

BRUM

55p

the midlands music monthly and more!

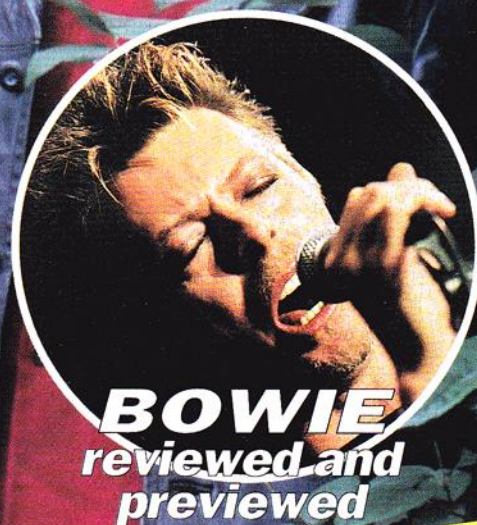
BEAT

laxton's superb

max takes a bite

december '95/january '96 issue 177

plus:
ozzy osbourne
lemonilla
therapy?
1995's bands
albums reviewed
aimee mann
the essential gig guide
the hottest demo
column in town
news ... reviews



**WIN TICKETS FOR EVERY
NIGHT OF THE BIG TWIX MIX**
- SEE DAVID BOWIE/ROD STEWART/
DIANA ROSS/ETERNAL
AND MORE ON US!!

5: RADIOHEAD - *The Bends*

Inspired, original and a surprisingly melodic leap into the very big league.

The Greatest Year In The World... Ever! And all packaged into one convenient 5'8 human-being. Well, not quite. Some belting moments (sunbathing in the snow atop Ben Nevis, The Nursery, an hilarious night in Malham, Cambridge Folk Fest, The Shawshank Redemption, Big Ron taking charge, Silencers at the Mean Fiddler, Del Amitri playing Ace Of Spades), an awful lot of very average material (living, breathing, working, Big Ron's effect on the pitch) and some absolute shit (Wake Up Boo, TV stars back in the charts, tangible signs of ageing).

Musically the advent of the coffee-table compilation CD seemed a good idea as an educational tool for the indie listener too afraid to risk £12 on a complete album, but the avalanche of releases that followed - ultimately compilations of compilations - negated much of the positive and probably cost the likes of Cast, Elastica, Dodgy and Echobelly dear in terms of album sales.

ARTHUR WOOD

1: DAR WILLIAMS - *The Honesty Room*

This may yet be my album of the decade. Refreshing. Wise. Thoughtful. Stimulating. Melodic. Impish. You name it.

2: ERIC TAYLOR - *Eric Taylor*

Proof that dreams do come true. Thanks Heinz, John, Iain, Mark (and Mickie). Most of all, thanks Eric for the stories. Dave 'Folkways' Obermann's annual cajoling was not in vain!

3: GUY CLARK - *Belfast Blues*

What can you say about this veteran. His stuff is the type that works. The recut of *The Randall Knife* is understandable, and truly heartfelt.

4: NOLLAIG CASEY & ARTY MCGLYNN - *Causeway*

This Celtic Mr. & Mrs. don't indulge in public displays very often. When they get around to it, it is always a special brew.

5: WILCO - *A.M.*

A phoenix from the ashes.

Then I thought ...

Probably the best year of the nineties (so far), for naval gazing releases. Song(s) of the year - When I Was A Boy / The Babysitter's Here - Dar Williams; The Cape - Guy Clark; A Boys Life In Texas - Steve Fisher; Label(s) of the year - Watermelon for Eric Taylor alone, followed by Bohemia Beat, Glitterhouse, 1-800 PRIME CD, Dejadisc and Waterbug. A patchy year for Philo. With Flying Fish now in their stable, '96 may be interesting: Gig(s) of the year - Dar Williams (The Borderline); Ray Wylie Hubbard (The Weavers); Wilco (Wulfrun Hall); Almost Top 5 albums - Letter to Laredo (Joe Ely - thanks to the man who musically introduced me to Texas, two decades ago); West Texas Heaven (Kimmie Rhodes); Buffalo Return to the Plains (Jimmy

