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COPERNICUS - Nothing Exists

Nevermore 1984
MoonJune 2010

A healthy nihilism goes all bellicose for the poet who turns his pen into a sword.

In the most Orwellian of years Joseph Smalkowski, or Copernicus, decided it was time for his verses to not only produce a verbal music but also put some external sound to the words - and got himself a kindred-minded band. "Let the musicians declare war!!" goes "I Know What I Think", and they do so, indeed, with a full-blown aural onslaught onto which the leader lays his punky stentorian chant. Deranged delight! - unlike the mournful recital of "Let Me Rest" clocking at 11.11.

But the opener "I Won't Hurt You" delivers on its sweet, slithery, soulful promise that either skanks or slides to form the most romantic song Copernicus could offer. Still, being himself he couldn't help but break such an innocence in the sonic terror of "Nagasaki", hung on an urgent, oscillating and scintillating rock 'n' roll guitar riff. It's here that the poet denies the existence of everything, him included, so "Atomic Nevermore" spreads its spoken word over the emotional desert which somehow makes the listener explore the album's dry landscape again.

***1/2



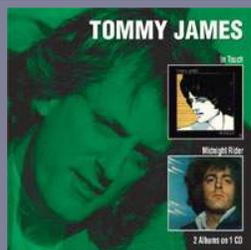
SOFT MACHINE - Softs

Harvest 1976
Esoteric 2010

The original angularity seeps away for guitar to feed on - and feedback - on a honeysuckle vine.

Having tapped into the fusion fad of the day with "[Bundles](#)", the machinists might have thought they arrived at the right station, yet the restless passenger in Allan Holdsworth knew better. The guitarist moved on across the pond to pursue his muse with Tony Williams even before the tour to promote the band's eighth LP started but, over the phone, suggested another axeman to take his place. And it's John Etheridge's instrument that reigns on their ninth one, even though the compositional reins remained in Karl Jenkins' ivory-ruling hands which nicely pin down the elegy in "Out Of Season", and it radiates the mood towards both the record's end and beginning.

The music here for the most part justifies the album's title, "Song Of Aeolus" being the most romantic ballad in the SOFT MACHINE canon; it, along with long, funky "Ban-Ban Caliban" where Alan Wakeman's saxes have a field day, features the predatory synthesizers by Mike Ratledge, the last original member in the line-up who, disillusioned, walk off when the sessions were still afoot. Not that it mattered. "The Tale Of Taliesin", flown in on Jenkins' repetitively captivating piano motif, gently bristles at the bottom end thanks to John Marshall and Roy Babbington's groovy interplay, whereas Etheridge waxes lyrical just to unleash a mad attack halfway into this 7-minute panorama and then slows it down for a grandiose finale. It's counterbalanced with several short pieces, including lacy acoustic guitar sketch "Etika" and the drumming rebus of "Kayoo", yet the swingiest time comes with the quintet's co-write "One Over The Eight", wild and arresting. It seems to have pointed to the bright jazz-rock future, yet the ensemble's [next studio effort](#) would be their last.



TOMMY JAMES - In Touch / Midnight Rider

Fantasy 1976 / 1977
Angel Air 2011

The second coming of the '60s hitmaker shows his creative juices didn't run dry in the wilderness.

A slave of Roulette Records whose boss Morris Levy put him in the fix, Tommy James couldn't allow his new music fall in such dirty hands and, after 1971, stopped recording until the contract was made void, to start anew five years later on the West Coast, on Fantasy, with these two strong works. James might have harbored the songs for half a decade but together they create a tasty whole, from the optimistic, almost spiritual flow of "Tighter, Tighter" on "In Touch" to the acoustic dreamcatcher of "Midnight Rider" the song, with its "My Sweet Lord" inflections. The drift also takes in a glam stomp so infectious in "One Track Mind" and "Do You Wanna Touch Me" that SWEET would have been proud of cooking it.

The "Calico" velvet heart even holds a sitar, yet the first album's core is harder than the second's where "Buddy Don't Leave Alone" drags on for more than 7 minutes and "Love Is Gonna Find A Way" pushes the banality border in its radio-friendly glow. Yet "What Happens To The Girl" is cool in the soft '70s way, whereas "Keep It In The Groove" kicks up the funk to prove the artist's versatility. It was worth waiting in the cold.

