

journey began?

The album reminds us poignantly of both voice imbued with youthful challenge wedded to uncompromisingly spare electric chords, and the unforced charisma of its owner, as if he had just been transferred from a bedsit to the breakfast television studios; but more, how Bragg personified the reinvigoration of the scene in the early to mid-80s.

The course he has since taken, which has seen him, both musically and politically, accompanied by all kinds of travellers, has been a complex one. Can there ever have been a worse phase to try to negotiate with mainstream socialist beliefs? But these are the raw urges that first propelled him; they remind us also that much of his material has always been derived from sources other than his politics. Do I have reservations? I think so. But this isn't the time or place...

Nick Burbridge

GORDON GILTRAP

★★★★★

Visionary

★★★★★

Perilous Journey

★★★★★

Fear Of The Dark

(ESOTERIC) www.giltrap.co.uk



By the mid-1970s, Gordon Giltrap, already a veteran of the UK folk scene, was ready for a new challenge. This came in an all-too-brief dalliance in the world of progressive rock. The result was three *tour de force* albums that blended folk and orchestral arrangements. Sadly deleted for some years, they have now been reissued in their full remastered and bonus-tracked glory.

All three blend Giltrap's skills as a guitarist and writer with an orchestral rock sensibility. The first, *Visionary*, is a loosely formed concept album, inspired by the works of the poet and mystic, William Blake. Titles such as 'Awakening', 'From The Four Winds', 'Lucifer's Cage' and 'Revelation' hint at the majestic sweep of the music.

The second, *Perilous Journey*, follows a similar orchestral template, its lush orchestral backing serving only to enhance the music rather than soften it. This album, of course, features 'Heartsong'. A minor chart hit, it became familiar to millions as the theme for the BBC's *Holiday* programme. Finally

there's *Fear Of The Dark* – a magnificently brooding set of tunes with a more rock-oriented sound, gaining even greater intensity from the focus this creates. Here Giltrap's prowess as a guitarist is displayed to full effect.

As befits any reissue package, all three albums come bristling with bonus tracks. These aren't the usual studio-floor sweepings but add value in and of themselves. *Visionary* includes 'Concerto', a previously unreleased acoustic suite containing many themes eventually to appear on *Perilous Journey*. That album contains a stunning version of 'Quest' featuring the Wren Orchestra (its sweeping, lyrical melody evoking William Walton and rolling seas) and a cover of Fleetwood Mac's 'Oh Well'.

Fear Of The Dark includes some singles previously unreleased on CD, most notably Giltrap's excellent version of 'The Theme From The Waltons'.

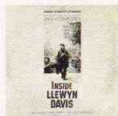
Trevor Raggatt

VARIOUS

★★

Inside Llweyn Davis

(NONESUCH) www.insidellewyndavis.com



Soundtracks are rarely an artistic success in their own right with their main function being a merchandising

opportunity for the main event. On this occasion, however, much was anticipated, with the Coen brothers teaming up with T. Bone Burnett for a movie about a struggling folk singer, set in the Greenwich Village folk scene of 1961.

On this occasion the Coens have not employed voice doubles, as a cast including Oscar Isaac, Stark Sands, Justin Timberlake and Carey Mulligan performs familiar folk songs, accompanied by The Punch Brothers and Marcus Mumford, that anchor the movie in its time and place. Whether this makes for a good record is another matter entirely.

Isaac, as Davis, captures the style of the times well on interpretations of MacColl's 'The Shoals Of Herring' and the traditional 'Hang Me, Oh Hang Me'. Other contributions are less admirable, with Sands in particular bringing Broadway rather than the Gaslight to mind for Tom Paxton's 'The Last Thing On My Mind'. His duet with Timberlake for Hedy West's 'Five Hundred Miles' is simply awful.

Also included are tracks by Bob Dylan and Dave Van Ronk. Neither is spectacular but they do serve as genuine reference points to an era that the movie's cast can only imitate.

Simon Rowland