

## a buyer's guide to aimee mann

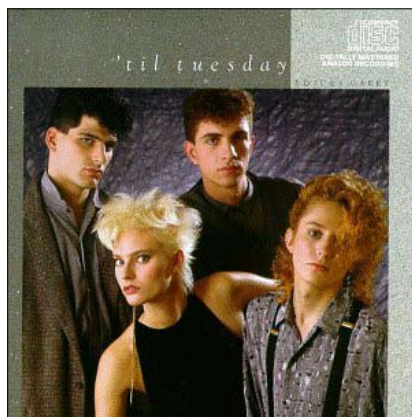
**C**reative force, campaigner for artists' rights, *bête-noir* of record execs, filmmaker's muse, professional cynic...this doesn't even come close to covering the multifaceted talents and fractured career path of Virginian songstress Aimee Mann.

Despite a stop-start career spanning over twenty years and more bad breaks than an orthopaedic surgeon could shake a splint at, she's amassed an impressive body of work across a dozen or so albums. It's testament to her consistency that the only below-par, completists-only offerings in her canon are a pair of cash-in compilations put together without her consent. Mann's career to date can be easily thought of as four distinct eras – the formative punk years, Eighties pop semi-stardom, major label agonies and the hugely credible independence with which she now operates.

The next entry in her oeuvre will be the somewhat surprising, if not downright unexpected, festive collection *One More Drifter In The Snow*, released this coming Hallowe'en. In typical fashion, she's warned us to keep the Kleenex close to hand; joy to the world will not be forthcoming. With that tantalising prospect in mind, **TREVOR RAGGATT** takes a look back at the extraordinary career of one of our very finest singer-songwriters.

### ♥ YOU 'TIL TUESDAY

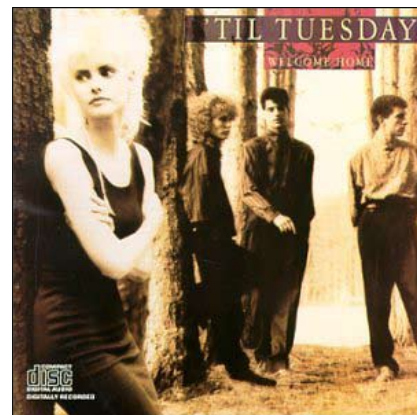
Mann formed the Eighties post-new wave pop outfit 'Til Tuesday in 1983 with fellow big-haired alumni of Boston's Berklee College of Music, Michael Hausman (her then boyfriend), Robert Holmes and Joey Pesce, and over the course of the next seven years produced three under-appreciated albums.



**Voices Carry** (Epic, 1985)

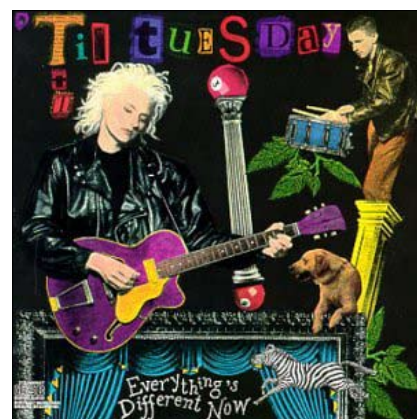
The first 'Til Tuesday offering is very much a product of its time, with its buzzing analogue synths, clanky up-front bass and overproduced guitar sounds. But dated as it may seem now,

it's still chock full of lush harmony vocals and thoughtful pop songs (many of which were inspired by Mann's split with Hausman). In truly bittersweet fashion, the album's title track gave Mann her sole bona fide hit to date, hitting the upper echelons of the Billboard charts.



**Welcome Home** (Epic, 1986)

For the second album, Mann began to assume much greater responsibility for the songwriting duties. This led to a sound that was clearly maturing from the first album's dance-synth pop, providing a clear bridge to her later work whilst retaining an inescapably Eighties vibe. Standout tracks include *Coming Up Close* and the heartstoppingly beautiful *No One Is Watching You Now*. It may have been a commercial flop but *Welcome Home* is artistically sound.