***** / ***



RENAISSANCE - Renaissance

Island 1969
Esoteric 2010

When the blues turn into a beautiful and exquisite tapestry, or the beginnings of one unique collective.

With attention always focused on their guitarists, nobody could tell what THE YARDBIRDS' soft core of singer Keith Relf and drummer - and one of the main composers - Jim McCarty would do once the band split up. Having left the name to their latest axeman Jimmy Page, who shaped his new group in a dirigible form, the two original members had more grandiose ideas of pursuing the art rock path where the "rock" part would play minimal role. And, unlike many of their peers, what RENAISSANCE, their new ensemble, came up with still feels totally organic and alluringly unpretentious, though big, in this marriage of different genres steered from a producer's chair by the main men's former bandmate Paul Samwell-Smith.

The classical edge feels unobtrusive with Beethoven and Chopin quotes, but the first cut on the debut album, the epic "Kings And Queens", throws the listener into the deep end thanks to John Hawken's baroque, if jazz-tinged, piano and Louis Cennamo's bass, a bedrock for McCarty to go panoramic and for Relf to wax lyrical and also show his sensual guitar skills. Well, for the Relfs, the second vocalist being the Yardbird's sister Jane, here mostly wordless, but stepping forward to lead "Wanderer" through the arresting harpsichord pattern and deliver a delicate folk ballad "Island" that unfurls in silky screen way, and takes in a playful scherzo, creating a blueprint for the band's second, [Annie Haslam](#)-fronted incarnation. Another epic, "Bullet", meanwhile, welcomes polyrhythmic jive, free improvisations and, finally, a bluesy harmonica, into its buzzing fold to bring it all to a close that leaves a long, delicious aftertaste to which a single "The Sea" adds even more lull.



NEKTAR - A Tab In The Ocean - Deluxe Edition

Bellaphon 1972
[ItsAboutMusic.com](#)
2011

The small, theoretically acid-spiked masterpiece ripe for getting its due - and how the band got there.

If there's reason for the German-based Brits to remain in the progressive rock's second echelon, it's the lack of a shtick rather than of their imagination expanse - or depth, in the case of this, their second album, a concept work tight in its shortness yet vast in its scope. IRON MAIDEN kept the record in high esteem to have covered the raging optimism of "King Of Twilight", the last of the four compositions that "A Tab In The Ocean" comprises, including the side-long title piece.

Heralded with baroque organ and unfurling into a solemn march, the epic flows on Royce Albrighton's liquid guitar, his theatrical voice giving a context to the orchestra-like sweep of it all, while the melodies ripple and shift out of focus - an otherworldly effect which, according to the group's idea, might have been caused by slipping some LSD in the water. Meanwhile, "Desolation Valley / Waves" picks up more vibrant dynamics and jazzy vibe on its gelatin riff, and "Crying In The Dark" adds a soulful grit to it thanks to Derek Moore's bass that welcomes a nice storm into the harmonic brew making it almost irresistible - where else Moog solo runs across a funky scratch?

This deluxe edition, the first in the series of NEKTAR remasters, has an additional disc, "In The Beginning", with the legendary "Boston Tapes", laid down in the USA when the English quartet working in Hamburg had caught the eye of an American producer. Nothing came out of the sessions, yet three songs resurfaced, fully fledged, on "...Sounds Like This", a follow to "A Tab", but the naivete of songs like "Do You Believe In Magic" is arresting, and there's the best take on Del Shannon's "Runaway" you're ever likely to have on your tab.

****1/3



BARCLAY JAMES HARVEST - A Concert For The People (Berlin)

A historical moment can't overshadow its own soundtrack. 30 years on, the political climate's changed but the song remains the same.

