

# Work, rest and play

**M**arianne Faithfull was the first, and remains one of the most interesting, examples of the pop celebrity without portfolio. We have all heard of her, and at the age of 44 she still excites tremendous media interest. She is still one of the most widely feted survivors of the swinging Sixties. Yet hardly any of us buy her records or attend her infrequent concerts. The acting career — once so intriguingly poised between *Girl* on a Motorcycle's soft porn posturing (1968) and *Ophelia* in a prestigious production of *Hamlet* (1970) — seems now completely to have stalled.

A straightforward audit of her talent and achievements can never disclose what all the fuss is about. She was "discovered" while still a teenager in 1964 by the Rolling Stones's manager Andrew Oldham, who was impressed mainly by her blonde good looks. He put her in touch with his boys and a hit single, *As Tears Go By*, was the result. It was followed by other, increasingly less successful records in a folkier vein which revealed only the frailty of Faithfull's quavery soprano voice and her lack of independent musical initiative.

For the rest of the 1960s she became the most famous girlfriend in swinging England, a dubious accolade which lives on in a lewd, made-up story about a chocolate bar. This and other details about the

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## As Tears Go By

*Marianne Faithfull*

**Mark Hodkinson**

Omnibus £14.95 pp216

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## Robert Sandall

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drugs bust at Keith Richards's country house in 1967 are, sadly, what Marianne Faithfull is chiefly remembered for today. She missed most of the 1970s, owing to heroin addiction, and by the time she had got her act together sufficiently to make her most impressive and characterful album, 1979's *Broken English*, she was, in commercial terms, history.

Faithfull now offers a rather mournful and battered version of the cabaret singer. In order to pull this off, though, she often sounds reliant on a gang of illustrious American session men, and chums like Tom Waits. The original impression — that her music needs all the stellar assistance it can get — still lingers, and her voice, never strong, is taking a beating from a heavy cigarette habit. Fifteen years of heroin and booze, and a terrible fall (stoned) down a flight of stairs in 1985 which flattened half of her face, have done irreparable damage to the good looks.

Faithfull's continuing appeal and her status as a minor icon hinge on a curious form of Sixties nostalgia. The music and the acting obviously

weren't up to much but she did, in other important ways, reflect the aspirations and idiocies of the period. The relationship between her and Jagger, for example, was a potent symbol of the allegedly new, classless Britain, for here was a middle-class, convent-educated girl hanging about with a leering scruff.

Faithfull also seemed to sum up the Sixties fascination with immaturity: only 16 when she signed to Decca records, she looked like the prototype flower child. And her subsequent descent into drugs and debauchery captured the ghastly flipside of the Sixties far more poignantly than her records did.

The life and times of Marianne Faithfull contain enough drama, incident and anecdote to make a better-than-average rock biog — but depressingly average is, unfortunately, all that *As Tears Go By* manages to be. The familiar problem of lack of access to key players is compounded, in Mark Hodkinson's case, by the fact that, at 26, he seems too young to have a feel for the period. Instead, he resorts to compiling silly lists, in the manner of the TV series *The Rock and Roll Years*. "The astronauts from Apollo circled the moon on the Christmas Eve of 1968," he writes. "Beneath them were Marianne, Jagger and [her son] on a cruise from Lisbon to Rio." Obtuse observations such as this, combined with the author's malapropisms, make what ought to be a good yarn into a trying read.