

(Surprisingly, though, he doesn't sing a note here, despite having one of folk's most pleasant and accomplished voices.)

John Kirkpatrick and Ashley Hutchings have been involved several years in the renaissance of Morris dance music, a bouncing, melodic, subtly varied folk form usually centered around an accordion or similar instrument. But it's surely not by intention that they bring up two sides of the old question of purism.

Kirkpatrick's *Plain Capers* (Free Reed FRR 010, British), states its purpose in the accompanying (and highly informative) pamphlet: "We've resisted the temptation to add 'extra' excitement to the music with electric folk-rock arrangement, for the music of the Morris is exciting in itself." Kirkpatrick and his fellow players seek individuality and originality firmly within a traditional framework.

Hutchings stays with electricity but does his best to disguise its use, though hardly from caution or prissiness. *Son of Morris On* (Harvest Heritage SHSM 2012, British), a successor to the earlier *Morris On*, doesn't rockify things so much as simply re-dress them. Amplifiers considered, it's still difficult to see how a purist could fault the record, because it is always faithful to the music.

The point is important and simple: that Kirkpatrick eschews electricity while Hutchings embraces it does not place them at opposite poles: it only means that each is currently pursuing his own vision of the music. True, it may well have taken a good deal of technical and philosophical battling to arrive at their choices, but once there, it's really that simple.

*Fairport* (left to right):  
Mallacks, Thompson,  
Pegg, Nicole, Swarbrick



*Two Sides to Every Story*  
Gene Clark  
RSO RS-1-3011

By Paul Nelson

**T**O THOSE WHO ADMIRE Gene Clark, *Two Sides to Every Story* is a heartbreaker—in the worst way. ("Is this the dullest album ever made?" was my original opening sentence. "Probably" would have been the second.) Languid to the point of laughableness, the once-classy Clark creeps through a series of Gilmanian ballads that is so Antonioni-slow the songs actually seem to stop. Dead. Like this. Bereft of either interest or ideas, this plodding work can only be described as California-liturgical.

Interlarded among the endlessness are some lame bluegrass ("Home Run King," "In the Pines"), listless rock & roll ("Marylou") and the worst train song ever ("Kansas City Southern"). Producer Thomas Jefferson Kaye is a great help, offering an interminable supply of nothing but the moldiest clichés.

Actually, there is one clever phrase: "You're either/Just the newspaper boy/Or you're either Babe Ruth." How much for a late city edition, Gene?



*Just a Story from America*  
Elliott Murphy  
Columbia PC 34653

By Paul Nelson

**W**ITH HIS FOURTH album, Elliott Murphy continues to impress and depress. Once overrated, now underrated, he has always had to struggle passionately to match his brilliant, top-heavy lyrics to a somewhat limited musical imagination—it's usually metaphysics and metaphors, not melodies, that are best remembered from his work. Like its predecessors, *Just a Story from America* is more heroic tonic than

headachy torpor, but there are times when one wishes that Murphy were more of a natural and could breathe some tactility into his theses ("Drive All Night" and "Think Too Hard," for example, are much too stiff).

Despite these not inconsiderable shortcomings, Murphy remains an incorrigible talent, and this record is one of the best of the year. Tenaciously thematic, the singer continues to proffer the magics and moral certitude of romanticism and rock & roll, fallen heroes and the awesomely benevolent nighttime, and when he connects, it's like a Dave Kingman home run—all or nothing, no coasting ("Aristocracy is like a crown of thorns/It takes believers"). With its haunting boys-choir backing, "Anastasia," a song about childhood, wintry nights, the Romanovs and the pull of death in the Russian Revolution, uses the old rock & roll/country music ruse of a telephone call from heaven to explore both a personal and collective loss of innocence that is positively—dare I say it?—cosmic. "Just a Story from America" sounds like Paul Simon adapting Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* for the Top 40, while "Caught Short in the Long Run" boasts a chorus that makes my heart pound. "Rock Ballad," with Mick Taylor playing guitar, conjures up those indescribably sweet but desperate times when you listened all night to music on the radio with someone you loved, and hoped that it would all last.

Elliott Murphy's *Just a Story from America* is an imperfect album about things that matter. Better that than a perfect LP about nothing, nothing at all.



*A True Story*  
Jelly  
Asylum 7E 1096

By Ariel Swartley

**M**AYBE IT'S BECAUSE all three members have put in years playing clubs and bars that Jelly delivers high energy better than quiet reflection. Whatever the reason, their studied forays into folk apocalypse—"Elijah," "Broken Man"—lack the singer/songwriter's most important attribute, conviction. But who's complaining? The sedate-looking trio sings R&B with fervor and has written two tunes on their debut album