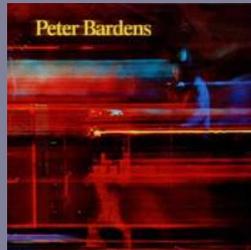
The steps of the Reichstag might be not the best place to stage a concert yet it's the ideal point to have about 200,000 punters mesmerised and listen to your every note, while being conscious of the fact that in some hundreds meters runs a wall which divides free world and the socialist camp. BJH knew that well - they even wrote a special song to mark the occasion, "In Memory Of The Martyrs", an acoustic, folksy centerpiece of this album now restoring two cuts and mix from the initial limited edition, out in Germany only: the show was ridden with technical problems, and 11 tracks that form "Berlin" are what's been salvaged in a studio. The piano-led title track didn't mark the exact moment, though; it, like most of the numbers here, comes from the band's latest LPs.

One such cut, "Love On The Line" with its light danceable groove, translates live as a great opener which allows John Lees' guitar soar and share the wing spirit with the only classics on offer, the supremely majestic in concert version "Child Of The Universe" and

Polydor 1982
Esoteric 2010

"Mockingbird", as transfixingly transparent, before growing anthemic, as another new composition, "Live Is For Living", that rolls easily on Mel Pritchard's sensual percussion. The repertoire seems to be specifically on the life-affirming side, so "Sip Of Wine", carried by Les Holroyd's funky bass throb and vocals harmonies, is a real stage gem, and "Loving Is Easy" surely rocked the Wall's stones. A subtle contribution to history, perhaps, but three decades down the line it still echoes loudly.

****3/4



PETER BARDENS -
Peter Bardens

Transatlantic 1971
Esoteric 2010

Experiments for the sake of it - with mixed results and a big break in solo career.

Keyboard players are prone to self-indulgence, just ask Rick Wakeman, but Pete Bardens never really went for sheer flamboyance - at least in the studio, with a band of his own. Except that on this, self-titled album, his second, he did. Having delivered the brilliant "[The Answer](#)", Bardens must have felt he'd have a license to let it loose, and here his organ playing often comes unfocused. So "Tear Down The Wall", the record's centerpiece, diffuses the African chant, which more jars than pumps the blood, in the phased funk, whereas "Feeling High" does the same trick in the countrified boogie, and the soulful "Write My Name In The Dust", voiced by Victor Bronx and the female choir, flows too monotonely for almost 7 minutes with no solo break for the ivories.

Still, "Sweet Honey Wine" scatters its piano beams over a silky backdrop, thus creating a summery vibe, and in "Down So Long" the maestro really delivers, bleeding his weapons with Vic Linton's guitars. The opener foxtrot of "North End Road" sounds too jocular and superficial to really kick the dirt, yet it sets the expectations mark somewhat high. The problem is, though the playful mood is reprised in acoustic "Simple Song", there's not too much on there to reach that mark, save for the stately "My House" that sounds as if fashioned for CAMEL Pete would join soon after the album was finished to get back to solo mode only in 1979. In that band he really opened up - and got lost for good.



HAWKWIND -
Space Bandits

GWR 1990
Atomhenge 2010

A fount of youth found in a crime of passion. Veterans enter their third decade rejuvenated and slick.

This album's title sits so tight in the Hawk-fans lexicon that it's hard to believe the disc was released only in 1990 to present a very different band to the ones those in the group's wake knew. The masculine heroics and heaviness of the '80s stepped back before a new, feminine elements edged in to change the balance: if Stacia the dancer called for focal attention, Bridget the singer commanded the vocal point - exactly what the times needed.

Ms Wishart's voice smoothes the sharp edge of Dave Brock's guitar in "Images" setting the course for more new-wavish wonders and taking in synth wave from Harvey Bainbridge and Simon House's violin spice in its almost 10-minute cosmic journey. A couple of soundscapes from Alan Davey, whose bass punctures the universal matter elsewhere, keep the momentum pregnant with expectancy but it gets lost in the noodling of "Black Elk Speaks" that features John Neihardt reading the words of a famous Sioux healer. The groove is picked up with the stroboscopic buzz of "T.V. Suicide", yet the psychedelic rave-up of "Out Of The Shadows" represents a genuine return to the "Silver Machine" base. In the most threatening live take - in the bonus section, alongside the enchanter "Snake Dance", criminally unreleased before - it's as bandit as it gets for the veteran band. A real rebirth.

