

On Over gallops along with typical high lonesome vitality belying a broken hearted lyric. *Heartache Town* builds through a melodic fragment that rises, step by step, into a ear-worm chorus, this one at a steady medium tempo. *Shadowland* is another mid-tempo tune as the pair breathe the heartache lyrics passionately while the gorgeous instrumental mix swirls around them. Each word and every note oozes with what country music delivers like no other genre: sad, sad longing and an ache that burdens the soul. This whole album oozes the same emotional pathos as those timeless Orbison classics. **Alan Cackett**

www.troubadourkings.com

2-Bit Palomino RIDES AGAIN

Songdog Records

★★★★☆

Pure magic, with opulent vocal harmonies, memorable melodies and subjectively engaging lyrics



During the closing years of the noughties, Houston, Texas-based husband and wife duo Peter 'Ren' Renfree and Andrea 'Andi' Renfree, aka The Renfrees, greatly admired the songs of Florida-born six-foot plus, solo singer-songwriter Bill Ward. Based upon a fond childhood memory, the tall and talented guy had composed a song titled *2-Bit Palomino*. Making the decision to form a performing/recording trio, they adopted the name. On the strength of their 'must hear' 2010 self-titled debut, the following year 2-Bit Palomino scored the Texas Music Award's Vocal Group of the Year title.

Supported by a number of sidemen on their debut album, the twelve-song folk-country *RIDES AGAIN* is a stripped back 'this is how we sound live' affair. The sole returnee was Lloyd Maines, whose trademark pedal steel can be heard on two songs, while Bill (vocals, guitar, piano), Andi (vocals, guitar, mandolin, ukulele) and Ren (vocals, percussion, kazoo) furnish every other sound on the disc. On the trio's debut album, the songs were composed individually, together and with others, and, bar two covers, the same formula applies here with Andi once again the principal contributor.

West Virginia-bred musician Tim Henderson arrived in Austin, Texas during the early 1970s just as the city's songwriter scene was exploding. He passed

on November 1, 2011, and the trio pays tribute to this fine writer with a cover of his classic Tex-Mex ballad *Maria Consuelo*, a heartrending tale of love, found and lost. The kazoo makes its sole appearance on the other cover, *Tonight You Belong To Me*. Penned in 1926, almost three decades elapsed before it enjoyed repeated chart success. Almost an octogenarian, the song has been covered by acts as diverse as The Chipmunks and Eddie Vedder of Pearl Jam. 2-Bit Palomino's rendition is a vocal harmony rich affair.

Ren takes the lead vocal on the melodic opener *My Own Backyard*, a sprightly tale of travel and true love. Where finger-picked guitars graced the former, Andi's mandolin and voice share the lead on the wistful *Me, The Willow And The Wind*. From his Y2K solo release *SKYLINE* (2003), Bill reprises *Thunder In My Ear*. *Tulsa Tempest* is a rhythmically funky creation, Lloyd's steel graces the pure country that is *Good Morning Teardrops*, while this album's centrepiece *Church Of The Underground* was penned by Andi and Bill. As for *Cotton Dress*, suffice to say it's a hook-laden delight. One of the final engagements of the American Civil War, Ward's *Appomattox* is a powerhouse treatise on the horrors of war. In *The Dream* memories of a land that once overflowed with 'milk and honey' merge with the reflection that, in these financially strapped times, products once manufactured at home are now imported from abroad. Continuing in the vein of 'what we've lost,' the closing song queries *Where Have All The Heroes Gone?*

Arthur Wood

www.2bitpalomino.com

Angie Palmer OLD STICKS TO SCARE A BIRD

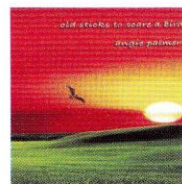
Akrasia Records:

PMCD6

★★★★

Just as English folk catches up with her, Angie takes another leap forward

Although she still looks like a fresh-faced teenager, Angie Palmer has been in and around the British folk scene for quite a few years now, starting out as a busker and eventually playing every folk club between Lands End and John O'Groats, before basing herself in France when fame and fortune avoided her in her home country. Now with her fifth album, folk music has finally caught up with Angie Palmer as Mumford and Sons,



Ed Sheeran, Noah and the Whale combine the best in Americana with traditional British folk music, to create what is thought of as a 'modern commercial sound,' but is exactly what Angie Palmer has been doing for the last ten years.

OLD STICKS TO SCARE A BIRD starts with the potentially political *Ballad Of Jack Everyman* when Angie barely contains her anger as she tells us your taxes line his pockets and your labour fills his store and he still keeps you poor. It's as good as anything Billy Bragg wrote in his heyday, only with a melody. *Raising Hurricanes* is a break-up song that combines English folk and blues but sounds like it was written in Louisiana (now do you see why she's difficult to categorise?). Angie Palmer can even do cute—*Postcard From Paris* is a love song to that great city and it works on every level, especially the blend of guitars, violins, violas and mandolin that give it an ethereal feel.

Traditional folk rears its head on the beautiful *Song Of Drowning Sailors*, which could have been written any time in the last 100 years, but was written by Angie and Paul Mason for this album, and goes to show what great songwriters they actually are. As usual, I have a favourite track and here it's *Dirty Little Secret*, which is a fun-rocking Americana-soaked song, where the title tells you all you need to know.

