

13 SONGS FOR AGEING CHILDREN

JOHN MITCHELL

Wild Things Run Fast (Geffen)

A YEAR before her 40th birthday, the great romantic rock music widow her locket once more. Three years have passed since "Misquissippis" and the world has moved fitfully on; but in Mitchell's universe the identical concerns have to be invoked and picked over, obsessively, again and again. I've ventured in this waltz so many times I'd like this to be a valedictory look — except "Wild Things Run Fast" seems such a melancholy dance, so lacking in what Mitchell can be so good at, that I'll have to leave with a heavy heart, not a cleaved one.

I could sum it all up immediately as an extraordinary record from someone who has pursued the extraordinary and frequently come near it. It could, of course, simply be a low point in a continuing body of work, but Mitchell's records are not supposed to be commonplace artefacts of the rock game; and they haven't been, from "Court and Spark" to "Misquissippis". "Wild Things Run Fast" seems such a palpable retreat from the vantage point she'd grafted towards her so long that its appearance is a severe self-criticism in a progression that should have dispensed with highs and lows. There seems nothing of consequence to remark on.

The most immediately disappointing element is its sound. I seem to recall a declaration of a first estrangement from the rock system around the time of "Misquissippis", a decision to plant a flag on jazz's dark moon — but this is a record of rock music, pure and distressingly simple.

There is the patented weightless feel with which Mitchell and her master recordist Harry Lewey always lighten her loads of strings and rhythm, and Wayne Shorter pipes a few sublime soprano borders on three songs. But that is a rich woman's indulgence. There are cañon guitars, big warty backing singers, rock 'n' roll drums. Her inclusion of a snobbish remake of "You're So Square Baby I Don't Care" wounds embarrassing, a reach back into the gauche innocence of her first music which her own writing can no

JAN ANKAS

longer accommodate.

There are familiar pleasures, perhaps too familiar: the urbane gesture, a certain distance, a frequent gossamer delicacy. Her voice is unimpaired — it was never a jazz voice anyway, more that of a versatile chanteuse prone to the ruling of the unbidden heart. Sensuality was not Mitchell's strongest suit. She would rather dance among the daffodils than lay down in them. And there were always her diaries to look through, over and over.

Time catches up with everybody, and the central weakness of "Wild Things Run Fast" is that it isn't in time with anything. Where once Mitchell's confessional sincerity seemed as permissive as this strain of gentral, lithe, lyrical sophistication was going to get, rock has abandoned its timeless fidelity for good and all. Rickie Lee Jones has already accomplished all that Mitchell reached after, and beside a record as suggestive and rich in resonance as "Fireside", "Wild Things Run Fast" begins to look very yellow and grey indeed. Linda Ronstadt's "Easy For You To Say" is as affecting a breakdown of the amorous burden as anything here.

For all her investigations of her heart's inner sanctum, Mitchell has progressed little from her first muddled gush of romance if this writing is a true barometer. To maybe half the songs here she seems to want to return to that era: at least,

there is a surrender of her sharpest faculties in "Solid Love", "Ladies Man", "Man To Man" and "Underneath The Streetlight" that seems an absurd waste. If she chooses to shut out the observational eye that brought about brilliance like "Edith And The Kingpin" and "Otis And Mariena" then she does down her greatest skills.

Because she does not have the gift of writing great dumb-pop music. That's the only thing that would carry a trifle like "Wild Things Run Fast" itself. There is a persistent suggestion that she's slumming in the cheapest throes of dime-novel romance, and it's ludicrous that the progenitor of the scorched skyline of the "Hejira" set should want to settle for something so facile. This is a simplification, not a passing away.

Inevitably, there are some things to salvage: throwaway words, a brief single on the line. The beginning, "Chinese Cafe", is a portrait of regret between friends that touches a little more deeply; and the close, which she has chosen to call "Love", might as well be the last song she writes. "Even if I understood all the mysteries — if I didn't have love I'd be nothing." She refers to 1 Corinthians 13, which is Paul's farewell to that people; but I looked at 1 Corinthians 11 — "Judge in yourselves — is it comely that a woman pray to God uncovered?" Indeed.

