

DVD REVIEWS

BIG GOLD DREAM – The Sound Of Young Scotland (Tartan Features / Year Zero Pictures) DVD

Documentary film-maker Grant McPhee enables the telling of this fascinating story of Scotland's record label scene of the late 1970s/early '80s. Focusing on two significant players, firstly Edinburgh's Fast Product, run by Bob Last and Hilary Morrison, and Glasgow's compact and bijou Postcard Records affair run by Alan Horne. Last's Fast also cast its net wider issuing debut's from Sheffield's the Human League, Leeds combos the Mekons and Gang Of Four, and were first in the UK to unleash a Dead Kennedys record. Both cities spawned groups already making waves on the gig circuit, but since the growing independent label trend—largely idealized by the 1977 punk rock explosion—a shift took place that allowed a support structure for unknown groups and new, small label operations to strike out on their own, without the stifling majors deciding what could and couldn't be done.

Big Gold Dream debunks some of the myths whilst getting inside the machinations of the industry, letting the creators have their say as the trials and tribulations surrounding the groups and recordings begin to unfurl. Everything is told through a series of interview segments with group personnel, managers, label workers, radio presenters, record shop staff and promoters. Chief among the participants are Edinburgh group Scars, one of the finest from that time who, especially during the 1978-80 period, deserved more success than what eventually came their way in the wake of *Author! Author!*, their lone, charting LP issued in 1981 by major label Charisma's Pre subsidiary. The Fire Engines too—"Big Gold Dream" was the title of their final Bob Last-helmed Pop Aural label single—were similarly keen envelope pushers but ceased to exist before proper success could be bestowed on them. Partly rebuilt, they tried again as the more commercially-appealing Win. As an Edinburgh group that were signed to the Postcard stable, the role of Josef K plays out across the whole narrative; guitarist Malcolm Ross later hooked up with Postcard's flagship group Orange Juice once Paul Haig pulled the plug on the 'K soon after their *The Only Fun In Town* LP hit the stands in the summer of '81. Concentration then shifts across to Glasgow,

and the joys and woes surrounding the Postcard scene. Ultimately, this details the most successful of all *Big Gold Dream's* studies, Orange Juice. Ironically, wider success only came after the Edwyn Collins-led group signed with Polydor; turning away from trebly Byrds / Velvets fixated awkward pop vignettes towards a horrible funky-pop style hybrid in the process. (Lenny Helsing)

TRAVIS PIKE – Grumpuss 20th Anniversary Platinum Edition DVD

Last year, *Ugly Things* introduced sixties rocker, Travis Edward Pike to its readership. "Watch Out Woman" and "The Way That I Need You," songs Pike performed in the 1966 movie *Feelin' Good*, have since been released by State Records, and the original 1967 recording of Travis Pike's Tea Party's "If I Didn't Love You Girl" and "The Likes of You" is due for release on a vinyl 45 in early 2018.

Now Pike is releasing the 20th Anniversary Platinum Edition of his 1997 videotaped world premiere performance of his original epic rhyme, *Grumpuss*, staged for Britain's Save the Children Fund at Blenheim Palace, home of the Dukes of Marlborough and birthplace of Sir Winston Churchill.

During 2017, I asked Travis how a Yankee rocker from Boston, Massachusetts, composed a medieval fantasy entirely in rhyme, and managed to stage it in a world heritage site in the heart of England. Pike answered, "My stories in rhyme were as much a part of my shows as my songs in coffeehouse performances, and later, in rock concerts, when we experienced technical difficulties, I sometimes entertained audiences with my rhymes until the show could go on. In March 1997, an English professor at Bridgewater State College, who had used my 1991 demo recording of *Grumpuss* in her seminar on *Homer and Greek Tragedy*, sent me an effusive thank you note, closing with the hope that I could 'arrange for the general public to meet him soon.' So I did.

"The rhyme is in English and set in Britain's medieval past, when the oral tradition prevailed, supported primarily by kings, nobles, and some colorful outlaws. Today, that bardic tradition is still celebrated in Britain, particularly in Wales. Unknown in the UK, I wondered how I would attract an audience for *Grumpuss*, until a friend suggested I make it a charity gala, and since the rhyme was suitable entertainment for children and adults alike, stage it for the Save the Children Fund.

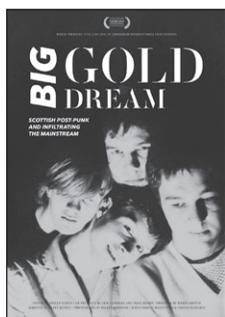
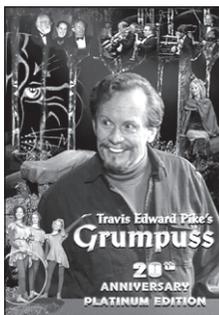
"The charity agreed, so I scouted more than a dozen celebrity venues large enough for the equipment and crews I required to videotape the event, but none sufficed. At a meeting with my British crew, one wag suggested 'nothing less than Blenheim Palace would suit me,' so I



Travis Pike, 1965.

scouted it. That rascal's joke led me to the perfect location for my world premiere. With Anna Scott in the role of the Queen of the Sidh, and three of British Gymnastic young ladies to play the waifs the queen holds in thrall, all that remained was for my English friend, David Carr, formerly of the Fortunes, to arrange and conduct my music at the event."

Around my own magazine and book writing work, which included this assignment, I watched Pike's remastered DVD, in every way more revealing and potent than the reviews and testimonials for the 1998 VHS release claimed. To learn more about this award-winning, critically-acclaimed, family-friendly entertainment, now on DVD, visit the fascinating Legacy Section at Grumpuss.com. (Harvey Kubernik)



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