

COUNTRY MUSIC WORLD

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DAN FOGELBERG

The Song Painter From Illinois



Fools Gold

On that night in 1977, I questioned Fogelberg's decision, I had eagerly anticipated his first British visit. When the 'Netherlands' album appeared a few months later, it was stale, and I felt that he would probably have benefited from the break which the European tour had offered; some fresh air, new faces, new scenery and new influences might have restored that old magic. His work was becoming repetitive and boring.

There are certain artists who, however bad their releases become, I somehow stick with them all the way. Sometimes my patience is rewarded.

Fogelberg doesn't possess an extremely strong voice, in fact it would probably be best described as wafer thin. What he lacks in the vocal department is however, more than amply compensated for by his skill as a songwriter. A recording artist, whose career has spanned ten years, Fogelberg has recorded seven solo albums, and they range from superlative to absolutely dismal.

Fogelberg is a singer / songwriter whose work is set firmly in the country rock mould, and he has some fairly interesting musical associations which bear investigation.

GRANDFATHER'S PRESENT

Born, 1953, in Peoria, Illinois, Dan's first introduction to music came when his parents sent him to piano lessons. He also began tinkering with an acoustic slide-guitar, a gift from his grandfather. Dan's teenage years were spent playing in a succession of 'Garage bands' before he graduated to playing coffee houses as a solo act.

Art and painting played an equally important role in Dan's early life and he enrolled in a painting course at the University of Illinois, after graduating from High School. Like many others before him, music soon became the dominant factor in Dan's life and he left University while still in his first year. Moving to the west coast he played the folk circuit, including appearances at the Los Angeles Troubadour. He went on a national tour with Van Morrison, failed to find a producer in California willing to record his songs, and therefore switched the base of his operations to Nashville.

By 1972 Dan had signed up with Full Moon Productions and all his subsequent recordings have been released on the Epic label. His first album, 'Home Free' was recorded at Quadrafonic Studios

by ARTHUR WOOD

in Nashville with Norman Putnam in control of production. Backing was provided by the 'Nashville Mafia' of Messrs Buttrey, Myrick, Spicher, Morris and Briggs. Glen Spreen was responsible for the string arrangements and Dan has maintained over the years, a working relationship with him, and Putnam, albeit on an irregular basis.

THE GROVE

It is rather appropriate that the opening track was titled 'To the morning' — an introduction to the day, a beginning for Fogelberg. The delivery appears fragile and

In 1977, sitting in a draughty cow shed near Stafford which occasionally proffers itself as a British answer to those massive American concert bowls, I heard a girl say, 'Who's this guy, Fogelberg?'. Not unnaturally, she'd come to see bill toppers, "The Eagles" go through their paces. Little did she realise that when the lights went down, the rather tasty, Val Carter would take the stage as a last minute replacement. Fogelberg had decided to stay home and complete his 'Netherlands' album

yet it is, for me, an epic track. Its strength lies in the truthful simplicity expressed in the lyrics, with Spreen's understated strings presenting a perfect backdrop for the song. The album contains many other outstanding songs which cover the colourful spectrum of life including 'Be on your way' and 'The River' which closed the album. 'Hickory Grove', which closed side one, provides an early indication of Fogelberg's autobiographical style of writing. The 'Grove' is obviously a place which Dan remembers with great affection, since his music publishing

company is named after it. The album was finally released in Britain in late 1980 on CBS's Embassy budget label. There was proof that Dan retained his love of painting as a self portrait appeared on the front of the album liner.

Sad to relate, the album sold poorly and Dan spent the following years working as a session musician, on albums by artists like Randy Newman, Roger McQuinn and Jackson Browne. Florence Warner's only solo album was released by CBS in 1974 and featured two of Dan's songs: 'Boy from Half Mountain', (which later appeared on his second solo

album) and 'The Lady Loves the River', which Dan has not recorded to date. The album showcased Dan's guitarwork, and was produced by Glen Spreen.

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THE EAGLES

The Eagles and Joe Walsh were already part of Azoff's empire and Walsh was responsible for the production of Dan's second album, 'Souvenirs'.

