

MUSIC

Thompson doesn't play in mainstream

RICHARD FROM 22

Rather than basing his brand of rock music on American sources, Thompson has squarely rooted his in English and Celtic traditions.

"It's not instantly radio accessible or something people already know," said Thompson, who appears Thursday at Wilbert's Bar & Grille. He noted that Celtic music and its offshoots aren't exactly mainstream in America.

"I wouldn't call it obscure, but it's something that's a minority form of music," he said. "It's something that isn't really the main diet and so you expect a smaller but more specialized audience."

While he obviously wouldn't mind being better known, Thompson is pleased with the enthusiastic and loyal audience he's built up over the years.

"The audiences are great, they're educated in a sense that they expect me to challenge them with new material and new ideas all the time. It's an audience that never lets you sit back and relax," he said.

The expressive guitarist and moody vocalist began his career with the ground-breaking British folk-rock group Fairport Convention in 1968. With them, he recorded such acclaimed albums as "Unhalfbricking" and "Liege & Lief."

He began a nearly decade-long collaboration with his wife, Linda, in 1974, which included 1982's classic "Shoot Out the Lights," which has made more than one critic's list of the best rock albums of all time.

His solo albums have included such notable efforts as 1985's "Across a Crowded Room" and 1991's "Rumor and Sigh."

His most recent release is this year's "you/me/us?," an ambitious two-CD project.

Why would an established 48-year-old artist decide to put out a double CD at this point in his career?

"I don't know, I probably thought it was really time to annoy people," Thompson joked, noting "it's supposed to be the kiss of death when you hand in a double album to your record company and they ask, 'What are we going to do with this?'"

Actually, the format works well for the 19 songs Thompson has assembled, reflecting his usual gloomy outlook on a world where love seldom lasts and betrayal is all too common. He's split the songs into acoustic ("Nude") and electric ("Voltage Enhanced") discs. Pain and retribution are abundant throughout.

"There are a few happy little songs, but yeah, most are pretty bleak," Thompson admitted. "I didn't want to compromise the material by throwing in token songs. These are the strongest songs I had, and I thought I should put them on whether it creates a downbeat mood or not."

Fulmer is a free-lance writer in Strongsville.

✓ For your information

Richard Thompson performs at 9 p.m. Thursday at Wilbert's Bar & Grille, 1360 W. 9th St. in Cleveland's Warehouse District. Former Del Fuegos frontman Dan Zanes opens. Tickets are \$20 in advance, \$23 day of the show at Wilbert's or through Ticketmaster at 241-5555 and 1-330-945-9400.

✓ "Remember," Rusted Root (Mercury): Forget all those comparisons to the Grateful Dead. Pittsburgh's Rusted Root may be one of those wannabe hippie H.O.R.D.E. bands. But this followup to 1994's bestseller "When I Woke" is not as strange a trip as it seems. It's more like Jethro Tull without the flute — overwrought, jazz- and worldbeat-influenced folk rock made worse by the goofy, "I'm-having-a-seizure" vocals of lead singer Michael Glabicki. Grade: D.

✓ "Recovering the Satellites," Counting Crows (DGC): A little louder and angrier than their 1993 debut "August and Everything After," but the Van Morrison-meets-Buffalo Springfield folk-rock tunes aren't nearly as memorable or catchy this time around. Welcome to the dreaded "sophomore slump." Grade: C.

✓ "Best of Van Halen Volume 1," Van Halen (Warner Bros.): David Lee Roth gets his chance to reclaim his Van Halen throne and then throws it all away by embarrassing himself and his bandmates on this year's MTV Video Music Awards. Smooth move. But

at his best, Roth is without question a more effective Van Halen frontman than the recently departed Sammy Hagar, giving the band a darker, hard-rock edge. The differences between the two leap out on this 17-track greatest hits package, which spans the band's career. The set features two new songs that reunite Roth with his old bandmates — "Can't Get This Stuff No More" and "Me Wise Magic." They rock harder than anything Van Halen has released in recent years. So long, Diamond Dave. Grade: A.

✓ "The Way I Should," Iris DeMent (Warner Bros.): The thing that made Iris DeMent's first album, "Infamous Angel," so compelling was its unadorned Ozark honesty and beauty. But this recording comes off sounding a little too slick and calculated, with DeMent fronting a band of professional session players (keyboardist Chuck Leavell, pedal-steel player Paul Franklin, etc.) and singing heavy-handed political songs about child abuse ("Letter to Mom"), materialism ("Quality Time") and American greed ("Wasteland of the Free"). Grade: C.

✓ "The Doors Greatest Hits," The Doors (Elektra): Ten of the Doors' biggest '60s hits, available for the first time in the United States on a single CD. As a bonus, you get a never-before-released version of "The End," taken from the soundtrack of "Apocalypse Now," plus "Ghost Song," a Jim Morrison spoken-word piece set to new music recorded by band members Ray Manzarek, Robby Krieger and John Densmore. Fans with multimedia computers can also tap into a video for "Ghost Song" and other interactive features. Grade: A.

✓ "The Doors Absolutely Live," The Doors (Elektra): A stunning, 21-track live album compiled from performances recorded in the United States between August 1969 and June 1970. Includes sparkling, digitally remastered versions of "Alabama Song," "Backdoor Man," "Five to One," "Petition the Lord With Prayer," "When the Music's Over" and other Doors concert classics. Rock 'n' roll at its sexy, poetic, drunken, dangerous best. Grade: A.

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