LaFave); The Tide (Lucy Kaplansky - OK, so it was a '94 release !!!); Wrecking Ball (Emmylou Harris - what do the xxxing critics know ?!); Crayons (Betty Elders); Bluefields (Tom Pacheco); Publication(s) of the Year - Dirty Linen (again); Music City Texas and The Performing Songwriter, running real low on steam: Reissue(s) - New World Karla Bonoff; Border Affair/Naked Child (Lee Clayton); the 10CD Kerrville Live 1982 - 1991: Reformation - Bryndle (Bonoff, Edwards, Gold & Waldman) and (almost) finally, these damned incredible (songwriter) compilations: Texans - Live from Mountain Stage; This Is Boston Not Austin; The Postscript; The Silverwolf Homeless Project; On the Mountain 2; A Celtic Season; Folks Live, Sunday Morning Sessions and the first Dejadisc and Watermelon compilations. Dedication for '95: to the memory of the late Ann Moore and the glory days at the Breedon. Prospects in '96 - the 25 day, 25th anniversary Kerrville Folk Festival ... and what price a new Terry Clarke solo album ??????????

PAUL FLOWER

1: RADIOHEAD - *The Bends*

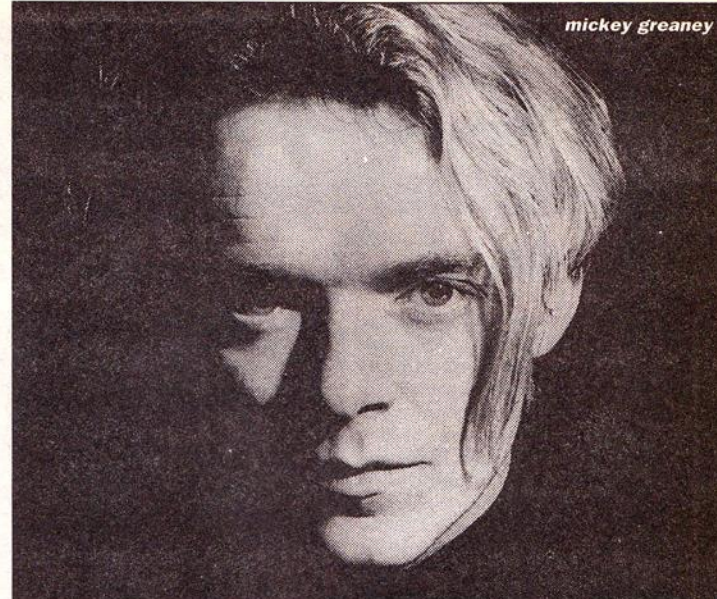
2: THE SMASHING PUMPKINS - *Mellon Collie And The Infinite Sadness*

3: THE VERVE - *Northern Soul*

4: GARBAGE

5: BUFFALO TOM - *Sleepy Eyed*

The year that British radio turned its back on the specialists and ran to embrace monotony. More choice of stations, less choice of music. The year that American punk finally got it right and sold it back to us by the bucketload. The year that British pop looked to its strengths rather than seeking



micky greaney

overseas aid. For '96 will witness the rock/ska/dub resurgence. Birmingham will start to stand up for itself and for something.

ANDY TIPPER

1: MICKY GREANEY - *Little Symphonies For The Kids*

A perfect album of emotional torch tunes, overflowing with chocolate-rich melodies and simple warm splendour. No artist or album this year has given more pleasure than Micky Greaney's *Little Symphonies For The Kids*. It's unspeakably evocative and fun to listen to as well. Wonderful music and wonderful lyrics, Greaney has a classic collection of songs that deserve thrill the nation.

2: FREEZONE - *Variations On A Chill*

When 'Trip-Hop' became the latest fad earlier this year, this album shocked me to the core with its astonishing variations that confounded all efforts to pigeonhole it. Freezone has got whispers of every electronic genre, and perhaps lies closest to that thing we call 'Trip-Hop', but this album comes head, shoulders, and probably the clouds, above the competition. It's a stunningly exotic collection with more variety than Heinz. Truly glorious music.

3: OASIS - *(What's The Story) Morning Glory*

For breathing a kiss of life back into the British Music Biz.

4: CARL CRAIG - *Landcruising*

Detroit techno polished like a diamond.

5: VARIOUS - *Techno Nights, Ambient Dawn.*

A major label compilation that startled me with its quality, proving that techno has arrived.

