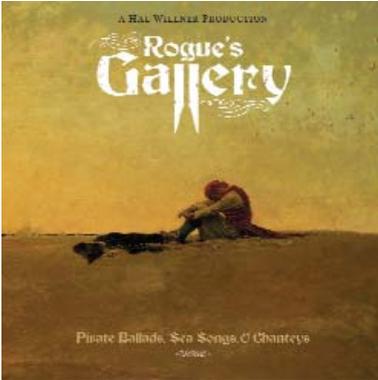


Rooted in Tradition

By Kevin C. Madigan

Various Artists—*Rogue's Gallery: Pirate Ballads, Sea Songs & Chanteys (Anti)*



What an inspired idea. Take a bunch of watery old tunes, mad laments and tall tales of the sea and match them to an offbeat crew of current artists who interpret them in their own style. What you get is unexpectedly touching, clever and at times both frivolous and profound.

In the chantey (or shanty) the rhythm of the song matched the men's activity—hauling lines or rowing, for example. A sea song is a more personal narrative, while a pirate song extols the virtues, glory and adventure of criminal life on the high seas.

All three are ingeniously presented in this collection. Stan Ridgway does a fine job of “Hanging Johnny,” Loudon Wainwright handles the very bawdy “Good Ship Venus,” “Blood Red Roses” is sung by Sting with appropriate subtlety, and Bryan Ferry acquits himself splendidly on both “Lowlands Low” and “The Cruel Ship’s Captain.” The liner notes provide crucial information on each of the 43 songs on this double disc. Film director Gore Verbinski, of *Pirates of the Caribbean* fame, writes: “The sailors of the time were dancing with death, and these were their tunes.”

Claire Lynch—*New Day (Rounder)*

If Nashville siren Patty Loveless says someone is good, you pay attention. Claire Lynch has established a solid reputation among her peers and fans of acoustic music with her previous four solo albums and her work with The Front Porch String Band in the early eighties. There isn't much she doesn't know about traditional American music, and here she proves it once more.

For *New Day*, Lynch assembled a crack team of musicians to assist her and she picked good songs and songwriters too: “Love Will Find You Again,” written by Lindy Robbins and Pierce Pettis, is a charming lament, and Peter Holsapple’s “White Train” is tight, funky and you can dance to it. “Long After I’m Gone,” co-written by Lynch with Pat Alger, is about what we leave in our wake, and manages to name-check both Neil Armstrong and Mother Maybelle.



Sandy Denny—*Under Review: An Independent Critical Analysis (MVD Entertainment Group, DVD)*

She never broke through to the mainstream, but, almost thirty years after her death, Sandy Denny remains an enigmatic and respected figure in the genre of folk-rock music, which she did much to establish. Unlike other artists whose star has risen posthumously, her cult status has not altered significantly since the '70s. But her place as one of Britain's finest singers and musical pioneers is secure.

This “unauthorized” documentary of Denny, an artist of great complexity and range, was destined to come up short given the limited availability of footage from her short life and relatively brief career. But it soldiers on, offering glimpses into what went on during the nascent days of British folk-rock and Denny's pivotal role therein.

Although crucial participants (like Fairport Convention band-mate Richard Thompson and record producer Joe Boyd) are lamentably absent, interviews with other colleagues make the film compelling. All express fondness for Denny and some frustration with her. Drummer Gerry Conway admits to the confusion and pain he felt after being put out of work by one of Denny's whims, and another percussionist, Dave Mattacks, explains the seriousness with which Denny took her music.

Denny's full body of work is readily available on CD, in re-mastered and expanded form. Well worth investigating.

Worthy of Mention: Guitarists John Williams and John Etheridge perform together at the Dublin International Guitar Festival (Sony Classical). Newly remastered releases of Verdi's *La Traviata* (with Richard Tucker, Anna Moffo and Robert Merrill) and Puccini's *Turandot* (Birgit Nilsson and Renata Tebaldi) are both out now (RCA Red Seal). Ethereal world-music duo Dead Can Dance continues its sporadic Middle Eastern-influenced journey with *Wake (4AD)*.

Kevin C. Madigan writes about music and other artistic matters from his home in Atlanta, GA.