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No.17

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ROGER McGUINN

Treasures From The Folk Den Appleseed
APR CD 1046

The terms 'full circle' and 'déjà vu' definitely come to mind when listening to this collection. Prior to his rock star chart topping days with the Byrds, McGuinn served an apprenticeship in the folk clubs of his native Chicago and many points beyond, accompanying artists such as Judy Collins, Chad Mitchell and The Limelighters.

The eighteen songs (plus hidden track) on this disc, are mainly drawn from traditional sources. The initial phase of McGuinn's apprenticeship preceded the early sixties folk explosion which witnessed the emergence of Bob Dylan, and in his wake, a virtual legion of contemporary folk songwriters. While embracing Internet technology partway through the final decade of last century, McGuinn observed that, these days, traditional folk songs were rarely featured on any of the broadcasting mediums. McGuinn began posting his own – mainly, voice and guitar – recordings of traditional songs on a website called, The Folk Den. While firmly embracing the concept of déjà vu, this recording takes the latter concept one step further – into the commercially distributed domain, and features McGuinn performing with a number of folk legends.

In the 1930s, Alan and John Lomax purchased a cumbersome Ediphone recording machine and made their way through the back roads of the American south collecting traditional songs. Seven decades later, using an Apple G4 Cube computer, the Cool Edit Pro software package and a single Stedman microphone, McGuinn traversed the Eastern seaboard of the States visiting Tommy Makem, Pete Seeger, Jean Ritchie, Odetta, Judy Collins and Josh White Jr. and digitally recording renditions of traditional songs, performing in the relaxed setting of their home. While on tour, Joan Baez and Eliza Carthy added their contributions in Roger's adopted hometown of Orlando, Florida. Roger's guitar teacher at Chicago's Old Town School of Folk Music, Frank Hamilton, performs *The Brazos River* with his wife Mary. Other featured songs include *Whiskey In The Jar*, *Nottamun Town*, *Finnegan's Wake* and *John Riley*.

Appleseed Recordings, P.O. Box 2593,
West Chester, Pennsylvania 19380, U.S.A. and
in the UK via Koch Distribution.

Arthur Wood

VARIOUS ARTISTS

The Songs Of Bob Dylan Vol. 2 – May Your Song Always Be Sung Again BMG/Ariola
74321 84693 2

A Nod To Bob Red House RHR CD 154

For nineteen tracks, Volume 2 of *May Your Song Always Be Sung Again* is a curious smorgasbord of musical styles linked, solely, by the authorship of Bob Dylan. The bonus twentieth track, a previously unreleased Harry Belafonte rendition of the traditional *Midnight Special*, is deemed exclusive since this early sixties cut features the harmonica playing of a twenty-year old from Hibbing, Minnesota. It is also the oldest recording on a collection that runs the gamut from soul, country and rock through to that curious musical hybrid, spaghetti funk (aka hip hop, pasta style), and on to performances by artists such as Odetta and Melanie. On a number of alternative musical outer limits, you have Elvis Presley's rendition of *Tomorrow Is A Long Time*, Gary Burton's instrumental jazz improvisations on *I Want You*, and the flamenco fired rhythms that Kiko Veneno injects into *Memphis Blue Again*. Volume 1 was released three years ago, with Volume 3 promised ere long. Apart from the curiosity value, it does pose the question – why did they bother?

While the latter recording uses existing tracks, the concept behind *A Nod To Bob* is that artists on the Red House roster were asked to choose and record their favourite song performed by the bard. Based in Dylan's home state of Minnesota, Red House Records is a fifteen-year old bastion for, mainly, North American born songwriters of a folk/ roots music persuasion. The Red House management approached the task with almost religious zeal, all the way from the fourteen exclusive recordings to the richly annotated, twenty-page liner booklet.

My earlier statement "record their favourite song performed by the bard" includes the option to record a song not penned by Dylan, which is precisely the route Minneapolis based local boys, Spider John Koerner and Dave Ray took. Before Dylan relocated to New York and (found) world renown, he worked in a duo with Koerner.

Koerner and Ray's choice, the traditional *Delia*, appeared on Dylan's 1993 collection *World Gone Wrong*. Guy Davies is the only performer, on this fourteen-song disc, who chooses a song not written by Dylan during the sixties. His soulful interpretation of *Sweetheart Like You* being drawn from *Infidels*.

French Canadian quartet Hart Rouge translate *With God On Our Side* into *Dieu A' Nos Cotes*, while Tom Landa & The Playboys kick off their contribution with some flourishes of flamenco guitar. Before you know it, they have converted *All Along The Watchtower* into a stirring Celtic anthem. It was almost guaranteed that humour would underpin the selection by Suzzy and Maggie Roche. In truth, they transform *Clothes Line Saga* into a soap opera of epic proportions. Europe, or at least our own little island, is represented by Martin Simpson, who contributes a touching version of the timeless *Boots Of Spanish Leather*. Simpson's finger picked guitar work on this track is a revelation.

The profusion of sixties material almost begs the question, "Didn't Bob write great songs in subsequent decades?" Maybe the answer lies in the fact that the majority of Red House performers are of mature years, some more so than others. It was probably the music they were most familiar with, in their tender, formative years.

The Red House compilation is available in the UK via Koch Distribution, while the BMG/Ariola disc is a major label release and in your local store currently.

Arthur Wood

KATE McDONNELL

Don't Get Me Started Dog Eared Discs 002

Andrew Calhoun's Waterbug label, now Oregon based, played host to Kate's solo debut and sophomore release. This time around she's taken the self-release route. On the front cover there's a mischievous grin on her face as Kate toys with a hand grenade.

