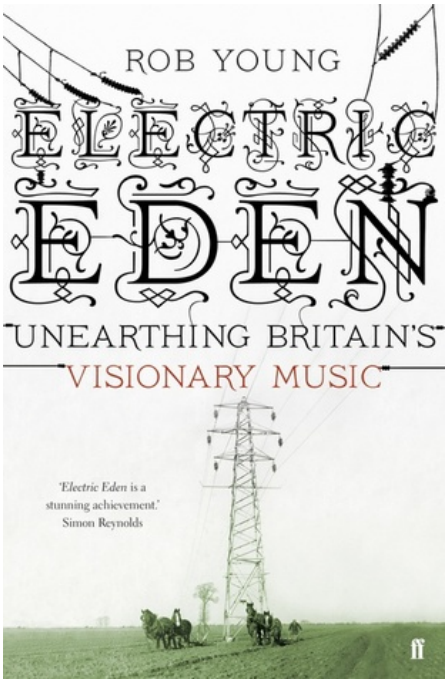

Electric Eden: Unearthing Britain's Visionary Music

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Electric Eden documents one of the great untold stories of British music over the past century. While ostensibly purporting to be a history of that much derided (though currently fashionable) four-letter word, 'folk', Electric Eden will be a magnificent survey of the visionary, topographic and esoteric impulses that have driven the margins of British visionary folk music from Vaughan Williams and Holst to The Incredible String Band, Nick Drake, John Martyn and Aphex Twin. For the first time the full story of the extraordinary period of folk rock from the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s will be told in a book with the breadth of a social history touching on sonic worship, pagan architecture, land art, ley lines and ther outer fringes of the avant garde. Electric Eden identifies a particularly English wellspring of imagery and imagination, an undercurrent that has fed into the creative and organic strand of Britain's music over the past century.

Electric Eden: Unearthing Britain's Visionary Music Details

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From Reader Review Electric Eden: Unearthing Britain's Visionary Music for online ebook

Jarvo says

To begin with some issues with the title. The author refers to Britain, but the book is almost exclusively about England. Secondly what is 'visionary music'? On the whole the book deals with music which is normally described as 'folk', but Rob Yoing does cast the net more broadly than that and discusses things like 'Strawberry Fields Forever' and Led Zepplin IV which aren't normally regarded as part of the folk cannon. Its best to take Jerusalem as your starting point. This is music which is inspired by 'England's green and pleasant land' and which has a mystical sense of what this means.

A conundrum: I read this book over a long period. I started with great enthusiasm, was delighted to find out more about the sometimes dubious activities of the Victorian and Edwardian folk song collectors, and then about the impact of traditional music on the likes of Vaughn Williams and Benjamin Brittain, before getting to the bit I really thought I was going to enjoy, the period from the late 50's through to the early '70's. But in the end I gave up feeling slightly numbed, and overwhelmed by the mass of details. Sure there was good stuff here - on The Incredible String Band, for instance, or on Nick Drake, on whom Young is particularly perceptive, making it clear that Drake is both the high point of the folk revival but also unique and standing apart from any movement. But there was just too much detail - too many bands I'd sort of heard of (Mr Fox anyone?), each of whom managed about 18 different changes in line up, each itemised, whilst recording two or three albums. Big themes were constantly alluded to like the politics of 'folk' (innately anti-elite or incipiently fascist?), the centrality of the erotic (especially a concern with female sexuality), and, especially, what the book likes to refer to as 'the occult meaning of the countryside' (magic to you or I). But they never seemed to be developed enough. Could the book see the wood from the trees?

So it was with slight trepidation that I returned to the book after a gap of two or more years and what did I find? That I thought Young writes excellent and loving vignettes, and that his determination to give full due to many of the foot soldiers is admirable. And moreover that his refusal to sub-ordinate the detail to a 'bigger picture' is a deliberate strategy. What he is writing about is an impulse - to draw on deep sense of place as the primary inspiration for your work - that cannot be repressed, but which produces an incredibly disparate body of work. He does also have a wonderful habit of referring to England as Albion. (Should have used the # England's Dreaming but I don't use #s).

So the 4 stars here are a combination of 3 stars for my first experience of the book and 5 stars for the second.

