

The background of the entire page is a photograph showing the silhouettes of a five-piece band performing on a stage. From left to right, there is a person in a cowboy hat, a person playing an acoustic guitar, a person sitting at a keyboard on a stand, a person playing drums, and a person playing a bass guitar. The stage is lit from behind, creating a strong backlight effect that silhouettes the performers and their instruments against a bright, hazy background.

LONESOME HIGHWAY

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in this issue

MEN OF ACTION

MURRY HAMMOND

JD WILKES

TEDDY THOMPSON

JASON AND
THE SCORCHERS

D.B. HARRIS

MAN OF

ACTION

DB Harris (Deron Braxton to his family) is a native of Birmingham, Alabama. He notes of his home State that "Hank Williams, Louvin Brothers, and the Maddox family had some roots there, but as far as what got me first it was probably bluegrass. From there it was sort of a porthole into country for me. I'm really glad I found some real key influences that turned me on to what I do now." He recorded an album *Deep Dark Black* having written the songs while down in Mexico and recorded it back in Alabama.

He recorded the follow up *Can I Return These Flowers?* in Austin, Texas drawing from such talented local players as Eddie Perez to make n album that was described by one local writer as a blend of Dwight Yoakam, Chris Isaak, and The Mavericks. A fair description of the mix between the singing styles of Roy Orbison and the Bakersfield sounds of Buck Owens and Wynn Stewart. DB was doing a double marketing degree from Auburn University whikle parsuing his musical career.

For his next release he added more guitars, some groovy Farfisa organ, a hint of surf pop and the result was *Contagious Heartache*, a concept record of sorts that looked at the trials and tribulations of heartache that was at times darker than the previous album but without losing its sense of humour.

In January 2006 DB moved to Nashville, Tennessee where he recorded his latest album *Country For Groovers* which has just been released.



You moved from Austin to Nashville, what were your motives for this?
I was being plagued by all manner of scandal, hard luck, and cursed projects. So, in one way it was just an attempt to escape that space. In another way I missed the south and had been gradually fascinated by Nashville's writing opportunities. I witnessed a few co-writing buddies get cuts with people like George Strait and saw the potential for the 'writing venture' to fund my non-mainstream projects.

It's been four years since the release of Contagious Heartache, did you need that time to settle in and find working musicians to share your vision?

I've actually made over 20 records in that period! One of my income streams is being an in-house producer for a company who has a constant flow of children's records (fairytalepop.com). I even perform on some of them. Between that job, a small cut or 2, and a few studio sessions here and there, I have survived on music better here than in Austin. There has also been the arrival of Ruby Kay(after Kay Starr), my first offspring. Musicians are a whole other story. Whores I tell you! Whores!

How does the musical community in Nashville compare to that of Austin?

Opposite in many ways. Live music, especially original country is very difficult to play in Nashville. There's tons of opportunity to play for free. Actually it's not free for the poor singer guy. Somehow a 'jar' system is expected to cover your backing musicians. In some cases there's not even a jar. If you are an up and coming dude in Nashville and you want a band worth a damn, you better get ready to go to the drive-thru bank after your show. Plus people don't come out as much as in Austin. You trade all that in on 'industry opportunity'. I'm a writer, so I think Nashville is where I should be. As far as the people...both places have really good folks.

The Men Of Action continues your particular musical vision which is a blend of country music that is part Buck, part Beat Group and a quite a lot of other influences thrown in for good measure. Would that to be an accurate approximation?

If I only hadn't discovered the 'Mustang Years' recordings of the Bobby Fuller Four, and all those Searchers records. If it wasn't for stupid ole tragically, and mysteriously killed Bobby Fuller. Why can't

the Men of Action just play it straight? Why can't we just be satisfied with aiming for Gary Allan coolness? Much more lucrative. Oh well.

Do you have to subsidize your music with other work or can you make enough to survive on your music only?

Making cool Everly style records and standing for the things that the Men of Action stand for musically really is a labor of love. I've put out 5 records now with my own label, Nighttime Music Company, and I just really like the process, but it's really hard to cover the multitude of expenses selling records for a few dollars apiece these days. Right now it's all music all the time, so that's good, no matter where your streams come from.

The new band includes Bryan Hartley as a co-vocalist and writer, how did you meet?

I pretty much go to one bar in Nashville. It's my neighborhood bar called the Family Wash. It used to be an old Washeteria. I can walk in there in shorts and flip flops and not worry bout hot burlesque girls, and rockabilly guys glaring. Anyway, Bryan was playing there. I walked in and he was playing kind of a lesser-known Morrissey song. A Buddy Holly looking guy from Memphis playing a Morrissey song? Couldn't ignore that! Now, here we are!

No doubt you are going to promote the new album with some live work, will you use the same musicians as you have on the album?
Musicians round here in Nashville are busy scouring mall parking lots where tour buses meet in hopes of getting on, or playing with hungry young hotties that give them cash and lovely smiles. Like my drummer buddy says 'everybody's workin it here'. Since there's so much musical chairs with bands it's hard to have the same guys. Unfortunately we're not teenagers playing in garages for fun anymore.

What is your long-term vision for your music?

I see myself playing multiple characters. My label's next release is a project called harris.hutson-In Dementia. It will be in memory to the late, great Lee Hazelwood. I've had this 'narcotic country' character I've played since back in the Birmingham days. I played in an Hawaiian trio called the Island Echoes with Ricky Davis (Dale Watson Band). I have the surf instrumentals I write, kids rock, and of course the Men of Action, which is country for groovers.

The feeling now is that the term alt.country is now the kiss of death in commercial terms. How do you view the Americana scene now?
Due to a socially reclusive lifestyle I haven't spent a lot of time in the Americana scene. I haven't registered for SXSW, Americana Conference, or anything like that in probably 5 years. I did get a taste of it in the Netherlands, and Norway a few years back. Seems like it's not a bad thing to be Americana in Europe. There are many pitfalls and scams in the area. I've hired publicists who gave me no results. The radio people charge you an arm and leg to 'service' stations. You get on a chart..maybe, and no one can measure if the station network is of any real value. I actually wrote a rant that made it in the editorial section of American Songwriter magazine Vol. 23 recently about how dicky Lost Highways artist have gotten. If anyone's to blame for the lack of quality in the genre it's them. They have the biggest get-up... and no they didn't turn me down or anything.

There are two songs co-written with Brian Hofeldt of the Derailers, in 2005. They are a band with whom you would seem to share some common ground, were they an inspiration to you?

I can't say enough good about the Derailers, except that they wouldn't let me in there band. I was hanging out and writing with both Tony and Brian in Austin when suddenly Tony split for a preaching gig. He's the sweetest guy in the world and I'm glad he's serving people in that manner. I think Tony wanted Brian to consider letting me take his place, but it was clear that Brian wanted to take the wheel alone. It's too bad we would have done some good stuff, but I think Brian was right in taking it his self. I mean who wants to be Sammy Hagar anyway... ya know? There's only one Tony V. baby. Long live the Derailers in any form!

Your albums have all been self-released, have you ever approached a major label and would you like to work with one?
Yes, I've been approached over the last 10 years certainly, but I always scare people off with my sarcastic questions. I'd love to have a bigger budget and buy some radio dudes, get hookers, and Daniel Lanois for a producer, but I'm more of an artist who kicks the shit out of the box rather than fitting into it. Can you imagine asking a label exec. for permission to do a Lee Hazelwood cover. They'd be like... huh? ummm.. Who's that?.. How bout Sting?



Where did your influences come from in your teenage years, had you always been a fan of country music?

No, I wasn't into country as a teenage numbskull. I did however link up very early with my beloved Smiths, Neil Young, and bands like the Pixies and Smithereens. Eventually hippie girls and Jerry Garcia led me to Bluegrass which some how led to Gram Parsons, to George Jones, to all the good stuff. I realized I had a somewhat of a county voice and just fell in love around the college years with 50's and 60's country.

The songs from the new album span from 2004 to 2008, are you a prolific writer or how do you approach your writing?

I used to write more before I started this terribly long and hard southern gothic novel. It's a mischievous church parking lot/rock quarry story that pretty much has zapped my song writing. Normally I write a couple of times per week alone or with others. Since I have two records 'Country for Groovers' and 'In Dementia' coming out right around the same time I've been in recording mode forever also. I figure why write more stuff for yourself when you have two records you've been writing on for years? I've pretty much gotten ahead of myself.

You have played in Europe (at the Blue Highways festival) and that may be a good market for you as there are also some parallels with the Mavericks and that audience remains to a degree. Are you considering a European release for the album?

I'm trying to. My last tour over there went bonkers and so I'm not sure if the label, Lucky Dice wants anymore of this hillbilly! The good news is CDBaby.com is now to the rescue and any of my peeps who want my material internationally can easily get it from them, and on i-tunes. It's amazing how many CD's I've sold through CD Baby. Most of the time the addresses are European.

As an independent artist has the internet opened new doors for you?

I think so. Not as much as I'd like, but it's tilted the playing field slightly toward the independent guy.

What are the problems and pleasures of being a musicians in these times?

Don't give me a forum to cry in my beer, cause I'll just go on and on about the woes of the music industry. My biggest challenge is waking up in the world of modern pop culture/ music while yearning to watch Robert Mitchum movies and sing Everly Brothers songs. I have a very disoriented and dislocated sense of life that comes with Brian Wilson style lock-ups and all manner of mental psychoses. On the other hand if you can survive on your art then you've got a real racket going. You're beating the man.

Does the current political climate effect you or the way you approach your music?

I leave that kind of stuff to Steve Earle.

Finally, what does you music mean to you?

It means accepting that I'm a small hard to find micro-brew and not a mammoth rock-star Bud-wiser.

*Interview by Steve Rapid
Photography by Thomas Petillo*



— — — — —

MURRY
HAMMOND
rolling across
the trestles

— — — — —

Formed in 1993 the Old 97's (named after the song Wreck of the Old 97) played the bars in Dallas prior to releasing their debut album *Hitchhike To Rhyme* in 1994. Following that album they linked up with Bloodshot Records for the album *Wreck Your Life* in 1996. Later they signed to Elektra for *Satellite Rides*. They have also released both live albums and compilations. Currently signed to New West their latest album is the acclaimed *Blame It On Gravity*. Bassist and founding member Murry Hammond has also released a solo album *I Am Leaving, I Don't Know Where I'm Going But I'm On My Way*.

INTERVIEW BY STEVE RAPID



How has marriage and fatherhood changed your outlook and your attitude to music?

My identity as a person used to be very heavily invested into whatever band I was in. Getting married, and especially having my son, has re-ordered everything, and now music, along with everything else, is at best a distant second to my family. That said – I think I do better music as a family man than I ever did as a young single person – having a family makes everyday things a life and death issue. That does good things for a song-writer that wants to keep life and death in front of himself and other people.

What made you decide to become the bass player in the Old 97's?

Well, I'm a charter member of the 97's – I even named the band. I was having a true re-discovery of the country/rural music of my youth, and my enthusiasm spilled over into mine and Rhett's (Miller) songwriting, and the 97's were born.

You come from a punk rock background, or were at least an avid collector of punk singles, was that an important time for you?

I was eaten up with punk – couldn't even listen to the Beatles – it all had to go. I wanted to deconstruct every sacred thing I knew, and build it all back up. I put out a fanzine from 1982 to 83, and American hardcore punk was my focus. I thought the music was important to the times – we Americans were in the Reagan years as you might recall – and I was sure we could make a difference politically. We were overly optimistic.

Did the possibilities of a punk and country mix seem right to you in the light of what bands like Rank and File and Jason and The Scorchers were doing?

I had no knowledge of those bands at that time – in fact, my roommate who was also into the hardcore scene, decided that the two musical styles that would likely never, ever mix, was country and punk. The mere thought sent us into fits of laughter. We were young! And here I am.

What was the initial impetus behind the forming the Old 97's?

Rhett Miller and I had been trying to "make it" as musicians, and we had turned into something that I formerly regarded with disgust: To make music second in the name of chasing popularity and a record contract. The 97's were originally a three piece without a drummer, and I never wanted to see another drummer again – figured that was the best way to be chained to the humble coffee houses and small bars. I didn't even care if we ever made a cent, or gained attention, as long as we were having fun. We charged out of the gate like that, but we gave our drummer Philip a try - I had to be talked into it, by the way - but once I heard what he did to our little acoustic music, I was sold. We have sounded basically the same ever since that first practice with our drummer.

You are making, arguably, the best music of the Old 97's career, what do you put that down to?

We still feel like we have something to say, even something to prove. We still feel mostly fresh as songwriters, which is crucial to a band that's been around as long as we have. We hate the thought of being an oldies act, and I don't think we ever really will – we'd rather just wait longer between records before we'll do that. We're still feel on top of it.

Playing live how has the audience and attitude to what you do changed over the years?

The early days were very, very raucous. It's still somewhat raucous,

but we've somehow appealed to such a wide variety of age groups and scenes – I mean, we get everybody from soccer dads to punks. They are no longer exclusively wanting crazy psychobilly/country/punk anymore, they sort of just expect a very energetic band.

If Rhett's solo career had taken off do you there would be an Old 97's now?

I once answered this same question this way, and I'll paraphrase it here: I think it is human nature to want to keep going down a highly successful solo path, so who knows? I remember early in that whole process – this was very late 2001 - Rhett did say that he couldn't predict how he was going to feel about the band in a year's time. I think he was trying to prepare himself for anything, and prepare us as well. However, he did always say that he wanted the band to remain together and have some role in his musical life, and that our friendship and history together was important to him. I take him at his word, then and now.



I note that the songs are credited to the Old 97's. Do you think that that is a good thing in a band set up?

It is a good thing, and it's accurate. Knowing how bands work, I always thought it was a bit disingenuous when a single songwriter is credited with a song, when I know that bands massage the arrangements, and throw in things that were not there before. That's why we came to a sort of percentage split with things, to make everyone feel valued, and reflect their real input on the material.

You're own solo album is belated. Did you feel the time was right to do it now?

I don't know that it really was all that belated. I don't think I was very focused on what I wanted to say as a performer by myself, until just a few years ago. It took playing music weekly at my church, and big shakeups like the death of my parents and starting my own family to really pull it out of me. It's out there now! I'm even working on my second one as we speak.

Has it been more of a one-off experience made over time or is it something you will persue with more recording and possible live gigs?

Definitely more recording, and I'm doing shows in the U.S. between Old 97's tour legs. Things are in the works that may result in me doing some Holland and Belgium dates next year.

What inspires you to write, and how do you decide if a song is best suited to the band or for your own use?

I tend to write the same in the band and without, except my solo stuff ends up being a good bit of a rawer version of what I do in the band. But if a song needs to be fairly big sounding, it's a band song for sure. If it needs to be pure atmosphere over volume, then it's in the solo pile.

The solo album was excellent and one of the best I've heard this year. Had you a particular sound in mind when you set out to record?

I just wanted it to sound like I felt when playing it – close to the bone. The rawer, more minimalist moments in the music of the Carter Family and Hank Williams and Johnny Cash have moved me deeply, more so than anything I've ever heard. The feel of those old records very much guide my writing and my performing.

It is very differnt from the Old 97's and therefore a real side project as quite often solo albums don't sound that different to what the artist may do with his main band. Was that the intention?

This music I do by myself simply distills the roots influence I put on the band, in a severe way, I think. I see it as the same music, but like I said – it is a very severe side of it. If you put my record next to the Old 97's song "Valentine" you'll see that Valentine could have easily lived on "I Don't Know Where I'm Going..."

You have created with producer Mark Neill a very individual sound that sits between the ages. Was that the intention?

It wasn't conscious except in the fact that old production qualities and reverb sounds, etc., give off an atmosphere that suits me perfectly. Mark gets this, and that's why I'll likely continue to work with him as long as I feel this "raw."

How important is religion in your life as it is central to some of the songs?

