

smoke rise

A rock opera; two records, nice artwork, tasteful book containing lyrics and pictures, all about a central figure's search for something with its roots in religion. Sound familiar? No, it's not "Tommy" or "Jesus Christ - Superstar". It's "The Survival of St. John", Paramount records entry into the Rock - Opera section this year.

It's not performed by a super-star coalition like "JC" but by an as yet unknown group called Smoke Rise. Despite its "borrowed" format (stolen might be a more apt word), it transcends its frequent snags to stand up as a fairly professional and enjoyable recording (but not a musical landmark by a long shot).

Though the album itself is rather stereotyped, Smoke Rise comes off as a distinctive and original band. When I sit down to review an album I usually end up comparing the sound of the group with another more well-known musical entity, but I just couldn't do it here. They simply don't sound like anyone else and that's something in the year 1971.

The Opera isn't based on the popular story associated with Joan of Arc (that's who it's about by the way) but on a legend to the effect that she was granted her freedom, is she lived on a farm with a mute, and that another girl her size and appearance is burned in her place. The farmer falls in love with her (naturally), but the voices of her three patron saints tell her to leave the farm whereupon she discovers a depressed and disillusioned France, which leaves Joan very unhappy. She then returns to the army, "the scene of her greatest triumph" only to have the soldiers rape her. It's a shame there isn't a song to represent this. She then wanders around the woods and is finally burned as a witch (because she was wandering around the woods?).

As you can see, the plot leaves much to be desired, but the music, with a few notable exceptions, maintains a fairly even level of skill throughout.

The lyrics are unnoticeable most of the time, even though the album has been mixed so the vocals are predominant. When you do notice the lyrics, they're so pretentious and embarrassing that you wish you hadn't.

The instrumental qualities of the album almost offset all its bad points. Smoke Rise have used overdubbing to a great effect, so much so that they haven't even added orchestration where it seems they have. Piano and organ taped on the same track has had the same effect here. I also admire the restraint of guitarist Gary Ruffin who could have easily lapsed into some Jimmy Page bullshit had he wished, but he keeps his solos to a minimum and fills in the holes only where they exist.

Vocals seem to be Smoke Rise's greatest strength, possibly arising from the fact that three of them are brothers. Imagine this; three and four part harmonies that don't even sound like Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young!! I only wish that Smoke Rise had chosen to make their debut in another way instead of this obvious "rock-opera" type. They're a solid band and could do some pretty heavy things if they just got their direction straight.

I don't want to drag this review out to a track by track analysis of the record, it's just something you accept as a whole or don't adept at all. Personally, I can take it for what it is and ignore the slut that's spread intermittently throughout it. It's one of those records you like to have on when you're reading a book (or doing anything else relaxing. Understand?) I know that this isn't going to be the monster Paramount records wants it to be, but they could do with keeping their paws on Smoke Rise.

Art Centre

by Sheelagh Russell

On Friday, October 8, the Art Centre in Memorial Hall will open on two displays of the weaving of Rae Demopoulos and an exhibition of the paintings of Mary Pacey.

The weaving of Rae Demopoulos, who is the wife of Professor W.G. Demopoulos of the UNB Philosophy department, includes twenty selections. Among them rugs, baskets, and garments. This exhibition is a travelling exhibition, and after it is on display at the Art Centre, from October 8 to 24, it will be shown at the Centennial Art Centre in Halifax.

At the same time, the paintings of Mary Pacey will be on display. These are thirty-two selections of scenes in Great Britain, Europe and Canada.

Mary Elizabeth (Carson) Pacey was born in Ottawa, and graduated from the

gree in 1939. She is the wife of Desmond Pacey, Vice-President (Academic) of the University of New Brunswick, and is the mother of seven children. They have lived in Fredericton since 1944.

Mary Pacey has exhibited in one-man shows in Fredericton, Saint John and Lennoxville, in seven of the travelling exhibitions of the Maritime Art Association, in the Canadian Society of Painters in Watercolour exhibition, and at group exhibitions in Fredericton, Saint John, Montreal, and Cambridge. She was awarded the purchase prize of the Maritime Art Association's Exhibition in 1960, and her paintings are in many private collections.

