



Bio information: **BIRDSONGS OF THE MESOZOIC**

Title: **DAWN OF THE CYCADS: THE COMPLETE ACE OF HEARTS RECORDINGS (1983-1987)** (Cuneiform Rune 274/275)

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FILE UNDER: ROCK / NEW MUSIC

"Cacophony meets classicism in a mesmerizing instrumental venture into the space age jungle. Boston-based quartet breaks new ground without breaking eardrums." – Billboard

"Even at its most dissonant and aggressive, this roiling, polyrhythmic music is informed by a wry, whimsical character rare in art rock and entirely absent from the minimalism of Glass and Reich....Birdsongs of the Mesozoic's percussive, stroboscopic strain of minimalism, with all its rocky edges intact."

– Michael Draine, *i/e*

"...if you're open-minded enough to stack Fripp, Pere Ubu, Philip Glass and John Cage in the same changes, then this disc may appeal to you."

– Don Labriola, *Buzz*

Birdsongs of the Mesozoic, "the world's hardest rocking chamber quartet" [*New York Times*], began nearly 30 years ago as a more classical/New Music, keyboard-oriented side project of Boston's famed post-punk rock band, **Mission of Burma**. Desiring an outlet for his piano music, in 1980, Burma's guitarist **Roger Miller** embarked on a collaboration with keyboardist and studio producer **Erik Lindgren**, the former composer and keyboardist of **Moving Parts**, the Boston art-punk band that had spawned Burma. As Miller recalls in liner notes, "What was I doing writing piano music again? No way to know: it just kind of fell out of me in early 1980 after having been dropped in early 1978 in favor of guitar (**Moving Parts**, then **Mission of Burma** in 1979). Perhaps the advent of the minimalists (**Riley, Eno, Reich, Glass**) encouraged me to reassess my early 1978 ideas of playing solo with prerecorded tape-loop bass lines (on a Fender Rhodes, of all things...). Erik...had offered me the use of his studio. And here were some piano pieces that could be developed. Why not? That was the start of it."

The first **Birdsongs'** recordings were two songs by the keyboard duo of Miller and Lindgren; one of these, "Pulse Piece," appeared on **A Wicked Good Time**, a sampler album of Boston bands released by **Modern Method Records**. To play a short, live set of **Birdsongs'** music for the sampler's 1981 record release party, Miller and Lindgren invited "tape-manipulator-turned-guitarist" **Martin Swope**, Miller's co-member in Burma, and keyboardist **Rick Scott** to perform. Although originally assembled only for a one-shot performance, the quartet became **Birdsong's** regular working lineup. The four skilled composer/musicians operated **Birdsongs** as a composers' collective, with each member contributing pieces and having equal say in the group's artistic direction.

In between work by the ever-busy Burma, **Birdsongs** began recording material for its first full-length album. In 1983, it signed with **Ace of Hearts**, the Boston label to which Burma was signed, and released a self-titled EP. "This debut EP finds them in complete command of a radically new musical vocabulary that's uniquely their own" noted critic Eric Lumbleau in a recent review, "Taking cues from both the modern classical canon and the systemic minimalism of Glass and Reich and welding them to a carapace of rhythm machine pound and R.I.O-ish angular astringency". In mid-1983, Miller's tinnitus led to the demise of high-decibel **Mission Of Burma**, and **Birdsongs Of The Mesozoic** became a full time band for all members. By the time of its 2nd lp, 1985's **Magnetic Flip**, *Trouser Press* noted that **Birdsong's** music had become "bolder and more aggressive. The opening of "Shiny Golden Snakes" is pure rock power chording, while the variations on Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring" pile one thundering dissonance over another and the austere keyboard repetition starting off "Ptoccata" does recall Glass." **Magnetic Flip** featured "The Rocky and Bullwinkle Theme"; the ability to intermix "high" and "low" art with elegance and ease in music that could alternately confound and please – to combine classical and rock music, serious composition and cartoon jingles, acoustic and electric instrumentation – would become a **Birdsongs** hallmark. **Birdsongs** supported its 2nd release with extensive touring, playing in countless rock clubs. A year later it released its 3rd EP on **Ace of Hearts**, **Beat Of The Mesozoic**, and again set out on tour.