Dan had first worked with Joe in 1973 on Michael Stanley's second solo album, 'Friends and Legends', and was also featured on Joe's 1974 album, 'So what', (strange to relate that the former album was produced by Bill Szymczyk, who later took control on the third Eagles album, 'On the Border'). The lines of that 1974 album contained the statement, 'Extra special thanks to Paul Ahern for leaving town'. 'Souvenirs', which was recorded in Los Angeles in late 1974, was released early the following year. Needless to say, the liner features the reply, 'Special thanks to Paul Ahern for coming back to town'. The album features a number of Eagles on backing tracks along with former members of Stephen Still's Manassas, plus California's ace skin basher and nutcase, Russell Kunkel and not forgetting Manchester's own, Graham Nash.

Among the many outstanding songs on the album, my favourites include, 'Illinois', (another autobiographical reference), 'The Long Way' and 'There's a place

in the world for a gambler'. 'Souvenirs' made an immediate impact on the charts, and Dan was later awarded a Gold album for it. He also established himself on the singles charts and then undertook a highly successful tour of the States with the Eagles as the Headlining act.

Dan was back in the studio in late 1975 and did the production work himself on the resulting album, 'Captured Angel'. The album marked the first occasion on which Dan recorded at the Caribou Ranch in Nederland, Colorado. The studios, which were opened in 1972, are owned by James Guercio, mentor of the jazz-rock group, Chicago.

Although the album made the charts, it peaked at 23 during a 19 week stay, and to be honest, it is a fairly pale repeat of the 'Souvenirs' album. Messrs Putnam and Spreen return to the scene along with Russ Kunkel and Jackson Browne's right-hand man, David Lindley. Dan had previously worked on Jackson's album, 'Late for the Sky'. Apart from writing all the songs and providing all the vocals. Dan also played most of the instruments on the backing tracks, and the album suffers thereby, because he wasn't able to be objective about the results.

If Dan's career seemed to be stagnating musically, the career of his backing band, 'Fools Gold' had begun to take off.

Having signed a record deal with the Morning Sky / Arista label, their first album titled, 'Fools Gold' was released in the summer of 1976. The album featured the skills of four separate producers, including, Glyn Johns (producer of the early Eagles albums) and Eaglets, Glen Frey and Joe Walsh. When the Danny Henson song, 'Rain oh rain' was released as a single it made the charts. The ten track album included Dan's songs, 'Old Tennessee' and 'Love me through and through', (which he has yet to record), plus 'Chances' which Dan co-wrote with band members, Tom Kelly and Danny Henson.

"MR LUCKY"

The following year saw the release of the group's second album, 'Mr Lucky', this time on CBS, but it sold poorly. It probably didn't matter anyway, since Dan and the group had

begun to drift apart.

As I said earlier, 1977 also saw the release of Dan's fourth solo album, 'Netherlands' which he co-produced with Norbert Putnam. The album included tracks which had been laid down in five studios from Nashville through Colorado to California. Despite featuring the musical talents of Ken Buttrey, Don Henley, Joe Walsh and John David Souther, plus the old rearguard of Putnam and Kunkel, the least said about the end product, the better. The inner album sleeve featured another self-portrait of Dan, which at least showed he had retained his interest in painting. Chartwise for some reason the album fared better than 'Captured Angel' and peaked at No 13 during a twenty-seven week stay in the charts.

