

Dave Swarbrick
Swarbrick
John Renbourn Group
A Maid in Bedlam
Transatlantic

Good to see material from the Transatlantic catalogue appearing in local shops again. Now that RTC have got the rights to this label, perhaps we shall get more material coming through. Incidentally, both of these albums are rather brave releases in this part of the world, considering the music of both these men is so much tied in with the contemporary folk-club circuit in England.

Swarbrick's album is a splendid achievement. Well, just what you'd expect from the driving force behind Fairport Convention's "Bridge over the River Ash" and "The Hen's March". For a taste of Swarbrick's high voltage fiddle-work try the opening number, "The Heilanman/Drowsy Maggie", with Beryl Marriott kicking up a storm on the ivories, in the best ceilidh band style.

There are some more familiar names on Swarbrick's album, including Martin Carthy who adds guitar on four tracks and Simon Nicol and Dave Pegg who add guitar and bass to most of the other tracks. Carthy recorded several duo albums with Swarbrick in the late sixties, and Nicol and Pegg were with Swarbrick in Fairport Convention. When Swarbrick does have a full band sound it is much the same feel as the Albion Country Band.

A lovely album this, and an obligatory purchase if you like English trad folk.

Now to John Renbourn. I was never really that stuck on Pentangle, of which Renbourn was a member. The group's rather 'cool' and tasteful version of folk music was somewhat kicked in the guts by Steeleye Span and some of the electric groups. In fact I think one of the happiest albums that Renbourn produced was his *Lady and the Unicorn* which was much more classical in both material and the treatment of the music.

A Maid in Bedlam exudes taste from



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Rossetti cover onwards but it doesn't really make much impact with me. I don't particularly like Jacqui McShee's vocals, and Keshave Sathe's over-predominant tabla-work almost drove me to distraction. Renbourn is a fine guitarist and this shows through the album, but with all the musical distraction going on around him, it is rather like looking at a beautiful gem in a rather awkward setting.

Still, "Nacht Tanz/Shaeffertanz" is an attractive version of these medieval tunes with strong oboe and violin work. But even so in hearing the oboe I am reminded of how much more enterprisingly this instrument was treated in Ashley Hutchings' *Compleat Dancing Master*.

But give Renbourn a listen if you can. I have a sneaking suspicion it will grow on me — I am already quite happily listening to it for the third time.

William Dart



Flora Purim
Encounter
Interfusion

With lush ballads and funky beats on her previous album, *Nothing Will Be As It Was ... Tomorrow*, Flora Purim appeared to be reaching for a broader, more popular appeal. The album was a melange that never really excelled in any direction. Now, with *Encounter*, she has left the big commercial arrangements and returned to her familiar ground of working with a small combo (varying here from two to seven members). "Returned" is really a misnomer because with this set Purim has moved ahead, exploring and improvising with a freedom and surety that mark the progress of a mature musician who is still extending herself. As in the past she operates, not as a singer with a band, but as catalyst and integral member of a group.

The musical empathy evident here is remarkable. Perhaps it is to be expected of such long-time associates as Airtio, George Duke and Hermeto Pascoal, but everyone's playing deserves high praise. Rhythms shift and swirl with a marvellous cohesion; beats are stated or implied with masterful subtlety. (Bassist Ron Carter is amazing as always.) These sensitive musicians can provide delicate support for Purim as she employs her vast range to float and soar, or

they can build blistering tempos to propel her silken yet elemental cries.

Followers of Purim's music will be familiar with the way her vocal work extends to a wordless, almost scat style. Here she continues the shift from singing words to creating sounds — the few lyrics are largely non-English anyway — and this often provides a more direct emotional concentration rendering the music positively atmospheric.

Besides Purim's voice there are many delights on this album: Chick Corea's typically light and airy composition "Windows", the rhythmic development of the ballad "Uri", Joe Henderson's tenor solo on his own "Black Narcissus", the tripartite vocal work on the title track. Mention must also be made of the two tracks involving piano giant McCoy Tyner. Perhaps initially the most inaccessible, these employ Purim and Tyner exploring interesting harmonic patterns.

There's a lot I could say about this record because there's a lot to listen to. Suffice that it keeps getting better. A word of warning however: it's not an album to easily assess after 20 minutes in your local store. (After one hearing I didn't even want to review it.) It requires — and amply rewards — serious listening.

Peter Thomson

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