

Thomas offers inconsistent effort

Ian Thomas
Levity
WEA

by Mike Spindloe

Ian Thomas is the perennial underdog on the Canadian music scene, occasionally cracking the domestic singles charts while cover versions of his work have been more successful internationally. Thomas has released a steady stream of albums while building a good live reputation over the years, although he hasn't been around Edmonton much recently.

Levity is a typical Thomas album, which means that when it is good, it is very good, and when it is bad, it is merely mediocre. The solid songwriting one expects from Thomas is here, along with clean, crisp production by Thomas and Christopher Neal. His voice has matured and deepened over the years and yet also somehow become less distinctive, at least on record — perhaps the production is masking

something.

Many of the songs are also less distinctive than they should be. Thomas is aiming for the charts, and it is a sad commentary on our times that an artist who we know can write *great* songs is obviously doing some commercial tailoring. This is obvious because *Levity* splits virtually in half between songs that sound and *feel* like Ian Thomas' songs and songs that sound like Ian Thomas processed by a demographics-happy cuisinart. A few lie somewhere in between.

This processing shows up most consistently on the three tracks produced by Neal, although his work on the title track fits the song well. Strangely enough, the two *best* songs, to these ears, have wound up at the end of side two: "These Are Not Gods" and "Let the Stone Roll".

The latter especially is a great song, worthy of inclusion on Thomas' next compilation even if it doesn't get released as a single. A few others are too; whether or not you wait for that album depends on you.

Bobby KING Terry EVANS

Live and Let Live!



Russell makes country music with integrity

Tom Russell Band
Road To Bayamon
Stony Plain

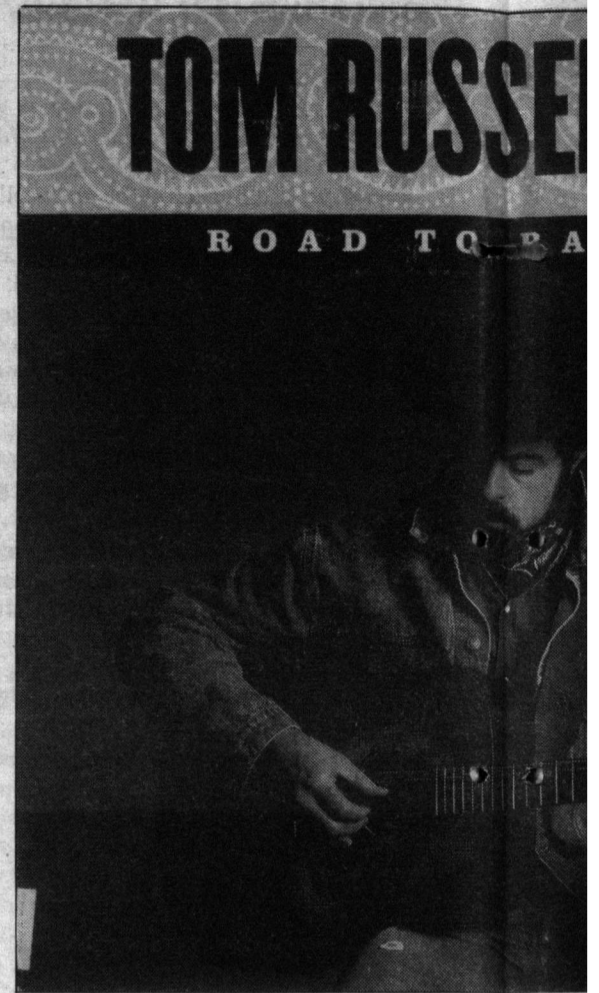
by Mike Berry

Just when it had appeared that country music with any degree of integrity seemed destined to become the "underground" of the genre, the Tom Russell Band arrives to calm the fears and restore the faith of the faithful.

Their fourth album, *Road to Bayamon*, is an outstanding return to the evocative, people-first philosophy that for so long provided the solid, if sometimes plain, foundation that epitomised country music.

Combining superb musical sensibilities with conscience and class, *Road to Bayamon* takes the listener on a journey through the present, oft-changing world of winners and losers, people and places that combines a poetic sense of time with a sometimes sombre sense of place. It is a pause in the ongoing race for conformity and profit that now earmarks the lives of so many dissatisfied souls.

The haunting steel guitar of Fats Kaplin, demonstrated most able in tunes like "As The Crow Flies", as well as his accomplished albeit tastefully subdued accordion on tunes like "Mescal", form the backup for Tom Russell's vocal stylings. These are well-articulated rather than drawn out or overextended, showing that the man can *sing* while he draws you into his easy style. Perhaps the best example of this is "U.S. Steel" — truly fine American folk music which takes a sad, reflective look at an optimism-filled past that no longer exists, — and "Akali", a musically



understated poem slightly reminiscent of Jimmy Buffet (on *Living & Dying in 3/4 time*) yet with more quiet power and grace.

However, one should not view this album with all seriousness; songs like "Wise Blood", especially, dig deep into the honky-tonk blues of the past to deliver a timely, uptempo salute to age and experience, which could be compared musically to some of the new work from icons like Ry Cooder and John Hiatt.

King and Evans win soul sweep

Bobby King & Terry Evans
Live and Let Live!
Stony Plain

Freddie Jackson
Don't Let Love Slip Away
Capitol

by Mike Berry

Even though most reviews tend to err on the side of verbosity, there is certainly no law that states a record review must be as it makes a review of the new Freddie Jackson album, *Don't Let Love Slip Away*, so much easier.

This is generic, late night tete-a-tete music with no outstanding characteristics. The usual themes of love, despair, and hurt abound, ad nauseum, and are all played at a slow and unimaginative pace. The music consists of tepid guitar and rhythm lines and only occasionally does the bite of the saxophone rise above the torpor.

Freddie Jackson has a pleasant enough voice, but so do most others in this genre of music; Freddie will have to turn on his imagination to produce more than, mere background music to late night trysts. Eugene Wilde and Millie Scott et al have little to fear from this quarter. If this album is an indication of the 'new' soul music.

If superlative soul is truly desired in contrast to the ersatz offering previously

discussed, and elements of flair, aplomb and imagination draw you to a record, then give a listen to one of this year's best: *Live and Let Live*. Bobby King and Terry Evans have worked with the pedigree richly-garnered on the soul-gospel road to produce a winner.

Those who saw the duo at the last Edmonton Folk Festival know exactly whereof I speak; those who didn't should check this out. While the album does lose some of the immediacy of the live show, the accomplished arrangements, production and quality musicianship more than compensate.

