can put a stable group together.

He is recording, for Polydor, and hearing the record was a relief. I didn't think anyone else still played "Blonde on Blonde" a lot. Murphy is a despondent, over-verbal and probably crazy visionary, but when he rocks out of that, he's great: "I'm sittin' in Brooklyn, there ain't no escape/Some people say the South is bad, but this ain't so great."

That's from "White Middle Class Blues." Other good songs: "Great Gatsby," with machine-gun lyrics, some of which mean something; "Rock Star," about Jimi Hendrix; "Marilyn," about Monroe. The album may make this one a star.

# polydor NEWS

# CREEM

December 1973



NOVEMBER 3, 1973

## Murphy Stops By



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### VARIETY

Wednesday, October 31, 1973

**ELLIOTT MURPHY: "AQUASHOW"** (Polydor). Elliott Murphy, from Long Island, N.Y., catapults onto the disk scene with this debut rock set featuring his excellent lyrics and nasal voice. Named for his late father's N.Y. World's Fair attraction, Murphy's program contains "Graveyard Scrapbook," "Last of the Rock Stars," "Marilyn," "Don't Go Away," "Like a Great Gatsby," "Hometown," and "Poise 'n Pen."



Elliott Murphy, newly signed to Polydor, stopped by Record World to discuss his recording career. Murphy, who describes himself as an "artiste," has a new single ("Last of the Rock Stars") and album ("Aquashow") that have just been released. A nationwide tour is planned, beginning in November, to promote him.

November 3, 1973

## cash box / album reviews

### NEWCOMER PICKS

**AQUASHOW**—Elliott Murphy—Polydor PD-5061

Elliott is a very versatile singer/composer/musician and his debut LP shows off his skills very nicely. In the style of Dylan, Bowie, and maybe Lou Reed, Elliott paints word pictures that are alternately suggestive or explicit depending upon his intent. "Hangin' Out" is the classic global story which could be told as easily in front of Max's in New York or the Speakeasy in London and is set to a good uptempo beat with solid supporting harmonies. "Hometown" is a mini-epic that has a distinctly dramatic flavor. "Last Of The Rock Stars" is a strong single and "Graveyard Scrapbook" an excellent composition.





polydor

# NEWS

## Newsday

SEPTEMBER 30, 1973

### MARSH / *A Rock-Singing, Surfing, Teen-Idol Suburban Identity Crisis*

By David Marsh

Unlike the everyday American pop star, Elliott Murphy doesn't need to demand attention when he enters a room; he just walks in, and he's got it. His ash blond hair and his silver sunglasses, his snow-white pants and shirt, set off perfectly by a Levi jacket and snakeskin boots, make Murphy look like he has just been returned from the dry cleaners.

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His father was Elliott Murphy, of Elliott Murphy's Aqua Show, and later, proprietor of the Sky Club Restaurant. The senior Murphy's death, eight years ago, shocked his son, not only because of their personal relationship, but because it threw the family out of the upper-middle-class opulence to which it had become accustomed.

"We use to be rich," Murphy says, with more wry humor than rancor. "There were two Cadillacs in the garage, and I was surfing every day and not thinking about very much else. And then one day it was gone." As a result, he thinks, honestly and openly, about money quite frequently: "The rich fascinate me. They're not like us, as Fitzgerald said. . . . But I'd like to be rich again, someday."

More than any other singer or songwriter I have heard, Elliott Murphy's music reflects the teenaged suburbs. That may be because his is the classic suburban story: On the skids with money in your pocket. His high school yearbook calls him the "Pioneer Surfer of Garden City," and in 1966 he won the New York State Battle of the Bands with a group called the Rapsallions, which, he says, "had a girl lead singer and sort of played surf music."

After high school, he made the usual adolescent bohemian junkets—to the Virgin Islands; to Europe, where he "played in a lot of cafes in Switzerland, and helped this girl escape from her private school on Lake Geneva. She's still with me;" to Key West, Fla., for an unusual reason: "I wanted to know what Hemingway found down there. But it's at the bottom of the country and you can imagine what slides down." Previously, he'd hung out in Greenwich Village and gone to Nassau Community College.

Why did he leave Garden City? He's wary of the question, for a moment. "I dug Long Island for a long time . . . until I knew anything else," flashing a smile that can't help but remind you of Robert Redford. "But there's something about suburbia that can strangle you. It's almost like science fiction: Everything's happening in a shopping center."

As a result of this "I Led Two Lives" scenario, his first album, "Elliott Murphy's Aqua Show," ("Maybe I'll name the second record 'Elliott Murphy's Sky Club,'" he mused) is doubly schizoid. Part of it is about the culture from which he originally escaped; part of it is about his European adventures, which to hear him tell it, he barely survived; and part of it is about the seedy rock and roll life he found in Manhattan, where he presently lives in an upper East Side apartment "that used to belong to my sister."

The record, due out shortly on Polydor, is caught in a time warp. Parts of it sound like Bob Dylan's "Blonde on Blonde," with music meant for a majestic circus and abstract lyrics that take some puzzling out, and don't necessarily lead anywhere. Another part, fittingly enough, sounds like the best of Lou Reed; the Garden City Flash paying tribute to Freeport's Master of Decadent Rock.

He sings quickly, punching out the lines in a nasal voice that grows on you in the classic rock and roll mold. "I dreamed I saw the king in a '53 Chevy," says one of the songs. "He rolled down his window, I guess to say 'Hi.' He was born to be the king, he was born to be the man, but I doubt he'd understand, when I say, 'Who is the last of the rock stars?'"

If that's the stuff your dreams are made of, the obvious answer to the question can only be, "me." Murphy has the dream, and he lives his life surrounded by its accoutrements—there are songs about the Great Gatsby and Marilyn Monroe on his album, posters of F. Scott and Marilyn in his apartment, and he has the talent. The rock business doesn't necessarily disagree: When Paul Nelson, who discovered the Dolls for Mercury, heard him, he immediately wanted to sign him. Two days before the Mercury contract was to be signed, he walked into Polydor; producer Peter Siegel gave him a next-day audition and he signed him.

Siegel was fortunate. Maybe it's only my taste speaking, but I think Murphy will be big. He's got the songs, and they're about things the rock market knows about. Who else is going to document people like "the girl that's home on Friday night, the boy who's out to play [and] that boy who knows he's gotta pay?" He could be just another pompous punk attacking the suburban, middle-class privileges he's abusing, but I think he's honest. The experiences he writes about strike too close to home too often to be anything less.

But I'm impressed by intelligence, and a world view that is as cynical—or at least, as full of crushed idealism—as my own; maybe his fetish for '20s novels, and his almost-sneering ability to deflate hip myths ("Max's Kansas City and [London's] The Hard Rock Cafe, it's all the same," he sings), his self-conscious awareness of the power rock stars hold over their audiences ("and never use," he adds with some amazement) are too weighty for what rock is buying (or selling) this year. If so, that's rock's loss. Win or lose, Elliott Murphy's still the last of the rock stars. So far.

Newsday Photo by Jim Cavanaugh

*Murphy at work in his apartment.*



# NEWS

January 31, 1974

**down  
beat**  
jazz-blues-rock

**elliott  
murphy**



## Profile

**W**hen I was about 12 my mother decided I was a hyper-active child and I'd better get my hands busy at something. So we started taking guitar lessons together. She eventually dropped out and I kept it up. I was playing in bands all through junior high school. In 1966 I won the New York State Battle of the Bands with a group called the RapsCALLIONS.

After high school I started traveling. I always took a guitar with me. There were a lot of people that I was interested in and I sort of wanted to go to the places that they had been. The main people that interest me are writers like Ernest Hemmingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald. I spent some time in Key West, Florida, because of Hemmingway; and then over in Europe it was more or less tracing Fitzgerald's steps. I always had the guitar and I was always writing and singing in cafes.

In Europe, being a musician is more of a respected profession than it is over here. If a kid says, at age 16, that he thinks he wants to be a lawyer or a doctor his parents say "Great!" If he says he thinks he wants to be a musician they send him to a psychiatrist a couple of times a week. In Europe being a musician is really accepted. I'd play these cafes; I don't think you could do that in New York. I would walk into places almost like luncheonettes. Can you imagine walking into Nedick's at one o'clock in the afternoon and singing and passing the hat?

I think the Rock culture and the pop culture sort of started in the '20s. F. Scott Fitzgerald was probably one of the first pop heroes; then it started going to the movie stars. It went to James Dean, Marilyn Monroe and Marlon Brando. I still go to movies a lot. I think films can change your life. That's really been the religion of my generation . . . films, television and rock-and-roll . . . those are the gods.

In the '60s everyone was saying how the underprivileged and the poor and the minorities were mistreated. But I like to write songs about how the upper class and the overprivileged and the majorities are mistreated.

I know that before people say I'm Elliott Murphy they'll say I sound like this and like that. When they first heard Bob Dylan, they said, "That's Woody Guthrie." Bob Dylan got to a point where if he'd wanted to he could have done some amazing things with the people that were under his control. He was like a folk hero, someone that the public looks at and thinks, "He knows something that other people don't know, and he possesses some sort of immortality."

When I got together with Polydor, we went out to California to do an album with Leon Russell on piano, Jim Gordon on drums and Doctor John on organ. I was out there and it just wasn't going right at all. One night I was eating dinner with my brother in a restaurant and really feeling down about the way that the album would end up and thinking I wouldn't know who I was. Suddenly my brother starts pointing across the table and his face is turning white. These booths were arranged so you were almost sitting back to back with people. I turned around and looked at what he was pointing at, and that second the guy in back of me turns around and I'm nose to nose with Bob Dylan. For some reason that gave me strength and I went into the studio and told the producer to forget it. I came back to New York and got together with producer Peter Siegel and we did it right.

Why? In *Rebel Without A Cause* James Dean and the other guy were playing "chicken." Just before they were getting in the cars James Dean turned to him and he said, "You know, I like you. Why are we doing this?" And the guy said, "You gotta do something." That's the truth. You gotta do something and you might as well do something like this. db



# Good Times

DECEMBER 26, 1973

## Elliott Murphy Melissa Manchester The Bitter End

By ANDY MCKAIE

The word went out about Elliott Murphy, but the crowd came for Melissa Manchester, which must say something about the cumulative value of personal appearances versus the immediate power of the press these days. **Then again, if Elliott continues to get the press raves and, in turn, gives more fine performances like the one this evening, you can never tell how big he'll get.**

Elliott's certainly got all the attributes: a flair for writing strong lyric lines; a great sense for mix-matching mid-period Dylan and Lou Reed (circa Velvet Underground) riffs; a good, flexible, nasally rock voice; and fine instincts for presenting it all as a most attractive, even refreshing package.