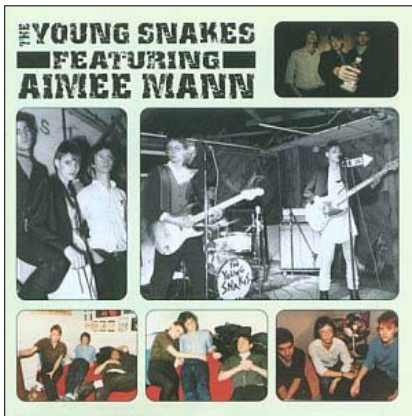
**Everything's Different Now** (Epic, 1988)

The third 'Til Tuesday album is effectively a band record in name only, and can be thought of as representing the first of Aimee Mann's solo albums. In fact, the band split soon after the completion of the disc and, in the first of many contractual wrangles with record labels, Mann was forced to tour the album herself, prevented from working as a solo artist in her own right. Such woes might suggest a weak and directionless disc but the opposite is true. Largely inspired by the end of her well-publicised relationship with singer-songwriter Jules Shear, the album boasts a number of great songs that foreshadow her later work, including *Limits To Love*, *J For Jules* and the Elvis Costello collaboration *The Other End (Of The Telescope)*.



**Coming Up Close: A Retrospective**  
(Epic/Legacy, 1996)

Those who want to explore Aimee Mann's formative efforts but are unsure of where to start could do considerably worse than investing in this handy compilation. Includes 'new' song, *Do It Again*.



**The Young Snakes, featuring Aimee Mann** (Lemon, 2004)

In 1980, Mann dropped out of Berklee to form The Young Snakes – in her own words, a “little punk noise-art outfit” that ended up constrained by its own “break every rule ethos”. She eventually left to form ‘Til Tuesday as a reaction against the Snakes’ “lack of interest in sweetness and melody.” This compilation bolsters their 1982 EP with sundry studio sweepings. Avoid.

## WISE UP AND BUY



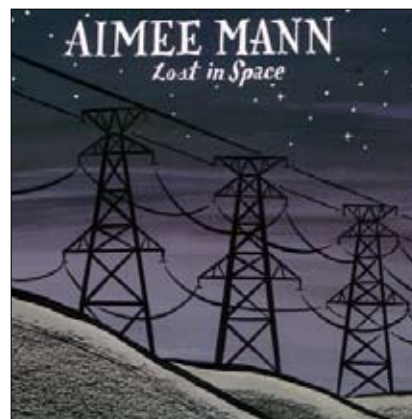
**Whatever** (Geffen, 1993)

Aimee's first solo album proper is a glorious slice of quality pop and mature, knowing songwriting where Sixties-inspired jangle-rock numbers like *I Should've Known*, *Fifty Years After The Fair* and *Put Me On Top* rub shoulders with quirkier musings like *Stupid Thing*, *Jacob Marley's Chain* and *Mr Harris*. Despite its faintly dismissive title, *Whatever* is a surprisingly joyous affair that largely avoids her, by now trademark, cynicism. As such, it could well be the perfect introduction for newbies.



**Bachelor No. 2, or the last remains of the dodo** (SuperEgo, 1999)

This is the album that almost certainly lost Mann her last major label deal – but not because it's rubbish. Quite the contrary! It is alleged that the suits at Geffen didn't hear enough radio-friendly single fodder and dispatched Mann back to the studio with her tail between her legs, or so they thought. After a lengthy legal tussle over artistic vision and rights, Mann was eventually released from her contract and *Bachelor No. 2* saw the light as an independent release on her own SuperEgo label. A baker's dozen of moving songs that still shine brightly, this is the record that famously inspired Paul Thomas Anderson's cult film 'Magnolia' (later pressings include the soundtrack's Oscar-nominated *Save Me*).



