

Various Artists

The Beautiful Old: Turn-Of-The-Century Songs

★★★★

Daobloon DR104

Bygone tunes illuminated by modern-day artists

The turn of the century in the title is, it probably goes without saying, from the 19th to the 20th, though some of the songs featured here play fast and loose with the brief. Intermittent Richard Thompson collaborator Christine Collister contributes the most archaic selection, Home Sweet Home dating from 1803, though she's closer to the concept when saddling up with Thompson on the litting The Band Played On (1895).

Parlour balladry and elegant folk abound on the album, the brainchild of producers Paul Marsteller and Gabriel Rhodes, who corral an intriguing cross-section of performers to revisit the past. Veteran pub rocker Graham Parker relishes getting into character on the rousing The Flying Trapeze (1867), The Band's Garth Hudson strikes gold with the elegant piano instrumental The Rosary (1898), while Dave Davies' vaudevillian romp After The Ball (1892) is a song that arguably helped inform the character-led pieces big brother Ray used to write for The Kinks.

Each song offers a delicious snapshot in time (1911's Come Josephine In My Flying Machine started life as a novelty ditty about newfangled air travel), and most were hugely cherished by the public, in many ways the roots of "popular" music – After The Ball was the first song in history to sell more than a million copies of sheet music. A delightfully off-the-wall album, executed with gusto, which will hopefully spawn further volumes. *Terry Staunton*

Bradford's Noise Of The Valleys: The Missing Music 2, 1972-1987

★★★★

Bradford Noise BN07VCD 006

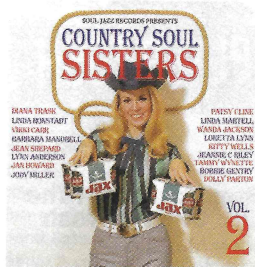
Yorkshire's forgotten musical heroes

Bradford musicians Gary Cavanagh and Matt Webster began their celebration of their home city's pop and rock heritage as a 2009 book containing more than 120

lowliest wannabe to national success stories such as Smokie and New Model Army. However, the accompanying four-disc box set would appear to have left a few stones unturned, hence this supplementary disc.

The intervening years has certainly unearthed some curios, not least Bingley-born Rodney Bewes' own version of the theme to his celebrated sitcom *Whatever Happened To The Likely Lads?*, and striking workers from the Hindle industrial plant covering The Strawbs' hit Part Of The Union. Unfortunately, a lack of biographical detail in the sleeve notes means referring to the original book may be the only way to get the full stories behind these tracks.

Beyond the spirited efforts of parochial stargazers such as Excalibur, The Invaders and the delightfully named Edible Marquetry, there are numbers which allude specifically to the region and its famous sons. A cappella folkies Swan Arcade chronicle bygone skirmishes on The Battle Of Sowerby Bridge, while Midnight Hearse sing of forlorn hope on We're Gonna Have A New World Champion, recalling boxer Richard Dunn's 1976 title fight with Muhammad Ali. *Terry Staunton*



Country Soul Sisters Vol 2

★★★★

Soul Jazz SJR CD 267 (CD / 2-LP)

Honey, who do you think you are?

As Waylon Jennings once opined, "Women do know how to carry on." And gawd bless 'em for that. This sumptuous collection of US country femmes is a kind of riposte to the stand-by-your-man school, featuring gems such as Jeannie C Riley's The Little Town Square and Dolly Parton's metaphorical The Bargain Store, which pulls off DP's trademark trick of saying one thing while meaning the exact opposite and also singing it like an angel fell to earth.

Rare and unusual items ensure the set transcends mere jukebox novelty. Linda Martell's Afro-American take

a gentle protest that must have rocked the Opry folks back on their boot heels, while Lynn Anderson isn't in the mood for rose-pruning on Stay There 'Til I Get There. Tell him, girl!

Some more familiar cuts from Bobby Gentry and Vikki Carr lighten the mood, while there's an outstanding version of Forever Young from Kitty Wells, accompanied by an Allman Brother or two. Best of all is Joan Harris' classic That's A Fact Of Life, which is so great you'll want to hunt down her every release. Domestic discord never seemed so sweet. *Max Bell*



Live Kraut: Live Rock Explosions From The Heyday Of Krautrock

★★★★

Sireena SIR 2090

Deutsche uncles

If your definition of krautrock begins and ends with "70s rock bands from Germany", *Live Kraut* shouldn't have you invoking the Trade Descriptions Act any time soon. Imaginatively cross-mixed to lend the impression that all of these bands were at the one event – most likely a typical European 70s counterculture festival, with bongos, bare breasts and bratwurst in profusion – the album actually spans 12 years of live performance.