This evening his backup band faltered a couple of times, and his pacing failed a trifle here and there. But the power that is Murphy and his music rose above all the momentary hassles,

striking home his Dylanesque yet straight-forward lyrics forcefully. His long, straight, pale blond hair hardly moved, perfectly framing his face, as Elliott delightfully ran through such self-explanatory titles as "White Middle Class Blues," "Hangin' Out," and his romping debut single, "Last Of The Rock Stars."

Melissa Manchester, on the other hand, shook her wild curls in every direction as she joyously bounded about on stage, but, as far as I was concerned, her antics were to no avail. Melissa's showbizzy presence matched her showy music, and the light airiness of most of her music complemented the happy vapid-ity of the majority of her lyrics.

Oh sure, she sang a torchy blues or two, but there seemed to be something missing—a certain amount of real emotion, most probably.

In other words, whereas Melissa came off affected and somewhat sterile, Elliott was the real thing. He lived up to his pretenses, even recognizing and understanding them, and gave every indication he'll fulfill the great predictions all sorts of soothsayers are making.

# RECORD

JANUARY 5, 1974

## CLUB REVIEW

### Murphy Magic at Max's

■ MAX'S KANSAS CITY, NYC — Elliot Murphy continued to build his burgeoning reputation as a fine poetic songwriter, with a strong set at Max's (22). Murphy, whose first album has recently been released by Polydor, has been making the rounds of New York's most prominent music clubs and he and his small band seem better every time out. Murphy, who plays good guitar, is joined by his brother Matthew Murphy on bass, Jay Acuff on piano, George Gates on lead guitar and Phil Lowe on percussion. The group works solidly behind Murphy's Dylanesque talk / songs. Murphy's music is, at this point in his development, similar to Dylan's music on "Highway 61" and although his poetic vision deals mostly with Long Island style suburbia, it is refreshingly sardonic and nonwhining. Some of his tunes stretch things a bit, like a love song about Eva Braun, but other tunes, like "How's the Family" are amazingly well wrought and perceptive.

In a time when the only acceptable song metaphor seems to be the singer as cowboy/drifter it is great to hear the writer deal with his own milieu in an artful, insightful and hip way. You'll undoubtedly hear much more from Mr. Murphy.

Robert Nash

# WORLD



# The New York Times

## ARTS AND LEISURE

### *How to Make a Pop Parody*

By HENRY EDWARDS

Elliott Murphy's bristling debut, *Aquashow* (Polydor PD 5061) — named after the water spectacle his late father produced on Long Island — has also begun to generate the kind of attention that makes Murphy another candidate for leader of a New York rock school. This 24-year-old native of Garden City concentrates on the high dives, back strokes, and frantic treading of water that comprises suburbia as he knows it.

Murphy's music, an obvious throwback to the Bob Dylan of Dylan's "Blonde on Blonde" era, provides a format for Murphy's lyrics, a splattering of alternately sharp and disillusioned perceptions about middle-class malaise. It seems as if Murphy has created a sing-along that could have been played as an accompaniment to that devastating *cinéma vérité* television portrayal of suburban life, "An American Family."

"How's the Family?" is Murphy's most effective composition. It even dispenses with the Dylan format and attaches a harrowing lyric of family life to a lush melody that is fresh enough to stand on its own. Murphy's potent vocal, which is as much of an acting job as anything else, includes a keening falsetto that complements perfectly the composer's pain-filled vision.

There is urgency and gentleness in Murphy's songs. A disconcerting preciosity also arises on occasion and sometimes one gets the feeling that the composer is buck-shotting, relying on personalized gimmicks to plug up some of the holes in his compositions.

Murphy, however, is not ashamed of being literate, a bold assertion in the fundamentally anti-intellectual world of rock. He also possesses admirable restraint, a miracle in this world of excess. The theme of suburban discontent is a time-worn chestnut. Murphy could easily become the singing symbol of the frustrations and rebelliousness of his audience. The pop myth-makers have begun to churn out reams of prose in an attempt to persuade him to assume that role. On the other hand, Murphy could add discipline and the benefits of experience to his unruly talents. The choice is his.

Henry Edwards writes on the rock scene for *New York Magazine*, *After Dark* and *High Fidelity*.

# News

# New York Post

FOUNDED 1801. THE OLDEST CONTINUOUSLY PUBLISHED DAILY IN THE UNITED STATES.

NEW YORK, TUESDAY, JANUARY 15, 1974



## Pop Scene

By JAN HODENFIELD

### Elliott Murphy in 1974

For all the recent commotion you might think Bob Dylan is still relevant.

In fact, in terms of his long vaunted social significance, he is forever locked into the middle '60s, a latter-day, radicalized Holden Caulfield with the beauty of his message not so much in his articulation of inchoate social concern as in his seismographing for a generation looking for new signals.

For a lot of his audience, tap-dancing through self-glorified dregs, he was someone out there who *understood*.

Which is why for some pop savants, getting into Elliott Murphy in 1974 is a lot more important (seminal, if you like) than getting into Dylan in 1974.

\* \* \*

For starters, the 23-year-old singer-songwriter's album, "Aquashow," is being compared as insistently as incessantly to middle Dylan, specifically the delapidatedly poetic "Blonde on Blonde."

Primarily, it seems, because Murphy, playing harmonica in concert with electric guitar, nasally, flatly and punkily talk-sings his way through 10 songs of smart-assed irony, coming across as cool, cynical, world-weary and self-centered as Dylan ever did.

And, as Dylan copped off Woody Guthrie when he began, why shouldn't a recent refuge from Garden City, L.I., apprentice on Dylan?

But Murphy, prettily featured under dark blond, Claircut hair, pop-star resplendent in green goat fur chubby coat, yellow trousers, and red shoes as he prepares to go on stage at Max's Kansas City, declines the connection.

"OK, who else is there playing harmonica, true, that's a valid comparison, but I don't think we write about the same things. Ninety percent of Dylan's songs are about girls."

He thinks about that for a while and decides he is more of a journalist. "A fantasia journalist, Dylan always created his own world, like 'Shakespeare's in the alley' and this and that. I like to deal with more real people, real situations."

\* \* \*

On "Aquashow," titled for a World Fair's attraction operated by his late father, his "fantasia journalism" is for the large part concerned with suburbia and what else should a kid from Garden City be writing about?

Except, and here perhaps the crux of Elliott Murphy's importance, in a nation that now is mostly suburb, no one else really has.

"Well, if it turned out I was a sharecropper's son from Mississippi and just had dreams about suburbia," he asks defensively if rhetorically "would that be more valid?"

It wasn't the question asked and in songs like "Hangin' Out," "White Middle Blues" and "How's the Family" he shows a crisp new comprehension of what's involved in being a poet laureate for white suburban kids singing the blues.

Or, perhaps, in being a hip, updated F. Scott Fitzgerald, as indeed he overtly is in his examination of Long Island might-have-beens, in his song, "Like a Great Gatsby."

Certainly his life, as he tells it now, sounds like spuriously updated Fitzgerald.

An erstwhile surfer and leader of a Beach Boyish group that won a 1966 Battle of the Bands, after two years at Nassau Community College it was off to Europe ("It was like another planet") where he sang on the streets and, in Rome, was an extra in a Fellini movie, then on to San Francisco before turning back to New York to work out at the Mercer Arts Center and forward march ever since.

"The only thing I can do is play guitar and write songs and I guess the next step below that is to become a waiter."

Why, having escaped suburbia personally, did he turn to it professionally?

"The writers people seem to like best are those who take a situation and, even if it's sad or happy, make some sense out of it. And that's why I wrote about it. To try to figure it out."

What was life about there?

"Until I was 16 I lived in a mansion with a wall around it and gigantic columns in front, on about five acres of land. But when I was 16 my father died, all the money went and I spent the rest of the time in a little suburban house with two bedrooms.

"I don't usually talk about this."



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# the village VOICE



records

**ELLIOTT MURPHY IS GOING TO BE A MONSTER.** He's a blond Natural Beauty Wonder who can shimmer from feminine to masculine quicker than old Mick can put on his Maybelline. And he's better than a combination of Vogue, Interview, and Women's Wear Daily for finding out just what's happening. In addition, there's some good stuff in between all the chic. Lyrics that are easy to remember, tunes that are fairly catchy, and a back-up with a nice hard-driving beat.

His promo material describes him as the first rock voice of the arrogant and anguished white suburbs, but that's a lot of bullshit. The suburbs are what rock is, and in fact, you could say they're all it's ever been. What's new is that with Murphy we may be getting a signal that the suburbs will finally stop apologizing.

The minute you pick up his new album, "Elliott Murphy Aquashow" (Polydor), you get the message. He's named it after his father's business (it was at the World's Fair, in case you missed it). And on the cover is an Esquire fashion-foto, with Murphy dressed in white à la the '20s and caressing a thousand-dollar brass-and-crystal antique. Not to mention the song titles embracing all the latest, most with-it fantasies. Murphy's not just "The Last of the Rock Stars," he's also "The Great Gatsby Still." Murphy's got enough sensitivity to land this side of callowness and enough intelligence to give his subject perspective. He may sound like the Dylan of "Blonde on Blonde," but there's a difference.

From "Hanging Out":  
*You can be in London in a hotrod  
 cafe*

*But Max's Kansas City got the same  
 things to say.*

*And I say, "Whoah now baby, what  
 de doin' this for?"*

*And she says, "You better shut up,  
 'cause You-know-who just walked  
 in the door."*

*I been taken, and my conscience is  
 aching*

*And I promise myself I won't hang  
 out no more...*

and then a later verse:  
*(I could) be a hooker or a looker,  
 but I guess my business is show.*

You've got to admit—after all

the syrupy self-righteousness and all the treacly indignation that's cursed rock music, a solid mix of self-hatred and self-acceptance is definitely refreshing. I don't know about anybody else, but the last thing I could take right now would be one of Dylan's cloying imitators telling me to be a better human being. Improve? Are you kidding? It's going to take all I can do to stay even.

The best thing about Murphy is that he's able to carry off his role as critic-participant with a certain amount of honesty—no mean feat when you consider the level of narcissism required to be a participant. Being a suburban youth is a full-time job, you better believe. It doesn't leave much energy for reflecting. At the very least, for as long as he's around, Murphy should be a good weathervane for where things are heading. He's got precisely that sensibility. Not deep necessarily, but on top of things. And he's got an uncanny ability to lock in on the most fashionable of right feelings ("Marilyn Monroe died for our sins," now I mean.)

Whether or not he'll develop musically is still an open question (at the moment he's technically limited to Dylan), but there's no doubt that he's smart enough so that his perceptions will grow. And listening to "Aquashow" is a lot better than taking a trip on the Long Island Railroad. So what if after three or four hearings the music starts to lag, the words become obvious, and you can stop listening to the whole thing? If he's true to his own pop suburbanism, that shouldn't bother Murphy any more than it bothered me.

