CD REVIEWS
The New Releases

The Black Lillies
100 MILES OF WRECKAGE
North Knox Record
★★★★★
The sound of young Tennessee

Where does bluegrass end and country music begin? I've never been sure but when you listen to 100 MILES OF WRECKAGE you won't care that the lines are blurred. The Black Lillies is the brainchild of singer and multi-instrumentalist Cruz Contreras from East Tennessee and this is the band's second album. Contreras has assembled a top assortment of players and every single one of them adds something special to this ensemble piece. The album opens with some fiddle and mandolin interplay on *Two Hearts Down* before Cruz's warm baritone voice creeps up on you like Tennessee's most famous export.

On *Same Mistakes*, yet again Contreras voice adds an extra dimension to what should be a run of the mill break-up song as his voice, the piano and guitars are all straight out of Laurel Canyon in the mid-1970s. *Shepherd's Song* is a very simple love song with a hint of the religious about it and could easily be mistaken for Vince Gill at the height of his popularity. My favourite song on the album is probably *Soul Of A Man* which also tips its hat towards Vince Gill but also JD Souther and even Alejandro Escovado. It has all the elements I love in country music—a story, a great voice; slide guitar, a sweet fiddle and a melody.

Soul Of A Man is run a very close second by *Ain't Nobody's Business* when Cruz is joined not just on harmonies but equal lead vocals by Trisha Gene Brady who gives as good as she gets on this rocking duet. I could easily have listened to another couple of tracks like this as the two voices are just made for duets, just like Tim and Faith. If you like great country music in the vein of Vince Gill, Poco or the very early Eagles you will love this album. I genuinely feel like *Maverick* has unearthed yet another treasure with the Black Lillies and I can't wait until I get to see them play live. ***Alan Harrison***
www.theblacklillies.com

out these days. Singer and lead guitarist David Mirabella has a lush dreamy voice which lends itself to the Spectorish production (lots of layers and treble) and has had me coming back for more as I drive around the highways and byways on the recent sunny days.

Another Moon, Tongue Tied and the piano led opening song *Real Life* stand out from the crowd like poppies in a wheat field but it's *Still We Believe* and its luscious harmonies, crashing choruses, Hammond solo and punchy guitars that will makes its way onto my MP3 'Sounds of the Summer' mix. There are a score or more of bandstrying to recreate this sound at the moment, but the Rationales pull it off and sound as if they have a big future ahead of them. ***Alan Harrison***
www.therationales.com

Catherine MacLellan
SILHOUETTE
True North Records
★★★☆
A melodically pleasant concoction, that lyrically focuses on love and little else

Three songs on Nova Scotia based MacLellan's previous outing, WATER IN THE GROUND (2009 were co-produced with David Baxter. He's been described as Canada's T-Bone Burnett, and Baxter co-helms production of the fourteen-song SILHOUETTE with MacLellan. Following the pleasantly adequate opener *Stealin'*, co-written with Baxter, on which you'd swear Gretchen Peters was the vocalist, is *Keep On Fighting* which is a politically informed observation about child soldiers—'Let the bold and the brave yield to the meek'—while the ensuing *Now And Then* is a melancholic paean to lost love. The hook-laden melody that supports this collection's fourth selection *Eastern Girl* is truly celebratory, and at that point SILHOUETTE springs into life. As for content, it's a commentary on Eastern Canada where Catherine was born, raised and still resides.

Jim Cuddy (Blue Rodeo) adds his voice to *Sparrows*, as does folk songstress Jadea Kelly to a few of the songs, Baxter having produced her recent EASTBOUND PLATFORM (2010). Apart from the aforementioned *Keep On Fighting*, MacLellan's principal lyrical focus on SILHOUETTE is *love* in its many incarnations. The melodically muscular *True Love* being an obvious example—'All the money in the world, It won't buy you love' and 'What is true love? I don't know.' In the vein of the album title song, *Same Way Again* is another hook-laden delight. The penultimate selection *Snowbird*, penned by Catherine's late father, Gene, was a number one hit song in Canada and the United States during 1970 and resulted in the first Gold record awarded to a Canadian solo female artist, namely Anne Murray. It's followed by *Chop That Wood*, a lyrically melancholic, melodically ponderous creation. ***Arthur Wood***
http://www.catherinemaclellan.com/

Amy McCarley
AMY MCCARLEY
Independent
☆
Just wasn't my cup of tea...

Vocally Amy McCarley's music lacks the performance, ability and range to go up against some of the wonderful female country artists around right now. Though her music is moody and musters emotive responses to the world's trials and tribulations, I have not been able to see past her vocal style, that is down-trodden and lack-lustre. I know, that in itself it's not a crime to be a half-good singer alongside some wonderful musicians, but saying that the music needs to be listenable. Some however, may appreciate it. Songs like Every Which Way with its traditional country taste is a genuine country song and while the guitar playing is sporadic and more rhythmic than complimentary, I'm afraid I have not been able to enjoy this record one bit. My advice would be to definitely check her music out before you purchase the record, as I'm afraid it wasn't my cup of tea! *Laura Bethell*
www.amymccarley.com

Big Mamma's Door
HANDBAGGED
Self-released
★★★★
Ecstatically executed to show how great they really are

Fronted by Fiona McElroy this debut album is full to the brim with a particular quality which is difficult to encounter with contemporary blues band, and as long as Fiona's the one standing in front of the microphone then this band is destined for great things. Consisting of nine songs, what it lacks in track length it more than compensates with quality over quantity, a prime example of this being *Another Night*. The immediate opening on piano instantly grabs you as it leads the band for a short time until Fiona arrives and seduces the listener to get up out of the chair and start to dance their troubles away. Only legendary band leaders can do that and, like Billy Cotton did with his orchestra, she does it so well. Any group which has stupendous band members need a leader and this comes in the form of Fiona and what a welcome introduction she gives to the uninitiated. ***Russell Hill***
www.bigmammasdoor.com

Candice Night
REFLECTIONS
Minstrel Hall Music MHM0527
★★★★
Folk-rock that identifies itself with the sounds of ancient times

Candice Night, an international recording artist and front woman for the band Blackmore's Night, has released

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