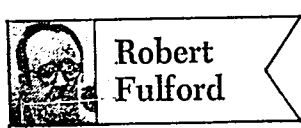


The legend called Steinbeck knew only one world-himself

On page 404 of Steinbeck: A Life In Letters it is 1950 and John Steinbeck, the distinguished American novelist, is writing to a friend that he's going out to buy presents for his son's sixth birthday. On page 831 it is 1966, that same son is about to leave for Viet Nam as a soldier, and Steinbeck is writing to Lyndon Johnson to thank the president for receiving both father and son just before the young man's departure. On page 832 it is 1968 and young John, back from Viet Nam, is a leader of the American peace movement—to his father's distress and annoyance. A second son is about to leave for Viet Nam.



Robert Fulford

In 1962, he unexpectedly (and, most people felt, undeservedly) won the Nobel prize for literature. He recognized immediately that this kind of fame was a greater danger to his integrity than the poverty and obscurity he endured in the 1930s. Things like this, he wrote to a friend, "can be corrosive. This is many times harder to resist than poverty."

He felt the Nobel prize might be a kind of tombstone for him. He noted anxiously that neither Ernest Hemingway nor William Faulkner wrote much of consequence after they received it. And poor old Sinclair Lewis just sank deeper into alcoholic stupor after he got his.

And indeed not much came from Steinbeck after the Nobel. There was no "late flowering" for him. His last years were a kind of dwindling—some reporting from Viet Nam, in which he horrified his old friends by supporting the American position; a picture book about America; and the inevitable cultural exchange tour of the Soviet bloc.

It may have been that the Nobel overwhelmed him. Combined with his own modest view of his work, it may have intimidated him, making him believe that he couldn't afford, in future, to publish anything except masterpieces. Or it may have been—and this is a fear often expressed in these pages—that his talent was simply exhausted.

"I have whomped a small talent into a large volume of work," he told one correspondent. This view, encountered again and again in the book, is as refreshing as it is surprising. There are so many writers who feel they have not properly exploited their talents, usually because the world has not given them the opportunity, that it's pleasant for a change to find one who believes he has actually done better than God may have intended for him.

Steinbeck refused to see his career as a tragedy, though no doubt some future biographer will discover profound sadness at the heart of his life. Americans like to mistreat



JOHN STEINBECK
A human chronicle

living authors (Steinbeck got terrible reviews) and then mourn the misuse of their talents a few decades later. (Unlike Canadians, who over-praise living authors, then forget them after they die.)

But as Steinbeck moved toward death in the 1960s—he died, at age 66, in December, 1968—he had one enormous artistic regret, the Big Book he planned but never wrote. Incredibly, it was to be some sort of

historical novel about the time of King Arthur.

"All my life has been aimed at one book," he wrote in 1961, "and I haven't started it yet." It was to deal with the search for the Holy Grail. The stirring Depression-era novelist who left us The Grapes of Wrath and the inspired literary comedian who gave us Tortilla Flat yearned for 40 years to write a book about Lancelot and Galahad. To this end he spent a year doing research in King Arthur country in England and on many occasions—the letters suggest—devoted time to planning this project. His letters to Jacqueline Kennedy after her husband's assassination link the Kennedy myth with Camelot; and at one point he seems to have entertained the possibility of a book about Kennedy that would stress this theme.

Steinbeck: A Life In Letters is not quite what the title implies. It is not the equivalent of a biography or even an autobiography—it lacks the judicious sorting-out of events and views that good biography and autobiography require. This isn't the Life, only some glimpses of it. But the glimpses are intimate and absorbing, and they tell us something about an admirable and interesting man. In those terms it's a valuable book.

Steinbeck: A Life In Letters, edited by Elaine Steinbeck and Robert Wallsten, MacMillan, 906 pages, \$18.

Massenet revival cheers opera buffs

Massenet: La Navarraise. Marilyn Horne, Placido Domingo and Sherrill Milnes, with the Ambrosian Opera Chorus and London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Henry Lewis. RCA ARL1-1114.

Not so long ago most opera lovers could claim acquaintance with only one Massenet opera, Manon. Now we are in the midst of a full-scale Massenet revival, with Don Qui-

Record Reviews

chotte, Esclarmonde, Thaïs, Werther, Thérèse, Herodiade and even La Navarraise finding their way onto the stage.

La Navarraise is a short, two-act opera, a Franco-Spanish Cavalleria Rusticana to some ears, with murder and madness among its dramatic ingredients. Yet both Queen Victoria and George Bernard Shaw evidently liked it and if you can imagine a more unlikely pair of yeasayers than that, maybe you can imagine why it has taken until 1975 for such a full-blooded hunk of French verismo to receive this fine recording.

Penderecki: Magnificat. Polish Radio Chorus of Krakow, soloists and boys' chorus of the Krakow Philharmonic Chorus and Polish Radio National Symphony Orchestra, conducted by the composer. Angel S-3744.

