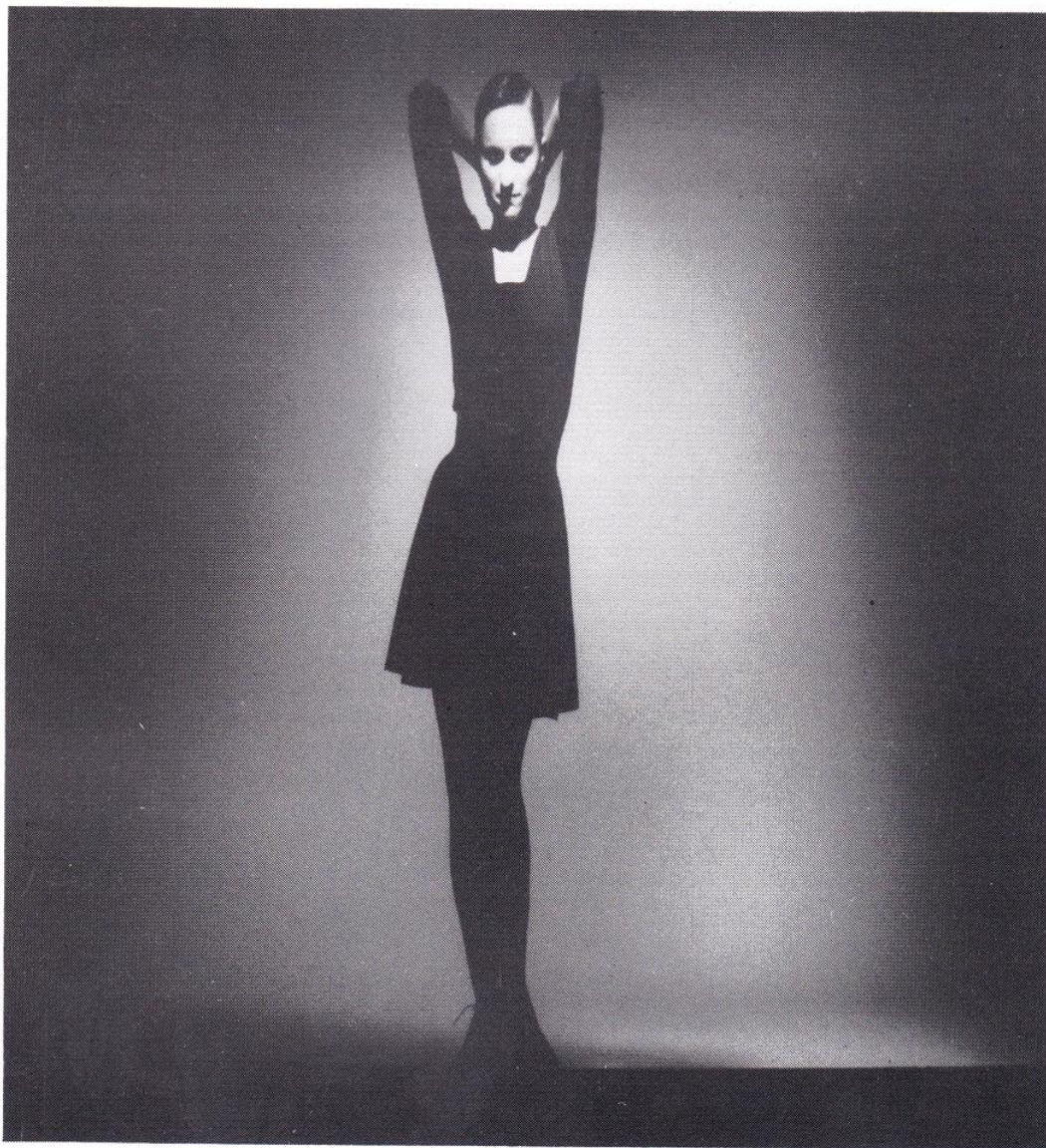


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AUGUST '93

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TERRY ALLEN

Pedal Steal / Rollback
(Fate Records / Topic)

Another broadside from the intriguing if willfully obscure Texan writer pairs up two pieces originally commissioned as ballet scores. 'Pedal Steal' is a long piece that sounds like a Garrison Keillor musical might, whilst 'Rollback' is song based and per chance more accessible.

If you enjoy David Byrne's word play or his 'True Stories' movie (in which Allen was involved) you'll go for this.

Steve Morris

MICHAEL NYMAN

The Piano (Virgin Venture)
Time Will Pronounce (Argo)

Displaying a tendency toward workaholic, yet with no deterioration in quality, Nyman offers two new albums, both seeing him breaking away from past associations - 'The Piano' is a film soundtrack, but composed for Jane Campion instead of Peter Greenaway, while 'Time' collects four 1992 commissions for new partners - string quintet and trio, harpsichord and even brass ensemble. 'The Piano' is probably the best starting point for beginners, with Nyman playing the title instrument. On the other hand, some of the vocal work on the Argo release, fine though it is, is an acquired taste. Nyman doesn't exactly play rock & roll (these days at least!), but does appeal to far more than the traditional Radio Three audience.

