

Thorogood plays rock the way it was meant to be

By MARK PEEL

If there is someone playing better rock and roll than George Thorogood and the Destroyers, I've missed the boat. Although it's often said of jazz, I think an argument can be made that rock is as much a way of playing as it is a musical form. In *Move it On Over*, Thorogood embodies the essence of rock as a style: he plays with a raw power and snarling ferocity that make no concessions to the middle-aged paunch rock has grown in the '70s.

Thorogood is not a "singer-songwriter" (that dread epithet for wimpy, diluted rock) but a performer. He wields a Gibson hollowbody electric guitar with which he power-chords, slides and generally thrashes about his audience with more technique and sheer guts than any five guitarists currently laying claim to the title.

The Destroyers draw on the historical roots of rock for their material, and one can very nearly experience the re-creation of rock 'n' roll listening to Thorogood transform the blues of Willie Dixon and Elmore James into the music of smokey basements and beer-soaked dance floors

records

Move It On Over *Backless*
Thoroughfare Gap

and of frantically jerking limbs and flushed, sweating faces.

It goes against every current trend in pop music, and as if this non-compromising dedication to pure rock 'n' roll does not make the band underdog enough, the Destroyers record for Rounder records, a small, folk-blues-bluegrass label. Thorogood's first album was the biggest selling record in Rounder's history — 50,000 copies (a modest production run by major label standards.) But small is beautiful. This is rock as it's meant to be played — with feeling and fire. **A plus**

Stephen Stills: *Thoroughfare Gap*

Thoroughfare Gap represents a low point in Stephen Stills' career. In fact, this album is

so bad, it's not even any fun to review. How, for instance, is one to muster a critical response to drive like "she treats me nice and she makes good gumbo?" You know, people think this is a glamorous business, listening to all the newest albums and blowing off about them in print. Well, it's albums like this that make me wish I were writing an anthropology term paper right now.

Anyway, I've listened to the album, so all of you don't have to bother. I'll sum up what Steve's up to here so you can get on with more important things.

He does a song about picking up the love of his life on the dance floor. The line that finally works is "what you need is a sunrise and a smile." You may want to try that one out sometime, fellas.

A couple of songs later, he's lost the love of his life and, quite frankly, he doesn't take it too well. He does learn a valuable lesson from the experience, however: "life is real and not a play."

He also does covers of "Midnight Rider" and "Not Fade Away." Neither would tempt one to forget the originals.

Finally, in a song I suspect may be a put-on, Stephen complains that he isn't able to get any booty. Perhaps the ladies have heard a demo of this album.

So there you have it. Don't say I've never done anything for you. **F**

Eric Clapton: *Backless*

Isn't this the guy who used to play guitar for Cream? Why is he making J.J. Cale albums?

The success of "After Midnight" may well have been the worst thing that ever happened to Eric Clapton. Apparently he got the idea that he was really meant to be a laid-back dude, and ever since his early successes he's been making albums that sound like they were recorded from a hammock. Which, I suppose, is all right for a genuinely laid-back dude, but is there anyone out there who thinks that this stuff is as good as Cream?

I don't think it's a meaningless question. Are we to accept this lazy crap from a guy just because he once was capable of making great music? Let me put it another way: is there a record company in America that would let this guy near a studio if he weren't already a big name?

Of course, Robert Stigwood is just delighted to have Eric in the studio with an album for the Christmas season. The packaging on this album is so beautiful, so typically RSO, that, in fact, the contents are nearly irrelevant.

The jacket, a grainy photo of Clapton reclining on a sofa in reddish, diffuse light, literally puts the music to shame. It just angers me that with an many struggling artists as there are who deserve to reach a larger audience, that it's slickly marketed albums like *Backless* that get the airplay and the trade ink, and that wind up being gobbled up by people who rely on computer-derived national FM playlists to spoon-feed them palatable, easy-to-digest music. **Album: F Jacket: A**

Mark Peel is music critic for the Daily Tar Heel.



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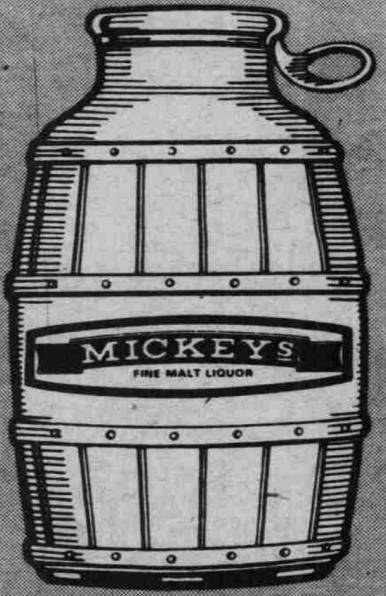
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