**Lost In Space** (SuperEgo, 2002)

*Lost In Space* picks up where *Bachelor No. 2* left off with another immaculate selection of downbeat tunes. Though rather more dour than its predecessor, with addiction and dependency as its overarching themes, it's still life-affirming stuff. Worth hunting down is the special edition version, released in 2003 through Aimee's

website. Presented in a hardcover book format with additional artwork by cartoonist Seth, its bonus disc includes five live recordings (including a great cover of Coldplay's *The Scientist*), two B-sides, a BBC session and two unreleased tracks, one of which is a duet with Glenn Tilbrook of Squeeze.

## GET WITH STUPID



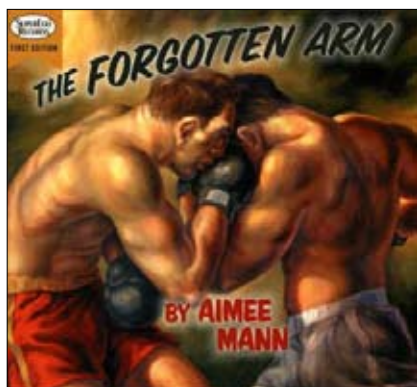
**I'm With Stupid** (Geffen, 1993)

This second solo offering is patchier work than *Whatever*, its outpourings of punk-pop angst on tracks like *Superball* seemingly betraying a growing frustration with her label's demands for a hit. You can't help but wonder, then, whether the sleeve's depiction of the lyrics was cocking a snook at the powers that be - all the words are there...in alphabetical order! However, the luxury of 'patchy' in this particular artist's back catalogue is that the songs remain well above the acceptable standard for most artists (notably *Choice In The Matter*, *Long Shot* and *That's Just What You Are*). Glenn Tilbrook and former Suede guitarist Bernard Butler guest. Well worth exploring.



**Music From The Original Motion Picture Magnolia** (Reprise, 1999)

Not to be confused with the Jon Brion score, *Music From...* features nine songs by Aimee, two by Supertramp and a Brion instrumental. Inevitably, there is some overlap with *Bachelor No. 2*, but the otherwise unavailable tracks like *Momentum*, *Wise Up* and Mann's unforgettable cover of Nilsson's *One* are worth the admission price alone.



**The Forgotten Arm**  
(*SuperEgo*, 2005)

Mann's latest opus is a loose concept album consisting of a series of vignettes charting the relationship between a down-and-out boxer and his girlfriend, from the first flush of love at the Virginia State Fair through separation (*Goodbye Caroline*), failure (*Little Bombs*), addiction, (*I Was Thinking I Could Clean Up For Christmas*) and finally redemption (*Beautiful*). Taking a stripped back, live in the studio recording approach harking back to Seventies rock, it's almost flawlessly executed. It's beautifully packaged, too; the sleeve presents the songs as if they were a novella and features illustrations by award-winning artist Owen Smith.

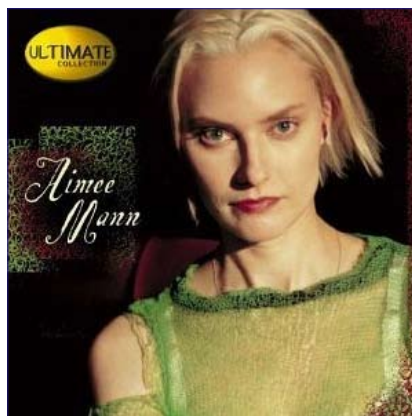
## LIVING IT UP



**Live At St. Ann's Warehouse** (*SuperEgo*, 2005)

Available as a bare-bones CD/DVD set, this sole live offering to date suffers from a capable but somewhat diffident performance. An Aimee Mann show will never indulge in on-stage histrionics, however, so it's probably a fair testament to an artist appearing where, perhaps, she seems least comfortable. Filmed over a three-night residency at Brooklyn's St. Ann's Warehouse, the neatly cherrypicked setlist spans all of her full-lengths, with *Pavlov's Bell*, *Long Shot* and *Deathly* being particular highlights owing to some dazzling musicianship from Mann and her fellow guitarist Julian Coryell. Aimee and the band have a decent enough stab at the backstage interviews, but anyone looking for real insight into the band dynamic will most likely be disappointed.

