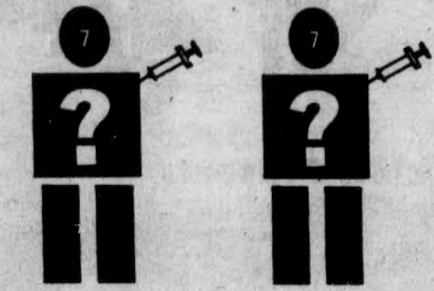


QUALITY NOT QUANTITY



ENTERTAIN MEAT



THE FOGUES If I Should Fall from Grace with God (Island Records)

The first time I came across these MacDermots, lead troubadour of Fogue Mahone (Gaelic for 'kiss my arse'), was during a rendition of *Lady MacLachlan*, during which the gentleman in question was providing an additional source of persuasion to a wild latter day Irish folk song by banging a serving tray on his head.

On the *Fogues* - what a glorious bunch! Given the Shamrockish ancestry of a large proportion of the band, the Downey Reggae has been but five years into they would surely have adopted as their fantasy house band. Its drink, drink, drink breakneck tempo carries all the way with scorching scorching tin whistles from hell lumbering in the background.

It was interesting to hear a traditional style given such a vehement kicking out of conventional boundaries, a band representing the unlikely apostles of the wandering wanderer, had been doing energetic renditions of emerald isle favorites for decades. Well, what can you call this then? Speed-Folk? Thrash-Celt? The band is a glitzy and often raucous party band, but it's also got a certain charm. It's the best rock band I've ever heard of. Sex Pistols although I think it's a bit out of category.

After blue printing through the London circuit with a bizarrely muted folk rhythm and blues, MacDermot started writing his own numbers and it immediately became apparent that the young man had quite a knack for writing seething and often bitter latter-day observations himself.

If I Should Fall From Grace is an album and sparing you any further waffle it is quite brilliant. Executed here in the shape of *Medley*: an intriguing tale made up of the complications of the Irish fighting for the British for the sake of the British, admonishing the collapse of any cultural differences and the inevitable day war amongst those fighting for one side (I think).

After consulting the lyrics of the album, we get the impression of introspective bitterness and cynicism for the liveliness of the backing music. In some parts this can be down to the lyrics. *Down by the Fire* could well be considered an ultra condensed version of Stephen King's *It*. "And they dance on the rain/They tap on the window/When the rain is in/And if you see them/Pretend that you're dead/Or they'll bite off your head/They'll rip out your liver/And dance on your neck/And they give you the cramp/And they cholic for jest". Just who 'they' (it) are (is) is never actually known but a crawling hatred and animosity is the taste in one's mouth. And the advice in the final verse? 'Good night and God bless you f**k off to bed'. Phew! Rock and roll!

Also included on the album is one of the most authentic Christmas songs one is likely to hear for a long time. Called *Fairytale of New York* it deals with an old piss-head (what else?) - a New York drunk tank on Christmas Eve thinking about his young Irish bride of many, many moons ago and having the death of the young man leaving only loathing and despair in the wake of the passing years. It's Tom Waits meets Springsteen in County Cork to be sure, but boy does it get those tears welling up in the old peepers before the accordion and whistle burst seasons out of the record.

Americana is dealt with again in *Thousands are coming*, a poignant tale of the countless immigrants flocking to the land of opportunity from the land of emptiness and despair. The Ireland of that era is not forgotten however: "Where e'er we go, we celebrate/The land that makes us refugees/From fear of Priest with empty plates/From guilt and weeping effigies/And we dance".

Moments of riotous raucous are to be found though especially in a favourite of mine, *Bottle of Smoke*, apparently the name of the old haunts that quite unexpectedly comes stumbling in first place at the races producing a mayhem for the narrator that inexplicably begins it. Also witness *Fiesta*, a composition I can't wait to blast out at whatever passes for a Celidh this summer in my back garden.

Altogether now *With me wack fol the do fol/The diddle idle day*". Here is band which sparkles even more with each layer of removed grime, thankfully most of it won't come off though it is here that the ultimate charm lies. Buy it, crack open a brew and oscillate wildly to the mishtake shurely? - Ed.)

NEDDY STEBBINS



ALEX CHILTON "High Priest" (Mercury)

Considering the erratic nature of Alex Chilton's musical career over the past two decades, *High Priest* could have easily been a world-weary, somewhat jaded album.

Happily, and to his credit, Chilton has come up with one of the freshest-sounding releases of the past year.

Musically, the album is a blend of blues, gospel and straight-ahead pop. Though most of the songs are not Chilton originals, he manages to make each his own, due largely to his pleasantly ragged vocal style. Occasionally his enthusiasm gets in the way of his better judgement (*Volare*, for instance, is best left dead and buried), but this is secondary to the purity and integrity Alex Chilton has retained after twenty years in an otherwise less-than-virginal industry.

TOM STILLWELL

Sinéad O'Connor "The Lion and The Cobra" Chrysalis / Ensign

Sinéad (pronounce Shi-nay-ad) O'Connor's debut LP is reportedly "... drawing massive critical acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic..." and rightly so. This album has definite impact.

A 20-year old Dublin native, O'Connor's musical career kicked off in 1986 when she met U2's Bono in a London recording studio. Impressed with her work, Bono and The Edge asked her to collaborate on "Heroine", a single from the "Captive" soundtrack. This effort coupled with a subsequent live spot on the BBC led to her present contract with Chrysalis.

"The Lion and The Cobra" is an album very much of Sinéad's own vision; she composed and arranged eight of the nine titles, performs all vocals and produced the project herself. The result is a strong album with a good contrast of quiet, mystical ballads with heavier, more rhythmic selections.

"Jackie", the album's opener and one of its best cuts is an excellent example of her talent for producing an original sound using established tricks. She layers haunting vocals over a penetrating, heavy string base while belting out a tale of a lover lost at sea. "Mandinka" and "I Want Your (Hands On Me)", both obvious choices for single releases are more rhythmic, upbeat tracks but every every bit as affecting as the first. Another notable mention is "Troy", a ballad blending traditional Celtic folk and angry, almost operatic vocals driven with unique, unexpected string arrangements (using the real instruments, no synthesizers here). On "Jerusalem", my personal favorite, she experiments again with percussive rhythms and demonstrates her impressive range with eccentric vocals (Siouxsie fans take note) and an unnerving melody line.

Sinéad O'Connor is a highly original artist, falling into no convenient musical category. Behind this strong voice are also a competent musical backing, intelligent lyrics and captivating melodies. Her first album is very impressive and recommended to any seekers of artful rock. My only real complaints are that you sometimes have to strain to decipher the lyrics, and worse, there's no lyrics sheet!

ANDREA N.

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