

Allan Taylor LEAVING AT DAWN

Stockfisch Records
SFR35740572

★★★★☆

Beautifully
crafted songs
from a master
storyteller



Folk troubadour Allan Taylor has a discography going back to 1971 when he released the first of three albums on United Artists Records then his fourth in 1976 came out on Chrysalis Records. Now on the German label Stockfisch, he has released this wonderful 12 track album of entrancing stories set to music. Whether it be reflections of love as in the beautiful *Lay Soft On Your Pillow*, or embodying the spirit of a place in songs like *Providence* or my favourite track *New York In The Seventies*, all the songs seem to cast a spell that holds the listener while each separate story unfolds.

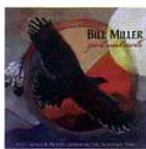
With three degrees to his name (Bachelor of Arts, Master of Arts, Doctor of Philosophy), Allan is often called upon to give talks about songwriting, especially at festivals. He is a very easy listening singer with plenty of interesting stories to tell, whether in the form of a song or a lecture. Like a good book, this is an album to relax with and enjoy. **DK**
www.allantaylor.com

Bill Miller SPIRIT WIND NORTH

Cool Springs
Records

★★★★☆

Atmospheric
album of mainly
Miller penned
flute instrumentals



The best I can figure it, including one outing shared with flute player/maker Robert Mirabal, *SPIRIT WIND NORTH* is Miller's fourth Native American flute recording. The album is subtitled *FLUTE SONGS & PRAYERS HONORING THE NORTHERN TRIBES*. Hailing from the Mohican bloodline, this multi-Grammy winner was born and raised on the Stockbridge-Munsee reservation, near Shawano in Northern Wisconsin. For a number of decades Bill Miller has made his home in Nashville.

Featuring a backdrop of birdsong, this album opens with the cleverly titled *Birds Of Pray*. Where a synthesiser is added to the mix during the closing half of the opening track, drums, percussion and finger-picked acoustic guitar support Miller's flute on the ensuing *Together As One*. *High Eagle Prayer* is precisely that, and features a prayer spoken in a tribal tongue.

In Native American culture, when a child is old enough, he or she is sent alone into the wilderness on a vision quest, the aim being for the child to establish a direction for his adult life. The quest normally lasts for a number of days and may include fasting as the child becomes attuned to the spirit world. Sandwiched between the instrumentals *Lost Canyon* and *Tranquil Fire*, is a melody titled *Vision Quest*. A practicing

Christian, Miller is a man of profound faith, and supported by a choir that (wordlessly) holds the melody, the penultimate instrumental and well known hymn, *Amazing Grace*, is bookended by *Journey Into Prayer* and *Reconciliation Prayer*. On the latter, Miller delivers his prayer for peace between nations in English. During times of quiet personal solitude, I can think of nothing more enchanting than the haunting, ethereal sound of the Native American flute. **AW**
<http://www.billmiller.net/> and <http://www.myspace.com/billmillerofficial>

Cheryl Wheeler POINTING AT THE SUN

DIAS Records

★★★★☆

Interesting self-
released song
collection from folk musician Cheryl
Wheeler



Let's begin at the end. Located there, is a three song suite that pays tribute to Penrod, Wheeler's now departed white feline friend. By way of insight let me add, Cheryl's current song publishing company is called Penrod and Higgins. On one centre page of the liner booklet there's a David Beemer watercolour of the aforementioned feline, while a colour photo of owner and pet graces the inside of the final page. It appears that Penrod was a feisty character who lived in a universe of his own making, and he narrates *White Cat*, which Wheeler delivers as a rap. Lyrical humour also pervades the ensuing *Cat Accountant* and *My Cat's Birthday*, the former is underpinned by a (between the World Wars) jazz café lead guitar ala Django Reinhardt, while melodic excess propels the lyrical insanity portrayed in the closing song.

The foregoing songs were produced by Kenny White as was Cheryl's redux of one of her older compositions, *Summer Fly*, wherein she recalls childhood memories of (a time) when 'the world was really mine from June to September.' The seven other songs on her debut, self-release on the DIAS label were produced by the talented Ben Wisch (Richard Shindell, Lucy Kaplansky, Patty Larkin), *POINTING AT THE SUN* being their fourth consecutive collaboration.

