

Record Reviews

Spirit of the West
Labour Day
Stony Plain

by Ron Kuipers

"You cannot stop a river if it has a place to go. You can redirect the water but you can't arrest the flow." True words were never spoken, and with their latest offering, *Labour Day*, Canada's own Spirit of the West continues that flow with yet another impressive record.

Like their previous recordings, *Labour Day* contains potent social and political commentary. Yet this record is decidedly more serious than previous efforts. Missing from this LP are the humorous good-time drinking songs found on their previous two albums. Unlike those records there is practically no humour on this album at all, yet this is appropriate.

As before, the band focuses much of its message on issues of social injustice. The

plight of the elderly and homeless is examined in several songs, including "Profiteers", a depressing and angry examination of how aged tenants were evicted from their homes on Vancouver's east side to make room for tourists during Expo '86. The band also grapples with some newer issues, like the dehumanizing process of automation. In the song "Dark House", a worker's lament, the band warns us that "soon we'll be watching the world turn with no hands at all."

Despite the group's strong social conscience, the album does not lose its personal appeal. The group seems to make a conscious effort to include, not alienate, the listener. By sharing their feelings, and not just their insights, the band draws the listener in. The band is not afraid to reveal themselves in songs that deal with their personal relationships and past experiences. As well, the lyric sheet contains short introductions to each song that helps create a stronger tie between the listener

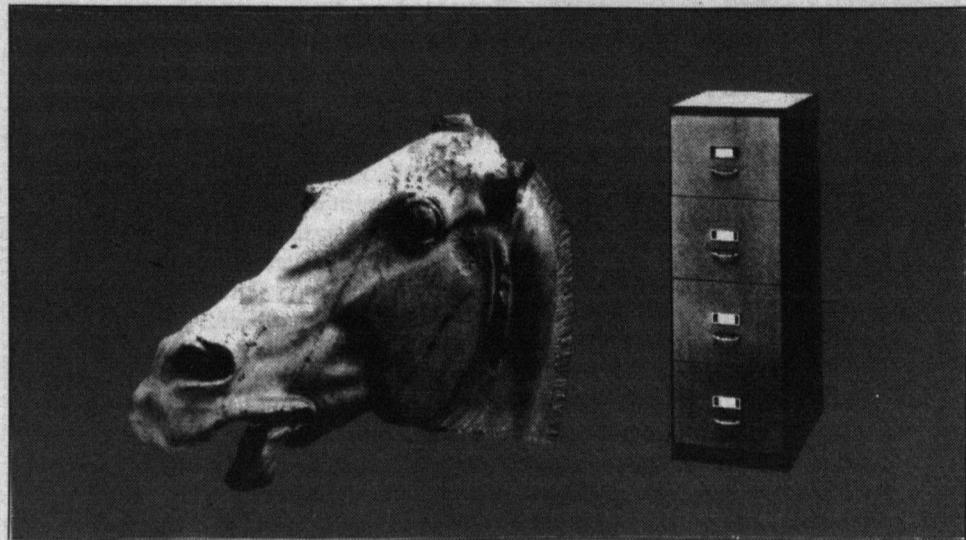
and the musician.

Clearly, strong social commentary is a big part of what Spirit of the West is all about. But what really makes the band, and this record, so special is the music. The music is so fresh and vital, it has an undefineable, mystical power all its own. Combining traditional Celtic melodies with folkish, country-type rhythms, the music has the ability to stir even the most placid listener. Using such instruments as flute, mandolin, and bodhran, Spirit of the West creates a sound uniquely their own. As well, the band has added harmonica to several of the tracks — an addition that works well for them. The music and the sound of the band continues to grow and develop, building on their previous efforts.

Labour Day is a solid recording featuring powerful lyrics and innovative music and not one weak song on the entire album. These lads are insightful, as well as gifted and imaginative musicians: "You will never stop this river. It has a place to go!"



