

## Michael Chapman

"**Chapman's** expansive guitar work creates a filmic soundtrack of the American South-West that's as compelling as anything Ry Cooder might Muster" *Q Magazine*.

**Michael Chapman** is a troubadour in every sense of the word, raconteur, songwriter, astounding guitarist and a musician who just loves to play to audiences. He is unquestionably understated and downright honest. A favourite of the late John Peel, he dismisses his technical ability, saying "what I play is atmosphere" - and he is right he does play atmosphere, but atmosphere with mesmerising prowess.

Whether he is a renaissance man or not, right now **Michael Chapman** is enjoying a renaissance. With a 40th anniversary edition of his much vaunted album "**Fully Qualified Survivor**" about to be released and a coast to coast tour of the States already booked for 2011, Chapman is now being championed by Thurston Moore (Sonic Youth) - recording for his Ecstatic Peace label. With three more albums scheduled for release this year too, there is a lot going on *chez Chapman*.

**Chapman** is a highly skilled guitarist and (as has been said for the last forty years) was an early exponent of "meditative acid folk". His own summary of his career and how it all began is far more pointed:

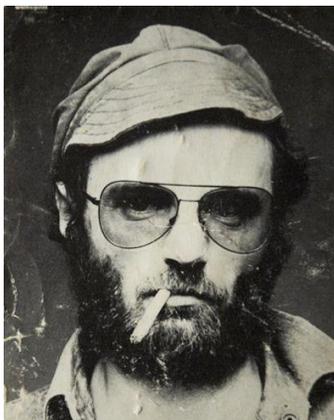
"I had an art college education and on a rainy night in 1966 I went to a pub in Cornwall, but I couldn't afford to pay to go in. So I said, I'll tell you what, I don't want to stay outside in the rain, I'll play guitar for you for half an hour. They offered me a job for the rest of the summer and I've been at it ever since."

And you find him in equally focussed mood if you ask him about "that" reputation as a folk player, "I've never called myself a folk singer. I call myself a songwriter and guitar player, but in them days folk clubs were the only place where you could play an acoustic guitar."

With a discography spanning the best part of fifty years and 30 releases (last estimate) on major labels - Harvest, Decca and more, **Chapman** is as prolific as he is difficult to pigeon-hole. His moves between acoustic and electric guitar are driven by the songs he writes or the collaborations he is involved with. Mick Ronson (pre-Bowie) appears on "**Fully Qualified Survivor**", Rick Kemp (Steeleye Span) played bass on all the Harvest material whilst "**The Man Who Hated Mornings**" showed the respect Michael commanded from fellow musicians with supporting performances from Andy Latimer (Camel), Keith Hartley and violinist Johnny Van Derek.

Whether it's the surge in interest in British folk, the exposure through collaborating with Thurston Moore or just a re-appraising of what an amazing musical talent **Michael Chapman** is, 2011 looks set to be a landmark year for him. Prosaically he offers this theory "Maybe it's just my turn again."

Whichever theory holds true, and in either recordings or in live performance, **Michael Chapman** always delivers "the sound of a real songwriter who's lived the life and all that entails" - *Q Magazine*.





A NEW ROOTS UPRISING

FIRST CUTS

# UNSUNG HEROES

## Michael Chapman

### How the Yorkshire John Fahey became acid-folk's latest unlikely pin-up...

"IT'S OFTEN BEEN said that, if I'd been born in America instead of Leeds, my career would have been tenfold," says Michael Chapman, an extraordinarily skilled guitarist and early exponent of meditative acid folk. "They said that around *Fully Qualified Survivor* in 1970, and they're still saying it now." Chapman, 70, sees himself as a blue-collar craftsman, dismissing his unquestionable technical prowess by claiming "what I play is atmosphere." Others, though, see him as a distinctive talent who stands comparison with the likes of John Fahey. Embraced by a new generation of primitive guitar fans, Chapman is set to release at least four new albums in 2011, and has lost count of how many others he's racked up (30 at a rough estimate) since his musical career began in the late '50s.

Having taught himself guitar, Chapman paid his way through art college in Leeds by playing in local jazz bands. In the summer of 1966, he quit a teaching job at Bolton Art College to become resident guitarist at The Counthouse in Botallack, near Land's End. There, his playing shifted towards a more folk-blues style. "One night someone said, 'You must be mates with Bert Jansch, you play the way he does,'" Chapman recalls. "I said: 'Who is Bert Jansch?' I was totally ignorant of the folk scene."

