

## RECORDS

## Music's loners make good company



Jazz

Geoff Chapman

## A swinging homecoming from Hardy

**Hagood Hardy, *Morocco* (Sackville):** Toronto vibraphonist Hagood Hardy leads a local sextet through some breezy, relaxed songs here, highlighting not only his delicate, Milt Jackson-inspired tones but a satisfying "homecoming" (forgive the joke) to jazz.

With solid contributions from Michael Stuart's saxes, Terry Lukiwski's enterprising trombone and Gary Williamson's crisp piano (when the leader isn't using it), Hardy's ideas flow smoothly through familiar tune territory.

The eight-track session from mid-'89 mostly swings, as Hardy adds growling accompaniment à la Lionel Hampton to the likes of "Freddie Freeloader", "Teasin'", and the catchy title song, while Stuart really opens up on "Infra-Rae".

**Ralph Sutton, *At Cafe des Copains* (Sackville):** With the legendary cafe silenced this month (musical happenings transferred to the Montreal), it's grand to hear a stimulating 12-item grab-bag of tunes recorded there between 1983-87 by the pianist who began it all in June '83 to pioneer a 13-week experiment!

Sutton's bouncy energy gives a cheery feel to standards such as "Sweet Sue" and "Somebody Stole My Gal" and suits his swinging interpretations of lesser-known songs like "Laugh Clown Laugh".

He brings a light touch to the blues, tosses in some barrelhouse, and then — with trademark chordal intros and lots of flourish — delivers ballads like "Exactly Like You" with the proper degree of intimacy. (It's worth noting that Sackville also provides that comparative rarity — informative liner notes.)

**Dexter Gordon, *Nights At The Keystone* (Blue Note):** This three-CD collation of great tenor saxman Dexter Gordon in heated action at a San Francisco club on various dates in 1978-'79 is just one of many reissues featuring the legendary link between Lester Young and John Coltrane — but it's one of the best.

High-powered support from his regular sidemen at the time — pianist George Cables, bassist Rufus Reid and drummer Eddie Gladden — is one reason; another is the extended workouts, many tracks almost 20 minutes long, that showcase his distinctive sound.

Most of all it's the late Gordon's towering and passionate presence, roaring solos on "Backstairs" and "Ginger Bread Boy", loping swing on "Come Rain Or Come Shine", and the fresh ballad delights he conjures from "Body And Soul" in a splendid collection of jazz treasures.

**Charlie Rouse, *Unsung Hero* (Epic):** The alter ego of jazz genius Thelonius Monk is featured here in the days before the tenorman linked up for his 11-year stint with the pioneer pianist.

Rouse leads a quartet in a blend of standards and blues recorded 30 years ago that show off a simple swinging approach and staccato delivery that's deceptively effective (as on "Lil Rousin'" and "Billy's Blues") and underlines the debt he clearly owes Ben Webster in ballad treatments of "Stella By Starlight".

The title of this tribute to Rouse, who began his career at 20 in the Eckstine band and kept Monk music alive in the band *Sphere* until his death in 1988, is right on.

**Albert Collins, *Iceman* (Virgin):** Collins is a powerful blues guitarist, to understate a cliché, but his first studio recording since 1987 is overwhelmed by the assembled showbiz trappings. This axeman doesn't need two rhythm guitars, organ, bass, percussion, keyboards, backup singers, two saxes, trumpet and trombone to help his cause.

Not only that, the voice is under-recorded, so that his vocals sound like heavy metal shrieks with laryngitis and his expressive guitar enjoys only Pyrrhic musical victories over dense arrangements. The only tunes that work are slow belters like "Don't Mistake Kindness For Weakness" and the funky "Put The Shoe On The Other Foot".

**Larry McCray, *Ambition* (Pointblank Virgin):** Nothing fancy about Larry, 30, who composed his songs, we're told, on GM's Detroit assembly lines. The army of musicians in support certainly suggests factory mobs, but McCray's intense delivery, spotted with soul and rock licks, saves the day.

Best tracks are his own "Frustrated Baby" and the modern, slick and punchy spin he puts on "I Don't Mind", "Keep On Walking" and the spirited title track.

