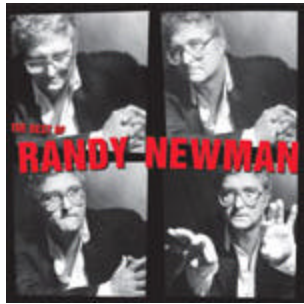


# PANTS

## A Randy Newman Newsletter and Journal - Number 5

**"I'm gonna take off my pants!" - RN**

Welcome to my PANTS! The only Randy Newman Newsletter I know of.  
Issue Number 5. September 2001. Seattle, Washington, USA.  
Written, edited, blah blah blah, by Gary Norris (norrisc@cojk.com) ©All rights  
ridiculous.



### **Randy Newman - *The Best Of Randy Newman (Warner Archives)***

I am not going to say too much about this CD, except it is a long-time overdue, I like the selection of songs, and I hope people buy it, especially the people who did not buy the box set.  
This issue is about the release of *Little Criminals* on DVD.

September 18, 2001 - Well, once again I am caught with my pants down, so I decided to RUSH out this issue in celebration of Randy's new CD released today!  
I guess I really don't need to worry about each issue being full of surprises and brimming with information. Hell, it's free! Also, he's playing a couple of shows this week and next week (that's it for this year):

### **9/21/01 Villa Montalvo Garden Theater, Saratoga, California**

**Randy Newman - From "Sail Away" to "Short People," award-winning songs for popular films "Toy Story" and "A Bug's Life."**

**Sept. 21, 2001, 8:00pm GT**

**\$32/38/46/56**

### **9/28/01 Mann Music Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

**Friday, September 28 at 8:00 P.M.**

## **Randy Newman**

### **With The Mann Festival Orchestra**

**This quirky contemporary composer, songwriter, and singer has created scores for countless popular films – *Pleasantville*, *A Bug's Life*, *Toy Story*, *Parenthood*, and more. In addition to his own, often devilishly clever hits, Randy Newman's credits include hits recorded by a host of other performers, such as Peter Gabriel, Judy Collins, and James Taylor. Join us for an entertaining session with this prodigious artist.**

**Tickets: \$48, \$38 and \$20. Single tickets on sale May 1.**

So, you can't say I didn't tell ya. Late, I know. Perhaps I will get a review of these shows from the Little Criminals at randynewman.com to publish here next issue.

- I grew up in Saratoga, went to High School there. I spent a lot of time at Montalvo, before it became the dog & pony show it appears to be now. The middle-class white folks of Saratoga did their darndest to keep the Mexicans and Hippies out of Montalvo in the late 60's, early 70's, but it is/was a public park and they had an uphill climb. It's a beautiful estate. Someone used to call it home. A girl friend of mine was murdered there sometime around 1972. Cathy. She was real sweet, and it was a big deal for something like that to happen in a place like Saratoga. I wish I could be there for the show. It would bring back some memories. The movie theatre where I first heard Randy's music in *Cold Turkey* was not more than a mile from Montalvo. It's always about me, isn't it.

- Randy has played the Mann Music Center before, on August 16, 1984, and maybe even some other time. But this time he has an orchestra behind him, or in front of him, or by his side. Don't miss seeing him with an orchestra! It's very cool.

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DVD's - Randy Newman Live... & Randy Newman - Little Criminals (DVD-Audio) (Warner Archives)

LP - Little Criminals

SONG - "Little Criminals"

DVD follow-up- Randy Newman Live - Rhino

The DVD of the Odeon show got delayed somehow, but it looks like it is coming out before Christmas. So you can buy it for your friends who own DVD players.

DVD - *Little Criminals*

I was hurt that I was not asked to contribute some ideas for this DVD from Rhino and WB that will hopefully be released December 18. I did however recently suggest to Randy's manager, Cathy Kerr, that they should try hard to find "Hard Hat Blues" which was to have led the LP off as lead cut back in 1977. Gregg Geller made a valiant effort to locate this tune in the WB vaults, but could not find the vocal tracks. More about this song some other day...

Anyway, I am happy to see this DVD title. I am unclear just what DVD will do for us, but I do know that the Randy-movies on DVD (*The Natural*, *Bug's Life*, *Pleasantville*, etc.) sure sound good to me! And I don't know at this time what kind of extra material will be included on the DVD version, perhaps his video for "Short People" or the strange "Baltimore" film/video thing. I understand that *Sail Away* is also in the works for DVD, which is just fine with me, as it is still my favorite album, however disjointed it may be.

LP - *Little Criminals*

Let's take a look at *Little Criminals*, the album.

