

After a good few years, together with regular releases, JUICE NEWTON finally made it into the British charts a couple of months back with "Angel Of The Morning". ARTHUR WOOD introduces the singer to CMP readers.



The Lady is a Virginian

ONE SUNDAY in April, 1977, a guy who has subsequently become a good friend of mine played me an untitled tape he had been sent which featured a lady singing a song called "Just Remember Who Your Friends are".

"Have you ever heard anything so good? You don't happen to know who she is?" he asked.

"Sure," I said. "That's Juice Newton."

Of course, as luck would have it I had just purchased the 1975 debut album by Juice Newton and Silver Spur from a now defunct Manchester country emporium owned by George Davenport. (By the way, does anyone out there know where George is these days?)

Now with her sixth album recently released in the States, Juice has made it right into the top regions of the charts with her version of Chip Taylor's

"Angel Of The Morning", her first taste of major commercial success, but something which in my estimation is long overdue.

Without entering into a long diatribe about the state of the majority of the radio stations and musical press in Britain, it seems criminal to me that there are a large number of ladies who have produced such sterling work in a similar vein to Juice and yet have not been heard of by the majority of the public. Ladies such as Bonnie Koloc, Patti Dahlstrom, Karla Bonoff, Kim Carnes, Leah Kunkel and Mary McCaslin are a few that spring to mind.

Anyway, enough of the soap box bit, let's find out a bit more about Juice Newton.

Born in Virginia, on America's eastern seaboard, Juice performed traditional folk music in acoustic duos and trios

during her high school days before moving to Los Gatos in mid-California to attend college. While at college she started performing in various styles, such was the state of flux of music in California in the late sixties. Juice has said of those days that "the music on the West Coast was more open and creative. My accent made everyone think I was singing country, but my influences at that time stretched more into rock and country rock".

Silver Spur, the road band which Juice fronts, originally consisted of two guys—Otha Young, who sang mainly background vocals and played lead guitar, and Tom Kealey, who also sang back-up and played electric bass.

Young was born in Texas but moved to Northern California while he was still young. While at College in St. Louis (Southern California) he began to play guitar and at night he would tune in to San Francisco FM stations, where he picked up on the new style of rock which that city produced in the late sixties. After leaving college he moved to Los Gatos, where he met up with Juice and in the early seventies they began singing together in coffee bars and the like.

Tom Kealey was born in San Jose, California, but was raised in the little town of Lakeport on Clear Lake in the northern part of the State. As a youngster he played trumpet and later majored in music for two years at Santa Rosa Junior College. His college weekends were spent playing in jazz-orientated trios for a couple of years, but in the late sixties he took up the electric bass "to be more contemporary", and moved back to San Jose and began playing full time in a variety of bands. He met Juice and Otha in the Grog and Sirloin Pub in '72, and Silver Spur was formed. In late '73 they moved their base to Los Angeles and began to add a drummer on occasion. At first they performed all kinds of tunes, including various obscure Willie Nelson and Dylan songs, but by '75 their act consisted of almost entirely self-penned material.

By 1975 they were also beginning to attract record company interest, eventually signing with RCA. Their first album, "Juice Newton & Silver Spur", was recorded at Wally Heider's studio in Hollywood in June of that year under the auspices of Bones Howe. Of the ten songs on the album, eight are Young compositions, the remaining two being by Kealey. The album also features guest appearances by Rusty Young on pedal steel and both Hal Blaine and Jeff Porcaro on drums.

The songs are mostly based on the male/female theme with outstanding cuts being "Just Remember Who Your Friends Are" and "The Sweetest Thing" together with "Catwillow River". Otha Young took the vocals on the up-tempo "Roll On Truckers", probably the weakest song on an otherwise excellent debut.

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JUICE NEWTON

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The following year saw the release of the second album, "After The Dust Settles", again recorded with Bones Howe, but with Alan Abrahams as producer. By this time the band had added two regular back-up players in Micky McGee on drums and Robbie Gilman on piano/synthesizer and both were featured on the album. Standout tracks were "Slip Away" and "If I Ever" and overall the album had a heavier feel to it. Both albums received FM/AM airplay, especially with songs like "Won't You Stay (Just A Little Bit Longer)" and "If I Ever". During this period the band also showed their versatility by touring across the country and opening for acts that ranged from Loggins and Messina to Hot Tuna. Having played with the latter at the Electric Ballroom in Atlanta they were invited back as headliners. Public conceptions of the band were not strictly in line with how the band themselves saw their music. "For various reasons people thought we were a country band at first, but we've never been a straight country act. All sorts of influences are reflected in our music. When we toured through Nashville everyone thought we were pop. We did take a pedal steel on the road with us for the first tours, but we've never used one on stage since."