As readers of my sometimes quite personal column will know, the year started quite badly with my girlfriend unexpectedly dumping me, but luckily the fickle face of romance changed from a frown into a smile and I met a mad bastard of a girlfriend soon afterwards. The summer was memorable for the thousands of wasps that seemed intent on carrying out suicide missions into my amber pints of lager. This was followed by an autumn of low finance and high passion taking in long lie-ins and Stratford strolls, willow trees, cottages and castles, and all things nice. Shucks. A good year in many other respects too! Including chats with Detroit techno legend Eddie 'Flashin' Fowlkes, German genius Oliver Lieb, local sonic sculptor Jony Easterby, techno-punk author Jeff Noon, and the interminable problem of trying to decide whether to watch the X-files or Cracker first. Ambient may have been bumped off in the media, but as the amazing fun-fest at Tribal Gathering '95 proved, techno has now infiltrated the mainstream, and music has changed forever.

STEVE MORRIS

1: BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - *The Ghost Of Tom Joad*

Quite simply a masterful piece of work from an artist who plainly believes in the value of his work above career plan or the whims of Sony's accountants. Uncommercial, uncompromising and probably the most important album of the decade.

2: EMMYLOU HARRIS - *Wrecking Ball*

Perhaps the most significant 'country' album in two decades.

3: JACKIE LEVEN - *Forbidden Songs Of The Dying West*

So, maybe the album's a little uneven but overall Leven's brand of Celtic soul searching is potent indeed. And what a voice the man has.

4: JOSHUA KADISON - *Delilah Blue*

Not due for release here until February, Kadison's second album is a huge leap forward that'll amaze past detractors.

5: ERIC MATTHEWS - *It's Heavy In Here*

Reversing into tomorrow ...

Jeez, where do you start. Radio and the national weeklies seem determined to ignore good music. Puerile rap and dance still dominate and TV stars are the biggest sellers of the decade ... and yet wonderfully eclectic events like Phoenix, where it was possible to see acts as varied as George Clinton and The Rockingbirds on the same day suggest that there is some sanity left. As does the emerging A&R frenzy surrounding Micky Greaney, a man destined for greatness. And what makes that even sweeter is the fact that *Brum Beat* has played some small part in setting Micky on that path, kinda makes you feel - well damned good actually. Personal highlights? Well, interviewing Jeff Buckley on his tour bus and realising that he's everything and more that we've been told, and the little guy's first summer at the sea and his tentative first steps ... that really puts it all into perspective!

recorded delivery

is going to surprise anyone over the age of gullibility. Sure the synthcolour washes are more dominant than you might expect from a 'rock' band, but again hardly radical on a nineties rock album. Similarly when the dance beats sneak in they're hardly groundbreaking.

The major surprise actually comes from tracks that are paradoxically the biggest let-down, tracks that confound the pre-release foreplay by sounding most like U2: Your Blue Room is an ambient gentle tune of a gorgeous One persuasion whilst the Pavarotti featuring single Miss Sarajevo, as you already know is quite simply one of the year's best. Most off the wall is the Bonorap Elvis Ate America that bullseyes the spirit of Tom Waits without imitation.

For the most part though, the biggest fault is the band's apparent need to share their holiday pics with us all - never a particularly good move. Now if someone will remind 'em what those Fenders'n'Marshalls are for ...

★★★★ Steve Morris

RAMSHACKLE

Depthology (Big Life)

A slinky spliffed up cousin of trip hop with heady fumes of spacey 60s psychedelia and smokey stoned soul picnics, the trio (with brief instrumental appearances from Jah Wobble and Steve Winwood) sway their way through soulful dubpop grooves, Floydian clouds, shades of Townsends's Quadrophonic orchestral soundscapes, and some of Prince's old purple hues while Prayers For The Lonely takes its handle from The Doors (The American Prayer to be precise). More a case of progpsychdelia retro draped in new threads than the technotrance zeitgeist itself, but intoxicating enough to make it worth erecting a dance floor on the dark side of the moon

★★★★ Mike Davies

RENAISSANCE THE MIX

Vol. 2

(Network)

The most stylish club in Britain sold 120,000 copies when their classic favourites were assembled on one superbly packaged triple CD, and this new double CD (that opens out in the shape of a cross) is just as delicious. Renaissance is where style and enjoyment meet head on, making the tunes merge and meld in a seamless French-kissing mix. Pick your own superlatives for this, and anything else connected with Renaissance.