**Dinosaur Jr. *Green Mind* (Blanco Y Negro/Warner Music) *Morrissey Kill Uncle* (Sire/Warner Music):** In spite of the talk of teenage rebellion and alienation, most rock music aligns itself with a community of some sort or the other. Whether it's the 10 million Elvis fans who can't be wrong or the 1,000 self-righteous pop stars of "We Are The World", whether it's the Love Generation of Scott MacKenzie's "San Francisco (Be Sure To Wear Some Flowers In Your Hair)" or the boozing congregation of the Replacements' "Here Comes A Regular", rock has celebrated the group as a focus of life, loyalty and devotion.

But against that backdrop of community — of the world, the generation, the dancefloor or the bar — stand the loners, the outsiders, the alienated few. Roy Orbison was one (and remained one until his death, despite signing up as a Wilbury). Del Shannon was one. Some of the characters in Bruce Springsteen's songs may be, but the Boss himself isn't, although he tried to be on *Nebraska*. Ian Curtis in Joy Division was one; Bernard Sumner in New Order is not.

Listening to *Green Mind*, Dinosaur Jr.'s major label debut, it becomes apparent that J. Mascis fits neatly into the loner camp.

*Green Mind* is a stormy, strained chronicle of attempts, most of them unsuccessful, at communication and connection; by the end, you're not

at all surprised that Mascis, after working with bands on the first three Dinosaur Jr. records, has ended up making this one more or less by himself.

Songs such as "The Wagon" reflect the unease that comes with being unable to articulate those inchoate feelings, half-formed thoughts and full-blown fears that pop up when you don't get out much. "I don't know a thing to say to you," Mascis sings over and over in his quavering, unsure voice — he makes Neil Young sound like Robert Goulet — on "Blowing It". When the song segues into "Live For That Look" and Mascis finally breaks through, you're not sure whether to be happy for him (for making the connection) or feel sorry for him (for being satisfied by such a small reward).

Musically, *Green Mind* is the perfect vehicle for Mascis's concerns. He's filled most of the record with a mass of guitar, sometimes strident, sometimes gawky and out of the maelstrom emerges both surprisingly expressive guitar solos and surprisingly sweet harmonies both of which are tempered

MIDDLE AGE: Joni Mitchell probes the pain and pleasures of middle age in *Night Ride Home*.

by Mascis's bittersweet thoughts. A sonically brilliant, lyrically unsettling piece of work.

Morrissey, the former lead singer of The Smiths, is something of an outsider as well, and not only because he's been unable to hold together a band or a writing partnership since he split with Johnny Marr several years ago.

But while he may be an outsider, Morrissey's got the stylist's self-assurance; he wears his isolation proudly, as a sign of uniqueness. Where Mascis verges on self-pity — to his credit, he never sinks into it — Morrissey places himself above the squalor of society and offers arch, amusing, observations and gentle words of condolence and encouragement from his perch.

And, on *Kill Uncle*, does so with inimitable style and wit. Freed from the constraints of a partner, such as Marr, with a distinctive musical style, Morrissey makes the music fit his words, wrapping "Asian Rut", a passing observation on a racially motivated beating, in melancholy organ and violin and lurching discordantly through "The Harsh Truth Of The Camera Eye", a

protest against the tyranny of photography.

With his unusual choice of subjects and his uncommonly clever way of dealing with them, Morrissey reaffirms his singularity on *Kill Uncle*. He may be a loner, but to judge from this record, he'd make delightful company.

**Joni Mitchell *Night Ride Home* (Geffen/MCA):** "Oh I am not old/ I'm told/ But I am not young," Joni Mitchell sings on "Nothing Can Be Done". No, I suppose she isn't — she's 47 — and perhaps that is why, after the electro-beat topicality of 1985's *Dog Eat Dog* and the cast-of-thousands approach that dominated 1988's *Chalk Mark In A Rainstorm*, Mitchell has returned to personal reflection and intimate settings on *Night Ride Home*.

