



Mother Trucker: Putting the Miss in Ember's hit-and-miss roster.

Smouldering

Ember, the little label that never caught fire. By Jim Irvin.

ANYONE HAUNTING record shops in the '60s and '70s, or digging through crates subsequently, will have come across the occasional intriguing oddity on the Ember label. Never affiliated with any major British companies, Ember was a wholly independent enterprise started by Jeffrey Kruger, proprietor of London's Flamingo nightclub. Though known as a jazz promoter, his label began with a surprise hit in the summer of 1960, the Danish song Banjo Boy by Jan & Kjeld, and grew into an eclectic outlet for everyone from John Barry and Scott Walker to James Brown and Glen Campbell. Despite some good music, Ember's catch-all philosophy, cheap'n'cheerful presentation and mostly licensed roster meant it never established a strong identity like Island or Motown, and when it finally had major hits – licensing Campbell's Wichita Lineman from Capitol in the US, for example – they were usually quickly claimed back by the sleeping majors concerned.

Ember's releases emanating from Sun, King or Federal in the US could be top quality, but its home-grown output was incredibly hit and miss, mostly miss – both in quality and outcome – with a distinct whiff of the lunchtime Tin Pan Alley deal, featuring dubious acts with names like Rusty Harness and Mother Trucker, jury-out singers such as actors Alan Lake (Mr Diana Dors) and Polly Niles, or some past-their-best attractions (P.J. Proby). Gathered together, however, and sprinkled with the occasional jewel – Davey Payne's classy soft-rocker A Walk In The Sunshine, a gutsy one-off single by Denny Doherty or the weird kazoo-driven psych pop of Echoes And Rainbows by Black Swan – this material radiates plenty of period appeal on *Rainy Day Mind: Ember Pop 1969-1974*, released by Fantastic Voyage, a new imprint issuing a stream of Ember's stuff, remastered from the original tapes.

Good To The Last Drop is a splendid comp of the label's soul output, drawing on releases by Johnny Otis, Jewel Akens, The Jones Girls, The Casinos and others. I particularly liked the Spectorish throb of The Values' Return To Me, Motown writer/producer Mickey Stevenson's dramatic Here I Am, Ed Robinson's moody Hey Blackman, the gospel authority of Mary Frazier Jones's version of Put A Little Love In Your Heart, and best of all, Dee Edwards' sexy Why Can't There Be Love with its fuzz guitar decoration.

The label's last drop occurred in 1979 when Kruger realised his promotion business was more lucrative than running a hand-to-mouth record company, and closed after a remarkable two-decade dabble.



Jimmy Campbell

★★★★★

Half Baked

ESOTERIC
All three of the reclusive Scouser's engaging solo LPs are out again but this 1970 set of melancholy rockers is his strongest, particularly the dynamic title track. Rare song Lonely Norman from a Vertigo sampler added. *JJ*



Cathedral

★★★★★

Forest Of Equilibrium

EARACHE
Dual disc reissue of classic 1991 doom metal debut now comes with warts-and-all 40-minute DVD document and bonus Soul Sacrifice. E incisive, earthy version of a landmark in heavy music. *J*



Jim Ford

★★★★

The Unissued Capitol Album

BEAR FAMILY
An inspired songwriter, this was to be Ford's follow-up to his country-soul classic *Harlan County*. He angered Capitol and the LP was shelved, 'til now. Includes Harry Hippie. *GB*



Jefferson Airplane

★★★★★

The Woodstock Experience

EARACHE
The Airplane's hallucinogenic fuelled set of "morning music" is here in full along 1969's *Volunteers* and a commemorative poster. *RJ*



Joe Pernice

★★★★★

It Feels So Good When I Stop

ONE LITTLE INDIAN
Pernice soundtracks his own slacker novel with covers from Push to Todd Rundgren. Sebadoh's heartbreaking Soul & Fire notably suits his lonely folk/country voice. Lovely. *JB*



Sly And The Family Stone

★★★★★

The Woodstock Experience

EPIC/LEGACY
The 1969 psych-funk near masterpiece *Stand!* is here with an extra CD of the incendiary Woodstock performance. A good deal



Various

★★★★★

Chartbusters USA: Sunshine Pop

ACE
From the softer side of the hippy explosion came these 26 crisp'n'clean cuts that bridge counter-cultural polemic and Brill Building finesse. Dreamy harmonies and happy pianos abound. *RB*



Various

★★★★

Creative Outlaw

TRIKONT
Subtitled 'UK Underground 1965-1971' the second in Trikont's Creative Outlaws series is a rag-bag, ranging from justified west London weird (Deviants etc) to, eh Nick Drake and The Nice. *J*