

A retrospective record of the 70s

Record feature by Jens Anderson

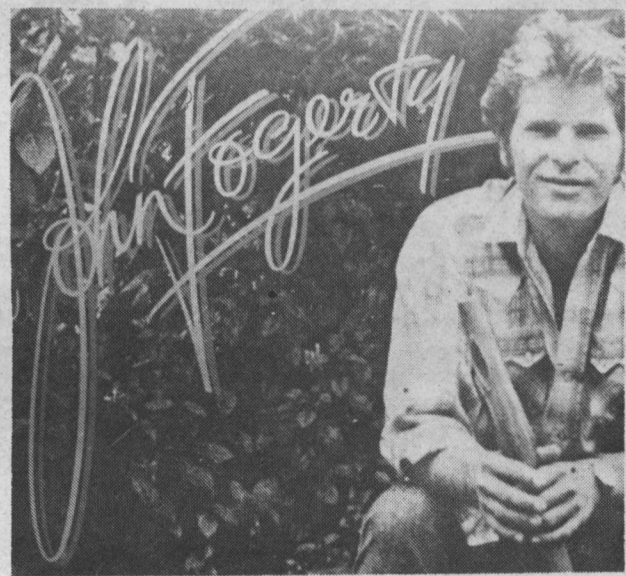
The popular music of the seventies was a rather sorry dungheap: Grand Funk Railroad, Alice Cooper, John Denver, Kiss, Disco Duck and a million amplified morons trashing the legend of Johnny B. Goode. Thus will the historians embalm it. The decade, however, did produce a few gems. *Zum Beispiel*, ten albums from the far end of the epoch:

John Fogerty — John Fogerty, Asylum, 1975. Once upon a time Creedence Clearwater Revival ruled the airwaves, subjugating the competition with songs like "Proud Mary," "Bad Moon Rising" and "Looking Out My Back Door." The band was driven by the singing, songwriting, guitar-playing and producing of the talented John Fogerty, and it rolled merrily along, winning the cheers of audience and record company accountants, until one day the neglected sidemen demanded equal rights in the music-making process. Whereupon they made a disastrous album, *Mardi Gras*, and promptly broke up.

This is Fogerty's second album since the disintegration, and it might just as well be called Creedence Clearwater Continued, so perfectly does it distill the group's funky brand of country rock. For some reason though, the album didn't sell, and the world was denied the spectacle of bar bands flogging to death classics like "Rockin' All Over the World," and "You Rascal You," as they had once flogged the Creedence chestnuts. The neglect is somewhat depressing, especially when one considers the lavish attention given to a certain milquetoast after the Beatles broke up.

Dan Hicks and His Hot Licks — Last Train to Hicksville ... the home of happy feet, Blue Thumb, 1973. So, Van Halen and Led Zeppelin give your girlfriend a headache. And the Sex Pistols seem a mite inappropriate when you have the pastor or the parents over for tea. What you need for those mellow occasions is this mildly stoned album of old-timey jazz. Sure, every song here is as square as a city block, but listen: the band is enthusiastic, their playing is razor sharp, and twenty years from now all today's nouveau-nouveau stuff will sound just as corny. Why not develop your reactionary tastes early?

Kinky Friedman — Sold American, Vanguard, 1973. This is not the best country and western album of the last ten years (such an honor probably falls on Gram Parson's *GP* or the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*). Still, it is one of the most enjoyable and easily the most eyebrow-raising. For Mr. Friedman is not content to be merely a skillful composer of plaintive ballads, barroom stompers and other truckstop fare. No, he is also a mischievous fellow who delights in writing anthems to male chauvinism ("Get Your Biscuits in the Oven and Your Buns in Bed") and fashioning other provocative titles like "High on Jesus" and "Ride Em Jewboy." Needless to say, there was a time when no record label would touch him with a ten-foot boom mike.



