

Brian Robertson, Scott Gorham, Brian Downey and Phil Lynott



## Thin Lizzy Retain Good Reputation

**Thin Lizzy**  
**Bad Reputation**  
Vertigo

Now, I'm not a fan of Heavy Metal music. That has to be said. But I love Thin Lizzy. Indeed I'd rate them as one of the premier bands at this moment cos for my money they contain more than a few extra added attractions that put them way above the standard of your average bunch of guitar thrashers. For one, they have Phil Lynott. A black Irishman, Lynott is not only a great singer but an even better songwriter, a rare animal in most HM product. Added to this they have a dynamite pair of guitarists in Scott Gorham and Brian Robertson, who can not only sustain the expected guitar posturing but also manage to inject enough in the way of variety and dynamics to prevent the all out attack from lapsing into a cliched rifferama. And it's because of this sense of dynamics that tedium rarely, if ever, sets in.

At their best, as on the *Jailbreak* set of a couple of years ago, Thin Lizzy is a stunning combination of all these factors. What's more, they managed to sustain this standard on last year's *Johnny the Fox*, which was only marred by the last track on Side Two, "Boogie Woogie Dance," a throwaway piece if ever there was one.

*Bad Reputation*, their latest, represents a departure in several respects. They've switched producers from John Alcock who was responsible for the last two albums, to Tony Visconti who's well-known for his

work with Bowie, Bolan and others. At the same time, Lynott has traded in his penchant for lyrics on love and kids on the street for an attack on the *big* subjects in "Soldier of Fortune" and "Dear Lord". Now I don't mind that, but allied to the more sophisticated production job, it's resulted in arrangements that are marred by their over-literality. That's to say, "Soldier" gets an arrangement complete with military drumbeat in the bridge, while "Dear Lord" has, yes you guessed it, a heavenly chorus courtesy of Mary Hopkin, who you have to admit always was a little bit angelic and ethereal.

In fact it's a credit to Lizzy's cutting edge that these elements grate as little as they do. And they are, after all, only minor aberrations on an album that overall maintains the band's amazingly high standard. For instance, there's the snappy single, "Dancin' in the Moonlight", which is reminiscent of Springsteen's "Spirit in the Night", (but that's a compliment, a couple of great rockers in "Bad Reputation" and "That Woman's Gonna Break Your Heart" and two of Lynott's finest songs yet in "Southbound" and "Downtown Sundown".

An album then that can only reward the attention of the growing number of Lizzy fans and perhaps by virtue of it's more sophisticated production sound, it'll seduce some new listeners into the fold. But I vote for a return to the basics next time. O.K. Phil?

Alastair Dougal

**Sandy Denny**  
**Rendezvous**  
Island

Sandy Denny always has had one of those voices. Despite the charms of *Full House*, Fairport Convention was never half the band without her. On the evidence of *Rendezvous*, however, she may need Fair-

port Convention every bit as much as they need her.

In many respects, *Rendezvous* is typical of the genre. It is hard to name an English folk-rock album which does not feature one or many of Dave Matthews, Jerry Donahue, Pat Donaldson or Dave Pegg. Where the album differs is in its use of weighty string arrangements to cover the impeccable playing of these musicians. Ostensibly, this seems intended to mark the maturity of Denny as a singer; not just a folk singer, but somebody who can get up there and belt out a cover version of "Candle in the Wind" with the best of them.

There is no doubt that she has the vocal ability to do it — her version of "Candle in the Wind" is a hell of a lot better than Helen Reddy could manage in her wildest dreams. The question that remains is, why?

Just as on her previous three solo albums and the truly great "Fotheringay" album, she proves here that she is a songwriter to be reckoned with, and the Fairport mafia, assisted by Richard Thompson, certainly do her justice. It is not as though she and husband/producer Trevor Lucas have wholeheartedly embraced the attractions of the middle of the road. Rather they seem to have struck to the hedge.

It is, in fact, a song by Richard Thompson which best illustrates the shortcomings of this approach. "I Wish I Was a Fool for You Again" opens the album and, while Denny comes close to matching the aching original vocal by Linda Thompson, the decision to take the song at half pace and to bury it beneath a huge, echoed tambourine orchestra and a banal vocal arrangement leaves the listener hoping for a taste of the spare grace of Ms Thompson's version.

