musical

RECORDS, from page 6

balked (co-penned by Dave Mason) with nice backing vocals and string arrangement. From there, things fell apart in short order, and it’s not the fault of Jim’s sidemen, who include the likes of Dave Mason, Roger Hawkins (an able drummer), Barry Beckett (an excellent pianist), Paul Kossoff (an even better guitarist) and, on a couple of tracks, the entire Traffic. Jim is unwise, apparently, to come up with very interesting musical ideas, settling for lackluster melodies and lumpy, thin lyrics, like: “Love is the highest high you can reach” or “open your heart so I can be part of all you feel as you are me and me is you.”

or “Love is the highest high you can reach” at times quite dull and just eh...

Dannie Richmond was added shortly thereafter, one of the foremost jazz drummers, to fill in the gaps. Clearly he had not needed everywhere, and the group exercised an intelligence rarely seen nowadays, and used his kit only where called for. So Mark-Almond filled out the sound in places, while retaining their competent, clean style.

Mark-Almond II is structured in two pieces, each comprising one side — the first being “The Susalitas Bay Suite,” and the other, “Journey through New England.” The album is much smoother than the first, and is a truly beautiful work; kind of a delicate, fragile weaving of crystalline tones and luscious textures. Almond’s extraordinary piano work, as well as Almond's

Mark-Almond: no rocker

Mark-Almond II — Mark-Almond (Blue Thumb)

Way back in the days of the Turning Point album by John Mayall, Jon Mark was with that percussive blues band, playing “finger-style” guitar, and Johnny Almond was in there on assorted wild instruments. Along with Mayall and bassist Steve Thompson, they put out some of the best and most distinctive music any band of Mayall’s has put out (along with the old Bluesbreakers featuring Eric Clapton). The Turning Point was a really nice jazz record, a marked contrast with the previous blues discs.

Eventually Mark and Almond split and joined up with Tommy Eyre on keyboards and bassist Roger Sutton, to form a band, similarly a jazz drummer, and put out Mark-Almond. Their first album was hauntingly beautiful in spots, generally low-key but rising to up-tempo, yet also at times quite dull and just eh...

Headkeeper: flash of ennui

Headkeeper — Dave Mason (Blue Thumb)

This is the record that has caused unmitigated furor and grief between Mr. Mason and his label, Blue Thumb. Mason has charged that the tapes for Headkeeper are of poor quality, poorly mixed, and as such, should never have been released, and since they were, damaged his career gravely. Blue Thumb has paraded with claims of Mason’s stealing from them, and contract-breaking. The status of the tape is unclear, but Mason is touring, urging audiences to not buy the record, and he vows never to record again for Blue Thumb; they in turn, may take legal action against Mason.

Whatever, it seems that supposedly poor mixing should not have been quite the issue it was, as the sound seems to be technically clear and excellent. The whole second side, recorded live at the Troubadour and the crux of the battle, sounds exceptionally clean for a concert taping. What should have dictated the release of Headkeeper is the musical quality of its contents. Apparently, this was not the case.

Of the album’s new material, only “A Heartache, A Shadow, A Lifetime” approaches some of Mason’s previous work whether in Traffic or solo. The rest are sort of vacuous, very nice music, but nothing to them.

The live side is in the same vein as much live Traffic, parts of Last Exit and Welcome to the Canteen and their ilk, such as the one last January in the Orpheum. The musicianship is very tight and accurate, but it never builds any sense of drama or excitement. It is the tension and buildup that is so essential to much of rock, and the lack of which being what makes the live recordings flat. The vocals are particularly bored sounding, making the original sound better without exception. “Pretty Queen” is speeded up, and Mason’s original rippling solo is replaced by a lackluster one; the drumming on “Feelin’ Alright” is terribly vacuous; very nice music, but nothing to them.

Headkeeper may be the last bit of recorded Dave Mason available to the public for quite awhile, possibly a number of years. It’s a shame he has to go out in such a flash of ennui.