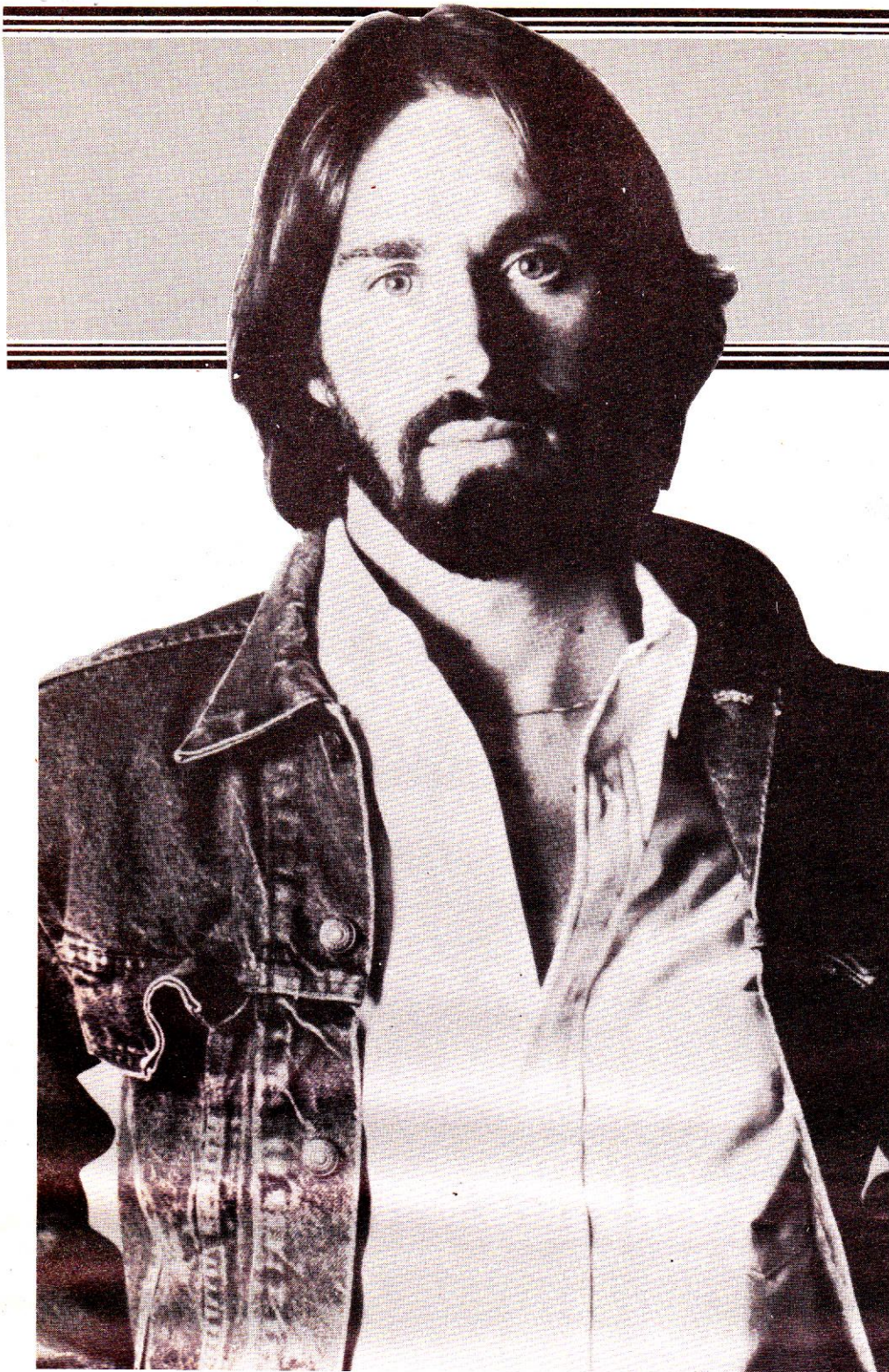
I get the impression that Dan also felt his music was losing direction as, Fogelberg 'the Chameleon' appeared the following year when, 'Twin Sons of Different Mothers' was released. It is rumoured that flautist, Tim Weisberg had played on some unreleased tracks from the 'Captured Angel' sessions. He certainly played on one track on 'Netherlands'; and so the two musicians got together in the studio, the result being the 'Twin Songs ...' album.

THE INNOCENT AGE

Eight of the ten tracks were written by Dan, being mainly highly melodic instrumental pieces. Judy Collins' composition 'Since you asked' and a seven minute version of the old Hollies song, 'Tell me to my face' completed the album. The latter song enjoyed great success when released as a single.

The album concept was neither revolutionary nor startlingly new, but it certainly was a refreshing change. Needless to say, it sold well, and at least partially re-established my faith in Fogelberg's musical / songwriting talents.

Starting in late 1978, Dan took almost a year to complete his next solo album, 'Phoenix'. Returning to the singer / songwriter mould of his earlier albums, it certainly confirmed 'His rising from the ashes' musically, but also appeared lyrically to be a fond farewell to the Seventies. The symbolic picture of a bird rising from a heart, which Dan painted for the



front cover, seemed to indicate that his spirit (for composing) was in full flight again.