—Lorraine O'Grady

DAILY NEWS, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1973

THE DRUMMER

NOVEMBER 20, 1973

### NIGHT OWL reporter

By ERNEST LEOGRANDE

#### The Monroe Chroniclers

The image of Marilyn Monroe has risen from the tomb and is floating among us like some newly discovered star. You can take your choice of books about her, and you can start penciling in dates for 1974 on a Marilyn Monroe calendar while wearing your Marilyn sweat shirt and listening to your re-issue of Marilyn soundtracks.

Maybe this surge of interest reflects a nostalgic attitude that life was better back in 1962, the year she died. Maybe it has to do with that mystic mileage marker, the 10-year lapse, or maybe with the declaration of women's liberationists that Marilyn Monroe died a martyr to sexism.

As Dory Previn wrote in a song about her last year, "They hang you on a meat hook/Where you age/But female meat/Does not improve with time . . . Hooray for Hollywood."

A couple of young male rock music writers have released tributes to her this year, raising the question, Where are today's romantic female inspirations?

Elliott Murphy, a newcomer from Long Island, son of the operator of the Flushing Meadow Aquashow, has a song called "Marilyn" on his debut album. He said he wrote the song, among other reasons, because "I finally realized I had reached puberty, at age 13, when I saw 'Some Like It Hot.'" British top-rocker Elton John's new LP with lyrics by collaborator Bernie Taupin has a song, "Candle in the Wind," ending with "Goodbye Norma Jean/From the young man in the 22d row/Who sees you as something more than sexual/More than just our Marilyn Monroe."



Marilyn as best remembered.

The true album for Marilyn fans, though, is the reissue of a 1958 LP, "The Unforgettable Marilyn Monroe," now called "Remember Marilyn" and with a batch of photos inserted. It has songs from three of her 20th Century-Fox movies, "There's No Business Like Show Business," "River of No Return" and "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes." Her familiar voice spins out surprisingly tuneful for those who remember her only as a husky-voiced song talker.

Lionel Newman, her music director for the movies, denies the frequent rumor that someone else helped dub her songs and said, "I wouldn't let anyone dub her, and we didn't intercut one note of anybody else. She did a lot of talking but if you listen to a song like 'Heat Wave,' you'll realize she sang too. Maybe I'm prejudiced but to me she was a crystallized performer. When she worked with me, she was on time and worked her butt off."

One man who has had it up to here with the revival is New Yorker Lawrence Quirk, editor of a movie fan mimeo sheet, Quirk's Reviews. "I think the Monroe mania and legend stink to high heaven," he wrote in his October issue. "They signify something wrong with our mores and manners and reflect the shallowness, silliness and essential vulgarity of our 1973 culture even more blatantly than the hijinks of our pols." The other major article in the issue is devoted to the question, "What does the future hold for Raquel Welch?"

#### ELLIOTT MURPHY- AQUASHOW (Polydor-PD-5061)

Coming from the same mold as Lou Reed and Bob Dylan might be hard to take but Elliott Murphy brings some added dimensions with him which put him easily on par with Springsteen and at moments nudging Bowie, the Blessed Lord, himself.

His nasal voice can break the variable barriers and descend to smooth melancholy. His harmonica reminds you of Dylan and how he should have learned to play it. His guitar work swings along the happy blues as Zal Yanovsky's did in the Spoonful .

His melodies are embedded in the rock of early Velvet Underground, swings over to Blonde on Blonde, mingles with Bowie's laments and bops along happy go day. His topics for discussion range from the white middle class experience in Garden City (his hometown) to rock avenues of adventure and expression, the stars of the twentieth century and life for the living and the loving.

George Cisneros

THE WEEKEND November 22, 1973

ELLIOTT MURPHY seems like a throwback to earlier and more exciting times. Bob Dylan's influence is readily apparent not only in the imaginative exuberance of Murphy's lyrics and the incisive thrust of their commentary, but also in his harmonica sound, which is instantly reminiscent of Dylan's famous way with that instrument.

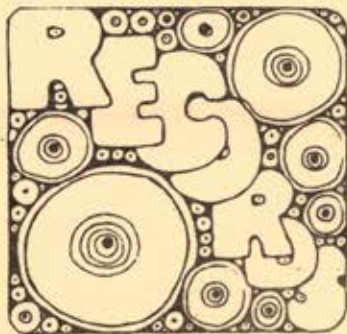
"Aquashow" (Polydor PD 5061) seems at first to partake of the hip-glitter syndrome, and, quite a few singing commentators of years past have indeed been intimately associated with the New York "scene" in all its grimy and deceitful splendor—one thinks again, immediately of Dylan and also of Lou Reed, another performer with whom Murphy shares affinities. Actually, though Murphy is much to caustically detached, in most of his songs, from their subject matter, to be seen as someone merely cashing in. Rather, it looks as though Murphy has something to say, and one hopes that he will last long enough to say it.

By Rich Mangelsdorff

December 7, 1973

LOS ANGELES

# FREE PRESS



**Aquashow** (Elliott Murphy).  
Produced by Peter K. Siegel.  
Polydor PD-5061.

When the opening cut on a debut album neatly summarizes *Ziggy Stardust* and "American Pie" and transcends them both, you know you're listening to someone substantially more than ordinary. The rest of *Aquashow* confirms the suspicion: Elliott Murphy is someone to be reckoned with.

The first couple of times through, you hear mainly the influences — Dylan in the rifts and harmonica style, late Velvet Underground in the general sound and clean, almost polite, lead guitar, Bowie in the voice and show-biz savvy. Then the words start coming through and you realize that Murphy could just as easily be you or me as some big-headed kid from suburban Long Island. The surprising thing is that his being, in his own words, "so low down middle class," works so well for him.

In contrast to Alice Cooper, whose appeal stems largely from his outrageous teenage fantasies and freak-outs, Murphy's persona is direct and based in a reality common to many of us. He's grown up, moved away from home and is into new scenes; but he's still hung up on rock and roll and his roots to his hometown and family are closer than he'd like them to be.

And he knows it, so his perceptions turn out to be acute and true to life. "Last of the Rock Stars," for instance, depicts the life of a high school rock and roller while hinting that the music is existing on little more than momentum these days. "Like a Great Gatsby" and "White Middle Class Blues" are also tied to the suburbs, the latter in such an overplayed manner that it becomes an amusing self-parody.

The album's class, though, takes place in the city: "Hangin' Out," complete with speeded up "Sweet Jane" chord progression, Murphy's most convincing vocal and lyrics that tell it all. When he sings, *You can laugh or you can stab but we're all in the same damn show*, it hits right home to anyone who's been a scenemaker in any form. Or how about, *And I said, "Whoa now baby, what we doing this for?" And she says, "You better shut up 'cause you know who just walked in the door."*

Often times, Murphy tosses in asides about desperation and despair but he can be brutally blunt about it, too. In "How's the Family," his best ballad, he throws in needles, knives and heart attacks before the chorus question is asked while the melody mocks "Somewhere Over the Rainbow."

The same device is used on "Graveyard Scrapbook." The tune is a thinly disguised "Leavin' On a Jet Plane" but the words put across a decidedly different sentiment: *I won't be there as the lights go low/And I won't be there as your habit grows/And I won't be there like some dead fly caught on your lampshade.*

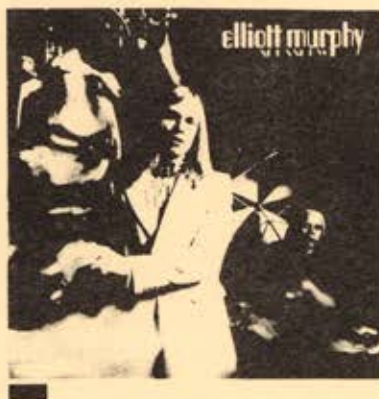
Murphy's vision isn't a pleasant one but it's tempered with enough clever irony to make it potentially palatable to a wide audience. Not that he couldn't stand improvement — the endings to many of his songs are simply too easy and his softer things tend to be a bit sappy: *Marilyn Monroe died for our sins, my ass.* But taken as a whole, *Aquashow* is everything a first album should be; it delivers a lot of good music right now and leaves room for growth in the future.

—Michael Davis

# CONCERT

THE MUSIC AND ENTERTAINMENT MAGAZINE

DECEMBER 1973



## Elliott Murphy Aquashow

Polydor (PD 5061)

If you can imagine an extremely pleasing cross between Bob Dylan, Lou Reed and Mott the Hoople, then you have a pretty good idea of where Elliott Murphy's head is at. Here's a suburban kid from Garden City, Long Island who has managed to assimilate some mighty fine rock styles, added to them his own very personal, very good lyrics, and come up with a debut album that is chock full of potential, both realized and un. It is the unrealized potential, in fact, the realization that **Aquashow** suffers from some "debut album" jitters that will undoubtedly be overcome on Murphy's next disc, that makes me rate Mr. Elliott Murphy as the most promising new performer of the year. He's just that damn good.

Murphy can do just about everything right, but nothing better than write absolutely marvelous lyrics, full of great rhyme schemes and an incredibly mature awareness of the mythic aspects of all sorts of people and institutions. It is, in fact, obvious from looking at the song titles on this record that Murphy is not your ordinary, long blond-haired "I wanna be a rock star just like Mick Jagger" type: "Last of the Rock Stars," "Marilyn," "Like A Great Gatsby," "White Middle Class Blues," all have to do, in one way or another, with how we perceive ourselves and others, the part myth plays on ordinary lives, and just why we do the things we do, are the way we are.

Take, for instance, "Hangin' Out," a boppin, up-tempo rocker, in which Murphy, as a tired-out cultural groupie looking for something else, notes that:

**I see the same old faces, same old dirty places.**

**I said, "Baby, I feel just like a whore,"  
I said, "Baby, is this what livin's for,  
"Is there nothin' more,  
"Or is it just to score?"**

Get the point here? There's a sensibility behind these songs, one which wonders about the apparent aimlessness of life, the commonplace ("Hometown") and the bizarre.

Lest I make you think that the album is perfect, though, let me stop here and assure you that it most assuredly is not. The production is a bit muddled, the instrumentals not always of the best, and Murphy's songs don't always hit the nail on the head, but the point here is that when Elliott scores, he does it with a vengeance.

Murphy may, in fact, be a little unsure of himself at this point in time, but good reviews and airplay, which **Aquashow** should most definitely receive, can do nothing but help Elliott's move towards creative stardom. I haven't heard this much raw talent on a record in quite some time; pick up on **Aquashow** and I'm sure you'll see what I mean. (L.B.)



## facts on wax

by bob morello

SYRACUSE NEW TIMES, DECEMBER 23, 1973

POST-GAZETTE — NOVEMBER 30, 1973

### Dylan-like Songs of Suburbia

Elliott Murphy, Aquashow  
(Polydor PD-5061).

by Jeff Burger

When singer-songwriter Elliott Murphy grew up there, Long Island was already a weird junkyard of harried commuters, McDonald's

hamburger stands and two-car garages. Like Lou Reed before him, Murphy high-tailed it out of there as fast as he could, and has since spent most of his time in Europe and New York City.

