



Sound Opinions by Mike Beagan

I have quite a divergent collection of titles for analysis this week. As promised, I will be reviewing releases from eccentric Toronto artists Gandharvas and Blue Dog Pict. Before I critique those two, however, I have a few things to say about two somewhat less peculiar bands.

British chart toppers Blur have unleashed a new disc entitled *The Great Escape* (Food/EMI). Hailed as pop geniuses by the ever-fickle British press, Blur paint admittedly competent power-pop sound pictures of English society. Covering all the ground between queasy listening and sonic attack, *The Great Escape* is an unbalanced album, but with the invention of programmable CD players, this means little. Blur uses a quirky mix of inventive guitar, strings, horns, goofy bass playing, and plastic keyboard sounds to back up their biting social commentary. It is not quite my cup of tea, but Blur is still one of Britain's best musical exports.

Drivin'n'Cryin' *Wrapped in Sky* (DGC/MCA) is an outstanding release. Layers of acoustic and electric guitars set the scene as vocalist Kevin Kinney chants intelligent social poetry with his pleasingly jagged lilt. *Wrapped in Sky* signifies a return to the rootsy vibe that spawned Drivin'n'Cryin'; a significant departure from their power heavy 1993 release, *Smoke*. If you like R.E.M., I recommend this disc stridently.

Toronto's Gandharvas shook up the Canadian music scene with their 1994 release *A Soap Bubble and Inertia*, winning a Casby for song of the year, and nominations for both a Juno and a Much Music Video Award. Their latest, *Kicking in the Water*, is a curious collection of artfully produced tracks. Strange and beautiful when taken one by one, these songs can be difficult to take successively. This is an album that will not fit well into most CD collections; however, the curious will find it worth a listen, at least.

Even more eccentric is Blue Dog Pict's *Anxiety of Influence: ...a nodding into...?* It is made up of twenty disjointed tracks, each one a carefully crafted piece of art. Musically, the style of each song varies so widely that they easily could have been recorded by different bands. From jangly power-pop to funk up jazz, it's all here. Whether it will please or offend the listeners ears is a matter of taste, of course. Personally, I find Blue Dog Pict to be an acquired taste. Though each song has its virtues, several could have been left off this release, thus making it a more palatable package.

That wraps up this week's opinionated rant. Next week's column will feature some interesting world music, and an interview in which Jay Semko (a former Northern Pike) will speak to me about his new solo release, *Mouse*.

BOOK REVIEW

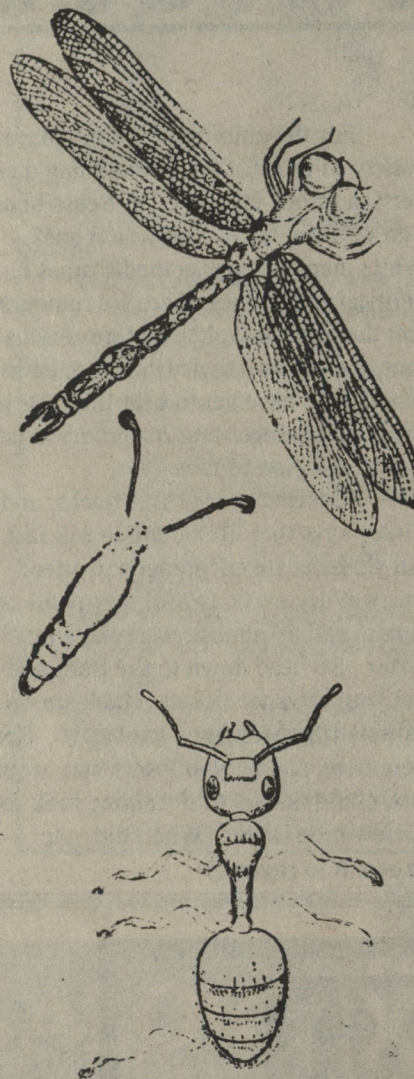
Build Your Own Bugs
(Andrews and McMeel)

Andrews and McMeel's *Build Your Own Bugs* is really fun. The set consists of rubber stamps, each of which portrays the head, body, leg or wing of a common bug. The stamps are remarkably detailed and reproduce very well. The accuracy of the stamps would make this set ideal for any naturalist or biologist as well as for children.

Also included is a well-written book which briefly describes the lifestyles of each bug. The book gives blueprints for each bug but the beauty of *Build Your Own Bugs* is that it encourages creativity and experimentation. There is no rule against stamping together a bug with the body of an ant, wings of a dragonfly and the legs of a spider. Many kids enjoy getting dirty and this is inevitable with rubber stamps sets. Fortunately, the ink included washes off without difficulty. The stamp blocks are easily held by little fingers but it is more difficult to attach the identifying stickers in the right direction.

The number of projects possible with *Build Your Own Bugs* is limited only by the time and imagination of your child. It is this added value plus the impressive detail of the stamps, which leads me to give Andrews and McMeel's *Build Your Own Bugs* a full 5 stars.

review by Shannon Younker



Music Reviews

Music Review

Orb
Orbvs Terrarvm
(Island)

"There may be a legal obligation to obey, but there will be no moral obligation to obey. When it comes to history, it will be the people who broke the law for freedom who will be remembered and honoured" --Tony Benn, British Labour Party MP

This message of rebellion, found in the liner notes of this CD, is consistent with the music on the disc itself. The revolutionary structure of the music is similar to another CD reviewed in last week's issue, *Maya* by Banco de Gaia, but

Orbvs Terrarvm is unique.

Orb composes music that is meant to be listened to. It is intricate, so every time you listen to it you discover something new. For example, the last time I played the CD through, I realized that one song contains a sample from the old cartoon show *The Chipmunks*. I laughed.

The music on this CD as versatile as it is beautiful. It makes great ambient music for intimate moments, and it is good to study by. It cheers you up on a rainy Saturday afternoon.

(4.5)

--Steve Ellis

Spanaway
Seaweed
(Hollywood Records)

This is an interesting disc. Five guys who sound like Green Day, but worse. Seaweed is a new band on the rock/grunge scene. Not to worry, and probably unfortunately for them, they have all their own music. They did not attempt to re-do any of those songs we all like, but rather created a mish-mash of their own. Sorry, but I just didn't like listening to this stuff. If you hadn't guessed already by the name, the disc case is all green, and a bad fluorescent green at that. The one song that did appeal to me was track 10, entitled "Punchy (the clown)". The only reason I thought it would be any good, which it barely was, was because I thought it read "Crusty" at first, and I hoped it was something by Bart or Homer Simpson.

-- Christopher Michaud

Ragged Ass Road
Tom Cochrane
(EMI Canada)

Now this was a welcome change after listening to Seaweed. Tom Cochrane is back in business with this CD. Tom Cochrane has kept the sounds that made "Life is a Highway" so popular four years ago. This disc rocks well, and sounds really good. The first track, "I Wish You Well", is already a hit in Canada and the States, and at least two other tracks are just as promising. Tracks two and four are really good, as well as the last two cuts on the disc. After the success of his debut, which sold over 600,000 copies, Tom took four years off and is back now with another good album.

-- Christopher Michaud