Most of the songs here deal with either the pleasures and pains of middle age ("The Windfall" is one of the nastiest reflections on divorce since Marvin Mitchelson last filed a writ) or the fragility and innocence of youth as seen in the rearview mirror of nostalgia ("Come In From The Cold" is like a

timeline of a lifetime's crushes and love affairs).

Supported by Mitchell's jazz-tinged acoustic guitar, and the limber, asymmetrical bass lines of her husband and producer Larry Klein and spare percussion, the material seems less adventurous (if in many ways more pleasant) than some of her recent work, but the songs are no less literate or well-written than those Mitchell has given us in the past.

The only real clanger of the record is "Slouching Towards Bethlehem", her reworking of W.B. Yeats' poem "The Second Coming". She's turned Yeats' clarity into equivocation ("The best lack all conviction/ While the worst are full of passion" becomes "The best lack all conviction/ Given time to think/ The worst are full of passion/ Without mercy") and, by setting the poem against a lightweight musical backdrop, has robbed the poet's words of their pervasive sense of dread.

To hear Mitchell sing it, you might think that "this rough beast/ Its hour come 'round at last" was slouching toward Bethlehem for a quart of milk and a pack of smokes.

## Esprit arouses the senses on its first CD

Esprit, the orchestra that knows how to throw a party, will pop its latest corks Monday at the Jane Mallett Theatre when music director Alex Pauk presides over not only the premieres of two new compositions but the launching of the orchestra's first compact disc.

The compositions, *Scorpius* by R. Murray Schafer and *In The Garden Of Gaea* by Andrew Macdonald, are only the latest in an impressive list of 55 Canadian works performed by The Esprit Orchestra since its founding in 1983, close to half of them specially commissioned.

Not that Esprit performs only Canadian music. In addition to his own *Cosmos*, Pauk will conduct the Canadian premiere of *Sotto Il Segno Del Sole* (Under The Sign Of The Sun) by the Swedish composer Anders Eliasson as part of Monday's mixed bill.

Still, Canadian music has become the house specialty of this unique ensemble and it is entirely appropriate that its debut CD for the CBC's SM 5000 series



Classical

William Littler

should embrace five recent scores from the land of the beaver and the loon.

Not that beaver and loon sounds can be found on the disc. If a musical profile of the country were to be intuited from these scores, Canada would emerge as a land of mystery, ecstasy and sensual exploration.

In his *Into The Distant Stillness*, Brian Cherney evokes a sense of movement toward a far horizon (with woodwinds divided into two separated quartets to enhance the effect), but the horizon seems to be more emotional than geographic.

In his *Dream Rainbow Dream Thunder*, R. Murray Schafer doesn't

even locate himself on these shores, drawing inspiration instead from a visit to Neuschwanstein, King Ludwig's castle in the mountains of Bavaria, from whose Wagnerian mists he has produced a color-tinted orchestral reverie of considerable atmospheric potency.

No mean tone-colorists themselves, Pauk, with his Javanese gamelan-inspired, post-Janacek *Echo Spirit Isle*, and Chan Ka Nin, with his equally exotic *Ecstasy*, round out the program in a similar state of sensory arousal, leaving it to that arch-Romantic, Thomas Dusatko, in *Traces Of Becoming*, to bring the listener safely back to the harbor of convention.

Avant-garde listening? Obviously not. Canadian composers tend to be realists these days, out to re-establish links with the concert public. And with this well-produced album, the Esprit Orchestra further extends its role as their willing agent.

Although no other Canadian orchestra duplicates this specialized role, the CBC's SM 5000 series contains a number of recent discs testifying to the artistic health of some of Esprit's sister ensembles.

Symphony Nova Scotia has issued a pair of interesting albums, one of them titled *Down Under*, in which the Vancouver composer Jean Coulthard's *Excursion Ballet Suite* improbably finds itself companion to scores from Australia and New Zealand by the likes of Percy Grainger, Douglas Liburn, George Dreyfus and Arthur Benjamin.

The music, much of it in the English light music tradition, offers more charm than substance, but Georg Tintner conducts it with a practised hand, as he does the dance music of Salzburg's favorite son in a companion album, titled *Mozart: Les Petits Riens And Other Dances And Marches*.