Jeff says

Electric Eden: Unearthing Britain’s Visionary Music is an ambitious survey of British folk music that is also, sad to say, indulgent. Putatively a tuned-in “reading” of Britain’s Blakean strata of culture, the music writer (for *The Wire*) Rob Young’s book promises, in his collector’s enthusiasm for a distinct period of musical recording, to rescue a forgotten lore of liberating reflection on his country’s past, but what he offers, ultimately, ought to weaken our resolve to continue looking for it.

What, after all, have Britain's fondness for its pagan (or pre-Roman) landscape, psychedelia, the occult, and folk music to do with one another? Maybe less than we think. That "unearthing" in the book's subtitle is a bit of a ruse. The idea that post-war British folk music is chthonic, and autochthonous, or up from the native soil, is incredible, given the transformations in sound technology that permitted, in the Sixties, developments in the cassette-recording, the eight-track and long-form playing disc, and a corresponding permissiveness in the number of acts signed to record labels, the culture of listening, as well as in the business of publishing rights, distribution and performance. American readers of Young's book will perhaps have heard of the Beatles, and the "new waves" of recorded British performance that transformed American popular music more than once.

The focus of fourteen chapters of Young's book, the period between the first and second British New Waves was a boom period for boys and girls with guitars. Nonetheless, Young's own thesis, blurrily argued throughout here, is that there's a continuous tradition of music-making that stretches from the Sixteenth Century Border minstrels to Talk Talk. The poet-printmaker William Blake, Wordsworth, Yeats, Aleister Crowley, the modernist composers of British orchestral music, like Ralph Vaughn Williams, the folk-jazz fusionist John Martyn – they're all in on it. British music, as Young hardly needs to tell us, is in on what he will then call "the loamy atavistic grit" that is "the Matter of Britain." No one will blame him for his engagement in that inquiry. But no one should assume that British folk music is as "up from the soil" as all that, and Young doesn't make his case. The "unearthing" here is of several stratum of cultural reproduction and its historiography, but Young's book bollixes the relations.

By rights, the book ought to tell us something about British folk music, and at times it does do just this. After initially modeling what's at stake in the recovery of the Sixties generation in the person of Vashti Bunyan, a folksinger who worked with the crucial producer-arranger Joe Boyd during the late Sixties, Young's six hundred page history opens on a one-hundred page survey of the British modernist composers in their treatment of "the folk" – a frequently rehearsed theme, after all, in modernist and cultural studies. Next Young tracks the musicians and ethnographers in the post-war period who collected songs and revived performance in rural villages. While the relations of those two periods of activity are worth Young's sorting through, he fails to represent the forces behind the ethnographical activity, or the performances themselves. Focusing on Bert Jansch, Shirley Collins, The Watersons, John and Beverly Martyn, Fairport Convention, Nick Drake, The Incredible String Band, Pentangle, Steeleye Span, Mr. Fox, Richard and Linda Thompson, and countless others, I read the book listening to the Bunyan, Martyn, Shirley Collins and the Watersons, Bert Jansch, and Bob and Carole Pegg for the first time – duly informed and pleased to so be. However, Young lacks a stylist's eye for startling juxtapositions, and the readings of these performances blur the ground between what is the precursor's achievement and what is an important information in "the Matter of Britain."

My wife and I are Richard Thompson fans, have seen him perform many times over the years, as astounded by his moving voice as by his range and skill as a guitarist, and often quite taken by his songs, as well. But the musician Young has me thinking most about is John Martyn, the hunky singer-songwriter who worked with Thompson on two albums in the early Seventies, at the time of the break-up of Thompson's first group, Fairport Convention, as well as in the duo Martyn was a part of with his wife of ten years, Beverly Martyn. Martyn and Thompson are an interesting pair, both depressive and soulful, both song writers who initially hung back behind their beautiful wives, but with their ears open to The Band's music with Bob Dylan, as

well as to their own country's native traditions, and both, finally, guitar masters who needed to work on their own. Martyn is aptly contextualized by the bohemian coffee house scene of Les Cousins, a London folk club that was the center of English folk revival of the mid to late Sixties. He does not emerge in his musical maturity much away from the folk duo he and his wife formed; alcohol and drugs, as well as his own crusty recalcitrance, seem to have kept him from the career Thompson has enjoyed on both sides of the Atlantic (Martyn died in 2009), and which Thompson continues to enjoy without major label support. Martyn, by contrast, emerges through the patronage of Chris Blackwell, the founder of Island Records, who dropped him from the label in 1988.

