

# The Vinyl Phyle

**Paul James Band**  
**Rockin' the Blues**  
 Stony Plain Records

After hearing great things about Paul James live act, I jumped on this album like a hound dog on a green steak. Like a dog, I don't always want what is best for me, and that's the case with this album.

The title of this album sums up its intent. It doesn't achieve that aim, and I'm not sure why. It could be that James is just one of those people who can't reproduce in a studio what he does live. It could be that, while James knows every single blues riff ever laid down, he doesn't do anything new with them. I suspect it's both.

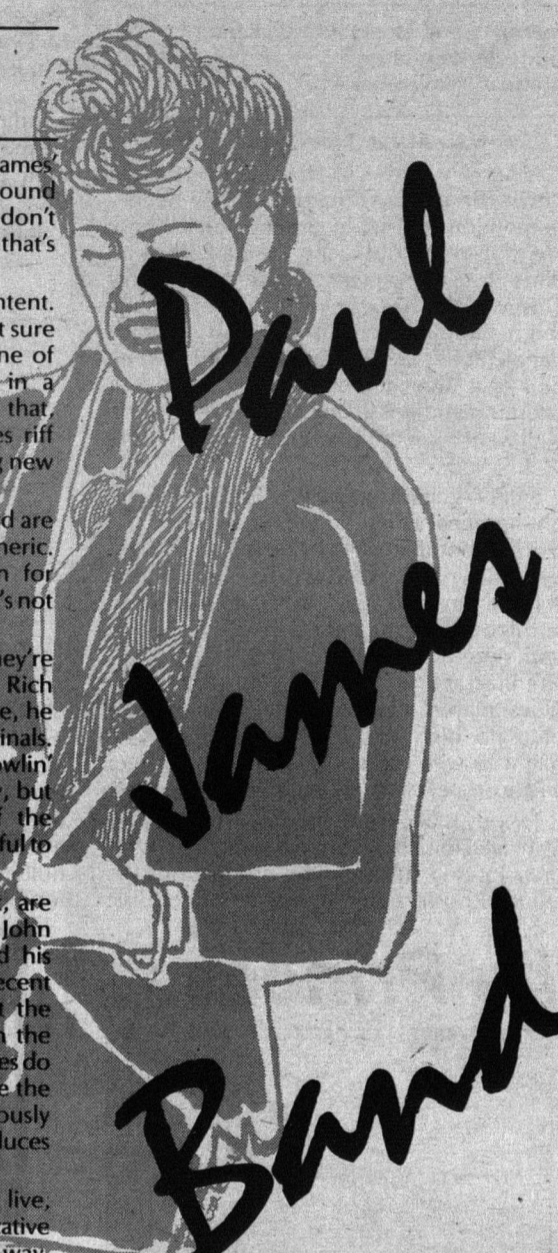
The songs James writes for this record are generic blues tunes. Well done, but generic. The exception is "Crazy Little Kitten for Christmas," which stinks. God, I hope it's not a hit. It could spoil the season for me.

James' covers are not generic. They're loathsome. He is to blues tunes what Rich Little is to comedy. However, like Little, he can't reproduce the quality of the originals. He does note for note covers of Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters, and Elvis Presley, but he can't reproduce the emotion of the originals. As a result, the covers are painful to listen to.

The band, as befits a veteran outfit, are tight, polished, and clean-sounding. John Hammond sits in on harmonica and his contributions stand out. James is a decent singer and decent guitarist, but I get the feeling that he never once lets go on the entire album. The result is that these blues do not rock, not even a little bit. I'd blame the producer, but great live acts are notoriously tough to record. Besides, James co-produces this turkey with Ken Whiteley.

I'd still like to see James do his thing live, and maybe then this tape would be evocative and would gain some credibility that way. Until then, I certainly won't listen to it again.

—Randal Smathers



**Tears For Fears**  
**The Seeds of Love**  
 Vertigo/Polygram

Artists, even of the pop variety, need to suffer. For proof of this we need only look at the slow and tragic devolution of Tears for Fears, who became one of the brightest lights of the English new wave scene overnight with the artistically and technically outstanding *The Hurting* in 1983. 1986 brought *Songs From the Big Chair*, which wasn't as inspired, but received well-deserved attention for bringing rich textures and innovative song structures to the mainstream pop market.

