

Dave's Record Reviews

For the AZ Audio Club Newsletter ~ April 2021

Right Hand Left Hand – **Zone Rouge**

(CD & LP, Bubblewrap, 2020)

I'm not sure how this album should be classified, but I'm going to call it jazz-rock. Despite the impression you will get of a full band/orchestra, this is two-only Welsh guys playing guitars and everything else. 11 tracks are joined by a theme of destruction of the earth, with each track named after a location of a natural and/or man-made disaster. The pair weave mostly instrumental sonic landscapes somewhat reminiscent of 80's "krautrock" but more accessible. Worthwhile and very intriguing stuff.

Laura Fygi – **Bewitched**

(CD, Verve, 1993)

Not nearly as well-known in the US as in Europe, this Dutch jazz/torch/pop singer is a vocalist to rank with Diana Krall, Holly Cole, and pretty much anyone else in this genre. She has done about 15 albums but if you only have one by her this should be it. A compilation CD, it pulls together some of her best work; heart-meltingly gorgeous songs with great backing and production. Most of these are covers of well-known songs, but not the worse for that. The sonics are terrific, Verve doing justice both to her vocals and the excellent backing musicians. Schmaltzy? Maybe, but when it's this well done who cares? Not into female vocals? Your loss. Highly recommended.

Various – **Wonderful Sounds of Female Vocals**

(LP & SACD, Analogue Productions, 2018)

If you ARE into female vocals you will probably appreciate this 2-disc audiophile sampler of demo-quality songs put together by analog guru Michael Fremer, who also authored the excellent liner notes. It's an undeniably great collection, with classic songs by classic woman singers; Julie London, Patsy Cline, Ella Fitzgerald, Dusty Springfield, Diana Krall and a number of other notable women are represented here. The remastering and pressing by Analogue Productions is up to their usual standard, which is to say very good indeed. Again, if you are not into female vocals, you are missing out. If you are and do not have this album, the only reason should be that you already own most of the albums from which the songs were taken.

Carl Perkins- Jerry Lee Lewis- Roy Orbison- Johnny Cash – **Class of '55**

(LP & CD, Polygram, 1986)

Billed as a "Memphis Rock & Roll Homecoming," four giants of country music combined their talents as a one-off super-group to produce this killer record, with several other big names contributing. Not every song is a winner, but this is a strong album by guys who – let's face it – knew what they were doing. If the lead cut, "Birth of Rock and Roll," doesn't get you moving and groovin', do check your pulse to make sure you're still among the living. Production isn't absolutely fantastic, but it is damn good. I haven't heard the CD so can't attest to its sound quality, but the LP's is excellent.

Steve Martin – **The Crow**

(CD & LP, Rounder, 2009)

Every knows Steve Martin the comedian. Not nearly as many know him as an excellent musician and banjo player. In recent years he has toured and done albums with the Steep Canyon Rangers and with former New Bohemians vocalist Edie Brickell. However this was his first all-out serious music album, and IMO it is his finest musical achievement to date. Call it bluegrass if you must classify it – it *did* win the 2010 Grammy for Best Bluegrass Album. I suggest that the album as a whole transcends that label, though the banjo is indeed prominent in the songs. With excellent

songs, almost all written by Martin, he is supported by the likes of Dolly Parton, Vince Gill, Earl Scruggs, Bela Fleck, and Mary Black. Oh, and it was produced by Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's string wizard, John McEuen, who also plays on some of the cuts. This is a fun, lively, infectious album. If you prefer serious, stodgy, philosophically deep sounds on your system you'll have to look elsewhere, but of-kind this is great stuff. The CD is good and very worthwhile, the LP (a limited edition on orange vinyl and probably rare) is better. But you knew that, right? His follow-up album, **Rare Bird Alert**, with the Steep Canyon Rangers and a few other interesting contributors (including Paul McCartney) is also good but not as strong overall as **The Crow**.

CLASSICS CORNER

Steeleye Span – **All Around My Hat**

(LP & CD, Chrysalis Records, 1975)

Steeleye Span formed in 1969 with former Fairport Convention member Ashley Hutchings, who recruited Tim Hart and Maddy Prior. He left in 1972, but Hart & Prior carried on with the support of a changing cast of other members. The group became one of the best-known English folk-rock bands of its day, that day basically lasting into the late 80's. Different formations of the band soldiered on for years after, however. They achieved international recognition and toured around the world including in the US. Their music – perhaps you could say their mission – was to take traditional English songs and ballads and revitalize them for the modern world. Most, though not all, of the songs they did were recognizable from their roots, but modified with fresh arrangements incorporating guitars, drums, piano, bass, and other instruments. And there was that voice, Maddy Prior. Though not the sole singer of the group by any means, her outstanding vocals characterized much of the group's work and enabled a fairly successful solo career.

All Around My Hat was the group's eighth album and its most successful, certified gold and with the title song becoming a hit for them. It is just one of some great cuts on the album, and the up-tempo, almost rock version of "Hard Times of Old England" is my personal favorite. Though they would turn out a total of about 15 albums (not counting several compilation albums) and remain a darling of fans of English folk/pop/rock, they never again achieved that level of popularity. Mobile Fidelity issued a half-speed remastered version of the album in 1980, which is the one to go for if you are so inclined. (Apparently it's not extravagantly expensive on Discogs...)

The group's other albums have excellent material on them as well. Their sixth album, **Parcel of Rogues** (1973), is another favorite of mine, the one that first caught my attention and made me a fan of the group. One of their many compilation albums might be of interest to those unacquainted with the group, and serve well as an introduction to their outstanding catalog.

