



STEVE HOWE



***The Guitar Legend
Talks To Us Exclusively!***

plus  news  views  gossip
 albums  videos  books
and more

NUMBER 153 / SEPTEMBER '93

DAN REED NETWORK



THE MAX MIX

GRISMAN, PEDERSEN,
GILL, BUCHANAN,
GORDY

Here Today
(Rounder-Topic)

A decade back, five musicians formed Here Today simply to make a career in playing honest bluegrass; making albums and taking it on the road.

It all went wrong. Kinda! Vince Gill became a big enough country star that he could afford to turn down a guitar picking job in Dire Straits; Herb Pedersen joined ex Byrd /Burrito Brother Chris Hillman in the Desert Rose Band, a huge outfit in the US, Emory Gordy became a production executive for MCA whilst Jimmy Buchanan and David Grisman carved out legend status in the bluegrass world.

And now the band's only album is reissued and what a gem it is. The songs are traditionally sourced i.e. they're country classics from the fifties; the vocal harmonies are perfect and the instrumental work is jaw slackening. Taken as a whole it's an exhilarating, stimulating listen.

Even if country is an anathema to you, you owe it to yourself to hear this, the skills and talent on display break every musical barrier. If you claim to love music, you'll love this. Steve Morris

BARRENCE WHITFIELD & TOM RUSSELL

Hillbilly Voodoo
(Round Tower)

Following the demise of the decade old Tom Russell Band, this recording, made with R&B wildman Barrence Whitfield, is one part of a plethora of special projects which respected roots rocker Russell is set to embark upon. And that's apart from conventional solo albums, where his intellectual prowess as a songsmith truly takes flight.

Recorded at Hank Bones Studio in Brooklyn, Russell, who also produced this get down dozen, manages to avoid the obvious trap of over indulging with his own compositions. Instead, the duo paint on a wider canvas, which ranges from Larry Green's Long Black Train with loads of twangy country guitar licks, through a languid rendition of Lucinda Williams' I Just Want To See You So Bad, to Lightning Hopkins on speed with Ice Water and gets real refined with the tribute ballad about Edith Piaf, Chocolate Cigarettes.

There's a rich vane of humour permeating this album. It bubbles to the surface on Russell's culinary cut The Cuban Sandwich and the double entendre of You Can't Get That Stuff No More.

There's everything to recommend this aural marriage of R&B and country/folk. Hell, the guys even delve into a little reggae, with Tom's early eighties



MEGASTORE 98 CORPORATION STREET, BIRMINGHAM

RECORDED delivery

MEATLOAF

Bat Out Of Hell II- Back Into Hell (Virgin)

In the film world, when you need to revive a dead career, you do a sequel to your most successful movie. It seems now the same holds true of rock'n'roll. Re-teamed with Steinman and featuring the same overblown epic mock opera epic production approach, Mr Loaf certainly seems to have regained the vocal form sadly absent on the albums prior to his lapse into oblivion. This is Wagnerian rock of the same proportions of the original and with the same themes of boys, girls and tragic romance. It is a concept album, however, is clearly let's make a lot of quick money. You see it's touted as Bat II, but three of the songs originally appeared on Steinman's own solo album,



Bad For Good. Which of course he said was a sequel to Bat Out Of Hell. So, be prepared for déjà vu as you find yourself listening to Rock'n'Roll Dreams Come Through, Out Of The Frying Pan (and Into The Fire) and Lost Boys And Golden Girls. Then there's Good Girls Go To Heaven, Bad Girls Go Everywhere which turned up on Steinman's Pandora's Box concept album. And I'd Do Anything For Love (But I Won't Do That) which he produced for Bonnie Tyler. New inspiration it's not.

And while Meat inevitably does a thunderous job on them, one has to question the advisability of him attempting to top Steinman's version of his glorious monologue Love And Death And An American Guitar (which isn't even credited on the titles).

Of the new material Life Is A Lemon, It Just Won't Quit, Back Into Hell and Wasted Youth are fillers, but at least Objects In The Rear View Mirror May Appear Closer Than They Are, which seems in part to be about child abuse and related to the Lost Boys track (and was probably originally intended for Bad For Good), is destined to rank as a classic. It'll sell loads, but it's unlikely to prove to have the same sort of staying power as the original. Mike Davies

standard, The Definition Of A Fool. Go on, discover that country soul is still alive and thriving, despite all that other (crap). After all, to paraphrase track ten, What Is The Color Of The Soul Of A Man. Arthur Wood

THE GIN BLOSSOMS

New Miserable Experience (Fontana)

From Tempe, Arizona the GB's have already had their own indie album and an American A&M EP, but this, which has already created a buzz round the city's indie stores, is the one that's going to make everyone sit up and take notice. The guitars come ringing loud and singer Wilson has one of those achingly bruised voices, echoing American classics as The Byrds and REM, along with neglected but no lesser luminaries The Rainmakers. It's boy/girl stories of messed up losers, big landscape, country slung rock with powered up melodic hooks and memory imprinting songs like Allison Road, Hey Jealousy and the tears'n'beer nugget, Cheatin'. The next great American guitar band, anyone? Mike Davies

