

I LIKE YELLOW THINGS

1. Bobbi Blake: **I LIKE YELLOW THINGS** (Tiel Faulkner; from MSR 2539)
2. Jim Lea: **THE DOING OF OUR THING** (Gilbert Prescott; from Tropical 170)
3. Dick Kent: **TIMES ABOUT** (Thomas Guygax, Sr.; from MSR 864)
4. Roger Bonnette: **THE HELL WITH YOU (home version)** (Jimmy Lewis; from MSR 2475)
5. Shelley Stuart & The Five Stars: **VAMPIRE HUSBAND** (Bernadette Barnett & Lew Tobin; from Sterling 591)
6. Cara Stewart: **SONG OF THE BURMESE LAND** (L. Hazlewood; from Air 5077)
7. Ron Davis: **IT'S A MYSTERY CALLED LOVE** (Maxine Lee; from MSR LP 203)
8. Gene Marshall: **EVELYN CHRISTMAS** (James Wilson, Jr.; from Preview 1774)
9. Buddy Raye: **FEELING BESIDE MYSELF** (Conor P. Kelly; from Sunrise LP HS-104)
10. Kay Weaver: **WOMAN'S LIBERATION** (Helen E. Osborne; from Columbine LP CRH-35)
11. Gene Marshall: **SHAKE YOUR GOOD STUFF** (Herman Earl; from Preview 3059)
12. Norman Burns: **STAY WHERE YOU ARE** (Nehemiah Taylor & Lew Tobin; from Sterling 404)
13. Dick Kent: **OCTOPUS WOMAN, PLEASE LET ME GO** (Randle R. Wilson; from MSR 2622)
14. artist uncredited: **MY DADDY HE DIED IN 1969** (Coyte F. Brackeen; from Halmark 750852)
15. Gene Marshall: **GREEN FINGERNAILS** (Charlotte Strathman; from Preview 2516)
16. The Jerrymanders (vocal by William H. Arpaia): **LISTEN MISTER HAT** (William H. Arpaia; from Vandalia 106)
17. Ralph Lowe: **MY SILENT THOUGHTS** (Virginia Bailey; from Columbine LP CRH-43)
18. The Downtowners: **I LOVE LOVELY CHINESE GAL** (Al Perry; from Preview 1318)
19. Betty Bond: **TILL DEATH DO US PART** (Sonia Oliver; from Tropical LP 220)
20. Bill Joy: **THE MESSER ROUND** (Eddie Bonham, Jr.; from MSR 2772)
21. Dick Kent: **GRETCHEN'S NEW DISH** (Chester T. Finley; from MSR 2413)
22. artist uncredited: **MY HAMBURGER BABY** (Ezra L. Work; from Halmark 750781)
23. Gene Marshall: **PRAYER FOR JAMEY** (Havelyn Sing; from Preview 1777)
24. Milford Perkins: **JERRY THE BUTCHER MAN** (Corinda Marques; from Preview LP 240)
25. Dick Kent: **THE SAILOR'S ANTHEM** (Wesley Earl Falterman; from MSR 2504)
26. Rodd Keith: **MY TWIN AND I** (Phyllis Varisco; from MSR 197)
27. Bobbi Blake: **GOOD** (Thomas J. Guygax, Sr.; from MSR 2289)
28. Gene Marshall: **SMOKE IT—THE POT** (Juanita Norberg; from Preview 2742)
29. Rodd & The Librettos: **SOMETHING IN THE NIGHT** (Walter Cutts; from MSR LP 206)

Also in the
MSR Madness series:

**THE BEAT OF
THE TRAPS**

**THE MAKERS OF
SMOOTH MUSIC**

**THE HUMAN
BREAKDOWN
OF ABSURDITY**

**I'M JUST THE
OTHER WOMAN**

**RAT A TAT TAT,
AMERICA**

I LIKE YELLOW THINGS



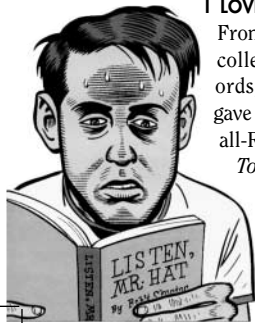
MY DADDY HE DIED IN 1969. The overarching sincerity of many song-poem lyrics can sometimes come up and snap you right in the face.

GREEN FINGERNAILS. Your guess is as good as mine. This and our other color-themed song, "I Like Yellow Things," are finds of collector Brian Gordon.

LISTEN MISTER HAT. William Howard Arpaia's motivational rant is not technically a song-poem, since writer and performer in this case are the same person. But Arpaia was forever blurring the boundaries between vanity and song-poem anyway, and this one is just too strong to contain any longer.

MY SILENT THOUGHTS. Übercrooner Ralph Lowe returns with a meditative number from the pen of first-timer Virginia Bailey.

