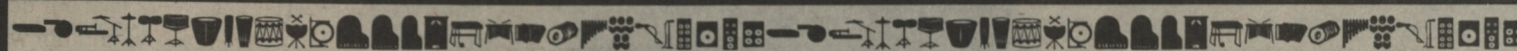


LIVE MUSIC - COMPACT DISCS - BOOK REVIEWS - POETRY - THEATRE

ENTERTAINMENT



Sound Opinions

by Mike Beagan

Howdy there all! I have returned yet again with a big 'ol pile of disks from the *Panther Prints* reject pile. You should find this final edition of Sound Opinions to be the same as any other. There will be winners, there will be losers, and there will be no apologies. On with the show!

First on my list of promising up and comers is **Beatrice Nine** and their full length debut *Little Stars Hung Upside Down* (MCA). The sound is pretty basic modern rock power trio fare, however, the dark and cryptic lyrics are original in style. Although outwardly simple, these lyrics have several levels of meaning to be deciphered through repeated listening, provided that you have the patience for that sort of thing. If you like your rock crunchy, yet moody, then *Little Stars...* just might be for you.

A far more interesting and original alternative to run of the mill teen-angst rock music is **No Doubt** *Tragic Kingdom* (MCA). Progressive power pop compiled from elements of new wave, reggae, dance, and rock is what No Doubt serve up on this release. The strange combination seems to work surprisingly well for the group. Central is the gravely vocal style of frontwoman Gwen Stefani, which has the ability to change from silk to sandpaper at a moment's notice. I recommend this one very highly to anyone looking for a change from the norm.

David Massengill *The Return* (MCA) is an acoustic guitar based collection of stories that are sure to please. Though the songs are folkish, that suffer from none of the staleness that the genre usually radiates. Witty, meaningful, and entertaining; Massengill's songs are a refreshing change from popular music's brain dead average. The title track is a modern retelling of the story of Noah, who is a rocket scientist, featuring God accessing him through the Internet, and telling him to gather three of each animal "...to ensure every possibility". "Orphan Train" is the poignant tale of a man's search for his younger brother. *The Return* has guest appearances by Suzanne Vega, Howard Jones, and Jane Siberry. I suggest that you give this one a listen.

Rocket From the Crypt *Scream, Dracula, Scream!* (MCA) is just another dumb punk album. I'm not knocking the genre, I enjoy some good angst as much as anybody else, but mediocrity is all that there is to find on this loud, annoying CD. All of the usual "angry rocker" themes are here, but since the instruments are just barely played and the vocals are just plain witless, I would suggest that you find somebody who can better portray them.

Clarissa Silver (Attic) is another mellow and meaningful acoustically based pop album in the Counting Crows vein. Guitarist/vocalist/songwriter Michael Rank seems to have it all together on this album. Each track is quite listenable and profound. I recommend this album highly, as well.

Well, that is the end of Sound Opinions for this semester. I hope to be back on a more regular basis next year (provided that the University lets me come back, of course), and plan to bring you a "Best of the Summer" series in the first few issues of next year's *Panther Prints*. May you experience luck, love, and little or no lower back pain.

Jay Semko Speaks

by Mike F. Beagan

After fronting the hugely successful **Northern Pikes** for ten years, Saskatoon's Jay Semko has come into his own as a solo performer and composer. He has recently completed several film and television scores, including the musical scores for *Due South*; and has also released his solo debut album, *Mouse* (Iron Music).

Mouse is a kind of travelogue album for Jay. It is a collection of road stories -- soul searching songs about real life. It features several straightforward rock songs, a couple of Mr. Semko's film scores, and plenty of soul searching.

I was given the opportunity to speak to Jay by telephone several months ago, however, due to technical difficulties I have been unable to bring you all the result of the interview until now. I would like to personally apologise to Jay for the lateness of the publication of this article.

The album was recorded in Semko's home town of Saskatoon, which Jay says was a "case of time and situation. When I recorded the album, I was not on a record label, and so basically, it was a case of me being able to do whatever I wanted, and ultimately having the final decision on how it was going to sound..."

"About half of the songs we ended up doing live off the floor. A lot of that was trial and error, and just finding the right version that had the right vibe -- the right energy."

Jay said that he has been writing musical scores for film and television "since right after the Pikes broke up. I was home in Saskatoon, and I really was not sure what I should do, so I was in my backyard gardening, or doing things like that. I got a call from Thelman Agency and they said that they were interested in a sort of Pikes type sound for the theme song for the pilot of this TV show which ended up being *Due South*. They flew me out to Toronto, and I worked on the pilot movie for it, and I stayed really busy doing that sort of stuff. I did two other independent movies out of the west. One was called *Strange and Rich* and the other was called *Paris or Somewhere*. I ended up last year coming to Toronto and working on the score for the series *Due South* -- 22 episodes..."

When asked about what he wishes for his audience to take from his songs, Jay said "The songs I write I write for me. I can't say that I write songs for the purpose of making singles, or making music for other people to hear. I just sort of -- especially on this album -- the songs that I wrote were... personal and songs that were really sort of directly connected to me."

To satisfy my curiosity regarding the title of the album, I had to ask Mr. Semko what the significance of *Mouse* was.

"Well, I guess the only significance is that it has no significance. I was just thinking of a small, living thing; you may not notice it but it is there. I guess. More than anything, I was trying to avoid making a grandiose, pompous statement. I didn't want people to have a preconceived conception of what was inside musically by looking at the cover or looking at the title, and I think that I accomplished that by calling the album *Mouse*."

I also believe that Jay accomplished his goal. I hope that many people will give this eclectic and pleasing album a listen. You will be pleasantly surprised if you do. I wish Jay Semko lots of luck in his musical endeavours, and hope that he will come to PEI to play in the near future.