Roger Miller left the **Birdsongs** in 1988 on very friendly terms, feeling that he had personally exhausted his own ideas for the band and urging **Birdsongs** to continue on without him. That same year, in an effort to carry the music of **Birdsongs** and Burma into the emerging digital age, the **Rykodisc** label utilized then-new CD technology and reissued selected tracks from the **Ace of Hearts** recordings onto a CD for each band; **Birdsongs'** CD reissue was called **Sonic Geology**. 20 years after Miller's departure, the **Birdsongs** band continues to thrive, prolifically creating new material and releasing 10 additional albums to date. The band has collaborated with Miller for several special projects, including inviting him to play as a special guest at **Birdsong's** 20th Anniversary concert at MA's Somerville Theatre. In 1993, **Birdsongs'** then-current lineup worked with Miller to assemble **A Fossil Record**, a Cuneiform-released compilation of early **Birdsongs** material that included both previously unreleased and reissued material – including the first two songs recorded by Miller and Lindgren.

Since 1989, when **Birdsongs of the Mesozoic** signed to DC-based Cuneiform Records to release its 4th recording, **Faultline** (released simultaneously on CD, lp and cassette!) the band has released 7 albums on the label (and 3 on others), and earned well-deserved, international recognition for its innovative, genre-blending and bending sound. Over a career now approaching 30 years, **Birdsongs'** unlikely mix of rock, punk, classical, minimalism, and free-form sonics has appealed to a broad range of musical tastes; while first played in rock dives, **Birdsongs'** highly-distinctive sound now rocks and revitalizes the classical stage, performing in concert halls (**The Kennedy Center, the Disney Institute**) and art museums (**Salvador Dali Museum**).

Reminiscing about the band's early days, Miller states that:

"If I had to say what I thought was most unique about the band, it was that we actually played rock clubs and basically pulled off this rather unorthodox thing (we opened for Siouxsie and The Banshees at The Orpheum, Echo and The Bunnymen at The Channel, The Fall at The Rat, Einsturzende Neubauten at The Channel, and played with Throwing Muses, They Might Be Giants, Volcano Suns, etc.). Well sure, we pissed off some rockers ("Just look at 'em up there, shuffling their papers!"), but that wasn't really our concern. If this odd quartet wasn't about as different ~~as some records get~~ ~~and still play these~~ venues, well at least we put up a pretty good fight."

Rick Scott comments:

"We were always the square peg in a world of round holes. Our instruments weren't bass, guitar, and drums, but guitar, three keyboards, and drum machine (with turntable, water can, washboard, and clarinet thrown in for good measure!). We played in rock clubs, but read from sheet music. We shared the stage with three-chord rockers, but played music from Brian Eno and Igor Stravinsky, and covered the theme from "Rocky and Bullwinkle." It boggles the mind how we got away with it."

Dawn of the Cycads, Birdsongs of the Mesozoic's new, double-CD released on Cuneiform, is the band's 13th release. Subtitled *The Complete Ace of Hearts Recordings (1983-1987)*, it is the first-ever comprehensive reissue of all 3 of the band's recordings for Ace of Hearts, reissued in their entirety and in their original order. In addition to the Ace of Hearts music, *Dawn of the Cycads* also includes more than 45' of previously unreleased bonus material (on two studio and seven live tracks). In addition, the release contains an 18 page booklet providing a history of the band's Ace of Hearts years, in liner notes written by band members Erik Lindgren, Roger Miller and Rick Scott (Lindgren and Scott remain in Birdsong's lineup today) and former roadie (now Andy Warhol Museum board member) **Jay Reeg**, and numerous historical photographs and art works. Produced by Ace of Hearts' owner, **Richard W. Harte**, Disc 2 includes a plethora of Birdsongs archival material in the form of posters, sheet music, dioramas, "Misinformation" sheets, setlists and much more, which are viewable on any computer! *Dawn of the Cycads: The Complete Ace of Hearts Recordings (1983-1987)* is a lovingly assembled and beautifully-designed retrospective of an extremely exciting, 4-year period in Birdsongs of the Mesozoic's early career.

for more information on Birdsongs of the Mesozoic, please see:

www.birdsongsofthemesozoic.org - www.myspace.com/birdsongsofthemesozoic

BIO INFORMATION FOR BAND MEMBERS ON *DAWN OF THE CYCADS* [all bio info supplied by the band and various online sources.]