I LOVE LOVELY CHINESE GAL. From Rodd Keith's personal collection of his own records, the same batch that gave rise to Ellery Eskelin's all-Rodd compilation *I Died Today*. This number is so atmospheric you can



COURTESY DAN CLOWES

practically smell the opium wafting through the den.

TILL DEATH DO US PART.

Taken from the album *Betty Bond (►) Sings Pop*, which, like "The Doing Of Our Thing," is from Bob Quimby's Tropical label. Not to cast aspersions on the song-poet, but an anonymous correspondent terms this harrowing depiction of heroin use "starkly accurate."



THE MESSER ROUND. The year 1979, as represented in all its song-poem glory. The elastic-throated Bill Joy was MSR's resident disco crooner.

GRETCHEN'S NEW DISH. Chester T. Finley apparently did not approve of the way Dick Kent, in his spirited, German-inflected delivery, got a little *too* spirited on the final words of the line "Gretchen full of doo-doo." Bobbi Blake was called in for the redo (do), which appears on a previous entry in the MSR Madness series, *The Human Breakdown Of Absurdity*.

MY HAMBURGER BABY. The Halmark label rarely bothered to credit their vocalists by

But think about what this ratio of bad:good must have meant to the studio cats hired to make the average-Joe lyrics of the song-poem form sing and swing. Perhaps in our own way we can all relate to this, but imagine if 90% of *your* workday was spent pushing burdensome bon-bon sentiments about lost loves, lost pets and dying children up the nice-music hill, over and over again. We can rhapsodize till the cows turn blue about how the song-poem process democratizes the production of music and gives melodic voice to the disenfranchised and the eternally hopeful, but the reality's not quite that romantic. Far more commonly, life in the song-poem salt mines consisted of trying to forge something like music out of pedestrian sandwich-bag jottings.

Imagine how exalted the assemblers and welders of these music factories must have felt, then, when they got one they could sink their teeth into, one of those rare submissions that showed even a brief glimmer of funk or inspiration. That premise doesn't explain every song compiled in this series, but it does go a long way toward understanding why the one-in-ten stands out in such clear relief.

So, our pledge to you: MSR Madness will always maintain only the strictest standards of song-poem goodness, and will remain your safe haven amidst a sea of "My Dream"s, "I'm Hanging On"s, and "There's Going To Be Heartaches Tonight"s.



SONG-POET WILLIAM HOWARD ARPAIA



I LIKE YELLOW THINGS. Perhaps inspired by Tom T. Hall's "I Love," veteran song-poet Tiel Faulkner (◀) contributes our title tune, a sweet number that is the musical equivalent of springtime itself.

THE DOING OF OUR THING. Gilbert Prescott's blissful vision of the hippie-led nation of Oilyville, a libertine and libertarian utopia run by a council of gurus. Their only mandate is to make sure "of love each has a share." Where do we sign up?

TIMES ABOUT. And the word is ... Tiger! Another deliriously inscrutable entry from the House of Guygax. To attempt to parse the meaning of a Guygax song is to miss its meaning altogether.

THE HELL WITH YOU (home version). A taut little kiss-off number sung by the unknown Roger Bonnette. This might be an example of a recording sent in by a song-poet and then given the MSR overdub treatment. The other side, the "radio version," sounds as if it uses

the same basic tracks, but they seem to have been sped up, and the line "Find somebody else that you can screw" has been bowdlerized to "Find somebody else, do-dobbie-do."

VAMPIRE HUSBAND. Sterling was a Boston-based label known primarily for its male vocalists Norm Burns and Gary Roberts. But Shelley Stuart, wife of Sterling's founder Lew Tobin, also checked in with a number of toplineers, including this well-written tale of divine love borne of the crypt. That's most likely Tobin himself tinkling the catchy piano line.

SONG OF THE BURMESE LAND. The ultraslinky Cara Stewart, the lone distaff vocalist of Lee Hudson's reverb-laden Northridge, California

hit factory, snakes her warm, inviting larynx around L. (*not* Lee) Hazlewood's enchanting protest lyric denouncing Burma's excessive after-hour noise. "Dooon doon doon, dang dang dang" — I couldn't have said it better myself.

IT'S A MYSTERY CALLED LOVE. In the guise of "Ron Davis," Rodd Keith hauls up another bucket from his bottomless well of dazzling popcraft archetypes. This one is short on weirdness and long on what Rodd was best at: structure, melody and harmony singing. The drummer seems to be telegraphing his timing in (perhaps from Burma), but Rodd refuses to be thrown.

EVELYN CHRISTMAS. At long last, a chance to expose the secret of James Wilson, Jr., the Chicago-based rival to Thomas Guygax, Sr. as World's Greatest Song-Poet. Every bit as surreal yet far more prolific, we are thrilled to finally put Wilson on the map with this lovely number about "Pastels from Alaska / Imported as the igloo in review." At last report Wilson was still at it, submitting multipage song-poem manifestos on a weekly basis.

