

Plundering the Vaults



The Grateful Dead

Grateful Dead

Spring 1990 RHINO



Every Deadhead has favorite pockets of shows—for those who jumped on the bus early, that might be any run between 1970-72, or the fabled Spring of '77. For latecomers (i.e., those who signed on after "Touch of Grey" in 1987) or career 'heads, the spring of 1990 looms large. The GD archivists have sought to address the latter group in a big way with this massive boxed set: six complete shows on 18 discs, housed in an enormous box (three inches thick) filled with all sorts of goodies, including a tour program, hardcover book, ticket stubs, promo photo, backstage passes and more—all selling for \$200. It's a stunning addition to the **Grateful Dead** shelf, but what of the music? That, of course, depends on how one feels about the Dead at this stage to begin with. **Brent Mydland**, the band's keyboardist at the time, had been with the band for some 11 years but would be dead in July, so these shows—from the East Coast, Canada and the South—mark some of his parting moments. That the band is playing well (although they are, at times, a bit uninspired) is never in question, so picking highlights is an exercise in futility, as every listener will likely choose another. (Hartford's first set and the "Hey Jude> Dear Mr. Fantasy" jam from Ontario are good starting points.)

Whether listened to in a marathon session or sipped casually like wine, there's plenty to grab onto here. With **Jerry Garcia** in relatively good shape at the time vocally and playing-wise, this may very well have been, as many believe, the last great tour. For those who are wary of shelling out the big bucks, a two-CD distillation is also available.

Jeff Tamarkin

Silver Jews



Early Times DRAG CITY

The world contained on **Silver Jews' Early Times**—a collection of recordings from the early 1990s—seems impossible to sustain from the first note. Obfuscated by cassette hiss, their own high-concept abstraction, and all manners of spasmodic clanging, leader **David Berman** and Pavement pals **Stephen Malkmus** and **Bobby Nastanovich's** first single and EP as the Silver Jews were as mysterious-sounding as '90s indie rock could get. The recordings are still brilliant 20 years later because they are just as confounding, and maybe twice as beautiful. As Malkmus and Nastanovich focused on Pavement, Silver Jews would become Berman's band, his lyrics always foregrounded. But, on *Early Times*, there is a fragility to the irresistible punk refrains ("Welcome to the House of the Bats"), surreal travelogues ("AM FT. TROOPS"), and proto-Pavement slabs ("West S"), where one can hear classic rock upbringings reluctantly

poking through—a guiding logic behind some ace young songwriters exactly smart enough for their own good. *Jesse Jarnow*

Taj Mahal

The Hidden Treasures of Taj Mahal 1969-1973 COLUMBIA/LEGACY



Every artist who is lucky enough to enjoy a lengthy career has a sweet spot. For

Taj Mahal, it's without question the late '60s and early '70s (and if you've never heard "Leaving Trunk" from his self-titled 1968 debut, or "Chevrolet" from 1971's *Happy Just to Be Like I Am*, stop right here and get those two albums). There are more than hidden treasures on this double-CD retrospective of unreleased tracks: Some are outright gems, including "Tomorrow May Not Be Your Day," which puts the funky hammer down over a "Try A Little Tenderness"-like backbeat, and the New Orleans-style "Sweet Mama Janisse"—a juke joint romp with Taj in full raspy croon. Disc two is a live set recorded in 1970 at London's Royal Albert Hall, and while the audience sounds a bit subdued, the band is as tight as a drum, boogie-rocking on "Divin' Duck Blues" and dialing back to a sleepy swing on "Bacon Fat." Whether you're a Taj completist or a newbie doesn't make a difference; this one just keeps on giving.

Bill Murphy

Grateful Dead

Dave's Picks, Volume 2: Dillon Stadium, Hartford, CT, 7/31/74 RHINO



Considering they would begin a sabbatical at the end of the year that many feared could mark the end, the

Grateful Dead were still on a creative roll in 1974. A considerably different band than they'd been just a few years earlier—with **Mickey Hart** on hiatus, **Pigpen** dead, and **Keith** and **Donna Jean Godchaux** now fully integrated—they were taut and lean but still unfailingly exploratory in their approach. The massive "Wall of Sound" PA system that they were carting around to gigs made every tiny nuance sound crisp and crystalline—perhaps too much at times. Some of the natural live ambience was lost in the process—and the band was clearly relishing its only-recently gained mega-audience. This summer East Coast date is both emblematic of the period's large-scale stadium gigs in general and a

notch above musically. From the start of the first set—a raging back-to-back "Scarlet Begonias" and "Me and My Uncle" (the set is marred only by **Bob Weir's** vocal mic failure in "Beat It on Down the Line") through an alternately spacey and propulsive third set highlighted by an extended "Truckin'"> "Mind Left Body Jam"> "Spanish Jam"> "Wharf Rat," all of the components (save, perhaps, for a particularly off-key Donna) are at the top of their game. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Mitch Ryder

Live at Rockpalast 1979+2004 MIG



Before there were the Stooges, the MC5 or Ted Nugent's Amboy Dukes, **Mitch Ryder** and the **Detroit Wheels**

owned Detroit rock 'n' roll with their hard-hitting, R&B-imbued sound. Three top 10 singles came of it, and then Ryder receded from view until the late '70s when his still ongoing comeback kicked in. This three-disc collection couples two German live shows, from 1979 and 2004. The gruff-voiced Ryder still drips sweat and his bands pack a punch. The previously mentioned hits—"CC Rider/Jenny Take a Ride" and "Devil With a Blue Dress On/Good Golly Miss Molly"—sound great 25 years apart, and Ryder makes classics like Hendrix's "Little Wing," the Stones' "Gimme Shelter" and Dylan's "From a Buick 6" his own, while his original tunes are also quite solid. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Weather Report

The Columbia Albums 1971-1975 COLUMBIA/LEGACY



Weather Report, along with Return to Forever, Mahavishnu Orchestra, Herbie Hancock and the Tony Williams

Lifetime—and, of course, Miles Davis' late '60s landmarks *Bitches Brew* and *In a Silent Way*—defined the fusion genre at its inception. But only some of the music produced during the peak of the era—the first half of the '70s—holds up well today, excised from the context of the times. The group's first half-dozen albums (one a double live set) have now been packaged as *The Columbia Albums (1971-1975)*, and when taken as a piece and listened to sequentially, they offer something of a mini-history of the movement's uneven genesis itself.

On their self-titled debut, Weather Report—in their initial incarnation of **Joe Zawinul** (keyboards), **Wayne Shorter** (saxophones), **Miroslav Vitouš** (electric bass), **Airto Moreira**