

● THE BITTER SPRINGS

By Michael Brandon

AND EVEN NOW ... THE BITTER SPRINGS

SINCE THEIR 1985 ORIGINS AS LAST PARTY, SIMON RIVERS AND HIS Bitter Springs have been quietly releasing some of Britain's most searingly poetic, beautifully erudite music. That songs of this consistent caliber elude a larger audience baffles massive music consumers. Take for instance their new album, *Everyone's Cup Of Tea*—a 26-track, two hours-plus double-LP explosion of poetry, humanity, and gorgeous melody, in the form of soaring, never-give-up anthems (standout “And Even Now”) and spooked ballads (“The Hospital Run,” “Free To Kill Again,” “TV Unplugged”) that sees Rivers in possibly his best lyrical form yet.

“I was writing songs with my sister when I was seven or eight, and haven't stopped yet,” Rivers recollects. “I remember pretending to her that I'd written ‘Skiing In The Snow’ [‘60s **INVITATIONS** R&B classic, a 1975 Northern Soul U.K. #12 for **WIGAN'S OVATION**]
—think I'm getting better at it now! I made a decision when I was in Brighton a few years back. I was looking through a club window at an empty stage, and I knew then that I would carry on doing this singer/songwriting thing regardless of any interest from outside forces. I saw myself as a lone troubadour on that stage—howling at the world!”

Everyone's is roughly Springs album number 10 (counting Last Party's LPs), a testament to such soldiering on. “When people that haven't liked us in the past started saying to me that they really liked “And Even Now,” I thought, ‘Aha! Now we're everyone's cup of

tea!” he explains. “So I changed the album title from [original idea] *And As For the Rhyming Slang Carvery*. I've had almost six years to put this album together, and in the end, I felt that although it's very long, it tells a better story of the turbulent times it was made in.”

To wit, I hear amazing couplet after amazing couplet in any given Springs song. Asked if he'd ever been told that his lyrics were completely badass, Rivers grins, “Yeah. Sometimes. One or two. Although I don't think they would have said ‘badass!’ [Laughter.] Personally, I don't need great lyrics to enjoy other people's music. It's just something I try to do myself. I grew up listening to the great lyricists, **DONALD FAGEN**, **DYLAN**, **MARK SMITH**, the **MAEL** brothers, **RAY DAVIES**, **BOWIE**, **COHEN**, **CAVE**, etc.—so there's a lot to live up to.”

I love all of the Springs LPs, but *Suburban Crimes Of Everyday Happiness* really stood out for this writer. “Only now are people saying how good that album was—in *Uncut's* review of *Everyone's*, they refer to that as ‘2001's extraordinary *Suburban Crimes!*’” he laughs. “It was pretty much ignored at the time. I thought that could have been a huge record for us, but on reflection, I'm glad it wasn't. I'm happy to know it's a great album [in retrospect], and it's there for all who want to hear it; it took me a while to get things back together after that one, though!”

Good thing he did. ★

