

## SHEENA AND THE ROKKETS

**C**urrent popular opinion states that the Japanese can take the best that the West has to offer, apply their precision, technology and foresight, and do it better. Evidence mounts to support this opinion after one listening to *Sheena and the Rokkets*, the international debut album of the popular Japanese rock group of the same name. Reviving the primal rock 'n' roll of the 50's and 60's and coupling it with new sensibilities, Sheena and the Rokkets deliver unpretentious pop: simple, bright and true!

Forming the nucleus of the group are Sheena (means "China" in Japanese, not a Ramones rip-off), whose lead vocals and personality are central to the band's sound and success; and Makoto Ayukawa (he and Sheena are married and have twin daughters) lead guitarist, vocalist and composer, who formed Sheena and the Rokkets in 1978. Sheena and Ayukawa are from the same southern island of Japan, Kyushu, and met in high school, where Ayukawa took up the guitar. Citing such influences as Lloyd Price, the Beatles, Little Richard, Muddy Waters, and later, Elvis Costello, Ayukawa played in a couple of successful southern Japan rock bands, and had three moderately successful albums before forming the Rokkets.

Along with bass player Takeshi Asada and drummer Kazu Kawashima, Sheena and the Rokkets got their first big chance at a large audience when they were chosen as the backup band for Elvis Costello on his Japanese tour in November, '78. A year later, they released their first LP, *Vacuum Pack*, from Alfa Records in Japan, which was backed by the highly popular Yellow Magic Orchestra and produced by YMO's Haruomi "Harry" Hosono. The single, "You May Dream" ("Yume," pronounced "you may," means dream in Japanese) became the campaign song for Japan Air Lines' national radio/TV ads, and generated a heavy concert schedule beginning in April 1980. "You May Dream" b/w "Stiff Lips" (both on the current album) were re-recorded in English at A&M Records in Hollywood, with Robin Cable producing, in May 1980. Their second LP, *Channel Good*, containing both English and Japanese titles was released by Alfa Records in October 1980, with Hosono again at the producer's helm. Following this, they had several successful singles, a nationwide college tour, and several "live spot" appearances, including a live session with Jake and Elwood Blues during the Blues Brothers' promo tour of Japan. In March, '81, Sheena and the Rokkets went into Onkyo Studios in Tokyo with Robin Cable of A&M again, to record the English-language version of *Sheena and the Rokkets* (original Japanese tracks produced by Harry Hosono).

From the opening, "Lazy Crazy Blues," a tune that shows off Sheena's vocal power, to the punkish "Stiff Lips" and power pop of the successful single, "You May Dream," side one reveals that this group wants to rock it! Side two continues to jump with "Baby Maybe," a bright, danceable tune that romps into "Kiss-Me-Quick," a precise rocker. Technopop meets the 60's with Sheena's version of "You Really Got Me," a highlight piece that proves the rock 'n' roll range of this exciting young band.

Just a sampling of a group and an album that recaptures the energy and good times of basic rock 'n' roll.

