

Born Again Randy

Randy Newman
Born Again
Warner Bros

New look Randy Newman



Those who have followed the career of Randy Newman will know he is no ordinary composer. He creates stories of irony and humour, although sometimes the laughter is strained, a little scary. He lives where others seldom tread (John Lennon compared the Beatles with Jesus; Newman sang as God). Who but Newman would open an album with a hymn to the benefits of selfish wealth?

*I don't love the mountains
And I don't love the sea
And I don't love Jesus
He never done a thing for me
I ain't pretty like my sister
Or smart like my dad
Or good like my mama
It's money that I love*

Other songs on *Born Again* explore the quirky themes one has come to associate with Randy Newman — Japanese and Russian spies infiltrating an unsuspecting America, transvestitism and exhibitionism, John Travolta clones up against real street punks, and (hilariously) the Electric Light Orchestra.

Some of the best songs are the deceptively simple ones about not much at all — family life, old girlfriends, people caught up in the job of making ends meet.

Newman's consistent stance of detachment sets him apart from other rock songwriters. Even when he adopts the first person he remains the storyteller and not a protagonist. The diary approach to writing is not for him.

Supporting some of the most literate lyrics one is likely to hear this year or any year is equally superb music. Every note seems selected for maximum effect, whether it be the pared down cocktail trio noodlings of "The Girls in My Life (Part 1)" or the synthesised composites of "The Story of a Rock and Roll Band".

Born Again is unreservedly recommended to those looking for more than just a head-bang.
Ken Williams

Fleetwood Mac Tusk Warner Bros

Tusk is an unresolved paradox. It is almost like two albums (apart, this is, from being a double), as if there was an abrupt shift of direction during its preparation. This could account for its being more than two years since Fleetwood Mac's last album, *Rumours*, and its remarkably high production costs (reportedly about \$1.2 million, although no doubt a fair bit went to the name photographers who contributed to the overdressed packaging).

Of the album's 20 songs about half are written by Christine McVie and Stevie Nicks, sharing the burden more or less equally. The effect is of *deja vu*. There are Christine's aching, "love hurts" blues ballads and Stevie's coun-

Fleetwood Mac



trifled laments. The singing is probably as good as these two get and the instrumental support is as strong as ever, but it is rather too familiar.

The remainder of the songs (nine, in fact) are the work of Lindsey Buckingham and they are a jolt. Propulsive and energetic, they rescue *Tusk* from any accusation of fatigue, while at the same time underlining the lack of adventure in the other tracks.

Buckingham's songs for Fleetwood Mac have always been strong in rhythm, but it is stressed to the near-exclusion of melody, as in the title track, which has added support from the University of Southern California Trojan Marching Band.

It is not that Buckingham's songs are so peculiar, rather that alongside the more conventional approach of McVie and Nicks they can sound downright weird. Or more to the point is it that the modes of McVie and, especially, Nicks have languished, but the structure of the group requires a sharing of the songwriting profile? If so, it's a pity. The dichotomy sits uneasily.
Ken Williams

BOC Mac

Blue Oyster Cult
Mirrors
CBS

Wherein Murray Krugman's and Sandy Pearlman's whizz-kids embark on yet another phase in their careers. Their previous stages of development have been marked by two monuments of heavy metal cut'n'thrust — the double *On Your Feet Or On Your Knees* which closed their science fiction razmataz, and last



Blue Oyster Cult

year's broad perspective *Some Enchanted Evening* signalling an end to their toned-down period. Or did it?

Mirrors is really a profitable extension of the second phase which included the important *Agents of Fortune* and the patchy *Spectres*, but their new album is a departure in that it is their first album to be produced by someone other than the Pearlman-Krugman team. Tom Wer- man, fresh from Ted Nugent and Cheap Trick production chores, has taken over and has replaced the Pearlman-Krugman satanic shades of past works with a dab hand of commercialism and keenness of sound.

As usual the Cult have come up with the right album formula of knife-edged songs honed to a fine point by Roeser's guitar ("The Vigil" picks up from where "Reaper" left off) and mellower lower-key efforts full of melodic moods like "In Thee" and "You're Not the One".

When it comes to superbly crafted rock'n'roll BOC are still the guys in America calling all the shots but what narks me is the fact that there are very few other bands there willing to follow their example.
George Kay

hymn-like "Big Ship", "Sombre Reptiles" "Becalmed" and the title track.

The album is the nearest thing Eno has recorded to a folk album and it's reminiscent of the pastoral pangs of the best of the Incredible String Band's earliest output. With the exception of *Before and After Science* it is probably his most satisfying and complete album.

SONIC REDUCER

"At one extreme I am a singer/songwriter, and at the other a sonic experimenter."

After the acclaimed *Before and After Science* and his well documented contributions to *Low/Heroes* Eno released *Music For Films* last year. The album could have been more accurately titled *Music For Moving Picture Interludes* as the contents are a collection of fragments, some of which have already been used in films and television programmes and others which are just begging to be snapped up as provoking soundtracks.