A career like Martyn's deserves more than *Electric Eden*'s contextualization, and despite having interviewed Richard Thompson for this book, Young has almost nothing to say about him (Thompson, tellingly, didn't give him much). The chapter on Richard and Linda Thompson begins with a squib on Caedmon (England's poet of legend), a squib on Milton, a squib on Teilhard de Chardin, a squib on the album cover of a band, Comus (after the Milton poem) that performed around the time the Thompsons were getting together. The chapter closes with a squib on Raymond Williams, the Marxist literary critic who wrote a book, *The Country and City*, all about "the Matter of Britain," though Williams' ideas – to say nothing of William Empson, or E. P. Thompson, or any of the cultural theorists of the pastoral, and popular culture, to whom Young might have looked to clarify his argument about why the one musician (Thompson) flourished while the other musician (Martyn) struggled – are not, finally, entertained. *Electric Eden* is a "popular" book without ever being a readable one.

Bill says

a reasonably good book about the history of folk and folk-rock music in the united kingdom. unfortunately, i found parts of the book to be downright tedious, and at over 600 pages, it was just too long. so i basically skipped through the last 100 pages or so. having said that, the book would definitely be of some interest to fans of that kind of music. and there are some great bands...fairport convention, pentangle and steeleye span, to name just a few. and there is a very useful discography at the end of the book, which lists the key albums from the uk folk genre.

Kelly McCubbin says

Daunted by the sheer numbers of excellent reviews on this book here, I'm going to keep this relatively brief. This is a really hard book for me to put my finger on. I love it's wealth of information on early twentieth century musical trends in Britain and the necessity of the music to look back in order to escape the platitudes of music hall and Gilbert and Sullivan and move forward. Young's take on the recurrence of "travelling" themes and a running pulse of paganism stirring Albion's musical pot is often compelling.
And then often it's not. After a while the cookie cutter approach to seemingly everything that uses an acoustic instrument (Talk Talk? Julian Cope?) being an unbreakable stream straight from King Arthur's loins starts to get unwieldy. Occasionally even a little ridiculous.
That said, though, the wealth of information about Pentangle, Shirley Collins, Nick Drake, Fotherinport Confusion... It's a wealth of smart loving commentary for people who love that particular brand of electric

folk.
I also dig his branching commentaries about paganism in films and the use of electric folk in things like *The Wicker Man*, *Penda's Fen*, *Quatermass and the Pit* and *The Witchfinder General*. It might be excessive here, but it's an excessive I like.
That said, I'd call his extensive coverage of festivals and post-70s folk fusion forced and misguided. And the desperate wraparound to bring those sections, towards the end of the book, back into thematic lock step through the use of fantastical liner notes and hobbit stories, is truly weird.
Take the four stars with a grain of salt if you are not fairly fascinated with 60s/70s electric folk music from England. But if you are, it's a pretty enjoyable read.

Mike Schwartz says

A comprehensive tome about the British Folk Revival that introduced me to a lot of great traditional and neo-traditional, hybrid electric-folk music that I'd never heard before. In addition to people like Mick Softley and Peter Bellamy (Young Tradition) and rediscoveries like John Renbourne, Shirley Collins and Anne Briggs, as well as old favorites like Bert Jansch (RIP, 2012), Pentangle, Fairport Convention and Sandy Denny, there were groups that I'd rarely heard, like The Watersons, a truly amazing family band reaching back into the farthest traditions of family bands, playing music from centuries ago and putting their own contemporary spin on it. I also rediscovered my love for the Incredible String Band and delved into British classical music including Delius, Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, Benjamin Britten, John Ireland, E.J. Moeran, and Peter Warlock. A treasure trove that I will keep coming back to.

Murray Ewing says

The brief period between 1969 and 1972 saw a flowering of British folk rock, mixing traditional songs with amplified guitars and rock'n'roll drums. But, as Rob Young points out in his study of the 'electric folk movement', this wasn't the first appropriation of working-class music to (predominately) middle-class ends: that was what 'folk' had been about throughout the 20th century, from the moment the Edwardian Cecil Sharp transcribed and harmonised the song his gardener (appropriately named John England) was singing as he worked, and presented it that evening at a choir supper.