★★★★★ Andy Tipper

TOM RUSSELL

The Rose of the San Joaquin (Round Tower)

The Rose of the San Joaquin is the thread (phrase and location) which

irrevocably binds the contents of this album. Tom's songwriting partnership with the legendary Ian Tyson dates from a decade back. Dormant for a spell, this album marks their writing reunion, with the title song and Heartaches Are Stealin'. Tom's other collaborators include Peter The Plimsoul Case, Dave Blaster Alvin and Pat Mud Acres Alger. The eleven song set includes two covers. Chris Gaffney's tale of an LA district known as The Gardens where gang warfare passes for everyday life on the street, and the late Jim Ringer's, Tramps & Hawkers. Bearing a traditional melody, with Ringer's lyric ... a wanderer returns from the road, to find a single flower growing on the grave of his former sweetheart the rose of the San Joaquin. The latter song dates from Jim's 1977 Philo album of the same name, and closes this Tom Russell album. There's tales, of lovers splitting up, about a hand carved heart in an old oak tree, an old guitar, horse thieves and Kid Jesus the fighter. All typical Russell fare. Also the essential new hit which addition to Tom Russell, songwriter and musician, demands every couple of years.

★★★★ Arthur Wood

KIM SALMON & THE SURREALISTS

Kim Salmon & The Surrealists (Glitterhouse / Direct Distribution)

Australian trio - think Bad Seeds / Cave with more rock accessibility.

★★★★ Steve Morris

SCORN

Gyral (Scorn/Earache)

Ex-Napalm Death drummer, Mick Harris' fourth album outing is a dark and sinister affair, bringing to mind a gruesome Orb, who share some of the same richly, ambient-dub overtones, but who lack the cold, snowscape quality of this bizarre, but mesmerising recording. Wonderfully unfathomable.

★★★★ B. Lee

MARTIN SIMPSON

Special Agent (Fledg'ling)

An English answer to Leo Kottke, this reissue of Simpson's 1981 album is a fine example of his diverse fingerpicking styles ranging from bottleneck blues to bluegrass, of influences from Carthy to Robert Johnson. Very much rootsy American in the landscapes it traverses, including some notable, sensitive covers of Desperadoes Waiting For The Train, Jamaica Farewell, You Win Again and Joshua Gone Barbados. There's also four bonus cuts, later (pre 95 but no details of when) recordings that brings an extra seasoned maturity to the early brilliance with You'd Better Move On, a nifty Man Smart Woman Smarter, Jazzman and an earlier version of Broken Down Engine which he revisited on this year's Smoke & Mirrors.

★★★★ Mike Davies

TOTO

Tambu (Columbia)

Thankfully free from gardening fatalities - though rumours have it that Simon Phillips' tour-postponing bad guts came from a dodgy barbecue burger - the ninth

album from LA's finest session folk is sadly little more than another exercise in self-indulgence. The largely unsuccessful (bar Africa) hobby horse that the guys climb on after a hard day's slog on the next million seller by (take your pick from Jackson, Ritchie, Houston, Carey et al), is definitely looking a little lame. Not that there aren't some nice touches; David Paich's understated keyboards work well throughout and everything gels on tracks like Drag Him To The Roof and Time Is The Enemy, but the ballads are simply mundane and the boys are out of their depth strutting the funkier stuff. Hunger is the missing ingredient - supplied in the past by an aspiring third-party vocalist but now a role handled by guitarist Steve Lukather - and without it there seems little point to the exercise, and there's not much here they haven't done better before.

★★★ Steve Adams

VARIOUS

Fly Fresh'n'Phat (EMI)

A new talent souldance showcase that suggests that above all style and fashion dominate rather than heart and soul. All the right buttons are being pushed but ...

That said with enough marketing muscle there is much here (A Level / Michelle Nixon / C223) that might tickle record buyers and jocks alike. The sad fact remains however that original soul sounds seem to be depressingly rare; a situation that can only be remedied when a reliance on studio toys finally dies.

★★ Sam Mitchell

VARIOUS

Wigout - The Music (Columbia)

Wigout? A soon come Sony Playstation game that the cognoscenti reckon is the biz.

The Music? Rare and wonderful 12" mixes from Leftfield, Chemical Brothers, New Order Manic Street Preachers, Dreadzone, Shamen and more.

The score? High, but if the gaming energy is as high as that of the music

★★★★ Sonic Sam Mitchell

KEVIN WELCH

Life Down Here on Earth (Dead Reckoning)

Two groundbreaking solo albums for Warner/Reprise, circa the early nineties, marked this Oklahoman out as a writer who was not quite Nashville, despite the fact that it was his operational base. Now part of the consortium of musicians who created the (re-negade) Dead Reckoning label, Life Down Here on Earth picks up where Western Beat left off. The line-up of supporting players is much the same, with the addition of Fats Kaplan, Al Anderson and labelmate Tammy Rogers. This time around, Harry Stinson shares the production credit with Welch. To be honest, Welch remains musically closer to say, Jimmy LaFave and Tom Russell, than Gnarls' current spate of hat acts. A guy who lives his life to the fullest limit, as the closing, title cut confirms.