But, while Reed concentrates on inviting his listeners to "walk on the wild side," Murphy writes often of the suburban life he left. In songs like "Hometown," "How's the Family" and "White Middle Class Blues," he offers caustic and often sarcastic impressions of the middle class. "There's so much food on the table, you can throw away your vegetables," he sings at one point. "The day you're born, you know you'll never kiss ass/Ain't life a blast/So low down, middle class."

Commenting on the world he's just beginning to encounter, Murphy is no less cynical. "Last of the Rock Stars" (the Dylanesque single culled from this debut album), for example, is a skeptical look at the "star" label. Its phrases ("purple haze," "hide-hi, hey-de-hey," etc.) recall a succession of "stars" to drive home Murphy's contention that they now rise and fall almost too quickly to keep track of them.

After each so-called "last of the rock stars" fades away, the song seems to say, another will rise from the ranks of "you and me" to take his or her place. Thousands of people are captivated by "making it," Murphy suggests, and there are a sufficient number of image-makers to keep them coming at us just as fast as the vinyl can be pressed.

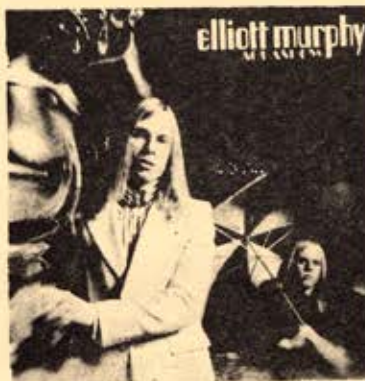
Be that as it may, Murphy himself deserves success. A few of the tunes on *Aquashow* demonstrate the problems of any first album, but much of the material leaves little doubt as to this artist's talent. Lyrically, the songs are quite imaginative and are strongly autobiographical. And musically, although there's a similarity to middle-period Dylan and recent Lou Reed, this is not a mere repackaging of old ideas. Tight-packed stanzas are confidently delivered, melodies are catchy and the production makes good use of Murphy's sidemen, who themselves are an asset.

Maeretha Stewart, who has sung with the Stones and Dylan, is prominent in Murphy's back-up chorus. Ex-Byrd Gene Parsons handles the drumming, and keyboard man Frank Owens delivers the same level of musicianship he gave us on Dylan's *Highway 61*.

While record-buyers get their first taste of *Aquashow*, Murphy is already busy with new projects. Tours of the U.S. and England are in the works, he says, and most of the tunes for a second album have been written. There will be some more material on suburbia and stardom, he explains, but tunes exploring fresh subjects can be expected as well.

"There's one song in particular that I'm really excited about," says Murphy. "Just finished it. It's called 'The Love Song of Eva Braun.' Should go over really big in Germany."

If it sounds as good as the *Aquashow* material, it just might "go over" in a lot of places.



Elliott Murphy — *Aquashow*,  
Polydor PD-5061

POLYDOR/Elliott Murphy  
*Aquashow*

Elliott Murphy is a young man who has the ability to relate via his music, the experiences and thoughts he has encountered in life. Coming across nicely with a somewhat nasally voiced delivery, are some sharp saying-something lyrics in his songs. Take a taste from Elliott's *'Aquashow'*, by indulging in cuts as "Last of the Rock Stars", "How's the Family", "Hometown" and finishes up side one with "Graveyard Scrapbook". Murphy music on two has, "Poise 'n Pen", a musical tribute to the late Monroe labeled "Marilyn", trailed by "Like a Great Gatsby" finishing off his LP with "Don't Go Away". Elliott Murphy, a talent to be reckoned with.

THE RECORD, MONDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1973

By ALLEN MACAULAY

Staff Writer

WITH SO MANY debut records by relative unknowns flooding the market, singling one out for purchase or even appraisal can be a chancy business. Mercifully, however, Elliott Murphy's "*Aquashow*" involves relatively little risk, because his Polydor album could make him one of the best new finds of the year.

Murphy's influences are fairly obvious; there's a lot of Dylan in his approach, and a fair amount of Lou Reed. But he's very much his own man, and it just happens that he sings a lot like Dylan — though with more sophistication and less raw power — and plays harmonica a heap better.

His lyrics, though, are his strong point. He is the archetypical middle-class dropout from Queens — in real life as well as show biz — and his words have a sardonic bite. "White Middle Class Blues" is a definitive statement about where a lot of young suburban heads are, and "How's the Family" speaks of the superficiality that characterizes so many of our relationships. "Marilyn," of course, is a tribute to Miss Monroe, and "Like a Great Gatsby" is a bow in the direction of one of his favorite fictional characters.

He's accompanied by a tight little group which includes drummer Gene Parsons, but Murphy really does it all to make this one of the top debut offerings of 1973.

## WHAT ARE THEY LISTENING TO?

by Norman Schreiber

**Elliot Murphy** "Lately I've been listening to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Also, I've just picked up an old 78 Victrola from my grandmother. One of the 78's I listen to is *I've Been to Hollywood* by Dorothy Shay, the Park Avenue Hillbilly. The last couple of years there's been very little pop music I listen to. I listen to old Velvet Underground a bit and Beach Boys and Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*. It's been such an ironic summer for me that these things calm me down.

"I guess I'm waiting for the seventies to begin."



# Strait

December 13, 1973

**AQUASOW**  
Elliott Murphy  
(Polydor)

This album picks up where *Blonde on Blonde* left off; it's the type of stuff Dylan might have done if he hadn't screwed himself on that motorcycle. I believe this album has created a minor sensation in some circles and it's no surprise. With his literate lyrics and non-voice coupled with a Columbia type band circa 1966, Murphy succeeds admirably in his first effort. The best cuts are "Last of the rock Stars" about Hendrix, "Marilyn" about Monroe sung like Lou Reed singing like Dylan and "White Middle Class Blues," the typical Johnny-won't-eat-his-favorite-dinner-cuz-he's-so-JUNKED-up-he's-seeing-snakes. Murphy has a great future in music and as long as he plays like Dylan and Lou, people are going to like him, no matter what.

**Newsday**

Wednesday, Nov. 21, 1973

## RECORDS

**ZOO WORLD** Dec. 20, 1973

## 45 REMINDERS PER MINUTE

The happiest moments of the singles revival is when a brand-new artist puts out a record that's such a grabber I can think of little else. Don't happen often, make no mistake, but Elliott Murphy's debut disc, "Last of the Rock Stars" (Polydor) is the genuine article. If he sounds familiar, think of Dylan circa-1966, injected with the energy of Bruce Springsteen, and you've got the picture. But Murphy's got enough of himself to mark his song as a unique product, no mere derivation. Puffing harmonica introduction bursts into a rapid-fire delivery of lyrics, dealing with himself and various relationships...in fact, very much along the confusion-chaos lines of middle period Dylanese. Yet the more I think about it, what's wrong with that; Dylan sure ain't givin' us none of the rock 'n roll no more, and this guy's got the knack. It's a true single, too, with chorus that goes *ooh-ooh-ooh*, and bears the mark of guaranteed endurance cause one or two listenings and it's in your brain for keeps. That's a fact—I heard the song for a split second on the radio and was hooked... didn't know who it was, where it came from, anything. It was worth sweating out to have in my hands. Try this out as authentic Americana, and you won't be disappointed.

—TOBY GOLDSTEIN

**Elliott Murphy: "Aquashow" (Polydor).** The music here sounds so middle-Dylan that it inspired me to play "Blonde on Blonde," after which unfair comparison I began to suspect Murphy of glibness. But although his themes aren't new and he does come at them like a know-it-all, that's not his fault—he does know quite a bit, maybe more than is good for him—and the quick phrases merely shield a plausible sincerity. Special concern: interrelations between women's self-knowledge (and lack of it) and the emotional disappointments of sexual love. None of which you're obliged to notice until you enjoy the music a dozen times. A.

By Robert Christgau



*Elliott Murphy: Last of the Rock Stars, confusion and chaos.*

# ZOO WORLD

NO. 41



16 3268

Jan. 3, 1974

**AQUASHOW**  
Elliott Murphy  
Polydor PD-5061

Don't you just hate to pick up a music magazine (or megapaper, as the case may be) and see a review in which some snot-nosed critic is calling some album you've never heard of the best album of the year? It's tough to take something like that seriously. And that's the main reason I'm not going to come out and call Elliott Murphy's debut album, *Aquashow*, the best LP of the year. I wouldn't want to blow my credibility before I even got a chance to talk about the music on this record. But, if anybody outside of a small circle of friends in New York knew who Elliott Murphy was, I wouldn't hesitate to go out on a limb. As it is, I'll limit my personal classification to saying that, with the possible exceptions of *Mott*, *10cc*, *The Wailers' Burnin'*, and *The New York Dolls*, no one has put out a better rock 'n roll set this year than this here upstart newcomer Elliott Murphy.

What woodwork did Murphy pop out of? Well, he was brought up on Long Island, N.Y. (same as yours truly) where his Dad ran the original World's Fair Aqua Show (hence the album title) in addition to running one of the swankiest restaurants on the Island. So when Elliott sings his "White Middle Class Blues," you'd



Photo by Bob Gruen

better believe he knows what he's talking about: "I'm in the middle of Brooklyn/Can't see no escape/They say the South is a bummer/But this ain't that great/Ain't life a gas/So low down middle class/The day you were born/You know you'll never kiss ass/White middle class blues."

The backup is bluesy but clean, as befits an upper-middle class band, led by Elliott's harmonica (which sounds like it was lifted right off *Blonde On Blonde*) and a band which is so sympathetic it sounds like a family affair. The bassist is, in fact, Elliott's brother, Matthew. The Murphy's were obviously two of those Long Island kids who went into the bit city a lot, with eyes wide open. Another archetypal ode to the urban/suburban social system is entitled, naturally, "Hangin' Out." The song obviously

emanates from considerable time spent learning first hand the existential despair of being perpetually 'on thymake': "I see the same old faces/And the same old dirty places/I say Baby I feel just like a whore/I say Baby is this what livin's for?/Is there nothing more?/Or is it just to score?"

The temptation is just to go on quoting lyrics left and right until I've repeated the entire album. Actually, that might not be such a bad idea, especially since there is no lyric sheet included with this album, and this happens to be one of the very few records released recently with lyrics worth repeating. Granted, Murphy runs on a bit and is guilty of some of the same over-rhyming that makes Bruce Springsteen, among others, so hard to take, but the thing that bails

him out is that he never strays far from singing about real people and everyday occurrences that any normal American post-teenage rock 'n roller can identify with. And, with a backdrop of characters including the Great Gatsby, Marilyn Monroe (I'm kind of tired of all the Marilyn sob songs being sung these days, but this one's OK), and "The Last of the Rock Stars," Murphy sings song after song about the lost innocence of American youth weaned on rock music, fast cars, and an insatiable desire to get off.