It has been very important to me. I want to say, though, that I run away from that right-wing religiosity that has high-jacked our faith and our politics over here – I really just admire the faith of the Martin Luther Kings and the Mother Therasas of the world, and many, many others who will forever be unknown and nameless, but are saints to their communities and families. My church tends to be on the "progressive" end of things, and so it is a good home for me as a person. It certainly helps to keep me grounded. My church does good things, too – primary missions there are not to "save" souls, but simply to feed and clothe and comfort people. It's a good place, our church.

The overall sound seem rooted in a earlier time, do you listen to a lot of music from earlier times?

I do. My musical bones are made up of very old music and very modern music at the same time, and they all find their place in what comes out of me. I love old Hank Williams music like I love the sunshine, but very influential on me is what some of the ambient and minimalist artists have done in the past few decades – Brian Eno, Stars of the Lid, Arvo Part. I also listen to a lot – and I mean a LOT – of choral music, and chants, and throat singing. I guess that's the old trippy Syd Barrett side that still lurks in me after all these years.

Do you see a time when you might do an album with Grey?

While I've been on the last three of her records, her "Graceful Ghost" record is probably the closest we'll ever get to a husband-wife duo. We've talked about doing a proper gospel record, but whatever we do, it won't be for awhile, until our son is older. Grey would rather just be a mother for now.

Any plans to play this side of the pond?

Oh yes! I've been over once to England with my wife Grey DeLisle, and Grey and I honeymooned in Ireland and swore to go over as musicians. I will definitely be over as soon as I figure out how to do it. I'm working on it.



JD WILKES

**“In the Great Depression
it was the bands,
the musicians that survived,
as in those times
people need merrymakers.
And that's the thing with us,
we are merrymakers”**

**SINGER AND SONGWRITER OF TH' LEGENDARY SHACK*SHAKERS
& DIRECTOR OF SEVEN SIGNS**



The white-hot sound of Th' legendry Shack*Shakers was forged in the crucible that was Nashville's Lower Broadway in the late 90's. They were a part of the second wave of bands playing venues like Tootsie's Orchard Lounge, Robert's Western Wear and the Bluegrass Inn. They followed in the footsteps of the ghosts of many Grand Ol' Opry legends who used to frequent the area and in the wake of the initial revival that had begun a couple of years earlier that had included BR5-49 and Greg Garing. Based in the Bluegrass Inn they played for tips and temptation. Their set included a bunch of original songs like Dump Road Yodel alongside some blues covers such as Slim Harpo's Hip Shake. There is a very much worse for wear unofficial and unwanted bootleg of those times called Lower Broadway Lo-Fi. The lineup then was Joe Buck on standup bass, Chris Detloff on drums, Chris Scruggs on guitar and Colonel J.D. Wilkes on vocals and harmonica.

The heart, soul and spirit of Th' Legendry Shack*Shakers has always been channelled through J.D. though. He is the focus and primary songwriter and visionary of the band and their deeply-rooted southern gothic sensibilities. J.D. has steered the band through a number of line-ups, continually honing the sound and direction of the band until he now has a band capable of taking on the world. His chief lieutenant and co-producer is stand-up bassist Mark Robinson. The line up is compelled by drummer Brett Whitacre and its newest member guitarist Duane Denison. That the world has yet to recognize them may be a matter of time or it may be that it will never understand them, but that will not stop them trying.

Their recorded output has included one album on Bloodshot Records and a trio, "the tent-show trilogy", on Yep Roc Records. All of which are testament to their powers and musical uniqueness. A rare band that delivers on the live front as well as in the studio, both compliment each other but are different approaches to delivering their music. A single Shack*Shakers gig will leave an indelible mark, one way or the other, but you are unlikely to forget having seen them. Their recorded output has become increasingly more accomplished, a layered sound that includes a wide range of ingredients from blues, rockabilly, honky-tonk to klezmer to create a unique mix that is blended, shaped and focused by the songs of J.D. Wilkes, the undisputed leader and visionary of the Shack*Shakers. The most compelling front man since Iggy Pop, a skinny-as-fuck Clark Kent, who is a Superman in reverse. He is an accomplished record producer, songwriter, cartoonist, painter and director. His film, The Seven Signs, that explores some real aspects and characters who have in then the soul of the South will, hopefully be available on DVD later this year. He is a multi-talented man whose strong vision which will undoubtedly be realized in as many facets as possible in the coming years. He holds strong views and is an honest spokesman for them.

What's happening with the band and with your film at the moment?

Well we're in the process of talking to a distribution company. Duane our new guitar player has a lot of new connections that we didn't have before. He's bring along opportunities that we didn't have before. Things like video distribution and management and legal connections. The business end of things. He's

satisfying all THOSE kinds of needs. We're going to have a whole new lease on life here I think through the success he's had (playing with Jesus Lizard, Tomahawk and Hank 111). I'm not related to anyone famous and none of us come from any wealth. Everything we have achieved so far has been on the strength of the show only. We've never had a publicist other than one the label had. We've never had a huge push, there's never been a lot of money behind the Shack*Shakers. All the hoopla has been earned by blood, sweat and tears. Now we can add to that some behind-the-scenes connections that Duane is bringing in.

How has Duane changed the band dynamic?

Well you might have thought that we were theatric before, but now I'd describe us as "cinematic." It's a subtle difference, but now the music has taken on a texture that is MORE grandiose. We can now sound more like the records do. It'd not just a crunching wall of noise slamming you in the face. But it's still loud. It's now more ambitious and closer to what we go for in the studio. All the places we try to take you to on the record we can bring you to live now. That's the "cinema" in the Shack*Shakers now. Before it was about spectacle and bombast with a shock value and while there's still that element - I can't help that with the way I perform - but now there's this added quality that Duane brings.

It's been a shot in the arm then?

Yeah, because if you sound like a bar band all the time you're going to end up playing bars all the time. If you ever want to graduate up to the next tier then you're going to have to sound like it and act like it. You have to demand that the music reflect that. We're trying to turn it on it's head. It's hard to be subversive with just rock music. Rock music has run the gamut, but if you go back to roots music and turn it on it's head... people dress up like rockabillies and have tattoos and piercings, which is like there is no way to be sexy unless you reference a more moral past and then subvert it. We've gone back to the roots of rock 'n' roll, which is an important thing to do anyway, then we're turning it on it's head and we're re-imagining it as some more warped and sinister, cinematic and personal. Lovingly-so though because we love all that music. The only way to revive it is to DEFIBRILLATE it. Electric shock therapy. Anything that will get that corpse moving again.

Which is what happened down on Lower Broadway back in the late 90s?

That's right, they lived the music and it takes a kick in the ass to get it going again, It's not precious period piece, like some Civil War re-enactment, though some of the purists think it is. If you were to go back in time and be witness to those old minstrel shows, medicine shows and honky tonks you would see that they were throwing down. It wasn't a precious thing that was all up it's own ass, as there was always a need for a visceral release. Something for the blue collar folks, the ones that slaved from nine to five who wanted to go out, have a drink and blow off some steam. There's always going to be a need for bands who fulfil that function. There's something ABOUT that real primal, primitive country and blues. It

gets under your skin and it's so accessible to common people, there's something in it that you can relate to. There's something in the rhythms... it's bio-rhythmic!

You need to take IT somewhere else.

That's right. Again, we can't just be a bar room band going through the twelve bar progression and crunch out one, four, five all night long. We have to present it, nowadays AT LEAST, in a way that fires peoples imaginations. That's what's required of a post-modern band. It can't just be tunes anymore, it's got to be an event. It's got to have theatre. It's got to be interactive. It's has to be what people require of ALL their entertainment forms these days. We're no different. And I'm happy to do it as I think those are great changes and great things to bring to live music. Slim Cessna's Auto Club probably do it even more that we do, as their show is like an opera. It's full-blown musical theatre. But it's so warped and weird. It's just what the doctor ordered.

You and Mark (Robinson -band bassist) have produced the most recent albums but given the recent changes would you consider an outside producer at all?
Yes, maybe for one or two songs. I don't THINK our records sound bad at all, but it might be interesting to see someone's take on a couple of songs, and it might legitimise us to a certain demographic. The kind of people who do respond to those name-dropping sort of tactics.

It would be interesting to see what a producer like T Bone Burnett would come up with.

There's all kinds of names that we've been kicking around. It would be interesting to be able to afford a different producer for every song (laughs)... what a weird bumpey ride that would be!

When we spoke recently you mentioned that you had a lot of material ready for the next few albums.

Well what we might do is one big, ambitious record. I mean I don't want to wear people out but I've got enough material for two or three records ready. I'm ahead of myself right now. But then there's always new things coming in and some of the older stuff you have to go back and rework. Some songs can stay on the back burner for years and you go back and rediscover them. And all of a sudden you know what's needed to complete them. But then a song like *Born Again* I just wrote in one sitting. You probably can tell. It so simple. And those simple ideas can occur to you in a flash and usually they're the best ones in terms of pop sensibilities, they're not too overthought.

Given the band's schedule do you still have time to work on your artwork?

I'm still doing the comic strip for a paper back home. The Nashville RAGE. But I've just decided to retire a certain strip that was JUST funny and wacky. I'm starting a new strip that will be more about THOSE Southern Gothic tales that are in the music lyrically. I'll ACTUALLY illustrate those. I'll put pictures to those lyrics, story board them and then eventually I'd like to republish them in a comic book or graphic novel, as they call it... or as a hymn book, maybe in "shape notes" so people can play along on their piano like they used to when people GATHERED around a piano to sing along. Some of these songs could probably work that way. A good song can be interpreted any way. So I'm working on this new strip called Blasphemy. It will be about Kentucky folk-lore and tales of weirdness and THE backwaters, made up or otherwise. Some of it is dreams I've had, some, as I said ARE from the lyrics - songs that I've written and I'll illustrate those. I've got enough done to get started but it would be the intention to draw it as a graphic novel, as it's own thing. But I could get lazy about it, as without the newspaper deadline, the cracking of the whip, I might never get around to it. It will take awhile but I'd say in about a year I'd be ready.

Can you work on the road?

I do it on the road every Wednesday night. I sit down with the clip board and the paper and pens and I draw the comic strip then I scan it and e-mail it to the newspaper, no matter where I am in the world. I keep a file which I can go back through to put them all together like a tetris which I can then make into a comic book line by line. Right now I'm just working on the content, as you have to sequence it out like a record so that it's a good read from cover to cover.



When to hope to have Seven Signs released?

Hopefully this year if everything goes as planned. We're talking to a guy this month about putting it out. Someone who is one of Duane's connections and he's really excited about it. So, so far so good.

Did it show at the Sundance Festival?

We showed it at the unofficial SXSW festival. It did also go to Cannes and it won an award at the Philadelphia Backseat Festival AND THE INTERBANG FESTIVAL. It's also going to other festivals, we've been requested by the Raindance Festival, they went out of their way to solicit the film. So there's a lot of good buzz on it. A lot of great feedback.



Do you want to do more directing?

No, I kinda got it out of my system for now. It was so arduous, as I don't own a camera or any software. If I knew how to do it then I might be making MOVIES all the time but there's the expense and the time and this band doing more and more, I think that's WHERE I'm going to devote my time. I've also had to slack off on the painting I do, the banners and things, unless a big money commission comes in. I'd prefer to concentrate on the "graphic novel", though I hate that term.

Given the visual and theatrical nature of the Shack*Shakers it surprising that you haven't had the opportunity to do a video as yet?

Well that something that Duane's been saying that we need to get onto. Something that's a story rather than clips of live shows, which we've done. Something acted-out, and I'd love to do that. That's right up my alley. We need to FIND the time and ACTUALLY have something to promote, so that will most likely have to wait for the next record. Which should be next year as right now we're taking a breather to consider our options. Management and all that grown up stuff.

Have you been looking after that yourselves lately?

We had a manager who got us our deal with Bloodshot and Yep Roc. He got it going but that was about as ambitious as he was. HE kinda thought the thing was going to run itself but we've always been more ambitious than that. I think now, with Duane, we have the possibility of making a big leap forward. I can't say yet that LSS needs a new label. I think that we can now graduate up to larger venues as we have the musicality now to do that.

But remaining a four piece?

Yeah, but were bringing in new instrumentation. I'm learning to play claw-hammer banjo and I'm BRINGING in the old melodian and we're going to bring in some visual props, backdrops and things to help create an environment everywhere we go. New things to look at. We have to really woodshed to make sure that those transitions are smooth and that sonically they work. AS a band this loud, it's hard to be able to just bring in anything. We'll probably have to bring the sound level down dynamically to create those moments. It's a great opportunity. We're getting older and the punk-rock-skull-fuck has run it's course as far as I'm concerned. Look at the Pogues, they're still considered a punk band yet they're older now people still love that music. People will still love the music, at least that's what I'm hoping for. Something more note worthy for the next year or two.

Europe has been responsive to you.

Yeah, good enough for us to be able to come over for this one show and send us right back. We think we're going to be doing shorter tours here but more often. But well orchestrated and well routed tours and also good paying shows in a row. Similar to the loops we do over in the States. Do a quick loop out to Texas or somewhere and then come back home to recuperate. You CAN get too far out now with the gas prices. We're feeling it like you have felt it all along. There's so much ground to cover out there for a band like us.

Do you feel any positiveness, a sense of change back home right now?

As far a Obama goes? No, I think he's crooked. He's a shyster. He's a Chicago kingpin. McCain is wishy-washy. They're two sides of the same coin. They're trying to make out Obama as SOME messiah. Photographing him with a halo on Time

Magazine, everything is the hero shot, from below looking up at him. While McCain is this old codger. So I don't know. I don't think the answer is to go and socialize America because AMERICANS will want to profiteer and use the benefit programs to take advantage OF EVERYTHING and they will run it into the ground.

It will be the blue collar, middle class that foots the bill, the people who work and mow their lawns and take care of their kids. There ARE all these slackers everywhere THAT WILL DO THAT KIND OF THING and that's Obama's base! I don't think there's any hope. America's finished! It just is. It's survived two hundred and something years, but I don't know, the big cities are JUST GHETTO-FABULOUS powder kegs. You CAN'T give the keys to the candy shop to these people. It's all about to blow. I don't know, I've been thinking about moving to Europe. I mean I love America and love what it does, or rather I should say I love Kentucky. I'm out in the woods now, but even there the culture's shit. It's THE bottom of the barrel, lowering of the bar, red-neck pride. It's the "slumming it" mentality that I hate, black and whites both. It used to be that you brought yourselves up, that you wanted to be better THAN your parents. Now it's like: get on drugs... everything's gone to pot. Downtowns are crumbling and falling in on itself. All the development is on the outside of the cities and encroaching on the farmland. So the charm and beauty of these towns, the thing that brought people there ORIGINALLY is gone.

Like my little town of PADUCAH. They're paving over the things that people USED TO loved and found appealing. Letting the quaint little downtown areas crumble in on themselves. The contractors are crooked AND IN BED with the politicians. It's all sweet deals and kickbacks and it's so corrupt. There no soul, it's all going to collapse under it's own weight. You can't smoke, you can't do anything. Everything's immoral, supposedly. Blowing off steam is immoral. Everyone's so churchy. I don't know. It ain't like I remember as a kid and it feels like it happened overnight. It became the REAL "me generation" in the '90s. Your neo-cons and your democrats are all like crusaders for holy justice, rule the world and teach everyone a lesson.

So in that respect you have to fall back on your friends on this group.

Well in the Great Depression it was the bands, the musicians that survived, as in those times people need merrymakers. And that's the thing with us, we are merrymakers. Art damaged indie rock bands, staring at their shoes with their artificial angst...they're going to be yesterday's news because people will be genuinely depressed and in need of actual merriment. And we'll bring that.

You've always been entertainers.

That's right. The harsher the times the more jovial the entertainment. When were all so comfortable LIKE THIS we can all sing dirges. But that's about to change. Our time will come.