KEO

Elements (Voice Records)

A six track CD debut from the local trio, that despite production short comings should win them friends. There's an almost Police-like feel to their approach to music making; well structured songs that are tidily arranged but the production lacks the beefy boot that would enhance their prospects. Steve Morris

ANI DIFRANCO

Puddle Dive (Haven)

Second album on Boo Hewardine's label and a new addition to the burgeoning list of female singer-songwriters with a political purpose, righteous anger, and lazy comparisons to Vega and Chapman. In fact, if anyone, it's a touch of Victoria Williams, especially lyrically, that hangs around Difranco's shoulders. The voice skits along as jumpily and as joyfully as the acoustic guitar (and she's a nimble picker), tumbling through her songs with a sense of humour lacking in most of her contemporaries, living, as she says in the jovial Egos Like Hairdos (a tale about men always wanting bigger billing), "in a world full of hope not a world full of hype". Essentially dusty blues tunes, her songs are defiant, woman-assertive takes on a world generally regarded as a male province, light-hearted rather than intense and perhaps at its best on Blood In The Boardroom, where she describes starting her period in a meeting and shocking the sensibilities of the suits, extending the theme to talk about woman as life bringer and man as the harbinger of death. Worth discovering. Mike Davies

THE UNDERTONES

The Best Of The Undertones (Castle)

If The Undertones had only ever released Teenage Kicks and then quit, as apparently was their original intention, they would still be the stuff of legend, so perfect was their encapsulation of adolescent

abandonment. In the event they released a handful of near-perfect singles and a set of flawed but worthwhile albums. This 25 track career snapshot glitters with such gems as the great Teenage Kicks, My Perfect Cousin, Mars Bars and The Way Girls Talk, as well as the more polished, yet often overlooked subtlety of later works, such as Julie Ocean. Whilst welcoming The Undertones reissue programme gleefully, it is imperative that the temptation to reform the band is resisted. An outpouring of youthful exuberance should not be replicated by jaded thirtysomethings. Steve Morris

THE CACTUS BROTHERS

The Cactus Brothers (Liberty)

Heavy bluegrass anyone? Yup these country boys have added electricity, not to mention humour and skill, to the form to create, hell, Cactus music, I guess.

For sure, they're a cut or two removed from the pretty boys that dominate CMT with their polyester pleas to lost love. May not be a groundbreaker but it's a barrel of fun. Steve Morris

TERRY CLARKE, MICHAEL MESSER & JESSE TAYLOR

rhythm Oil - The Sessions (Minidoka)

First, was the book with the working title, Rhythm Oil. American music historian, Stanley Booth was penning that one. Soon after that projected title appeared in an American newspaper article,

came Rhythm Oil the song. It was introduced to the planet by it's creator, Terry Clarke, during a support set (to Messrs Gilmore, Hancock and Taylor) at our very own Breedon Bar, here in Birmingham. The date, Tuesday May 1st, 1990. I know, because I was..... The echo from the closing chords had hardly died away, as Taylor offered to play on the studio version of the song, rhythm Oil the recording concept, was born on that early summer evening. Recorded over a matter of days during the Spring of the following year, rhythm Oil the album, was in the can. What ensued could only be described as, rhythm Oil the delay. Y'all know how cash flow works [or at least doesn't] these days. Particularly in the case of small, independent record labels. By the way, Stanley Booth's book was published in the UK last year.

Originally slated for a September 1992 release, rhythm Oil - the sessions, is finally on your record store shelves. The ten tracks close out a tad under sixty minutes, with the title and opening cut, being a five and a half minute, rip roaring, tour de force which cross references almost everything associated with oil. Along the way, there's even a few suggestions for rather exotic [or is that esoteric] applications of this universally slippery product!

Clarke penned five of the tracks, co-wrote another trio with Michael Messer, while the decade is completed by a Mississippi Fred McDowell tune and McKinley Morganfield's I Can't Be Satisfied. If Call Up A Hurricane was Clarke's nod at country music, then The Shelly River was definitely a folk set which found inspiration in his Celtic ancestry. With rhythm Oil he's one of the boys in band, getting down, for some gritty blues and good old rock n' roll.

Check out the CD booklet for Johnny Cash's astute liner notes (and thereby hangs a tale with enough grit on it, for a novel), some rather amusing details relating to the instrumentation on each cut, and a damned fine black/white liner from the lens of Alan Messer. Aided and abetted by a few bits of computer generated wizardry, that is.

Favourite cuts here, include the gentle and sensuous Purple Dress, the rockabilly rhythms of Rock Me Rosalie and the Irish influences/references in the lyric of Bodhrans and Bones. Finally, let's not forget the finger pickin' good contributions, made by those blues dipped soul mates, Michael Messer and Jesse "Guitar" Taylor. Arthur Wood

(And typically!!) he never explained why Rhythm Oil became rhythm Oil. Ed.)