A recommendation to producer Gus Dudgeon led to Chapman scoring a deal with Harvest. "EMI had a load of people they didn't know what to do with, so they put them all on Harvest. A bunch of misfits, maverick troubadours like

me, Kevin Ayers, Roy Harper and Syd Barrett." In 1969, Chapman released his debut, *Rainmaker*, and followed it the next year with what became his best-known LP, *Fully Qualified Survivor*. The sessions featured a young electric guitarist, Mick Ronson, then working as a gardener in Hull; it was by way of the Chapman record that Ronson caught the ear of David Bowie.

*Fully Qualified Survivor* confirmed Chapman as a gifted acoustic guitarist equally adept at playing rag-time instrumentals, slide and raga. Gus Dudgeon describes him as "an acoustic rock 'n' roller", but he's also no mean electric guitarist. "I always just make the record to suit the songs I've written," explains Chapman. "If it's a rock 'n' roll song you get a rock 'n' roll band, if it's an acoustic song you just play acoustic guitar. *Fully Qualified Survivor* was a bit of both."

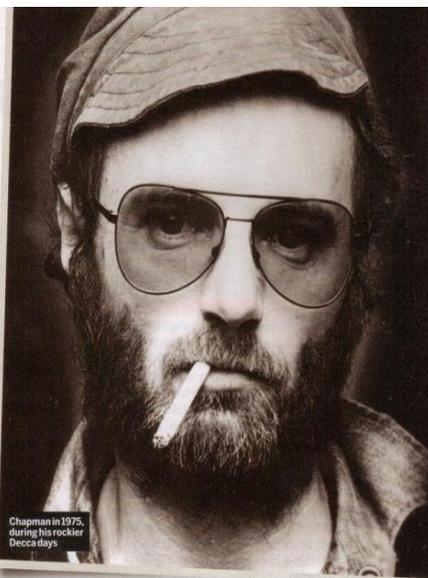
Steeleye Span founder Rick Kemp, who played bass on all of Chapman's Harvest albums (and many thereafter), witnessed first hand Chapman's refusal to be labelled. "Michael realised early he didn't want to be recognised as just

### WHY I LOVE...

Michael Chapman



"He shreds on acoustic guitar the way Kandinsky wails with a paintbrush. I knew that when I first saw him play..."  
**Thurston Moore**



Chapman in 1975, during his rockier Decca days

a folk musician," Kemp says, "even though that had a certain safety net. He's like Davy Graham, who just played whatever he felt like playing and was clever enough to make a good job of it."

Chapman made two further albums for Harvest before the deal ran out - "Nobody asked me to stay, so I went," he says bluntly - and he switched to Decca's progressive Gamma and Nova labels. After five diffuse albums, though, he felt stifled by Decca's interference and indifference and, since the '80s, has recorded exclusively for small independent labels. Chapman spent much of that decade clandestinely plugging away, mostly supporting rock bands in Europe, true to a philosophy that "if they've got the money, I've got the time".

It drew Chapman into a lifestyle that went haywire through drink and drugs, brought to book when he almost died following a heart attack in 1991. After recuperating, he discovered a musical climate more suited to his eclectic approach, particularly with relatively ambient instrumental works. These culminated in *Americana Volumes 1 & 2* (2001 and 2002), sonic recreations of

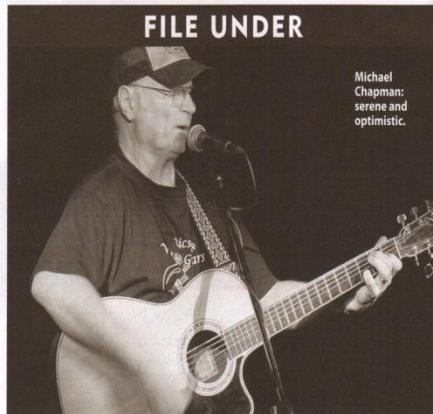
journeys across the Southern States and New Mexico.

Chapman, ever the bluff Yorkshireman, thinks the catalyst for his recent revival came after touring America with Jack Rose in 2008. "I couldn't pick up a guitar for a month after Jack died [in 2009]," he says. "I have never come across anybody as a guitar player and a friend who meant so much to me. One of Jack's last recordings, 'Woodpies On The Side Of The Road', takes the piss out of me. I'm a chainsaw freak. We'd be driving down the road; he's looking at women. I'm looking at logpiles."