Photographed at Andrew's Lane Theatre, Dublin by Ronnie Norton
Interview by Steve Rapid

J.D. hopes that the Seven Signs DVD will be available in the near future.
Check <http://www.myspace.com/jds7signs>



jason & the scorchers

Jason and the Scorchers formed in Nashville, Tennessee in 1981 when Jason Ringenberg, moved to Nashville looking to hook up with a "rock n' roll wild band". He found the Nashville Scorchers: Jeff Johnson, Warner Hodges, and Perry Baggs. The band never found the fame or commercial breakthrough that they deserved, but with their Americana Music Association's Lifetime Achievement in Performance Award they are getting their due.

The band finally dissolved at the start of the 1990's. As Hodges said later; "we didn't break up, we fell apart.". However at the insistance of Johnson the band reformed in 1993, and recorded and released a new album *A Blazing Grace* in 1995. That was followed by *Clear Impetuous Morning* in 1996. Johnson then left the band in 1997 and new bassist Kenny Ames came onboard for the live CD/DVD *Midnight Roads and Stages Seen*, released in 1998.

Since then the band have gone their separate ways and released solo albums. Both Warner and Jason currently have new albums on release. Jason's compilarion is *Best Tracks & SideTracks 1979 - 2007* and Warner's album is *Centerline*.

Jason and Warner have teamed up with bassist Al Collins and drummer Pontus Snied for a short series of UK and Irish dates that saw them play The Academy to an enthusiasctic response from long-term fans.

When I arrived at the venue the band were sound checking and considering the short amount of time they had to prepare for the gig sounded up to form. The new rhythm section was propelling Warner and Jason forward. After they were satisfied with the sound we went up tp the dressing room for the interview.



Was this a spontaneous or somewhat unexpected reunion or something that you had planned for awhile?

Warner: I don't think it was unexpected. I've know about it for awhile as I was over in September and October last year I was doing some solo shows as well as some dates with Dan Baird and at the time I was asked about doing some Jason and The Scorchers dates. So I conacted Jason and laid it on the table so from that point of view it wasn't unexpected. The unexpected part is how much fun we've been having.

It's been what, ten years since you last toured?

Jason: Yeah, it's ten years since the last serious tour.

So following on from these dates are you planning further Jason and The Scorchers activity?

Jason: Well we think that we have something special with this new line-up, it's exciting and we are learning as we go. With Al Collins playing bass and Pontus Snied playing drums it's the first time in a long time that I'm really enjoying playing with Jason. If your enjoying it then chances are you will figure out a way to continue doing it.

You both have solo albums out so this tour is a mix of solo and Scorchers dates.

Warner: I also have a bunch of dates with Danny (Baird). Jason's doing a bunch of solo dates too.

You both have versions of Harvest Moon on your respective albums.

Warner: (laughing) His is way better than mine. I just wanted to pay tribute to the song because I love it.

Americana music seems to be under pressure at the moment, in commercial terms at least, how does that effect you?

Jason: I think it will always be a cult thing, no question about that. The biggest artist in Americana are Steve Earle and Emmy Lou Harris and they sell around 500,000 albums. So you shouldn't go into this if you want to hit big sales. But the one advantage of artists like us is that we can have longevity.

Growing old disgracefully?

Jason: We're trying to find a way to do it with some grace.

Well there's role models in country with Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson or Porter Wagoner.

Warner: One of the great things about country is the Grand Ole Opry. Those guys have that gig until they literally can't do it anymore. That's a wonderful thing because once this thing is in your blood, and you never loose that need to play.

Taking the term Cowpunk, alongside the country influence how much was punk a part of it?

Jason: I think that that kind of music was very influential on me. But it was more the energy and the vibe of that kind of music. It was a weird thing but living in Nashville all those years what came out was just the way we played rock 'n' roll. I always just wanted to be in a rock 'n' roll band. I hadn't planned on being in a "cowpunk" band. That was the way the music came out, if that makes sense.

Jason: It's a weird thing to me, it something that somebody pointed out a few years ago and that was that one of the things about Jason and The Scorchers was that we played the country songs with the same intensity of purpose that we played the full blown rock songs, not neccessiraly volume but intensity. It wasn't tongue in cheek. It was the exact same type of music to us. It all fit together and made sense.

Watching the sound check you can see the way that you work together so well.

Jason: It great and we have a real band for the first time since '96. It's solid and this is only our third gig. There something really good going on here right now. Where we go with it is the next question. The London show was as good as anything we ever did. We were having the time of our lives.

The new rhythm section is only a recent addition?

Warner: Literally only three days ago. Al plays bass on my solo album and I play with him in his wife Stacie's band. When we started to talk about this we thought Al would be good as he really loves the band, and he loved what Jeff (Johnson – original bass player) did on those records. He was a natural fit.

Have you any plans to re-release your back catalogue?

Jason: Well pretty much everything is owned by somebody else. There's always compilations coming out, right now there's one out with Fervour and Lost and Found - which is the third version of that combination.

Are you drawing material from the Scorchers albums exclusively or are you adding some solo songs?

Jason: No, were not doing solo stuff. But were picking songs from all the way through the Scorchers albums. The later songs are sounding as good as the early stuff.

Warner: It's sounding as close to the early days as we can get, material wise and vibe wise.

Will you do any gigs in America, or take it futher?

Warner: That's what we were discussing on the drive down as both Jason and I have things we need to do. But were considering all the questions.

Jason: Al is definitely our bass player now. You should mention that the reason that Perry's not a part of this is that he is too ill to do it. It's not that he quit or anything. I should also mention that this year we are going to receive the Americana Music Association award for a lifetime achievement.

Well Desreved.

Jason: Thank you.

Warner, is this solo albums something you had wanted to do for some time?

Warner: No. I had called it a day. I had retired. So I was just covering for a buddy of mine for one gig and now I've been playing with Stacie for some time. She's wonderful. And it just mushroomed from there. One thing led to another and last year I had this guy driving me nuts over coming to the UK.

So I sent them an e-mail saying well get me some shows and I'll come and play thinking that I'd never hear another word about it. Well he got something together so I figured that if I going I need to take something over and I got this record together. I just got buddies like Dan and Al and we put it together to see what would happen. It wasn't necessarily what I wanted to do full time.

Did that give you a certain amount of freedom knowing that there wasn't any record company pressure on you?

Warner: The music is the important thing here, I don't really care about the money. I'm



absolutely elated now about having converstaions about how much fun were having. That's a wonderful thing as The Scorchers was a huge part of my life. Attitude is so important. I look at things now quite differently that I did four years ago. Fronting by own band. I look now at standing in the middle in a completely different way. I used to think I had a tough job standing over there but now I know were the tough job is. Standing in the middle I gained a million times the respect I had for Jason, I'd respected his work before but now I understand it so much more.



TEDDY THOMPSON



UPFRONT ON THE LOW DOWN

With a upbringing that included time spent in a commune in the late 70's and parents (Richard and Linda Thompson) who seperated and divorced, Teddy Thompson may have been predisposed to country music in some respects. He likely saw some of that genre's subject matter up close and personal.

He moved to the States in 1994 at the age of 18 and during that time began to consider music as a serious option as a means of self expression and a possible career. He initially worked during the day (in a hair salon) and wrote and made demos and did some gigs which in turn got him his first deal. He released his debut album on Virgin in 2000. He was then dropped from the label shortly after it's release and subsequent lack of sales. Following a move to New York and a stint playing in Rosanne Cash's band he worked on his mother's comeback album *Fashionably Late*. In 2006 he recorded his second album *Seperate Ways*, a well received album and a big step forward from

the debut which he was never that happy with anyway. That album had elements of what was to come next. *Upfront and Down Low* is an exceptionally good album, offering a contemporary perspective on classic country (and this writer's album of the year for 2007).

However in career terms it was considered by many a miss-step and his latest album *A Piece Of What You Need* finds him back on track for his label, (some) critics and fans. Thompson is a compelling and vibrant performer managing to convey the meaning and mischief of his songs with just voice and guitar, both of which were well equal to the task. Teddy spoke to us, primarily given the nature of this publication, about country music and his love of the form prior to his gig in Whelans earlier this year.

You have said that country music was something that you heard when you were growing up?

It was played a lot in the car. There were only two tapes going in the car when we were kids one of those was the Everly Brothers, the other one was Chuck Berry, I think. But it was the Everly

Brothers that I liked. It was the first music that I can remember hearing and liking. Perking up and listening when I was 6 or 7. When you get an early musical memory like that it tends to stick. I can go through a lot of other things and still come all the way back to the Everly Brothers.

So I started out with that really sweet country music, with harmonies and stuff and worked back then. I didn't get to Hank Williams till I was quite a bit older. I'd liked the pretty harmonies so that what I was seeking out. The Louvin Brothers and all that sort of thing. For a long time I thought that that was what country music was, that it had to be two people (laughs). But it's fairly ingrained now. My parents were big country music fans, as are most musicians. There are very few credible musicians that you might hang out with, no matter what style they play, who don't love country music. I live in New York and you would be hard pressed to find a drummer or bass player, anyone who you might play with, who doesn't love and have a knowledge of country music. We all love it, it's a building block.

When you came to do this album how did you decide on what songs to include?

There were a few songs that I wanted to do but in the end I don't think I did any of them other than *She Thinks I Still Care*. They were either too well know, or at least too well know to me. They were songs that I'd grown up with and I knew them too well so aside from *She Thinks I Still Care* which I did anyway. So it became quite a fun project looking for the songs. I went and brought a lot of albums, When I was traveling I called to second hand stores to see if they had anything. I'm not sure I found anything really obscure but it was a fun experience once I started looking for things.

When did you decide to add the strings, was that something you heard from the outset?

No, it was a bit of an accident in that I'd already started the record before I thought about doing the string quartet. I started to work on it in New York, and it was always going to be a side project between records, I had thought "I love country music, I wondering if I could get away making a country record?" I tried it out and I really liked it. Then one day I had a cellist came in and then when you start working with somebody you say "how about adding this?" and it suddenly turns into something else. Then at the end of it she was



playing a fiddle part but on the cello and I had a little light bulb moment. “Wouldn’t it be great to have... “. And what she played was very English, not country at all, not swinging in any way. It was against the swing but had this really cool sound and I thought that it would be a nifty idea to have non country string arrangements in a English baroque style.

Does it seem strange then to have an English man realizing a country record on a Jazz label?
Well what am I doing on a jazz label anyway (laughs) but label names don’t mean that much anymore.

Where do you see the core of your music lying?

Well I don’t have very strong folk roots at all, despite what you might think. I didn’t listen to folk music or go to folk clubs. I may have gone to one or two festivals when I was really young. I actually didn’t go to gigs for a long time. I was at school and my parents divorced when I was very young and then Mum wasn’t making records and I’d only see my Dad at weekends and holidays. So there was no folk in my life. I was into country at a very early age and that’s really what I was into full stop. When I was about thirteen I started to listen to other contemporary music. If you start off

listening to something old, with 50’s music, especially as the 80’s was a dodgy time for contemporary music. So I was of the opinion that old music was good and new music was bad. So I wasn’t even interested in listening to anything new. But as I got a bit older I began to find some things that I liked. So when it comes to my musical foundation I don’t know I really just do whatever I want. I’ve just finished another record which is totally the polar opposite. I don’t know if I’m just being erratic or if I’m just having some fun.

But listening to your previous albums there are definite strands that come through to the country album.

Definitely, I don’t see it as such a big leap. There is a lot of country feel in my music.

What was your label reaction to the music?

Well as I’m sure you can tell there was very little enthusiasm for the album. I mean it’s alright for it to be under the radar. When it came out in America they did a better job. It was always going to a difficult record to sell. But it would be nice if it had a bit of a life.

Your album, in some ways, seemed to reinforce the attitude, for some, that country music is



depressing but I like the sad songs... I do to.

You have a great feel on the guitar, where did that come from?

I learned to play by myself. I was young enough that I wasn’t conscious of why I was doing it. I was a 10 year old boy who wanted to play the guitar. I just took lessons at school but no dad didn’t give me guitar lessons. I’m not much of a guitar player in terms of technique but I think I have a good bit of feel. I lack some technique and I wish I’d payed more attention as a kid (laughs). But having said that it’s hard to have both and as you get older you see people with

great technique but, in the end, I rather have the feel.

Do you think that at some stage you might do another country album?

Yes, almost inevitably. As I said earlier most musicians love real country and they all want to make a country record at some point. I think that I just did it at a slightly odd time. People often do them towards the end of their career but it just sort of fell into my lap and happened. It certainly wasn’t a good career move right now (laughs) – quite the opposite.

What did the label say when you delivered it to them?

They would much rather that I hadn’t done it. But that was part of it too. I started it out as a bit of fun and there were lots of reasons for it. One of them was that when I went a played the record label some of the tracks... but to be fair some of those I played it to liked it because they’re good music people, but they did call up the next day to say that they thought that it was a really bad idea and that made me want to do it more. I thought “well if you think it’s a bad idea then I’m definitely doing it. I really dug my heels in about it. It was a really difficult record to just get made and I’m proud that I did it. I think it’s good

record and I think I’ll definitely do another one.

Would you write the material for the next one?

I don’t know.

There’s lot of great songs out there to be rediscovered.

Yes, that was part of it. Another one of the ingredients of it was that I was still writing for the next record and I thought well I could do a covers record. Down the line it would be fun to set out to write some. I’m not that far away anyway. It would only take a slight step to the left for me to think about writing for a country record. That would be fun.

Given your love of the brother harmonies would you consider finding a partner to do a record like that?

Yeah, but I think I’d rather have a girl – but only if she was pretty (laughs). To me that is the warmest sound in country. Those real tight country harmonies. You can’t get as close to those brother harmonies.

Someone like Tift Merritt?

I know Tift, she’s on the country album. And I’m doing gigs with her soon.

Interview by Steve Rapid with Ronnie Norton

KATHLEEN EDWARDS

Determination is part of Kathleen Edwards' make up. On the back of a postcard to promote her latest album *Asking For Flowers* she talks about travelling 13 hours on a Greyhound bus to New York, after a storm closed all the airports on the East Coast, to make an appearance on the David Letterman Show. That determination also saw her fight to use her husband Colin Cripps as producer for her second album against the advice of her record company. She didn't feel that the time was right to use an outside producer as she has on her new album where Jim Scott, who had worked with Tom Petty and Whiskeytown, came in to co-produce the record. She continues to work with Rounder Records in the

States but due to a new distribution deal in Europe now finds her working with Decca as part of the Universal Music Group.

'It's been very hit and miss for me this change. Dave O'Grady from Independent Records was my guy and he was great, he did a great job. So I have high expectations now I'm with a big company, but sometimes it feels like you get lost. Dave had a relationship with everybody and he's been around for awhile.

Nothing has changed for me in America, I'm still dealing with the same people and that's ok. But in Europe it's different, for instance my record wasn't even out in Germany. I'm doing promo for an album people can't get".

where's the flowers?

INTERVIEW BY STEVE RAPID · PHOTOGRAPHY BY RONNIE NORTON

Kathleen decided to work with Jim Scott and the decision proved to be a good one. "Jim has a wealth of experience... the last record was made with my husband (Colin Cripps) as producer... so it's a totally different thing when your not emotionally involved. Sometimes it's easier to talk around things without getting on each other's nerves. But with Jim he made it so easy because he knows how to talk to people and not just me but also the players in the room. All of them have had long term friendships and relationships so when stuff wasn't working he just knew how to come over the headphone mix and make it work. He'd say " this is sounding really good but maybe we should try this or try that." He has a way of communicating with people that works so that no one gets frustrated. He's very supportive. The other thing I never had to worry about was if it was sounding good, I knew it was".

