



## A Star Unborn (or What Would Have Been If What Is Hadn't Happened; The Amazing Story of Ralph Gean).

Hierarchy H 3307

Who is Ralph Gean, and why should you care?

Ralph Gean sings songs like "Homicidal Me" (mildly troubling until I learned it was written for a never-released film): "I need a thrill/A perfect kill/Carrie Lee or Jane/Or Jack or Jill/Anyone will do/A doctor, nurse or YOU/Homicidal me!" And "Hey Doctor Casey." "Diagnose my case and tell me what's to be my fate/If that won't make you happy I'll even let you operate." He plays and sings zonked out rockabilly like he means it, like he's actually been there.

He has.

You want dues? Ralph Gean's got dues. He recorded his first record in 1945 (*a capella* versions of hymns) at the age of three and a half; recorded/played with the likes of Glen Campbell, B.J. Thomas and Roy Orbison; and had regional hits in Houston in '62 and '64. All told, Ralph's been making music in one way or another for the last 50 years. To this day he's convinced—without a trace of bitterness—that with just a few more breaks he would have given Elvis a real run for his money.

Yeah, but has he really *lived* it? Hell, his life reads like a bad made-for-TV movie: born to a musical mother and a tone-deaf father in Port Arthur, Texas; a brief stint in the Air Force; a seemingly endless series of lousy jobs; married; a member of Rulon Alfred's Mormon polygamist sect in the 70s until Alfred was assassinated by a member of a rival sect; ex-communicated in 1978; wives left him; drifted; treated for depression; wound up in Denver.

Gean started hanging out in Denver's Wax

Trax oldies store, where he was befriended by Shannon Dickey, the store's jazz buyer. Gean gave Shannon a homemade cassette of his songs; Dickey shared it with Hierarchy owner Boyd Rice; and here we are.

Most of these songs are from Gean's own cassette collection, much of it homemade, recorded between 1962 and 1994; a few cuts, including the whimsical "Goddess of Love," were recorded with a pick up band in Memphis' Sun Studio last year. Given this stretch of time (not to mention the range of recording venues), there is a remarkable consistency from track to track, an essence that I gradually realized is...well, Ralph Gean. The man has presence, the man has a sound, and both come across with power on this 16 title comp. Even at his wackiest ("The Asshole Song," "The Bobbit Song--Lorena Lorena") his voice is strong and clear, his guitar playing clean, his tempo sure. There's not a bad song on the CD, and after a few listenings I'm convinced: this guy really *could've* held his own with the King.—To experience Ralph, call Wax Trax at 800/484-4165, code 1358; or write them at 638 E-13th Ave, Denver, CO, 80205, USA. Tell 'em who sentcha.