

Southern accents don't change Petty's downtown rock



Tom Petty
Observer, not participant

—Drew Gragg, Citizen

Tom Petty and The Heartbreakers
Southern Accents (MCA-5486)

On the jacket of *Southern Accents*, Tom Petty is pictured sitting on a bale of hay in a barn. But the album is not the turn from earthy downtown rock to southern boogie that the image implies.

The influence of the deep South is more thematic than it is musical. *Rebels* is a rock lament about the descendants of Dixie and *It Ain't Nothin' To Me*, goes into the heart of the bible belt via television where Jerry Falwell is preaching.

But Petty is an observer in all of this rather than a participant. The song's chorus, "It might mean somethin' to you/ It ain't nothin' to me" seems to say more than Petty intends it to. The South Petty knows is Florida where he grew up.

Call and response vocals on some tracks lend a hint of gospel, but more dominant is the East Coast dance beat. It brings the music much closer to The Rolling Stones than to the Allman Brothers. In general, the southern music influence is vague.

It is clear, though, that Petty is hunting for some new musical ground. This is far removed from the straight-from-the-heart street rock he began with. It is not guitar-oriented, which might well be due to practical reasons resulting from an injury to his hand.

For whatever reason, the music here has a fuller sound with back-up singers, horns, various acoustic string instruments and synthesizers. He uses the extra support sometimes at the expense of the honesty his earlier music had. At other times, songs are suffocated by overcrowded arrangements.

If *Southern Accents* was an attempt to tap down-home basics, then it was a good idea which doesn't work very well.



Rock
Evelyn
Erskine

The biggest failing of the album is overproduction.

Hugh Marsh
The Bear Walks (DSR 31009)

This is the first solo album by Bruce Cockburn's violin player, Hugh Marsh. Despite the distinctly jazzy nature of the music, the hope is to aim it at a rock market by keying into Cockburn's audience.

Cockburn appears on the album, but only on one track, *La Carezza*, where he plays acoustic guitar. That is not likely to be enough of a link to his audience. While Marsh's violin playing is a special attraction at Cockburn's concerts, this album has nothing to do with folk-rock. Only *La Carezza* hints obliquely at the Latin American folk fusion he participates in as a sideman.

This is an album of instrumental jazz-rock and there is no point in pretending otherwise. However, its appeal outside the jazz periphery is nonetheless quite possible. The music is energetic, highly listenable and often even danceable. Case in point is *Versace*, the opening track and single, with its instrumental trade-offs between Marsh and reknown tenor saxophonist, Michael Brecker, which are played out over a bed of jazzy dance rhythms.

Duels between Marsh and Brecker provide other highlights as well, but the

violinist is equally capable of creating moments when he is the main soloist. At times, the music recalls The Dixie Dregs in their prime as the Texas tinge in Marsh's violin works against fast-paced guitar funk.

Brecker is the only American in the line-up. Otherwise the album is a gathering of some of Canada's best session players. It is a well disciplined effort. The musicianship is adventuresome, but never indulgent. *The Bear Walks* is a superlative album.

Rational Youth
Heredity (ST 12399)

Rational Youth has decided to move from electro-pop to music that is more guitar-oriented in an effort to create a gutsier, more tangible sound. While the single, *No More No Less*, lives up to that premise, the Montreal band periodically falls back on the keyboards it feels comfortable with. In the case of the title track, *Heredity*, it also means backing into the synth clichés it wants to avoid.

The transition from keyboards to guitars is not a natural one for Rational Youth. The guitar playing does not prove to be nearly as imaginative as the lyric writing. The band is known for its unusual subject matter, inspired by fantasy adventures in exotic settings, which sometimes carry a pang of realism. *Freeze* and *Holiday In Bangkok* demonstrate that talent is still alive.

The album involves some stabbing around in the dark, which produces a few good tracks and a few outright clunkers. Its best music comes when the band is not being self-conscious about throwing in the heavy U2-style guitars.