

Psychedelic Nostalgia

By Matthew Hennessey

Does Richard Ashcroft from The Verve look a little familiar to you? Does the moody, angst-ridden frontman remind you of anybody from the 70's rock past? Let me give you some hints...heroin user and abuser turned straight edged performing artist...depression filled young man of the Haight Ashbury folk/rock generation who was admitted to a mental institution in Boston at the age of 17...a Carole King collaborator who was initially discovered by the one and only Paul McCartney in the late 60s and was the first American signed to The Beatles' own Apple Records...originated the singer/songwriter era of the 1970's...

Give up? James Taylor.

This troubled young man went through adolescence with pain in his soul, a guitar in his hands and musical genius in his mind. By the time he was 22, James Taylor had become one of the leading folk/rock artists with the release of *Sweet Baby James*, released at the inaugural year of the influential 70's generation. Just one year after Woodstock and the end of the Hippie Generation, Taylor's album quickly went platinum and produced a series of hits including the title track, "Anywhere like heaven," and the gem of the disc, "Fire and rain."

Despite his longevity in the music scene, his truly great work comes from his early career and most certainly from this Warner Brothers release. With poetry and musicianship both balanced on the scales of songwriting, it is no wonder that tunes like "Oh, Susannah," "Sunny skies," and "Country road" are still being covered today by local bar bands and successful musicians of the 90s.

Perhaps best known to the grunge generation for his guest spot on a Simpsons(TM) episode where Homer goes to space and receives inspiration from the temperamental Taylor, we should not forget the legacy that he has and the inspiration that he gave to so many people. That, if anything, should not be trivialized. James Taylor is still writing, recording and performing new material, which in itself is very strong; but a look to the past with this gifted songwriter will make anyone appreciate the present day folk/rock music that is on its way back into the hearts of Canadians, in this post-Nirvana generation.

James Taylor *Sweet Baby James* (Warner Brothers Records: 1970) - sweet baby james - lo and behold - sunny skies - steamroller - country road - oh, susannah - fire and rain - blossom - anywhere like heaven - oh baby, don't you lose your lip on me - suite for 20g



Queen
Queen Rocks
(A&M/Hollywood Records)

The death of Freddie Mercury, a few years ago, sparked a Queen revival which included a huge concert in tribute to Freddie (profits going to AIDS research), a double disc of Queen's greatest hits and even a number one hit from a now twenty year old song with "a little Bohemian Rhapsody, gentlemen" on the Wayne's World movie/soundtrack. All fine and good. So why is there another disc released, just before Christmas, that includes eighteen of Queen's songs? Well, for one thing, this record is *Queen Rocks*, and in essence it is ballad free, just the heavy guitar work of May and the soaring vocals of Mercury that was the trademark sound for England's best live band. That certainly seems to be the theme. Loud, live, tonight, sold out and other catch phrases that only the headbanger in you could love. Still, with the chant-rock of "We will rock you," and "I want it all," it's easy to see how Queen got to the echelon of heavy metal. Not a bad album for those who have a sparse Queen collection...indeed, this is Queen 101.

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Day In The Life
"Day In The Life..."
(TVT Records)

Green Day made it popular, Offspring made it cool, and punk music has never been the same since; even ska is out the door. Without a doubt, 1997 was the year that tried to kill punk as the Offspring's new release failed miserably and even Green Day is struggling to recapture the pre-teen market of yesterday. With Cobain now dead for a little over 3 1/2 years, it looks like the grunge generation will be moving on to better things...like easy listening (YUK!!) - see. Success of Hootie... At any rate, this is a welcome movement for some and a catastrophe for non PuffDaddylike music lovers, which is a shame, especially when we consider that there is still a lot of innovative bands in the punk rock genre, including this one. To my surprise, Day In The Life has a fresh sound that plays machine gun rhythms off smart lyrics bordering on a FU slogan pattern that only an East Coast band can trigger with such good results. It's unfortunate that these boys won't get the financial rewards that some of the West Coasters have, but critical acclaim fan respect can sometimes make up for the lack of Washingtons, Lincolns, Jacksons and Franklins.

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Noise Therapy
Cyclops E.P.
(A&M)

Whereas the Southern California punk scene followed in NOFX's and Black Flag's breakneck landspeed songcraft, the move now in some areas of the North America is to slow it down in the form of the Sex Pistols. Contrary to popular belief, the Sex Pistols were never a fast band, at least not in today's standards, they just relied on super heavy riffage with 1/8th note downpicking perfection. In essence, Heavy Metal of the 80's was closer to the Sex Pistols than the Circle Jerks could ever hope to be. I digress. Noise Therapy, from Vancouver, picks up where the shit disturbers from London left off, adding more depth, in the music and the lyrics. With this six song E.P. declaring outright the emergence of Punk/Metal, tracks such as "Losermagnet," "Down," and the surprisingly radio friendly, "Face down," all come off as ear candy. Better things are going to happen to this West Coast band.

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