## Little Criminals

BSK 3079 Warner Bros. Records 1977 - Released 9/23/77

Side 1

Short People (2:54)

Guitars - Waddy Wachtel

Bass - Klaus Voorman

Drums - Jim Keltner

Congas - Milt Holland

Background vocals - Glen Frey, J.D. Souther, Tim Schmit

You Can't Fool The Fat Man (2:44)

Bass - Willie Weeks

Drums - Andy Newmark

Congas - Milt Holland

Little Criminals (3:04)

Guitars - Joe Walsh, Glen Frey

Slide solo - Joe Walsh

Bass - Willie Weeks

Drums - Rick Marotta, Andy Newmark

Percussion - Milt Holland

Texas Girl At The Funeral Of Her Father (2:40)

Piano - Ralph Grierson

Jolly Coppers On Parade (3:46)

Guitar - Waddy Wachtel

Bass - Klaus Voorman

Drums and temple blocks - Jim Keltner

Congas - Milt Holland

In Germany Before The War (3:39)

(Total 18:47)

Side 2

Sigmund Freud's Impersonation of Albert Einstein in America (3:02)

Bass - Willie Weeks

Drums - Jim Keltner

Baltimore (4:02)

Guitars - Glen Frey

Bass - Willie Weeks

Drums - Rick Marotta, Andy Newmark

Percussion - Milt Holland

Background vocals - Glen Frey, J.D. Souther

I'll Be Home (2:40) January Music Corp./A. Schroeder Int. Ltd/BMI

Guitar - Waddy Wachtel

Bass - Klaus Voorman

Drums - Jim Keltner

Rider In The Rain (3:54)

Guitars - Waddy Wachtel

Bass - Willie Weeks

Drums - Rick Marotta

Background vocals - Don Henley, Glen Frey, J.D. Souther

Kathleen (Catholicism Made Easier) (3:35)

Guitars - Joe Walsh

Mandolin - Ry Cooder

Bass - Willie Weeks

Drums - Rick Marotta

Old Man On The Farm (2:14)

[Piano on last verse - Ralph Grierson]

(Total 19:27)

All songs Hightree Music/BMI except where noted

Keyboards - Randy Newman (except where noted)

Synthesizers programmed by Mike Boddicker

Songs written, arranged, and conducted by Randy Newman

Produced by Lenny Waronker and Russ Titelman

Engineered by Lee Herschberg and Loyd Clifft

Remix engineer - Lee Herschberg

Recorded at Warner Bros. Recording Studios, July, August, September 1977

Remixed and mastered at Warner Bros. Recording Studios, North Hollywood

Cover photograph - Bob Seidemann

Cover design - Mike Salisbury

Production assistants - Sue Bridgman and Noel Newbolt

Special thanks to Glen Frey for his help

Glen Frey, Joe Walsh, J.D. Souther, and Don Henley appear courtesy of Asylum Records

Jim Keltner appears courtesy of Dark Horse Records

I have so many copies of this album it's embarrassing: The LP itself, the test pressing of the LP, a "Promo copy" with a little pink sticker on it, the 8-track, the cassette, pressings of the LP from England, Canada, Germany, France, Japan, Holland, and the German Limited Edition 180g copy, and the Nimbus Supercut edition from England. Not to mention a few CD versions like the recent reissue from Japan with the song order all changed around.

It was the first Randy LP not released on reel-to-reel, and never released in Quad (big deal you say). and below are some singles born from the LP (this is redundant I know):

1977 - WBS 8492 - **Short People/Old Man On The Farm**

WBS 8492 - [Promo copy] Short People/Short People

K 17.034 (English) - Short People/ Old Man On The Farm (PS)

WB-17.034 (Dutch) - Short People/Old Man On The Farm (PS)

45-1666 (Spanish) - Short People/Old Man On The Farm (PS)

W 17.056 (English/Italian) - **Short People/Little Criminals** (PS)

1978 - WBS 8550 (promo) - Baltimore (stereo edit)/Baltimore (mono edit)

WBS 8550 (promo) - Baltimore (3:35 edit/mono)/Jolly Coppers On Parade(stereo)

WBS 8550 - **Baltimore/You Can't Fool The Fat Man**

WBS 8630 (promo) - Rider in the Rain (mono)/Sigmund Freud's Impersonation...(stereo)

WBS 8630 (promo) - Rider in the Rain (stereo)/Rider in the Rain (mono)

WB 17 069 (German) - **Short People/Rider In The Rain** (PS)

WB 17.103 (Dutch) - **Rider in the Rain/Kathleen (Catholicism Made Easier)** (PS)

GWB 0356 - **Short People/Baltimore** (re-issue single)

K17205 (England) - **Rider in The Rain/Little Criminals**

Needless to say, it was Randy's BIG SELLER. It's hard to say, in fact it's pointless to say (but I like saying pointless things) what would have happened to this excellent album if the "Short People" thing has not happened.

Randy on *Little Criminals*:

"But I don't really care all that much what happens... because I'm happy with it. I'm really proud of it, because I'd never made such a concentrated effort before on an album.. You know, though, I've been thinking about what might happen if 'Short People' really did get big...if a song turns into a hit single, you end up selling a tremendous amount of albums; but a lot of people that buy your album are buying it for one song - one song out of maybe 100 you've written. It's a freak situation" - Randy to Lynn Van Matre at the Chicago Tribune, October 30, 1977.

