

PAUL NIXON



**FEEL
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FEELING**

**BETTYE
SWANN**
SOUL

Bettye Swann
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PHOTOGRAPHY

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Neil Sedaka to Bill Withers to Wet Wet Wet - Paul Nixon looks at latest music news

East Anglia's music expert looks at a rich mix of new CD and book releases

Neil Sedaka - *Gold (Crimson/Demon)*

While the world is mourning the loss of one of its most prolific hit-makers, I feel we should be celebrating the massive body of work he has left behind for countless generations to come.

They may not have quite the same connection with the likes of Oh Carol or Breaking Up Is Hard to Do as we do, but his recordings will undoubtedly live on forever.

And so, looking back at one of the most recent compilations by Crimson/Demon, *Gold* is a very apt title as over 3 CDs of almost 50 tracks look back at all eras of Sedaka milestones.

From one of the earliest – Oh Carol written for his high school classmate, Carol King, celebrating an unrequited love through Happy Birthday Sweet Sixteen, Breaking Up Is Hard to Do, and a song he wrote for Connie Francis – Stupid Cupid, CD One encapsulates those early 60s years.

Classic covers include Chaplin's tearjerker, Smile and Fly Me to the Moon, with the set closing with Neil's spine-tingling Solitaire.

After the British Invasion of the US in the mid 60s when the Beatles, the Stones, and the like dominated the charts, Sedaka, after a huge career, found himself primarily writing for others while still issuing big sellers such as Laughter in the Rain in 1974.

In the mid-70s British megastar Elton John signed him to his Rocket Records, where he issued the magnificent *The Hungry Years*.

While this set does not feature much of the 70s material, it is a readily available compendium of much of the singer's amazing work.

Watch out, I would guess, for more compilations to hit the ground running very soon.

BOOK *It's No Wonder – The Life and Times of Motown's Legendary Songwriter Sylvia Moy* (Margena A. Christian) £25 Da Capo

Making waves at a time when female producers and writers were as rare as hen's teeth, Sylvia Moy is the subject of this exhaustive new page-turner which inevitably answers questions and delivers the answers for even the staunchest Motown fan.

Examining the ground-breaking career of a musical pioneer during those formative years of the 60s, the author digs deep into the psyche of a male-dominated recording industry at the pinnacle of one of the world's most famous black-owned labels.

Sitting alone in a room full of men, Moy became Motown's first ever female in-house producer and songwriter and is largely responsible for the career of Stevie Wonder.

For back in the early 60s, despite turning in the number one hit, Fingertips, had failed to deliver any further sizeable hits.

The young 'Little Stevie Wonder' was maturing – his voice was changing, and



1970s Reggae Love Songs

label boss Berry Gordy was in a mind to let the child prodigy go.

Enter the talents of one Sylvia Moy, who, along with the young singer and staffer Henry Cosby, penned the magnificent monster 45, Uptight.

Sylvia Moy and Henry Cosby set about writing a new song for the artist based upon an instrumental riff Wonder had devised.

On the day of the recording, Moy had the lyrics but didn't have them in Braille for Wonder to read and so sang the song to him as he was recording it.

She sang a line ahead of him and he simply repeated the lines as he heard them.

Further writing credits at the label include, My Cherie Amour, It Takes Two, Forget Me Not, My Baby Loves Me, With A Child's Heart, I Was Made to Love Her and Shoo-Be-Doo-Be-Doo-Da-Day.

But life was still not easy – she was still a woman in a man's world and this magnificent biography details the

struggles, the power shifts, and the stories behind just one small part of the Motown story but that one small part is so important both to women and to the fans – there have been many Motown books, but this story of a powerful legacy investigates the very large part the wonderful Sylvia Moy played in that story, a part that to date has been criminally ignored in former books.

Post script: A little-known fact is that there are several finished demos sung by Sylvia of well-known Motown hits sitting in the Motown vaults.

CD *Various Artists – Sweet Harmony 1970's Reggae Love Songs* (Doctor Bird/Cherry Red)

Back in the 70s, the air was thick with Jamaican tracks on myriad labels such as Harry J, Chacha, Duke, Cactus, Conflict, and the daddy of them all, Trojan.

The seemingly never-ending Summer days saw the charts alight with original reggae songs and but more prolifically were reggae covers of past and current hits, and many of them were tailored towards the love song market.

Who could forget those original megahits (included here), Janet Kay's – Silly Games, Johnny Nash and Tears on My Pillow, and Gee Baby by Al Campbell.

So prolific were they that many passed us (or me) by – this excellent new 2 CD set puts that matter right and investigates this phenomenon with covers by John Holt, Susan Cadogan, Marcia Griffiths and Ken Boothe, to name but a few of the 46 tracks compiled here.

Current and past hits that got the reggae lovers treatment include, Ain't No Sunshine, Love Me for a Reason, Homely Girl, My Love, and Unchained Melody.

The perfect set for a warm summer's day - all we need is the sun – it can't come soon enough.

