

# Something Unheard Of

by Brent Legault

The following review is the first installment of a continuing series. Its purpose is to focus on albums, new and old, that have not received the attention they deserve. The column will devote itself to sing the praises of the unsung. Therefore, it is unlikely well-known artists like Micheal Jackson, Madonna, or Guns 'n Roses will ever appear here. More likely, you will read about lesser known bands that haven't the access to nationwide promotion. Overlooked, or underestimated, albums by bigger stars may also find their way into this column, but look for the unusual to appear here.

From 1985 to 1991, Thin White Rope released five albums with Frontier records. Guy Kyser, singer/guitarist, composed nearly all of its music with the help of lead guitarist, Roger Kunkel. Bass players, drummers, and any extra instrumentalists came and went and came back again. Its sound, however, remained potent; its lyrics, poignant. After seven years of touring, and little recognition, the band stopped.

*Sack Full of Silver*, Thin White Rope's fourth release, and its only self-proclaimed "road" album, materialized in 1990. It received no hype, no

hullabaloo. It just appeared, like a phantom, on the store shelves somewhere between Thin Lizzy and .38 Special.

Excuse the romanticism, but this album is far too beautiful, too steadfast, to be hyped. Albums and musicians who are heavily hyped usually lack substance. Often, the work itself is so weak, it must rely on grandiose promotion to generate interest. Thin White Rope is too real for that. They repel hype.

Though it arrived like an ethereal whisper, there is nothing vaporous about *Sack Full of Silver*. It is a solid piece of work. Nine concrete and distinct songs, on subjects ranging from dancing fast-food napkins, to a malevolent, truth-revealing whirlwind.

Kyser's voice sounds like a mad scientist's attempt to splice together the vocal cords of Bob Dylan and Motorhead's Lemmy Kilnmister. Sometimes low and haunting, like the title track; other times loud and raucous, as in "Whirling Dervish" or "Yoo Doo Right". Kyser's gravel-gargling tone brings to mind a wizened, yet spry old man, telling stories on the side of an empty road, somewhere in the heart of the Mojave Desert.

He writes seemingly ambiguous lyrics, relying on word combinations that, at first, may not seem to connect. For



Thin White Rope  
*Sack Full of Silver*

instance, in "The Triangle Song," he writes: "I am feeling just a little down/ Nothing I can wrap reasons around/ But I can ignore it if I look real hard/ And make perfect tri-

angles out of every three stars."

Strange themes continue throughout, and it is really up to the listener to decide what is happening. Every song on this album bleeds poetry. No pretensions. No silly self-consciousness. Kyser's lyrics, plus his unusual and sometimes unexpected vocal melodies, create subtle and powerful statements. They defy interpretation, demanding either acceptance or rejection.

Roger Kunkel's amazing control over guitar feedback, moves the mood from that of mourning, to fury, again to mourning, to delight, back to mourning. Actually, those emotions can be arranged into any order you choose. They exist there on the album, ready

to reflect or distort your own feelings.

Kunkel uses gentle harmonies as easily as harsh ones. He incorporates traditional Country and Western sounds, with what "grunge" was before it was "grunge". His sound is desolate. It belongs to the desert.

Perhaps that is why Thin White Rope never had the monetary success that other, less qualified bands have received. It makes its own sound, classifiable only as "Thin White Ropish." They belong to no established category. They created "desert rock", and listening to *Sack Full of Silver* is like a long trip, across a dry highway, and suddenly getting sucked up by an angry, lonesome dust devil.

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