It is one of the paradoxes of contemporary music that Communist Poland continues to give birth to some of the finest Christian music being written. No large-scale religious work has since Britten's War Requiem had such an impact as Krzysztof Penderecki's St. Luke Passion and this Magnificat, which dates from 1973-74, represents a further enrichment of the literature.

A more conservative work than the St. Luke Passion, the Magnificat, apart from some quarter-tonal inflections, slow, microtonal glissandi and isolated sound conglomerations, is metrically simpler and texturally easier to assimilate. The performance carries the composer's own authority.

—WILLIAM LITTLER

The Best of Carly Simon, Carly Simon Elektra 7ES-1048.

On the back of this album, after hits songs like You're So Vain, Anticipation, and Mockingbird are mentioned, there are, in much smaller letters, the frightening words, "volume one."

Does this mean a volume two is already planned? It's enough to make you shudder or listen to Doris Day (whichever comes first and easiest). Things are bad enough as when a singer as awful as Simon can have a "Best of" album, without the spectre of a second such collection looming head.

The tune That's the Way I've Always Heard It Should Be, is nice enough. But that was recorded before Simon really hit the big time, marrying James Taylor and all, and became the underground Helen Reddy with her biggest hit, You're So Vain. Since she truly arrived on the scene, Simon's music has become insufferable—or at least unlistenable.

It's not just that her material is weak, it is, but she's even weaker. More to the point, it's that she couldn't carry a tune in a Gucci bag.

So that brings up a question. Why is this woman smiling on the front of this album?

—PETER GODDARD

Bruce Springsteen answers the appeal for a new Dylan

Well, my feet they finally took root in the earth but I got me a nice little place in the stars.

WELL, he sure has, that Bruce Springsteen. Only six months ago the 26-year-old singer-song writer was just a name on a pair of forgotten records. But now, after cover stories in both Time and Newsweek, after critical raves and a long tour that ends tomorrow night at Seneca College, he has arrived as the great white hope of American rock.

The rock press has been looking for someone like him for a long time. To be precise, it has been looking for the new Bob Dylan, just as the British rock media have been hunting for the Beatles' successors. And the qualifications for Dylan's old job as punk prophet (or profit, from the record industry's point of view) have been pretty demanding.

The next Great One had to be formed in Dylan's image, but at the same time he had to be somewhat different. He had to be street-wise, a sort of ragamuffin Villon of the '70s. It was more important for him to be artistically honest than artistically

interesting. And he had to have fire in his blood; he had to have passion, for American music, from John Denver to The Eagles, had become too mellow of late.

First it seemed that John Prine might be it. Prine, a former mailman from Chicago, wrote scruffy poetry full of comic turns and outrage. But Prine didn't accept the myth handed to him on a long-playing platter and kept to the streets.

Then along came this skinny kid from Freehold, New Jersey, who was addicted to pinball machines and the engines of old cars. He listened only to vintage rock. The Shirelles, The Crystals, Phil Spector and, especially, The Ronettes. And he wrote about himself with lines like "I had skin like leather and the diamond-hard look of a cobra." Or "I could walk like Brando right into the sun, then dance just like a Casanova."

Brando. The Wild One. The roar of a Harley. Springsteen was perfect. Critic Jon Landau said after one concert: "I saw rock and roll future and its name is Bruce Springsteen." Landau went on to produce Springsteen's third album, Born To Run (Columbia PC 33795).

Then there was Michael Watt's statement in Melody Maker that he listens to Springsteen "like I used to listen to Dylan. John Lennon and Chuck Berry—like my life depended on it."

Now it was one thing for Columbia Records to promote Springsteen as the next Dylan. Like Dylan, Springsteen had been brought to the company by the veteran John Hammond, and the comparison, for the corporation, was simply too tempting not to make.

It was an entirely different thing, however, for the rock press to hype itself about him. But this is exactly what happened.

"And this is probably why Bruce ended up on the covers of both Time and Newsweek," said Bruce Lundvall, a vice-president at Columbia in a telephone interview from New York earlier this week. "Both pieces were written by people who had been fans for a long time. Newsweek wanted to do the story first. But, I guess, when Time heard about it they had to do it too."

It hasn't been easy being the new Dylan, though, especially with the not-so-old one still very much alive and picking. And Springsteen has reacted to the recent deluge of publicity by avoiding interviews and, in several cases, by stripping the posters from the halls where he is to appear.

Still, the publicity hasn't hurt his record sales. "His first two albums (Greetings From Asbury Park and The Wild, The Innocent and The E Street Shuffle, both on Columbia) were not going anywhere," Charles Camilleri, director of Canadian promotion for Columbia, said recently.

"But with all the press the sales of the third album, Born To Run, just took off. It's already a gold album in the States, and we're going to present him with a gold record for over 50,000 sales at his concert here."

While it's hard to ignore Springsteen's success at selling albums or his popularity with the mass media, it's equally difficult not to be sceptical about all the excitement that surrounds him.

