Tales from the Crumhorn Crusade

*A Sonic Tonic*, Gryphon Live (Talking Elephant Records)

*Bold Reynold Too*, David Carroll and Friends (Taking Elephant Records)

Transatlantic announced the arrival of the first Gryphon album in 1973 with adverts asking readers to 'Imagine a rock band at the Court of King Henry VIII' and the band playing music entirely appropriate to that concept: medieval jigs and suchlike reinvented and rearranged with a backbeat for the 20th Century. Over the next few years the band would move towards longer instrumental compositions, including the sidelong 'Midnight Mushrumps' (from the album of the same name) for a theatre production, and then back to songs, before – after a tour supporting Yes – going full progrock with *Treason*. Now I liked and still like progrock but at the time *Treason* didn't sit well with fans or what was happening in music back in 1977 and the band called it a day.

Jump to 2007 and the band reformed, as bands are wont to do. They have recorded two new studio albums (I reviewed *Reinvention* [here](https://internationaltimes.it/formaction%3Dhttps%3A/www.paypal.com/cgi-bin/webscrmethod%3Dposttarget%3D_topinputtype%3Dhiddenname%3Dcmdvalue%3D_s-xclickinputtype%3Dhiddenname%3Dhosted_button_idvalue%3DLZTE6B2F33K94tabletrtdinputtype%3Dhiddenname%3Don0value%3DPaymentoptions.Paymentoptions./td/trtrtdselectname%3Dos0optionvalue%3DUKSubscriptionUKSubscription%3A%C2%A33.50GBP-monthly/optionoptionvalue%3DUKSolidaritySubscriptionUKSolidaritySubscription%3A%C2%A38.50GBP-monthly/optionoptionvalue%3DRestOfWorldSubscriptionRestOfWorldSubscription%3A%C2%A38.50GBP-monthly/optionoptionvalue%3DRestOfWorldSolidaritySubscriptionRestOfWorldSolidaritySubscription%3A%C2%A313.50GBP-monthly/option/select/td/tr/tableinputtype%3Dhiddenname%3Dcurrency_codevalue%3DGBPinputtype%3Dimagesrc%3Dhttps%3A/www.paypalobjects.com/en_US/GB/i/btn/btn_subscribeCC_LG.gifborder%3D0name%3Dsubmitalt%3DPayPal%E2%80%93Thesafer%2Ceasierwaytopayonline.imgalt%3Dborder%3D0src%3Dhttps%3A/www.paypalobjects.com/en_GB/i/scr/pixel.gifwidth%3D1height%3D1/form/reinvention/)), gathered up and reissued their Transatlantic recordings as box set along with an anthology from that period, and played a few gigs. And now we finally get a live double album from specialist folk rock, folk and rock label [Talking Elephant](https://www.talkingelephant.co.uk/). It's well overdue and very wonderful.

Recorded back in 2023, the album features a six-piece line-up containing three original members. Half the band play a wide range of instruments, which means the texture of the music is always changing, although the band mostly stick to tracks from their first album (often traditional songs rearranged) and similar-sounding work, including their last two albums. The exception is 'The Red Queen Muddle', a medley of themes from *Red Queen to Gryphon Three*, a loosely themed folk-prog concept album based upon chess moves. I confess that it's one of my favourites here!

But that's not to belittle the rest. The album starts with a stonking version of 'Kemp's Jig' before we get the story of fortune-telling, lust and blackmail that is 'The Astrologer' and then a newer instrumental, 'Dumbe Dum Chit' from *Reinvention*, the reformed band's first album. The lyrical instrumental 'A Bit of Music by Me' follows and then 'The Brief History of a Bassoon', narrated by the tree it was made from! (It also has a branch made into a crumhorn.)

And so it goes on, seamlessly moving from robust renaissance (or renaissance-sounding) stomps to gentler instrumentals via rearranged and new songs. On the second CD the band spread out a bit, with longer songs that include settings of poems by Christina Rosetti and Lewis Carroll and aforementioned 'Red Queen Muddle'. These are punctuated by briefer tracks, including what is described as a tip of the hat to the Bonzos, who started using crumhorns in their act after seeing Gryphon, a gentle jazzy number, and a superb version of 'The Unquiet Grave'. The album closes with the appropriately named 'Parting Shot', a heartfelt love song, and then returns to the eponymous first album for 'Estampie' which, as the title indicates, is full on medieval dance music, an endlessly repeatable set of musical phrases which can and do endure all sorts of variation and mutation.

The three original Gryphon chaps are also in the big ensemble that David Carroll has gathered up to play on his second album, *Bold Reynold Too*. The musicians also include a couple of Fairport Convention alumni (including the very wonderful Dave Pegg) and the banjo player from The Men They Couldn't Hang.

This octet, along with backing singers and a special guest cornet player, offer up ten tracks + 2 bonus tracks (why are they a bonus?) which are mostly versions of traditional songs, including a wonderful version of 'Sheath and Knife' (Child Ballad no 16). Here, electric guitar, crumhorn and violin all feature and Carroll's vocals are more laid back and suited to his range. I'm afraid elsewhere this isn't always the case, some tracks feel a little awkward in the vocals department.

Although the blurb for the original Bold Reynold album says it is 'putting the rock back into folk rock' for the most part, this is firmly in the folk department. 'Sheath and Knife' definitely rocks, in a very 1970s way, and the closing vocal quintet take of 'Adieu, Sweet Lovely Nancy' is haunting and quite lovely, but in the main this is definitely what I would call a folk album. Cleverly and intricately arranged, wide-ranging and varied, but in the main not really to my taste. You, of course, might love it!

Rupert Loydell

(770 words)