The key to the 'Visionary Music' of late-60s/early-70s folk rock is, as Young says, the 'sensation of travel between time zones, of retreat to a secret garden, in order to draw strength and inspiration for facing the future' — folk music's authenticity, then, is as much a search for one's own inner authenticity, or certainly that's what it meant to the hippie generation that's the focus of this study.

And it's easy to see the appeal of folk music to the intelligent, idealistic, musically-gifted youth of the time. It wasn't just about picking up a guitar and strumming a song. There were all sorts of side-activities to get involved in. As one interviewee says: 'we were morris dancing, clog dancing, playing instrumental music, singing ballads and songs, researching, going off to manuscript collections and working on material, original stuff that nobody else was working on.'

Clog dancing. If nothing else, you've got to admire their bravery.

It's an impressive book. I have to say I enjoyed the first section the most, which traced the development of

the idea of folk music from Cecil Sharp's (and others') transcribing of songs in-the-wild, to its adoption by the political left as the voice of the working classes in the 1950s and early 1960s, and then, finally, its use in more individualistic visions and interpretations in folk rock's heyday. After that, the bulk of the book can't help but lose that historical momentum and get a bit rock-journalistic, flinging around a lot of adjectives ('Fishing about Architecture', as Frank Zappa called any attempt to write about music) as it describes the key recordings. But anyway, at this point the historical narrative gets a bit diffuse with so many musicians moving between so many bands, marrying or splitting up with their fellows, going off to country houses to write new material, popping up in fellow musicians' side projects, and so on. I lost my sense of the chronology. But this part of the story is perhaps too tangled to turn into anything except a series of individual studies.

Electric Eden is a big, thorough book that takes the influence of 'Albion-centric, historically resonant folk-rock' right up to the present day, with the likes of the Ghost Box label's blend of synths and sound samples — a totally electronic music which should seem at odds with the acoustic-instrument authenticity of folk, but which certainly seems to share the same visionary spirit Young's talking about.

An excellent book. I'll be referring to it a lot as I make my way through my now much-expanded list of albums to listen to.

Steve Gillway says

There is a breadth in this which is admirable, where the concepts underpinning British folk music are explored through time. The author has selected the key movers and shakers and people can disagree with some of his choices. You can't doubt the author's fascination and love of the music and that enthusiasm is what keeps the reader on board for quite a lengthy ride. I think the longer perspective takes this well above the usual hagiographic music tomes.

Paul Christensen says

Folk music (= volk/blood and soil)
vs.
Pop music (= *pop*ulace/bread and circuses)

In some periods there was overlap between the two, however, as Rob Young shows in this chronicle of mainly British 1970s music.

Joseph says

OK, first point is I love 1960s/1970s British folk revival and folk rock (Watersons, Fairport Convention, Steeleye Span, Richard Thompson, etc., etc.), so I was excited to read a book that was apparently going to document that era. I'm not *entirely* sure this was that book, but I still found it interesting, and learned a fair bit.

It starts with the tale of Vashti Bunyan (a name I'd heard, but about whom I knew pretty much nothing)

making her way across England to (if I'm remembering correctly) meet Donovan, who was trying to set up a little community on some island he owned. Then it actually jumps back to the turn of the century to show Cecil Sharp, Ralph Vaughan Williams and others who were going out and collecting folk songs, or composing music using folk motifs, and in a real way laying the groundwork for what was to come later.

We then progress through the war years, the 1950s and the 1960s, when everything really began to blossom.

The structure of the book isn't entirely chronological, especially when we get into the main years -- each chapter kind of focuses on a specific performer or group; because there was so much overlap between the various major players, we'll often go back to a time or place we've already visited, but follow a different person on a slightly different path. In many cases, though, the focus isn't so much on the group or the performer specifically, as on his (or her) (or their) impact on the audience at large. (And many, many albums or concerts are described as "lysergic" or "weed-mellowed" or the like -- surprise! plenty of chemical enhancement in the folk scene of the day.)

A lot of the information was actually new to me; I do have some familiarity, just from reading CD liner notes and old issues of Dirty Linen &c., but I was certainly no expert. (Speaking of which: Some reviews I've seen have pointed out at least a few errors of fact in the book, so caveat lector.)

