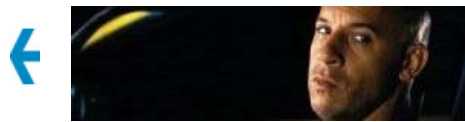




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Desert Island Discs: Marooned Again

Posted August 3, 2007 | 03:42 PM (EST)

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If you could only take one album to a desert island, which one would it be? That simple question has powered a long-running BBC radio show (in which the guests are allowed to bring a handful of CDs), endless water-cooler discussions, a classic anthology edited by Greil Marcus and now the followup anthology *Marooned: The Next Generation Of Desert Island Discs* (\$16.95; Da Capo) edited by Phil Freeman.

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Various writers hold forth on Elton John's "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road," Miles Davis's "Bitches Brew," and Motorhead's "No Remorse," among others. Of course, there are headscratchers - Dionne Warwick's "Legends" collection but not her work with Burt Bacharach and Hal David? Alice Coltrane

instead of John Coltrane? All is explained in the personal, passionate essays.

Writer Simon Reynolds speaks up for UK folk rocker John Martyn's "Solid Air." But what I liked most about his piece was Reynolds' practical response to the question. He really focused in on not simply naming his favorite album or the most important, but one that would serve you best if it were the ONLY music you could listen to on a Desert Island. So you don't want anything too depressing or one-note in tone and style. It should be accessible but odd. And so on.

Naturally, almost before you even start reading a book like *Marooned*, you start debating what album you would bring. Taking Reynolds to heart, I also added my own caveats: no massive boxed sets or anthologies allowed, or naturally I'd grab a boxed set covering Frank Sinatra's Capitol years or Ella Fitzgerald's Songbook series or the complete Beatles (someone in Japan must have boxed them up at one point, right?).

So no Bruce Springsteen's "Nebraska." (I might just commit suicide.) No R.E.M.'s "Murmur" (I love it but they put the last two songs in the wrong order and I'd hate to spend years and years always

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having to jump forward to "West of The Fields" and then jumping back to end with "We Walk.") No Steely Dan's "Aja" because it's too consistent in tone. And no Beatles because if I chose "Rubber Soul" I'd want "Revolver" the next day, or if I chose "Abbey Road" I'd kick myself for not picking the much longer "White Album" and why should I ignore "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" just because it's obvious?

And so I arrive at my obvious choice: Richard and Linda Thompson's 1982 masterpiece "Shoot Out The Lights." Richard is arguably the greatest living guitarist whether on acoustic or electric. Linda has one of the great rock voices in history. And they both share a deep appreciation for classic folk music entwined with rock and roll. Richard was in Fairport Convention, the UK equivalent to The Band. When he went solo, Linda joined him and they delivered a string of brilliantly acidic, tuneful albums climaxed by "Shoot Out The Lights," after which they promptly divorced. Many see it as the classic "break-up" album but as Richard points out, he almost always writes despairingly about love, so you shouldn't read too much into the coincidence of their separation being mirrored by the anguish of the songs.

At just eight songs and slightly over 40 minutes long, "Shoot Out The Lights" has proven endlessly fascinating to me. The opening track "Don't Renege On Our Love" gallops along with precision, followed by the beautiful tension of Linda's soaring voice (imagine if Karen Carpetner had soul) on "Walking On A Wire." Richard responds with the ache of a fellow walking out the door on "A Man In Need" and the back and forth between their songs has the same intertwined excitement of John Lennon and Yoko Ono's "Double Fantasy." Side One (remember them?) ends with the pacific calm and acceptance of Linda's voice on "Just The Motion."

That's immediately blown aside by the titanic title track "Shoot Out The Lights," which is haunted by a murderous unhappy fellow and dominated by one of the greatest electric guitar solos of all time.

Now I'm not a guitar freak. I like it as much as any other instrument, but I don't go gaga for speed or pyrotechnics. But **Richard Thompson** is simply phenomenal. I can remember every bended note, every twist and turn of his guitar solos on every album he's done. And certainly I know the piercing, jagged, frightening and downright astonishing work he delivers here.

My older sister Elizabeth once warned me when we were in high school that playing "air" guitar was not cool, but "air" drums were okay and I've liked by that injunction ever since. But not when it comes to Richard. I can't help myself, even if my college roommate Jesse did walk in unexpectedly to find me wearing headphones and contorting myself into a pretzel as I mimicked the sound of his guitar on this very track. I think he's stopped laughing by now.

That's followed by the nasty little jab at women who cheat "Back Street Slide." Linda's sole co-songwriting credit is next, the chilling "Did She Jump Or Was She Pushed?" And it all ends with "Wall Of Death," a song ostensibly about an amusement park ride that some critics find scary in its embrace of the end. I've always found it a lark.

There are nooks and crannies in the music I've been exploring for years, whether it's Linda's peerless voice or Richard's endlessly fascinating guitar work. The lyrics are wryly intelligent and capture every mood a desert island inhabitant might want to experience: anger, humor, love (briefly, mind you), acceptance and joy.

They've both got marvelous new albums out. Richard has "**Sweet Warrior**," Linda has the lovely "**Versatile Heart**" and their son **Teddy** has "**Up Front & Down Low**," a wonderful collection of country covers that shows off his voice to perfection. But it always comes back to "Shoot Out The Lights."

Okay, I know you've been dying to tell me: what's your desert island disc?

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