Not that it's all that bleak. Lyrics notwithstanding, the music on this album stands by itself as substantial, rousing rock 'n roll. Plus, Murphy has a timely sense of humor which keeps him from seeing everything with a jaundiced eye. That sense of the comic should stand Murphy in good stead as he seeks an audience for his music. My fear is that, although he directs his songs at an obviously large section of our society, he might have some troubles getting people to take that first listen. After all, he's not a glitter star, he doesn't perform with snakes, and he doesn't even have a decent symphony orchestra to back him up. Plus, he has said that he "will never perform on TV, unless it's The Ed Sullivan Show and it's Black and White." Geez, with an attitude like that...he must be a star, right?—GARY KENTON

# ZOO WORLD

## ELLIOTT MURPHY



# Elliott Murphy

Until his lease on parental security ran out, Elliott Murphy dabbled with guitar and played in a teenage rock band, but he gave little thought to serious musicianship. Today, after several years on the road, and with his interest more sharply focused, he's almost back to where he started geographically, but he's come a long way musically: all the way, in fact, to the release of his fine debut album, *Aquashow*.

The hardest part of Murphy's trek out of obscurity was making the break with his easy suburban life. "Most middle-class parents," he says, "have enough money to provide their kids with pretty much anything they want while they're young. The thing is...they can't really support them for their whole lives. So suddenly, they have to do something. And the kids say, 'Why should I have to do anything? What should I do?'"

When he himself was faced with these questions, his answer was to flee the suburbs and back-pack it through Europe with his bass-playing brother. There, they played cafes, passed the hat and barely survived. But Murphy became increasingly intense about his music and composed many of the tunes that would later find their way onto his album.

While some of these songs put down the "styleless" suburban culture that he'd left, others express admiration for a flamboyance made possible only by great wealth. On the one hand, there's "Like A Great Gatsby," which eulogizes the decadence of Fitzgerald's era, and "Marilyn," a bow to film star Monroe. But when Middle America is the subject, Murphy turns to the kind of sarcasm found in his "White Middle Class Blues": "There's so much food on the table/You can throw away your vegetables," he sings. "Ain't life a blast..."

As unenthusiastic about the instant superstars of today as he is about the overabundance that produces them, Murphy treats the big names of the 70's with none of the reverence he accords Fitzgerald and Monroe. His "Last of the Rock Stars," for example, makes the point that cult figures now grow up overnight and disappear just as quickly. "Andy Warhol believes that in the future, everyone will get a chance to be a star for 15 minutes each," he says. "That's what I had in mind."

On this tune and others, Murphy's use of a female chorus and his rough-edged New York voice recall Lou Reed. He says, however, that until recently he hadn't heard any of Reed's music, except the first Velvet Underground album. "When I was over in Europe, I wasn't listening to anything," Murphy explains. "Cause when you're traveling, you can't carry a phonograph. Then I got back to the States and I was playing in San Francisco. And people told me that I sounded something like Lou Reed."

From Frisco, Murphy's trail led to Los Angeles, where he attempted a first recording. Unhappy with the initial results, however,



Photo by Bob Gruen

he decided "to go back New York and do the album right." After only a few gigs in Manhattan, at Mercer Arts Center and Max's Kansas City, the record companies were bidding. Auditioned by Polydor producer Peter Siegel, Murphy was immediately signed to the label and *Aquashow* began to take shape.

Though he may well sustain audience interest on his own merits, record-buyers might first be attracted to Murphy's album by its impressive list of sidemen. Dick Wagner, one of Lou Reed's guitarists, and Maeretha Stewart, who's sung with Dylan and the Stones, are among the backing vocalists. Another luminary, ex-Byrd Gene Parsons, handles the drumming.

How were the musicians chosen? "Peter (Siegel) and I started talking about people that we really liked," says Murphy. "And it was funny: we agreed on all the same people. I didn't know Frank Owens' name, but I said, 'Whoever played keyboards on (Dylan's) "Ballad of a Thin Man" has got to be great.' And Peter got him."

Striving for a "live" sound, Murphy had at first been apprehensive about being backed up by people he'd never worked with previously. "I was afraid we'd have a studio musician sort of album," he says. "Too much over-dubbing and any music will become lifeless. But we played together a lot before we actually turned on the recorders and the songs got very tight. Then we did most of them in just a few takes."

With the album completed, Murphy is getting ready for an upcoming U.S. tour "with my brother and some musician friends from my hometown." And, he says, he'll play Europe (this time without having to pass the hat) early next year.

Murphy's base of operations, however, will remain New York because it's his home turf and he now feels that "the scene" is basically the same everywhere. "You could be in London at the Hard Rock Cafe," he sings on the album, "but Max's Kansas City got the same things to say."—JEFF BURGER

# News

Feb. 25, 1974

# THE NEW YORKER

## ROCK, ETC.

### *Elliott Murphy's White Middle Class Blues*

AS the polarity of Los Angeles and San Francisco in a sense defined the sixties, so the spirit of this sobered-up (or at least hung-over) decade can be found, like that young dude in the Dolls' song, somewhere between the Babylon of Manhattan and Babylon, Long Island. Not coincidentally, for the first time since the rock-and-roll era began, a distinctive New York brand of rock is coming into its own, aesthetically and mythically, if not (yet) commercially. New Yorkers embody the contemporary mood because of their dogged belief in original sin, their emphasis on ambition when possible but survival above all, and—perhaps most important—their rootedness. Out-of-towners may come here seeking anonymity, but native New Yorkers are always reminding everybody where they came from—what neighborhood, what class, what family; if their chauvinism is often inverted (my section of Queens is uglier than yours), it is because they are really bragging about their stamina. In palmier days, such parochial attachments had begun to seem a bit cranky; a basic assumption of the "cultural revolution" was that young (white) people were transcending (read obliterating) their origins, materially through affluence and the endless possibilities of selective consumption, morally and spiritually through one or another variety of expanded consciousness. Although,

ironically, this very attempt at transcendence led many people—especially those involved in politics—to an almost anthropological preoccupation with their backgrounds, as a generation we resisted the idea that we might have more in common with our parents than with a great many of our peers. The countercultural ideal rather neatly paralleled the melting-pot myth, even in the racism that gave it the lie. Bohemia was, after all, an alternative to—or a special kind of—upward mobility. It offered all of the cultural and—under the veneer of voluntary poverty—many of the material advantages of upper-middle-class life without the traditional work and family obligations, and it was one possible resolution of the conflict of loyalties often experienced by college graduates from poor and lower-middle-class families. This was all very well in a superheated economy that allowed unprecedented numbers of people to have their freedom and their stereo set, too. Now that we can't always get what we want—and may not even get what we need, a shockingly un-American possibility—it is embarrassingly obvious that the head next door is (and always was) first of all a minister's daughter or a car salesman's son, a Jew or a WASP, a product of Scarsdale or Gary or Flatbush; and that the tensions, prejudices, and limitations of vision these differences imply are ultimately more potent than Orange Sunshine.

All this is natural subject matter for pop music. Much of the power of sixties rock lay in its ability to mediate between white middle-class bohemians and their urban and suburban past. Bob Dylan, the archetypal cultural revolutionary figure—fleeing his home, changing his name, re-creating himself again and again—called his first rock album "Bringing It All Back Home." Now a kid named Elliott Murphy, an F. Scott Fitzgerald freak who plays a familiar-sounding harmonica; writes lyrics that make "Blonde on Blonde" fans shiver under their leopard-skin pillbox hats; looks—with his long, lank platinum hair, his white Gatsby suits, and his inward stare—as if he just stepped off the "Bringing It All Back Home" album jacket; and has gone the route from Garden City to Max's Kansas City (with a European detour), offers us a contemporary report on the trip.

Murphy's first album, "Aquashow" (Polydor PD-5061)—consumers of such arcana may recall that his late father ran the Aqua Show in Flushing Meadow—is on one level another end-of-the-dream lament, but his stance is more complicated than that. It is clear to him that we can't really go home again, even though we never really left, because home itself has changed irrevocably: the sixties fantasy and its



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failures have become part of everyone's everyday reality. In "Hometown," Murphy insists, "Don't tell me you don't hear that small town callin' you, 'Cause y'know what, baby, you're still doin' all the same things you used to do." But this hometown is a place where "even churchmen are wearin' stripes, And all the hometown girls are gettin' in much too late tonight;" where "you know they used to say that kid was born with a silver spoon. He told me that he left his home way too soon, 'Cause no one ever told him about the power of a real full moon." "How's the Family?" is a dirgelike catalogue of sixties casualties: the wife who realizes her self has been denied, the fifteen-year-old junkie, the estranged old people, the men who "know who they're working for and what's more they know why." "Aquashow" is not kind to the suburbs, but neither is it the usual hip whine. Murphy obviously identifies with the milieu he is describing; instead of the air of moral superiority that was the counterculture's most irritating trait, his suburban songs reveal an edge of self-doubt, even of guilt ("I saw your mother downtown yesterday. . . . She told me all her kids had run away. They call at Christmas-time"), as well as a healthy, sardonic

awareness of privilege. His tone is less that of the cultural pundit deploring alienation than of the teen-ager griping about his high school; as he puts it in "White Middle Class Blues," "I'm in the middle of Brooklyn, can't see no escape. They say the South is a bumper, but this ain't that great."

Murphy also avoids the overreaction of some of his contemporaries, who would like to pretend that the sixties were simply a hallucination. He is still obsessed with pop myths, as any aspiring rock star has to be. "Last of the Rock Stars"—his theme, and the best where-are-we-now anthem since "All the Young Dudes"—is about the power of that obsession. Invoking the death of Jimi Hendrix and (implicitly) his own ambition, he cries out, in an agony of faith and cynicism, that rock is still the best we have, yet isn't enough: "Rock and roll is here to stay, but who will be left to play?" Which is exactly the way many of us feel about the state of our music, not to mention the state of our souls. Murphy is less successful with

songs like "Hangin' Out" and "Poise 'n' Pen," whose evocations of hip low life can't compete with Lou Reed's or, for that matter, David Johansen's. Somewhere in between is "Marilyn," an interesting try that misses. In it, an ingenuous adolescent persona informs us that "Marilyn Monroe died for our sins," and in the process re-creates the sin that killed her, making her into a symbol instead of a person. I like the idea, and some of the words are great—my favorite line is "Our thoughts were dirty, though she was clean"—but, finally, the song doesn't come off. What's wrong, I think, is that Monroe really did die for male sins, and so Murphy as well as his narrator ends up sounding innocently exploitative.

So far, I'm more impressed with Murphy's album than with his live performance. In spite of his considerable talent, his striking looks, and an excellent backup band, his onstage presence is not as electric as it should be. Though he is cocky enough, I sense a certain lack of divine confidence, which may come of being too cerebral. But whether or not Elliott Murphy makes it as the last, or the next, of the rock stars, he is certainly the best thing to happen to the New York scene since the Dolls. And that, for me, is saying a lot.