For all his apparent outrageousness Friedman is as safe as a church-going Babbit. The calculated vulgarity and shock tactics conceal nothing more sinful than the commonplace observations that organized religions are materialistic and that Jesus freaks are none too bright. As if to atone for these minor heresies he turns around and writes a touching hymn to mankind's lack of Christian compassion, and calls it ... "The Top Ten Commandments"!

New York Dolls — Too Much, Too Soon, Mercury, 1974. Sit your old grandmother in the easy chair, put the Dolls on the stereo with the volume good and high, and ten seconds into "Babylon" she will be hopping, skipping, shaking and bopping off the ceiling like she was 18 again. This is the rock and roll record of the seventies; just bursting with adrenalin, testosterone and other hot electric juices. Roll over Beethoven and tell Tchaikovsky the news.

Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band — Clear Spot, Reprise, 1972. The Captain isn't a regurgitating punk rocker, a creepy purveyor of weird electronic

noises, or a lame no-talent, jazzing his act up with a lot of offbeat gimmicks. He is only a mildly deranged and highly ingenious musician who likes jazz, blues, rock and soul so much that he composes and plays, with the help of the accomplished Magic Band, music that is all these categories rolled into one. The trademark of this distinctive amalgam is a cockeyed and wickedly propulsive rhythm, odd melodies, pyrotechnic sax and guitar playing, and to top it off, Beefheart's rough-as-a-cob caterwauling, a perfect echo of the late great, big bad Howlin' Wolf; a voice guaranteed to strip paint, and induce heart failure in fans of wounded crooners like Neil Young or Bruce Springsteen.

And the lyrics! Big-eyed beans from Venus, long neck bottles, mosquitoes in moccasins, and the answer to the answer. Whew. At least one stanza from "Low Yo-Yo Stuff" deserves to be reproduced in full:

"What if my girlfriend back home/ finds out what my fingers a-been doin' / on my guitar since she been gone / don't anybody tell her / I been doin' the low yo-yo yo-yo / like any other fella / away from home / all alone / I been doin' the low yo-yo yo-yo yo-yo-o-o / Yeah I been REALLY carryin' on."

For those fed up with "daring" and "innovative" music that invariably turns out to be the same old crap, this is pure ambrosia.

John Cale — Paris 1919, Reprise, 1973. How many songs in the modern popular music repertoire are as majestic and stupendous as "The Endless Plain of Fortune"? Fifteen? Twenty? And half of them must be by John Cale: "Please" from *Vintage Violence*, "The Soul of Patrick Lee" from *Church of Anthrax*, "All That Is My Own" which he arranged for Nico's *Desertshore*



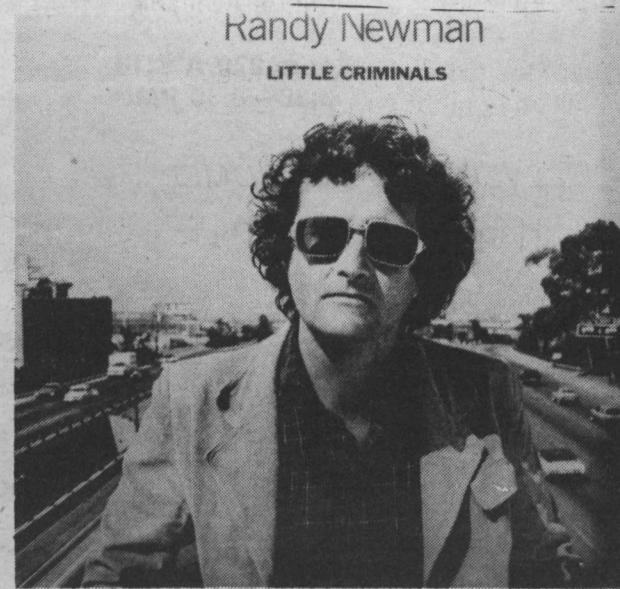
No one could turn out such masterpieces consistently. On *Paris 1919* there is only "The Endless Plain" and, going down a notch, "Macbeth," a furiously Bolshevistic rocker which is at the same time as precisely constructed and intricate as a microprocessor. Of the remaining seven songs, four are merely excellent and three are average-to-boring. All except "Macbeth" have orchestral instrumentation and lie in a category somewhere between pop and classical. It should also be noted that Cale's occasional penchant for being ugly and abrasive is absent here, except for a fairly decadent tinge to some of the lyrics.