Part of that process was the decision to recording the bulk of the album in California rather than in Canada something that concerned her at the start of the process. "I was worried at first as I didn't want to be one of those artists who goes to LA to make a record because it's so easy to go and do that. You can hire the best musicians in town but you can walk away with a record that doesn't have any soul. Sometimes when you are in a situation of playing with people that you don't know there is no emotional attachment so often there isn't the will to deliver that extra performance to make a song. One that's really honest on a certain level. I knew there was a lot of things I wanted to be involved with and I think as I had spent more time making this record I was able to go and work on parts on my own. I mean I didn't produce any of the sound on the album. I mean there were times when I said that "I'd like this or that to be louder". I had sketched out a lot of the record in terms of arrangement and textures, this type of guitar solo is what I was looking for. So I was aware of the sonic landscape before it got recorded. I had a vision of what I hoped that it would sound like. The X factor is who plays on it and what do they play".

The players she worked with, included Benmont Tench - who had worked on her second album and who was a link to one of her all time favourite artists Tom Petty, all

seemed like musicians who get involved at a deeper level. But was not as inviting as it might seem on paper. As Kathleen notes "other than Benmont I walked into a room of people I didn't know but when I left I felt that I had made great friends. People who I now talk to all the time".

She also got involved with the music process more than previously to the point of recording her first guitar solo as well as contributing on a range of other instruments. "Well it's a lot better now that when I first did it" she said after a laugh. "It's such a little thing but when you're married to someone who is, I've always considered to be, one of the best guitar players in Canada and may be the best guitar player I'll ever play with, it can be intimidating to step out and do it. I was getting frustrated with it and he said " you know you can do this" and I did. And between now and the next record I feel I can come on in leaps and bounds. I can work on it and get better at playing the electric guitar. I'd like to do some guitar solos on the next record".

How I wondered did she prepare to record an album? Was she able to write on the road and therefore have some material ready when she decided what direction her next set of songs might take. "I have a couple of different directions that the next record could go in, it will depend on the kind of songs that I end up writing. If they're anything like the songs that I'm writing now it's going to be a 45 minute rock 'n' roll record. But then there are songs like *California* on this record where I'd wanted to jump more into the pool of my musical background. A little bit more of a sonic landscape rather than a three and a half minute verse, chorus, verse, chorus scenario. Then there's a album that would be more like a Sunday morning coffee drinking record". I suggested that she could possibly do both a notion that might be considered. "Yeah, maybe I'll have one on each side". For Edwards writing is something that is an ongoing process that can change depending on circumstances, for instance she explained that "on this past record it took me about six months of being home to be able to start writing. I didn't really have anything to go on as I only had one or two songs in my back pocket. And, at that time, I didn't know if I was going to be working with

Jim so I didn't have a vision. I just knew some of the things that I wanted to try". In preparation for the recording of the new album she was not as ready with the songs as she naturally would have been for the first and perhaps second album. The songs she had ready she had recorded locally. "I recorded them acoustically. But I only had four or five songs written at the time we started recording and that included *Asking For Flowers* and *California*. They were four of the heavier, darker songs. I'd take the time then to digest them and to think about them and then maybe go back down and work on them some more".

The process of preparing a song varies from artist to artist but in Edwards case it is usually the lyrics that she starts the process with. "The lyrics were done on those first four songs, they represent what was happening to me and once they were done I felt that a weight had been lifted from me. I was ready then to have more fun in the other songs. I was able to write *I Make The Dough, You Get The Glory, The Cheapest Key* songs that were, to me, a little more fun".

Although Edwards travelled and lived in the varied locations as Switzerland and Korea when she was young (her father was a diplomat) her nationality has still played a part in her writing worldview. Kathleen feels that it has played its part "I think it influences what I write about. But I live a pretty quiet life when I go home. I think that as I grew up overseas a lot I don't wear my flag on my heart so much. I think though I'm very much a product of my surroundings. Those surroundings have always been Canadian and community, friends and family, I think winter plays a large part in the psyche, both being isolated from other people and at other times being very connected to a certain community". That community spirit relates to her living arrangements, where up to now she been slight remote from the music scene which has meant that she tends to be a home person when off the road though that might change. "I don't go out much to shows as I don't live in Toronto, I live outside the city. It's about 45 minutes away. But I think that might change as I do feel a little isolated out there. I don't go to shows often which is not because I don't like listening to music it's just that when it's your work you want a break.

The last thing you want when you've been doing shows is to go out. You want to relax and to read a book".

However being a professional musician has brought with it the nomadic lifestyle that all musicians have to adhere to, a lifestyle she has got very used to over the last number of years. "It's a lifestyle that I've got very used to. There are a lot of things about it that I don't enjoy. I find touring in Europe really hard because you are in a different country almost every day. You deal with different currencies all the time. I'm just not at that level where I can get to stay in a nice hotel, have a shower. I end up showering at venues and every punk band has been in there and it's not ideal. But at the same time it's like camping right? And I love camping. I mean I'm having a great time right now. We all get along in the band. They're all my brothers. Jim (Bryson) is more a brother than a friend. The new guitar player in the band right now, he made a comment the other day that Jim and I speak in a secret code because we've been around each other for so long. We have this kind of sibling language that no one else understands". It does naturally have its drawbacks in terms of relationships that mean one of the things she looks forward to most is seeing her family whom she may not have seen for some time.

After three acclaimed albums and a very positive reaction to her live shows she has to consider where she can take her music which include working with a bigger set of musicians. "I'd like to be big enough to maybe do a concert with a full orchestra or a brass section or try new things which means that when you try new things that are ambitious they usually cost more money. I'd like to try new things and not have to worry what the bottom line is. It's about having friends or fans coming up to you and saying that they see that you have made a major step forward in your creative endeavours. That there has been a major shift in how and what you're doing. You know that people know who you are but I find that stuff offputting. It's a weird double edged thing. I have a close friend who became a friend because they're a big music fan who has said to me "you know the difference between you and other people I go and see is that one day I know I'm one day going to see you play with a 50 piece



orchestra and I'm going to be in the audience". That's a little overwhelming but I guess that that is a possibility. At the moment I have a hard time moving past the next two or three days ahead. Having said that I think that if I thought that my career was not going to go anywhere or not get any bigger that it is now I would feel discouraged. I'm working really hard and I'd like to think that it's going to grow".

Given that it is deemed that, in mainstream terms, the genre of Americana has not produced a major star and has been seen to translate into a failure of the music overall, It seems a somewhat ridiculous notion when you consider the strength of the music being produced under that banner is something that Edwards considers: "the thing is that the genre of Americana might not mean anything as it's such a broad title for a lot of crappy music. All you need is a microphone and a computer to make a record now. Which I think maybe is a bad thing. Only because I think about Bruce Springsteen, Born To Run was only his third record. So nobody really has a chance to develop their craft in an environment that is conducive to doing it. If you can write something now that is saccharine enough you can get on radio, famous for five minutes, and someone is going to tell you that you're great because someone else will benefit". This also has a direct effect on her friend Jim Bryson. "I don't know how he does it. He has his fingers in a lot of different jars. He plays with me and he also makes his own records. But he does it without a big infrastructure in a way that I feel that I do. I mean I have a record label that I think is committed to seeing me do well. There are ups and downs to that but generally they're there. I genuinely believe that Jim is a great songwriter but he can't get arrested. But I also know that there is a joy in playing music that has nothing to do with the business. I hope that will always be true".

Kathleen Edwards' strong will, talent and determination will doubtless see her continue to make music that many people will want to listen to and to see her perform live.

TRACKS ON THE HIGHWAY

Farrell Spense *A Town Called Hell* Self-Release

Recorded, the sleeve tells us, in Spense's apartment in East Vancouver this Canadian singer/songwriter has an experimental edge but one that has a grounded roots quality too. The songs are, in the main, written by Spense but she also includes a couple of covers, most notably and the one most listeners may be more familiar with, is Mary Gauthier's *I Drink* which is given a sparse rendering, with some atmospheric electric slide guitar, but captures the song's resigned acceptance. Though Spense voice is quite different to Gauthier's and it has a quality that makes it work for Spense also. The second cover is Bukka White's *High Fever Blues*, a song she makes very much her own in the overall sparse and atmospheric settings. The music is full of nuances. Subtle sounds feature between tracks, ambient scene settings that enhance the unquiet mood that prevails through this largely understated set of songs. Spense has a voice well suited to this and the songs set the tone, they are long pieces, rarely less than four minuets and, in a couple of occasions, over six. Therefore you will either fall into Spense's world and be entranced or you will dismiss it as unfocused. It has to be said that it is not the most upbeat record that you'll hear and the title should give you some indication of that, but for all that it is compelling and captures a quality that makes this album work within the context that it is delivered. That it was produced and mixed by Spense means that this album sounds exactly as she intended it to, which is something I would applaud and the end result is special enough to warrant wider attention. The closing song *Here's To You And Me*, features vocal accompaniment with Rob Bracken, who offers a perfect counterpoint to Spense, and closes the album on a more upbeat if still regretful note. It's that kind of album, one to check out.

Two Fingers Of Firewater *Self-titled* Chiller

UK quartet playing a mix of country and rock based songs that use pedal steel, accordion, mandolin as well as synth and keyboards to give them a broad palate for this their debut album. It opens with the only non-original song on the album a folkish, slightly European

take the traditional *Satan, Your Kingdom Must Come Down*, which then segues into their own song, an instrumental *Bandit*. Next up *Endless Highway* explores a much covered theme in a style that shows that they have listened to some notable country rock. *The World Can Turn* is also more solidly country and from there on they cover themes of life, lost love and loneliness. The results vary, as do the directions that the songs go in terms of sonics. Even though the pedal steel features across a number of songs some sound more jangly and rock based and less country, as with *The Night Ends*. *B Mando* is more experimental, with its backwards sound intro before taking a more conventional route. The brief musical interlude *The Beginning* features the synth and the pedal steel on an instrumental that suggest the band may explore a more diverse direction in the future. I would hesitate to call them a country band, though that is clearly an influence, and as a debut this is an album that will, doubtless, appeal to fans and open the ears of a wider audience to their possible potential. One that has yet to be fully realised at this point but one that has possibilities.

Phil Vasser *Prayer Of A Common Man* Humphead

A piano based singer/songwriter who always brought a broader context to his music, even if he was classed as "country" in some quarters. Vasser has a strong voice and is a solid songwriter who overall may appeal to Paul Harrington, Liam O'Reilly and Elton John fans in this neck of the woods. Produced by Vasser and Mark Wright the sound is full on, as you might expect with some respected A Team players involved. The majority of the songs are Vasser co-writes, the best of which are the reminisces in *My Chevrolet*. There is a 60s feel to some of the songs and that era is a touchstone throughout. There are love ballads like *Let Me Love You Tonight* that will appeal to some while others may like the Shawn Sahm, Max Baca and Speedy Sparks' song *Why Don't Ya* which features Los Lonely Boys or *Baby Rocks* which show that Vasser can rock out too. A Billy Joelish *The World Is a Mess* comes from a completely different place and no way in the world could be called country. So this is an album that could find favour with a much broader audience that it might initially be aimed at, but without radio support here it could fall between the cracks.

Becky Schlegal *For All The World To See* Lilly Ray

Schlegal is a writer, singer and rhythm guitarist who also co-produced this album with guitarist and banjo player Brian Fesler. It is largely acoustic and predominantly bluegrass in nature though it also features percussion and acoustic bass to underpin the occasional steel guitar, electric guitar, piano and cello textures. All are used unobtrusively to add colour behind the clarity and focus of Schlegal's voice, a strong and striking instrument itself that brings her songs, songs that show a strongly independent nature, to a place and of love and of loss. The bluegrass direction of a song like *Best Time Of The Day* will see the album defined, to a degree under that heading and

indeed Randy Kohrs' dobro and Fesler's banjo playing emphasise that aspect but other songs are either more stripped down, such as the guitar only *Lonely* or simply acoustic. Some songs are perfect vehicles for sadness and regret as with *Jenny*, an album standout. Fans of Alison Krauss, or bluegrass music in general will enjoy the skill displayed here, on many levels this will delight. www.beckyschlegal.com

Zane Lewis *Self-titled* Slant

The music here is turbo country with a strong rock overdrive. Lewis is a singer and has chosen songs to suit his oeuvre. He adds his name to two co-writes, otherwise the songs are from outside writers. Recorded in Nashville it features players not yet on the A list, but players who easily fulfil the roles required of them. It's a big sound with very upfront drums. A sound that should find some traction at radio. Lewis has a strong voice, if not one that you could immediately identify. It suits what he is doing and pushes the song along. *Off The Record* sets a scene about listening to Haggard and learning about life from a bunch of country records. The music is mostly up with songs like *A Helluva Time* and *She's Got It Goin' On* emphasising the good ol' boy havin' a good time ethos. *Bad Ass Country Band*, a song he co-wrote with co-producer Lex Lipsitz (the other producer is Brett James) is a signature song, Waylon Jennings and Merle Haggard are mentioned as touch stones but the engine here is supercharged and bound to appeal to those who like their country hot, uptempo and full-on. www.zanelewismusic.com

Jefferson Pepper *American Evolution* American Fallout

The second installment in Pepper's trilogy that tracks American history through a series of seemingly ordinary lives. Not the history makers but those who live with it's consequences. It is a monumental task that Pepper has succeeded with, in the main, and one that entertains as well as making it's point. It is essentially an anti-war and pro-people message. But Pepper's characters are not without their flaws and idiosyncrasies. The album starts in the 1920s and runs through the birth of rock 'n' roll to plastic surgery and ruminations on the return of Jesus. The range of subject matters is a tribute to Pepper's skill as a writer and he manages to make these people live and breathe in your mind. The songs are give life by a range of musicians equally in tune with the songs and their intent. Pepper himself plays a host of instruments and players of the calibre of Fats Kaplan and Scott Neubert add their talents to the collective sound. The lyrics are well thoughtout and are largely successful in telling the tales of the lives he inhabits. Some, understandably, will work better for some than others, but highlights for this listener include *Collection Of Angels*, the banjo and dobro driven *Good Morning Mrs. Stine*, the more stripped down *The Ballad Of Betty Wulfrum*. They are also not without a sense of humour and humility to balance the harder edges of a song like the closing *Another White Line*. There are seventeen songs and as producer Pepper has made sure that there is plenty of variety in the music that makes it a particularly

pleasurable listening experience, but one that has a point and a purpose. Jefferson Pepper has produced a concept that should be heard in entirety and I look forward to the final installment, but for now this album will have me coming back for more as American Evolution is undoubted achievement for all involved, and that includes the listener. www.americanfallout.com

Kathleen Edwards *Asking For Flowers* Rounder/Decca

Whiskeytown producer Jim Scott is co-producer with Kathleen Edwards on this latest album, which finds her on the Universal label in the UK for the first time. Hopefully that will give this fine album some more exposure. Edwards has a distinctive and emotive voice that has, a times an edge of world weariness and resignation. But that doesn't mean that the music lacks expression or passion. The sound is uplifting and life affirming with a strong grounded core that is emboldened by some strong guitar textures, with Colin Cripps, Greg Leisz, Jim Bryson and Kathleen herself all involved on that front. Leisz also adds pedal steel while the keyboard duties are handled by the likes of Benmont Tench. Edwards has involved herself at all levels of this album as writer, player, singer and producer and has delivered an album that will delight those acquainted with her previous work and one that will also possibly attract a new set of admirers. The way the voice and guitars on *Run* have a sense of atmosphere and dread provides one of the album's many highlights though in truth this is an album to savour as a whole. Edwards is singing better than ever and her singing has a haunting quality that lingers whether set against the quiter, more uncertain songs, such as *Scared At Night* or the fuller soundscape of the closing *Goodnight, California*. Kathleen Edwards is making music that is unconcerned with trends or chart placing but deserves a wide audience for its integrity and introspection and quiet beauty, like the flowers pictured in the album booklet.