In spite of that, it's quite apparent from the lines "it's groceries, kids, god, nintendo, summer doors would winter shut, nothing's different here" from *Gone*, that this girl has a firm grasp of the realities of daily routine. And that's the problem – in the line "everyone dies, but not everyone lives," Kate alludes to the principle of always living life to its fullest extent – before, that is, it's *Gone*. After

expressing, in the opening verse, an almost uncontrollable yearning for *Sticky Buns*, the second provides the unexpurgated recipe. Delivered with a bluesy swagger (and undoubtedly a twinkle in her eyes), the closing verse concludes that you can deduce much about the nature of a man, by the way he devours *Sticky Buns*. Say that it isn't so.

McDonnell is a contemporary writer and acoustic performer who, at particular junctures on this collection, reminded me vocally of Patty Larkin, the late Kate Wolf and early career Dar Williams, with a dash of Christine Lavin when it comes to lyrical humour. While they didn't shake the foundations of my world, Kate songs witnessed a couple of mild tremors. Available from PO Box 437, Slingerlands, NY 12159, USA
Arthur Wood.

TOM RUSSELL

Borderland Hightone HCD8132

Reflecting in words and music upon his Irish/Scandinavian ancestors, respectively paternal and maternal, Russell's final collection of the second millennium AD, *The Man From God Knows Where*, was firmly founded upon his, long established, literate brand of folk/country music.

Born in California, Tom was a New York resident for over two decades. In 1997 he relocated to West Texas town of El Paso. With the Mexican border the matter of a few miles away, the music employed on *Borderland* draws much of its inspiration from that region. As for the storylines and the emotions Russell touches upon, whether delivered in the first person or by a narrator, they are, at times, extremely personal. Two borderlines feature prominently in the eleven songs. The physical entity that divides two countries and cultures, and the metaphorical one that (often) separates men and women. Pursuing the Mexican theme, a Jay Marvin painting, based on the day of the dead style, graces the cover of the three-piece cardboard fold-out liner.

Considering the title of the collection, it's hardly surprising that Tex/ Mex inspired rhythms provide the foundation. Produced by long time Lucinda Williams sideman, Gurf Morlix, the latter furnishes guitar and vocals on a number of cuts. Andy Hardin, Tom's ever present, right hand man once again works his

own unique brand of acoustic magic with six strings and a hole big and round. Jimmy LaFave and Eliza Gilkyson provide (occasional) supporting vocals, while Joel Guzman's accordion adds that genuine, south of the border, down Juarez way feel to the proceedings. Russell rarely fails to deliver literate collections of songs, and *Borderland* proves once again that this craftsman remains in tune with the term work of art.

Borderland is available in the UK via Proper Distribution.

Arthur Wood

👉 **Sally Shuffield *Ties That Bind*** (Larkspur LR02) Thirteen Shuffield originals constitute her second acoustic release. Arkansas born, this Colorado based anthropologist merges the bluegrass music of her native Ozarks with the wide open country influences of her adopted South-West. Although the contents won't change your life, the closing *In Dreams* is a real keeper. Available from PO Box 3, Jamestown, Colorado 80455, USA or on the web at www.sallyshuffield.com

American Troubadours – Groundbreaking Singer Songwriters Of The '60s

Mark Brend Backbeat Books, ISBN 0-87930-641-6, Distributed in the UK by Hi Marketing. Available by mail order from Jazzwise £12.95

If presentation were what really counted this 176 page paperback would be a heavy-duty contender. Right down to the imitation hardback 'fold over' outer cover in appealing shades of green. Analysis of the contents finds the initial ten pages allocated to the author's overview of the era, followed by a thirty page picture gallery of the nine featured songwriters with outline notes accompanying each photograph. Add to that an illustrated discography for each artist, the biographical key to other musicians/ managers/ label owners mentioned in the text, an Index, and you've soaked up another thirty plus pages.

As a result the biographies of David Ackles, David Blue, Tim Buckley, Tim Hardin, Fred Neil, Phil Ochs, Tom Rapp, Tim Rose and Tom Rush are confined to an average of nine pages and around 9,000 words each. Of the nine protagonists, five are no longer with us. Ackles, sadly, succumbed to lung cancer a few years back, a heart attack took Blue in 1982, Ochs committed suicide in 1976, while Buckley and Hardin were both the victims of drug abuse many decades ago.

Travelling in the wake of Dylan, none of the featured writers enjoyed sustained major commercial success. In researching this work, Brend interviewed the protagonists still with us, plus Ackles just prior to his passing. As a result the biographies of the living individuals are less speculative than the quartet of departed musicians. The deficiency is due to the lack of historically documented facts that support Brend's suppositions. In order to establish a time line, each biography leans heavily upon a blow by blow account of the recordings made by each artist. It's a well-trodden path. I also have the sense that the artists chosen for this treatise are there purely on the merit of being the author's personal favourites. Why, for instance, no Eric Anderson.

The book purports to concentrate on '60s contemporary folk music as a Boston/Cambridge and New York/ Greenwich Village phenomenon. The only other "folk singer enclave" mentioned is Miami's Coconut Grove. Pursuing that vein, whither Buckley and Ackles, who were (in the main) West Coast based performers ? As if to add insult to injury, the black and white photograph accompanying featured on the title leaf is of The Troubadour, a West Hollywood venue.

If you desire a more complete picture of the life and times of Phil Ochs, I'd suggest Marc Eliot's *Death Of A Rebel*, or better still the more recent *There But For Fortune – The Life Of...* penned by, the other, Michael Schumacher. In relating Tim Rose's story, Brend practically demolishes the artist's catalogue of recordings, apart from a handful of songs. Or was that meant to be constructive criticism? In analysing Hardin's output, the conclusion is drawn that his career peaked with the recordings 1 and 2.

Still, this attempt to give some exposure to a much-maligned period and group of songwriters should at least be applauded for its earnestness.

Arthur Wood