Because of poor sales the band were cast aside by RCA, but were soon signed up by Capitol, with whom Juice has stayed to date.

Their third album (and last as Juice Newton and Silver Spur), "Come To Me", was the first to secure a British release, in late 1977. Elliot Mayer who produced the album became interested in the group after hearing a demo they had made, watched them live and immediately offered his services.

For this album the group still retained two back-up players, although they brought in a new drummer, Buzzy Buchanan.

As before, there were ten tracks on the album, two being Bob Seger numbers (Silver Spur meets Silver Bullet): the highly sexual "Fire Down Below" and the never before recorded "Good Luck Baby Jane", Seger's answer to Helen Reddy's "I'm A Woman" emancipation number. Seger had heard a lot of good things about the band and when he heard that they intended to record "Fire", he quickly made a piano demo of "Baby Jane" and offered Juice the song. Apparently the song had been written some years previously but Seger had never found anyone he thought could do the song justice until he heard Juice. She does!

The remaining numbers are written by the band and range from the powerful rocking "Low Down And Lonesome" to the slow, emotional title track and "Crying Too Long"; the latter being the ace in the pack as she milks the song for everything it's got.

According to Juice, at the time of release the album "has much more depth and sophistication than the first two. This is the first album to really capture

our sound. We've learned a great deal as we went along and now we are beginning to present our music right".

The release of the fourth album, "We'll Keep A Secret", in late 1978, saw Juice in a solo capacity with only Otha Young (who co-produced the album with Juice and John Palladino) remaining from the original band, apart from a couple of guest appearances by Buchanan and McGee.

The country rock influence of the first three albums had been pushed into the background and songs like the old Ike and Tina Turner gem "A Love Like Yours" and the Bruce Channel hit "Hey Baby" are featured. This album was the weakest she had recorded yet, and there were too many tracks where the raw power of her vocals seemed uncontrolled. The only track which harked back to the sound of the old group was "If There Could Be" which closes the album, and for me was the outstanding track.

At the time it seemed a pity that with the demise of the original Silver Spur, the Newton/Gilman and Young/Gilman songwriting partnerships were broken up, as they had written some excellent songs on the previous two albums. During 1978 Ed Leffler, Juice's manager, recommended her to record a version of Bonnie Tyler's British hit "It's A Heartache", probably in an attempt to widen her market, but Tyler's version scored Stateside also, his track has not to date appeared on any of Juice's albums.

If ever ten songs were released that repaired the disappointment felt over the weakness of a previous album, then the release of "Take Heart" in the autumn of 1979 saw Juice back on the rails again.

The album, produced solely by Otha Young this time, was more varied, with ballads and up-tempo numbers in a well balanced programme. There was also less dependence on the songwriting talents of Otha Young, and only one

track, "You Fill My Life", (a definite classic) was featured, compared with five songs, four of them fairly pedestrian, on the previous album. Juice, like many contemporary singers, such as Judy Collins and Linda Ronstadt before her, began to look further afield for songs, and on "Take Heart" features songwriters as varied as Johnny Burnette, Jonathon Edwards, Tom Waits and Britain's own 'Midas Twins', Chinn and Chapman. I don't believe that there was a weak track on the album: there were certainly many gems, but the singles that were released never scored on the national charts. For some reason, best known to Capitol, "Take Heart" was never released in Britain.

And so we come to February of this year and the release of the sixth album, simply entitled "Juice". She has retained the variation in songwriters and throughout the ten tracks nine writers are featured, the catch this time being that most have country links of some sort, however tenuous.

A new producer, Richard Landis, is used, although Otha is credited with being associate producer. The liner notes also credit a number of 'heavy' sidemen, mainly from the contemporary LA scene, but best of all is the album, which is a classic and by far the best one she has released so far. Without delving too far into a track-by-track resumé, let it be sufficient to say that "Angel Of The Morning" thoroughly deserves to be a hit. "Queen Of Hearts", a single for Dave Edmunds last year, is also included and could make an excellent follow-up single. Incidentally, the song was written by ex-Emmylou Harris steelie Hank DeVito. The old Everly Brothers hit "All I Have To Do Is Dream", written by Boudleaux and Felice Bryant, is given a competent airing. Otha's song this time, "The Sweetest Thing", is an excellent closer, and the whole album bodes well for a successful and deserved upturn in Juice's career.

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