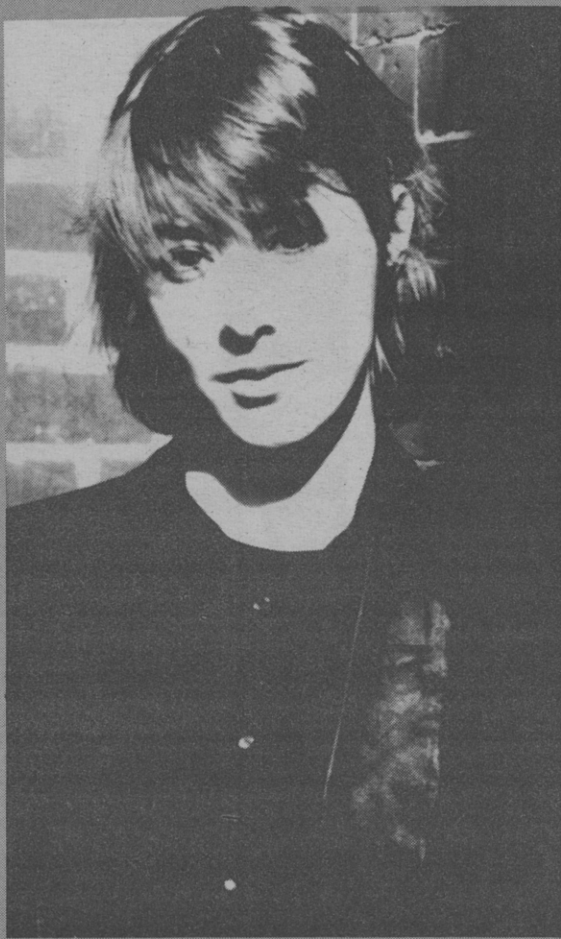


NEW ARTIST PROFILE



SUZANNE VEGA

The New York Times has called her "potentially one of the most powerful poet singers since Bob Dylan", and "one of the most promising young talents on the folk music circuit". The Boston Herald claims she is "an absolutely original talent, a mesmerising performer".

The lady is Suzanne Vega and though the accolades are somewhat overblown, there's no doubt that her work is both refreshing and gently captivating. Vega belongs with the traditional folk-poet adventurers and she couldn't object to comparisons with Joni Mitchell and Rickie Lee Jones but, like Laurie Anderson, she takes traditional forms and updates their structures into something very personal and just a little different.

Unlike Anderson, she shies away from avant-garde distortion. Her songs are straight and pure and true to strict folk construction. Yet synthesisers and electric guitar merge with her acoustics without seeming incongruous and, with one or two of the tracks (notably 'Neighbourhood Girls'), she lapses into a rapping freestyle that's most attractive.

Suzanne Vega's greatest gifts are an oddly affecting and pure voice and an eye for the small details of life — or romance and mental health, as she wryly categorises her material — which can speak volumes.

Produced by Lenny Kaye, ex-Patti Smith guitarist, this record has been hailed as a masterpiece by New York's cognoscenti, Suzanne Vega is quite a talent and if you're prone to this kind of thing, this record is an unexpected find.

AVAILABLE ON ALBUM AND TAPE



Records

Various Artists Repo Man MCA

Hard core independent American music from a hard core independent American film. *Repo Man* stars Harry Dean Stanton (*Paris Texas*, *Alien*, etc) as the numero uno car reposessor getting involved in the LA band scene and mixed up with something extra-terrestrial. The film came out in 1984 and died, until midnight showings developed it into a hot item.

The soundtrack has some great moments and works better than the comparable *Return of the Living Dead*. There's Iggy Pop's nifty title track and hardcore fun with Black Flag's 'TV Party' (a different version from the one on *Damaged*). Circle Jerks contribute 'Coup D'Etat' and a surprise acoustic number called 'When the Shit Hits the Fan'. Suicidal Tendencies have done better songs, but their 'Institutionalised' fits the mood of the movie, as does Fear's 'Let's Start A War'. The most interesting tracks for me are the Chicano tracks by the Plugz, with 'El Claudy La Cruz' and a version of 'Secret Agent Man'.

Other than the Dead Kennedys, this is the first local release for American hardcore — hopefully it won't be the last. Things like Husker Du and the Meat Puppets deserve more coverage than a few copies in the import bins.
Kerry Buchanan

Andrew Poppy The Beating of Wings ZTT

Andrew Poppy does not deal directly with things. Like his classical forebears, to whom he pays some much homage (Bach in particular?), he does not directly comment on love, smoking, hangovers, infidelity, vacillation, misery and

the dozen or so other emotions that plague humankind, nor does he inspire one to dance or sing or kiss someone. On these points, even Wham! are ahead; is Andrew Poppy the product of naive academicism, or merely positive thinking?