—ELLEN WILLIS

## Good Times

### ELLIOTT MURPHY: "This age of anti-heroes is dull and depressing."

By STANLEY MIESES

Cross-legged, self-assured, cool, he sits opposite you. Blond straight hair tight against his head, shirt buttoned to the top. Stickpin cutting across the collar, hard and flat on his neck. Completely buttoned black vest. Zippered grey-yellow snake skin boots. Mirrored silver sunglasses, which he takes off.

"You can blow your mysterioso in five minutes," says Elliott Murphy.

Elliott Murphy?

Product of Garden City, Long Island, winner of the 1966 New York State Battle of the Bands, European cafe troubador, Fellini movie bit player, Hollywood dreamer: a rock and roll star is born.

Elliott Murphy plays guitar and harmonica and sings on his first album, *Aquashow*, a collection of ten original songs which has caused more than a tremor of excitement with its release. Some of the musicians backing Elliott have played with Dylan and Lou Reed, and Gene Parsons of the Byrds is on drums. Elliott plays chords like Lou Reed and blows shrilly runs like Dylan, and his singing can be as frantic or direct as either. He hates that sort of comparison, but relents. "I suppose you have to compare with the big names. That's the way the media works. Bob Dylan was called the new Woody Guthrie when he first came up."

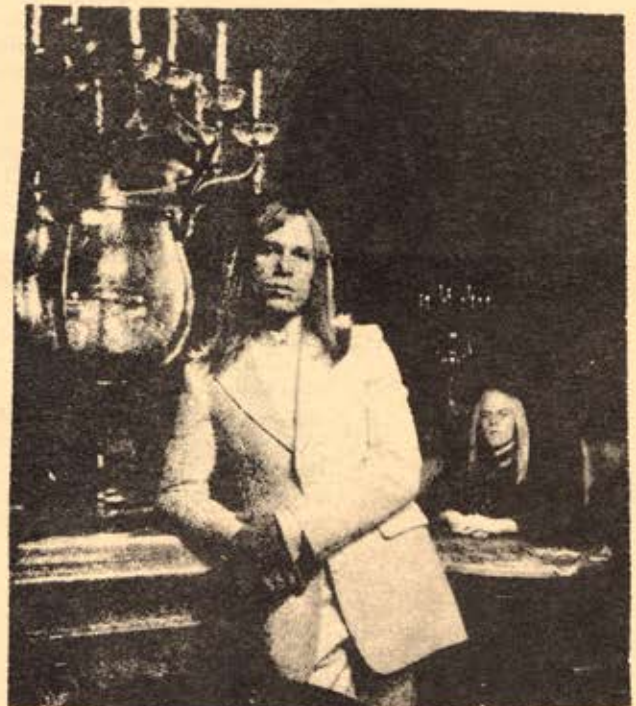
Elliott Murphy knows enough about the media to understand that people like Jimi Hendrix and Marilyn Monroe died of over-exposure, not overdose, and he's written two songs, one hard rocking, "Last of the Rock Stars," ("Rock and roll is here to stay/But who will be left to play?") for Jimi, and a soft, caressing eulogy to "the last of the Hollywood stars"--"Marilyn Monroe died for us," he sings plaintively. "Marilyn died," Elliott explains, "because she was caught in a time warp. She should have been a star in the 1930s. The studios took care of their stars then, and she couldn't do it by herself."

There are many parallels to be drawn between the '30s and 1973, and Elliott Murphy's new album is the strongest link the world of rock and roll has offered to date. It's the first album to reflect a new suburban consciousness. Dylan's "Talking World War III Blues" reflected (through holocaustic humor) a real fear of destruction in the early sixties, and the Velvet Underground grew out of the negative street energy ("Run, Run, Run") and paranoia ("Sunday Morning") of the mid and late sixties. Now Elliott Murphy's "White Middle Class Blues" dwells on excess and distortion (just like the '30s when people dreamed of money and the movies, and their heroes were aristocrats and dashing romantic figures) and how these inflated times have changed the terms of suburban desires.

His lyrics--

Now I'm sitting down to dinner  
There's so much food on the table  
You can throw away your vegetable  
You can eat 'til you're unable  
And your veins are filled with butter  
Blood won't run through them  
And your kid OD's on goof-balls  
And gives the finger to you...

--reflect a suburban dilemma as knotty as the pine paneling of the finished basements where this new wave of rock music was spawned.



Elliott believes that behind the veneer of suburban comfort and security is a backbone of an intolerable stainless-steel sterility. A sort of death on the installment plan that the sons and daughters of the great American dreamers didn't buy into.

"Everyone finds their own situation fairly boring out there. Now they want to come back and get wild--they know what goes on back in the city because of the media coverage." Anyone who's visited Max's Kansas City lately will agree that it's been invaded by Queens (the borough). "The faces are all the same," he sings.

"You can travel out to the suburbs--everyone there wants to be a rock and roll star. The media caused that." To Elliott, TV or not TV is the question of suburban existence.

"TV has replaced religion. Some people worship TV. I know I've spent more time watching TV than anything except sleep," he said very matter-of-factly. "It proves that it's not the human part of these people [the stars] they're worshipping. It just doesn't matter that some of them have died."

TV has also tamed the outrageous and rendered it quite predictable. "It made Alice Cooper an accepted Establishment figure. I could see Alice Cooper having breakfast with President Nixon." Elliott quipped. "He's very safe. You could invite Alice home and he'd behave himself. After all, he came out of that Frank Zappa group, and Zappa used to work for an ad agency. It proves you can sell anything.

"I never want to go on TV," says Elliott. He'd opt for an elaborate stage show, though. "I'd like to appear at the Palace Theater like Bette Midler with palm trees on stage and a skit going on behind each song--why not?"

Elliott believes there should be a pronounced difference between the star and the audience. "Things are going to be more elegant, more elite," he announces. "I'm going to wear an Elliott Murphy uniform, with high black boots, white riding pants, a white jacket and an armband with my initials on it. If my audience wants to look like me, they'll all have to wear armbands."

If that sounds a little strange and reminiscent of a '30s movement that has nothing to do with music, you may be right. Murphy's next single, after "Last of the Rock Stars," will be called "The Love Song of Eva Braun" and will be sung in German.

"I can either be a journalist and record the times or I can take the power, take the reins. It's strange that no one's chosen to do it yet...This age of anti-heroes is dull and depressing."

# Phonograph Record

THE GREATEST  
HITS OF 1974

## ELLIOTT MURPHY

by Bud Scoppa



Bob Gruen

*The New York glam scene has already been publicized far out of proportion to its worth, but of all the bands who have followed in the footsteps of the Dolls, few are likely to make any impact. Thus far, the scene has proven itself simply too limited for much further expansion. Elliott Murphy runs the risk of being caught in the wave of general disappointment, so it should be established right now that he is the product of a separate and far deeper tradition, with a talent and an approach to rock & roll that is uniquely universal. He has all the makings of a star, and he's just the kind of star we could use right now.*

My first glimpse of Elliott Murphy was riveting. A year ago, Mercury A&R man Paul Nelson and I were seeing a lot of the inside of the Mercer Arts Center in pursuit of the New York Dolls. One night Paul spotted a poster advertising a new band that called itself Elliott Murphy's Aquashow. The poster, showing a dressed-up, very nonchalant-looking blonde kid, seemed a bit uptown for the

Mercer and all the more interesting for that reason. On a whim, we went to see the group. As soon as we arrived, we could see that something odd was afoot: instead of the usual Mercer audience, the crowd in the Oscar Wilde Room was made up entirely of the fresh-faced and well scrubbed, with — and this was the clincher — what looked like several parents among them.

And then the band came on stage. There were five, and four were dressed entirely — but not theatrically — in black. These four ringed the stage around the figure in the foreground, who was completely in white, from his Gatsby suit to his blonde-finish Fender guitar and his white-blonde hair. Aside from the striking visual effect, Paul and I were both struck by the air of relaxed confidence coming off the stage. This was hardly diminished when the band swung without fanfare into the first number; now and then I've been completely swept up by the first chords of the first song of a new artist, getting the sense that within those chords lies a



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compelling, fully developed new realm — and this was one of those times. The band played like the phantoms of the sessions that produced "Like a Rollin' Stone" — that sense was unmistakable. At the same time, they had the casual intensity the Velvet Underground had displayed at Max's several years earlier. Murphy's *Aquashow* seemed just as cockily disdainful, just as matter-of-fact about its passions.

The set was a seamless display of classic rock & roll, in its music and in its over-all aura. And many of the fresh-faced were dancing merrily along with it. This band wasn't uptown, it was out-of-town — Long Island — and so was the audience.

It wasn't until after this incredibly good show that we found out the set we'd just witnessed had been the band's first professional performance. Needless to say, we were back the next night with our Sony 124s, putting the set on tape for posterity and for the boys in Chicago. They went for it, but not quickly enough — Polydor's Peter Siegel saw them not long after Paul and I had, and he got his company to sign the group.

After the Polydor signing, there were a few problems. Someone decided this superb band should be rearranged, that Elliott and his brother Matt, who played bass in the group and who was just as blonde as Elliott, should become a brother duo, with the others in support. That idea lost them a drummer and a keyboard player, and the three remaining players were forced to find appropriate outside musicians to play on the recording sessions. They were lucky to get former Byrds drummer Gene Parsons and keyboard man Frank Owens, who — not at all coincidentally — had played on "Like a Rollin' Stone" (Elliott asked Owens whether he'd played piano or organ on those sessions and was taken aback by Owens' answer: "I don't remember.").

The album came out fine, although not as fiery as the best of the Mercer sets; it might have benefitted by the inclusion of their one non-original, Martha and the Vandellas' "Heat Wave." But *Aquashow* does contain enough of the magic we'd been witness to at the Mercer to make it one of the best albums of the year, and one of the most impressive debut albums in ages. Now the band, with replacements, is back up to full strength, and they've just played a week at the Bitter End, winning over practically the entire critical community in the process.

Currently they're as cold sales-wise as they're hot critically — it's the most unbalanced critical-to-commercial situation since Blue Ash. But the music is there, the group just needs a chance to have its work heard. It's certainly not hard to imagine this music on AM radio. Murphy is a distinctive singer, he plays it cool, business like guitar and a touching, melancholy harp, as the bandleader in the group's live performance — he's magnetic — and then there are his songs, about which so much has already been written.

They reflect his preoccupations with the old Dylan, the old Lou Reed, Gatsby and Fitzgerald, wealth, the family, the pursuit of myth and the perpetrators of myth, the books and the records

and the movies. All these fuel a still-budding but already noticeable genius, and all can be traced to the growing up years of a kid from Long Island whose origins lay in both show business and in quiet wealth, and who developed an active imagination and the ability to find the mystery beneath the commonplace. There's a continuous autobiographical sense about Murphy's songs: he suggests both the literal realities of the suburban world and the fantasies that come to someone who inhabits it.