Production of the album was shared by Dan, Norbert Putnam and Marty Lewis. The latter character having first worked with Dan on the 'Netherlands' album. 'Phoenix' peaked at No3 on the album charts, in March 1980, while the single, 'Longer' reached No2 in the same month.

Consummation comes in many forms. A few artists are lucky enough to have talents which bear a rich harvest, albeit for a few fleeting moments. Time may prove that 'The Innocent Age' was Fogelberg's Masterwork (I

hope there's better to come). Released late last year, there has hardly been a day go by that this double album has not graced my turntable.

Without a doubt, it was my favourite album of last year and probably of many years to come. Cast in the 'shiver down the back' category, the album is full of story songs that touch many nerves and emotions, and I'd honestly go over the top (and down the other side), to sing its praises. Reaching No2 in October last year, the album currently remains high in the Top Twenty chart. Already registered as a Platinum album for sales in excess of one million copies, it

would be detrimental to pick any one of the seventeen tracks as outstanding, for me, they are all that and more.

Co-produced by Dan and Marty Lewis, the tracks feature all the usual gang on the backing tracks, plus the added bonus of duets with Joni Mitchell and Emmylou Harris, on a couple of the songs.

The only thing missing now is for Fogelberg to tour Britain, but in the meantime, at least there is the rich tapestry of his seven albums. If you haven't heard any of them, and they are still available, then do yourself a favour. ●



The Eagles

MICHAEL MURPHEY



Lewis and Clarke Expedition — Murphey is extreme left, London is extreme right.

THE EARLY YEARS from DALLAS to AUSTIN

The genre of the singer/songwriter came to prominence in the late Sixties/early Seventies, when many fine performers appeared on the scene. There is little doubt in my mind that Gram Parsons' influence and 'cosmic country vision', led to the rapid expansion of the country-rock end of the field. Groups like the Flying Burrito Brothers (which Parsons helped form) and Poco led the field, and in their wake, many other bands and solo artists followed. Michael Martin Murphey is one case in point. By Arthur Wood

Murphey was born in the Methodist Hospital, Dallas, Texas, in 1945 and claims that he had a radically conservative upbringing, with the Southern Baptist Church as the focus of his early life. In his teens, Michael was ordained to preach in the church, and at one stage even considered a career as a minister.

Michael's involvement with music began at the age of six, when his Irish seafaring grandfather Murphey, brought him a plastic ukelele from Hawaii. Storytelling had been one of Michael's interests from an early age and naturally complemented his new found fascination with music. His interests manifested themselves in the many songs and short stories Michael wrote while still young. In Ninth grade at

school a play that Michael had written was performed by his classmates.

The summers of his early teenage years were spent helping his grandparents on their farm, and working on a ranch for adolescents. Michael acted as a guidance counsellor on the ranch and also provided entertainment as a wrangler and singing cowboy. The experiences gained from these jobs all added to a rich store of ideas and influences and undoubtedly assisted Michael's development as a songwriter.

By his late teens, Michael's natural talents as a musician and writer were recognised in and around Dallas, and he performed regularly in Nightclubs and on local television. His work was even featured in a national poetry anthology.

Another musician who was hanging out around Dallas at this time was Mike Nesmith. Although

he was born in Houston, December 30th, 1942, Mike had been raised in Framers Branch, near Dallas. Nesmith only became a serious musician after he was discharged from the Air Force in 1962. Their mutual friendship and interests resulted in the formation of the Trinity River Boys with John Raines on drums and John London on bass. In 1964 the band recorded an album for the Prospector Label, but it was never released, and they drifted apart (for some of the members, this was only a temporary parting). Within two years, Nesmith was a member of the Monkees. The only member of that band with any real musical credentials.

In pursuit of his aim of becoming a Baptist minister, after graduating from High School, Michael enrolled at North Texas State University where he studied Greek and Latin. Michael's interest in music soon overtook

his studies. He also began to doubt his faith, as the more he progressed with his religious studies, the more uncertain he became about his beliefs.