Steve Earle *Copperhead Road (deluxe edition)* Geffen

This reissue of Earle's third album comes with a contemporaneous live CD. Though originally released on the UNI label as MCA Nashville didn't quite know what to do with him, this doesn't sound as rock-orientated as it seemed at the time, perhaps having Tony Brown as co-producer had a restraining factor, though the band's live appearance at the National Stadium was pretty full on. It contains several Earle classics in the title track, *The Devil's Right Hand*, and *Johnny Come Lately* recorded in London with the Pogues. The remaining tracks all acquit themselves well if not quite hitting that classic status, though the closing *Nothing But A Child* with Maria McKee comes close. Some of the additional material has previously been available as single b-sides and includes his version of the Stones' *Dead Flowers*. The unreleased 1987 concert includes *Fearless Heart*, *San Antonio Girl*, Chris Hillman and Gram Parsons' *Wheels* as well as Rodney Crowell's *Brown and Root* and the band is on form. Overall with the expanded booklet and additional songs this will please

long time fans, though how much broader it's appeal would be is a little questionable even with those who have got to know him through his more recent work.

Mary Gauthier *Genesis (The Early Years)* Proper

This compilation of songs from Mary's early album releases includes some of her best known songs such as *I Drink*, *Drag Queens In Limousines*, *Camelot Motel* and *Christmas In Paradise* making it the perfect round-up of those early years. For completists it includes two unreleased live songs *I Ain't Got No Home* and *I Don't Know Nothing About Love*. Either way it serves as reminder of her talent and individuality. She has a distinctive and deliberate voice that often delivers her words in a understated, almost spoken way that seem perfectly suited to the telling of her stories, the voices of her characters are drawn in from the fringes or the those, like herself, who feel like outsiders in a uncaring world. The playing is equally subtle and sparse but thoroughly solid, if not quite as vibrant as the playing on her more recent albums. The new songs see her in a natural setting onstage with, on Woody Guthrie's *I Aint Got No Home*, just her voice and guitar, all she needs to hold and entrance her audience. The final track sees her onstage with some additional players for *I Don't Know Nothing About Love*. Both useful if, in truth, unessential tracks that are simply a bonus to the strength of her previously released material that show that from the get go Gauthier was a worthy talent deserving of the recognition she has since received.

Jill Johnson *Music Row* Humphead

A big star in her native Sweden, Johnson recorded this album in Nashville with some top notch session players. Produced by Scott Baggett it features some of her favourite songs alongside some outside suggestions. That Johnson can really sing is readily apparent and when she tackles such often (over) recorded songs as Jolene she manages to make her interpretation a little different. Other songs given a gloss coat of paint include *Angel Of The Morning*, *Angel From Montgomery* and *Tumblin' Dice*. The arrangements move from the turbo-charged full-on to the slightly less so, the overall sound is considerably more contemporary than it is classic country. Nothing here is underplayed. No doubt the album has been a huge success in her native Sweden where it was released last year. Now, in a different market, it may attract the curious with the song choices, but as essentially a new artist it, along with a lot of cover albums, begs the question- does it surpass the originals? In most cases it doesn't, but then it never intended to, judging by Johnson's sleeve notes, rather it is a more personal take on these songs which, on its own terms, can be considered successful in that Johnson has obviously put a lot of herself into these particular versions. Your reaction will depends on how you will like or dislike the way she and producer Baggett have chosen to set these versions as radio-friendly retreads.

Agnostic Mountain Gospel Choir *Ten Thousand* Balling The Jack

This is the third release for the Canadian quartet whose primal blues and folk axis has garnered comparison to some of the usual suspects. It is raw and ragged but exuding a primitive energy that crosses numerous barriers and can appeal to several different audience sections. The songs are mostly written by the band with covers from Dewey Balfa, Sleepy John Estes and Son House thrown in for good measure. The overall effect, for some reason, reminds me of a performance of one man blues band Duster Bennett. It has that kind of simple directness. The playing is not show offy but has a variety of textures and percussion that includes banjo, trombone, piano, slide guitar and, er, mixing bowl. The vocals and harmonies make it easy to spot the Tom Waits and Beefheart comparisons that have come up though the latter was always more electric and the former more eclectic. But it gives you a place on the map to start. I found it a more entertaining and enjoyable album than *Fighting And Onions*, their last album, and can see how they are captivating live audiences. However in pure recorded terms this will find favour with those who love early blues and acoustic music. Like a friday night celebration at a mountain mining camp. It lets of steam and has a good time.

Kimmie Rhodes *Walls Fall Down* Sunbird

A frequent visitor to these shores Rhodes has made mainstream radio and TV appearances, all of which have undoubtedly helped her music gain exposure. *Walls Fall Down* should be the recipient of this attention for it is a very fine album that showcases Rhodes' voice and writing skills as well as her interpretative skills. The latter is obvious on her versions of Townes van Zandt classic *If I Needed You*, Rodney Crowell's *Sex And Gasoline* or the quiet and subtle take of Lennon and McCartney's *The Fool On The Hill*. Her songs, often co-writes are gentle and reflective, some are written with Four Of Us' Brendan Murphy and with Kieran Goss, amongst others. The best are *I've Been Loved By You* with and understated guitar figure underpinning the song, the closing *Last Seven Seconds* as well as the title track. Her son (Gabriel Rhodes) and the album's co-producer plays some effective guitar throughout as part of a set of like minded players, also including the keyboard skills of Floyd Domino, who serve the songs on the album rather than themselves with a sound that may well be described as contemporary folk. But it is Rhodes herself who is the focus and she again proves worthy of that attention.

Rachel Harrington *City Of Refuge* Skinny Dennis

Her last album *The Bootlegger's Daughter* received a lot of praise (from Bob Harris in particular) and her follow up is likely to do so also. Using an essentially acoustic backing she again manages to evoke an earlier era, something that is enhanced by the use of period pictures on the cover and the use of particular instruments like the clarinet in her arrangements of the traditional songs *Old Time Religion/Working On A Building*. Her own songs are also rooted in an earlier era like the bluegrass styled *Tuman* (about a Harry R.

Truman, not the similarly named US president) or *Under The Big Top* (which adds some evocative pedal steel to the mix). She comes more up to date with her song *Carver* which uses some of the writer's material in the song. The most well know cover here is her version of *Ode To Billy Joe* which is given an old time earthy dobro-coloured treatment. Harrington's voice is crystal clear and captivating. The playing, which features Tim O'Brien on fiddle, Zak Borden on mandolin and Mike Grigoni on dobro, is equally adept and brings her songs and characters to life. *City Of Refuge* is the kind of place, as displayed here, were many would like to spend some time getting acquainted with the residents.

Pete Cummins *The Brilliant Architect* Sidekick

A longtime cornerstone of the Irish scene Pete Cummins has been a member of Granny's Intentions and the Fleadh Cowboys amongst others in his time. Now, at long last, comes this solo album. It showcases his skill as singer, songwriter, producer and player. It is largely a roots orientated affair with some fine ensemble playing. Veteran players like Trevor Knight, Fran Breen and Ed Deane make sure of that. The one cover is his take on Johnny Cash's *Train Of Love* which sound like a more spontaneous tribute than a considered move. While not the greatest vocalist Ireland has produced Pete still sings with a soulfulness that is right for his songs. *The Only Business* reflects that in a world gone materialistic it is love that is a far more important commodity. That theme is continued with the sense of regret in *Burning All Your Candles* and of rejoice in *Delivery Man*. He is also attuned to world affairs in *Flowers In Baghdad*, where he delivers perhaps his best vocal, a song that takes a small detail to highlight the futility of conflict. The bluesy *Damaged Man* has a good groove and good solo. There are a variety of moods here that make the album a good listening experience from the opening cut right through to the laid back sparse but effective and evocative closing title track. *The Brilliant Architect* reaffirms Pete Cummins as one of the elder statesmen and a most worthy member of the local music community.

Paul Brainard and Friends *Caught Steelin' Vol. 1* Self-Release

Best known as a member of Richmond Fontaine and for playing with Willy Vlautin, they perform together on the CD accompanying Vlautin's latest book *The Hardline*. This album is a solo side project from the steel guitar player which in common with a lot of such projects cover a wide range of styles. Some are cinematic, some tender, while others are funky. All show Brainard skill as a steelie and a musician. He also plays trumpet, ukulele, piano and guitar throughout. Lovers of the steel guitar will enjoy the range of moods on offer here. It is totally instrumental, unlike recent release from fellow steel players Joe Goldmark and Jon Rauhouse who both used guest vocalists. Duke Ellington's *Caravan* is covered alongside some self written songs and the album closes with a track that takes the steel guitar back to it's Hawaiian roots with

Aloha Oe, but gives the sound a contemporary twist. The steel guitar is a versatile and multi-functional instrument in the hands of a player like Brainard, within or without Richmond Fontaine. Though it is with the latter than he will undoubtedly reach the wider audience. myspace.com/paulbrainardmusic

Solomon Burke *Like A Fire* Shout Factory

Burke's last Buddy Miller produced album was a triumph. This follow up album has been given a far less country approach by producer Steve Jordon but still has, at it's heart, Burke's huge soulful voice. The songs are taken from a different source with writers like Eric Clapton, Keb' Mo', Ben Harper and producer Jordon providing the source material. The latter's co-write *The Fall*, featuring Dean Parks' pedal steel, is one of the album highlight. As is the Harper song *A Minute To Rest And A Second To Pray* with it's writer joining in on vocals and dobro. He also add his vocals to Jordan's *Ain't That Something* a song that again highlights Burke's vocal prowess and inherent ability to deliver a song. The Burke/Clapton co-write *Thank You* takes a more stripped down approach in it's praise to God, with prominent banjo over upright bass and drums its less is more ethos works very well. In a similar vein the final track uses a simple backing of keyboards and light drums to allow Solomon to deliver an understated vocal that again emphasises what a tower of real soul he is.

Paul Chesne *White Man's Curse* Self-Release

The latest album from Chesne is a vibrant, life affirming, affair with a large cast of players adding to the mix on the roots blend of rock and twang. The songs are all by Chesne and he delivers a strong and purposeful vocal over the keyboard and guitar-led ensemble. A song like *There's A Place I'd Like To Show You* takes a soulful route, with keyboard and multiple vocals that is both effective and effusive. Chesne's last album was produced by Dwight Yoakam drummer Mitch Marine (that task is here split between Mike Sutherland, Wyn Davis and Denny Weston, Jr.). That connection is continued here with the involvement of former Yoakam players David Roe and Skip Edwards. Largely recorded in California, it has that West Coast flavour and feel. The pedal steel that underlines *No Big Surprise* emphasises the roots feel as does Eric Suoninen's guitar work. The album also takes an underlying sense of humour to life, as evidenced on songs like *Won't Die...* "It all goes to dust one way or another". Fine stuff. Their high self-esteem is noted on *Pathetic Underdogs* but they soon pick themselves up with *Pink Champagne*. The closing track, from which the album takes it's title, is an uptempo song that reflects on man's (well a certain section of the species at least) burden and ends an enjoyable and entertaining album on a (drink induced) high note.

Trisha Yearwood *Love Songs* Humphead

A collection of songs that lives up to it's title. The collection includes her early big hit *She's In Love With The Boy* and then runs

through a collection of songs befitting the title taken from her tenure with MCA Records. Yearwood has always been a powerful and emotive vocalist who's material has moved from the traditionally minded to the more pop orientated. There have been a couple of hits collections available that are more rounded in song direction than this selection which none-the-less given its themed selection shows Yearwood's talent and strength. It's appeal will be to a more feminine audience who will enjoy what's on offer here.

Dolly Parton *Backwoods Barbie* Dolly Records

This time out Dolly has delivered a country album that is the kind of sound that many expect from her after her more rootish bluegrass orientated albums and those that followed. She has co-produced the album with Kent Wells. It is an album that plays to her strengths and to her public persona. However, one should never underestimate her vocal skills. She has an undeniable country voice, an iconic voice that is perhaps one of the best know in the genre, even to those who normally wouldn't know one voice from another (which is these days more common than it used to be). The A-list players are out in force and give the kind of performance one would expect from them. Add to that a host of backing singers and you have a spirited sound that lives up to her image. None the less so on the opening *Better Get To Livin'* or on the tongue-in-cheek but barbed title track. It may be self-deprecating with its "too much makeup, too much hair" acclamation rather it's a case of "don't be fooled by thinkin' the goods are not all there". Parton is a smart cookie and a talented one who is very aware of who and what she is. Musically she has sometimes taken bigger steps and moved towards a far more mainstream audience. But here she has made album that will, doubtless, have a broad appeal while remaining at it's heart a country music album. There are exceptions with a song like *Only Dreamin'* which has a celtic sound or the piano led bluesy *The Lonesomes*. Dolly has written most of the material here, with such covers as *Tracks Of My Tears* and the Fine Young Cannibals' *Drive Me Crazy* given Dolly make-overs. The former features veteran players Lloyd Green and Pig Robbins alongside the newer boys. That this album will appeal to Dolly Parton's many fans is a given but it will also raise a smile on other more traditionally minded-faces too. Long may she reign.

Hayes Carll *Trouble In Mind* HumpHead/Lost Highway

Setting his case out in the opening *Drunken Poet's Dream* you know that Carll is serious about his looseness. There is a humour here as well as Carll's honed observations on life's little foibles. Carll has stepped his game up a notch with this release, his first for Lost Highway, production duties are handled by Brad Jones who has used a selection of players who bringing something different to a session. Among then are Pat Buchanan, Carl Broemel, Will Kimbrough and George Bradfute all contribute guitars. The ubiquitous Al Perkins plays banjo and pedal steel when required. Producer Jones is on

bass and drums are by John Gardner. Others appear here and there but suffice to say the sound is full, textured and muscular. Rocking and rootsy *Trouble In Mind*, the album and track still loosely fit the alt-country category that Carll started out under but the possibilities are wider and the potential is wide open at this time. Carll is a writer who can be considered to be continuing in the tradition of the great Texas storytellers and troubadours. With a handful of fine albums to his credit Carll can further hone his craft across time but right now this is a solid statement of intent and with songs like the final *She Left Me For Jesus* he is likely to garner greater attention for his particular point of (world) view.

Pentangle *The Time Has Come* Castle

A four CD retrospective set that covers the years from 1967 to 1973 of this ground breaking genre-crossing quintet. There roots were in the folk club revival of the Sixties but there influence stretches through to the new folk-based movement of today. They were and are masters of their craft, supreme instrumentalists and vocalists who took songs from past centuries and brought them up to date with a sound that still sound fresh some thirty five years later. Personally the more song-orientated side of their output was that which appealed to me rather than the material that showed off their playing skills. On this collection there is, thankfully, something for all tastes as well as for those who appreciate Pentangle for everything that they were. For those unacquainted with them previously there is much to explore musically as well as a informative and visually enriched booklet. Bert Jansch, John Renbourn, Jacqui McShee, Danny Thompson and Terry Cox created their own sound and their own direction mixing acoustic and electric instruments with a sitar to explore the possibilities of the music they played. The success of their vision is on display here for all to enjoy.

Reckless Kelly *Bullet Proof* Yep Roc

The band are back with another muscular hard hitting slice of the roots rocks that they have been refining since their early days. Those who may miss Steve Earle's hardcore Dukes days would be well directed towards this album. The songs, mainly from singer Willy Braun, cover such topics as the life on the road (*Ragged As The Road*), different aspects of love (*Love In Her Eyes/A Guy Like Me*) and US foreign policy (*American Blood*) and the flooding in New Orleans (*God Forsaken Town* - a song co-written by Braun and Robert Earl Keen). For the most part these song rock but can on occasion take a gentler tone as with *I Never Had a Chance* and *Mirage*. That they see themselves as a modern branch of the out-laws movement of old is underlined by the use of the graphic of a Ned Kelly-like figure on the cover. Reckless Kelly are the kind of band with a solid musical foundation and a loyal following but are unlikely to trouble mainstream radio or its related charts. Rather they make the music that want to from their Austin Texas base and send it out to the world to enjoy. Their world-view is that it is an uncaring

and hostile world for those that don't fit within the normal margins of society and its questionable morals. They play well, sing well and deliver a strong set of songs that are not afraid to show where their feelings and loyalties and in these often bland band days that has to count for something. I suspect that Reckless Kelly may not be bulletproof but they are willing to be in the fight.