It's a shame to see how many used copies of this LP showed up for years and years in the used record bins across the US alone, after the "Short People" thing subsided. I shudder to think of the many people who dumped this album along with their copies of *Frampton Comes Alive* and old mid-period Linda Ronstadt albums at the Goodwill drop-off stations. Damn. It's like they never got past "Short People". Sometimes I think they should have started the album off with "Little Criminals". [You will never *truly* understand the music business if you have never worked in a used-record store. It's where the *truth* is delivered: Yeah, a lot of people bought your album, but how many of them still *own* it...]

The lyrics on the back of the album don't follow the track line-up, and are listed alphabetically, which for some reason has always annoyed me. Must be my anal proclivities. The later US editions of the LP changed the order of the lyrics to reflect the actual song order on the LP, but all subsequent vinyl editions from Europe and England, and elsewhere, maintained the alphabetical order system.

There were (lousy) t-shirts made, and buttons, posters (including one of those huge [4'x4'] square Styrofoam and/or paper replications of the cover that WB used to make to promote albums - I just saw someone pay \$46.00 for one on eBay this week!) and a cardboard standup for record stores to display on their countertops! Bill Graham productions had hundreds of little buttons made up for his Berkeley show in November, 1977, saying, "Short People Power". A huge Foster and Kleiser billboard graced Sunset Blvd as well. Cool. I hate billboards. The album was released on September 27, 1977, and by October 27, there was a 30-city campaign launched by the sales force at WB, as they pushed the likes of Leo Sayer, Debbie Boone and Randy to the masses. I think as many as 700,000+ copies of the LP shipped, which does not reflect returns and such, but Randy was selling records for sure.

He toured all over America and Europe to promote this album, playing around 105+ shows between August 23, 1977, and August 23, 1978! Busy guy. You could say *Little Criminals* changed his life.

In May of 1977, Randy rented an office in West Los Angeles with a piano in it, and drove to work each day and began writing songs for the album through June. Initial piano/vocal demos were recorded at the Amigo/Warner Bros. Records Recording Studios at 11114 Cumpston Ave., in North Hollywood, California, on June 8, 1977, which included "Going Home (1918)", which is on the box set. Randy recorded a new version of the same song as "Going Home" for his *Bad Love* album. Two demo versions of "Texas Girl At The Funeral of Her Father" were recorded, one with a few extra lyrics at the end. He had written both, "Sigmund" and the instrumental, "Ragtime" by this time, for the film, as well as his 1968 tune, "I'll Be Home". He has since described "Sigmund" as an exercize to prepare him for the *Ragtime* film, which was in the hands of Robert Altman at the time.

Basic tracks were recorded with scratch (temporary) vocals by July 13, 1977, and the album was mastered in early September, for release on the 23rd (or was it early October?). It had been roughly three years since the release of *Good Old Boys*.

But what a great record! Some of my own thoughts and some Randy quotes on the songs:

#### Short People

Well, what more can be said about this song that has not already been said. A great parody of bigotry. If Randy has a tombstone, it'll be mentioned there (no).

#### You Can't Fool The Fat Man

The first appearance of "two-bit" on the LP.

#### Little Criminals

One of my favorites on the album. I think maybe they should have rocked it a little bit more. I am so surprised no one has ever covered this song commercially (to my knowledge).

"It's about a junkie who wants to go with these guys on a robbery and they don't want him to go. Kids who are going to rob a gas station generally try not to have a junkie along. It's a point of honor - no junkies" - Randy to Richard Cromelin, WB, 1977. The second appearance of "two-bit" on the LP.

#### Texas Girl At The Funeral of Her Father

Simply one of his finest moments.

Randy to *Rolling Stone* in 1977: "You wouldn't know what 'Texas Girl' was about without the title...I wanted to write a song about being a sailor, with dust all around. There was a longer version of it. Linda Ronstadt and the Eagles heard it, and they all liked the shorter one, but I still have my doubts...It will probably get me more ass in Texas... Now why did I say that? I write a nice song and then come out with a terrible line about it. That song could mean something to someone who's father died. Why do I do that?"

#### Jolly Coppers On Parade

I envision the Rose Parade in Los Angeles in all her finery. Maybe Randy was thinking of a parade in New Orleans.

Randy said to Steve Clarke in the *New Musical Express*, London, in 1977, "There's one about a police parade called 'Jolly Coppers On Parade' which isn't an absolutely anti-police song. Maybe it's even a fascist song. I didn't notice at the time".

