

THE RETURN OF AN OUTLAW AND SOME FRIENDS

Marc Almond was supposed to be history. Seven years ago, he scaled the charts singing "Tainted Love," but by 1987—with the release of the album *Mother Fist and Her Five Daughters* (Virgin/U.K.)—exposure on British TV and radio had evaporated. Almond told reporters he was convinced that it wasn't so much his bold lyrics as his brazenly kissing a male lover at a music industry function that had exiled him. Virgin dropped him. The LP was never released in the United States, and it looked like the industry had finally pulled the flusher on the ferocious fag's career.

A loyal cult—and one nervy A&R rep—kept the faith, however, and Almond has rewarded both with the knockout dance hit "Tears Draw Rings" (Parlaphone/U.K.). It cracked the English top ten and deserves to do the same here. Unfortunately, the American 12-inch features idiotically tricked-up remixes of "Tears" without the killer original. So wait for the LP. *The Stars We Are* (Capitol) is slated for a late-November release. The album is studded with Brechtian ballads, including a duet with Nico—her last recording—on "Your Kisses Burn."

The release of the live LP *Rank* (Sire) may signal an appropriately ragged sign-off from **The Smiths**. The 1986 concert, broadcast at the time on the BBC, is more souvenir than celebration or revelation—seemingly as offhand as Morrissey suggests **Johnny Marr's** decision to split the group was. I suspect a load of mock naïveté in both claims: It is my guess that Morrissey could have done better. He apparently hopes to gall Marr by implying that his precipitous departure left only this artifact to document the legends live.

Mozzer assured *The Catalogue*, though, that this release cleans the band's attic, pleading, "Everything has been released... apart from a hidden version of 'Baby, It's Cold Outside.'" In the same issue of the United Kingdom-zine, on the back of a flexi-disc featuring a cut from the LP, a scrawled lyric is printed, titled, "Poppy-cocteau." It reads, "So then I went to Liverpool/ And got held up outside a/ Nightclub by two merchant/ Seamen who said:/ 'Give us your money or give/ Us your trousers.'/ And as I handed them my trousers... / (Well, you've got to make the/ Most of life, haven't you?)"—August/Winter Eighty-hate MORRISSEY." He's still rock's queerest celibate. (And the most maddeningly coy.)

Billy Bragg, the urban-activist folksinger, told me that after reading one of Mozzer's impassioned celebrations of Oscar Wilde in the pop press, he wrote the reticent one a personal letter, urging that he become involved in the campaign against Section 28, "because his beloved Oscar was the target of this kind of bigotry, and under Section 28, his books could be again. It was nothing to do with Morrissey's sexuality: just that here was a need to stand up for the freedom of those ideas not just then but today." Bragg

doesn't know if he received the letter, but Morrissey never joined in public opposition to the bill.

Bragg did. He joined the director of the film *Letter to Brezhnev* ("Who said to me, 'Billy, you don't have a gay bone in your body' ") in lobbying the House of Commons. Bragg also takes pleasure in talking about "sexual rights as basic human rights" in introducing his song "Tender Comrade" on his current tour.

The a cappella plaint featured on his current LP, *Workers Playtime* (Elektra), isn't a song about gay lib at all but about the affection between soldiers, which is the true, unspoken basis for loyalty in battle. Billy croons, "Brothers in arms in each other's arms/ Was the only time that I was not afraid."

I was hoping for something like "Spare the chef and spare my boyfriend/ I need sustenance and sex/ No hungry soldier with a boner/ Is prepared to meet his death." OK—so neither one is Top 40 fodder, and his is a touch more sensitive.

Billy remains a rugged singer and sterling ally. He slated a benefit concert for Oct. 26 with the Nicaraguan combo **Mancotal** and his tour mate, **Michelle Shocked**, at New York's Beacon Theater. All artists' proceeds will be donated to AIDS activists in ACT UP and for direct care for PWAs through 24 Hours for Life. It's terrific to find this all-hetero lineup pitching in for this event, which will hopefully inspire some gay artists and management to follow suit.

Michelle Shocked, the anarchist-feminist string bean who sounds like Arlo Guthrie's Texan little sister, also lent her voice to the astonishing LP *Til Things*

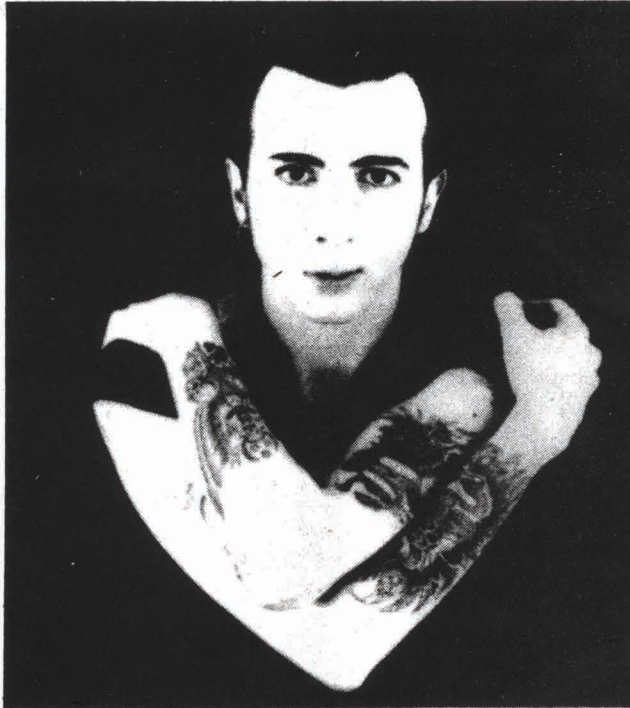
Get Brighter (Red Rhino/Fundamental), with 12 singers covering Johnny Cash songs and all proceeds going to a gay U.K. AIDS charity. (Send \$10 to P.O. Box 2309, Lovington, GA 30209.)

Johnny Langford (The Mekons) and **Marc Riley** (The Creepers) assembled a band to lay down 13 of Cash's classics and then invited uncompromising vocalists to sing. Standout cuts include Shocked's comic confession of an assembly-line auto thief, "One Piece at a Time," and **The Beehive Sisters** strut through "Five Feet High and Risin'." There is a delicious irony in having the dude from **Gaye Bikers on Acid**, who answers to the name Mary Mary, singing "A Boy Named Sue."

The shambling performances make for real folk music, worth chewing on. Certainly none more so than Marc Almond as Roy Rogers, making a fashion statement against the plague out of Cash's theme, "Man in Black," vowing, "I wear the black in mourning/ For the lives that might have been/ Each week we lose 100 fine young men/ I'll try to carry off a little darkness on my back/ Till things are brighter/ I'm the man in black."

Have a little awe on the lam.

—Adam Block



Marc Almond: over-the-top debauched diva

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