Now Chapman has, as he puts it, "taken another detour, working with Thurston Moore, The No Neck Blues Band and drone bands like Pelt". Thurston Moore even asked Chapman to make a 'noise' album for his Ecstatic Peace label. The result is *The Resurrection And Revenge Of The Clayton Peacock*, two 20-minute pieces played on four different guitars. "I just went into the studio and turned things on," explains Chapman. "It starts and ends in feedback, although I was worried Thurston might find it too melodic. I never thought I'd take to abstract, loud music, but I love it." **MICK HOUGHTON**

## FILTER REISSUES EXTRA

### FILE UNDER



Michael Chapman: serene and optimistic.

## The power of six

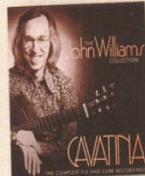
### Guitar strings, that is. Jim Irvin surveys reissues by three masters of the subtle axe.

THREE TYPES of guitar soloist: classical crossover, jazz and blues. The first is John Williams, a British, classical, Spanish-guitar player, raised on Django and Segovia, and happy to play across musical boundaries. Williams popularised the instrument during the '70s and '80s, cropping up on TV variety shows and Pebble Mill At One as soloist and, later, as a member of crossover supergroup, *Sky Cavatina: The Complete Fly And Cube Recordings* (Salvo), comprises his three pop LPs from the '70s. 1971's *Changes* included the Stanley Myers composition *Cavatina*. Seven years later, this undeniably pretty tune was a smash hit after its emotive use in *The Deer Hunter*. *Changes* also included a Chinese-flavoured, heavily orchestrated version of Joni Mitchell's *Woodstock* and a great solo reading of *The Beatles' Because*. Cue George Martin, who produced 1973's *The Height Below*, which took a left turn with Williams on electric guitar and devoted a whole side to his flatmate Brian Gascoigne's ambitious multi-genre suite, *Emperor Nero*. Third album *Travelling*, released as *Cavatina* took off, strayed into funky Bach, swingy Handel and panpipes but, nonetheless, this set shows Williams to be a warm, engaging player.

Also extremely warm and engaging: the tone generated by Wes Montgomery, the man who defined and ruled mellow jazz guitar playing until his early death at 43. *Boss Guitar* (Riverside) was one of five albums he released in 1963, when he won the Down Beat critics' poll for Best Jazz Guitarist for the fourth year in succession. It's a straightforward mix of standards (Besame Mucho) and his own feather-light compositions (*The Trick Bag*), maybe not his most groundbreaking or celebrated work (the Grammys started arriving a few years later) but still supremely easy to admire and enjoy.

We've covered singer-songwriter and Yorkshireman Michael Chapman in this column before. Alongside his sung works, Chapman has often included atmospheric instrumentals using blues and folk changes on his albums, now *Trainsong: Guitar Compositions 1967-2010* (Tomkins Square), collects 26 newly-recorded examples on two discs. He's a master of ragtime pieces that seem to be played by a lead, counterpoint and bass-player simultaneously, though it's all

Chapman alone on one guitar, recorded in a single pass. His sound is serene and optimistic and, as Charles Shaar Murray comments in his notes, he seems to have an uncanny ability to evoke large bodies of water with his playing. "If you happen to be in the mood to spend an hour or two listening to one man playing the guitar by himself," continues Murray, "then you've got the right record right here." And I'd echo that.



### HOW TO BUY... Michael Chapman



**FULLY QUALIFIED SURVIVOR**  
 HARVEST, 1970 ★★★★★  
 John Peel's favourite album of 1970; Mick Ronson's playing on "Stranger In The Room"

signposts Bowie's *Hunky Dory* sound. Engaging songs with enthralling arrangements, none better than the lengthy "Aviator".



**THE MAN WHO HATED MORNINGS**  
 DECCA, 1977 ★★★★★  
 Reunited with Mick Ronson, Chapman only used his contribution on the sombre "I'm

Sober Now". Chapman cleverly strips back Dylan's "Ballad In Plain D", while "Dogs Got More Sense" is near-classic, infectious pop.



**TRAINSONG: GUITAR COMPOSITIONS 1967-2010**  
 TOMPKINS SQUARE, 2011 ★★★★★  
 A timely resumé, although it feeds his fear that new admirers see

him only as a guitarist. Reinterpretations of instrumentals from his whole career, dating back to the spirited slide of "Thank You PK1944".

