

Reviews

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tar and Patrick Hallahan on drums) allowed the League to create skeletons of songs. The meat was put on the bones in the studio with contributions from percussionist Doni Schroader (...And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead), sax player Deanna Varagona (Lambchop), percussionist Ben Martin (Clem Snide), and vocalist Jim James (also My Morning Jacket). The one major drawback to blasting a record out in an evening is that some of the material does not see the expansion it deserves. Natural progression is therefore truncated to preserve a sense of immediacy and intimacy. This gamble pays off for Bare most of the time with a few exceptions that will merely confound the listener. But Bare is one smart feller; that may have been his intention all along.

You'll never become comfortable with a sound and be able to predict what Bare will deliver next on *Meow*. Bare's bizarre mouth-percussives and his lyrics about visits from the Pope, as Sonny sings to Cher, punctuate the dusty cowboy slide guitars of "Demon Valley." This is followed by "Mayonaise Brain" and its cocktail vibes, which serve as a foundation to a pounding drum-and-strum buildup that teases before falling into a mournful yodel. "Snuggling World Championships" may as well be credited to Sam The Sham as produced by Joe Meek — very challenging yet somewhat unfulfilling. The best song is easily "Borrow Your Cape," which goes exactly where the group intends. Hallahan's rumbling toms and fiery cymbals provide the setup to Broemel's characteristic guitar, Brad Jones' churning organ, and Grimes' rub-a-dub bass punchlines. The disc's closer, "Stop Crying," leads with demented steel guitar and ghostly background vocals behind Bare's story of a relationship that won't be dissolving tonight, although it ought to. Eventually the whole Starvation League joins in as the honking sax and stuttering rhythm contradict the grim lyric.

Heck, no, I don't know what you call this music, either. Tell the kid working the counter to "file under good" and leave it at that.

— Mark Polzin

William Bell

New Lease On Life

Wilbe Records (Wil12010-2)

Grade: B+

Collector's Edition: Greatest Hits

Wilbe Records (Wil2006-2)

Grade: B

Vocalist William Bell returns with the aptly titled *New Lease On Life*, his first album of fresh material in six years. An early exponent of the Memphis sound, Bell found success at Stax Records during the 1960s. The seasoned composer is credited with cowriting the 12 songs on this disc, and his supple voice resonates with its distinctive, smooth soulfulness.

Opening the album with its title track, Bell delivers a magnetic mid-tempo groove that conveys the cool R&B

DVD Reviews

MUSIC DOCUMENTARY

Sandy Denny

Under Review: An Independent Critical Analysis

Sexy Intellectual (DVD SIDVD 507)

Grade: A

Led Zeppelin

The Origin Of The Species: A Critical Review of the Band's Roots and Branches

Sexy Intellectual (DVD SIDVD 505)

Grade: C

Queen

Under Review 1980-1991, An Independent Critical Analysis

Chrome Dreams (DVD CVIS 399)

Grade: D

The Rolling Stones

Under Review 1962-1966, An Independent Critical Analysis

Sexy Intellectual (DVD SIDVD 506)

Grade: B

How many shivers run down your back when you hear the dreaded words "an independent critical analysis"? It's almost oxymoronic, after all. If an analysis isn't independent, then it's scarcely going to be critical, is it? And "independent" of what? Unwarranted interference from the band or its management? Word-by-word scripting by an author with ulterior motives? Beards? *This disc is guaranteed free of unnecessary facial hair.*

Or maybe not. There are enough fungus patches in the Fairport Convention footage on Sandy Denny's *Under Review: An Independent Critical Analysis* for a family of badgers to take up residence. But the funny thing is, if all the DVDs in this ever-expanding series used that disc as their yardstick, then we could all go home happy.

Contributions from Denny associates Dave Swarbrick, Dave Mattacks, Martin Carthy, Gerry Conway, and Martin Renbourne are, without exception, fascinating; Denny biographer Patrick Humphries and folk journalist Colin Irwin put in their own valued two cents' worth and, though there is less actual footage of Denny than one might hope for (a consequence, perhaps, of the rel-

that he developed in the 1960s and 1970s. He duets with labelmate Jeff Floyd on "Part Time Lover"; in addition to coproducing his own disc, Bell produces Floyd's solo releases on the independent Wilbe label.

Changing pace, he caresses the romantic "Up Close And Personal," and he connects with the emotive

ative commercial obscurity in which she lived her life), still the disc ends with you feeling as though you've genuinely learned something new.

The key to any documentary, after all, is to talk with people who are worth talking to, and the Denny set certainly falls into that category. The Queen disc, *Under Review 1980-1991*, on the other hand, falls so far from that ideal that you could wear out the fast-forward button, spinning through talking head after talking head, while the band footage offers nothing that you wouldn't have seen a thousand times already. Plus, do we really need to spend 78 minutes reliving the 1980s?

Much the same can be said of The Rolling Stones disc, *Under Review 1962-1966*, although the proceedings are certainly enlivened by the presence of original guitarist Dick Taylor and mid-1960s associate Chris Farlowe, who at least remember things that they haven't either put in their own book or told in somebody else's. There is also a healthy helping of footage that the manufacturers insist has never before appeared on a legal DVD (the bootleggers got in there long ago). They're only clips, of course, but it's fun to see them regardless.

Farlowe reappears on the Led Zeppelin disc, *The Origin Of The Species: A Critical Review of the Band's Roots and Branches*, which might well be the most entertaining of the four. Concentrating not on the monster-to-be but on the four band members' pre-dirigible past, *Origin Of The Species* spins through stories that really haven't been overtold. OK, maybe The Yardbirds are a little overdone now, but Band Of Joy and Dave Berry, to name two, are scarcely household names on any DVD shelf. The presence of sessionman supreme Clem Cattini cannot help but enliven the proceedings.

With nothing more to bind these four discs than the same manufacturer and release date and the same somewhat gimmicky approach to rating and reviewing each of the artists' records (you can fast-forward through those bits as well), comparisons between them are very much apples and pears. If you're looking to build a vast DVD reference library, three of the four are recommended (Queen is the exception). If you're a fan of the performer, again Queen is the only one that is guaranteed to disappoint. But, if you just enjoy music documentaries, no matter who they're about (or who's saying what), go out and buy the lot. They're better than most of what we get on TV these days.

— Dave Thompson

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