## HITS AND MISSES



**The Ultimate Collection**  
(*Hip-O*, 2000)

This collection of songs up to and including the *Magnolia* era presents some difficulties for the diehard Mann fan. Yes, it includes a moderately representative bunch of album tracks and rarities (including five hard-to-find B-sides), as well as the 'hits', but Mann is openly critical of it. Whilst the album reeks of contractual obligation and was indeed compiled without any artistic input from Aimee herself, it is still a fairly decent introduction for the neophyte listener.

## DOWNLOAD DELIGHTS

Aimee occasionally pops up on soundtracks, compilations and other people's albums. Here's a few worth investigating...

**Rush** – Time Stands Still (*Mercury*, 1987)

It's hard to believe that Canadian prog-rock dinosaurs ever went through an accessible "pop" phase but this single proves it. Mann provides backing vocals and also appeared in the video lying on her back rotating gently in the air above the band!

**Shaken & Stirred: The David Arnold James Bond Project** – Nobody Does It Better (*EastWest*, 1997)

Mann's contribution to this star studded tribute to the classic Bond themes doesn't quite match Carly Simon's original in terms of class, but her vocals and the Beatles-style arrangements come pretty close.

**Aimee Mann & Michael Penn** – Two Of Us / Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds (*V2*, 2002)

Another Beatles connection; these two songs are taken from the soundtrack to the Sean Penn/Michelle Pfeiffer film 'I Am Sam'. Other highlights are Sarah McLachlan's version of *Blackbird*, Ben Folds' *Golden Slumbers* and Heather Nova's take on *We Can Work It Out*. ■

## FORTHCOMING RELEASES:

### September 2006

- 04 Beyoncé - B'Day
- 04 Missy Elliott - Respect M.E.
- 04 Charlotte Gainsbourg - 5:55
- 04 Anna Krantz - Precious Time With You
- 04 Maria McKee - Acoustic Tour 2006: Live
- 04 My Brightest Diamond - Bring Me The Workhorse
- 04 Dani Siciliano - Slappers
- 04 Stereolab - Serene Velocity: Anthology
- 04 You Say Party! We Say Die! - Hit The Floor!

- 11 Bat For Lashes - Fur & Gold
- 11 The Duhks - Migrations
- 11 Kelis - Kelis Was Here
- 11 Diana Krall - From This Moment On
- 11 Nina Nastasia - On Leaving
- 11 Revl9n - Revl9n
- 11 The Rogers Sisters - The Invisible Deck
- 11 Susanna & The Magical Orchestra - Melody Mountain

- 11 T.a.T.u. - The Best Of
- 18 Shawn Colvin - These Four Walls
- 18 Cyann & Ben - Sweet Beliefs
- 18 Fergie - The Dutchess
- 18 Mates Of State - Bring It Back
- 18 Scissor Sisters - Ta Dah!
- 18 Veruca Salt - IV
- 18 Weapons - Weapons
- 25 Tori Amos - A Piano: The Collection
- 25 Brightblack Morning Light - s/t
- 25 Christina Carter - Electrice
- 25 Natalie Cole - Leavin'
- 25 Janet Jackson - 20 Years Old
- 25 Jamelia - Walk With Me

### October 2006

- 02 Evanescence - The Open Door
- 02 Julie Feeney - 13 Songs
- 02 Juliette & The Licks - Four On The Floor
- 02 Tilly & The Wall - Bottoms Of Barrels
- 02 Kathryn Williams - Leave To Remain
- 09 Alesha - Fire'd Up
- 09 Be Good Tanyas - Hello Love
- 09 Husky Rescue - Ghost Is Not Real
- 09 Frida Hyvönen - Until Death Comes
- 16 Isobel Campbell - Milk White Sheets
- 16 Sarah McLachlan - Wintersong
- 16 Madeleine Peyroux - Half The Perfect World
- 23 Girls Aloud - The Best Of
- 23 Lucie Silvas - The Same Side
- 23 Amy Winehouse - Back To Black
- 30 Aimee Mann - One More Drifter In The Snow

### November 2006

- 06 Joanna Newsom - Ys
- 13 Sugababes - Overloaded: The Hits

