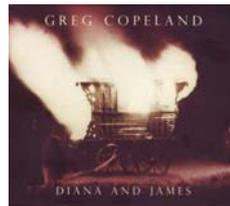
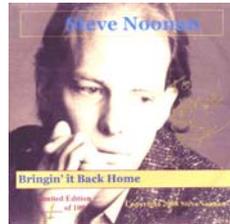


Translation for the review published in Xroads #13, November 2008

GREG COPELAND *****
Diana and James
Inside Recordings



STEVE NOONAN ****
Bringing it Back Home
www.stevenoonan.com



Songwriters made in California

Two destinies, maybe not interconnected but rather tangled, with always above, the embarrassing and unavoidable shadow of Jackson Browne, their high-school friend. Among other common points, Noonan and Copeland have written many songs together, including *Buy for me the rain*, which was recorded with some success by the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band in 1967, and both release a new album after a very long hiatus — we're talking 40 years for Noonan and 26 years for Copeland! A parallel interview will soon follow, providing us with more details about those different points.

No-one had heard from Greg Copeland since 1982 and *Revenge Will Come*, his excellent debut album produced by Jackson Browne who had brought in bandmates Rick Vito, Danny Kortchmar, Bob Glaub and Bill Payne. Of course, the sound was close to that of *Lawyers in Love*, the Jackson Browne 1982 vintage, very square and efficient. 25 years later, most of my friends grab the LP with a smile and we're a handful waiting for Copeland's follow-up album, not without some apprehension, like when you're about to meet a long-lost high-school friend back from nowhere. And the surprise is excellent. The sound is less rock-oriented and actually very "modern" with acoustic guitars, mandolins and fiddles. Lyrics too have changed, less political (at the time, Joan Baez had covered "El Salvador"), which could be a sign of maturity. Rather short and well-crafted, in the vein of David Olney's, Copeland's songs can be read like short-stories. And while he claims this is not a concept-album, Copeland explains that his characters, Diana and James, can be found in the songs at different moments in their lives. For example, the character in "I'm the One" is responsible for the death of the female character in "Muddy Water". You also run into Hank Williams on the night he died ("The only wicked thing"). Rest reassured, Greg Leisz' elegant production brushes up these dark and dry stories. Like T-Bone Burnett and Joe Henry, Leisz is a producer who changes everything he touches to gold, by means of his guitars arsenal (tenor, baritone, mandolin, mandocello, lapsteel, Weissenborn and pedal steel guitars), but also by placing Copeland's voice in the light, somewhere between John Hiatt and Eric Andersen, and by making the most of the musicians: Carla Kihlstedt and Gabe Witcher on fiddle, Jay Bellerose on drums and Jennifer Condos on bass (both have worked with Joe Henry), Bob Glaub on bass (the only musician who was already on *Revenge Will Come*), as well as Patrick Warren (Joe Henry) and Phil Parlapiano (John Prine) on keyboards. *Diana and James* is really an excellent album

which will be featured in my Top 5 for 2008. You see meeting an old friend can be fun sometimes!

Steve Noonan's trajectory is similar to that of Greg Copeland's. Flashback to 1968. Produced by Paul Rothchild (whose name will be removed on the artwork), Noonan's debut album released by Elektra reminds you of Tim Buckley's first album. Not surprising as Elektra wanted to make Noonan a second-coming Buckley. This mistake led to a disagreement between the young man from Orange County and a lack of promotion by the label, sending the LP straight to hell, I mean the used records bins. Half of the songs were co-written with Copeland, the other half by the young Jackson Browne. You can read on the Internet Richie Unterberger's story of this troubled period. Forty years later, Steve Noonan is alive and well. He does not play in stadiums but in Santa Cruz coffee houses and is releasing an entirely acoustic record, recorded and manufactured at home. Of course this is remote from Greg Leisz's sophisticated production but everything is good in *Bringing it Back Home* when it comes to the intimate atmosphere of a guy face to face with himself, armed with his sole guitar against disappointed hopes ("It's no big deal"), globalization and fair trade on "Fair Trade Boogie" (*Your free trade isn't fair, and it's anything but free/And it takes us back a hundred years/to the days of slavery/fair trade is the only way we see/To reach equality*) and politics with "War is Your Business" coupled with Sidney Carter's "Crow on the Cradle" (the song was covered by Browne on *No Nukes* some thirty years ago). You're closer to a Sammy Walker or a Bob Martin, with Noonan's seasoned voice supported by a flawless guitar playing on true and honest songs. As this album is exclusively available through Noonan's website, I urge you to also order the reissue of the Elektra album with three bonus tracks of songs off the 68 album recorded live forty years later. Then you can wait until early 2009 when the new album called *Lightning Strikes Twice* is released. Will Greg Leisz stand at the helm? You can always dream, can't you?

Jacques-Eric Legarde

File next to *Time the Conqueror*, the new album by the third member of the South-Californian gang