THE BIG INTERVIEW

Bill Withers – Just As I Am – Making Music (Music on Vinyl)

Just out are these two stunning reissues of classic Bill Withers LPs by reissue experts, Music on Vinyl.

From 1971 comes the Buddah/Sussex Records original release *Just As I Am* with the legendary Booker T Jones on production duties and guitar along with guest guitarist Stephen Stills, you know you are in for one hell of a ride.

Blending raw, emotional storytelling with a warm, folk-soul groove, the LP established Withers as a premier voice of authentic songwriting.

Often featuring sparse instrumentation, it allows Withers' voice on such notables as Harlem, the milestone, Ain't No Sunshine, and takes on the Beatles, Let It Be, and Everybody's Talking.

By the time 1975 came along Withers had switched to Columbia Records where the Bill Withers – Making Music LP made an appearance.

Reading through the credits on the album is like a who's who of notable names, with Motown legendary string and horn arranger, Paul Riser, on similar duties.

Featuring studio giants, Ray Parker Jr, Harvey Mason Senior, Wah Wah Watson, The Brothers Johnson and Ernie Watts, the stylishly packaged reissue comes along with an informative 8-page booklet where the original musicians reflect on the body of work.

With romantic overtones, the album largely follows the mid-70s soulful R'n'B polished production values and so the rawness of the previously mentioned LP seems a million miles away.

Withers' versatility shows through on tracks such as, I Wish You Well, The Best You Can, She's Lonely, and Sometimes a Song.

Where Music on Vinyl have really come up trumps is the packaging and the pressing.

Pressed on heavyweight 180 gram audiophile vinyl and limited to 3000 individually numbered copies on translucent red vinyl (*Making Music*) and 7500 numbered translucent yellow copies (*Just As I Am*) these are very much a thing of beauty, the silk textured sleeves and booklets make these every inch a collector's dream – almost too good to unwrap and play.

Bettye Swann – Feel the Feeling (Soul 4 Real)

I am making no excuses for why the majority of this week's offerings are from the Soul and R'n'B arena it seems that it's a real area of growth in the reissue market.

And nobody knows that market better than Spain's Soul 4 Real label with this only their second LP release.

This brilliant new collection from one of soul music's largely unappreciated artists breaks the mould of vinyl releases.

For here we find not just a straight reissue which seems the order of the day at most labels but a gathering of 10 tracks from her Atlantic period along with (and I don't know how they have done this) 3 completely unissued tracks.

It's amongst those tracks that you will find her meaningful take on the Isley Brothers, This Old Heart of Mine (Is Weak for You), a defining take on Maxine Weldon's, I Want Sunday Back Again, and the angst-ridden Either You Love Me or Leave Me.

The Philadelphia, Sigma Sound recorded, Kiss My Love Goodbye and When the Game Is Played on You are as expected lushly orchestrated showing a more sophisticated side to Bettye while a pairing with Sam Dees on Just As Sure turns the R'n'B knob up quite a few notches.

The 13 tracks give a casual buyer an all too brief overview of the singer's amazing back catalogue but will hopefully encourage further investigation of one of the genre's overlooked singers – for us who are in the know it is a fabulous selection of the singer's work that holds up as an LP project rather than a greatest hits package – oh and packaged beautifully too.

TOUR NEWS

News reaches me of a trio of local nostalgic gigs happening in Ipswich, Norwich, and Bury St Edmunds.

Kenny Thomas

First off is British Soul singer and 2 times Brit award winner, Kenny Thomas, who drops in at the Ipswich Corn Exchange on Wednesday 18th March, celebrating the 35th anniversary of his debut LP, Voices from whence came Thinking About Your Love.

The Ipswich gig is the first night of an extensive Unstoppable tour and celebrates the singer's first new album for 15 years, Unstoppable.

Toots and the Maytals

Acclaimed singer, songwriter, record producer, performer, and daughter of the legendary Frederick Toots Hibbert and now lead singer of the new look Toots and the Maytals band, is keeping her father's legacy alive.

Dedicated to celebrate and pay tribute to the man who coined the phrase "Reggae" by performing songs from his extensive catalogue of hits as well as songs from her catalogue.

The new look Toots and the Maytals will be performing at the Norwich LCR on Thursday 28th May.

Wet Wet Wet

Wet Wet Wet (minus former lead Marti Pellow) will be performing their Intimate Acoustic Evening at the Apex in Bury St Edmunds on Saturday 30th and Sunday 31st May.

The last nights of their extensive tour will see founding member Graeme Clark, long-standing guitarist Graeme Duffin, and lead singer Kevin Simm perform a full set of newly arranged WWW classics.

This stripped back approach re-works songs from throughout the legendary group's back catalogue and has inspired a brand-new studio album which has been released on CD and limited-edition coloured vinyl to coincide with the tour.





Bill Withers.
Right: Neil
Sedka; Toots;
Wet Wet Wet

NEIL SEDAKA GOLD



NEIL SEDAKA GOLD

47 TRACKS ON 3CDs

INCLUDING:
Oh! Carol
Happy Birthday,
Sweet Sixteen
Breaking Up Is Hard to Do