***3/4



HERE & NOW -
All Over The Show

Charly 1979
Esoteric 2010

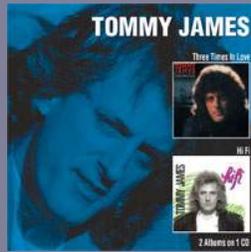
Lysergic juggernaut from hippies-turned-punk and stuck in the middle of space.

Strange creatures crawled out from the shady Ladroke Grove area, and HERE & NOW were among the weirdest in their endless jams and bottomless idealism. That's a good logic in letting one's hair down while always playing for free and passing a hat afterwards, so the punters who didn't like it might leave or keep their pennies. A bit out of this world, perhaps, that's why Daevid Allen zapped the bunch for his PLANET GONG and they came out the other end more alien than before at the moment when punk reigned. God only knows what the spiky mob made of the music preserved here, especially of the madful slide guitars in "Think For Yourself" that opens this live recording and the sprawling motoriks if "Surgeon's Knife".

But they could relate to "The End Of The Beginning" and "70's Youth", though elsewhere it sounds like the chipmunked HAWKWIND flying in teapots, and an acid-free listener will have to check if the CD player's speed is right. Yet ballad "Only Way" is airily progressive, while the phasing effect which undecorates "Open Door" can't hide the blues behind its riffs, so the cosmic brew, inebriating in delicious improvisation of

"Jam", feels well-grounded. Still, the bonus single turns the ground upside down, as instrumental "Choke A Koala" rides a ska wave in style. A nice trip if you like a bumpy ride.

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**TOMMY JAMES -
Three Times In Love /
Hi Fi**

**Millenium 1980
Aegis 1990 /
Angel Air 2010**

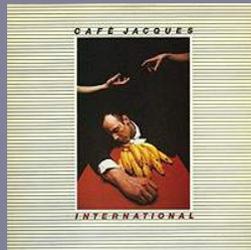
The second installment in the Tommy James' reissues series. A classy return to form from the "Mony Mony" man and the sacrifice to the times.

The '70s weren't too kind for Tommy James who, having disbanded THE SHONDELLS, went solo and after 1971's "Draggin' The Line" hung in hit limbo with no desire to record for the mob-connected Morris Levy, the same one who had John Lennon entangled in the "Rock 'n' Roll" adventure. By the end of the decade, though, James was free and engaging his muse again.

In 1980, back in the dear to his heart New York, the singer came up with the surprisingly strong "Three Times In Love" LP which marries his classic '60s writing style to a new era's pop tendencies. This combination is genuinely irresistible in the title track that entered Top 20, while "It's Magic" holds the exact mix of saccharine and stringed lace to be one adorable ballad. At the same time, "Lady In White" adds boogie to the disco snap, whereas "You Got Me" rolls on the distinctly West Coast guitars. Infectious riffs interspersed with accentuated bass are aplenty here, culminating in the rockarama of "I Just Wanna Play The Music".

Released 10 years later, "Hi Fi" accumulated the worst the '80s had to offer and is mostly lifeless, if melodic. From the opener "Go" the synthesizers suck out any zip there is, and the Chris De Burgh mask James tries to don in "Love You Too Much" doesn't fit at all. The cello-spiced "Ordinary Girl" feels good yet too, er, ordinarily generic, but if "Annie Come Knockin'" spills its riff into the electric swamp, the slight rocking keeps "Burnin' For You" above the morass. Yet Tommy keeps on burning still, and the "high fidelity" term can describe the man himself.

**** / **



**CAFE JACQUES -
International**

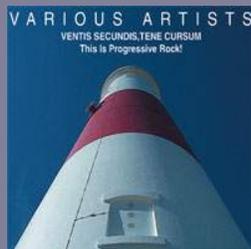
**Sony 1978
Esoteric 2010**

The second and, alas, last chapter in a short-lived but long-lingering story of broken dreams.