For just the way record producers tailor a song to ride on the popularity of an already established musical style, it would seem that the rock media are able to tailor their new heroes.

Instead of finding out who Springsteen really is, we're being told who he's supposed to be.

—PETER GODDARD



DELUGE OF PUBLICITY has Bruce Springsteen hiding from the press but it hasn't hurt his record sales. He's at Seneca College tomorrow.



—Photo by Art Usherson

JONI MITCHELL'S The Hissing Of Summer Lawns is one of the most visually oriented albums ever

recorded. It starts in France, and ends in disturbing calm of "reservation dining rooms" in California.

Joni's radical new album is a truly visual record

IN one song in Joni Mitchell's new album, The Hissing Of Summer Lawns, certainly the most radical record she has ever released, there's a line that describes "a lady in a Paris dress with runs in her nylons."

Is this the singer describing herself? She plays such a peek-a-boo game here, peering out briefly through the luxuriant growth of her imagery, then running away frightened, back into the tangles beyond. One can never be sure if this is the real Joni Mitchell, or only a part she wants us to see, or whether there's such a person.

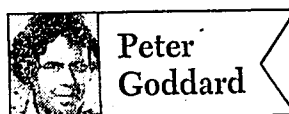
It's not that she's playing a game—at least not the way Lennon and McCartney used to do by providing answers for questions not yet asked. If anything, if there is a game, she's part of it. She's looking for herself, too.

And the operative word here is "looking." This is one of the most visually oriented albums ever recorded by a musician (the singer's design of her own cover art has the same subtle care for nuance as photographer Arthur Elgort's work for Vogue).

The most disturbing song in the album, The Jungle Line, mentions "Rousseau," meaning, one supposes, the French primitive painter Henri Rousseau. And certainly Rousseau's magic jungles and gleaming animal eyes are perfectly mirrored by Mitchell's music, with a counter-melody from a synthesizer almost groaning through the rhythmic backing supplied by the warrior drums of a Burundi tribe.

Yet the artist's visual orientation is much deeper than this. In the album's opening song, In France They Kiss On Main Street, she notices "kisses like bright flags hung on holidays." Edith And The Kingpin is an incident told almost entirely in visual terms. And in the title song suburban despair comes with night, when "tube's gone, darkness, darkness, no color, no contrast."

Even the strongest song on the album is one that refers to yet another visually oriented magazine, Better Homes And Gardens, to tie together her own piece. Harry's House, with the Johnny Mandel-Jon Hendricks tune Centrepiece. In this "a paper-minded" male travels and is free while his wife is stuck at



Peter Goddard

travel. But here she's at home looking, from her window, at the "blue pools in the squinting sun." And she feels a strange breeze at her cheek and, at this distance, hears strange rhythms.

The album, with its Vogue-like tone to everything, begins gaily in France where "we were rolling, rolling, rock 'n' rolling." It ends in the disturbing calm with the beautiful untanned Hollywood people "in reservation dining rooms."

This is a major album, and an unsettling one, too.

The Hissing Of Summer Lawns, Joni Mitchell, Asylum 7ES-1051.

BESTSELLING RECORDS

Compiled by The Star with the co-operation of seven major dealers.

POP SINGLES

	LAST WEEKS
	WEEK ON LIST
1. That's the Way I Like It/K.C. & the Sunshine Band/RCA	1 5
2. Saturday Night/Bay City Rollers/Capitol	4 9
3. Sky High/Jigsaw/Quality	8 5
4. Fly Robin Fly/Silver Convention/Columbia	9 6
5. 18 With A Bullet/Pete Wingfield/GRT	6 4
6. The Way I Want to Touch You/Captain & Tennille/A&M	5 6
7. Fox on the Run/The Sweet/Capitol	7 3
8. Nights on Broadway/Bee Gees/Polydor	2 8
9. Do You Know/Diana Ross/Motown	18 2
10. Let's Do It Again/Staple Singers/WEA	15 3
11. Venus and Mars Rock Show/Paul McCartney & Wings/Capitol	16 4
12. I Write the Songs/Barry Manilow/Capitol	20 2
13. My Little Town/Simon & Garfunkel/Columbia	12 5
14. Island Girl/Elton John/MCA	3 10
15. Down to the Line/Bachman-Turner Overdrive/Polydor	13 4

POP ALBUMS

	LAST WEEKS
	WEEK ON LIST
1. K.C. and the Sunshine Band/K.C. and the Sunshine Band/RCA	1 4
2. Rock of the Westies/Elton John/MCA	2 8
3. Wish You Were Here/Pink Floyd/Columbia	3 13
4. Chicago's Greatest Hits/Chicago/Columbia	5 3
5. Main Course/Bee Gees/Polydor	— 12
6. Wind Song/John Denver/RCA	4 13
7. History of America/America/WEA	— 4
8. Bay City Rollers/Bay City Rollers/Capitol	— —
9. The Hungry Years/Neil Sedaka/Polydor	— —
10. Gord's Gold/Gordon Lightfoot/WEA	7 4