Tony Joe White *Deep Cuts* Munich

This album, has come in for some stick from some quarters for daring to re-do some classic Tony Joe White songs in a new setting. Produced by his son Jody White, who also co-wrote some new songs here, it is an attempt to give his father a more contemporary musical setting. From that point of view it works. It takes a classic voice, full of swamp soul and mixes in a musical bed of programmed sounds and hard rhythms. "What's the point?" it has been said. But I think the point is to perhaps open him up to some new possibilities and directions. The cover however uses some photography from an earlier period of his career which is at odds with the music on the CD and somewhat confusing the issue as to the content. Fans of the classic TJW sound will not be convinced and will instead listen to the original songs. Those not as familiar or new to his work will find that mine-deep and swamp laden voice intact on a sonic structure that sets a mood and tone that may have been better served with a selection of all new songs or perhaps some well chosen songs that were not part of White's former repertoire. The 3 new co-writes between Tony Joe and Jody are all shorter, moodier pieces and it may have been more rewarding for them to explore the possibilities of the collaboration with some more substantial new songs.

Rodney Crowell *Sex and Gasoline* Yep Roc

The title track was played as a work-in-progress on Crowell's last visit to Dublin, now it takes pride of place as the opening track on this his latest album. The pre-release review copy has no information relating to production and players. Those songs deal with Crowell questioning subjects that relate to the times he lives in, trying to understand the world around him. A world that runs on "sex and gasoline" but one where he also looks inward at his own life and finds himself, as he outlines in the song, *Closer To Heaven*, it closes the album and lists many of the things that annoy him as well as the things from which he takes comfort. One thing is for sure he is making some of the best music in his life, thoughtful and tactile, righteous and relevant. Musically it follows the path of recent recordings in that it has a contemporary sound that at times touches on his country roots without ever being completely set into that category. Crowell has always worked with solid players who support his songs where needed. His voice has matured and is one of the most distinctive around today, capable of both anger and ardour. Those expecting a return to the country chart hitting sound of yore may be disappointed, but everyone else who has witnessed his renaissance over his last few albums can rejoice in this reaffirmation of his talent and commitment.

Southern Tenant Folk Union *Revivals, Rituals & Union Songs* Ugly Nephew

The second album from the six-piece UK bluegrassish band is a exploration of their combined talents as singers, writers and players. There is a least one song from each member and they cover such diverse themes as drug use (*Cocaine*), lost love (*My Love's Gone Cold*) salvation (*No More Hard Times*) and magical persons (*Changeling Child*). The instrumentation is acoustic and the overall sound is bluegrass but the music touches other bases as well. With the variety of writers involved and three members credited with lead vocals, whilst all sing, there is a plenty of choice on offer - from the folkish *Folk Tree*, the full bluegrass interplay of *Her Love's Gone Cold*, to the more restrained playing that sits behind the words of hope on *No More Hard Times* (*No More Trouble*). While some may still question the authenticity of a UK bluegrass band the music on offer here suggests different. Granted the Southern Tenant Folk Union may not, at the moment, produced an album as powerful and perfect as some of their American contemporaries they have, none-the-less, made a record that will please fans of the band and acoustic music in general and one that alludes to the exuberance they should have in their live shows.

Kitty, Daisy & Lewis *Sunday Best*

The young Durham siblings make music that is set in another era. They have put a lot of effort into recreating the methods sounds, look and feel of such classic studios as Sun, Chess and, closer to home, Joe Meeks' home studio. They have gathered vintage equipment together to record this, their debut album. There are some who just do not see the point of recreating the sound of an earlier era when, especially now, more and more music from the Fifties particularly is available. But often without a living, breathing, working example of a genre based sound there is nothing to point a new, younger audience in the direction of that music which can be fruitful and rewarding and worthy of exposure. A band like BR5-49, in their early days, turned a lot of people onto some vibrant and vital hillbilly music. Here the trio cover early r'n'b, rock 'n' roll and rockabilly sounds. The songs are, with two exceptions, taken from the music's heyday. *Going Up The Country*, *I Got My Mojo Working*, and *Mohair Sam* are all classics from an earlier era. The problem here is that relative youth of the trio means that their vocals don't carry the weight that some of these songs need. Though their exuberance and attention to detail is to be applauded, and loved by fans. That's nothing that some life experience and some grit will not make the music feel stronger. But it's early days and the trio have made a good start that will see them improve with age if they aren't diverted to some outside producer's idea of what they should be.

Sugarland *Love On The Inside* Humphead

The duo of Jennifer Nettles and Kristian Bush are Sugarland and they make the kind of music that Music Row currently loves. It is

a big production sound that has pop and rock elements well to the fore with touches of country in banjo, steel guitar, accordion and mandolin and dobro in the overall mix. They look, for all intents and purposes, like the latest pop duo sensation, but for all that Nettles sing with an undeniable twang in her voice and the songs are co-written with writers like Bobby Pinson - whose own country sounding album got nowhere - and (on *Joey*) with veteran writer Bill Anderson, the end result are solid and sometimes the country content rises to the fore as with *Genevieve* or in the very odd plea for Mr Steve Earle to write Nettles a song. Making *Steve Earle* perhaps the most overtly "country" song on the album. Nettles and Bush are credited as writers and co-writers of all but the last two songs on the album in the deluxe editions bonus selection (on of those is a cover of that "country" classic *Life In A Northern Town*) as well as with the (co-)production so it's safe to assume that Sugarland sound pretty much the way they want it to and that, without a doubt, that sound has been well received at radio and with their many fans and for that they are to be applauded. If you like Nashville's now sound Sugarland will be sweet music to your ears. The rest of us may need a sugar free diet.

Paul Kelly *Stolen Apples* Independent

A venerable and veteran performer and writer Paul Kelly is highly regarded in his native Australia and has a fair number of fans over here also. His latest album see him release an album recorded over a more contemplative period of time with his core band rather than his more usual 'get-them-down-while-their-hot' method. This is thoughtful and thought provoking music that should hit home for many. The vocal are mature and carry a soulful edge that can be seen in Bruce Springsteen. An artist with whom his music has an affinity, in that Kelly is also a veteran of many albums and many road miles. His band, a tight four piece, are right there behind every song delivering the kind of backing that is full and flavoursome. Additional guests add a raft of vocal harmonies, some piano and trumpet to the overall roots orientated sound. After that it's down to Kelly's undoubted talent as a writer and singer. The songs draw on subject matters close to his heart like the song about the Aboriginal painters Queenie McKenzie and Rover Thomas in *The Ballad Of Queenie and Rover* while *The Foggy Fields Of France*, which takes its chorus from an e.e. cummings poem and has a more early rock sound as it basis that makes it a delight. On the other had the album opens with an eastern sounding motif for *Feeling Of Grief* and *God Told Me* takes a look into the mind of a terrorist's motives, in a first person narrative, that tries to understand what is largely not easy to completely understand from the outside. Kelly is one of those writes who has the skill to bring you to the heart of his subject as much as any musician can. But also brings you some great sounding songs to enjoy. The enjoyment also continues with a second CD recorded live that features songs on the main album among its fourteen tracks and makes this package doubly welcome.

Loudon Wainwright *Recovery* Yep Roc

The songs of Loudon Wainwright are well know to many and here he reinvents some of the songs through the production of Joe Henry and a bunch of inventive players like guitarist/steel player Greg Leisz. The result, especially for those of us who wouldn't count themselves as long time fans, is rewarding and relevant. In that it makes you hear song from his back catalogue in a new light. But I don't doubt that the skill with which the artist and producer have reworked these song will also have a fascination for his devoted fans, of whom there are many given his reception at the Midlands festival. His satire and with have been integral to many of his songs as well his sharp observation that is the core of songs like *School Days*. Other classic songs, like *Motel Blues*, are given the kind of reflection that comes with age with loosing the essential core meaning of the song, rather they gain from the sense of experience of what those days where and what they meant. Joe Henry is one of those producers who always manages to bring something special out of an artist, especially those who have been around the block a time or two. The kind of poignancy that inhabits the closing *Man Who Couldn't Cry* is a perfect example of that and how his insight into the human condition at it most basic. It also underlines the skill that Wainwright brought to his songs, a skill still apparent all these years later. The test of a true talent.

Various Artists *Steelin' It* Proper

Subtitled - *The Steel Guitar Story* this is another in Proper's 4 CD sets. 100 tracks and a 56 page booklet means a value for money package for most. But if you have no interest in the history of the steel guitar then there may be little to captivate you here beyond the tracks, recorded in later years, that feature some big names in country music. CD one explores the roots of the instrument and the Hawaiian players who first made the the instrument popular. The sound quality is as you might expect from track recordings dating back to 1925 and the music featured on it may have limited appeal to the casual listener but the remaining three discs explore the role of steel guitar in Western Swing and Country and Western's early days. Early legends like Bob Dunn, Noel Boggs, Leon McAuliffe and Ted Daffan are featured on disc two, while the final two discs feature the steel as an integral part of the music of such renowned singers as Faron Young, Floyd Tillman, Ernest Tubb, Hank Williams and even Billy Haley. The selection was compiled by Adam Komorowski who also annotated the booklet which is an essential part of the package and one that will appeal, mainly, to lovers of early country music and especially of the steel guitar.

Donna The Buffalo *Silverlined* Sugar Hill

The country jam band have a freewheelin' sound that will loosely fit under the roots umbrella, one that is varied and eclectic. Vocals are shared between guitarist Jeb Puryear and fiddler Tara Nevins who are also the main writes here. I got to know their music initially

when Jim Lauderdale recorded the album *Wait 'Till Spring* with them in 2003, as well as through the solo album of the now departed Jim Miller. The music of Donna The Buffalo is accomplished and melodic, built around the keyboards of Kathy Ziegler, grounded by the tight rhythm section of Tom Gilbert and Bill Reynolds and garnished by the aforementioned Puryear and Nevins. The standout tracks for this listener included the accordion-led reggae-ish *I Don't Need A Riddle*. Nevin's melodically catchy *Beauty Within* also hit a home run though, in truth, the Donna The Buffalo sound is not one that has made a big impact on me. There are many though who will enjoy this band and their wide ranging musical approach.

The Watson Twins *Fire Songs* Vanguard

Following on from their collaboration with Jenny Lewis The Watson Twins wrap their laid-back close harmonies on songs like *Lady Love Me* which features some lap steel adding a touch of country flavour to their sensitive sound. This not an album that highlights individual songs rather it sets up its sweet, shrouded sound over the length of 11 light sensitive songs. Even their cover of the Cure's *Just Like Heaven* falls under their spell and sounds not out of place among their own songs. Some will love it, some find it languid but either way they are making the late night listening music that has warmth in its embers.

Tim O'Brien *Chameleon* Proper.

In a long solo career Tim O'Brien has released what is truly a solo album in that the only person on this album is O'Brien and a single instrument. Each of the sixteen tracks features only one specific instrument as accompaniment. The opening song *Where's Love Come From*, for instance, features a 1943 Gibson J-45 guitar while in the closing song *Nothing To Say* O'Brien uses a 1989 Nugget bouzouki. Inbetween there are a variety of instruments including a variety of guitars, mandolin, fiddle, banjo and mandolas used. Your preference for the tracks will depend on your liking of the instrument and the strength of the song. All written or co-written by O'Brien they cover many topics from such self defining titles as *World Of Trouble* and *This World Was Made For Everyone*. O'Brien is blessed with a strong, compelling voice that is adaptable and distinctive and the album for O'Brien fans is something of a tour de force where in the simplicity of the setting on voice and single instrument is offset by his dexterity as a player and his skill in delivering the song's sentiments. Everyone will have favourites, largely depending on the direction he takes the song but a song like *The Garden* hits home with this writer. Tim O'Brien as the title states is something of a Chameleon and one can only admire that he is showing his colours.

Tim Grimm *Holding Up The World* CoraZong

The latest album from this singer/songwriter is a folk/country outing that highlights his warm voice and his basic humanity. Guitarist

Jason Wilber provides a link to the work of Wilber's other job, playing with John Prine, in that both have a quality to their writing that offers simple insights into often ordinary lives. This is illustrated by songs like *This Hole*, about being misled and deception, to *So It Goes* in which a hard bitten farmer tells of his life and even harder times. He looks at a moment in history in Rebecca Versailles wherein the mother of the title makes her difficult decision to send her children away for an education in a time when she knows that they, as black children, won't receive it in the South. Throughout the playing is subtle and restrained, largely acoustic with Wilber delivering his electric guitar with a light touch that gives depth and texture as does the use of instruments like cello, banjo, field organ and autoharp. Though when percussion is used it helps to give certain songs an additional drive. The single well known outside song is his version of *Blowin' In The Wind* that updates the Dylan classic for these times. Tim Grimm should be better known and if this album gets exposure and distribution then there is little doubt that Grimm could achieve that. www.timgrimm.com

Gene Watson *Matters Of The Heart* Humphead

A collection of songs from his time with MCA that show why Watson is considered among the best singers of that era and why he still holds appeal for the Irish country music aficionados of a certain age. The selection has been made with the assistance of long time Irish fan Sean Brady. A 20 track collection that spans a period from 1981 to 1983 and has been mastered from vinyl albums and sounds pretty good given the source. It may be a little soft for the harder country fans of rough and ready honky-tonk. That era is not particularly known for its solid hardcore country music, remember this was before the so-called New Traditionalists shook things up. Perhaps only Watson and John Anderson were among the major labels acts played country music that wasn't drowned in strings and cross-over pop stylings, even back then. Watson chose songs from top notch writers like Harlan Howard, Tom T. Hall, Dave Kirby and Dallas Frazier and delivered them in a voice that made the most of the lyrics that covered lost love, cheating and drinkin'. The backings are full of steel guitar and solid country foundations and should appeal to a wide range of listeners who like the likes of George Strait, they may not be aware of Watson's work or have been unable to get much of his older music. He has recently also released an acclaimed new album last year.

Taneytown *East of Everything* Corazong

This is a very enjoyable country album with a rockin' edge from Dutch quintet Taneytown. The band recorded and co-produced the album in Groningen in the Netherlands and then added some additional instrumentation from guest artists who recorded their parts in the US. Dave Hadley adds pedal steel, there's fiddle and vocals from Amanda Shires and cello from David Henry, all add an extra touch to the album's contemporary styling. The songs are all written in

English by vocalist Edwin Jongeduk, who has an undeniable grasp of the genre. The songs have good hooks and are often memorable and cover such topics as the changing rural landscape (*Harvest Time*) moving on (*Road Song*) and heartbreak (*The Way I Feel Tonight*). A highlight is the duet with Shires, the slow lament *Moonlight Serenade*, a song from the perspective of a soldier and his girlfriend that features steel and accordion to heighten the sense of separation and it closes with a hint of the title song. *East Of Everything's* twelve songs are all strong enough to place the band along side some of their American contemporaries. Not hardcore honky tonk, not alt.country rock but rather country music that is recognisably so. Well produced, played and packaged it proves that country music can be made anywhere that musicians have a real belief in the music. www.taneytown.nl

Chely Wright *The Ultimate Collection* Humphead

A singer who started her career with a contemporary sounding country album in 1993. Her debut release *Woman In The Moon* stands up well, four tracks are included here with the opening *Sea Of Cowboy Hats* setting the tone. Wright co-wrote that one but she also covered traditional writers like Harlan Howard, his *He's A Good Ole Boy* is a whole lot of fun. However when we get to the final tracks on the album the pattern that was followed by most major labels, bending to the dictates of mainstream radio, means that album ends with big drums and pop productions, the obvious country content is greatly diminished. Throughout Wright sings with conviction and confidence, well able to meet the needs of the ever changing direction the music is taking her. The mid-period, Tony Brown produced album *Let Me In* still has a distinctly country sound even if it has become more uptown. The song *Shut Up And Drive* particularly hit home with an ever aware female audience. The Wayne Kemp song *Feelin' Single Seein' Double* is also full of mischievous fun. She hit the high end of the charts with the title track of her 1999 album *Single White Female* which also marks the move towards a broader suburban sound. Despite hitting the strong sales figures at that time Wright and the label parted after her 2001 *Never Love Enough* album. Chely Wright had the credentials but the revolving door nature of Nashville meant that someone new was always waiting in the wings for their moment in the spotlight. This collection is testament to her skills as singer and, on occasion, writer and the first half at least, for this writer, is worth hearing again.