Haunted By A Stranger is one epic story split into two songs, as the narrator gives us both sides of a fleeting moment in time and the result is astonishing. Speaking of epic, the finale is the eight-minute long *Fresco* when Angie and her band slide their collective hand inside your chest and gently squeeze your heartstrings, with an arrangement made in heaven by angels.

Alan Harrison

www.angiepalmer.com

Anne Hills THE THINGS I NOTICE NOW

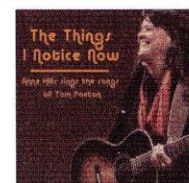
Appleseed

Recordings

★★★★☆

Anne Hills celebrates Tom Paxton's 75th year with a collection of his compositions

Thomas Richard 'Tom' Paxton was born on October 31, 1937 in Chicago, Illinois and subsequently grew up in Oklahoma. This fine arts graduate arrived in Greenwich Village in 1960 just as the contemporary folk music explosion was gathering pace.



NEW RELEASES

Containing twelve songs, *THE THINGS I NOTICE NOW* is long-time friend and musical accomplice Anne Hills' tribute to one of America's most iconic bards on his 75th birthday. Consciously choosing not to record a hits collection, Tom assisted her selecting the songs, and joins Anne, vocally, on three of them. Aged 15, Hills first heard Paxton's music on record while attending Interlochen Arts Academy, and on this collection she's joined by fellow pupils Pete Erskine (drums, percussion) and Chris Brubeck (trombone). Two long-established collaborators also contribute—Cindy Mangsen (accordion, concertina) and album co-producer Scott Petito (guitars, Dobro, bass, piano, organ). Paxton never indulged in the same acerbic approach to lyrics as, say, Dylan and others, while his firm grasp on life's realities is borne out by much of the fare on offer here.

Co-written with David Horowitz, the album opens with the self-explanatory title song, and features Messrs, Erskine and Brubeck. The song debuted on Paxton's 1969 album of the same name. Where the latter album was Tom's fifth outing for the estimable Elektra label, the oldest material here is taken from Tom's 1965 sophomore release *AIN'T THAT NEWS*, by way of renditions of *Hold On To Me*, *Babe* (with a Paxton vocal) and the tender, love-themed closing song *Every Time*. The sad tale of a streetwalker *Cindy's Crying* hails from *TOM PAXTON 6* (1970) as does *Dogs At Midnight*, an ode to the many health hazards faced by coal miners.

Boston-based folk musician Geoff Bartley included his instrumental composition *Redemption* on his 2008 album *BLACKBIRDS IN THE PIE*, and soon afterwards Tom added a lyric. Titled *Redemption Road*, this new creation makes its public debut here. The seasonal *Early Snow* from 2002's *LOOKING FOR THE MOON* (once again featuring Tom's voice) is the disc's only other 21st millennium Paxton composition. From the early 1980s album *BULLETIN*, *Hard Times Are Here Again* reflects upon times of economic hardship, while *Mother* is tender, heartfelt testament to love. Featuring at one juncture a Paxton counterpoint vocal *When Princes Meet* appeared on 1988's *POLITICS LIVE*, and the optimistic *Time To Spare* hails from 1991's *IT AIN'T EASY*. Like Judy Collins and Bonnie Koloc, Anne possesses a crystal clear soprano and throughout this tribute collection her voice soars and swoops effortlessly. **Arthur Wood**

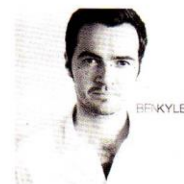
www.annehills.com

Ben Kyle BEN KYLE

Self-Release

★★★★☆

Acoustic pop perfection



Ben Kyle used to front the not particularly well-known American alt.country outfit Romantica, but although some of his ex-bandmates appear on his solo debut, as well as some famous friends like Carrie Rodriguez, this is a horse of an entirely different hue. Gentle, quietly addictive acoustic pop is what Kyle offers, and mighty good it is too. While writing Romantica's third album he discovered, as he puts it 'that [he] wasn't interested in making it as an artist if that meant not being there as a dad.' This discovery informs the album, strongly on songs like *The Dark*, *Simple Life* and particularly *God Only Knows* and more subtly on the hymnal *Mercy*. It's never overly sentimental though, just honest and open, and the sentiments are ones that anyone can identify with. It's not all intense by any means either as *Hills Of England*, a paean to the old country, has a loping melody and an irresistible chorus that screams hit.

Sweet harmonies, delicate melodies, a warm intimate feel, everything judged to exquisite perfection; this is one of those rare albums where not a foot is put wrong. Kyle has a gift for cutting to the core, nailing what he wants to say in a few perfectly chosen words. It's one of those things that you don't appreciate until you hear it and then you realise the difference between the great and the merely very good. One can only hope that he will feel able to venture over to the UK again, and soon too. **Jeremy Searle**

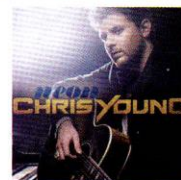
www.benkyle.com

Chris Young NEON

Sony Music

★★★★☆

Long awaited first UK release for American country hit-maker



Chris Young has been recording for the past six years, has three albums to his credit and scored five number one country hits. This album was released in America a couple of years ago and belatedly becomes his first UK release to coincide with his participation in the CMA Songwriters Series