#### In Germany Before The War

"The one about the Dusseldorf child murderer is maybe the best thing I've ever done on record... I don't know whether people will like it. It's kinda scary." - *New Musical Express*, 1977. Randy based this song in part on a trip to Dusseldorf, with his first wife Roswitha who is from there, and the classic Peter Lorre film "M" which was based on the real murder of a child.

#### Sigmund Freud's Impersonation of Albert Einstein in America

Randy to Brian Case at *New Musical Express* in 1978: "...I was making fun of Freud, you know, in some way. I've heard Freud criticized that he was a product of the Vienna of the late 19th Century, which was a very strange place where there were gypsies... An American has never seen a gypsy in his life. My wife once told me she had a dream about Gypsies coming after her. She's German. I was

just making a little joke there, just to myself. I was thinking that Freud was off-base about part of that dream. American's don't dream about gypsies or gypsy knives - African appendages maybe, and maybe baseball. It's an odd song. One I like though."

Truly one of Randy's funniest songs! Knowing his love for History, it makes the song all the more endearing. This song generally gets a bigger laugh than "Political Science".

### Baltimore

To Steve Clarke: "I wrote a song about Baltimore and I remembered later that I saw this great picture in the *National Geographic*. And that was it. And I also saw it once from a train".

The people of Baltimore had a lot of problems with this song. I remember meeting a DJ on vacation in Greece, and he mentioned he was from Baltimore. I told him I had never been there, and my impression of the song was based on Randy's song. He said he did not like the song, or Randy Newman for writing it. I guess you don't have to just be short to not like Randy Newman. I thought at the time that it was too bad his entire knowledge of, and his feelings towards Randy are based entirely on that one song. He hated "Short People" too.

Randy said later that it could have been about any city.

### Randy Newman Is All Wet - by Hyman Pressman, 1978

There is no need for us to fret  
For we all know that Randy is all wet  
He doesn't seem to know the score  
When he downgrades our Baltimore

We caught old Randy with the goods  
He hasn't seen our neighborhoods  
We speak of love but he can't hear it  
He knows not our great city's spirit

He cannot feel. He's made of leather  
He wonders why we work together  
He slides down banisters every day  
And all the splinters point his way

We have a City that is bloomin'  
But Randy Newman isn't human

### I'll Be Home

At the time, I was shocked that this song was on the LP. Randy was not fond of it. He wrote it at the request for a song from Paul McCartney for Mary Hopkins, and she never recorded it. It's on his live album, and I kinda thought that was that. But I guess they needed another song, and the song did need an arrangement at some point. It is a very beautiful, sentimental song. At the time, it was my favorite Randy tune.

### Rider In The Rain

Until he wrote, "I'm Dead (But I Don't Know It)" this song was Randy's standard sing-along tune for hundreds of his live shows. It's a wonderful send-up of a cowboy song, with his own special touch. His comment to Steve in 1977, "There's also this one about me as a cowboy. I kinda like the idea of me as a cowboy [the *Land of Dreams* cover comes to mind - Gary]. I think it's ridiculous."

Kathleen (Catholicism Made Easier)

Truly, like "Let's Burn Down The Cornfield", a sexy song. I think so. Crude-sexy. Honest. I can just see this guy. I don't like him, but I understand him. I love the "Nel Blu Dipinto Di Blu" ["Volare"] quotes:

"Volare, oh oh

cantare, oh oh oh oh.

Nel blu dipinto di blu

felice di stare lassu`"

[by Domenico Modugno]

which Randy changed to:

"Nel blu, dipinto

Dipinto di blu

Felice de stare

Di stare lassu"

That means you love him

And he loves you

"Piu bel ci sono

Ci sei tu"

This last line, "Piu bel ci sono Ci sei tu" translated at Altavista translations as, "Beautiful Piu is Us six you". Wonderful.

Old Man On The Farm

So damn understated. This song has a similar feel as "William Brown", a quality that appeals to me so much personally. Not much happens here, but that in itself is enough. Maybe I am quieting down in my mid-age.

And here's some press from 1977 (I ain't gonna go into 1978 very far, where much-too-much was written about "Short People" with utter disregard to the rest of the songs on the LP. There are 100's of reviews of the album, and most of them are *good* reviews):

The Washington Post, September 28, 1977, by Mark Kernis -

Randy Newman's "Little Criminals" (Warner Brothers BSK 3079) plays on the same themes as "Sail Away" (Warner Brothers MS 2064) and "Good Old Boys" (Warner Brothers MS 2193). What keeps the 12 new compositions (11, really: "I'll Be Home" is an early Newman tune redone here) from being a mere sequel is his extraordinary sense of place. No one in popular music is as good as Newman at creating an emotional tone that evokes such clear physical images.

"In Germany Before the War" is a haunting sketch of impending doom through indirect references.

"Old Man on the Farm" is a Newman-esque portrait of an individual alive past his time, and the spare lyrics allow for pathos without mawkish sentimentality. Both these compositions accent Newman's uncanny use of words. After he says all he needs to say, he stops - sometimes leaving a lyricless chord hanging pensively in mid-air.