Gila's Braintwist from 1972 is the earliest inclusion: an alluringly cheap two-chord jam with stick-insect keyboards and a stream-of-semi-consciousness vocal from Conny Veit: "Won't you be mine for some minutes?" They probably thought they were The Doors, but they were actually The Seeds. Pferdesegen, by Ougenweide, from 1984, is the set's most recent track: too late in the day to claim classic status, but its kosmische-folk curiousness is arguably closer to krautrock's contrary heart than anything else on here.

Noteworthy is in between include incorrigible commune crazies Guru Guru, whose Transylvania Express is jazz-rock with shouting; Jane, whose Out In The Rain is dolorous Moody Blues balladry with a gaseous synth; and Grobschnitt, whose Augen is haunting

suggesting that their singer-guitarist is devouring a boar. No less than you'd expect from a guy called Willi Wildschwein. *Oregano Rathbone*

The London American Label Year By Year 1964

★★★★

Ace CDCHD 1366

Another fine mix of hits and rarities

It's always a pleasure to receive the next instalment in Ace's *London American* series, presented as they are with a care and knowledge so often missing from cheap charts a time when the US music scene was in a state of confusion: The Beatles had arrived, and homegrown acts sometimes found themselves looking backwards for inspiration – hence the two Buddy Holly-esque releases from David Box (Little Lonely Summer Girl) and Ray Ruff (I Took A Liking To You).

As if to prove the point, Jerry Lee's rocking opener, Lewis Boogie, was actually recorded in summer 1957, while a 1962 Crystals single, Uptown, gets included by dint of its appearance on the B-side of the aborted Little Boy release.

Releases from Solomon Burke, Tommy Tucker and Otis Redding (his second UK single, Come To Me) point the way forward: raw, adventurous soul, and all the better for it. The best moment arguably comes from Willie Mitchell's 20-75, a great dance groove that sets the template for the later Hi Rhythm sound; Gloria Lynne's slinky I Wish You Love; and Ruby & The Romantics' Baby Come Home. It's no wonder the label continues to attract collectors. *Kingsley Abbott*

Midnight Steppers

★★★★

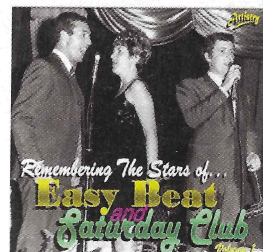
Fantastic Voyage FVTD 167 (3-CD)

Myriad visions of the old Joanna. Boogie on, hepcats

This anthology, compiled by *Blues Unlimited* authority Mike Rowe, is a 70-track trawl across a period from the 30s to the post-war roots of rock'n'roll. The 34 pianists are termed heroes – and it's easy to hear why. When you kick off with Memphis Slim and Champion Jack Dupree – doing the "Bluebird Beat" honours on Beer Drinking Woman and Junker Blues – and end up at Dust My Broom (Robert Lockwood, featuring Sunnyland Slim) and Otis Spann's Otis In The Dark, the

woogie legends such as Pete Johnson, Albert Ammons and Meade Lux Lewis dominate the second CD with ease; but there's also interest in the margins, where you'll find Roosevelt Sykes' stupendous 44 Blues, Montana Taylor's Indiana Avenue Stomp (which sounds like the kind of thing Steely Dan grew up on) and Eddy Boyd's Five Long Years.

Giving prominence to support-role piano men such as Henry Gray (heard gingering up Howlin' Wolf's peculiar I Have A Little Girl), The Midnight Steppers become the main event. So, step forward and take a bow Big Chief Ellis, Thunder Smith and the fantastically named Dr Hepcat. *Max Bell*



Remembering The Stars of Easy Beat And Saturday Club Vol 1

★★★★

Artistry LCE 161042 CD

Sound reproduction

The 60s – a wild period which rock has never shaken off. Beyond the long hair and matching solos, however, there was another pop 60s, and someone in your family enjoyed it: the reproductions of hits cut by companies such as Avenue, who commissioned the tracks on this CD in the late 60s/early 70s. Crafted by arranger Alan Caddy and singers such as Tony Steven, recently featured in *RC*, people bought these records by their thousands.

Today we can appreciate them for what they are, rather than moaning "these ain't originals". Countryish tracks feature heavily, but the best avoid mawkishness: Laura Lee's Gypsies, Tramps And Thieves is fiery, and Rose Garden's choppy guitar and soaring strings resemble reggae circa 1970. Danny Street is great on Almost There, while Tony Steven has a nice line in soul; his All In The Game is more Levi Stubbs than Cliff Richard, though wisely he aimed for the Bee Gees' How Can You Mend A Broken Heart rather than Al Green's, in a version you might take for The Hollies. This stuff is not any kind of statement; there's no attitude.