A Meet-the-Artists evening will be held Friday evening, October 8, from 8 to 10 p.m. at the Art Centre.

mick abrahams

Mick Abrahams, for those of you with short memories, was the lead guitarist with Jethro Tull on their first album and leader, guitarist and vocalist with Blodwyn Pig, a group he formed after his exit from Jethro Tull. Abrahams left Blodwyn Pig about a year ago, whereupon the group reduced its name to Blodwyn, giving rise to some nasty rumours. Abrahams again formed a band, only this time he made no pretence about the strength of his ego, the band being called "The Mick Abrahams Band." Ironically, this is the tightest band Abrahams has been with, minus the all too frequent grandstand plays of members of his past bands (Ian Anderson with "Tull" and Jack Lancaster in the "Pig") Even Abrahams, who's supposed to be very egotistical and a bastard to work with, plays down all his tendencies to steal the spotlight and instead lets his band be judged simply as a band. And it passes the test with flying colours.

Abrahams's new band consists of Walt Monaghan (bass, vocal), Bob Sargeant (keyboards, 2nd guitar, vocals) and Ritchie Dhrama (Percussion).

The album opens with a song about touring entitled "Greyhound Bus". The rhythm section is extremely tight in this number, which has Abrahams and Sargeant doing lead vocal together and each taking extended solos on their respective instruments in the middle section.

"Awake" starts off softly with Abrahams doing the vocal honors, then jumps on you after the first verse when two guitars one an octave above the other, play the same riff in unison as the band moves into the song. After the riff is played once, a third guitar joins, again higher than the other two. This is a trick the Allman Brothers use a lot, but they have two lead guitarists-

Abrahams has to rely on studio overdubbing here to achieve the same effect.

The break in this song showcases Abraham's guitar style nicely and gives vultures like myself a chance to pick his playing apart. So here goes. Abrahams is certainly not a stereotyped rock guitarist. Guys like Eric Clapton and Mike Bloomfield have listened to old blues records (B.B. King, most notably) and taken the old runs and guitar lines and speeded them up, changed them slightly, ect! but outside of that created little of their own. This isn't to detract from these two gentlemen's reputations they're just two names I pulled out of the air. What I said applies to 95 per cent of the "name" guitarists operating today. Hendrix, if he were still around, wouldn't fall into that class. He'd started developing, with the help of a lot of acid, his own style as far back as 1965. If someone played you the guitar break off a song you hadn't heard before, I don't think you'd have any trouble telling whether it was Hendrix or not. This can be said of Jorma Kaukonan, Neil Young, Peter Frampton, Clarence White. And Mick Abrahams. Their styles aren't familiar every time you hear them and they're certainly not predictable. It makes you sit up and listen, because it's fresh and new. Can you say the same of Alvin Lee?

Anyway, back to the task at hand.

The album's 3rd cut, Winds of Change, is an acoustic folk-blues number, strongly reminiscent both in vocal and guitar of

Bert Janch. Abrahams pulls off a nice little seven string slide guitar solo in the middle of this one.

Side 2 opens with "Big Queen", which sounds almost exactly the same as "Greyhound Bus" so I don't usually listen to it.

The second cut is another Abrahams-Sargeant song called "Not to Rearrange". It's a country tune, sung by Sargeant which was probably written so Abrahams could play pedal steel guitar, but if I want country-rock, I'll look up Poco thank you.

The 15-minute "seasons" is the album's "tour-de-force". It's easily the best song Abrahams ever wrote. The vocal harmonies of this band are better than I imagined. Sort of a cross between Argent and the Beatles (Who?) The middle section of the song is an Abrahams solo, without any backing, in the true Jimmy Page-Hendrix style. There are echoes here of Pete Townsend and even Hendrix, but they occur only momentarily. Abrahams is too smart to copy anyone. He's his own man and in this day and age I can dig that.

After the solo, the band slides (and how they can slide) back into the song with a tasteful organ break which gives rise to another guitar solo, only this time Mick "gets it on" with his boys and does an admirable job at it too.

All I can say about "The Mick Abrahams Band" is that I hope they stay together long enough to record another album. To hope beyond that in today's music business is fruitless.

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