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CD REVIEWS • NEW RELEASES

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CD REVIEWS - THE NEW RELEASES

Sheelanagig

FREAKS, FOOLS AND GHOULS—LIVE!

Get Real Records GGRCD012

★★★

A serious party band

Now, I don't wish to discombobulate [to confuse or disconcert] anyone but if, in some small way that particular word has drawn your attention to this article then it's a job well done. I suppose the same could be said for the band Sheelanagig who, on the strength of their superb CD covers (paintings by band member Adrian Sykes) surely look like a force to be reckoned with.

Combining a heady mix of Klezmer style enthusiasm blended with a soupcon of Celtic for good measure the band's infectious feel-good groove should have any self-respecting festival goer whirling like the proverbial dervish by the end of the evening. The thing about a 'live' recording (the band also have two studio albums to their credit) is that, hopefully it captures a moment in time that not only the band can reflect on just how good they really are but also allows them the opportunity to savour the immediacy of the response from the audience as well. With Aaron Catlow's fiddle and Adrian Sykes flute taking the lead/harmony honours and the energetic rhythm section of Dave Archer (guitar), Dorian Sutton (double bass) and John Blakeley on drums they prove a formidable act that could re-power the nuclear plant at Fukushima.

All of the members are splendid musicians and with the addition of special guest harmonica player Ralph Grottian adding a colourful texture to the overall sound this is a serious party band. **Pete Fyfe**
www.sheelanagig.co.uk



Michael Fracasso

SAINT MONDAY

Little Fuji Records

★★★★☆

On this revelatory album Fracasso weds rock rhythms to folk-tinged lyrics

Fracasso's latest solo album, his eighth (if you count the live set BACK TO OKLAHOMA), amounts to a marriage of the arts with production credited to Michael and Austin-based novelist, one-time art critic, freelance journalist, and screenwriter Jim Lewis. They share the connection of being New York City based for a time, and formed a solid friendship some two decades ago in Austin, Texas having been introduced by Michael's long-time bass player George Reiff. The duo co-wrote *Eloise*, *Broken Souvenirs* and the album title song, and Lewis' electric guitar is present on most of the album's ten songs. George Reiff (bass) and Mark Patterson (drums, percussion) furnish this energetic song collection with its substantial backbone, Matt The Electrician blows his trumpet on *Gypsy Moth*, while Kevin Russell, founder of the Gourds, nimbly picks mandolin on the album's only cover tune—John Lennon's *Working Class Hero*.

From start to finish, Michael's voice has never sounded better, and for that matter more powerful. SAINT MONDAY comes out of the starting gate like a wild untamed bronc, thanks to *While The Night Is Young*, pursued by the marginally less vigorous *Eloise* and *Little Lover*. An exploration of the murder ballad tradition, Fracasso's *Elizabeth Lee* previously appeared on BACK TO OKLAHOMA. Elizabeth's cuckolded husband a Pittsburgh steelworker who 'turned a river of fire, into an automobile,' deals bluntly with her infidelity—'I had my foot to the floor, I had my head in a fog, There was Elizabeth Lee, I ran her down like a dog.'

Set in contemporaneous times, in a hotel that's seen better times, the narrator employs the eighteenth-century phrase *Saint Monday*—it means 'too hung over to go to work'—with regard to the aftermath of another alcohol fuelled weekend. Propelled by a pounding Patterson backbeat and country guitar riffs, Fracasso's Austin buddy Patty Griffin adds her distinctive voice to *Ada, OK* (as in Oklahoma), the bitter tale of: '...a house where love's gone bad.' On the outro the Mainer purses her lips and whistles—quite wonderfully. In a compact one minute fifty-nine seconds the pure pop creation *Broken Souvenirs* recalls love found and lost. On the gentle final selection *Another Million*, featuring only Michael's voice and piano accompaniment with additional (spoken?) vocal from Jim Lewis, finally acknowledging that nothing lasts forever the narrator yearns for times gone by—'All I want is another million of reasons to believe' and 'All I want is another million of what whatever made you smile.'

From the outset of *While The Night Is Young* to the dying chords of *Another Million*, Fracasso grabs the listener by the scruff of the neck and doesn't let go. On the exuberant SAINT MONDAY Fracasso's penchant for penning hook-laden melodies wed to engaging lyrics remains intact, making it for sure one of 2011's 'must buy' albums. **Arthur Wood**
<http://michaelfracasso.com/>