Newman has always been a jokester and "Little Criminals" has its share of laughs. "Kathleen (Catholicism Made Easier)" falls into his self-designated "diseased love song" category and "Short People" is a riotous ode to paranoia with possible hit-single potential. (No Newman tune has ever

even come close to being an AM radio "hit." However, this album seems to have been produced by Lenny Waronker and Russ Titelman with a broader audience in mind.)

Though "Short People" has the funniest lyrics, "Rider in the Rain" is the Swiftian satire in the bunch. Newman uses a plausible country rock score to send up the entire California cowboy music scene. The facts that Newman himself is a California native and that he uses the Eagles - the epitome of the genre - for backup vocals are added zingers.

The lyrics are barely exaggerated West Coast cool ("My mother's in St. Louis/My bride's in Tennessee/So I'm riding to Arizona/With a banjo on my knee") and, just when you think he's gotten on the last yuk, Newman stops the music and drawls "Take it boys" as the Eagles swoon into a final chorus. The contrast to the hard-edged urban urgency of "Baltimore" and the title cut is startling and shows the author's emotional range.

[I probably cut and pasted more of this review than I should have, so sorry Mark, but I like what you said]

Newsweek, December 1977 -

Randy Newman and Harry Nilsson are kin: brilliant singer-songwriters with comic styles and serious points of view. In *Little Criminals* (Warner Brothers), the dour Newman divides his time among gentle, sharp and obscure satire, some black despair in "Baltimore" and occasional tenderness in "Texas Girl" or "I'll Be Home."...

The Washington Post, December 19, 1977, Monday, Final Edition

Randy Newman's hit single "Short People" has been taken off the air in Boston and Kansas City, Mo. The lyrics refer to "grubby little fingers and dirty little minds" of short people. "Insensitive," said a Boston listener. Newman said it was a satire of prejudice.

"Little Discs, Big Bucks" by Mark Kernis, The Washington Post, December 23, 1977

Let's talk about singles. Not the "Looking For Mr. Goodbar" singles, the small records with the big holes. Why singles? Well, besides the fact that everyone else seems to be talking about albums, singles are still a vital cog in the music machinery.

"Short People" single-handedly introduced Randy Newman to the mass audience and its LP, "Little Criminals" (Warner Brothers, BSK 3079), could well outsell all the previous Newman albums combined.

And here's some reviews from:

<http://www.geocities.com/SunsetStrip/8678/spnewmanrandy.html>

### ***Little Criminals***

#### **Randy Newman**

Warner 3079

Released: October 1977

Chart Peak: #9

Certified Gold: 1/24/78

*Little Criminals* is Randy Newman's first album in... hell, we don't even want to count the years. In his absence, a whole generation of semi-demented, would-be perverts calling themselves punk rockers has tried to cop his act. We aren't calling Newman the first punk rocker -- for one thing, he's intelligent. For another, his piano belongs in a Salvation Army band or a smoky San Francisco bawdyhouse. But we are calling Newman perverted, wry and one of our favorite crazies. The long-awaited album is everything we hoped for. There's a vicious song about short people. There's a song

about a city that begins with the letter B (first "Birmingham," now "Baltimore." Next stop, Berkeley?). There are hypnotic love songs with simple phrases running over chords like worry beads. There's a patriotic number called "Sigmund Freud's Impersonation of Albert Einstein in America." The album's getting plenty of airplay; it might even make Newman a star.  
- *Playboy*, 2/78.

Always the master craftsman, Newman doesn't waste a second here, doesn't permit an inept lyrical insight or musical fillip. But over the past three years he doesn't seem to have written one song that ranks with his best. Among all these explorations of America's dirty white underbelly, only the out-and-out jokes -- the gross intolerance of "Short People" and the Eagles music on "Rider in the Rain" -- distinguish themselves. Very disappointing. **B+**  
- Robert Christgau, *Christgau's Record Guide*, 1981.  
[Boy, did Christgau miss the boat on this one, or what? A bullshit review. "Gross intolerance?". Yeah, right.]

Because it included "Short People," Newman's only hit single (it charted for twenty weeks, holding down the No. 2 spot for three weeks), this was easily Newman's most popular album, reaching No. 9. Unfortunately, it is far from his best -- his lyrical muse seems to have deserted him. He goes through the usual motions all right, but too often the results are cruel, rather than creative, let alone insightful. It does have its moments: "Sigmund Freud's Impersonation of Albert Einstein in America" and the L.A. country send-up, "Rider in the Rain," performed with the Eagles. But two out of twelve is a lousy batting average, even for a lesser artist. What it does have are creative, lush musical arrangements, which are fairly effectively reproduced on the CD, albeit with slight compression and a tendency toward harshness in the heavier vocal passages. **B-**  
- Bill Shapiro, *Rock & Roll Review: A Guide to Good Rock on CD*, 1991.  
[Nope. Wrong. "This was Newman's most popular album". Wrong again. Best seller maybe, but not most popular. A "lesser artist"? Where do these guys come from?]