Murphy — whom Paul Nelson describes as "a Long Island superpunk with too much brains and too many heroes" — has followed the steps taken by the most inspired talents of the era: he's dived boldly into the heart of his sources and he's emerged on the other side out only with the marks of his inspirations but also something quite apart from them — and thoroughly personal. The

Dylan of *Blonde on Blonde* and the Lou Reed of "Sweet Jane" are transmogrified in this suburban kid, who — unlike the Hollywood hillbillies and the would-be spacemen — revels in the very commonness of his origins, and who finds more than ample mythic content there. He may do for the Long Island - Manhattan axis what Jackson Browne has done for Southern California: exalt and romanticize the everyday without distorting its ordinariness. These two are handing white middle-class kids their lives back to them by illuminating and pointing out the stuff of myth in their own realms of experience. That's what rock & roll did in the first place, and — thanks to Elliott Murphy and a few others — that's what it's beginning to do again. If Fitzgerald had been born 40 or 50 years later, he might have been the leader of a rock & roll band.



Bob Gruen

# ROLLING STONES

## RECORDS

### *He's the Best Dylan Since 1968*

Aquashow  
Elliott Murphy  
Polydor PD-5061

By PAUL NELSON

These days, some of us are beginning to realize we have spent far too much time stuck in the middle of some glorious and familiar Sixties boomtown, and that, while the area still has its attractions, a lot of the real action now takes place up the street. Re contemporary music, perhaps a majority of our overcivilized band of Dylan-Beatles-Stones despairados have long championed the belief that, while there are some interesting newcomers, there are no new heroes (nothing, really nothing, to turn off); with the possible exceptions of Rod Stewart and the Who, no one has entered the white rock & roll pantheon since the aforementioned golden triumvirate—and, so the argument goes, no one ever will again.

Unfortunately, in a generalized Nixonian state of the union, this safe, dead-end frame of mind, whether right or wrong, has managed somehow to pass for realism; under such circumstances, perhaps only reunion, nostalgia, and endless intermarriages are possible: Once-young Billy the Kid has evolved himself into Pat Garrett who, threatened by a darkening vision, too quickly shoots down the new Billys because they are not the old Billys.

Well, it's 1974, and a brace of fully qualified William Bonneys has arrived. If rock & roll is to grow, prevalent myths may be overthrown (or at least damaged a little), and the new set of upstarts must be allowed the respectful and necessary dual ritual function of slaying the founding fathers while simultaneously carrying on the old traditions. An *auteur* theory of popular music should not and does not preclude new heroes, and the best of these—Elliott Murphy, Jackson Browne, the New York Dolls, Bruce Springsteen, Jonathan Richmond from the Modern Lovers—have learned, rejected, relearned, and now pay homage to their respective influencers by working peripherally in their genres in mathematics-without-damage fashion.

Murphy, Springsteen, Lou Reed and Mott the Hoople mine the Dylan genre much as Dylan himself once mined Woody Guthrie's and Jack Elliott's; all of these people are murderers and creators, but they are not imitators. If you persist in that folly, then Richmond is Reed without tears, the Dolls are the Stones with youthful fangs, Murphy's *Aquashow* is easily the best Dylan LP since *John Wesley Harding* (definitely including those by the master), and Browne's *For Everyman* is quite possibly the finest Byrds-Beach Boys-California album ever.

"The quiet lights in the houses were humming out into the darkness and there was a stir and bustle among the stars. Out of the corner of his eye Gatsby saw that the blocks of the sidewalks really formed a ladder and mounted to a secret place above the trees—he could climb to it, if he climbed alone, and once there he could suck on the pap of life, gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder."



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Although F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote those lines on Long Island in the Twenties about a different kind of romantic hero, he could have been talking about a spiritual descendant who also chose to be photographed in the Plaza: Elliott James Murphy, 24, and also in quest of myths, born of once-rich and internationally famous show-business parents (father now dead), high-school surfer king, world traveler (a trip to Key West to see what Hemingway found there, down and out in Europe and Hollywood), pragmatic idyllist (he once helped his girl escape from a private school in Switzerland, then rowed to freedom at night across a lake as in *A Farewell to Arms*), movie hopeful (a part in *Fellini's Roma* and a real desperation to play Jesse James), et cetera, ad infinitum.

For someone who sounds as if he invented his life from film fantasies and his favorite Twenties novels, Murphy in person is a likable, totally believable, extraordinarily intelligent young man who sometimes seems caught in the shadow world of the potential teenage tragic hero (James Dean's crushed idealism, astonishing good looks, and some classic AM-radio songs: "Last of the Rock Stars," "Hangin' Out") and the gates-of-Eden, strawberry-fields, no-expectations-land of the true gods of rock & roll. It's nice work, if you can get it.

Musically, *Aquashow* acknowledges its debt to *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde On Blonde* (the organ and harmonica, the full, anthem-like sound of the band), but I'm inclined to believe that any Dylan-Murphy comparison is meaningful only because it isn't completely meaningless. Murphy may sound like what people think Dylan sounded like in the mid-Sixties, but a careful replay of the records in question should prove the resemblance superficial at best. Vocally, although both are great rock & roll singers, the two are miles apart.

Murphy's lyrics are solid, direct and at times less magical and less naive than many of Dylan's, but they get the job done with equal artistry; Elliott writes about himself and those he knows in specific situations and is far more concerned with the actual past, present and future Seventies myths and archetypes of a Long Island superpunk with too much brains and too many heroes than he is about creating an alternative science-fiction world filled with people totally transformed from their own reality by a more visionary point of view. Murphy pins his hometowners, suburban teenagers and families to the wall as if they were characters in some modern-day Walker Evans FSA photo, and not a stream-of-consciousness allegory.

Dylan's major and most credible theme in the Sixties was one of being rootlessly on your own ("Like a Rolling Stone"); in the Seventies, Jackson Browne, who writes about the costs of staying or leaving, gave us a new anthem, "For Everyman," in many ways a complete reversal of Dylan's earlier stand. Murphy, escape in his heart, tries to understand his roots both realistically ("How's the Family," "Hometown," "White Middle Class Blues," "Graveyard Scrapbook") and symbolically ("Like a Great Gatsby" unites two idols: Dylan and Fitzgerald), but no matter where he goes (to the alleged high spots of the world in "Hangin' Out"), he finds himself in the same place ("I won't be there like some dead fly caught in your lampshade"), desperation setting in:

And don't tell me you don't  
hear that hometown  
calling you  
'Cause you know what,  
baby, you're still doing  
all the same things you  
used to do  
Whoa, whoa, darling, you  
never used to wait till  
tomorrow  
And now you can't wait  
at all.

He seems to want something better ("I got 2000 years of the Christian blues"), something with the glories of F. Scott and Ernest's Paris ("Do you ride on ancient ships under Doctor Eckleburg's eyes to heaven/Ticket 1927"), but the hoped-for conversion never takes place: "Waiting for some dream lover like a Great Gatsby/And then I look into the mirror and it's only me."

But Murphy's magic should be enjoyed, not analyzed; his songs are complex, but not difficult: They are always about something that touches us all. Any one of us can understand the agonized mythic ecstasy of the "boy who knows he's gotta play" rock & roll guitar and be a star ("Last of the Rock Stars"—and Elliott is as good a guitar player as he is a songwriter), the decline of Fitzgerald's West Eggers into creatures from Dylan's Desolation Row and Peter Townshend's teenage wasteland ("Hometown"), the lack of communication within families ("How's The Family," "White Middle Class Blues") and between men and women ("Graveyard Scrapbook," "Like a Great Gatsby" and even "Marilyn," a song in which male moviegoers misunderstand the late Marilyn Monroe). There is a lot of pessimism and real terror here ("But now your world begins with never"), but some hope, too ("And if you love the thought of love/Your birth will never end"), because the artist never loses his great compassion or his ability to look at personal relationships.

*Aquashow*, well produced by Peter K. Siegel, ends with a love song, "Don't Go Away," one of the most beautiful in popular music. Since Elliott Murphy and his work will be with us as long as we have rock & roll, I suggest we play it now.

Who'd mind?  
While we're out  
Anyway.

# Melody Maker

FEBRUARY 23, 1974

## Semi detached suburban Mr. Murphy

**I**N a 1960s-styled security building on the upper east-side of New York City, a uniformed doorman presses the button to an electric lock door and ushers guests into a spacious lobby decorated lavishly with period pieces, crystal chandeliers, Italian murals, and Oriental rugs on marble floors: all of which flourishes in cruel contrast to the tiny, white plaster studio apartments of the building's residents.

In Apartment 103, a paperback collection of F. Scott Fitzgerald novels fills a portion of the bookshelf. A colour reproduction of the New York City skyline shines, clipped from a magazine and pasted to the bedside lampshade. A 1974 Marilyn Monroe Datebook sleeps unopened on the desk.

An early Warner Bros. publicity photo, autographed in red ink: "All good luck from James Cagney," stands in a blond frame on the compact dining table. Taped to the wall is a B&W blow-up poster of the apartment's resident: his wet hair combed back in surfer fashion, his pouting lips mimicking the arrogant style of Dean and Brando.

Elliott Murphy looks distinctly unlike his arcade poster. His face is one of chiselled-softness, delicately framed with straight blond hair which falls past his shoulders. He slouches in a lounge chair, talking with a journalist whose tape cassette is in motion.

"I don't ever want to appear on television," Elliott is saying. "TV demolishes myths. When idols like James Dean, and Bob Dylan, and Mick Jagger first came out adults were scared of them. There was something about them that respectable citizens didn't like, and they didn't want their children listening to them. But, as soon as someone can be seen on television it makes him safe."

And just who is this media-mind who slouches in his \$280-a-month apartment, dreading the "Midnight Special" and displaying a conceptual sophistication akin to that of Bryan Ferry?

Murphy is a 24-year-old product of upper-middle class American suburbia, who relishes in and enlarges upon his heritage.

His father was Elliott Murphy, of Elliott Murphy's Aqua Show, and later, the proprietor of a swank restaurant atop Long Island's tallest building.

Elliott Jr. achieved a smattering of notoriety at an early age, when his high school yearbook heralded him as the "Pioneer Surfer of Garden City." He eventually sold his surfboard to buy a sun-burst Gibson guitar.

He picked the name of his first band, The Rapsallions, out of Websters Dictionary, and in 1966 the group won the New York State Battle of the Bands.

"The contest was sponsored by Macy's department store," Elliott reminisces, pulling on a strand of blond hair. "We were awarded matching blue blazers and hundred dollar Savings Bonds."

When Murphy graduated from Garden City High School, he packed up his guitar to travel through Europe: street singing, writing songs, playing a bit part in Fellini's Roma and delving into the dreams of F. Scott Fitzgerald (whom he considers to have been "the first pop hero").



