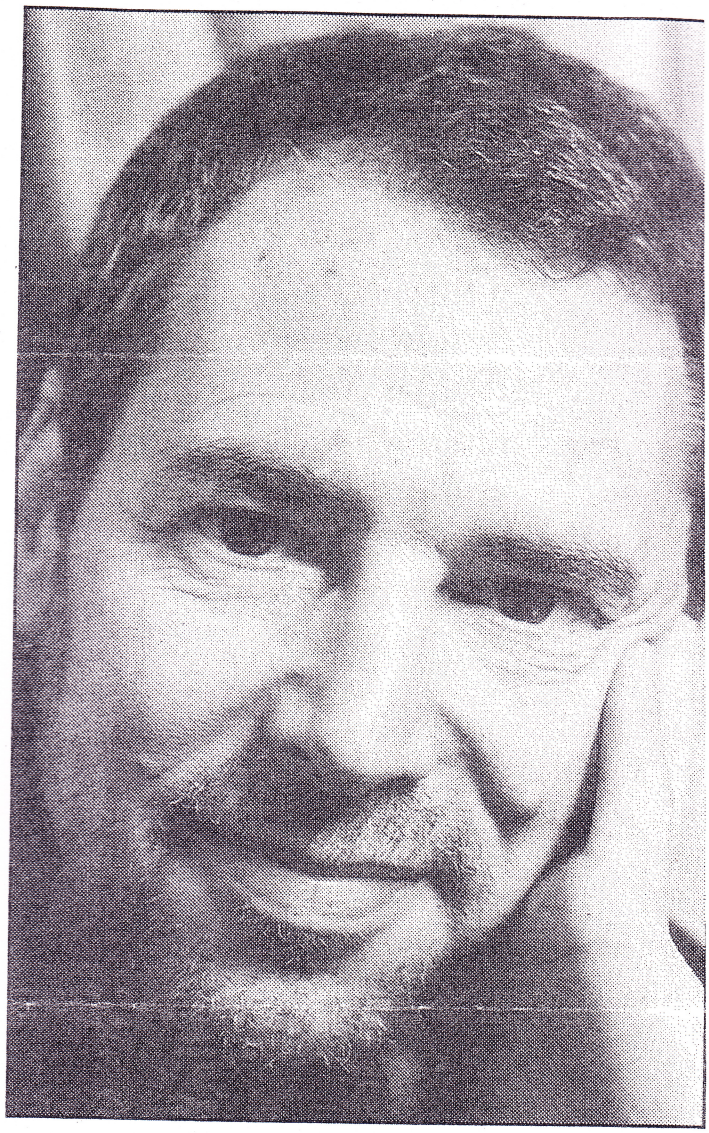
El Sidran

ROCK: *Ay caramba! Don Carnell hears a father and son take some Spanish steps*



Give me something for the Spain: Ben Sidran, the senior señor

BEN SIDRAN
THE CONCERT FOR GARCIA LORCA
GO JAZZ GO6033
LEO SIDRAN
L. SID
GO JAZZ POP GO6041

Ben Sidran's "Concert For Garcia Lorca" was recorded live in Spain to mark the 100th anniversary of the birth of the renowned Spanish writer murdered by the Fascists during the Spanish Civil War.

For the gig, Sidran used Lorca's own piano, the same one his killers had dismantled in a frantic search for a radio transmitter.

"The Concert" is a beautifully packaged affair and the playing isn't far behind, as Sidran and his quartet set Lorca's poetry to music and take time out for a stroll through assorted jazz standards.

"On Defeating Death" is the cream of the crop — a more sophisticated take on Allen Ginsberg's poetry-meets-jazz shtick, a meandering introspective but essentially triumphant journey, where death is ultimately defeated by the immortality of (Lorca's) art.

Elsewhere, Sidran, a leading light in his local Reform synagogue, displays his mastery of the blues piano on Mose Allison's "Look Here" and of jazz standards with Gershwin's "It Ain't Necessarily So."

His impressive rock pedigree — he has worked with Van Morrison, Diana Ross and the Stones, as well as co-writing "Space Cowboy" with Steve Miller — means that "The Concert" never becomes too precious or reverential.

A lot of the power of blues and jazz lies in their capacity to remove us from suffering, rather than revel in it. Just like poetry, in fact. Lorca knew it, Sidran knows it, too. And like Lorca's work, this album bears repeated investigation.

Ben's son, Leo, plays drums on the album, but his own Latin-tinged "L. Sid" offering is a far poppier affair, not a million miles from Paul Simon's excursions into the genre.

Leo Sidran's voice has the same pristine quality as Simon's and he possesses a similarly polished musical style. His guitar-playing impresses, too.

Indeed, if you heard "L. Sid" playing in the next room, you'd swear it was the Rhyming One himself.

But, as the bluesy "It Wasn't Supposed To Happen This Way" shows, Sidran is no mere Simon clone. Built around a shimmering acoustic backdrop, it is the highspot on a surprisingly accessible outing.