On *Little Criminals*, Newman's penchant for satirically illuminating the quirks in human nature earned him a million-selling #2 hit with "Short People," a song that dealt with the issue of bigotry. It also earned him the loathing of thousands of short people who failed to get the message. Aside from that controversy, *Little Criminals* was relatively tame by Newman standards. "Baltimore," "Sigmund Freud's Impersonation of Albert Einstein in America," and "Rider in the Rain" were among the standout tracks. \* \* \*  
- Rick Clark, *The All-Music Guide to Rock*, 1995.  
[OK. But "relatively tame"? I don't agree.]

from: <http://www.highfidelity.net/sonstigesout/7599-27321-1.htm>  
Bissig, sozialkritisch und genial ! So kenne ich Randy Newman seit 1974. Ich liebe unbequeme, ehrliche Zeitgenossen, weil ich vermutlich selbst dazuzähle. Meine alte "Little Criminals" ist jenseits von "gut und böse", also ein willkommener Anlass, diese gegen die perfekte, rauschfreie und auf den Stand der Zeit gebrachte Kopie auszutauschen. Ich will keine "Perlen vor die Säue" werfen und kann in meinem Urteil über diese Neupressung nur sagen, dies ist ein Meilenstein in der Geschichte der Rock-Poeten !! Ich habe die Seriennummer 696 und bin froh über diesen einmaligen Neuzugang.

From: <http://www.soundtrack-express.freemove.co.uk/osts/littlecriminals.htm>

Whenever you mention Randy Newman, most people stare blankly at you and then suddenly realize that they have a Green Eggs and Ham discussion group, tonight being why he did not eat them on a train. Yet, despite his only modest commercial success, he did at least have one hit, kind of and if you discount his movie songs. Short People is the song that made Randy Newman less obscure than he might have been. It was almost certainly the fact that short people detested it was what made it famous. As usual, the point of the song was missed. If you listen to the lyrics some of the reasons that short people "got no reason to live" are totally absurd - bigots invariably find the most stupid reasons to hate people and that was the point of the song. It could just have easily been tall people, fat people, black people, gay people etc etc. Randy just happened to pick the diminutive. I guess the lack of understanding of Randy is one of the reasons he's not very popular - they often believe that he is being a bigot himself, when of course he speaks for other people in his songs. I don't profess to understand the meaning of all of his songs, but with a bit of lateral thinking and the assumption that Randy doesn't actually think what the song character is saying and you can usually get the general meaning of the lyric.

Of course after Short People, most new listeners will be on unfamiliar territory and I must confess that I find it harder to interpret his earlier albums. You Can't Fool the Fat Man has nothing to do with fat men but some kind of character study of a criminal from what I can tell. Little Criminals, on the other hand sets up a curious tale of a group of teenagers about to rob a petrol (sorry, gas) station and also hints at the kind of in fighting that these kinds of gangs invariably descend to. One of Newman's always classic intimate character studies comes in the shape of Texas Girl. It is economic with lyrics and production values, but it is in these types of song that Randy lays out his more emotional side.

I have absolutely no idea what Jolly Coppers is meant to be about. I assume it has something to do with policemen, although the fact that copper is more of an English slang term than American seems curious. If I was to descend into a more crass than usual comment, I'd say that it has a great laid back tune and makes for a jolly enjoyable song, especially considering the meaning of the next item. In Germany Before the War is another character study, but this time is a portrait of a man stalking a young girl. The lyrics themselves don't seem to be all that terrible at face value, but when you appreciate the meaning it all makes more sense and his comments are all twisted into a new meaning, especially the final lines "We lie beneath the autumn sky, my little golden girl and I. And she lies very still." Albert Einstein etc etc has to be one of the strangest song titles I've ever heard. I wonder if Randy lies awake at night thinking of really daft titles for his songs. Probably. Of course the title has more meaning than might be imagined as I always took this as a song that reflects the way that "foreigners" perceive America and possibly some hint at how American's perceive "foreigners." Baltimore is a portrait of a city in decay and is quite long for a Randy Newman song, yes it breaks four minutes... The harmony and arrangement remind me of somebody else, but I can't think who, possibly Van Morrison, but I can't be certain. Whatever the case, it's a favorite of mine, even if it is a fraction depressing.