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# NEWS



Waiting for some dream  
love, like a Great  
Gatsby,  
And then I look into the  
mirror and it's only  
me.  
And hey now, baby,  
what's on your mind?  
Do you ride on ancient  
ships into Dr Eccles-  
burg's eyes  
To heaven? A - ticket  
1927.  
(Like A Great Gatsby)  
Three years later, he re-  
turned to the States to  
audition for record com-  
panies.  
"I wanted to be a rock 'n'  
roll star and I didn't  
want to do it in Europe,"  
he reasoned. "The English  
have formulated the rock  
industry to death, I think  
the emphasis is going to  
shift back to America in  
the '70s."  
"I think music is going to  
get more basic and more  
lyrical."

Elliott's lyrics spoke about  
Fitzgerald and Marilyn  
Monroe, about the life  
he'd lived in Europe and  
in the Long Island  
suburbs.  
Three guys pass me b. ...  
white T-shirts.  
They're in '63 Super Sport.  
And they don't like my  
looks.  
I'm in the middle of  
Brooklyn,  
Can't see no escape.  
They say, "The South is  
a bummer."  
But this ain't that great.  
Well, ain't life a blast.  
So low down middle  
class.  
The day you're born  
You know you'll never  
kiss ass.  
White middle class blues.  
(White Middle Class Blues)

Most of the major record  
companies turned him  
down.

It is Paul Nelson (the  
Mercury A&R man who  
signed the New York  
Dolls) whom Elliott  
credits with having "dis-  
covered" him.

"I met Paul one night at  
the Mercer Arts Centre  
when we were both  
watching the Modern  
Lovers, I told him I was  
playing there the next  
week, and he came to see  
me."

Nelson wanted to sign  
Murphy with Mercury,  
but Polydor's A&R head,  
Peter K. Siegel, moved in  
faster.

"It was a funny situation,"  
Elliott recalls. "I went  
through a pattern with  
record companies where I  
would walk in and say:  
'I'm going to sign with  
another label, but I'd  
rather sign with you.'"

Siegel gave Murphy a  
studio audition the day  
after they met and signed



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him immediately. Conflicts soon developed over the direction Murphy's first album would go in.

Originally, Polydor sent its newly-signed artist to record in LA with producer Thomas Jefferson Kaye who had heard four demo cuts and was very excited about the material. Kaye intended to produce what Murphy calls a "country-rock super session" with such super sessionmen as Dr John, Jim Gordon, Elliott Randall, Poco and Leon Russell.

"Tommy's idea of how he wanted the album to sound was completely different from mine," Elliott confesses. "I like a raw sound without a lot of overdubbing and studio tricks."

Elliott Murphy stayed in an LA Holiday Inn for a week, then returned to New York to record with Peter Siegel at the Record Plant.

"After the LA fiasco, I decided to just get some good people and do the album all at once," he explains. Al Kooper was producing Lynyrd Skynyrd downstairs and Murphy, who had "always like the keyboard work on Dylan's albums," asked Al if he'd consider playing on his album.

Kooper declined, but recommended Frank Owens, who accompanied Dylan on "Highway 81." In

addition to Owens, the session band included ex-Byrd Gene Parsons on drums, Teddy Irwin on acoustic guitar and Elliott's younger brother, Matthew, on bass.

"The good thing about Matthew is that I taught him to play bass," Murphy chuckles. "He's only played to my songs."

"Other than Elliott and Matthew, the band was made-up of people who had never played together before," Peter Siegel told me over the telephone. "They only rehearsed for twenty or thirty hours, other than the time in the studio. The tracks were done in nine evenings."

"It was an easy album to make," says Elliott of his first studio recording.

"We set it up so that I could sing and play at the same time, and most of the stuff is live vocals. Peter's an excellent technical producer which is the key to making that kind of album."

Elliott titled his album after his father's early enterprise: "Elliott Murphy's Aquashow." It contains ten Murphy compositions, the lyric lines of which are subjectively suburban.

Murphy's vocals range from crisp to frantic. His guitar work is clean and straight-forward, and his harmonica style is student to the Dylan school. Matthew Murphy's bass-work lends strong punctuation, and Frank Owens' keyboard colourings often are reminiscent of the "Positively 4th Street" period.

Peter Siegel described the production well. "It sounds like what you remember Bob Dylan albums to be," he said, "but you won't find a Dylan album like it."

An' I said Oo-oo-oooh,  
There's the last of the rock stars

An' me an' you  
An' a Oo-oo-oooh,  
Rock 'n roll is here to stay,

But who will be left to play?

(The Last Of The Rock Stars)

On the wall of Elliott's apartment hangs a copy of his new album strappainted gold and lovingly encased in a dimestore frame. The inscription on the label reads: EM Aquashow/To Be Replaced /Your Greatest Fan/MEM.

"That was given to me by some girl," Murphy explained when questioned about the "gold" album's origin.

"Did you know her at all?" asked the journalist.

"No," said the rock star from suburbia. "She was just a fan."

PETER J. PHILBIN

# News

## Andy Warhol's Interview

### ELLIOT MURPHY

Talks to  
Peter Ainslie

Since the passing of the Beatles, rock pundits have been heralding the arrival of a new pop messiah with all the regularity of changes in the Nixon cabinet, and with about the same degree of effectiveness. There was Loudon Wainwright III, there was John Prine, there was Bruce Springsteen, to name a few of the early contenders. All of which prompted Wainwright to remark the other day that he was thinking of organizing a luncheon get-together once a year for the group and calling it "The New Bob Dylan" club.

The latest entrant, if the rock press retains any credibility, is a blond 23-year-old from Garden City, L.I., by the name of Elliot Murphy. His first album (on Polydor Records) arrived the other day with a press kit containing no less than 30 reprints of rave reviews in which his music is incessantly compared to Dylan's "Blonde on Blonde" period. The album, called "Aquashow", is named after the Busby-Berkley-water-follies show which Murphy's later father operated on Long Island for eleven years.

Murphy has apparently taken up where his father left off: he has an affection for wearing solid turquoise outfits—a clever sort of visual pun since it transforms him into a walking, talking, living, breathing aqua-show. He's also infatuated with F. Scott Fitzgerald and the trappings of decadence.



Interview trespasses Elliot Murphy.

Lorey Sebastian



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Waring Abbott

At his suggestion, we met for the first time over lunch at the Plaza, (his favorite restaurant), which was the location for the photo on the cover of his album. In person he's wry, and soft-spoken, unlike his music, which is filled with caustic and acrid commentaries on the suburban life from which he sprang. In spite of his slightly nasal delivery and his Dylanesque harmonica-playing, Murphy admits to surprise at the reams of copy that are calling him the new suburban Bob Dylan.

PA: I always wanted to do an interview like those teen magazines. You know, questions like what's your favorite food, what's your favorite color.

EM: Well, I was up at *Sixteen* magazine recently, and they just give you the *Sixteen* All-Star questionnaire, which is exactly that. What's your idea of a dream date? Who's your favorite movie star?

PA: How did you answer?

EM: I put down Edie Sedgewick for movie star. I don't know what that'll mean to *Sixteen* readers.

PA: How do you feel about the constant evocation of Bob Dylan when people write about your music?

EM: Well, it's nothing that's conscious on my part. I was never into the whole suburbia thing until I started reading my own press. I've always had a nasal voice. I didn't plan that. I'm not really capable of making a conscious effort to sound like Dylan. This is really the top and the bottom of what I can do. This is just how it comes out. Certainly in comparison to a group like "Yes" or "Genesis" my music is closer to Dylan's than to theirs. I don't enjoy that kind of music at all. I'd like to know how Bob Dylan feels about it.

PA: You said something about the power that pop stars hold over audiences and yet never exercise it. What do you mean?

EM: In days past just about anyone who could bring 20,000 people to their feet like Dylan can would be using it for political purposes. And pop stars don't. They just do it and then they go home to their mansions and sip their brandy. It could be done. There was certainly a time when a Bob Dylan, if he wanted to get politically active, could have done it. Though it would be more difficult now. I think the system tends to de-myth you too much. Because you're so

media-over-exposed. But I think if it was possible in this day and age for anyone to pull a coup—a rock and roll dictator—that that's where it would come from. Myths are what you need to get a power thing going.

PA: You're working on a new album now, I understand. Are you making an effort to avoid the suburban hand-wringing business everyone has been putting on you?

EM: Well, I've made a lot of decisions to do things, but it never works out. The last time I sat down to write I came up with "The Love Song of Eva Braun." I don't know where that came from.

PA: Where'd your interest in Fitzgerald come from? Growing up on Long Island?

EM: I guess it started in the 10th grade, when you take American Lit. and read *The Great Gatsby*. It was about this time I was getting stoned and everytime I'd get stoned I'd take a car and go driving around the North Shore—all those mansions are still there—and the two just came together in my mind.

PA: What are you obsessed with now?

EM: No? Now, it's myself. (laughs) No. Lately it's been Adolph Hitler. I been thinking about him a lot. I played that song, "Eva Braun" for five or six promotion men at Polydor—who are all older men. They didn't say a WORD after they heard it. They just didn't want to hear about that. It's really sort of my own vision. It's hard to describe, but when I look at that scene the synapses in my brain go through and I come up with this sort of vision and then I write it down. In the song I say, "His eyes at night were chilling and his words were thrilling." I would never want to give the impression that I don't think Hitler was a totally despicable and horrible man, but I mean, he's history. He was *Time's* Man of the Year in 1939. And I think it's naive to think that that's not going to happen again at some time. It keeps happening over and over. Alexander the Great. Genghis Khan, right on up. Sometimes I think I'd like to do a whole album of history rock.

PA: I read that you pirated your girlfriend out of some ritzy private school in Switzerland in the middle of the night... rowed across Lake Geneva in the middle of the night. Is she still with you?

EM: Yes.

PA: What does she do?

EM: Geraldine just sort of hangs around—helps me get dressed. (laughs) She reads a lot. She's sort of like part of my personality in a way. She's probably as responsible for where I'm going as I am.

PA: What do you want to be doing in ten years?

EM: I think I'd like to be in movies.

PA: You were in one already?

EM: Yeah. I was in Rome and a friend of a friend is Farley Granger, and he got in touch with an agent. I wanted to do some cowboy movies, but they had all just moved out of Italy into Yugoslavia. So I went out to Fellini's studio and they stuck me in a room and everyone left. I was just standing there, walking around, when the door opened about three inches and someone looked in and then the door shut. Apparently, that was Fellini, and he hired me from that. I did some great scenes in "Roma" but most of them ended up on the cutting room floor. I did make the movie though. There are good times for different things. Your twenties is a good time to be a rock and roll star. The thirties are a good time for movies and your forties and fifties, you start writing the Great American Novel. And then in the twilight years, you paint.