

**SING-ALONG TO "PART OF THE UNION" FROM PROG-FOLK-ROCK LEGENDS
THE STRAWBS ON NEW "BEST OF" COLLECTION**

Once upon a time in the '70s, British folk music melded with British rock. From Jethro Tull, Renaissance and Genesis to Fairport Convention and the Strawbs--perhaps the most adventurous of them all--U.K. bands brought their roots to rock.

The Best Of Strawbs edition of 20th Century Masters/The Millennium Collection (A&M/UME), released February 25, 2003, pays tribute to a prog-folk-rock outfit exemplified by once playing an electric dulcimer through a fuzzbox. Featuring 10 selections digitally remastered from the original master tapes, The Best Of Strawbs spans four of their nine A&M albums and includes their best-known recordings, "Part Of The Union" and "Lay Down."

In 1968, the Strawbs became A&M Records' first U.K. signing. But it was not until their fifth album, 1972's Grave New World, that the band, which earlier included the likes of Sandy Denny and Rick Wakeman, broke through in the U.S. With singer-guitarists Dave Cousins and Tony Hooper, keyboardist Blue Weaver, bassist John Ford and drummer Richard Hudson, Grave New World, produced by Bowie/T. Rex collaborator Tony Visconti, became their first U.S. charter and narrowly missed the British Top 10. The Best Of Strawbs culls the album's "Benedictus," the track with the aforementioned unique instrumentation.

1973's Bursting At The Seams, the Strawbs' first self-produced effort, saw the group move into more overtly rocking territory as co-founder Hooper was replaced by the more aggressive Dave Lambert. "Lay Down" became their first U.K. hit, peaking at #12. The rousing sing-along "Part Of The Union" was embraced by unions but was vilified by the Conservative

Party, which assembled Parliament to vote for banning the song. In spite of, or because of, the controversy, the song rose to #2.

After Hudson, Ford and Weaver exited, they were replaced by Rod Coombes, Chas Cronk and John Hawken, respectively, for 1974's Hero And Heroine. Charting in America for more than four months, the album included the gothic-epic title track, moody eight-and-a-half minute suite "Autumn" and infectious, lyrically provocative rocker "Round And Round." The upward Stateside momentum continued with 1975's Ghosts, with its catchy "Lemon Pie," haunting title track, multi-hued "Starshine/Angel Wine" and soaring "Grace Darling." The Nomadness album followed the next year but it was the last of the Strawbs' A&M LPs.

Other albums, a dissolution and a reunion have since ensued. Most recently, Cousins, Lambert and latter-day guitarist Brian Willoughby have also been touring the U.K. with band offshoot the Acoustic Strawbs, truly returning to their folk roots.

The series **20th Century Masters/The Millennium Collection** features new "best of" albums from the most significant music artists of the past century.

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