Incessant touring is great for breaking a band through yet sometimes it sends a group to the verge of breaking up. That's how it was with the Edinburgh ensemble who didn't have enough strong new material to follow their **debut** but got a backlog of songs to delve into, which meant going artsy in punky time, with a record label demanding to conform to the era and producer Rupert Hine hanging on to the classic values. And it's these values that make "Boulevard Of Broken Dreams" so alluring - a transparent song where a light synth and guitar hook gently underpin Chris Thomson's voice without turning posh. Such a start feels hard to overshadow, and other tracks indeed pale in comparison.

Still, if rock 'n' roll that is "Can't Stand Still" sounds awkward, there's no escaping the elastic catch of "Chanting And Raving". And while "Knife Edge" doesn't cut the prog wood as much as it strives for but possesses a nice rhythmic pattern, "The Medley" embraces a smattering of genres stitched to the best pop formula around with acoustic guitar and fiddle cameos for the brilliant confusion. More so, there's jazzy vibe to make "Waiting" fall on the right side of cheesy panto, the "victim of circumstances" line proving sadly prophetic. CAFE JACQUES just didn't have the third album in them, so they bowed out gracefully.

***1/3



**VARIOUS ARTISTS -
Ventis Secundis, Tene
Cursum**

Perpetuum mobile, or a progressive rock sampler from one of the most vociferous labels around.

It's a contradictory genre: derided for its pretentiousness and revered for its cleverness, prog rock comes so multifaceted that it becomes a rather loose concept which is brilliantly illustrated by this collection culled from the Angel Air catalogue. There are too many albums to choose from, of course, and one may marvel as to what "Dust", a recent offering by Rob Thompson, does in its husky Americana way alongside IAN GILLAN BAND's jazzy take on "Child In Time", and how comfortably **Mo Foster**'s airy, folk-tinctured new-age piece "Achill Island" shares the space with CARMEN's hot flamenco of "Bulerias" and Spanish tones of WARHORSE's "No Chance". But they do nicely to show, more than anything, that prog rock still moves forward and doesn't dwell in the past.

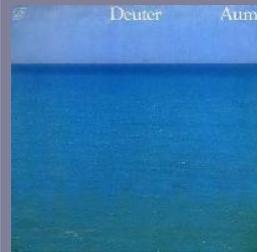
And that this domain remains unpredictable, too, so you meet more riffs in the

Angel Air 2011

contemporary "Where" by CONSORTIUM than in live version of classic STRAY track "Mister Wind", even though it's the latter band that deal in heavy music. At the same time Afro-rock of ZZEBRA's "Amuso Fi" somehow confusingly complements concert variant of "Bedside Manners Are Extra" from the latest line-up of GREENSLADE, while instrumental "Ashen Basher" from MOUSE rages nicely behind the cinematic tapestry of THIRD EAR BAND's "I The Key". That would also be funny to counterpoint the brass-oiled "Three Sisters" from AFFINITY with a certain devilish hit by ATOMIC ROOSTER, hung on the same melodic figure, yet the latter heavies are represented here with the bopping "I Can't Take No More".

The listener undoubtedly could take much more for the CD begs to delve into the Angel Air vaults - for it also demonstrates, first and foremost, the progressive width of the label's scope.

****4/5



DEUTER - Aum

Kuckuck 1972
Reactive 2010

When West meets East, or a melodius meditation as an art form rather than religious practice. Get drowned in drone and then some.

The second album syndrome is inescapable for anyone who has the whole life to work on a debut opus and then obliged to deliver a follow-up on borrowed time, but Georg Deuter mind was boiling with so many ideas that for the sophomore effort he simply changed direction. As ethereal as [its predecessor](#), "Aum" dwells on a spiritual terrain, so "Sattva" flies in a stringed soundscape and in "Soham" Deuter's Indian ways hit the pure raga drone. But then, "Offender Himmel II" floats like a slowed down Wagner on helium, while "Phoenix" spreads out of the mist with a rumble of thunder into the ring of lulling bells and a faux sitar to shape up an irresistible slice of acid folk.