Catherine MacLellan *Church Bell Blues* True North

A Canadian singer/songwriter MacLellan fits the profile set by some of her contemporaries in delivering a set of songs that are acoustic based, life-experience songs that are enhanced by a subtle rhythm section and some unobtrusive organ and electric guitar textures. It has a gentle, reflective sound that allows for introspection. A time where she wishes to "keep the outside world at bay, let the telephone ring". The album has that kind of insular nature that, with

MacLellan's unforced delivery, has the potential to draw you in and sit you down to listen. Something that, in this day and age, may be something of a luxury. But if you take the time to listen to be drawn into a private world that looks through the window at a snow cover and cold outside world, its warmth comes from within.

Billy Currington *Little Bit Of Everything* Humphead

The opening song on this album, co-written by Brett Beavers, who works with Dierks Bentley, has something of the feel of that artist on that song but then moves into other territory on the rest of the album. The Currington sound, alluded to in the title, includes a little bit of everything, some country, some r'n'b, some pop and some rock. Having previously hit the top spot with two previous singles. He has his audience and they will enjoy this album. Some songs hit the mark better than others, the Bobby Braddock and Troy Jones song is a reflection on life, love and reaches the conclusion in its title *People Are Crazy*. It has some nice pedal steel from Paul Franklin. Currington has had a hand in co-writing several of the songs as well as co-producing the album with Carson Chamberlain so one has to assume that the varied and good humoured nature of this album will appeal to the artist and his fans. *Walk On* find him in a reflective nature, thinking of a passing infatuation, while *That's How Country Boys Roll* takes a different tack to a similar lifestyle. Built on a solid riff it will be a show stopper. While the border flavoured *I Shall Return* has an universal appeal, and it follows a path that was previously trodden by the likes of Marty Robbins. A little bit of everything will please many to some degree but, as mentioned, should go down well with Billy's fan base.

Michael Weston King *Crawling Through The USA* Valve

It must be difficult when you're a songwriter of the calibre of Michael Weston King, something that is recognised by critics and fellow artists but your career is conducted under the radar of the general public. But success is measured many ways and by this stage King is likely never going to turn that around, but then stranger things have happened. This is a collection of superior songs recorded in America for live or radio performances. The majority featured the traditional troubadour method of guitar and voice and they highlight his skill as player, performer and writer. He is joined on some of the other tracks by other musicians but the focus is MWK. He also does very decent cover of his friend Townes Van Zandt's *Marie*. The songs include highlights of his live set including *A Decent Man*, *It Will End In Tears*, *Let The Waves Break* and *My Heart Stopped Today*. All attest to his skill as an observer and chronicler of diverse notions such as beauty and anger. There's no better recommendation for his music than to listen to it, either live or on record. The bonus track *Cosmic Fireworks* is sung by his partner Lou Dalgleish with whom he is making an album of classic country duets. Contact Michael at www.michaelwestonking.com

Lee Ann Womack *Call Me Crazy* Humphead

Having covered both sides of the tracks of contemporary country music from the deeply traditional to the puffed-up pop crossover it is interesting to see where, in 2008, Lee Ann Womack is coming from. The sign are good with Tony Brown in the producer's chair and song from the pen of Jim Lauderdale which is featured alongside four co-written by Womack, two of these with Dean Dillon (best know for his George Strait covered songs). Strait in fact duets with Womack on one of these. The sound in truth a mix of some more traditional sounds and the more acceptable radio friendly sounds. Throughout Womack is singing as well as we should expect from as singer with her skill and track record. From that point of view those who count themselves as big supporters will be pleased with the results. Those of us who prefer the harder country side of her sound will enjoy the closing section of the album with such striking songs as *If These Walls Could Talk*, the smooth fiddle-led *Everything But Quits*, with Strait, the aforementioned Jim Lauderdale song, *The King Of Broken Hearts* about George Jones and Gram Parsons. It was written back in 1992, and was also recorded by Strait - an album highlight of what is a very strong album for Womack that does a good job of covering a wide range of options for her many supporters.

Joan Baez *Day After Tomorrow* Proper

The immediate thing that you are aware of is *that* voice, a unique and dependable instrument that has it's own history and space. It is still as potent as it has been in the past and here the songs give that voice some depth to play with. Producer Steve Earle has provided 3 songs, while other contemporary writers whose song are on offer include Elvis Costello, Tom Waits, Eliza Gilkyson, Patty Griffin and Thea Gilmore. Earle has, rightly, kept thing sparse and acoustic using a selection of top notch players like Tim O'Brien, Darrell Scott and the, light of touch, rhythm section of Viktor Krauss on bass and Kenny Malone on drums. The focus is Baez and her interpretation of these songs. *The Scarlet Tide* co-written by Elvis Costello and Joe Henry sounds like a song for the ages. In truth many of the songs come across as age-old ballads given the folkish direction the overall sound so fittingly takes. *Henry Russell's Last Words*, a song written by Diana Jones, has a similar feel. The closing Earle song *Jericho Road* again highlights her vocal strength with just voice and handclaps as instrumentation. The album sets a mood that finds the songs interlocking into a satisfying whole, making it the kind of album that may attract some new fans but, more likely, will appeal to her long time fan base who love her voice and sense of honesty and commitment.

Dan Baird and Homemade Sin Jerkin' Crocus

If the rough and rowdy rock of the Faces and, at times, Stones were the sounds that stirred your heart then Dan Baird latest album will likely cheer you up. This is guitar-riff heaven with both Baird and band mate (and Scorcher) Warner Hodges playing the guitars. Baird has written these songs in combination with some like minded

individuals like Terry Andeson, Tommy Womack and Warner as well as a co-write with Chris Knight, who he also produces. This is good time rock and pretty full-on throughout the whole album. They occasionally take there foot off the pedal for brief moments such as *Lazy Monday*, which gives you time to appreciate the soulful rough nature of Baird vocals. The organ of Michael Webb is another key part of the sound scape adding additional depth to the sound. This is the kind of album that you will either get and therefore find much to enjoy or one that will be dismissed as being out of place. In reality this is the music being played in many roadhouses across America by a countless bar bands but rarely with the skill and verve on offer here. Music played for it's own sake and enjoyment and not looking for much more than that.

Lucinda Williams *Little Honey* Lost Highway

By now we are all familiar with Williams commitment to her music, a commitment that has seen her look for perfection in what she offers to her public. This has meant a restlessness that has seen her use numerous producers and players in her quest to capture the sound she hears in her head. This latest outing see her working with producers Eric Liljestrand and Tom Overby and a new set of players with only Doug Pettibone remaining from the previous album. The songs cover a lot of ground from the bluesy *Tears Of Joy* to the cautionary tale of *Little Rock Star* through the jagged *Well, Well, Well* that is enhanced by the vocal chorus of Jim Lauderdale and Charlie Louvin. There is the pleading hope of *If Wishes Were Horses* and the sadness of *Jailhouse Tears* which is with duet with Elvis Costello, a kind of *Fairy Tale Of New York* for a honky-tonk audience. The track is an album highlight and comes in two versions, a bonus alternative early track at the end of the album that show how the song developed in the studio. *Knowing* features some well-placed sweet, soulful brass. Brass also plays a part on *Rarity*, a soft and gentle song of bitter understanding. The stark *Plan To Marry* is just Williams and her guitar yet it carries as much weight as the full band tracks. Throughout Williams vocals are elemental and emotional and among the best she has yet placed on record. It may not replace *Car Wheels On A Gravel Road* in some people's estimation but it is without doubt a very fine album and one that will go on opening up it's sweetness in time to come. It ends with the only non-Williams song a well chosen cover of AC/DC's *It's A Long Way To The Top*, which doubtless sums up her feeling and the state of music these days. Never-the-less Williams has maintained her integrity and vision and is still at the top of her game.

The John Henrys *Sweet As A Grain* 9LB

This Canadian quintet dress on the back cover in western shirts, nice ones too, and though they use lap steel they aren't strictly a country band, they also play some edgy roots rock as well. They are pretty self contained unit with four of the five members contributing songs and a similar number providing the vocal firepower. The songs cover such honky tonk topics as drink, or rather a unconvincing

pledge to stop, as evidenced in *Ain't Gonna Drink No More*. They can move easily from raucous to restrained as in *Truth Be Told*, all the time using their harmonies well. There is a lot to recommend with The John Henrys, while breaking no new ground, they deliver a set of original songs with spirit and humour, something that makes for a thoroughly enjoyable album that has enough variety to move from the one dimensional to a broader delivery. The instrumentation includes mandolin, organ, piano, lap steel, harmonica and banjo over the bass, drums and guitar bedrock and they playing is good throughout. undoubtedly a great band to see live in their native Canadian bars The John Henrys have also put their name to an album worth checking if you like your roots music hot.

Various Artists *The Imus Ranch Record* New West

Compilations, by their nature, can be a mixed bag in that there are many variables present and when the songs featured are covers of well know songs the chances of disappointment are potentially even greater. That this collection is a charity album may be reason to go easy on the results but, in truth, there is no need. It is a very enjoyable and successful experience that features some very good versions of some classic songs as well as some lesser known ones. Production was overseen by Kyle Lehning and Tracy Gershon with Don Imus. Imus and his wife Deirdre founded the Imus Ranch in New Mexico as a place to help sick and indisposed children, which makes the focus of this album a very worthy one. With a list of artists that includes Levon Helm, Lucinda Williams, Little Richard, Willie Nelson, John Hiatt, Randy Travis, Raul Malo and Dwight Yoakam you are talking about some of the most distinctive and distinguished roots vocalists of our times. Each has been assigned a song that was felt that they could do justice to and, and this is the telling point, they don't just make you want to hear the original again as sometimes is the case, they pretty much hit the nail on the head. I concur that Raul Malo is a fantastic vocalist but have not always been happy with the way he has arranged some of the covers has chosen to do in the past but here on the Charlie Rich's *Life Has Its Little Ups And Downs* he delivers on all counts. Even Big & Rich's version of the Beastie Boys' *You've Got To Fight For Your Right To Party* works within the idea of reshaping the song in their overblown rockin' roots context. Other highlights, and there are no real bummers here, are John Hiatt covering The Bottle Rockets' *Welfare Music*, Dwight Yoakam reworking of Doug Sahm's *Give Me Back The Key To My Heart*, Vince Gill's emotional *Satisfied Mind* recorded shortly after he had sung it at Porter Wagoner's funeral. This is worth buying to support the charity it represents but it is equally worth the purchase for the excellent music that is featured on it.

The Charlie Pickett and Bar Band *Americanus* Bloodshot

A compilation of Florida bar band leader Charlie Pickett band's 80's output that covers some hard rock 'n' roll, some rockin' country and some blues. This is the story of a great many bands who can build up a strong following in their local area, makes some indie

records, tour a hell of a lot on a much wider basis but never make that critical move to the next level. Charlie Pickett managed to have REM's Peter Buck produce an album for them, but like their previous album it didn't sell. They had a fearsome reputation for live shows and this collection made up of singles, album tracks, live songs and rarities sums up their work and it still has a edge, an attitude that suggest how the band would have been live. Their cowboy fixations show up in songs like *Marlboro Country* and *But I Didn't*, while their love of blues is apparent on Son House's *Death Letter* where they sound is not unlike Gun Club. Elsewhere they have the taste to cover two mid-period Flamin' Groovies songs with *Slow Death* and *Shake Some Action*. If you like rough and ready rootish rock 'n' roll that you should, at least, check this album out.

Various Artists *Hot Guitars* Viper

The album is subtitled American Guitar Tracks from the 1920s - 1950s and that exactly what it is. Lovers of instrumental guitar music will relish this collection, though vocals are also included. Opening with the wild guitar and sax interplay of a 1954 Johnny 'Guitar' Watson recording, it runs through such goodies as Jimmy Murphy's autobiographical *That First Guitar Of Mine* (though, in truth, there's little hot guitar picking involved - you'll find that elsewhere on tracks like Joe Maphis' *Fire On The Strings*) and Bo Diddley's *Spanish Guitar*. The earliest recording here dates back to 1922 with Nick Lucas and Al Casey's *Guitar Man* in 1957 is the most recent track. Some of it is fascinating, some less so, but overall anyone with an interest in historic guitar sounds will find much to enjoy in the 20 tracks on offer.

Giant Sand *proVISIONS* Yep Roc

The latest installment of Howe Gelb's ongoing band project has been recorded in Denmark as well as in Tucson. Yet it still manages to exude that arid Arizona sound that has common links with Calexico and Friends of Dean Martinez. The mood is desert cool, cinematic, jazz tinged and twang toned but it is always intriguing. The opening *Stranded Pearl* has Gelb's voice pitched against the female vocal to create a striking contrast. The use of of the female voice is a major part of the sound and includes Neko Case amongst others but as this pre-release copy has no credits it's difficult to know who does what. The focus though is on Gelb's semi-spoken vocal, a narrator of tales of love; love in its many variations. Titles like *The Desperate Kingdom Of Love* and *The New Romance Of Falling* suggest the places where the songs are coming from. The parched, slow paced flow of the desert-warmed music is shown on a pivotal track like *Pitch & Sway* a subtle blend of instruments blowing like the breeze across the sand with corrosive effect. Fans of the aforementioned bands as well of Gelb's many projects will find much to savour on this latest release of desert noir.

Kate Campbell *Save The Day* Large River Music

Working with producer Walt Aldridge Campbell has delivered a full sounding album that uses the musicians to full effect and that they

include such luminaries as Spooner Oldham, Jim Hoke and Randy Kohrs tell you of the quality of the playing which moves from the sparser acoustic tracks to organ and piano focused songs. One of the best songs here is her co-write with Aldridge, *Fordlandia*, the story of Henry Ford's town built in the Amazon jungle. It features Khors' dobro well to the fore as well as Campbell clear and crystal vocal. By way of contrast *Back To The Moon* has a strong rhythm give the song its direction and a strong chorus behind Campbell. The background vocals throughout are bolstered by guests like John Prine and Nanci Griffith. *Falling Out Of Heaven* tells of the wandering tribe of Israel but is a song of belief and hope in a wider context. *Everybody Knows Elvis* questions how well we really know anyone and is another example of Campbell's strength as a writer, usually with Aldridge, but also with others including Kevin Gordan on *Shining Like The Sun*, a song with a beat and some good guitar that again shows how well this ensemble works as a unit. Campbell's literate Americana fits easily alongside many of her better know contemporaries, maybe not quite as intense as some, but still worth checking out.