NATIVE AMERICAN ART

While at North Texas State, Michael was a member of the Dallas County Jug Band, along with Steven Fromholz and they frequently appeared at Rod Kennedy's Zilker Park folk concerts in the summer of '65. They later performed together in the Michael Murphey Trio, but the group broke up when Fromholz was drafted into the U.S. Navy.

The study of Native American Art and Culture had become one of Michael's hobbies in his late teens, in pursuit of a wider knowledge of the subject, in late 1965, he hitch-hiked through the South Western and Rocky Mountain states. Michael managed to fund his travels by playing as a solo act in the places he visited.

Eventually Michael made California, and he enrolled in a 'Creative writing and poetry' course at UCLA. He continued performing in bars and clubs and soon had a songwriting contract with Screen Gems. It should be understood, however, that the Screen Gems contract was on the basis of writing songs to order, in competition with other writers that Don Kirshner had gathered together. Screen Gems Music was part of the Columbia Pictures Corporation, and in 1966, Kirshner was not only responsible for forming the Monkees, he also provided the songs they sang.

Kirshner's top writing teams like Goffin and King, Boyce and Hart were obviously shown preference, but two of Murphey's compositions did appear on the Monkees' albums.

The Colgems label had been created to handle the Monkee's releases, but other artists were subsequently added to the label's roster. In 1967, Colgems released an album by the 'Lewis and Clarke Expedition'.

Historically speaking Meriwether Lewis and William Clarke had led expeditions into the American West at the start of the 19th Century, opening up

trails for new settlers. Musically speaking, the 'Lewis and Clarke Expedition' was a five man group which featured Travis Lewis, (Michael Murphey), Boomer Clarke, (Owen Castelman) and Ken Bloom plus Messrs Raines and London from the Trinity River Boys. The album consisted of fairly lightweight pop songs and yielded a minor chart success when, 'I feel good, (I feel bad)' was released as a single. Most of the material on the twelve-track album was co-composed by Murphey and Castelman. The three song segue, 'Memorial to the American Indian' did however carry a clue as to the future direction of Murphey's writing. Apart from John D. Loudermilk's 'Lament of the Cherokee Reservation Indian', the composition credits were shared by Murphey, Castelman and Hilderbrand.

SCREEN GEMS WRITER

It really is amazing how the links of the chain all fall into place. Diane Hilderbrand was another Screen Gems writer, and she had a solo album release on Elektra titled, 'Early morning blues and greens'. Jack Keller who produced the Lewis and Clarke album, shared quite a number of writing credits with Diane on her album, the title track of which was also recorded by the Monkees. Wheels within Wheels!

Murphey continued as a writer for Screen Gems till 1970 and after a couple of other non-profitable songwriting deals, he decided to return to Texas in 1972. Working and living in Los Angeles had already proved to be too claustrophobic for Michael and in the last few years that he spent in California, he operated from a secluded bungalow in the San Gabriel Mountains. Any new compositions being sent into the music publishers in Los Angeles via the mail.

One of the last projects he worked on in Los Angeles was the 'Ballad of Calico' double album recorded by Kenny Rogers and the First Edition. It also proved to be the last album that Rogers and the First Edition recorded together, although that is hardly the fault of Murphey's rather

excellent compositions. It only sold in moderate quantities, peaking at No. 118 during a fourteen-week stint on the charts.

Larry Cansler and Michael co-composed the music on the nineteen-track album, while only Michael was responsible for the lyrics. The concept for the songs on the album came to Michael after paying a visit to the silver-mining ghost town of Calico in the Mojave Desert. The material on the album showed that Murphey's skill as a writer had improved immensely relative to his work with Lewis and Clarke. Lyrically his songs had become more and more, a direct expression of his personal experiences and fantasies.

During an interview with Michael Wale in 1973, Murphey expounded on the effects of his visit to Calico as follows, 'I began to question what I was doing in Hollywood as a songwriter. You know they come along and they tell you to write a song about this, write a song about that, or, this and that's in the charts, try write something in that vein; and here I was standing in front of something that was a cosmic experience for me. And I was asking myself, why can't I write about this, because this is what I can portray more vividly than some made up situation that I don't want to write about.'