★★★★ Arthur Wood

WHIPPING BOY

Heartworm (Columbia)

Current recipients of next big thing status and infamous for the attention-grabbing antics of lead singer Ferghal McKee (self-mutilation, striptease and transvestism are among his onstage repertoire), Dublin's current favourites thankfully survive the hype and display the talent. Heartworm is the dark, grown up follow up to 1992's well-received indie debut Submarine, and finds the band in familiarly unsettling territory. McKee often talks more than sings, narrating tales of the dark side of human nature with alarming honesty and accuracy (We Don't Need Nobody Else), but his voice, rather than just the words, can also be a potent driving force, as on the climactic The Honeymoon Is Over. Musically it's a sparse, occasionally convoluted brand of indie rock - with a hint of Tindersticks strings - but equally effective at making its point with a needle or a drill.

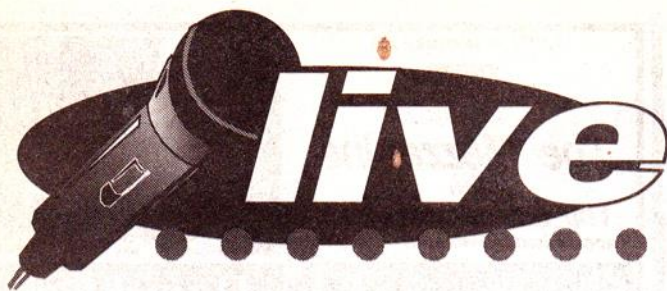
★★★★ Steve Adams

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

The Ghost of Tom Joad (Columbia)

Stripped down to basics with seven of the dozen tracks completely solo acoustic performances, this marks a return to the sparse Woody Guthrie inspired folk sound and storytelling of Nebraska. An album where Springsteen rediscovers the power of his own words. Taking its title from the character in The Grapes of Wrath, Steinbeck's harrowing novel of the 30s Depression, like Guthrie (who also wrote a song called Tom Joad) it shares a deep concern and empathy for America's dispossessed, the 90s underclass victims of cruel fate and a system that has no time for anything but winners. Raw and passionate, it's a remarkable state of the nation address from its leading blue collar songwriter. Haunted stories of ex cons drawn back into the abyss, failed robberies, poverty struck migrants running drugs to earn a few pesos feed their children, disillusioned workers cast aside by recession, men and women abandoned by god and country and abandoning god and country in response. Balboa Park, Highway 25, The New Timer, The Line, these are tales told in the chill dark around flickering camp fires, full of death, violence and desperation yet aching with compassion and never casting judgement. And, ultimately, echoing the final lines of John Ford's film, these are tales of the people that go on forever, reaching for the light at the end of the tunnel with enough hope to trust it's not an oncoming train. The people who still hold to a dream of a promised land Across The Border, the embittered Vietnam veteran from Galveston Bay who finally realises you have to end the cycle of violence. The album ends with My Best Was Never Good Enough, a caustic dismissal of the political betrayals embodied in Forest Gump's chocolate box philosophies. Tom Joad haunts America still.

★★★★★ Mike Davies



BOX EM DOMIES

Jug Of Ale, Birmingham

Domies, dominoes. Box 'em, ancient north midlands pub tradition. Near to licensing hours games must be completed - 'box 'em domies'.

Error. Domies cannot be boxed. Skipping genres like jumping beans.

Genesis, local heroes to a (wo)man. Six spots, numerous other bands or haunts, legendary faces. Entered competitions with wide eyed admiration of The Pogues, leaping frisky folk based raucosity.

Flirtation with half baked record company. Album recorded, not released. Band refuses to die, performs simply for the pleasure. Not so much the glory or the admiration as the rider. Box Em Domies, gluttony as an art form.

Evolution, one step beyond. Metamorphosis into pop gurus, every one an anthem. Band even claim to know the meaning of life.

Consumption, jigs, audiences in disbelief. Domies dance on conception. Game, set, match.