Andy Mabbett

BETTY ELDERS

Peaceful Existence
(Whistling Pig Records - Import)

A chain of personally unhappy events, mainly concerned with the passing of members of her family, caused Elders to put her performing career on hold for over twelve months, commencing mid 1991. From her subsequent struggles with body, mind and soul, Elders has fashioned the eleven compositions featured here.

The fulcrum of Elder's 'Peaceful Existence' lies in tracks four and five. 'The Quiet', as the title suggests, represents that period which follows the storm. Once a sense of tranquility has settled like a veil upon the survivor, the 'Falling Rain' follows naturally. Never before, have the elemental images of wind and rain, running rivers and far-away trains, been used to such achingly stunning effect. Simplicity encounters towering emotion. 'Falling Rain' represents rebirth, a second baptism, the cataclysmic catharsis. On the final line, as Elders reaches for that top note, you can sense her combatting those devils all over again. Elders explores new love in 'Edge Of The Universe' while appreciating that this significant human emotion is but a microcosm when compared to all of creation. Realism subjectively permeates this album. While life is given a bleak perspective in the opening cuts, there's an element of optimism contained in the songs which succeed 'Falling Rain'. They're the reflections of a survivor, rather than the venomous outpourings of a victim. For highs, lows and those innumerable levels between, repeated prescription of this album is one of the finest medications you could indulge in currently.

Available from Whistling Pig Music, P.O. Box 43477, Austin, Texas 78745-0477.

Arthur Wood



Wraith

WRAITH

Riot (Warhammer)

Wraith, it seems, have come of age. Where their debut album 'Danger Calling' had its moments but failed to elevate the band, 'Riot' takes the same foundations but fills them with solid gold. The idea is to build a skyscraper. The main difference with Wraith '93 is that the guitars of Gregg Russell and Andy Gamble are finally as macho and muscular as their owners' physical constitutions. Instead of some insipid attempt at Maiden mimicry, Wraith go at it full pelt with a street-cool aggression and a Panther approved heaviness. Mark Bruce must take some of the credit for bringing this gutsy quintet's firepower into a new light. Jed Clarc has improved as a singer, and the band's sense of harmony is rarely at odds with the thrust of their songwriting. From 'Russian Roulette' onwards, Wraith take no prisoners. Only 'Pride Of Youth', a way-too-ambitious attempt at an epic, fails to convince the listener. The likes of 'Cursed' and the slightly less brutal 'Human Zoo' leave one in no doubt that this is a very much improved band on the one that produced 'Danger Calling' just a year ago. Wraith's second album ends in the same way as it begins, axes and drums blazing. Only the sweet smell of promise remains in the memory longer.

Steve Beebe

ACME SPRING COMPANY

Springland (Fracture Zone)

Second (what was the first?) release from the Wolverhampton label is an oddity indeed. It starts with a clattering, sort of Russian Yiddish Orthodox dance tune, slips into what could be a Scandinavian bierkeller drinking number and proceeds through sonic punk, mutant Latin, thumping Euro-industrial metal riffs, farfisa sleaze, electro race, nurseryland Richmanisms and a Depeche shuffle and drone, delivered with hollow, tunnelled vocals and a kaleidoscope of bizarre lyrical creations. A little overbearing at times, but never what you might call boring.

Mike Davies

VARIOUS

The Great British Psychedelic Trip
(See For Miles)

Great British summer fun from the period 0f 1965 - 1970, with the strangeness of 'We Are The Moles' and Love Sculptures 'Sabre Dance' mixed with the charm of Simon Dupree's 'Kites' and Tomorrow's 'Strawberry Fields'. There's a local interest too thanks to the Idle race ('Skeleton and the Roundabout' and 'Worm Red Carpet') and Locomotive with 'Mr. Armageddon'. And much more. But it's all nostalgic brilliance!

Kevin Wilson

BILL MORRISSEY & GREG BROWN

Fiend Of Mine (Philo/Topic Records)

Two of America's premier folk songwriters agree on a recording studio assignment - the master plan - an acoustic pickin'n'singin' session of their favourite tunes by other composers. Well almost, as Brown's personal commentary about his pal 'Fishing With Bill', makes the final track.

