

Arts & Entertainment

Steve Skinner's Disc Spin

Reviews by Steve Skinner

The Smiths Strangeways, Here We Come
Sire Records, Tapes, and CDs

The Smiths have yet another new American release in short succession following the spring release of their British hits collection, "Louder Than Bombs." On a sad note, this could be the last in a string of great Smiths albums with the recent Morrissey-Marrs split - Marrs leaving the band over highly speculated reasons. It's truly a song-writing talent combination destined to go down in history as one of the finest during the progressive rock era.

So "Strangeways, Here We Come," with a "Push and a Rush" leading the way. This cut is caught up in a trap at first, escaping later from the eerie echo (tubular) beginning. It rolls in painful, yet pure, urgency and consistency. Another key track, "Death of a Disco Dancer," breaks into a new sound for the Smiths which is not at all uncommon. It's a strange, piano-laced, pull and strain that moves forward at a stressed rate. The end builds into a powerful guitar strum, when effectively, the band pulls a stringy outstretch, extending the track into "Girlfriend In a Coma," the British hit single from the album's overseas counterpart, "The World Won't Listen." This single just finished ripping the charts over the summer in England, and is wildly poised to do the same in the States. It's really a simple ballad featuring the sort of silly twist the band does best. And at last, Morrissey screams, "It's serious!"

The other side of this seemingly sideless disc features "Last Night I Dreamt that Somebody Loved Me" - a pseudo-ballad that builds on soupy strings and a much hallowed Morrissey wail. "Unhappy Birthday" is my favorite this time around. The lyrics tell it all . . .

"I've come to wish you a unhappy birthday,
because you're evil and you lie
and if
you should die, I may feel
slightly sad,
(But I won't cry) . . . No, I'm
going to
kill my dog."

The inside sleeve of the record is even plastered with XXX's and OOO's (surely to be picked up soon by your local Hallmark store - What a neat way to send someone a unhappy birthday!). In short, I like the cut because it's short, snappy, and truly British in tone.

This disc is full of other Smiths classics I have not the time nor the space to mention. Crave it, buy it, and wail along with it. This may very well be the last of its kind.

Jesus & Mary Chain
Darklands Warner Bros. Records, Tapes,
and CDs

The Jesus & Mary Chain may well be one of the world's most fashionable bands out today. They have, over the course of the last two years, become widely known and accepted if not for their raw sound, then for the beauty that lies beneath.

This time out the beauty is unearthed as the band does away with its progressive staple of "airplane liftoff"-heavy laden layers of fuming feedback that once covered warm and melodic acoustically inlaid workings of fine, mystic sound. This progressiveness found on 1985's "Psychocandy," provided just what the band needed to break through. And several of their cuts from that release, namely "Just Like Honey" and "Some Candy Talking," made it big as English singles on the top of the foreign pop charts.

It's now 1987 and their major label debut on Warner Brothers Records is haunting alternative album stations across the country. Jesus And Mary Chain are dark and the "Darklands" provide that needed boundary (or happy hunting ground) necessary for their obviously unique moldings of musical magic. Top releases as singles from the album include "April Skies" (an early spring release overseas) and "Happy When it Rains" - both entities of flagrant, yet harmonious acoustical style. Breathless vocals and shrouded lyrics make up the eternal basis on which this follow-up rotates and shines.

The real pleasure releases on side two as the band places emphasis on the ballad, complete with soft, sexual overtones. "Cherry Came Too", "On the Wall", and especially "About You," sum up the focus of the band. They continue to build on the theme they set up with "Psychocandy." Even without the progressive sting of feedback, this band can move an audience. They've taken away the edge, concentrated on melodic purity, and provided the essence of beauty in today's progressive rock scene.

Pink Floyd
Momentary Lapse of Reason
Columbia/CBS Inc. Records, Tapes, and
CDs

"A Momentary Lapse of Reason" is a good justification for this otherwise misunderstood (rockin' the grave) release. The Floyd has gone Water-less (Roger Waters opting for his solo work instead - he's totally against the band's use of the Pink Floyd name) - thus providing a murky, unacceptable, and incomplete result for the band to wade through for some

time to come.