Album opener *Holding On*, and the later *One Step At A Time* find the narrator exploring the ups and downs of daily life, and Wheeler adds that thing called love to the mix in *You Know You Will* and *Underbrush*. In the album title song she explores the role of the natural world and religion in our lives—'Every church proclaims the only one, Ants and elephants have lives to run, And all the plants are pointing at the sun'—and embraces the Sun's role in the Earth's weather in *Grey And Green*. The latter opens with: 'With the blazing sun at bay on this August day' while later lines run to: 'Beneath this welcome shroud of heavy cloud, With the world all grey and green.' Mention of all of the foregoing subjects, in major or minor detail, surface in *Praise The Lord And Life Is Grand*. Overall, on this

Billy Walton Band NEON CITY

Self Released

★★★★☆

With guitar playing so good that it should be outlawed,
this is one heck of a fantastic album



Playing his trade in New Jersey with his name becoming quite famous in that area, Billy Walton is truly one of the greats of contemporary rock and roll. To hell with your Kaiser Chiefs and whatever other band deems themselves to be legends of the genre, Billy Walton is one name to be reckoned with and must surely be celebrated here with this album release which was recorded along with his other two main members of the band.

Being mostly an instrumental track, *Treat Her Right* might delve into the realms of a song which is destined only for jamming sessions and not success. But no, this is not the case here as the efforts really are quite superb by all. The self-penned *Soul Song* has the quietest beat of the ten tracks, but what a sound it is. It has an end of the night feel about it which then builds up to a Hendrix styled finish mixed with a Yardbirds groove which is never a bad style. The concluding track of the album happens to be a cover, but what a fine cover it is. The aforementioned track being *Papa was a Rollin Stone* and what a remarkable achievement it is, it keeps true to the original but the band adds their own ingredients in what is a very tasty musical cake to digest.

I can honestly say with gusto that the name of Billy Walton must surely be regarded soon as a legend in his own right. **RH**
www.billywaltonband.com
www.myspace.com/billywalton

occasion, Wheeler's lyrics appear subjectively limited and a little repetitious. **AW**
<http://www.cherylwheeler.com/>
<http://www.myspace.com/cherylwheelermusic>

Cimarron INCOGNITO

Incognito Records

00A1

★★★★☆

A run of the mill

country style

outfit



Cimarron came into existence in Columbus, Ohio, in 1984. Over the years there were a number of personnel changes as the band engaged itself in various styles. There is little available information as to whether the band made any recordings during the earlier years but this current album was actually recorded in 1997. At that time the line-up comprised Pat McLoughlin on lead vocal, Kent Robbins, (lead guitar), Kerry Patesel, (keyboards), Larry Reese, (bass; vocals) and Bob Kettler, (drums). All the material was written by McLoughlin and Kent, and listening to the album one concludes that by this time the band had settled for a fairly straight, if, for the time, a contemporary country style. The songs, if not destined to become 'classics' are quite acceptable, with a sensible mix of numbers with a strong backbeat and some slower material. Robbins and McLoughlin collaborated on one of the songs, *Lady Di*, written and recorded just a few months prior to Princess Diana's tragic death. It is a rather whimsical reverie about how Lady Di may have turned her life around had she chosen to turn her back on all the pomp and ceremony with which she had to contend and decided to lead a far less complicated life with a cowboy. The song may conceivably have worked back in 1997, but it is most inappropriate today and really should not have been included on this album.

On the strength of INCOGNITO, it would not be unreasonable to describe Cimarron as a tight, enjoyable bread-and-butter band, the type that tours ceaselessly, has its own solid fan base and works extremely hard without ever really making the big time. There are countless such bands on both sides of the Atlantic who bring country music to audiences in pubs and small clubs, year in, year out, and country music would be poorer without them. Perhaps there could be a change in fortune for Cimarron following the release of *My Green Eyes*, a single from the album, which has been released in Europe and is, by all accounts, receiving considerable airplay. There appears to be a slight change in the line-up since INCOGNITO was recorded, with Kent Robbins and Bob Kettler having been replaced by Ric Boals and Scott Langley, but in the absence of any new material since these changes, it is impossible to draw comparisons. **LK**
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Danielle Spencer CALLING ALL MAGICIANS

Independent

★★★★☆

A strong release
that embodies
that vintage female singer-songwriter
sound and focuses on the concept of
originality



The opening song, *Just A Thought*, leaves a long-lasting impression on the overall listening experience well after the album was over. Danielle Spencer is an Australian singer-songwriter, daughter of Australian television presenter Don Spencer, and wife to esteemed actor Russell Crowe, with whom she has two sons. Danielle's debut album came in 2001 with *WHITE MONKEY* released through EMI Australia. *CALLING ALL MAGICIANS* is produced by Tony Visconti (known for his work with David Bowie in the 1970s) and the overall sound of