As I said,I don't know if this was quite the book I wanted -- I would've probably preferred something with a bit more of a chronological narrative -- but this is probably the best thing you're going to find on the subject.

And as to why I was interested:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQEkX...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSnYJ...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qs9PM...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M3dJH...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sdzQJ...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GX3An...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O8_eF...

Bob says

Rob Young bites off a daring to daunting sized mouthful of UK cultural history, from William Morris to Current 93, (with even a dip back to the English Civil War of the 17th century - a straight line from the Diggers to Maggie Holland).
While the bulk of the book is about the folk revival of the 1950s-60s and the folk-rock boom of the 1960s-70s, Young is interested in and capable of drawing together literature, visual arts, pre-Christian spiritual movements, forgotten Hammer horror films and more, to elucidate some general tendencies in the cultural history of the British Isles with a whole lot of quite specific, fascinating and well-written detail.

Even if you have the general outline of Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, Bert Jansch, Shirley Collins, The Pentangle, Fairport, Steeleye Span, Vashti Bunyan et al (not to mention Vaughan Williams, Delius and Elgar before them), you'll probably find a lot you didn't know and a lot to consider. (You probably have to be at least passingly familiar with the core of musicians that start this paragraph to start in).

Charles Hatfield says

This book was made for me: a grand, sprawling history of English folk music revivalism, Rob Young's *Electric Eden* answers something in me that dates back to my high school days and first tentative forays into British folk rock. A fearless, hugely ambitious, frankly imperfect book, *Electric Eden* covers a huge swath of ground, placing folk music and its culture, including offshoots like classical pastoralism, ethnomusicological preservationism, electric folk, psychedelic folk, and even fantasy fiction, in a huge, overlapping set of contexts: social, political, mystical, psychogeographical, iconographic, literary, and, yes, musical. Threading from Vaughan Williams, William Morris, and Cecil Sharp to Ewan MacColl, Davey Graham, and Shirley Collins to Fairport Convention, the Incredible String Band, and Comus, and eventually getting to topics like the Glastonbury Fayre and Aphex Twin, this book gets *around*, and spins an beguiling web.

There are parts of the book that bemuse and even, occasionally, frustrate, including what struck me as oddly aggressive and disapproving passages on heroes Sandy Denny and Nick Drake (Young's treatment of *Pink Moon* is inadequate to that great, frightening album). I wish too that Young had paid more attention to Richard Thompson's later output and not flattened Thompson's work to fit a certain thesis. Also, I wish Young had not treated the later Steeleye Span (after founder Ashley Hutchings' departure) as mere purveyors of Pop kitsch; again, he *uses* them to push forward a thesis, in a particularly bald, probably unfair, way. And then there are Young's tics of style, which recur a bit too often as he strives—valiantly, it must be said—to knit everything together: his search for reigning metaphors to give the chapters shape can sometimes err on the side of obviousness, and he has favorite words (*lysergic!*) that he leans on a bit too hard.

But, BUT, there is so much that is revelatory and mind-expanding in this book, and Young achieves such a broad, synoptic and compelling vision of British folk that I found myself thrilled more often than anything else. *Electric Eden* helps me understand why I love so much of this music, and that, to me, is a great gift.

Silvio111 says

This was my favorite book of 2011. Being an old 60s hippie-earth mother-musician type who knew every song on the FM radio from 1965 until around 1978, I found this book absolutely fascinating. I lived through the 60s and 70s and listened to all the British folk and folk-rock albums, but I had no idea of most of the connections revealed in this book. For instance, a young British woman named Vashti Bunyan (her real name, in fact) dropped out of University in the early 60s, acquired a gypsy's wagon and horse, and set out with her artist boyfriend on a journey across Britain and Scotland. During this odyssey, she wrote charming pastoral folk songs on her guitar, singing in her wispy voice about fields, fisherman, dogs, horses, flowers, and just generally her feelings about life. Apparently, according to the author, she set off the folk revival and then faded away into the rural country side in Ireland and Scotland, living on Donovan Leitch's island, befriending the members of the Incredible String Band, growing a garden, and studying Gaelic. She recorded an album, but her producers did not promote her album sufficiently, so she lost interest and went off in another direction, only to resurface 30 years later, completely unaware that she had become a folk icon to

musical historians. This is just one of many, many interesting stories.