Paul Flower

HEADSWIM / FIBRESTREAM

Prince Of Wales, Cannock

After Fibrestream's set, the soundman was stripped naked before an angry throng, thrashed with an inch of his life, sacked and booted out into a chilly, deserted street where wolverines tore his sorry ass limb from limb. He very NEARLY spoiled EVERYTHING. But Fibrestream are a bit special and their gloriously menacing howl managed to tear through the murderously inept mix and pummel everyone into submission. No wonder so many people want a piece of their hard, sinewy, 'alternative' rock action - they are simply the BEST unsigned band around at the moment. Bar none. It's been some time since my last live Headswim outing and although new songs abound, nothing much else has changed - other than Clovis' sideburns. I'm tempted to say thankfully, because I've always got well off on 'Swim's swirling, psychedelic rock. The last time I wrote about them, I likened them to a harder, '90s version of, your friends and mine, an early '70s prog-rock outfit. This is fine as far as it goes, i.e., I feel sure we must consider Headswim an album-oriented band - I can't hear their songs cleaving a path through the charts. They may well stomp all over the pop pap that festers there these days, but seven minute epics with no easily-discernible tunes do not a whistleable pop classic make. Now, don't get me wrong - I care not a jot for such matters, and I suspect neither do Headswim, but there were only a handful of us die-hard, hardcore 'Swimmers in attendance tonight and it kinda begged the question, what

now? Ah, who cares? They were wonderfully dramatic and managed to fill the sports hall-like venue with some magnificently grand menace. I imagine all my fears will be laid to rest with the release of the second album.

Max

LABI SIFFRE

Old Rep, Birmingham

Reviewing a grey-haired, gay, black poet, one must be wary of tired, politically incorrect clichés. Fortunately, Siffre makes this easy, by failing to fit the majority of the stereotypes such clichés engender (though his put down of "arrogant straights", after describing agnosticism as "he only honest option" did smack of hypocrisy). Mixing songs and poetry recitals (all from memory), he challenged his audience, entertained them, and, when they least expected it, tugged unmercifully on their heart strings. Midway through his first set, he performed an acoustic guitar version of his masterpiece, (Something Inside) So Strong, an uncomfortable arrangement, seemingly offered only as a reluctant sop to audience expectations. It was a welcome surprise, then, when the same song was used as his encore, at the electric piano, in an arrangement much truer to the recorded version, with all the panache, enthusiasm and joy one could hope for.

Andy Mabbett

PAW

Foundry, Birmingham

Quite possibly the best gig I've attended this year, and everyone I spoke to who was there was of the same opinion. Paw were awesome. That's all I can say. Only kidding - I can say loads more, like: their way of (and I've talked about this time and time again) mixing hard-nosed punk rock with a gentler, country influence; their ultra-credibility (what's that, you may ask? I dunno, but you know it when you see and hear it), their approachability, their sense of humour, their stagecraft, their rapport with the audience (Paw are very much a 'people's band'), their ability to tuck away vast quantities of alcohol without it affecting their playing ability, their encouragement for people to get on-stage with 'em (one guy even gave singer Mark a piggy back whilst he warbled!), their passion, their emotion (their songs - roughly split between material from their Dragline debut and current album, Death To Traitors) and Mark's lyrics all sound like they're coming from the heart) - it all bonds a band to an audience forever. They admit they're drunk, tell us they won't play anymore unless we buy 'em shots of whiskey, 'cuz in reality, they're hookers, but they acknowledge our requests anyway. When I heard they

BLACK SABBATH

Civic Hall, Wolverhampton

A reminder of where it all began. Flawlessly executed renditions of Sabbath, and thus heavy metal standards. Based around the distinctive guitar work of founder member Tony Iommi and driven by the astounding bass of Neil Murray, the performance was tight though a little clinical ... and bloody loud.

Report and pic by Mark Hadley



were gonna be on for an hour and a half, I thought, uh-oh, even your fave bands get boring after that long. But not Paw - they're good time rock'n'rollers, and we were all having a good time. They could've gone on forever...