Don't misunderstand however, the disc is solid as ice and its coolness shows. The instrumentation is apparent, the Floydian psychology obvious, yet the sheer energy and melodic arrangement (strangement!) under Waters' direction has disappeared. Where has the concept gone? The mystic? The power? The energy?

The album cover surfaces with an ocean breeze of freshness. Who would of thought of placing a mental ward on the beach and stretching it to eternity? For album cover collectors this is a must!

The cuts are familiar. We've all heard this Floyd play before. In fact, taken are some of the best effects, many straight from the classics - at times, only the song titles are different. The music is eerie, quaint, free, static, moving and even paranoid - spreading from one realm into another. It's even loose at times and sometimes moody.

The opening cuts march forward with familiar sensations that only Floyd can conjure. Striking guitar jabs and echoes of loose, flowing rhythms abound. It's some

of the best of the early albums. Included are bits and pieces of "Meddle," "Animals," "Wish You Were Here," and "Piper at the Gates of Dawn." But it all rages as a mere anthem to what was once the one, true progressive band. Let's celebrate the classics and enjoy the new, but as far as the best ever? Never.

It seems a "final cut" would not be enough. In this age of multi-platinum supergroups, and unhealthy (down right decrepid) reformations, we have to accept yet another in the big bill, big bucks series (as if the Monkees, the Grateful Dead, Boston, and Lynryd Skynryd weren't enough). It's funny what a little bit of money does in the world today.

Again, the fact most apparent in this new work is the missing Waters talent. He was the brainchild behind the band and the masterful creator of Floydian witchcraft.

Only time will tell if this release is truly to live up to the classic Floyd releases of the 70's. Buy it. Enjoy it. It's Pink and it's Floyd, but it's obviously dry without the Waters.

O'Keeffe Centennial to be Musically Celebrated

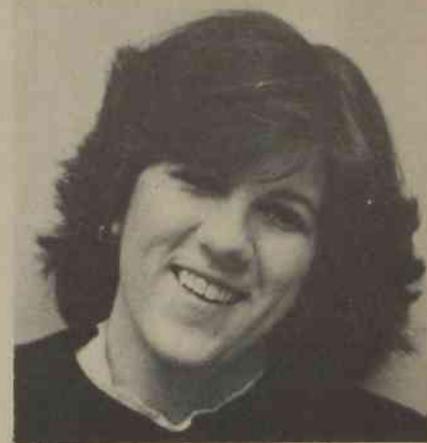
Jill Stricklin

The celebration of the 100th birthday of renowned American artist, Georgia O'Keeffe, will not only involve a retrospective of her collected works, but also the innovational performance of a musical piece which was inspired by O'Keeffe's artwork. Entitled

"Black Bird, Red Hills", the newly commissioned chamber music piece for clarinet, piano, and soprano is a multi-media presentation which features reproductions of seven O'Keeffe paintings. "Black Bird, Red Hills" is the brainchild of Thea Sikora Engelson, accomplished soloist and music professor at St. Andrews Presbyterian College, and B. Scott Bridges, clarinetist and associate professor at the University of Alabama. The composition itself is the work of former Composer-in-Residence of the Minnesota Orchestra and Pulitzer Prize finalist, Libby Larsen. The idea for a musical tribute to the work of O'Keeffe was conceived one evening at a pool party when both Engelson and Bridges were teaching at Governor's School East on the campus of St. Andrews. They contacted Larsen, a college friend of Engelson, who agreed to compose the piece.

O'Keeffe's life and works were researched by Engelson and Bridges in order to provide Larsen with information to aid in her composition. O'Keeffe, although she was originally from the mid-west and spent her young adulthood in

New York, had strong ties to the south-east. Engelson pointed out that O'Keeffe herself drew a strong parallel between vis-



Thea Engelson

ual art and music. "She really felt that one of the great transition points in her life came at the University of Virginia. It was there that she began writing that music could be visual. Some of her pieces painted at this time were inspired by music," remarked Engelson. "I was surprised by the number of singing references occurring throughout her life. She described 'singing shapes' and said that if she were reincarnated, she would like to come back as a soprano because she felt that singing was the ultimate means of expression. She said, 'I can't sing, so I paint,'" Engelson pointed out. Thus, a musical tribute involv-

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