This book will send you repeatedly to download songs, or order albums online, or if you are particularly old school, to run to your music store and actually buy a CD! I highly recommend this book if you love British music.

Paul Bryant says

Like an elephant in a hot air balloon Rob Young's gargantuan Observer's Book of Folk comes wafting towards us on a breeze of critical hot air. Now we have our old weird England to set beside Greil Marcus' old weird America. Newsflash : morris now hip. This just in: folk rocks. Come out of hiding Cecil Sharp, Lucy Broadwood and Mr Fox. The amnesty has been declared. Folk is rehabilitated. Official.

Well I guess this builder's hodsworth of paper will do for the definitive history of visionary folk and folk-inspired English and a little bit Scottish music until the real one comes along. But reading Rob Young it's hard not to feel as if you are being beaten softly with pillows each stuffed with ten thousand feathery folk facts which escape and float about until the air is thick with facts and factlets and facticles making you snort and sneeze as you plough, hack and heave yourself through these 600 pages PLUS notes PLUS timeline PLUS bibliography. There's a lot in here. Is this further proof that you can have too much of a good thing?

A couple of years ago, before the reissue of **Just another Diamond Day** and before the t-Mobile ad campaign, it's possible that this book would not now have started off with a 30 page account of **Vashti Bunyan**'s rural gypsy hippy life, but this gives us a fair idea about what RY is getting at here and really, it's not that profound. Folk music reconnects us with the past and inspires us to rethink our modern values and plugs us into the old weird England which comes percolating into your brain as soon as Pentangle begin lyke wake dirging or Forest begin their bluebell dance. Sorry, dahnce (they were posh). So the same **eldritch eyesockets, green man grimaces and thrawn buttocks** connect Steeleye Span back to Arnold Bax, Ralph Vaughan Williams, ley lines, Alisteir Crowley, Grimes Dyke, Gustav Holst, Kate Bush (*what was that again?*), William Morris, David Munrow, Nick Drake, Robin Williamson, Maiden Castle, Stonehenge, Tinhenge, Woodhenge, Woolhenge, David Sylvian and Julian Cope right back to the very first druid who drugged himself into the very fist blissful stupor and then got eaten by something unspeakable.

Rob's loose and baggy understanding of the remarkable tentacular reach of this English (mostly) visionary thing has him describing **the details of Beatles' Strawberry Fields promo film and the plot of The Wicker Man, Peter Dickinson's obscure novel The Changes, the laments of Rambling Syd Rumpo, Kate Bush's first – and second – and third – and fourth albums, how modal music affected bebop…** is there anything which isn't grist to this vast grinding mill?

We've got to get ourselves back to the garden. This was a hippy thing. But before that it was a first-folk-revival thing. Rob thinks (and I don't disagree) that the great era of visionary wyrd folk stuff was 68 to 72 and the throbbing heart of it all was an intensely nostalgic yearning for a time you never lived in, for a time that never existed – **the Land of Cockayne, the Big Rock Candy Mountain, the misty coast of Albany, Middle Earth with better hi fi equipment, and no Disney** in the enchanted forest. You can see English psychedelia steeped in this nostalgia -Penny Lane, Pink Floyd's Syd songs, plus See Saw and Remember a Day – there are dozens of them. Folk music takes away the jazz cigarettes and granny glasses and substitutes the cruel sister, the hanged man, the demon lover, the unquiet grave, the foggy dew, yes, but it's still a dream world fitting closely on the cultural shelf next to Lord of the Rings, Gormenghast and HP Lovecraft.

