Music that moves in subtle ways

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bells letters

If your main interest is standing up and screeching "Getitonboogie!!" at musicians stop reading right now. Because this column is about three men who make music which has a potential to move people in much more subtle ways than that. And that music isn't interested in people who only want to boooogie!!!

The music is the steel-string, finger-picking style of guitar playing, best exemplified by John Fahey, Leo Kottke and Robbie Basho. Their related styles are commonly described simply as "Takoma" because they did their major early recording on Fahey's Takoma label.

Their stock in trade is a blues-flavored, technical virtuosity on solo guitar applied to everything in sight. When a musician really articulates through his instrument, when the joy or sorrow, the delight or rage comes rolling out—that's the idea of art. These men are artists.

Fahey (my favorite for no logical reason) leans more toward blues. Some of his ablums, especially *The Transfiguration of Blind Joe Death* on Riverboat Records and *The Yellow Princess* on Vanguard, employ snatches or medleys of traditional blues or work songs. Most of his numerous recordings are on the Takoma label, although his latest album is with Warner Bros.

Kottke is apparently enjoying a wider popularity since he has been recording for Capitol. He, too, started on Takoma. Kottke's guitar work tends to be faster and maybe a little flashier than Fahey's. And he sometimes sings and occasionally performs pop material such as an instrumental treatment of "Eight Miles High" on his *Mudlark* album for Capitol.

Kottke's newest release for Capitol is a live performance called *My Feet Are Smiling*.

Robbie Basho is probably the least known of the three, although he has released at least eight albums. His latest (to my knowledge) was *Voice of the Eagle*, released last fall on Vanguard Records. The album is a contemporary musical study of the American Indian.

Basho's style, as he describes it, combines American finger-picking styles, techniques of Hindu music, Western European classicism and the Japanese and Middle Eastern scales.

By itself the guitar is a subtle and beautiful instrument. Fahey, Kottke and Basho are among its technical masters. But technical mastery isn't enough; if it was, music could be computerized. A sensitivity needs to exist.

As Robbie Basho's notes to his album *Song of the Stallion* say: "My philosophy is quite simple; soul first, technique later, or 'Better to drink wine from the hands than water from a pretty cup.' Of course, the ultimate is wine from a pretty cup."

Leo Kottke

Incredibly trite plot, bad acting kill 'Shamus'

Review by Jim Gray

If you have seen *The French Connection, The Getaway,* any James Bond movie, *Mannix, McCloud* or *Columbo; don't bother to see* Shamus. You've seen it done better.

There is, first of all, Predictable Plot No. 43-B (loveable but dissheveled private detective solves murder mystery, but without the mandatory clever twist of the plot. And without a shred of wit.

The plot is incredibly trite. Astute film-goers will be able to predict the plot outcome after five minutes. The rest of the audience should take 10 minutes at most.

Halfway through, things become so painfully obvious that a deaf and blind hermit could predict the next character's death and the next love affair.

As could be expected in a framework like this, there is not a shred of acting to be found.

There is, of course, Burt Reynolds, negating any career advancement he got from *Deliverance*. As the crummy-but-loveable detective (who lives in a filthy fifth floor walkup with a cat and sleeps on a pool table) he gets to say such wonderful lines as "Do you fool around?"

And, of course, Dyan Cannon as the rich-but-wonderful heroine-plot-wrecker who gets to say wonderful lines like "You're tough ...tough...tough."

And, even more tritely, the colorful-but-inane supporting characters including a sharpie whose entire dialogue consists of a goldmine of sports trivia, a grossly fat, jovial poolroom owner and a Mafioso restauranteur. zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz.

There are more stereotype characters than in *True Confessions*..

The movie is even worse technically. The photography is totally unimaginative. It's almost as if the tech crew had sat through a John Wayne double feature and had used its photographic memory to create a cinematic carbon paper collage.

If the tech crew did that, it's obvious the director was watching a Three Stooges film festival at the same time. Even the fight scenes are hoked up unbelievably. The love scenes are...well, they're funny, hysterically funny. And they're not supposed to be.

It's painfully apparent at times that the movie is intended to be nothing more than a vehicle for Burt Reynolds. Which would be fine if Reynolds could handle it, but he can't.

Exploitation of the Reynolds sex object image is blatantly obvious from Reynolds' first scene, in which he lies in bed naked, save for a strategically-placed sheet (instant replay of Cosmopolitan).

Reynolds struggles admirably at being funny—stumbling, bumbling and mostly twitching his way through the schlock. But without any cogent direction, he just can't make it.

And in a one-horse picture like *Shamus,* when the star doesn't work, nothing does. Paced by Reynolds' ineptness, the movie starts slow and degenerates.

If it's any comfort, this movie is better than *1776*. And *Up the Sandbox*. And maybe even *Gidget Goes to College*.

Shamus should have been a pilot movie for a TV series. At least then it wouldn't have sold.

mini record reviews

The Old Bum's Rush. **Tony Williams Lifetime. Polydor (PD5040).**

Jazz fans will recognize the names of Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, Bill Evans, John Coltrane and John McLaughlin. After playing with and being praised by these jazz musicians, drummer Tony Williams is coming up fast.

Williams was only 16 when Davis found him. Williams played with Davis's combo for six years. But now Williams has his own group called Lifetime.

There are three things which make *Old Bum Rush* a fine album:

—Williams and his drumming;

—Webster Lewis's organ and clavinette work;

—stunning vocals by a woman called Tequila.

Old Bum's Rush is different from some of Williams's earlier recordings, primarily because this album has less hard-core jazz. "You Make It Easy," "What It's About," "Mystic Knights of the Sea" and "The Boodang" are the finest cuts on the album. Williams's vocal, "Changing Man," is the most disappointing cut on the record. But it's still mighty fine.

Larry Kubert

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The Six Wives of Henry VIII. **Rick Wakeman. A&M (SP4361).**

Surrounded by enough equipment to open a music store, including organ, electric piano, harpsichord, grand piano and two or three moog synthesizers, Rick Wakeman, keyboardist for Britain's Yes, has produced one of the most unique albums of the year.

Devoting an entire record to musical interpretations of the wives of England's Henry VIII, Wakeman has attempted to characterize each of the wives in relation to keyboard instruments.

How successful Wakeman has been is impossible to say, since these are his interpretations; however, the entire concept is brilliant and brilliantly handled.

The album is exciting, especially to those who enjoy images of dead ghosts wandering through dusty and dimly lit passages of our minds.

The Six Wives of Henry VIII stands a good chance of being named one of the top ten albums of 1973, not only for Wakeman's performance, but also for his inspiration.

LK

Rick Wakeman