Spirit of the West: give us your downtrodden huddled masses...



Wire: what do these two objects have in common?

Wire
A Bell is a Cup Until it is Struck
Enigma

by Greg Pohl

Wire were one of the few bands to do something constructive with the chaos that was punk in the 1970s. After breaking up to pursue solo projects for 7 years, they reformed in 1985. This, the third chunk of vinyl by Wire Mark II, came out in the middle of the summer. I've been trying for months to figure out what the lyrics are all about, and I still haven't a clue. The subject matter of every song is completely obscured by endless metaphors. Take, for example; "He transferred his soul to his imagination/His atoms were excited, and he glowed in the dark" (from "Boiling Boy"). These lines SOUND important, but I find them too abstract to generate anything more than unconnected images in my mind. In interviews, Wire claims that these lyrics generally present rather nasty messages. Alas, only they really know what their songs are about.

So much for the words. Wire's great gift has always been the ability to make listenable songs out of seemingly unconnected bits of noise. By layering digital samples, vocal parts, and guitar riffs, they create a

satisfying rhythm that is far greater than the sum of its parts. Rather than writing songs with obvious melodies and few background frills, Wire gives us only a thick backdrop. The listener is left searching through the rhythm for a nonexistent melody. The band has thus averted boredom by forcing us to pay attention to all the little details in their music.

Especially interesting is the way Wire uses the guitar as a percussion instrument. This technique particularly shines through on "The Finest Drops", where there is no continuous guitar part. Instead, a solid bed is formed by layering several sequenced riffs. Some of this guitar has a distorted edge to it, but overall the result is much softer than Wire's earlier work. Only one cut, "A Public Place", has shades of the moody industrialization that typified earlier work. Colin Newman's vocal style, too, has become much more sublime. The more scathing voice of Graham Lewis is highlighted only once, on the aforementioned "Finest Drops".

Overall, *A Bell is a Cup* is not as diverse as last year's *Ideal Copy* LP, but still much more original than the synthetic debris played on commercial radio. Buy the CD; it's got most of the extra cuts from the 12 inch singles. Just don't think about the lyrics too much.

After All
How High the Moon
Capitol/EMI

by E.S. Petruszczak

Riding the wave of current rock banality is another Canadian hopeful, Vancouver's After All. Their debut album, *How High the Moon*, evidences both their immaturity and over-dependence on the musical stylings of REM, Aerosmith, and, for the most part, U2, as the basis for their sound. Granted, imitation is the most sincere form of flattery, but in the case of After All, their pastiche is unsuccessful. The majority of their melodies have interesting shapes, but they are so poorly focused and developed that they can only be termed songs in progress.

How High the Moon is a collection of thin, repetitive, listless arrangements. After All has very little to say about the world, and what they do manage to say (mostly about feeling lost), they do not do so particularly well. Lyrics such as "nothing really mattered, nobody cared at all" ("Holiday"), "I'm so lost inside" ("Shadows of a Dove"), "it's not over/it's not the end/it's only the blues" ("It's Only the Blues") are either cliches, which are seemingly repeated endlessly; or pseudo-psychological analyses of the hopeless existence of the band's members.

The arrangements for the ten tracks on the album are, for the most part, shamelessly U2-ridden and badly produced. "Save Me From Myself" and "Bullets", the two strongest songs, are somewhat reminiscent of tracks from *War* and *The Unforgettable Fire*, yet they lack the energy that sets U2 apart from its clone bands.

Vocalist Scott Acomba is annoying and off-key throughout the majority of the record. The backing vocals of Jordy Birch and Todd Simko do little to complement Acomba or add to any of the songs.

Producer John Webster (Rock and Hyde, Tom Cochrane, Bon Jovi) seems to have rushed through the album and appears to have spent little time creating anything especially original or memorable. Songs have dull introductions, muddled middles, and, for the most part, incomplete endings.