For flavour, the boys run the gamut of blues, country and rock n' roll, while as expected, a folk undercurrent dominates the proceedings. Casting right into midstream, Ferron's 'Ain't Life A Brook' opens this expedition and is followed by the Willie Dixon standard 'Little Red Rooster'. The Stones connection bobs to the surface later, with 'You Can't Always Get What You Want', while the guys net some good ol' rock n' roll with Chuck Berry's 'Memphis, Tennessee'. If you've ever heard Guy Clark's 'New Cut Road', then you'll wonder where the traditional 'Duncan And Brady' came from [!], while all you Lonnie Donegan and Kingston Trio fans out there, will warm to the original 'Tom Dula'. Before signing off with 'Baby, Please Don't Go', the cowboy portion of the show consists of Ian Tyson's 'Summer Wages', segued with Hank Senior's 'I'll Never Get Out Of This World Alive'. And ain't that the truth.....

Arthur Wood

VIGILANTES OF LOVE

Jugular (Fingerprint - Import)

Let me regale you with the tale of how I stumbled across the Vigilantes Of Love. Divesting their New Age image, the Windham Hill label's foray into the singer/songwriter field has been spearheaded by a compilation series titled 'Legacy'. The latest disc included the Mark Heard tune 'Look Over Your Shoulder'. Struck me that the guy was a damned fine writer. Thankfully the accompanying CD booklets are detailed to the degree of obsession, in terms of artist biographies and contact addresses. Mark, sadly recently deceased, was also a record producer and amongst his production credits were ... the Vigilantes Of Love.

Sporting the title 'Jugular', this VOL recording dates from 1990. Subsequent Vigilantes releases included 'Driving The Nails' and 'Killing Floor'. The latter set being a co-production by the band, Mark and some local muso called Peter Buck.

So we're talking Athens. The one in Georgia. Recently reissued by Fingerprint, Mallonee describes the VOL, mostly self produced, debut album as 'Real stripped down and immediate. Folkier than 'Killing Floor'. The Brum Beat readership knows to their cost, where my interest lies. These guys lean heavily toward the *get it done in one style* of recording.

What pierces the fog like a beacon of laser light is Mallonee's songwriting, aided and abetted by Mark Hall's accordion and Jonny Evans' harmonica. If your flavour to savour, is a slice of life ala early Dylan and The Violent Femmes, with more than a dash of Uncle Tupelo's most recent recording, then go get some \$s and mail 'em to FINGERPRINT RECORDS, P.O. BOX 197, Merrimac, MA 01860-0197, U.S.A.

Arthur Wood

THE HAMSTERS

The Hamsters (Rockin' Rodent)

Recorded in Netherton, in the heart of The Black Country, this fourteen track set amply conveys the versatility of the outfit possibly best known for the Hendrix impersonating abilities of guitarist Slim.

At last he's able to show his command of the instrument on record with a fine cross section of material from subtle to knife edged.

It's unlikely that the album will turn the band big time (I doubt that such a move is on their agenda, anyhow), but it should alert many to the fine quality music that is available in their local clubs.

Steve Morris



The Hamsters

MAURA O'CONNELL

Blue Is The Colour Of Hope
(Warner Bros - Import)

Last month I raved about Mary Black's fine new album 'The Holy Ground'. Well, O'Connell comes from the same background as Black, the Irish folk vocal group. And she could easily challenge Black's current supremacy if Warners would release her albums here. This third set is her strongest yet with songs drawn from Mary Chapin Carpenter, Paul Brady, Paul Carrack/John Wesley Harding and Tom Kimmel as well as the man who provides for Black too, Noel Brazill.

There are two fundamental differences between the ladies; O'Connell's records are Nashville products and as such are staffed by some of the finest and most sympathetic sidemen around. This gives them looser feel than Black's and provides a better setting for Maura's slightly warmer vocal style.

'Blue Is The Colour ...' is worth searching out, it's a thoroughly heartening record that, if you open your ears and drop your hip guard, will warm your very existence.

Steve Morris

JIMMY WEBB

Archive (WEA)

Possibly because his name became entangled with the (perceived) MOR balladry of Glenn Campbell, the supper clubber of Fifth Dimension and the maligned epic of Richard Harris' 'MacArthur Park', Jimmy Webb never really became considered as the fine singer-songwriter he surely is.

Well, this twenty tracker should help redress any such notions, simply listen to the sweet ache of 'The Moon's A Harsh Mistress', the newly revealed perspective of his own version of 'Galveston' and the sweetly soaring sweep of 'Land's End/Asleep On The Wind'. That's case proved and time for some new recordings.

Steve Morris

THE JAMES GANG

The True Story Of The James Gang ... Plus (See For Miles)

The early seventies saw the three piece rock band peak thanks to the sweaty armpit white noise that was Grand Funk Railroad and the harmonic hard rock of Cream. The James Gang straddled that divide and hit rock highs with 'Funk #49', 'Woman' and 'Run Run Run'. Joe Walsh cut his musical teeth in TJG before he made The Eagles even better and this collection is a tribute to him and the whole Gang philosophy of fun and musical values.

Kevin Wilson