Now, as the 80s draw their last breath, comes *The Seeds of Love*, the logical extension of all that was wrong with *Songs From the Big Chair* and notice of how far the "new" music has fallen. Chief songwriter Roland Orzabal, whose dark exploration of his own tortuous childhood provided *The Hurting's* emotion, no longer has any personal problems and can only think to write about social issues. And, while there have been moving songs that deplored the exploitation of the Third World, the subjugation of women, and the absence of love in the cold world of politics, none of them are on this record.

Tears for Fears' songs continue to become better produced, more complicated, and less original. The saddest example of this is "The Badman's Song," an unfortunate attempt at soul that even the extraordinary talents of drummer Many Katche cannot save from

being both annoying and boring. (It should be noted that this is at least the third great British band to be undone in an attempt at sounding American. After the recent disasters by Tears for Fears, U2, and the Simple Minds, the British government would be more than justified in passing a law preventing musicians from travelling to the United States.)

There are three good songs on the album, including the now-universally known single, but to get to them you have to wade through some real sludge, including the soporific "Advice for the Young at Heart," which answers the question "What would a state-of-the-art Air Supply sound like?," and which I'm told some misguided publicist has decided to promote as one of the next singles. In their defense, Tears for Fears retains superb production and intelligent arrangements, particularly of live and programmed percussion. But the album as a whole is extremely disappointing.

The obvious problem is that Mr. Orzabal has gotten too comfortable. The kindest thing we could do for him is not buy *The Seeds of Love* and hope it is a complete failure. Then, with luck, his wife would leave him, his mortgage-holder would foreclose, his bar-tab at Monte Carlo would come due, and he would rediscover the passion that informed *The Hurting*. He'd hate us for a while, but the artist's burden is not a light one, and this is the only way we're likely to ever hear another interesting Tears for Fears record.

—James Ingram



**Daniel Lanois**  
**Acadie**  
 Island/WEA

Everyone knows the Daniel Lanois sound, though perhaps not the name. From his base in Hamilton, he has produced some of the best and most successful albums of the 80s, including U2's *The Unforgettable Fire* and *The Joshua Tree*, Peter Gabriel's *So*, and Robbie Robertson's self-titled LP. The release of his first solo record, *Acadie*, gives us the opportunity to see if his incredible success is due to his own ability, or that of the big names he works with.

*Acadie* was obviously not made to sell. It is understated and somewhat esoteric, carefully avoiding pop conventions and instead offering a diverse assortment of highly original sonic sketches. This disparate collection is united by the Lanois sound: a sparse, often delicate mixture of plain acoustic instruments and more exotic layered synth and guitar that somehow disguises its careful production and avoids the sterility that afflicts so much techno-textured music.

The record is also held together by Lanois' concern with his Acadian heritage. In some songs the French Canadian influence is as subtle as vaguely Catholic religious imagery, while others are sung in French and take the form of traditional work songs or folk ballads, in one case complete with accordion. There are also a few predominantly instrumental

tracks, which combine Lanois' lonely guitar with the haunting synthesizer atmospheres of Brian Eno, best known for his work with Roxy Music and U2. The songs all share an underlying feeling of simplicity, tranquility, and spirituality which carry a hint of the traditional French Canada.

They aren't, however, as inaccessible as they may sound. At least four of the songs would be quite at home on the Robbie Robertson disc. And, when given a chance, the more eccentric tracks become quite catchy. A few of the non-pop songs even manage to bop, in an odd, folksy sort of way, perhaps in part because of the discreet presence of the U2 rhythm section. Two of the songs, "Fisherman's Daughter" and "Silium's Hill," are rather self-indulgent, as Lanois-the-poet overcomes Lanois-the-musician and we get uncomfortable intervals of poetry reading, but most of the others are musically interesting and no two are alike.

This is an album of quiet brilliance and uncommon originality. Warning: Implicit in the preceding is that if you're basically happy with the loud and conventional (and this nothing to be ashamed of), *Acadie* might well bore you. But if you liked the slower, more atmospheric songs from *So*, Robbie Robertson, and *The Unforgettable Fire*, and have some tolerance for folk and even traditional music, this record deserves your attention.

—James Ingram

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