Turtles — Happy Together Again, Sire, 1974. Strictly speaking, the Turtles were a sixties group (they broke up in 1970), and they were admittedly second-rate, as Canada is second-rate; but like Canada they had their moments, and it is good to see the good stuff rounded up in a nice compact anthology. All the chartbusters are here, from "It Ain't Me Babe" to "You Showed Me," plus an impeccable selection of singles, album cuts and previously unreleased numbers. Of the latter, the most notable is "Santa and the Sidewalk Surfer," a seasonal Beach Boys parody which deserves a place of honor in the record collection of anyone senile enough to remember when "Pipeline" was the first tune mastered by the aspiring electric guitarist. The artwork and liner notes to the album also deserve a standing ovation.

Fairport Convention — Angel Delight, A&M, 1972. All the dull inventions have had their histories meticulously researched and written. But where is the documentary of two of mankind's real masterworks: rock and roll and pornography? The two are naturally related and, judging from the evidence presented here ("The Bonny Black Hare"), both go back at least as far as Auld Scotland. True, the Scots lacked Fairport's electric instruments, but this minor technicality probably didn't prevent the minstrels of the day from injecting some Low Yo-Yo Stuff into the bawdy ballad, when they serenaded a well-oiled audience on Saturday night at Loch Lomond. And if the selfsame minstrels were as gifted as Fairport Convention, they also got into the song a bit of the awe and mystery that is the way of a man with a maid.

If you haven't latched onto the British traditional music renaissance yet, this is where you start.

Randy Newman — Good Old Boys, Reprise, 1974. "There is only one sound argument for democracy, and that is the argument that it is a crime for any man to hold himself out as better than other men, and, above all, a most heinous offence for him to prove it." What!?!? Who said that? Nietzsche? Hitler? William F. Buckley? Nope. And it wasn't Randy Newman either, although he might as well have said it,



for every song on this record carries the message neatly between the lines.

Not that the record is in any way a position paper or political tract; it is rather an amusing dramatization. What Newman does is simply this: first he slips, one at a time, into the personas of the wretched of the earth — cracker, steelworker, drunk, loser, pursesnatcher, etc. — and, with an empathy and fidelity that almost obscure the tongue in his cheek, he sings the man's pathetic song. Then a quick change of costume and he is the Kingfish, demagogue Huey Long, strutting up and down in front of the same sad specimens, playing upon their naive hopes and smoldering resentments, bellowing, "Who took on the Standard Oil men / and whupped their ass / just like he promised he'd do / Ain't no Standard Oil men gonna run this state / gonna be run by little folks like me and you." With a deft final touch he sings Long's own siren song to the downtrodden, "Every Man a King." If there is any more eloquent argument against Power to the People it has escaped my notice.

Anyway, all the high explosives are wrapped up in Newman's rollicking, Hollywood-classical arrangements and performed by the cream of L.A.'s session men. My ears detect at least five songs head and shoulders above "Short People" (if you'll pardon the pun). Two or three others sound like they were composed by a wino after a long bout with the bottle, but they are easily forgiven.

Walter Carlos — Switched-On Bach II, Columbia, 1973. "Isn't classical music dull or something?" Wrong. "But don't you have to be an intellectual in order to even understand it?" Wrong again. "But how do you tell what is good and what isn't ... I mean ... there's not Top 40 and you can't ask anybody because they just laugh at you or give you strange looks."

Okay, the first thing you do is buy this record (or *S.O.B. I*, or *The Well-Tempered Synthesizer*). Sure it's a gamble, but the odds are no worse than when you act on a favorable review in *Fusion* or *Stereo Review*. After all, they've lied to you before and I never have. Right? Right.



Maria Formolo presents a spectrum of solo dances at Espace Tournesol, May 9, 10 and 11 at 8:30 p.m.