Richard Cook

A SHORT STORY

THE MEKONS

The Mekons Story (CMT)

IT'S a story of love and a story of music — a story of art with a capital F. A story of an art student crowd inspired equally by a musical revolution and a newly acquired drinking problem. Those who couldn't play tried to learn and those who could tried to forget — The Mekons came out of chaos and seemed surprised as anyone as they stumbled on a sound of hepazoid pop perfection. The first album showed a monkey typing Shakespeare and contained sounds of equally improbable genius. Unable to maintain the freshness, The Mekons collapsed in a crisis of nonexistence into a different kind of chaos. The inspiration and coolness gone, The Mekons mucking about seemed to be inevitable.

That's The Mekons story — this album is simply a bizarre footnote, a non-chronological (what else?) chart of their decline from speed pop to electro-noise obscurity. The vintage sparks of "Dance And Drink The Mekons" and "Fight The Cuts" bring a nostalgic burst of colour to what, I'm afraid, is otherwise a fairly drab reflection.

I really would like to be nice to this legacy but the quality of things is, in this case, proving distinctly uneven.

Don Dore



Virgin Prunes

Ph: Hugo McGinness

NOSTALGIE DE LA PRUNE

VIRGIN PRUNES

...if I die, I die (Rough Trade)

"PRIMITIVISM" is usually the recourse of the Western sophisticate in need of inspirational refreshment. The Virgin Prunes have built a whole career out of it. Or at least so trappings, but perhaps through the primalist foliage and it is revealed. The Virgin Prunes operate comfortably within current modern rock conventions, and this, their first LP, is an occasionally interesting but largely unremarkable affair.

The whole Quest for Fire

trip is reiterated in the lushly attractive packaging — the name of the game is roots. And I'd guess that the fortune-head of their inspiration is to be located, jolly, many years ago Roundabout 1969 and the release of Pink Floyd's "Ummagumma". Hardly a record played a lot recently, but the Virgin Prunes bring it to mind instantly — pastoral pipes, gnomish vocals and every so often a sweet little line.

More recent mind-expanding outcra are recalled. On "Caracuse Walk" it's Soutine's painting

over. The other Dublin band, U2, are evoked in a ringing anthem, the appropriately biblical "Walls Of Jericho". The pretty entitled "Ballad Of The Man" roars of The Only Ones and The Clash in total mood. And perhaps Gavin Gugg and David did want to suggest the plaintive (and melodically exotic) cry of a mason on "Sweet Home Under White Cloud", but all my mind's eye sees is the ludicrous figure of Jethro Tull's Ian Anderson. And so on.

Maybe the Prunes have never heard of these people. But it sounds as if they have.

And for me that is where this album's enjoyment, such as it is, lies — it recalls more original, provocative talents. All The Virgin Prunes contribute is a veneer of mangled angst and the portentous mystique of nostalgia de la lune.

Mat Snow

HARDLY HABIT FORMING

THE ADICTS

Sound Of Music (Razor)

THE SUCKEST punk package yet hits the streets with only four weeks of heads down no nonsense mindless shopping in turkey sandwich skin, and The Adicts are already nullifying anticipatory hands all the way to the bank. After all, they've probably reckoned that no one can foul up without a seasonally adjusted trivia as this.

From the asking band itself — a gang of hyaline pop-jerk mask — up to their bowler-hatted, clean white boy white dresses, through the garnish of obligatory song names and irrelevant warty punk trinomials and right down to the front cover illustration — a jolly merry-go-round scene — and even though to the title itself "Sound Of Music" minks of as much premeditation and cold

blooded peculiarity — forethought as anything perpetrated by the likes of Sham 69. These dox can Indies are all the same, let's go for the big one this time boys, and everyone else. Hopefully divine retribution will lend a hand and The Adicts will suffer the humble 30th way.

Persistently pretending to the rather dubious accolade of "sokers in the punk pack", The Adicts' debut album leaves them without a bump into the vacant slot somewhere between stabilisers and dashing tool junkies Chron Gen and stile-mates and kraiser tenets Sordide.

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Arnth Rai