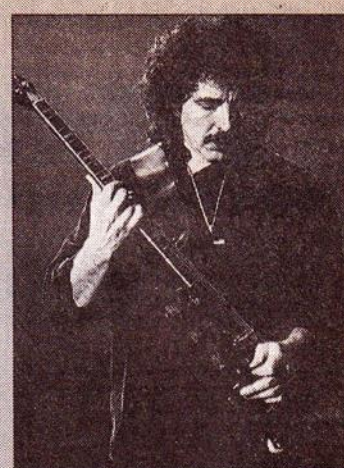
Max

THE TRACEYS

Jug Of Ale, Moseley

What a mixed crowd at the Jug tonight, from noisy teenage indie-kids to more reserved thirtysomethings. At least there was a crowd. The last time The Traceys played here they were beset by sound problems and were grateful that not too many witnessed it. Tonight's show was an entirely different affair and all those who did attend got a bargain for their £2.50. Local support bands Jigsaw and Bumper, played accomplished, well-received sets but I had to feel a little sorry for them when, only half way through The Traceys second song, the earlier offerings slipped easily from my mind to be replaced by the most powerful, hard-edged guitar pop I'd heard all year. Perhaps it was relief after the disaster of their earlier trip to Birmingham; perhaps it was just the fact that these boys know that they're good; whatever it was, The Traceys were buzzing. The fliers Scattered round the tables of the bar downstairs proclaimed The Traceys as playing 'very loud pop music'. They wouldn't need to fear a visit from the trading standards department if they changed it to 'very good pop music'. The Traceys have such potential for mass appeal that they might just follow the likes of R.E.M. and Radiohead into the mainstream. They certainly pleased tonight's indie-kids and the thirtysomethings. As I left, I heard a girl in stilettos say that the singer was quite cute; maybe even Sharon's will like the Traceys!

Jonny Emanon



BIG COUNTRY

Civic Hall, Wolverhampton

Big Country have survived media indifference through sheer determination and a loyal fan base. Material remains strong, supported by excellent musicianship and tight live performance. Perhaps a little unspectacular visually, the band were nevertheless enthusiastically received ... and rightly so.

Report and pic by Mark Hadley

THE CELTIC SWING TOUR -

ELEANOR SHANLEY / SHARON SHANNON / LUKA BLOOM

Town Hall, Birmingham

The principal thread running through Eleanor Shanley's cover material, was the subject of injustice. The main problem with the end result, was that Shanley attempted to cover too many bases, traditional as well as contemporary, without stamping them with an indelibly individual imprint. There's no doubting the quality of her voice. It is a truly awesome instrument, but like many folk voices before her, she is an interpreter and not a creator.

Supported by acoustic guitar, fiddle and [electric] upright bass, Sharon Shannon revels in the role of muse and sylph of instrumental Celtic rhythms, whether they were born and bred in the Emerald Isle, Brittany, or for that matter, the Shetland Isles. Her virtuosity is unquestioned, and she effortlessly switched from accordion to fiddle to whistle. Her infectious enthusiasm for her chosen music spilled off the stage like a tidal wave. Toe tappin' stuff.

And then Jack the Lad strode on to the stage, to the introductory strains of Sport from Peadar O'Riada's current album Amidst These Hills. Do you like me shirt? I bought it today. It's not too bright for you, is it? [It was black silk!] Can I have a round of applause? We dutifully complied, if only because of his blatant cheek. Kicking off with Gone to Pablo from his debut Warner Bros. disc Riverside, Luka Bloom is the epitome of the term folk rock. He has the heart of an Irish poet and the licks of a fifties, Memphis street punk. As a result, his compositional style is unique. The performance trick, has always lain in the ability to gain attention

with some quirk or catchphrase. Bloom's is a short and snappy, accented Tanks, delivered at the end of each song. Presenting material, mainly drawn from The Acoustic Motorbike and last year's Turf, Bloom was magnificent. Eventually he was joined by the whole company for the cover Can't Help Falling in Love, and a rousing encore of his You Couldn't Have Come at a Better Time.

Arthur Wood

LOUDON WAINWRIGHT III

Symphony Hall, Birmingham

Wainwright himself has sung of his irritation of being dubbed 'the new Bob Dylan' though he has one talent far in excess of Mr Zimmerman - humour. Within two lines of song, he can take his audience from tears to laughter and back again, even before they realise what he has done to them. He also has something Dylan has never shown - humility, changing his set-list on the spot to accommodate a request shouted from the audience, or making repeated self-deprecating cracks, like those when he kicked his glass of water across the hallowed Symphony Hall stage. Furthermore, he has the rare gift of being able to introduce a family member on stage - in this case, his daughter Martha, about whom he has sung for many years - without it seeming like a cloying betrayal of decency and taste. Both duetting with her father and during a short solo spot, Martha held her own admirably - and she don't pull such ugly faces as he does. Her father's down-to-Earth-ness is further evidenced by the way he bares his soul publicly as only an American can - at least, few English singers would be prepared to be so honest about their own hopes, fears, or failings - or pitiful audience size, given the half empty auditorium. So where were you?