Rider in the Rain is a curio country and western effort, complete with twanging guitar and backing chorus "He's a rider in the rain." The final two tracks seem almost like afterthoughts in some ways. While the lyrics might be profound, the music just doesn't have much impact. In fact Old Man on the Farm makes almost no impact at all. Then again, all Randy Newman albums seem to end on a bit of a whimper compared to the kind of finale that might be desired. I must admit to having a preference for Randy's later albums; perhaps its the arrangements or perhaps its that I understand the songs more readily. It's more likely that in many ways **Little Criminals** is actually quite depressing and while I can appreciate the songs for their content and arrangement, I don't actually always enjoy them. While many consider this to be one of his best albums, I feel that younger fans who want to expand their Newman collection might do well to pick one of the later albums. Randy's

music covers so many different genres that liking one album and not another is not all that surprising. The fact that he can successfully cover so many musical genres is a testament to his skill as a composer, but is perhaps one of the reasons he has never achieved the fame he deserves.

[I have to agree here with his, "end on a bit of a whimper" statement. Not that I don't like whimpering, but with the exception of *Faust* and *Born Again*, Randy's album's usually end with a quite or subdued song. I love this, and when Randy whimpers, it can be a powerful gust. And I don't find the LP depressing.]

From:www.amazon.com

*Little Criminals* proved to be Randy Newman's commercial breakthrough, thanks in large part to an unlikely top 10 novelty hit. "Short People" may be responsible for positing Newman in the public consciousness as a kind of highbrow Ray Stevens-type wag. On the bright side, it sneaked its B-side--the unremittingly grim album closer, "Old Man on the Farm"--onto thousands of jukeboxes. One can imagine barflies the world over punching in the wrong number and being confronted by a solo pianist morosely mumbling, "Waitin' for some rain to fall / Waitin' for some mail to come / Waitin' for the dawn again / Old man on the farm." In 1977 that may have been more subversive than "Anarchy in the U.K." While *Little Criminals* isn't as focused as its studio predecessors and is marred by one or two throwaways, it's studded with memorable songs, including "Baltimore" (one of Newman's best rock arrangements), the desolate "Texas Girl at the Funeral of Her Father," and "In Germany Before the War," a chiller inspired by *M*, Fritz Lang's 1931 melodrama about a child-murderer. --*Steven Stolder*

[Steve - I love ya man, but there ain't no throwaways here.]

And last but not least, the worst, and maybe the most famous, of all the reviews of *Little Criminals*, and I will probably get into some trouble for reproducing it here in total, but the following exemplifies why I dislike so much of Greil Marcus's work. I tried to write something about his Randy-related work (and his occasional Dylan-bashing) and why I dislike it so much, but I am just not articulate enough to convey my feelings in words. I think he's a smart guy, maybe *too* smart to write about popular music. But here it is. Some Randy-owes-us-something bullshit from Greil:

Review of My Aim Is True (& Randy Newman's "Little Criminals")

Rolling Stone, 1977-12-01

- Greil Marcus

### **Don't Tread On Me by Greil Marcus**

Herewith, two rock & roll singers distinguished by their almost total disregard for the music and marketing strategies of their contemporaries. One is as established as such a performer can be and, it seems, is settling into an acceptance of the refusal of the great audience to accept him; the other is new on the scene and, just possibly, a star for these times. God knows what other times he might be a star for.

LITTLE CRIMINALS offers all the minor charms of Randy Newman's music and none of the major ones: craft without vision, which means the craft is uninspired. The songs aren't even funny; they lack bite. Neither Newman's performances nor his words carry the conviction needed to put across his situational ironies, gnomic narratives and skewed

moral tales, in fact, this time around, the ironies, morals and narratives seem too slight to elicit conviction. Newman can't put all of himself into a song as vague as "I'll be home" or as pallid as "In Germany Before The War", because the songs contain so little of him. One can go back over Newman's work and find any number of tunes that cry out to be heard, whether or not very many people actually did hear them; there isn't a song on LITTLE CRIMINALS that sounds as if it needed to be sung. Newman has always been ambivalent about his ambitions, aesthetic as well as commercial, but this is the first time his ambivalence has gotten the better of him.

What LITTLE CRIMINALS showcases are not songs, but arrangements, plus the contributions of various members of the Eagles. The arrangements are good - particularly with "Jolly Coppers" and "Baltimore", not to mention the dreamy bandbox sound on "Sigmund Freud's Impersonation Of Albert Einstein In America" - but they're good in limbo; the music fails to bring out Newman's lyrics and his singing, because both are so limited. "Baltimore" is clearly meant as a statement about The Death Of An American City, but there isn't a detail in it that has anything to do with Baltimore. Where is Newman's eye for the specific, the eye that picked out the little fat man next to Calvin Coolidge in "Louisiana 1927"?

Some of the new songs never rise above the level of the tame joke, but "Sigmund Freud's Impersonation Of Albert Einstein In America" aims half-heartedly at serious satire. The song was meant for the soundtrack of Robert Altman's now-shelved movie-version of RAGTIME; the worst that can be said of it is that it fully matches the cheap sarcasm of E.L. Doctrow's book, and the best that can be said of it is that there is a touching beauty to the way Randy sings the opening line: "The world of science is my game / And Albert Einstein is my name." The problem is that Newman is no longer taking on the personae of his characters, and so, beyond that first turn of phrase, "Freud" and "Einstein" evaporate. Newman simply has nothing to say - except that America is not all it's cracked up to be, a notion unlikely to stagger even the unwary.