Nothing too original even for the early '70s, yet the Arcadian effect which peaks in "Soma" on the tidal waves will make this record a fave with a meditation devotees and ambient aficionados alike. Still, the Floydian chord that anchors "Susani" takes it all onto a different plane, a valley of icy art rock with a choir frozen into its surface, and the exquisite clang of "The Key" links the trip back to where it started. Push the button again, and a circle of life will stay unbroken.



NATURAL GAS -
Natural Gas

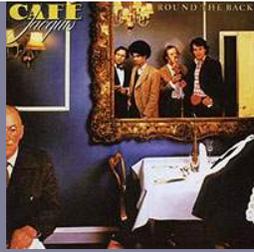
Private Stock 1976
It's About Music 2010

One doomed supergroup with not so superb, yet highly enjoyable album.

Mid-'70s were the times when ego reigned supreme and not the best alliance era, but two Liverpoolians, guitarist Joey Molland and bassist [Mark Clarke](#), both good singers, didn't care. In 1975, a bit bored with a sidemen role, the former with BADFINGER and the latter most recently with TEMPEST, they recruited HUMBLE PIE skin-kicker Jerry Shirley and stabilized the line-up with session keyboard meister Peter Wood to share the lead. The quartet demos didn't impress the suits until Felix Pappalardi, the levelheaded producer of CREAM, took the reins. The result was this sole LP, much adored by those who had the chance to hear it.

It's a high-class collection of confusedly sequenced songs: the opening piano-driven boogie of "Little Darlin'", a nice tone-setter, is followed by a delicate "Once Again", polished but bass-punctured to fall on the right side of banality and leave the final bow to another boogie, "St. Louis Blues", hooked on guitars, with many a spark in between. The album bubbles with energy, most vividly in the sway of "The Right Time" that could be a perfect fit for [URIAH HEPP](#) with whom Clarke did some wizardry some years earlier, in the perfectly shambolic "Miracle Mile" and in "I've Been Waitin'" where Molland's slider smoothes the organ grit. While the leaders' vocal harmonies hark back to their beat roots, the band soar impressively when Mark's voice shines on his own, like in the majestic "I Believe It's Love" that sounds like Joey's previous group's leftover.

Paradoxically, it's on the gloomy "Dark Cloud" that the ensemble's originality shows clearly, yet there was no future for them. Clarke and Molland saw it differently and in the end didn't even speak. Thankfully, they let the music do the talking - and it's a gas indeed.



**CAFE JACQUES -
Round The Back**

**Epic 1977
Esoteric 2010**

Poker-faced rather than po-faced, prog goes pop to flow with the times.

Late '70s saw art rock bands dismissed as dinosaurs which didn't prevent two Edinburgh students, Peter Veitch and Chris Thomson, from picking up, respectively, keyboards and guitar, and taking their songs to the stage - and into a studio where Rupert Hine applied his Canterbury nous to this fine collection. A sole cover, Bobby Bland's infectious "Ain't No Love In The Heart Of The City", plus riffs of fusion-glossy "Farewell, My Lovely", get it all rooted in the rhythm-and-blues, and CARAVAN's Geoff Richardson's flute paints "Sands Of Singapore" into proggy colors, yet there's a contemporary lightness of touch to the bass-punctured opener "Meaningless" to set the smooth tone which makes all the album so attractively even.

Spiky "Dark Eyed Johnny" might be melodiously reflecting the era of punk and disco, and "None Of Your Business" comes full of jerky, Cajun-smearred sneer, while the gentle, though not too delicate, "Eberenthel" and the transparent, French-worded "Crime Passionelle" that rolls on the synth bed, are two of the best ballads to have come from the age of plastic music that was the other side of it all. Maybe it's this multi-facetedness that makes "Round The Back" sound as fresh today but whatever the reason, it's a pleasure - doesn't matter guilty or not.

****1/3



**BULLET -
The Entrance To Hell**

Angel Air 2010

A durable missile that went amiss to be remelted into HARD STUFF but hot and stinging still.