Big Bob Young *Hard Way To Make A Dollar* Self-Released

I expected this to be something like Dallas Wayne, a fairly robust honky-tonk outing, but in truth it's more akin to something more rootsy with some soulful organ led playing that utilises Burrito Deluxe as the main backing band, along with players like Colin Linden on electric and slide guitar. It is produced by three members of that band - Jeff "Stick" Davis, Michael Webb and Carlton Moody. Young has been many things over his life and has honed his songs from those experiences. The end result is direct, honest and upfront. The sound is a bluesy mix of road-house rock with country overtones that suits Young's age roughened and weathered voice, perhaps not a perfect instrument, but one most suited to singing these songs, and with more than a degree of realism. Trumpet and saxophone augment on occasion but it is the keyboard and guitar interplay that is the main currency on the majority of tracks. Big Bob Young is not making a big breakthrough that's not the intention, rather a hard-working bed rock integrity is at the heart of these songs. The closing song a uptempo gospel inspired song closes the album on a high note, in more that one sense. This is the kind of album that tends to get little attention in the media but is more worthy that some more acclaimed major label releases. www.builttonblues.com

North Twin *Stronger At The Broken Places* Good And Dirty Music

A strong four piece band from Seattle who deliver some very satisfying music. Their main songwriter is Tony Fulgham, who is also the lead vocalist, though all members sing. They are Rebecca Young on bass, Tim DiIulio on guitar and Rick Cranford on drums. They play what was once called alt.country though there is a fairly strong emphasis on the latter in evidence than is often the case, even with the rock element well to the fore. Produced by Johnny Sangster the sound is strengthened with additional instruments including B3, trumpet and pedal steel guitar. It is a accomplished and robust sound that

brings out the best of everybody, while the songs are equally strong. The best thing here, for this listener, is the uptempo *Clear As Day*, which is taken at an uptempo pace. A tale of a man taking stock of his life and the wrong turns he has taken and the consequences for those around him which builds up to a point where a lone trumpet blends with the guitar to heighten the mood and tension. A real highlight on what is already a good album. Another standout is *High And Low*, taken at a slower base the snare mixes with an accordion to underscore the strong vocals on a tale of a forlorn ghost town of heartbreak. There is a sense of storytelling here that relates to the classic country template even when the rock the songs out. They can also, as in the final song *Black River*, take a more restrained approach where the song needs it. The acoustic guitar and steel emphasise the songs point that nobody is totally alone in their journey through life. Amen to that. North Twin can be contacted at www.northtwin.net

Henry McCullough *Poor Man's Moon* There Wolf

As a survivor of the Sixties Henry McCullough brings a wealth of life experience to his music. His voice has that sense of aged-wisdom and his skill as a guitar player is undiminished. Here, he has produced arguably the best album of his long career. The impetus was a meeting with Horslips member and journalist Eamon Carr who provided McCullough with a set of lyrics from which 7 new songs were written. These include album highlights *The Burial Ground*, *Too Late To Worry*, *Belfast Train* and *Fix Me Up Jesus*. Henry wrote the title track, which refers to a full moon - one which would provide suitable light for poaching activities! Recorded in Amberville Studios in Northern Ireland with a selection of players that McCullough has worked with in the past. The resulting sound is both relaxed and righteous. A warm and rewarding sound that will please longtime McCullough's loyal fan base. Recent live performances have shown that McCullough can deliver equally well in the live context. In these, often, ageist times it is heartening to see an artist deliver an album of maturity and majesty. *Poor Man's Moon* is an album for anyone who enjoys blues based roots music that covers a number of bases.

Jamey Johnson *That Lonesome Song* Humphead

Any album released by a major label that opens with the sounds if a man being released from prison goes against the normal. That the album then goes on to darker elements of that man's life is equally refreshing in the context. For it then to be a contender for album of the year is more than note worthy. After his debut album's success and his subsequent falling out of favour allowed Johnson to take his time in recording this album. It is produced by the Kent Hardly Playboys, who are Johnson and his band. They recorded the album in Nashville and it restores faith in real solid storytelling, the kind more usually found emanating from Austin or anywhere but from Music Row. As regards the music it is contemporary country at its best. Johnson himself set the scene with his descriptive closing track *Between Jennings and Jones*. The influence of the former is

apparent throughout but especially on his version of *Dreaming My Dreams*. Johnson is a seductive writer of songs that ring true, songs like *Mary Go Round* and *Mowin' Down The Roses* are proof of that. And Johnson's rich baritone is the perfect voice to deliver these tales of woe and regret. But overall the album exudes a sense of life and of hope. Its to be hoped that Johnson gets the support and sales he needs to continue his journey as we badly need artists like him and Ashton Shepherd to fly the flag for real country from a prominent position.

Ashton Shepherd *Sounds So Good* Humphead

A singer/songwriter who has that definite twang in her voice that spells c-o-u-n-t-r-y. Shepherd's debut is that of a confident and clear headed individual who is tapping into and extending a tradition. She writes songs that tell friendship, frustration and friction - real feelings in other words. Buddy Cannon's production is spot on giving the sound an edge that is both traditional and of the moment. Players of the calibre of Dan Dugmore, John Jorgenson and Kenny Greenberg see to that. Shepherd has written seven of these songs solo and three with her co-writer Adam Cunningham, who also contributes the hard hitting closing track *Whiskey Won The Battle*. All show her formidable talents as both singer, songwriter and interpreter. There are a lot of very good tracks here, performances that are firing on all cylinders. Songs that reaffirm the right to life like *I Ain't Dead Yet* and *Takin' Off This Pain* through the sadness of *Old Memory*. Songs about drinkin', cheatin', listen' and lovin' - the sort of subjects that country music should be about, and was in its past. How well Shepherd will be received at radio is another matter, she certainly isn't getting the attention there that a cross-over singer like Carrie Underwood receives and that's a pity as here is an artist who is well deserving of wider exposure. Either way do yourself a favour and go out and go out and get this fine album.

Rancho Deluxe *True Freedom* Self-Released

Some potent West Coast country from a band that is headed by its two principles Mark Adams and Jesse Jay Harris, who have written all the songs between them, and good stuff it is too - lots of twang and steel. This is their second album and it is produced by Jesse Jay Harris, with the help of others, it is full of some superfine pickin' and playin'. With Harris at the forefront with his guitar playing. Add to that such notable LA players as Jaydee Maness, Skip Edwards and Don Heffington and you know you are on solid ground. Both principles sing and add harmonies giving the album a strong, warm vocal presence. That combination of playing and singer is evident on such songs as *Valley Of The Bears*, the self-evident tale of over-indulgence in *Whiskey and Saturday Night*, the uptempo *Ghost Town* or the break neck instrumental *Bone Rock Breakdown* which highlights the non-vocal talents on display here. But it is the vocals that impress overall, the duet singing on *Mercy Me* or Adams strong vocal input on his song *True Freedom*. Rancho Deluxe continue the fine tradition of country music that is based in California. If that combination of country

playing, singing and songwriting is something you look for then look these guys up at www.ranchodeluxe.org

Philippe Solal *The Moonshine Sessions* Yabasta

Something different here, French producer Philippe Solal, of the Gotan Project, came to Nashville and recorded an album of songs he had written with a variety of guest singers and some notable players. He also included some cover choices. The album was co-produced by Bucky Baxter who also plays guitar and atmospheric pedal steel. Solal brings that kind of abstract ambience to the project which otherwise offers up some Lee Hazelwood style storytelling. The album opens with the song *Academy Of Trust*, not your average country title but then the song is not your average either but Jim Lauderdale manages to harness its haunting quality. Elsewhere the songs range from more directional as with *The Roads To Nowhere* which features Shawn Camp to the nod to Morricone on *I Lost Him* which features Melonie Cannon, in fine vocal form. The album is divided into sides. It was the tracks on the Side Two section of the album that initially attracted me. The prospect of Rosie Flores singing *Pretty Vacant* was intriguing. And indeed the acoustic bluegrass tinged take on the Sex Pistols classic is just that. As is the similarly styled take on *Dancing Queen* with Cannon on vocals. This is an album that takes repeated plays to bring out its best, certainly with some of its tracks but it is, ultimately, a very rewarding experience. It also comes with a DVD with some additional songs, some remixes and a short making of film.

Amy LaVere *Anchors and Anvils* Archer

A very individual talent LaVere has a strong vocal identity that makes her voice distinctive and her song choices captivating. LaVere mixes her original with a selection of songs from other writers that add to the overall strength of the album. This is her second for the Memphis based Archer Records label and her first to be produced by the legendary Jim Dickinson. Though he played on her previous album which was produced by her drummer Paul Taylor who also plays here. Chris Scruggs is among the guests playing pedal steel, though the album direction is more eclectic than the country music the pedal steel's presence suggests. The gypsy violin on Carla Thomas' *That Beat* does much to emphasise that. So it is over the remainder of the tracks artist and producer take us on a journey that covers both the bright lights and the dark corners. From Taylor's *Pointless Drinking* through to the cover of Dylan's lesser known song *I'll Remember You*. Her own *Cupid's Arrow* is typical of her individual approach and her humour. An aspect of her work that adds to the humanity on show. The songs are reflections on the openness and oddness of human nature all of which makes Amy LaVere a enjoyable artist, yet one who gets her points across as well as her music. She is grounded by her anchor and shapes her songs on her anvil. Both her albums are worth owning you can check them both out at www.archer-records.com



Hillbilly All-Stars by Steve Rapid

Buck Owens, British Invasion and The Beatles.

That Buck Owens and The Beatles had a mutual respect and influence on each other is undoubted. That they themselves still exert a influence on contemporary bands is underscored by these three current albums. There is little doubt that most musicians who play real country music these days have much wider exposure to other genre than just country. One only has to look at the number of ex-punks who are now playing country or string band music these days to see that. But one particular strand has its own devotees, those who, at the core of the music, take the tight melodic dance beat structure that was common to the Cavern in Liverpool as it was to the Blackboard in Bakersfield.

Now to satisfy those with a gra for this type of music come three acts who deliver, in their own way, on that template. The Derailers have long been acknowledged as torchbearers for this combination of genres and their live shows in Ireland were testament to their broad appeal. Their last album was a tribute to Buck that was a little too reverential in my book but their latest album returns to form. Since main songwriter and co-vocalist Tony Villanuava left the band Brian Hofeldt has stepped up to the plate and taken on the role of main singer with able support from all four of the current line-up. *Guaranteed to Satisfy* lives up to it's title and while it may not surpass the very best of their previous work more that holds it own.

I assume that Hofeldt also had a big role in the writing as nowhere on the album (or website) can I find any mention of the song's writers. Hofeldt though takes the sole production credit and no doubt the countless gigs he has done as frontman have helped him know end to become a better singer. That is shown here in his strongest vocal performance yet, which while not taking him to the front of the class, shows that he knows how to deliver these songs.

The band which includes long time member Ed Atkins alongside drummer Scott Matthews, Sweet Basil McJagger on keyboards and Chris Schlotzhauer on steel are a strong support team breathing live into the songs. These include the twangy title song, the beat group sound of *The Sun Is Shining On Me* or the piano groove of *The Way You Move*. *The Blood Of A Man* is one of those man done wrong songs that have a long precedent in country music. *The Get Go* is another song you could find on a 1960s album or maybe on a Flamin' Groovies collection. *You Carried Me* is a steel and strings underscored ballad of respect. *Corn Pickin'* is an instrumental that channels the Buckaroos.

The album closes with a song about being on the road, dedicated to good women that the band have back home. The album will doubtless please Derailers fans all over.

DB Harris has made several albums under his own name that include *Can I Return These Flowers* and *Contagious Heartache*, the later credits to DB and his Men Of Action now for these release he has subsumed himself into the band now known solely as the Men Of Action for this release. This is partly due to his sharing

the writing and vocal duties with Bryan Hartley. With a sound that also recalls The Mavericks it is a vocal led sound that is short sharp and energised. *One Time Offer* opens the album with a kick and then moves through *If Memory Serves Me* which utilises a Farfisa organ to good effect on a Everly's style delivery. The joint vocals tend to reference that quite a lot. The uptempo tex-mex sound of *Shame On You*, co-written with Sunny Sweeney, adds variety to the sound. There are pure country songs like *If I Were A Cheater*, a song that reflects that is the singer where also a cheater than he object of his affections may have a relationship. *It's Only Me* has an interesting effect which sounds like beer bottles banging together which adds a sonic distraction to the tale of woe.

The next two songs were co-written with Brian Hofeldt of The Derailers and *Next Time Around* is closer to the British Invasion sound than *One More Time* which is an uptempo Farfisa keyboard and guitar twang song that could easily find a home on the Derailers current album. There are a couple of live songs recorded at the Blue Highways Festival in Holland which close the album, *Tremble* with Harris's most athletic vocal, which recalls some of the great vocal gymnasts, show the band's potential.

Finally in this round-up is from The Boxmasters a trio led by Billy Bob Thorton, whose album of late have not been receiving the most complementary of reviews but that deserves to change with this double set. One CD is ours which are original songs and theirs which is a selection of cover songs. The trio aside from Thornton are J.D. Andrew on guitars and harmony singing and Michael Wayne Butler on electric and steel guitars and they are accompanied by a number of players but with Thornton on drums are self-sufficient as a trio. Whatever reservations I had about Billy Bob's singing on previous albums are not an issue here. The band setting and harmony vocals have given his voice an extra dimension that works. Again he is not going to be ever considered a vocal dynamo but, in the context of this album, that doesn't matter. I listened first to the cover collection as some of the selection were familiar and at no time did I find myself put off by their interpretations. That they are in their own words of Thornton a combination of The Beatles, The Monkees, The Turtles with Del Reeves, Merle Haggard and Buck Owens is borne out through out the two sets.

The covers set includes The Louvins' *Knoxville Girl*, The Who's *The Kids Are Alright*, as well as two Mike Nesmith songs and the Fab Four's *I Wanna Hold Your Hand*, a suitably twanged fill arrangement, all of which makes for a fun and fulfilling listening experience.

The "Ours" set features songs written or co-written by Thorton and they often have a certain theatricality that suggest Thorton's main profession. Again the country element is well to the fore with *The Poor House* opening with some fine steel playing. If anything this set is stronger and filled with the kind of characters that fill some of Billy Bob's movies. There is a line in *I'll Give You A Ring* that goes "Tell him I'll give you a ring when you give me back my

balls" that kind of sums up the attitude. There are some self-serving low-lives in these songs while others are looking for redemption and trying to turn their lives around. But nothing gets in the way of the exuberance of the music and playing. Having been a fan of his work since *Slingblade* he has now released an album that matches that movie in scope, vision and execution that makes Boxmasters an album to own and treasure if you like your country tempered with some of the better outside influences that have happened since country's heyday.

Editorial

Welcome to the latest issue of Lonesome Highway. Due to a variety of reasons, some personal, it has taken us a lot longer than expected. Lonesome Highway is a labour of love and is generally split between three of us. I write, Ronnie takes the pictures and Sandy corrects my writing and offers sound advice. On occasion we get help from others and we would like to thank Paul McGee for his contributions in the past (and hopefully future) as well as those including Kirsty Lee who have been a part of the team in the past. We would also like to thank those artists who were kind enough to allow us to interview them in person, by phone or via e-mail. Thanks are also due to those who have sent us CDs to review. These include Stevo Burebe, Freddie and Amy at Universal Music Group, Geraint Jones at G Promo, Martha Moore, Yep Roc Records' Fergus Denham and Jo at HumpHead. It was with sadness that we learnt of the closure due to the credit crunch in the US of Miles Of Music. The two Jeffs and Corrie had become friends of the magazine and an invaluable source of otherwise hard to find albums, information and encouragement. As with all closures it leaves some with a bad taste. It seems, also, that it is getting more and more difficult than ever to read about the music we love with many magazines either closing down or going online. Indeed in the case of Lonesome Highway we have had to suspend the publication of the print version of the magazine as it costs was offset by a single back page advert but, of late, we have found it virtually impossible to find anyone who was willing to help out in that area. We hope that it will come back at some point but without some financial assistance it would be impossible as it had always been our intention to give the magazine away for free. It's still free now but online now as you can see.

We would also like to thank those promoters who include Derek Nally, Darryl Downey, Forever Presents, The Kilkenny Rhythm and Roots Weekend organization and venues like Crawdaddy and Whelans where we have met and interviewed these artists. With a number of sources closing we are hoping that artists and labels will send CD's for review directly to Lonesome Highway - our focus is on hardcore country, alternative and Americana and albums fitting those categories will be welcomed and reviewed.

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