So : the narrative arc of Electric Eden goes like this. After a tour of the folk-influenced classical composers of the early 20th C – Vaughan Williams, Holst, Bax, Ireland, Warlock (unfamiliar territory to me) we then get the MacColl/Lloyd/Lomax years when folk becomes a hot political potato (a very familiar tale). As we know, McColl in Britain and Seeger & Lomax in America lost the argument and folk detached itself from crude leftwing political alignments, as can be seen in the discography of the once Communist Topic records. RY tells us that this enabled folk to rediscover its true wyrd self. That all takes 100 pages. And then begins the parade of three to ten page potted histories of Rob's favourite folkies of the golden age. This turns out to be the usual suspects – Watersons, Shirley Collins, Pentangle, ISB, Fairport, Nick Drake – and some lesser spotted ones, like Comus and Mr Fox. This is all familiar stuff too, although there are enough meaty quotes from RY's own interviews to make it very worthwhile. But exactly how the mod group The Action morphed into Mighty Baby and became folk sessioners and two of them were "instrumental" in the conversion to Sufiism of Richard Thompson is the kind of thing some may find fascinating but others… really won't. There's a whole chapter on outdoor festivals ("there was something beyond flower power at work"). That whole section is 400 pages. And finally we get some **really quite unconvincing attempts** to trace the whole wyrd vision thing in the work of contemporaries such as Julian Cope, David Sylvian and Talk Talk.

Some other reviewers have pointed out in unkind terms how error-prone and un-proof-read this book is. Examples: (p.263) Lord Darnell is not in Fairport's Tam Lin but Matty Groves; there's mention of a `twelfth Century Saxon' church (p.399); Donovan's "Gift from a Flower" LP has this song "And Clett Makes Three" when it doesn't, and so forth. I might also point out how a reader's teeth can be set on edge by passages such as this :

Compared to The Incredible String Band's contemporaneous spirit odysseys, Bolan's songs sound like an unbearably over-spiced cod-celtic gumbo, a kitsch antique store stuffed with onyx dolphins, marble satyrs, astrakhan chaises, ostrich feathers and elkhorn trumpets.

and there are some real head-scratchers ;

The passion with which the String Band addressed the quest made the mystical pretensions of other contemporaries merely sound like the honeyed crumbs of those who had no bread.

Electric Eden is some kind of achievement which may be best taken in small 50 page doses and not eaten whole like I did. After 664 pages, I'm thinking that the next wassailer, mummer or hobbyhorse at my door is going to get a bucket of molten death metal all over their jingly particoloured heads. Which would not be very visionary at all.

RATING :

Rob deserves a full five stars for effort. This boy has been working hard. But deduct one star for all the errors, and the really ridiculous all-encompassing non-theory which all of this...stuff...is strung across. Deduct another star for some horrible over-writing and a general lack of sparkling wit.

Add one star for getting off his arse and interviewing a lot of people and getting some great quotes.

Deduct the same star for frankly tiring me out. Three - that's your lot.

Koeeoaddi says

Must enjoyed, despite the author's frequent odd and over-the-top turn of phrase.

There was also my usual problem with books about music, which is profound boredom with the flood of names that mean nothing to me. No doubt they'll be fascinating to the reader who is less a dilettante than I am; the pilgrim who both knows and cares passionately about who produced the Stone Monkey's dance bits, featured in the live performace of the Incredible String Band's "U" and who played back-up gimbri on the demo pressung of Vasti Bunyon's debut album.

God bless and no points deducted.

Timothy Finnegan says

American popular music, as Nik Cohn once said, is black beat or rhythm with white sentiment. In part he spoke of the recurrent British influence on American pop, or the multi-layered British invasion, that goes on up to the latest moment. In the late 50’s and early 60’s, however, the tide ran the other way and many of the blacklisted folk artists from the United States came to live and perform in Britain. (Guitars appeared for the first time in Britain in the 1950’s, imported from American manufacturers.) Rob Young has done popular musicology a service by writing his history of 60's and 70’s English folk music. There is lots more than anyone would know about the history of the Incredible String Band and too little about my favorite group in the history, Fairport Convention, but that is not the author's failing. He describes the promiscuous informality and immateriality of the players of the great English folk movement who freely borrowed from early Anglo and American folk tunes, had their go, and then provided inspiration to groups like Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd-who made all the money. Fairport Convention, led by Sandy Denny and Richard Thompson, recorded the iconic “Liege and Leaf” and then flaked out. Sandy Denny possessed one of the great voices of any time and then died shortly thereafter as a rock causality. Richard Thompson became a Muslim with his wife Linda, retreating to a commune, and now survives as the most unsung British guitar hero…many years later.

I learned a great deal from Mr. Young’s book. I had never heard of many of the personalities who took Cecil Sharp’s collection of English folk songs to popular knowledge and sonic success and thereby revolutionized rock. The book, however, does read like a dissertation, and it could have been cut in half. Otherwise, indispensible for the fanatic.