It looked like a promising project, when two Johns, DuCann and Gustafson, had left, respectively, ATOMIC ROOSTER and QUATERMASS and, together with the former band's drummer Paul Hammond, joined forces in BULLET. Hoping to hit the charts, the progressive heaviness wasn't to be discarded, but the name, shared with an American group, was. Thus, HARD STUFF came to be to go and release two albums for Purple Records, the first being 1972's "Bulletproof", demoed two years before, and in this case "demo" means a whole record from which the finished product took only a part. Cue "The Entrance To Hell".

Released for the first time now, those tapes don't have the streamlined impact of "Bulletproof", yet sound somehow fresher in their rawness that's to the fore not only in some jams, including the title one, but in the sharp, if loose, rock 'n' roll swagger of "Sinister Minister" or "Millionaire", where Gustafson's bass rumble greatly complements DuCann's guitar riffs. Several cuts - "Monster In Paradise" dating back to John G's days with EPISODE SIX and later recorded by Ian Gillan, and "The Soul That I Had", bluesy as in John DC's ANDROMEDA time - reek of the musicians' psychedelic past. But everything is in hard rock vein here, "Time Gambler" feeling possessed, whereas "No Witch At All" provides a space for DuCann to lay the rhythmic frame and solo endlessly at the same time, all the while doing the harmony vocals (are there other songs, save for The Fabs' "I'm So Tired" to mention Walter Raleigh?). More so, there's a funky grit in the two stringers' attack that Hammond's beats fly around; it's most prominent in their only co-write "The Orchestrator", clearly underdeveloped but fizzy, and in the bottom line of "Mr. Longevity".

Sadly, the destiny didn't deal longevity for this band. But while they lasted they were great, as is having BULLET back in one's skull.



**PETER BARDENS -
The Answer**

**Transatlantic 1970
Esoteric 2010**

The ivory heroics in the land of light, shade and enlightenment.

Now one can only surmise if Peter Bardens' joining CAMEL, for which he's mostly known, was a blessing or a curse. The band's gain, as his playing underpinned their guitarist's vision, might have been the pianist's loss. A leader in his own right, having steered the careers of Peter Green and Rod Stewart, Bardens came from Georgie Fame class of rhythm-and-blues and could rage heavily like Jon Lord, with all his abilities are laid out here, on his solo debut - or in the epic "Homage To The God Of Light" that took up the whole second side on vinyl and steals the show here: it's an all-encompassing tribal festival, a tension-building funky kaleidoscope of aural images that swirl around Hammond's roar. A blinder.

Still, if the light needs a shadow for contrast, it lies in the riffy murk of "Don't Goof With A Spook", chilly to the bare bone, while the 10-minute-plus "I Can't Remember" with its life-affirming buzz is a precocious slice of infectious Afro-rock that breaks into a rocky groove for Bardens to jive to the tilt. But it takes some time to get there, and the immersion starts with the title track where, once the playful piano sets the classical tone, the tasty organ rolls out a bedrock for Andy Gee's ethereal guitar and Peter's soft vocals which duel with Steve Ellis' bluesy voice. A wailing of different kind comes from Peter Green and Linda Lewis on the boogie walk of "Let's Get It On" - simple, catchy and impressive.

impressive.

Less so are two single sides from VILLAGE, a band Peter Bardens had worked before embarking on "The Answer", but these swinging bonuses provide a peek into the mindset that gave birth to this monument of an album which still stands tall and true.



**MAGNA CARTA -
Midnight Blue /
Live & Let Live**

**Polydor 1982
Angel Air 2010**

Where the gloss devours the rustic: the folkers' shamelessly shining hour and a concert journey to and from it.

Authenticity wasn't something Chris Simpson's band cared for as much as FAIRPORTS or STEELEYE, which to some extent gave MAGNA CARTA more freedom while denying the group the misty-eyed appeal of their peers. This approach, though, paved the way to "Midnight Blue": laid down in 1982 when most folk rockers felt like going the dodo way, it's a great collection of songs. It might be set in motion by a glossy country roll of "Slowbone Jones" but instead of usual homespun feel, so prominent here on the slide-sprinkled "I'll Walk Mine", there's many a scintillating urban moment. The nocturnal velvet wraps the funky smut of the title track, the soul ballads like "Wind On The Water", with Kate Robbins vocals sharing the spotlight with Simpson's, or "Have A Nice Day", and even the bass-shaking boogie of "It's So Easy" that bristles with Philly brass. Languidness and glitter that reach the zenith in "Little Bit Of My Heart" suit this band well!

