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BOOKS & DVDS //

Beyond And Before: Progressive Rock Since The 1960s

Paul Hegarty and
Martin Halliwell

Continuum, £12.99

Hegarty and Halliwell may sound like a dodgy pair of solicitors but they have enough letters after their names to qualify big time as professors of rock (indeed Halliwell is a professor of American studies at Leicester Uni). Their ambition is as epic as the music they earnestly analyse, as they attempt to pull together the multitudinous strands that comprise that ineffable genre, prog rock. They perform manfully, sweating away at details more furiously than Carl Palmer ever assaulted his drum kits. And if you wanted a single volume whose

sweep covers this massive subject this is as good as it gets. Only problem is that like its subject matter it's also humourless, lacks a sense of proportion and telescopes too much together. It tries too hard to suggest that much of prog rock (notably Yes and Genesis) had an agenda for social and ecological change, while they also miss out on the visceral experience of what it was like to partake in a Floyd or Crimson gig. It's a book that's ruled by its head while lacking an emotional heart, much like the music it explicates. There are some odd omissions, like Brit jazz-rock doesn't exist (no Colosseum, Mike Gibbs, Halsall or Holdsworth). But most glaringly, how can so many po-faced intellectualisms be expended on Hawkwind with nary a mention of the lustrous Stacia? **Andy Robson**

Artie Shaw – King Of The Clarinet

Tom Nolan Norton, £12.99

"I'm cursed with serious-mindedness and I know you can take yourself too seriously," Artie Shaw told an interviewer right after he'd returned from a gruelling stint with his big band in the Far Eastern war zone. All of which led Shaw to walk away from performance and success a number of times, and also informed his tempestuous love (and marital) affairs. Forever seeking a female companion who might emulate his high-minded cultural awareness, the good-looking Shaw had seven wives in all. "Beautiful women hovered around Art like hummingbirds at a feeder," Nolan writes. Shaw cultivated fierce rivalries, made enemies, attracted film stars as lovers and yet created some of the swing era's most enduring music. All of which suggests that Art (later Artie) Shaw, born Arthur Arshawsky in New York's Lower East Side in 1910, of Russian-Austrian Jewish immigrant stock was a highly complex individual. A self-educated perfectionist who was: "high-strung,

dogmatic and a close man with a buck," as his trumpeter Max Kaminsky attested. Often riven with contempt for his audiences, he went on to attain a level of fame and financial success that seem almost perverse given these attitudes, his clarinet playing thought by many to have out-paced Goodman and sufficiently innovative to have attracted the plaudits of the boppers. Yet there was always the undertow of potential escape, this ultimately leading to his total estrangement from music and commitment to writing, the only truly honourable pursuit

for a man so wedded to self-exploration and high art. When I carried out a telephone interview with Shaw ahead of his (non-playing) London concert in 1992, he cited Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, told me about his 10,000-volume library and dismissed any desire to return to playing the clarinet, only speaking with any enthusiasm about the impending completion of his long-awaited (but unpublished) three-part novel. Nolan has produced the definitive biography of this difficult, curmudgeonly man, threading in the personal and the musical in brilliant fashion. **Peter Vacher**



DVD Cecil Taylor: All The Notes

www.christelver.com | ★★★★★

Ferlinghetti

www.christelver.com | ★★★★★

Chris Felver, a photographer and occasional documentary film-maker, chooses as subject artists at the cutting edge of their art. Those he portrays are individuals with a history, who have established a highly personal body of work that is to a degree *sui generis*. His experience as a photographer enables him to frame his subjects in a manner that allows their story to unfold without imposing an artificial narrative. The two stories here – of pianist/composer Cecil



Taylor and poet/activist Lawrence Ferlinghetti – are explored quite differently. With Ferlinghetti, the film is more obviously biographical, as a life where art and activism form a mutually-informing axis emerges. With Taylor, the concentration is on art as a life-affirming, expressive process. Taylor appears as a witty, articulate advocate for his music without ever seeming didactic rather than as the martinet of popular jazz legend. Here man and music are rendered inseparable. I came away not wanting merely to listen to Taylor's work but wanting to hear it all, while the Ferlinghetti film had me returning immediately to the poet's 'Coney Island Of The Mind'. Felver is an unusually talented film-maker and these two films provide fascinating and genuinely moving portraits of their subjects.

Duncan Heining