

... an emotional musical rollercoaster

# March for Penn's March in March

by Alistair Croll

Michael Penn's new album, *March*, stands out from the swath of new releases which besiege record buyers these days. Penn's inspired vocals, varied style, and haunting tunes give the album more than a passing dash of true quality.

Penn shares glimpses of his life with his listener. In poignant tunes like "Innocent One," Penn

bemoans the loss of loves and opportunities. But Penn's real talent shows through in songs like "No Myth" and "Brave New World," which are reminiscent of Bourgeois Tagg.

Throughout *March*, snippets of music call to mind songs we've all heard, but can't quite remember. The lead single, "No Myth," sounds like U2's "Angel in Harlem;" "Brave New World" could be Dylan.

Michael Penn is at his most approachable in "Evenfall." His throaty bass and candid lyrics shine through in pieces like "Bedlam Boys," "Big House," and "Cupid's Got a Brand New Gun," adding some pep to the lamentous overtures of "Battle Room" and "Innocent One." The album ends on a high note, but not before Penn has dragged his audience to the depths of depression and back.

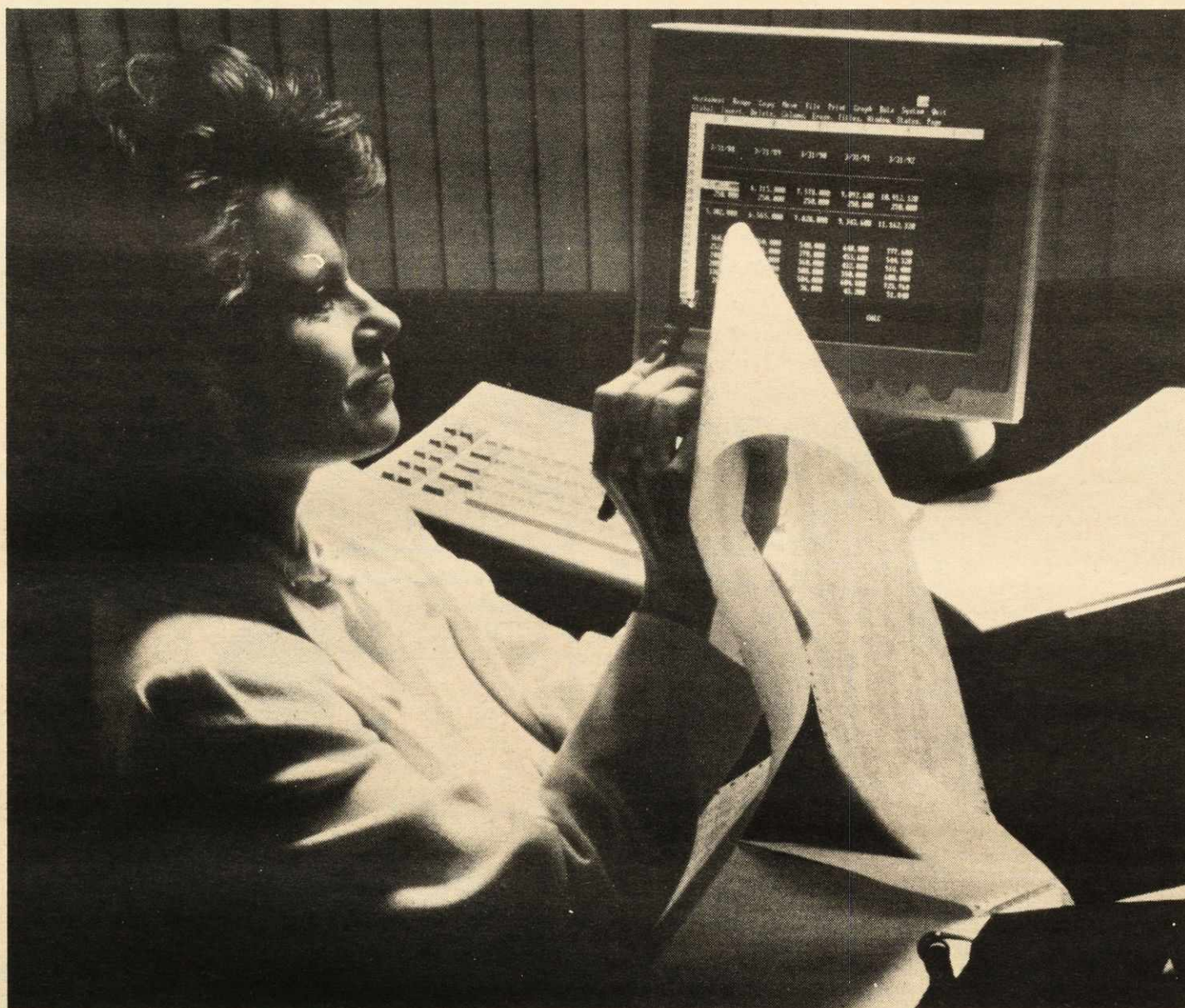
Penn's style is hard to describe. He is blessed with a distinctive voice — somewhere between the Travelling Wilburys and the Beatles — and a penchant for relating experience in song. (ed. note: Does Penn sing in four-part harmony by himself?)

Penn takes us on an emotional musical rollercoaster, steering his audience into the doldrums of "Invisible" and back. His writing, alternately mournful and

joyous, is nevertheless extremely enjoyable.

*March* is the work of an accomplished troubador. Penn writes all the songs on the album, sings, and plays almost all the strings.

There is little doubt that Michael Penn is a sensitive, thinking musician and poet, able to convey emotions and thoughts in word and music. If Penn's experiences weren't so easily recognizable, he could be criticised for being too introspective. As it stands, however, the universality of his experience is his saving grace.



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## No vamps

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niques are the best since Peckinpah.

It should then come as no surprise that Bigelow's new film *Blue Steel* is an equally strong follow-up. Here she tackles a different genre, the police thriller, and proves she is completely at home in this genre as well. Other recent stylized efforts such as Ridley Scott's *Black Rain*, Harold Becker's *Sea Of Love*, and Mike Figgis's *Internal Affairs* pale by comparison. Bigelow's film contains both style and strong intelligent characters, and she never sacrifices one for the other.

Perhaps Bigelow's advantage lies in the fact that all of the previously mentioned directors are British and she, being American, better understands the violent climate of the United States. She has the ability to examine how this atmosphere affects the motivations of her characters.

Motivation is an important aspect here. What makes a person become a cop or a killer? These are the questions that *Blue Steel* poses.

The cop is expertly portrayed by Jamie Lee Curtis. She brings the perfect amount of believability to her role of a strong yet naive rookie cop with an itchy trigger finger. Her love interest is chillingly portrayed by Ron Silver (*Enemies — A Love Story*). He is a charming floor trader who may also be a serial killer. There is no question that these two performances give the film the strong core that it needs. As she demonstrated in *Near Dark*, Bigelow has a superb eye for casting.

Kathryn Bigelow with her new film has definitely confirmed her place as one of the most potent action directors working today. Like the gun that is caressed by the camera during the opening credits, *Blue Steel* is a well-oiled precision machine designed for maximum impact.