

Yes or No Rating to Recent Rock Albums

BY ROBERT HILBURN

● There are two types of new groups worth watching in rock music—the ones (like McGuinness Flint, Crazy Horse, among others) that establish themselves immediately as important major acts and, on a secondary level, groups that show potential for someday developing into a major act.

While only two or three new groups a year go directly into the first category, there are a dozen or so groups at any one time that attract some supporters (either on the basis of a hit single or good club appearances or promising albums) who feel the group may eventually develop into a top attraction.

Here, alphabetically, are some of the groups in the second category, some groups that have been attracting attention in recent weeks. Though some of them have had albums out previously, their current works are the ones that have brought them special attention. Each group is

given a Yes and No rating on whether its current album offers enough potential to make the group's future work worth special, serious attention.

"Grin" (Spindizzy Z 30321, distributed by Columbia)—This is a trio built around Nils Lofgren, a young songwriter who has already gained some attention through his association with Neil Young, Crazy Horse and other major rock figures.

While his songs are uneven in this album, the best ones reflect a general maturity and strong central focus that is absent in most of the other albums under consideration here. "Everybody's Missin' the Sun," for instance, is a tasty tune about night life, while "If I Were a Song" is one of those instantly infectious numbers that every new band prays for. Grin's rock is rather soft, drawing upon both folk and country influences, thus right in line with the strongest trend in rock.

Enormous potential. YES.

Ocean's "Put Your Hand in the Hand" (Kama Sutra KSBS 2033) — This Canadian group, which deals in a sort of folk-gospel rock, strikes me as one of those occasional outfits that can come up with a few AM hits (as it did with the title tune), but is rather unimportant in the long run. The instrumentation, generally, is uninteresting, the lead male vocals frightfully bland and the over-all impact disjointed. But "We Got a Dream" could be a huge single record. NO.

"Redwing" (Fantasy 8409)—This is a foursome from the Sacramento area that writes most of its own material and deals in an easily accessible brand of country-tinged rock. There is a lot of spirit and enthusiasm in some songs (particularly "Hogtied"), but most of its work is rather undistinguished, offering little hope for future rewards. The group's handling of Mickey New-

bury's "Why You Been Gone So Long" and Jimmie Rodgers' old "California Blues" seems particularly lifeless and predictable. NO.

"Rio Grande" (RCA LSP 4454) — Ronny Weiss, the 28-year-old singer - writer - guitarist with this Texas-based group, is the kind of Hank Williams and Bob Dylan-influenced musician that would be at home with Graham Parsons (the ex-Flying Burrito) and Doug Sahm (of Sir Douglas Quintet). All three were raised with country music and rock music and know the best ways to combine the forms. Weiss, who co-writes Rio Grande's material with David Stanley, produces a sort of irresistible brand of down-home country-rock that fluctuates between weeping ballads (like "Me and My Wife") and some furious rockers (such as "Nice and Easy").

Recorded in Texas

This album was produced by Dale ("Suzie Q") Hawkins and recorded in the group's hometown of Tyler, Tex. While it may be a little too country for some tastes and its instrumentation may strike some as too narrow, it is one of the most appealing and musically accessible albums of the year. The lyrics are a little familiar, but everything else is sheer fun. YES.

Timber's **"Bring America Home"** (Elektra EKS 74095)—There is a lot, happily, to praise in this album, the quintet's first for Elektra. The group has some fine musical instincts, easily accessible lyrics and melodies, and some inviting vocalists (particularly Judy Elliott). The group's songs, all original, cover a variety of contemporary topics, from one about a draft resister ("Canada") to ecology ("Remember").

North-South Heritage

Three of the members of Timber are from Tennessee, while the other two are from California, giving the group a sort of north-south musical heritage (blending country, folk and rock styles) that one finds in such groups as the Band and in such solo artists as John Stewart.

Though much of the work on this album seems too easily traced to other musical influences (notably the Band) to give the group the unqualified endorsement it takes to reach the top level of rock attractions, its next album, if it reflects continued growth, may remove all doubt. YES.