All is not grim, however. On many tracks like "One Way Donkey Ride" and the vaguely Mitchellessque, "Gold Dust", Sandy Denny proves she can write and sing as well as ever, just as her cohorts are still in the top league. It is in the control room that this record falters, and even if you have got one of those voices, you can't compete with production.

Francis Stark

**Bob Johnson and Peter Knight**  
**The King of Elfland's Daughter**  
Chrysalis

Chrysalis have one of the best track records (ouch! no pun intended) with the electric folk thing. Let's face it, they have Steeleye Span on their books, and the members of that group have had various individual projects of note. Maddy Prior's *Silly Sisters* album with June Tabor was one that I had to travel to Hamilton to catch up with.

Bob Johnson and Peter Knight are two S.S. men and this record, *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, represents their personal project. It is a concept album based on the book by Lord Dunsay, telling a tangled plot of the King of Elfland (Christopher Lee), his daughter (Mary Hopkin), a handsome young hero (Frankie Miller), a wicked witch (P.P. Arnold) and a troll (Alexis Korner).

There is a very English feyness to the whole album that many Kiwis will find hard to take. Perhaps Hello Sailor might try a concept album based on the drawings of Trevor Lloyd? And Christopher Lee's commentary between the songs does rather force one to accept it as a total album. This was perhaps a mistake as the

girl even sang on Carla Bley's *Escalator over the Hill*. But Carla Bley and Top 40 are um, well let's say they're just poles apart. So perhaps that's why we know Ronstadt mainly for her more mainstream musical activities.

*Simple Dreams* has some really lovely moments. For those who liked her "That'll Be the Day", there's another Buddy Holly number, "It's So Easy". The other two tracks which approach the raunch are Warren Zevon's "Poor Poor Pitiful Me" and her version of the Stones' "Tumbling Dice". And when Linda has an opening line like "People try to rape me" it just sounds a little more believable than when the divine Mick himself rasps it at his audience.

Rolling Stone mag seems to criticise the predominance of softer ballads, but they do admit that Ronstadt deals with them superbly. And, after all, I think a lot of Ronstadt followers will prefer this approach. The single from the album is (I think) "Blue Bayou", a reworking of the old Roy Orbison number. Linda transforms it into a rather beautiful experience, all shimmering and undulating sound. It has the same sort of feel as Maria Muldaur's "Sad Eyes". The stuff indeed that dreams are made of.

Other highlights: A very beautiful duet with Dolly Parton on the traditional "I Never Will Marry", and a final "Old Paint" with some of the most subdued and subtle dobro works from Mike Aldridge that I have ever heard.

Like Maria Muldaur, Ronstadt is just the singer to do your reputation a lot of good if she tackles your songs. After listening to her version of J. D. Souther's "Simple Man, Simple Dream", I am finding myself digging out an old Souther record to listen to the man himself.

Simply Ronstadt, simply dreamy.  
William Dart



**Blondie**  
**Chrysalis Records**

It's the influence of Richard Gottehrer (co-writer of "My Boyfriend's Back", producer for the McCoys) that makes Blondie's debut album more old wave than new, more like '60s nostalgia for the '70s audience. Blondie is a New York group from CBGB's; Gottehrer is the producer of this, their first album.

The song titles ("X Offender", "Rip Her to Shreds") suggest something of the aggressive and raw sound Blondie are said to have in concert but on record the songs are tempered by Gottehrer's '60s approach; altogether too cute question and answer choruses with occasional handclaps and finger snaps. To be honest, Gottehrer is only exaggerating the essential character

of the band; vocalist Debbie Harry recalls the Shangri-Las, the Ronettes and the Chiffons; keyboard player James Destri seems bent on reviving the Farfisa; drummer Clement Burke adds perhaps too many drum rolls and the group even looks the part. And his songs are all between two to three and a half minutes long.

All this would be too much were it not for the sexuality and bitchiness of Debbie Harry, the blond in Blondie, and the underlying aggressiveness of songs such as "Rip Her to Shreds" ("She looks like the Sunday comics") coupled with the band's apparent good humour ("The Attack of the Giant Ants", a parody of cheap sci-fi flicks). Which makes Blondie's first album good, not great. And a lot of fun.

Jeremy Templar

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