Though Newman has occasionally pandered to his cult of fans - congratulating them for being hipper than the rest of the rock & roll crowd - he has most often dealt with his lack of a broad range of listeners by offering the big, shapeless pop audience work that is better than it demands and tougher than it can handle. He has challenged that audience to respond to his work, and thus challenged himself, as a born minority artist, to reach that audience without conceding anything to that audience's weaknesses. With LITTLE CRIMINALS, one can still say that he is making no concessions, but that is because he seems to have none to make.

Elvis Costello's debut album brought home to me just how timid LITTLE CRIMINALS really is. Costello's best songs are anything but timid, but they're as intelligent as some of Newman's finest, as endearingly elusive in their meanings, and funny in the same bitter, self-deprecating manner. They're also, like Newman's signature songs, very weird. Costello, a twenty-two-year-old ex-computer operator who grew up in Liverpool and now looks like an underfed, misanthropic Buddy Holly, is proof that not only are things quite strange in England today, they are capable of getting a lot stranger.

It should be said out front that there is a strictly musical difference, among many others, between Newman and Costello. Newman draws on ragtime, blues, Kurt Weill and movie

music to orchestrate his lazy drawl; Costello, who in his quieter moments sounds something like Nick Lowe, who produced MY AIM IS TRUE, aims for tricky, infectious pop stylings, or he rocks out....

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So. That's most of the article. I disagree with him about many things:

*"...is settling into an acceptance of the refusal of the great audience to accept him..."*

- What? I think Randy cared/cares very much about "acceptance", and capturing a greater audience. He wanted to sell some records, but at the same time give us songs that could really mean/say something to us. Songs that tell stories about us. I think it's funny, bad funny, that critics get paid for what they do.

*"...LITTLE CRIMINALS offers all the minor charms of Randy Newman's music and none of the major ones: craft without vision, which means the craft is uninspired..."*

- "Uninspired"? "Craft without vision"? What sort of visions should we be getting here? These are songs, not Treatises For Mankind. Each song tells a story, or gives us an image, a glimpse into a character or place. Songs are impressions, not absolute or final word.

*"The songs aren't even funny; they lack bite"*

- Bullshit.

*"Neither Newman's performances nor his words carry the conviction needed to put across his situational ironies, gnomie narratives and skewed moral tales, in fact, this time around, the ironies, morals and narratives seem too slight to elicit conviction".*

- "...to slight to elicit conviction"? Does Randy have to beat you over the head with a song and its meaning? No, he does not. Music does not have to "do" anything.

*"Newman can't put all of himself into a song as vague as "I'll be home" or as pallid as "In Germany Before The War", because the songs contain so little of him."*

- "vague" and "pallid"? These songs are not about "him". They are stories/songs about characters, observations through song, about how some people live and feel. Does Marcus find people vague and pallid?

*"One can go back over Newman's work and find any number of tunes that cry out to be heard, whether or not very many people actually did hear them; there isn't a song on LITTLE CRIMINALS that sounds as if it needed to be sung."*

- God-damn. "...whether or not very many people actually did hear them"? Randy had been heard by many up this point. To suggest that no one, or few, were listening is absurd. "...needed to be sung"? What the fuck? All songs need to be sung.

*"Newman has always been ambivalent about his ambitions, aesthetic as well as commercial, but this is the first time his ambivalence has gotten the better of him."*

- I do not agree. Randy might have feigned indifference at times, still does, but I think he has always cared what his music does to people, and who is listening to it.

I am not going to even bother with the rest of the review.

I guess I just want to say in closing, that Greil Marcus's review is useless. It gives us nothing. His love of music, or his interest in music, seems so conditional and academic to me. I'll bet he's not much fun at parties, or even in a locked closet. There's not a musician alive or dead who could live up to his standards.

SONG Lyrics: Little Criminals

What you wanna come back here for?  
Thought you're with your uptown friends  
Don't need none of your junkie business  
You gonna screw us up again

Get your blackjack off my table  
Get your coat out of my rack  
We don't need you 'round here, jerk-off  
Chuck, I want you off my back

'Cause we've almost made it  
We've almost made it  
We've almost made it to the top

Got a gun from Uncle Freddy  
Got a station all picked out  
Got a plan and now we're ready  
Gonna take that station out

So you go about your business  
You just leave use folks alone  
We don't need no two-bit junkie  
Screwin' up our happy home

'Cause we've almost made it  
We've almost made it  
We've almost made it to the top

Well, that's it for now. I gotta get going here. Next newsletter will be better, and have more stuff.  
See you later. May you find comfort and love with friends and family at this sad and angry time -  
Gary