Not that Symphony Nova Scotia plays Mozart with quite the refinement applied by the National Arts Centre Orchestra to the *Mozart Clarinet Concerto* in an album conducted by Franz-Paul Decker.

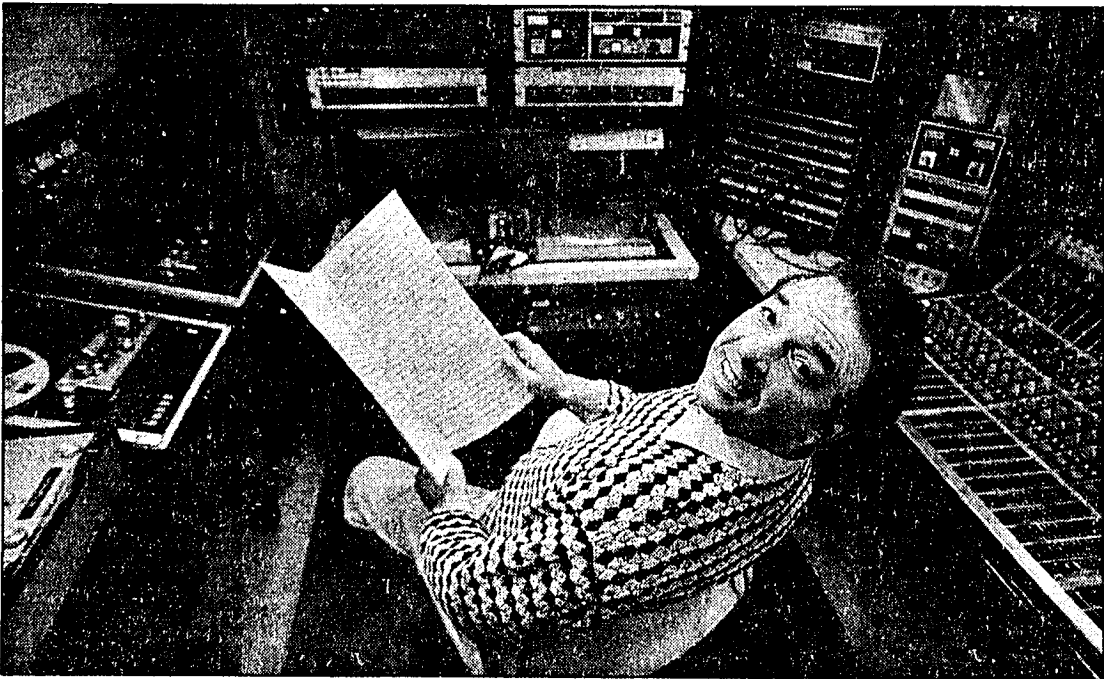
A showcase for the artistry of Canada's foremost clarinet soloist, James Campbell, this album also finds the Indiana University faculty member applying his easy technique and fluent phrasing to the Copland *Concerto* and Weber's *Concertino*.

Further West, the revitalized Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra under Kazuhiro Koizumi's direction flies the flag of Czarist Russia in an album pairing respectable performances of Tchaikovsky's *Suite No. 1 in D Major* and Glinka's *Kamarinskaya* with a more than respectable reading of Sophie-Carmen Eckhardt-Gramatte's *Capriccio-Concertante*.

A Moscow-born adopted Winnipegger, Eckhardt-Gramatte was a maverick all her life and in this 1941 opus she damns the torpedoes, hammers out her triple-meter rhythms and gives the orchestra a thorough workout.

And speaking of orchestral workouts, Mario Bernardi leads his Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra in one of the very best of recent SM 5000 discs, a pairing of Schumann's *Symphony No. 3 and Konzertstueck For Four Horns*.

It takes a brave maestro to propel a provincial orchestra into the record catalogues with this repertoire. Bernardi succeeds because the Calgary Philharmonic, on its best behavior, no longer sounds like a provincial orchestra.



SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE: Esprit Orchestra and its music director Alex Pauk will celebrate the launch of their first CD Monday at the Jane Mallett Theatre.

ANDREW STAWICKI/TORONTO STAR