

DULY NOTED

'Lonely at the Top'

Randy Newman
Sail Away (1972)
Good Ol' Boys (1974)

Randy Newman has the unenviable distinction of having been noted, by the critics of the "Rolling Stone" for three years running, as the one artist most deserving to succeed.

After the third year (1974), he finally started to receive some public acclaim, though he's hardly broken into the 'top of the pops'. The sad thing about all this though, is not that Randy Newman has missed reaching the millionaire status but that too many people are missing some of the most original, moving music being recorded today.

Newman's songs are usually of the soft, lilting, laid-back variety, dominated by piano (he is an excellent pianist) and often accompanied by very tastefully arranged and (mercifully) unobtrusive horn and string sections.

He also throws in an occasional half-rocker for spice. His voice sometimes sounds like he eats gravel for breakfast, but even so, like Bob Dylan and Neil Young, his voice suits his music better than any other voice. His most famous, and probably his best song is "Sail Away", a beautifully moving song about the slave trade.

Newman is one of the few lyricists in rock whose lyrics play a major role in his songs, and which add tremendously to their quality. They deal with themes ranging from the problem of evil to the despair of an Old Man ("won't be no God to comfort you, you taught me not to believe that lie"), to the prejudice of the Northern States, to Frank Sinatra ("Lonely at the Top").

The lyrics are usually quite biting and sarcastic, and though they are occasionally extremely witty, they are nonetheless, on the whole, quite depressing. Newman doesn't pretend to have any answers to mankind's miseries and this lack of hope is about the only significant criticism I

have of Newman's music. But where it lacks the quality of being uplifting, it has the strength of making a powerful comment on human nature and modern society. So, despite his despairing attitude towards life, and despite the fact that I believe there is an answer to man's fallen state, I recommend these albums both for their challenging lyrics and for their excellent music.

Buffalo Springfield "Retrospective" (1969)

The Buffalo Springfield recorded only four albums during their short life span, this last one being

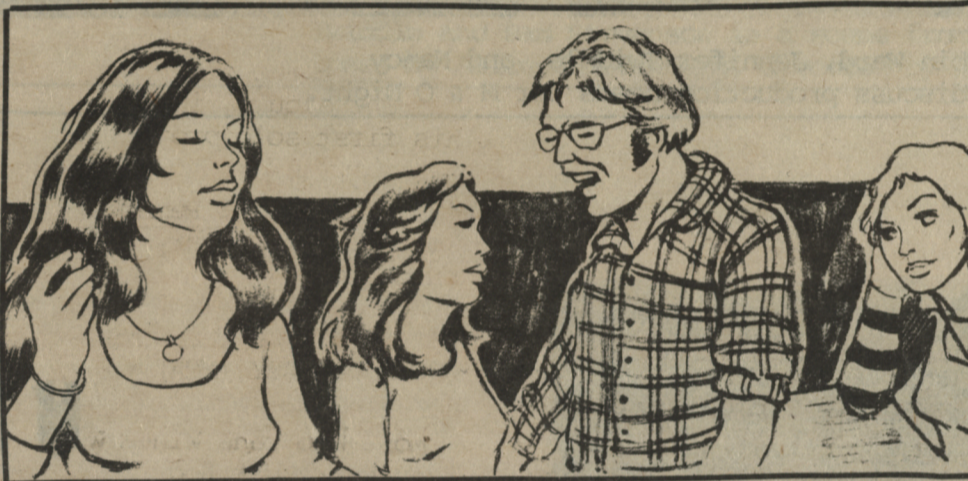
a collection of the best songs from the first three but yet they've made a lasting contribution to rock. Included in the group were Stephen Stills and Neil Young (C,S,N,Y), Richie Furay (Poco), and Jim Messina (Loggins and Messina), but contrary to some popular belief Buffalo Springfield were not merely a training ground for future rock stars. In point of fact there is no album from the post B.S. period that can come near to matching this album in terms of originality, variety, depth, and just plain good music.

Stephen Stills contributed five songs to this album the best one being his

famous protest song, "For What It's Worth", and Richie Furay contributed one, his country-flavored "Kind Woman". But it is Neil Young's work that is the high point of this album. He has contributed the two most original and accomplished pieces on the album, "Broken Arrow" and "Expecting to Fly".

Though they are both highly stylistic, experimental and multi-layered with musical ornaments, they still have the deep, personal feeling so characteristic of Neil Young's best music.

If you have liked the work of the groups spawned from Buffalo Springfield, I think you will likely love this album.



Andy Pratt "Resolution" (1976)

From the front cover photo of some local loser wearing what must be size 13 sneakers and playing a grand piano, to the last song of side two, this is just an excellent album. Pratt is a gifted songwriter, and good pianist and singer, and this combined with his excellent back-up group and Arif Mardins almost impeccable production makes this an album of great quality, depth, and beauty. It is also a rarity for its day in that it is 1. a concept album, centered around Pratts' new found philosophy on life, universal love and 2. in that the producer and artist cared enough about it to spend the time necessary to make it as good as they possibly could.

The two standout pieces on the album are the title cut and "Lillian's Song". The former is an intense, stirring, powerful song about Pratts' struggle to overcome the self-imposed obstacle that keeps him from being the loving person he knows he really wants to be.

The latter is a simple beautiful song about how with a vision of love, everything falls into place. The album contains only weak cut, "Set Your Sights". I highly recommend it, but only if you're willing to give it the attentive and repeated listenings that it requires at first.

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