This thing called *The Beating of Wings* (including the title's strange and meaningless attached "formulae" of S/B/Ch and K/W/Th) consists of four pieces, each some 20 minutes long. They are no more complex in structure (and no less accessible) than Mike Oldfield's *Hergest Ridge*, or Nina Simone's recent and sublime 'Vous Etes Seuls, Maisje Desire Etre Avec Nous' (not as weighty as it reads); it is their stylistic *origin* that is the source of their newness and austerity to Pop ears, rather than the thinking behind them. There is a "serious" attempt to combine "modern" and "classical" in 'Listening In', and it fails miserably; 'Listening In' is all reason and no purpose.

After stalking up and down the room a bit, some emotions become clear. 'Cadenza' is a very pretty and delicate piece, even ending as it does on a sharp, single and grating note. 'The Object Is A Hungry Wolf' takes time to make its point of sombre complexity; like much of the album, you wonder if it could not be achieved in slightly less time.

So this album made me think. But would I be so eager if I did not have to review it? I'm eager about a lot of music, as are countless others, and that is the crux of the problem; Andrew Poppy does not need you to be so.

Chad Taylor Robyn Hitchcock & the Egyptians fegMANIA Bigtime

Boyoboy, does this Robyn Hitchcock deliver a great line in Syd Barrett impersonations! He's been doing them since his Soft Boys days back in '77, and he still sings 'em in '86, along with running off a fairly nifty lyric in the Barrett vein.

fegMANIA is unmistakably English, mildly psychedelic and non-heavy ... but rather uneven. It

opens pleasantly enough with 'Egyptian Cream', then 'Another Bubble', before really taking off with 'I'm Only You'.

Then it's 'My Wife and My Dead Wife' with an immediate tune and great silly words: "I'm drilling holes in the walls, I turn round and my dead wife's upstairs, she's still wearing flares, she talks out loud but no-one hears ... am I the only one who sees her?" 'Goodnight I Say' closes side one (and, sadly, most of the fun) with a bashing chorus that works just fine.

'The Man With the Lightbulb Head' contains as delightfully corny a lyric as you'd expect, but apart from 'The Fly', side two merely slides pleasantly by without living up to the promise shown on the first side. The lyrics are all simple and neat, but the musical inventiveness is not sustained all the way ...

fegMANIA's highs are high, and the whole thing's nice, but it just misses on catching me fully.
Paul McKessar

Albert Collins, Robert Cray, Johnny Copeland Showdown Alligator

The teaming of individual stars too often makes for dull records in which one dominates or all withdraw slightly; seldom do the participants give more than one would expect (or hope for). In the blues context, the B.B. King/Bobby Bland collaborations are notably disappointing.

However, *Showdown* exceeds all expectations and is one of the most exciting of modern blues albums.

Producers Bruce Iglauer and Dick Shurman have brought together three of today's big blues stars, only one of whom (Collins) is contracted to Alligator. The three guitarists are old collaborators in on-the-road jam sessions and perhaps it is this experience that gives the album its backbone.

Collins is the principal soloist, but only by a fraction, because all three get to sing and play plenty. It's a pleasure to say that not only do they not get in each other's way, but in fact drive each other to new heights. They're aided and abetted

by Collins' old Icebreakers rhythm team of Johnny B. Gayden on bass and Casey Jones on drums.

From the opening kick of 'T-Bone Shuffle' to the climactic closer 'Blackjack', *Showdown* flexes muscle at all times. Especially good is Robert Cray's pleading 'The Dream' with Collins demonstrating that he can provide sympathetic support as well as flamboyant leads. Highly recommended.
Ken Williams

John Cale Artificial Intelligence Beggars Banquet Nico & the Faction Camera Obscura Beggars Banquet

John Cale has been in this business for over 20 years and it's beginning to show. Whilst avoiding the depths so ungracefully graced by the truly awful *Caribbean Sunset*, *Artificial Intelligence* dribbles with Cale clichés (Artificial Beligence, etc) that these days sound tried and tired, sometimes insipidly uninspired.

The idiot sinking in his own idiosyncrasies? Not quite. But you get an inkling that Cale's mining through his backlog with the nuggets long gone and only sludge to be dredged up. We don't need to be bogged down with it and Cale doesn't need to sink in it.

Leaving it up to you, John-boy ... Old buddy in arms Nico is at least charting more adventurous paths with the Faction on the Cale-produced *Camera Obscura*. But as one who prefers blood 'n' guts to blips 'n' thuds, the electronic eeriness here doesn't quite gel and the Faction do little to change my ever-so-biased opinion that synthesiser bands usually result from people playing with their organs for far too long.

Still, there's enough in Nico's performance to suggest her shows here could be worth investigation, and, who knows, with favourable, close to raveable reports floating across from the UK, we could even be in for a surprise.

Validity over posterity, anyone?
Shayne Carter



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