A shuffle every now and then, the album underwent a little re-shuffling with one original track excised and supplanted with two cuts from the same sessions, not to mention a smattering of new compositions - and a whole disc of concert recordings, for the most part from two last decades. Classics ("Time For The Leaving", "Airport Song"), rarities (the aforementioned, and very different, "Wind On The Water"), covers (J.J. Cale's "Call Me The Breeze" with an exquisite fretwork from the leader) and recent songs (the amazing, epic "Fields Of Eden") possess contemporary shine and mellow mood, and see Linda Simpson duetting with her husband. Yet hidden among them is a real gem: an acoustic instrumental "Sponge" from 1971 which makes the on-stage time-trip go full circle and present more unexpected sides to MAGNA CARTA.

**** / ****1/3



DEUTER - D

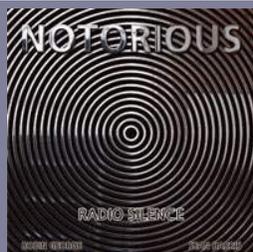
**Kuckuck 1971
Reactive 2010**

A (dis)quiet revolution in sound, or one-man sonic crusade into the ambient world.

One can admire Eno but the Brit artist wasn't that much of a pioneer when it came to the ambient music for there was Georg Deuter before him, and "D", the first entry in the manifold string of his recordings, is a milestone on many levels. Recovering from a car accident, Deuter, a graphic designer from Munich, discovered there were more dimensions to the world and set to explore it with aural tools. Alone, with a two-track tape recorder, for months he built a disturbing edifice, a reflection of Germany through Stockhausen's prism yet palatable enough for the art rock audience.

There's a lot of sharpness in "Der Turm / Fluchpunkt" to hook the hard-psych crowd on its riffs, while floating effects, funereal bells and babies' cries of the four-part "Babylon" throw a listener into much deeper end, with "Atlantis" drowning the music into its waves. Still, there's a light into that underwater swirl, an FX-laden guitar leading the way: it meanders through the Eastern drones onto the folk pastures and then shoots its clear rays to fill the emotional void and turn it into the madful fair with a synth for a barrel organ and then, in the del(h)icious "Krishna Eating Fish And Chips", sails Eastwards again. The results could have been trance-inducing if not for the full absence of serenity, even in the lulling sway of "Gammastrahlen-Lamm", and it feels great to be constantly disturbed. A work of genius - almost.

****4/5



**NOTORIOUS -
Radio Silence**

The silence may come after deafening thunder - and two heavy stalkers provide it here in exquisite spades.

Another album marked by a [Robin George](#) curse, which means it sunk on the original release to be ripe for rediscovery and revaluation two decades on. This time the guitarist's partner in crime was Sean Harris from DIAMOND HEAD whom George produced, but what the pair delivered had a pronounced commercial edge. Perhaps, not too commercial for the late '80s to make it big time, though the bubbly shuffle of "The S'Walk" was a neat chart-biter with its P-Funk gloss instead of metal one could expect from its masterminds, while "You Need More" is an upbeat, if airy, ballad up there with the best from the hairy royalty of its decade.

Here, re-sequenced and expanded, the songs punch the bag from the title cut, that has a

Geffen 1990
Angel Air 2010

bluesy slide lick squeezed between the funky jive and harmony choruses, to the swaggering closer "Good Times" that sums up the hour spent with this album. Even when the flow is loose, like in the bass-shaking and harmonica-riding "Do Like A Man", it goes straight to the nerve as does the silky, strings-wrapped blues "I Believe In You" which showcases Harris' soft spot rather than hard place - but "The Game's Up" recycles the "All Right Now" riff for the umpteenth time, while "It's Energy" feels too generic to ripple a soul. The Philly-sounding brass and guitars mix of "Soul On Fire" rectifies that, yet "Radio Silence" still remains a product of its time, a nice one with it.

***1/3

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