

Morrison's always had a penchant for rather schmaltzy atmospherics, but now his voice doesn't -or can't- cut a swath through all that goo. Get rid of the synthesizers and faceless back-up singers and all that other sonic blubber and just bring it, Van; that voice is the most potent instrument I've ever heard. I'm not saying this album is lousy, it's not. If you like his newer music, you'll like this. I suggest if you like his newer stuff to check out Woodstock, the most accessible of his classic albums.

The latest from Rickie Lee Jones (she is not country, by the way) is her fifth album in twelve years (slow down, girl!). It's also her worst. Rickie, Rickie, Rickie... why are you such a flake? Pop, Pop is a collection of jazzy covers that can be thrown in the basket with Pin-Ups, Almost Blue, and Rock n' Roll. The material on this album expresses the more annoying qualities of her voice over accompaniment that consists most exclusively of a stand-up bass and acoustic guitar. I've always found her hurried, girlish vocals wildly emotional, but here they're merely irritating. Most of this music doesn't manage to convey any kind of feeling whatsoever. The only decent songs arrive ten (!) songs in with "Love in the Kitchen," which features Rickie's layered vocals to typically beautiful affect, and the track "Comin' Back to Me," one of the few songs here which doesn't sound like she's singing with a big grin on her face. There are a few other moments when the simple melodies are momentarily touching, but they then revert back to the hamminess that sinks this album. Doesn't it piss you off when you buy something, and after you own it once you know it'll never see the light of day again? Rickie, Rickie, Rickie...

Wait a while but Robbie Robertson's

second album is finally out. His first, which had many beautiful slower songs while the more up-tempo ones tended to be throw-aways (although pretty good throw-aways), was one of the best albums of that year, and so is this one. Robertson's always had a gift for melody, and that gift is here in abundance on an album which is even more solid than his first. Robbie's voice, a gruff, monotone (think of Leonard Cohen or Lou Reed and you're on the right track), is even "worse" than it was on his debut, but it works; it conveys emotion, which is what music is all about, right? What makes this music so beautiful is the way it struggles towards transcendence yet never quite attains it, creating a heart-rendingly painful tension. Standouts include "Soap Box Preacher," which has Neil Young on back-up vocals, and "Sign of the Rainbow," which features the gorgeous voice of Aaron Neville (now there's a match made in heaven). Lyrically Robbie deals with "fast living, hot music, and moonburnt nights." Yeah, anyway, who cares what he's talking about; the music speaks for itself.

When I first listened to this album I was frustrated by thinking about what the Band, Robertson's old group, could have done with this calibre of material. While it's still true that Robbie's feeble pipes keep this album closer to the ground than it could have been, the songs are truly great, and even without a great singer -like Richard Manuel, Rick Danko, or Levon Helm- Robbie Robertson can still take your breath away.

One out of three from these artists? Not too impressive. Nonetheless check out Storyville. It's pretty inspiring stuff and my pick for the best album of 1991 so far. Well, coming up next week I've got that little purple guy, Prince. See ya then.

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