That just about says it all. Murphey had decided he could be his own man, he'd served his apprenticeship. Like many other expatriates in the early Seventies, he returned home to Texas, settling near Lake Travis which is about thirty miles outside Austin.

Michael already had a few contacts with clubs in the Austin area, and he started gigging there on a regular basis. At one of his early dates, Bob Johnson, a producer of some note in the early Seventies, turned up to check out Michael's act.

Johnson must have obviously felt that Murphey had a future as a recording artist, because a solo contract with A & M Records quickly followed. The original plan was to record the first album in London, but the sessions finally took place at Columbia Recording Studios in Nashville.

Murphey the solo artist was on his way. ●

PLAIN' FROM THE HEART

Be good to yourself / A fool in love / Heartbreak radio / I've got dreams to remember / In the midnight hour / I wanna thank you baby / Sandy beaches / Lipstick traces (on a cigarette) / I feel so bad / Rooster blues. (Capitol ST 12188 — Import).

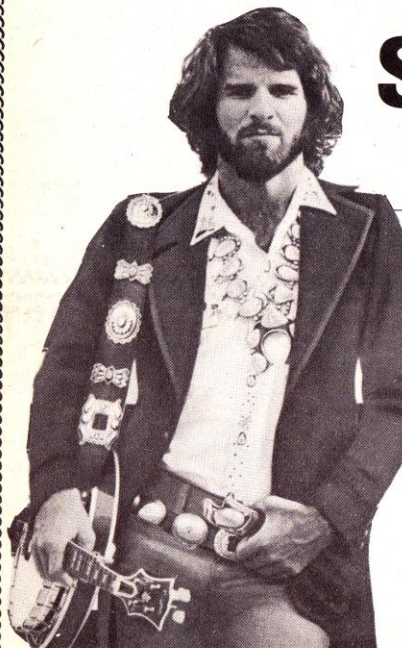
From the same production team that spawned last year's hit album, 'The jealous kind', Delbert delves deeper into the heart of Soul (music).

The fringes of every musical field are so naturally hazy that they merged with one another. McClinton's roots undoubtedly classify him as a 'down home country boy'. As the years have passed, he has, however, leaned more toward 'soul music' and although it has been classed as 'country soul' by some reviewers in the past, they would be really gilding the lily to continue with that pretence, regarding this album.

There is no doubt that 'Plain' from the heart' is a good album, if considered in its true context; after all, those good ol' boys at Muscle Shoals in Sheffield, Alabama, have been pumping out this stuff for years. This is a solid funky soul package with some rock 'n' roll riffs thrown in for good measure, but it ain't country in any way whatsoever ●

ARTHUR WOOD

THE STEVE MARTIN BROTHERS



American Photography / A scientific question / What I Believe / A Showbiz moment / The real me / Love God / Make the rent / The gospel mania / Sally Goodin' / Saga of the old west / John Henry / Saga (reprise) / Pitkin County turn around / Hoedown at Alice's / Song of perfect spaces / Freddie's Lilt Parts I and II / Waterbound / Banana Banjo. (Warner Bros K 56943.)

Steve Martin is affectionately known Stateside as 'the wild and crazy guy'. The first side of this album was recorded during performances in Los Angeles and Hollywood, and purports to display Martin's talent as a comedian. Trust is, the first side is about as funny as a late Saturday night at Central Television Studios in Birmingham (know what I mean?). His almost childish glee in constantly repeating what are noted on the cover as, 'dangerous words', is quite pathetic.

You may be wondering by now why this album is being reviewed by CMW. The reason is, side two, with the exception of one vocal track consists entirely of bluegrass instrumentals which display Martin's prowess on Banjo. Most of the tunes were composed by Martin, they all have a light and airy feeling about them and can best be described as, 'pop' bluegrass.

Martin's connections with William E. McEuen and the Dirt Band go way back, and he is ably assisted on the backing tracks by the McEuen Brothers with the added bonus of some fine fiddle work by Vassar Clements.

Truth is, with a little investigation, I discovered that the Aspen Recording Society planned to release a Steve Martin Bluegrass album, titled 'Saga of the old West' in 1975. Needless to say it never surfaced, but I'm sure those recordings now form side two of this album. ●

ARTHUR WOOD

