

ENTERTAINMENT

Darkroom: standing *Test of Time*

interview by Don Teplysk

Jim Gray, vocalist of Edmonton's Darkroom, is enthusiastic about the band's just released album *The Test of Time*. The album has met with favorable reviews and extensive, national airplay. Jim pulled himself out of a warm bath late Wednesday afternoon to grant *The Gateway* this interview.

Gateway: You brought in a relatively big name producer to work on the new album. I assume this was at the record company's suggestion.

Gray: Yes, they suggested him. We were looking for two things in a producer. We wanted someone who didn't have too heavy a hand. We didn't want a producer with which we would walk out of the studio sounding like him. The last album (1983's *San Paku*) sounded too thin. We wanted a producer who would work with us. Tom Treumuth was very openminded and allowed us to experiment. There was never a time in the studio when someone had to put their foot down — we were always able to listen to each other and work it out.

Gateway: WEA Records has not been very patient of late with developing artists. Recently Cherie Camp, Messenjah and Eddie Schwartz were dropped. Did the band feel pressure as you recorded *The Test of Time*.

Gray: Definitely we felt pressure while recording. We know that the album would have to be very good. The pressure is off now that the album is out. We just have to see how it does.

Gateway: Is the Record company being supportive?

Gray: This time WEA is being more aggressive with the album. With *San Paku* they became involved halfway through recording and as such, didn't feel as much a part of it. With *The Test of Time*, the company was there from the very beginning and are naturally more enthusiastic about it.

Gateway: Is *The Test of Time* being released outside of Canada?

Gray: We'll know within a few weeks if other countries are going to pick it up. We need to get a release outside of this country. *San Paku* was released only in Canada and that was very discouraging. I don't know what we'll do if not one else wants *The Test of Time*.

Gateway: Why didn't *San Paku* do as well as everyone hoped?

Gray: Honestly, the quality of it wasn't good enough. The production was uneven and it didn't have the depth of songs needed for it to sell. The album was recorded in whatever spare time we could find. We all had day jobs and played live on the weekend, so the only time we were able to record was after gigs and on Saturday afternoon. Often there would only be one of us in the studio at a time working on a song. As a result, *San Paku* was quite uneven.

Gateway: How has radio responded to *The Test of Time*?

Gray: CFNY (a Toronto-area station) flipped out over the album and are playing several songs from it. The people at CFNY honestly like the band — its nice when the support you get is genuine and not just as a favor to someone. Right now, the only place where we're not getting airplay is in Vancouver and we'll be going out there in a month to change that. All the stations in Edmonton have been very supportive.

Gateway: What has been the most drastic change with Darkroom in the past two years?

Gray: The biggest thing has been that the band has matured. Being on the road together really brought us closer and everyone still gets along really well. On the road we like being around each other but when we're at home we stay away from each other so that we can have our own little space.

Gateway: Tell me about your version of Marianne Faithful's "Broken English." (I didn't really ask this question — Jim brought it up — but I thought it might look good if I asked it.)

Gray: "Broken English" was the last track recorded for the album. Myself and Tim Palmer (Darkroom drummer) really like the song and wanted to record it but we never mentioned it to the others. Later, the producer phoned us and suggested we record the song. I guess it was fate that we recorded "Broken English". We didn't change the song all that drastically except for the vocal — nobody can sing like Marianne. I was really nervous about recording the song but now that it is finished, I'm very happy with it.

Gateway: I get the impression that it has become a favorite past time of Edmontonians to slag Darkroom.

Gray: I don't feel that way at all. The people I meet are usually very supportive of the band. We're not snobby and are always willing to meet people, if we have time.



Jim Gray: Working to improve since *San Paku*

Photo Bill St. John

Singing with contrived urgency

A Test of Time
Darkroom
WEA REcords

review by Warren Opheim

Maybe it is somewhat "trendy" these days to knock a band (in particular a local band), when they've achieved a certain amount of success. I refer specifically to Darkroom having just put out their second LP on a major record label. But when the band essentially asks for it, well, the critic just can't be held responsible.

Nine songs. Three covers. That leaves, hmmm... six originals. That would make a right nice EP, that would. Come now, do we really need a half-hearted version of Marianne Faithfull's "Broken English"? The other two covers were penned by the Leggat Brothers, whose "Lions Made of Stone,"

makes most of the original pale by comparison. That doesn't make a good case for the "real" Darkroom.

Take the lyrics from "In a Dream," for example:

*Could have a nightmare
Or a love affair
You could be the world's greatest lover
The boundaries are broken
You don't have a conscience
When you are under the covers.*

Sheesh. This, and all other songs, are sung with a sense of contrived urgency, and something contrived never comes across as sincere. Unfortunately, the same is true for the music itself. Swirling synthesizers and whining "rawk an' role" guitar solos abound.

This is definitely something that should have been avoided, considering that these

guys have made known their desire to avoid being pigeonholed.

Darkroom's biggest problem seems to be that they are taking themselves far too seriously. For the type of market they appear to be aiming at (trendy disco synth boppers?) the self-importance they convey might be an asset, but critically speaking, when a group is this self-indulgent, they can't help appearing pretentious, condescending and an insult to the intelligence.

To me, however, the most upsetting part of the album musically has got to be the introduction to "Fixing Pieces." It sounds very much like the introduction to "Nothing Lasts Forever" by local band Truth. Does this mean that Jim Gray and company intend to get WEA Records to sign up Truth? Sure would be nice to see some real Edmonton originality representing us on a national scale.

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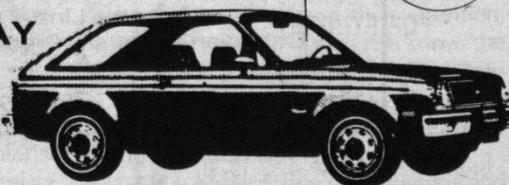
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