FEELING BESIDE MYSELF. Innumerable listens fail to reveal whether this first-person account of

schizophrenia was written as an intellectual exercise, or from a more lived-in point of view.

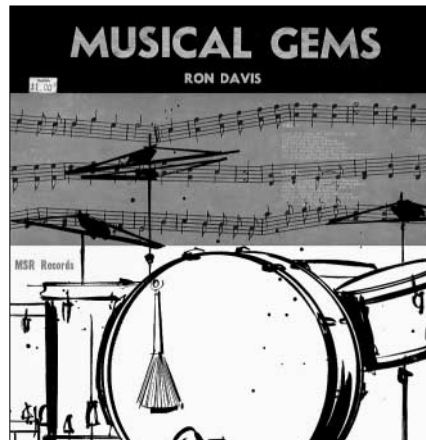
WOMAN'S LIBERATION. An ironic matching of material and performer. Kay Weaver (▶), an award-winning feminist filmmaker in her life outside of song-poem music, is here forced to declare, "But one thing I don't understand / Is woman's liberation." It's refreshing to see the song-poem game for once backfiring upon one of its players.



SHAKE YOUR GOOD STUFF. Gene Marshall delivers a typically authoritative reading of Herman Earl's once-fashionable lyric. This is the flip of "All You Need Is A Fertile Mind," which we visited in a previous installment.

STAY WHERE YOU ARE. The aforementioned Norm Burns nails a delightfully orthogonal arrangement.

OCTOPUS WOMAN, PLEASE LET ME GO. A tale that turns *Humanoids From The Deep* on its tentacles. With its flip "The Flying Horse Of Thunder," this discovery of WFMU's Irwin Chusid is another double A-side winner. Both were written by Randle R. Wilson.



THE DOING OF OUR THING *or* THE ONE-IN-TEN

by Phil Milstein

WELCOME BACK, STURDY LISTENER, for another round of the Greatest Hits of a most debauched musical form.

Now's as good a time as any to clear up a common misconception about this song-poem jazz. Please realize that the greatest bulk of the records that turn up are all but unlistenable — witless, tired, dreary — while the really good ones amount to but a small proportion of the all of them. According to my gut estimation, less than 10% of the records made via the “set your poems to music” assembly line are worth even so much as a second listen, and but a mere quarter of *that* pile are strong enough to be deemed “keepers.”

The good news is that the stockpile of available song-poem records has grown so vast that the really hot ones still amount to such a number that we could conceivably run this series into the double digits before getting anywhere close to scraping metal.

I just didn't want you to have to labor another day under the misinformation that all song-poem records were as well as these 'uns. But I am honored to serve as your Checkpoint Charlie, guarding the gates of goodness, martyring myself across the swords of song-poem drek in the noble quest for high weirdness.

name, substituting instead the song-poet's address. Halmark even had trouble spelling the name of their own company, sometimes adding an extra “l” for no apparent reason.

PRAYER FOR JAMEY. Just when you expect Havelyn Sing's lyric to zig, it zags. Based on a true story.

JERRY THE BUTCHER MAN. Only in the song-poem genre could you hear anything so incredible as a poignant song about a meat-cutter. Then again, vocalist Milford Perkins could make the phone book sound poignant. Don't hold me to this, but I'm pretty sure that's George Liberace himself bouncing the bum fiddle note.

THE SAILOR'S ANTHEM. Both this elegy to Davy Jones's locker and its also-excellent flip, “Elvis The King,” were written by Wesley Earl Falterman.

MY TWIN AND I. I get a sense of something very real in Phyllis Varisco's lyric, which happens far more often in song-poem music than it does with, say, Billy Joel.

GOOD. And the moral? “While pert, to always maintain the balance of dears,” of course. Go, Guygax (►), go.

SMOKE IT – THE POT. Wrapping up a song that stretches furiously to make its rhymes, Juanita Norberg stretches to *avoid* one. A nice find from the collection of Bob Purse.

SOMETHING IN THE NIGHT. Maury S. Rosen — the MSR of MSR Records — hated having to rerecord a song for a dissatisfied customer, but a contract is a contract. There's nothing overtly wrong with the first version of this ghost song, found on MSR LP 206 (*Terry & Rodd & The Librettos*), but Rodd's remake, three albums later (*Something For Everyone*), is a triumph. Perhaps he was haunted by the mediocrity of the first version, and redid it of his own initiative.



Producer: **PHIL MILSTEIN** | Cover art: **PETER BAGGE** | Rerecording engineer: **ERIK LINDGREN** | Disc art: **CHARLES BURNS** | Digital mastering: **ALAN LOWE ARCHIVING** | THANKS TO: Tom Ardolino, Peter Bagge, Dave Brown, Irwin Chusid, Dan Clowes, Byron Coley, Michael Cudahy, Nicholas Cudahy, Esther Curry, Lili Dwight, Ellery Eskelin, Brian Gordon, David Greenberger, Erik Lindgren, Bob Purse, Wayne Rogers and Jim Shaw.



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