Andy Mabbett

IRON MAIDEN

Civic Hall, Wolverhampton

A rare opportunity to see stadium rockers in the relatively intimate environment of The Civic. The gig was an important one for Maiden - the first gig on home territory to feature vocalist Blaze Bayley. The familiar Maiden theatrics featured throughout, the band exuding energy in one of the most memorable rock gigs of '95. Blaze, formerly of Tamworth's Wolfsbane and a formidable frontman was uncharacteristically restrained though his vocals were awesome. If allowed to display a little more of his personality, Blaze will undoubtedly preserve the band's position as the UK's premier metal band.

Mark Hadley

CHINESE STATE CIRCUS

Outdoor Tent, Centenary Square

Gasps of amazement were multiplying like rabbits at this fantastic circus extravaganza. I couldn't believe my eyes at the range of acrobatic miracles completed by these supremely talented individuals. The astonished whispers became almost deafening as we collectively turned to the person next to us saying, 'I can't believe they're even going to attempt that. It's just impossible!' Of course, the impossible was achieved with ridiculous regularity, but I still can't get over how easy those feats were made to look. It was the perfect marriage of performance and style, parading the dazzling



skills with some welcome oriental panache. Jumping frogmen leapt frenetically through rotating hoops of ever-increasing height, troupes of colourful gymnastic plate spinners followed some neck and head juggling of incredibly heavy Chinese pots. Luminous dragons danced like crazy rainbow creatures, elastic high wire acts took your breath away, and traditional characters like dogmen and pigmen linked the main acts in pleasing fashion.

I left feeling like a kid who had just opened his Christmas presents early, having seen some fabulous sights and surprises. The greatest show on earth definitely lived up to its billing.

Andy Tipper

SOUTHSIDE JOHNNY

Wulfrun Hall, Wolverhampton

No Asbury Jukes, just the skeleton providing some acoustic colouring as Southside unplugs. And whaddya know, the man best known for the brassy big band rhythm and blues blows the roof off the place with just acoustic guitar and keyboard behind him. Hell even the bass player and drummer were a minimal presence.

See, the key here is Southside, not the arrangements - and not the famous pal and geographical connections - he's blessed with a hoary old bluesers voice and, perhaps more importantly, a huge love of music. Oh, and the ability to make anything his own. Thus the opening Dean Martin song and the Beatles' covers that peppered his set all became southside soul. Albums may be few and far between these days and live appearances in these parts more so but missing either event is folly.

Steve Morris

HUMAN LEAGUE

Civic Hall, Wolverhampton

They may have made some of the best pop singles ever - you wanna argue, just listen to Don't You Want Me and Human before you try, pal - but the Human League retain a certain comforting amateurism that transcends the hi-tech all white staging the minute they sing. The girls you see are eternal disco dolls; perfectly capable of holding a tune but perhaps more concerned with their make up. And Philip, actually the possessor of a fine voice (see Human) flirts with the notes as though they're just a mere trifle in the major concern of actually being a pop singer. And yet the wall to wall hits show was simply wonderful; a feast of tuck shop confectionery.

But someone had obviously forgotten to tell the nostalgia buffs in the audience that middle aged guards are to be dropped on such occasions and that League excited, decade old memories of post disco fumbling should inspire carefree dancing not sheepish seat shuffling.

Phil and co. might be Kraftwerk's love children but playing to showroom dummies is not, I guess their mission. They're back this month so if you got a ticket, let your hair down 'cause with a real audience it'll be one doozie of a night.

Steve Morris

C.V.C.P. in association with

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Tickets available in advance from
The Connaught Hotel, Tettenhall Rd, Wolves. 01902 24433
Mike Lloyd Megastore, Queen Sq. 01902 27567
The Civic & Wulfrun Halls box office, North St. 01902 312030
Birmingham Odeon, New St., B-ham., 0121 643 6101
Any remaining tickets available on the door

Information Hotline 01902 23837



David Gray

on
Tuesday 12 December
TICKETS £3.50 & £3 (concs)

Dave has previously sold out three shows at the acoustic club / Mezzanine and returns to us for his only UK show, outside of London, prior to the release of his third album. His previous two albums 'A Century Ends' and 'Flesh' received ecstatic reviews on both sides of the Atlantic which in turn led to a full US support tour with Radiohead. Although often compared to the likes of Morrison and Dylan, it needs stating that the overwhelming gifts of songwriting that this man possesses are the main reason you should consider being at this show, like your next breath of air!

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