



## **Discussions -- Jay Dunner**

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**QUOTE OF NOTE:** “I was wondering if I should try to be me. It was much easier to be somebody else. That worked better.” (David Bowie)

### **WHEN THE DAY IS DONE: The Orchestrations of Robert Kirby** (Ace-UK)

Not every musician develops his or her own style alone. Many collaborate so closely with an arranger or producer that the ensuing sound also becomes part of the collaborator's catalog. Tony LiPuma gave an added sophistication to Diana Krall's transparent jazz piano and cocktail vocals. Nelson Riddle's urbane strings sweetened decades of vocalists, including Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Nat “King” Cole, and, more recently, Linda Ronstadt, on her trio of albums of standards. Claus Ogerman's lush colorations brought Antonio Carlos Jobim to the masses. And Creed Taylor, founder of the CTI jazz label, with its gatefold LP covers, and emphasis on simpler melodies, practically defined the pre-smooth-jazz era, with the likes of Bob James, Hubert Laws, Deodato, George Benson, and Astrud Gilberto.

Robert Kirby is credited with the subtle orchestrations that graced Nick Drake's melancholy British folk with its enticing, haunting air. Indeed, it's a safe bet that, without Kirby's pastoral touch, Drake's *Five Leaves Left* and *Bryter Layter* would not have grown from their initial commercial failures to the world-wide recognition (and imitation) they possess today. However, as this illuminating Ace-UK set shows, Kirby's trademark tracings transformed many other artists as well. Audience's “Raviolé” is spiced with saucy chamber strings goosing the guitar lines. Ian Matthews' “Gimme an Inch, Girl” rides on pianissimo pads that landscape the longing. Kirby paints Shelagh McDonald's “Ophelia's Song” in peaceful shades. Vashti Bunyan's feathery voice is decorated only with delicately draped spiderwebs of piccolos and recorders in “Rainbow River.” Spriguns' “White Witch” may suggest Bread's “Make It with You” in its melody, but the seductive dance done by Kirby's woodwinds and strings around Mandy Morton's vocals is subtle perfection. And on it goes: the magic of Kirby's colors is how they remained in the background of each artist's arrangements, yet were essential to the artists' respective sonic portraits. Kirby, whose mastery laced through 40 years of British folk and progressive rock, is another unsung hero. This collection begins to set that right. \*\*\*\*\*

### **JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR: LIVE IN CONCERT: Original Soundtrack of the NBC Television Event** (Sony)

This production of Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber's Passion play was presented on live television on Easter Sunday, 2018. Featuring John Legend as Jesus, Sarah Bareilles as Mary Magdalene, Brandon Victor Dixon as Judas, and an expectedly campy Alice Cooper as Herod, the story was given a post-industrial setting in décor and costume. Even with this punky modernization, the power and glory of Rice and Webber's messages came through again and again. That said, Legend's Jesus seems a little weak when compared to Deep Purple's Ian Gillan's portrayal in the original 1970 recording; Gillan brought more fire and brimstone. However, Legend does redeem himself in “Gethsemane (I Only Want to Say),” his finest, agonized moment in the play. Bareilles brings the balm, while sorting through her feelings for Christ. Dixon's Judas is this remake's standout role; his stern and scared admonitions to his savior are gripping and terrifyingly real in his portrayal of Judas Iscariot's inner conflicts over what his history would be. The one flaw in this recording is the arena-sized audience's applause after nearly every scene, as it interrupts both the flow of the story line and the listener's immersion *in* the presentation. Had that been edited out, this live soundtrack would have been yet another excellent interpretation of this classic. Of course, nothing beat the original 1970 Broadway production with rock band, orchestra, choir, and holy-moly emotion. But this NBC set comes very close. \*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\* *Outstanding.* \*\*\*\* *Excellent.* \*\*\* *Good.* \*\* *Fair.* \* *Ecch!*

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