There are no bombastic grandiose film themes here riddled with clichéd major chords, so forget the implications of the title, *Music For Films* from that angle. Eno has used his electronic inquisitiveness to shape eighteen pieces of atmospheric instrumentation similar in texture to their counterparts on *Another Green World* and *Low/Heroes* but different in that they are more mood orientated and less melody-conscious.

The album is Eno on his home ground creating what he feels he is best at — "contemporary electronics and recording technology without lapsing into quirky gimmickry that normally characterizes this pursuit." *Music For Films* is rich in a diversity of tone and texture stretching from the crystal acoustic picking of Fred Frith on "From the Same Hill" to the chillingly mournful 'orchestral' mood of "Sparrowfall 2&3". *Music For Films* then is an unqualified success, electronic music with purpose and discipline that easily avoids trivial gimmickry.

The same can't be said for *Music For Airports*, the first in a planned series of albums presenting music as an integrated part of a particular environment, in other words muzak. The problem is that this idea is contradictory to the concept of music as something to listen to, consequently *Music For Airports* doesn't shape up under close scrutiny.

Robert Wyatt has collaborated with Eno on one track but his acoustic guitar is well immersed in the cold linoleum arrangement. The album consists of four pieces, two using multi-tracked female vocals to provide an ethereal effect/backdrop for Eno's hesitant piano inclusions.

The album achieves what it sets out to do, that is the creation of a certain mood or atmospheric background, but for my money Eno is really cheapening himself on this venture no matter how grand or worthwhile he may believe his ambitions are.

So there you have it, four albums representing four stages or facets of someone called Brian Eno — rock as in *Tiger Mountain*, the fifty-fifty world of rock and instrumentation on *Another Green World*, the contemporary electronics of *Music For Films* and finally the wallpaper strategies of *Music For Airports*.

Take your pick.
George Kay

ENO

Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy
Another Green World
Music For Films
Polydor

Music For Airports
Ambient

AFTER ART SCHOOL

Brian Eno is one of a rare breed — a survivor, like his colleagues Bowie and Ferry, of the recent rock'n'roll transition and a man revered for his forward thinking and electric imagination. He's lasted the pace because, like the aforementioned gents, he's not only a leader of sorts in his particular niche but he's also in possession of the prerequisite talent and contemporaneous outlook.

Educated in a religious environment until he was sixteen he then studied at Ipswich and Winchester Art Schools where he formed his interest in avant garde music and cybernetics. Eno's public career can be dated from his collusion with Bryan Ferry, January 1971 to July 1973, on the first two Roxy Music milestones, and it's more than apparent his contributions were vital to the band's glossy ritziness. But Roxy was too small to contain the disparate abilities of both Ferry and Eno so the latter left after heated arguments and later that same year collaborated with Robert Fripp on *No Pussyfooting*.

SOLO STRATEGY

Great things were expected of the man with the release of his first solo album proper, *Here Come the Warm Jets*, but despite the presence of gems like "Blank Frank" the album was something of an anti-climax. Never mind, *Taking Tiger Mountain By Strategy*, followed quickly and made amends although even it was ridiculously underrated at the time.

Eno has often referred to himself as a 'non-musician' and in many ways you can see what he means as he doesn't adhere to acceptable songwriting/arrangement norms or patterns. *Tiger Mountain*, like its predecessor, affirmed his belief in simplicity ("When I listen to my previous albums I am surprised by my confidence in simplicity") and highlighted his unusual songwriting abilities in the rock idiom. Because of his lack of a traditional rock background and his long-standing interest in electronic music, Eno's dabbings with rock have been very personalised and off-beat. He juxtaposes a variety of different elements. For example on *Tiger Mountain* his everyday deadpan vocal drone, styled very much on Robert Wyatt's approach, is often urged along by some weird instrumental pairings: bagpipe synthesisers leading into a singalong on "Back in Judy's Jungle" and the nursery rhyme qualities of "Put A Straw Under Baby" illustrate this eccentricity.

But *Tiger Mountain* is really Eno ruled by straightforward notions especially when Phil Manzanera strides out on "Third Uncle" and "The True Wheel". The album ends on the tranquil note of the title track, a glimpse into the peacefulness of *Another Green World*. *Tiger Mountain* made its point and must be noticed.

ANOTHER WORLD

Another Green World is really an aural landscape incorporating a balanced combination of the Two Sides of Eno — the man as vocalised rocker exemplified in *Jets* and *Tiger Mountain*, and as expansive synthesiser instrumentalist later to find fruition on *Low/Heroes* and *Music For Films*.

AGW is a beautiful album in the true sense of that word: beginning with the atypical harshness of "Sky Saw" Eno eases into melancholia in songs like "St. Elmo's Fire" (which boasts an authoritative guitar solo from Fripp), "I'll Come Running" and the quaint "Golden Hours". Yet it's the pensive melodic instrumentals that steal the prizes, notably the

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