

ARTIST: ANTHONY REYNOLDS

TITLE: BRITISH BALLADS

LABEL: HUNGRY HILL/SPINNEY

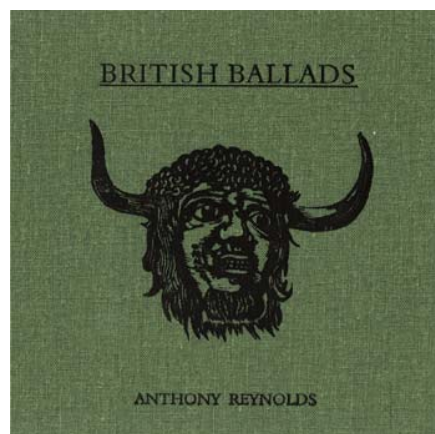
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Anthony Reynolds writes beautiful music for drunken librarians. Or at least for an audience who aren't afraid to listen to the words of a man with a voracious reading (amongst others) habit. He is a man who has been known to namedrop an author every now and again in this culture of fashionable dumbness.

Reynolds: "I live in Britain in the early 21st century but I don't subscribe to any prevailing common consensus. I don't watch TV or buy newspapers. I've never seen an episode of 'Big Brother' or 'The Office'. I think increasingly it's not a matter of 'What's your culture' but 'What's your *immediate* culture'. My reality is my friends, the pubs I get drunk in, the books I read and the films I watch. The world at large seems deeply unimportant to me. I frequently forget how old I am or what day and year it is and where I've put my front door keys."

There is no justice in the pop world because it's the cloth corporate ears of record companies and local radio programmers that define the landscape. Otherwise, just perhaps, Anthony Reynolds would have hit paydirt with his band **Jack**. Though **Jack** were critical darlings and big in France if not Japan, their intelligent pop of doomed romance, dirty streets and Nabokov and Cocteau references failed to see them looking dour through fringes on Top of the Pops. After three albums from **Jack** (including the recently re-released classic "*Pioneer Soundtracks*" on Spinney) and a variety of side projects, *British Ballads* is the first true solo album that can be filed under Anthony Reynolds. *British Ballads* is a declaration that he isn't quite yet ready to reside in the corner of a bar declaring with brandy breath that he was once a troubadour with a reputation in Athens. Greece.

But then commercial success was hardly ever the point anyway.

Reynolds: "I only exist on my records and that's the main reason *they* exist. You will find A.R. much more present in the instrumental passage of 'The Disappointed' than you will meeting him for dinner or whatever. Outside of my songs I am merely a random squadron of second hand opinions, genetic pull and shove and floating moods, fancies and debt."

Anthony Reynolds is older now, so that misanthropic youth with all his passions is noticing the lines under his jade green eyes aren't just pillow marks that will fade as the day passes. Despite that, *British Ballads* sees him produce his most refined and accomplished work to date. Although this doesn't mean he's ready to provide a soundtrack for your dinner party just yet. Behind the beautiful arrangements lurks a man not afraid to remind your assembled guests that they might have sold themselves short for a jeep and a pension before the host runs to the kitchen weeping but beside the melancholy there are enough shards of hope that you don't have to stand precariously on Suicide Bridge just yet.

Reynolds: "I like the shadows. I dislike bright daylight. My favourite time of day is dusk and my favourite light is pub- light. When reading a biography I always skip the first few chapters. My favourite reading is the tragedy - around chapter 13, when the cocaine and cognac kicks in and the hero starts dropping babies at christenings..."

We are lyrically in a world of grime, hopes, city lights and stars. Reynolds also dares to dabble with Rupert Brooke's classic poem *The Hill* with the assistance of philosopher **Colin Wilson**, a man whose prodigious literary output means he has probably written almost as many books as Reynolds has read. It seems quite obvious that Reynolds should work with **Colin Wilson**, just how thumbed and pencil-marked could his copy of Wilson's 50's existentialist work "The Outsider" be? **Dot Allison** also sings beautifully on the opening song, *I Know You Know*, and she is a woman with impeccable taste when it comes to aiding and abetting others having worked with Death in Vegas, Arab Strap and Hal David. 70s cult crooner **John** 'Kid In A Big World' **Howard** also contributes some Liberace-like grand piano. And on occasion, the legendary **Vashti Bunyan** lends her voice to Reynolds's to sublime and stirring effect.

Reynolds: "It's empowering making music with friends. Which isn't always necessarily the case when making records. Vashti, John, Dot and Colin are all artists I admire. For their tenacity and dignity as much as their talent."

Melancholy has always been a key figure in Reynolds's work. On *British Ballads* it's at its most distilled but though Reynolds can be passionate within his sadness, there is much more to *British Ballads* than that.

What is always clear from any Anthony Reynolds project is that he is not a man to sit down and work out what might sell and which demographic to pitch his musings to. He is a man writing for himself and hoping that by chance it might transpire there are others out there who just might want to hear it.

Reynolds: "I don't consider my 'career' as being a catalogue of critical successes and commercial failures because I have never considered what I do to be either a career or a job. My interest is not in sales, fame, numbers or even an audience, but in expressing and defining myself and trying, maybe to allow beauty to come of it. I have never worked for my pay but I have been paid for my work on occasion and while this is important and useful it's not the motivation..."

British Ballads is an album that deserves to be heard in an undeserving universe. It's a true *album* that constantly improves on further hearings. It is delicate but it also has a pugilist air to it, there is pity, but it never veers into cloying self-pity.

This is an album that smells of creased Penguin Modern Classics, abandoned cathedrals, unicorn dung, wheat fields and redheads.

Could *British Ballads* finally see Anthony Reynolds time in the sun? And would he even want to be in the sun when the shadows suit him so much better. Too much sun would just lead to him sporting a nose-guard and burnt ears. Some flowers bloom only at night.

Robin Ince, London & Edinburgh

Robin Ince (born 1969) is an [English stand-up comedian](#), actor and writer. His stage style tends to lean towards erudite rambling, often at break-neck speed. He is also an adept [impressionist](#), having performed his [John Peel](#) on [The 11 O'Clock Show](#), for which he also wrote. (Wikipedia)

Tracklisting

- 1) I Know You Know (featuring Dot Allison)
- 2) Those Kind Of Songs
- 3) Bread And Wine
- 4) Country Girl (featuring Vashti Bunyan)
- 5) The Disappointed
- 6) A Quirt Life
- 7) Where The Dead Live (featuring John Howard)
- 8) The Hill (featuring Colin Wilson)
- 9) Just So You Know (featuring Vashti Bunyan & Simon Raymonde)
- 10) Song Of Leaving

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