As far as debut albums go, After All's *How High the Moon* is an example of another Canadian band going nowhere. Developing a solid, original sound is a must for After All. Hiring a keyboardist might be a good start, as would a few years of "finding" themselves.

Aslan
Feel No Shame
EMI/Capitol

by Scott Gordon

The origin of this Dublin band's name comes from the lion in *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis, but do not let these pop-meisters turn you off from reading this entertaining book.

Aslan's debut album starts out with a lot of promise. The first cut, "Loving Me Lately", starts with very catchy riffs and hard singing by Christy Dignam, moulded into a tough-edged pop sound. Unfortunately, by the middle of the sing, all that is left is pop; weak, soppy guitar-driven pop. Dignam's voice is still hard and powerful; he is the only redeeming quality here. He would be a awesome with a better band and a better sound behind him; as it is he merely makes Aslan's shortcomings stand out.

They try, certainly, but it is all for nought. There is just no escaping the morass of pop that this young Irish band is wallowing in. Good intentions abound, but even the best intentions, the most dedication and the hardest effort cannot drag Aslan out of pop and into rock.

CJSR 88 FM Weekly playlist

#579 WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER 28, 1988

TW LW WO

- 1 - 6 - 2 - Tom Waits - Big Time - Island/MCA
- 2 - 16 - 3 - Housemartins - Now That's What I Call Quite Good - Go! Discs/MCA
- 3 - 20 - 2 - PoiDog Pondering - Postcard from a Dream - Texas Hotel/US
- 4 - 5 - 3 - John Hiatt - Slow Turning - A&M
- 5 - 1 - 2 - Karen Young & Michael Donato - Contredanse - Justin Time/cc
- 6 - 19 - 2 - Big Drill Car - Small Block - Varient/US
- 7 - - - 1 - Antonio Mozza - The Way I Remember It - Independent/cc
- 8 - 2 - 3 - Buckwheat Zydeco - Taking It Home - Island/MCA
- 9 - 3 - 3 - Joshua Breakstone - Evening Star - Contemporary/Fantasy/US
- 10 - - - 1 - Jeff Healy Band - See The Light - Arista/BMG/cc
- 11 - - - 1 - Edie Brickell The New Bohemians - Shooting Rubber Bands at the Stars - Geffen/WEA
- 13 - 10 - 2 - Dumka - Soundscapes - Kalyna/cc
- 14 - 21 - 3 - Wagoners - Stout & High - A&M
- 15 - 27 - 3 - Rusty Reed & the Southside Shuffle - Stairway to the Blues
- 16 - 11 - 7 - James - Strip Mine - Sire/WEA
- 17 - 23 - 2 - Let's Active - Every Dog Has Its Day - IRS/MCA
- 18 - 4 - 5 - Color Me Psycho - Pretend I'm Your Father - Raging Records/cc
- 19 - 7 - 4 - Harold Budd - The White Arcades - Opal/WEA
- 20 - 17 - 4 - Sam Phillips - The Indescribably Wow - Virgin/A&M

EPs, Singles

- 1 - 5 - 2 - Kool Moe Dee - No Respect (12") - Jive/BMG
- 2 - 2 - 3 - The Gathering - Let it Shine - cc
- 3 - 7 - 6 - Scruffy the Cat - Boom Boom Boom Bingo
- 4 - - - 1 - Itsa Skitsa - Self titled (EP) - Its Records/cc
- 5 - 4 - 2 - Boris Betanoff - What's Up Rocky (Single Cart) - Streetsounds/UK
- 6 - - - 1 - Boogie Down Productions - Stop The Violence - BMG
- 7 - 3 - 2 - Psychedelic Furs - All That Money Wants (12") - CBS
- 8 - 8 - 4 - John Newlands - Rain (Tape EP) - Independent/cc
- 9 - 1 - 4 - Morrissey - Suedehead (EP) - Sire/Wea
- 10 - - - 7 - HMS Dub - Dis Dub Disarm