ERIK LINDGREN [www.sfzrecordings.com - www.myspace.com/frankensteinconsort]

Erik Lindgren has been prolific for 30 years as a composer with a catalog of over 5 dozen contemporary classical works. Along with Rick Scott, Lindgren is a charter member of Birdsongs of the Mesozoic, which formed in 1980 with Roger Miller and Martin Swope. He also runs Arf! Arf!, an archival label with over six-dozen CD releases dedicated to the preservation of '60s Garage/Psychedelic Rock and Outsider Music. Arf! Arf! has also issued 4 CD retrospectives of his 1970-'80's studio moniker The Space Negros. In 1977, he formed the Moving Parts with Roger Miller and Clint Conley, which evolved into Mission of Burma and Birdsongs of the Mesozoic and released one posthumous CD in 1993 "Wrong Conclusion" (Arf Arf AA-039).

Since 1979, Lindgren has run Sounds Interesting, a state-of-the-art 24-track digital studio and commercial music production company. Credits include scores for all three networks, PBS, Polaroid, Boston Globe, Prentice Hall, and Eastpak. He is also a founding member of the Frankenstein Consort, a classical crossover quartet that includes flute, clarinet, bassoon, piano, and percussion and has released "Classical a-go-go" in 2007 (SFZ-004).

ROGER MILLER [www.funworldmusic.com - www.myspace.com/rogercmiller]

Roger Miller is an American singer, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist best known for co-founding the groups Mission of Burma and Birdsongs of the Mesozoic. His main instruments are guitar and piano. Critics describe Miller's guitar playing as balancing rock energy with cerebral experimentation, while his keyboard work has earned comparisons to "Béla Bartók and even Cecil Taylor."

Miller was raised Ann Arbor, MI. Inspired by Jimi Hendrix and Detroit-area bands like the Stooges and the MC5, Miller formed several garage bands in his teens. With brothers Benjamin and Laurence B., he formed an ongoing collaboration, M3, and Sproton Layer (documented on the 1992 CD *With Magnetic Fields Disrupted*). Miller played bass guitar and was the primary singer and songwriter.

Attending CalArts in 1976, majoring in composition, Miller also studied piano and French Horn, and studied music by 20th century experimental composers like John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen. He would eventually drop out of college in favor of punk rock.

Relocating to Boston, MA, Miller was a member of the short-lived Moving Parts before co-founding Mission of Burma in 1979. The group was popular in and around Boston, but was unable to expand their audience. Miller played guitar and sang, and slightly edged out bassist/singer Clint Conley as the more productive songwriter. It was also Miller's idea to invite Martin Swope to join the group and add tape loop effects, giving the group an unusual, experimental sound.

Mission of Burma disbanded in 1983 due in large part to Miller's worsening tinnitus, attributed in large part to their notoriously loud live performances. In subsequent years, Mission of Burma's small body of recordings grew to be regarded as important and influential. During the Burma years, Miller worked as a freelance piano tuner.

After Burma broke up, Miller turned his attention to playing piano in the more experimental, instrumental group Birdsongs Of The Mesozoic, which he left in 1988. Subsequently, Miller has had several collaborations, solo efforts and film scores; many of these post-Burma albums were released by SST Records: Alloy Orchestra, a trio w/ Miller on keyboards that composes scores for silent films; Exquisite Corpse, an instrumental group w/ Miller on guitar, piano & sampler; Binary System, an instrumental piano/drums duo with Larry Dersch; Hooker/Miller/Ranaldo, a free improv trio with William Hooker, Lee Ranaldo & Miller on bass.; M3, an ongoing musical collaboration with the Miller brothers; Maximum Electric Piano (solo prepared piano with loops); No Man (rock-oriented project with Russell Smith on bass and Ken Winokur or Malcolm Travis on drums); and Elemental Guitar (solo prepared guitar with loops).

RICK SCOTT

Rick Scott is an American musician, a founding member of Birdsongs (keyboards) and still a man of few words. He hails from Detroit and collaborated with Roger Miller in the '70s in the band Red Ants.

MARTIN SWOPE

Martin Swope is an American musician and a founding member of Birdsongs (guitar). He was raised in Ann Arbor, MI. Along with Roger Miller, was a member of Mission of Burma as the band's tape loop specialist and sound engineer. He currently lives in Hawaii.