

...the new releases

and the nadir is reached with *Now, Divide*, which 'distinguishes' itself by consisting of nothing more than relentless humming accompanied by strummed acoustic guitars. An album as lacking in imagination as its title. **JS**
www.molinajohnson.com

Karl Culley BUNDLE OF NERVES

Triumphant Sound Records
★★★★

Probably the strangest yet most exhilarating music released this past year

Opening BUNDLE OF NERVES is *Elephant Juice* an exciting song with strange yet lively music accompanied by the oddest lyrics. What is Elephant Juice? Throughout the two minutes Karl repeats: 'I love you but you never come round with the Elephant Juice,' and these are the only lyrics throughout the short song which abruptly ends with the sound of violently fast music and the sound of swords being drawn from their sheaths. Odd maybe isn't the word for it, but interesting definitely is. The interesting and oddness doesn't stop at track one. *I'm Not Proud Of Myself*, has a tinge of chanting monks, and a hint of Arabic in Karl's singing style, making this such a remarkably attractive piece of work. What genre is this piece, well, there isn't a genre to describe it. Unique doesn't even sum up this work as Karl has created something here extremely exquisite that goes beyond being unique—he should be proud of himself. In *Her Nature* is a comical number, as Karl sings with Giles Perring and Simon Edwards about a girl who stabs the men in the spine, describing the girl like a scorpion. The music again is full of mad life, with manic sounds screaming from Giles' Fender jaguar electric guitar, making this a song to go crazy about. On the other hand, *Thick as Thieves* isn't as outstanding, good as it may be, Karl's vocals seemed to be laid upon the music slightly too thick, and through the panting and puffing it would seem he is struggling to push out those notes, making it debatable whether or not the panting was worth it. *The Haunting of Karl Culley* is another exciting track which with the help from Giles and Simon makes a perfect ride of fascinating heights and scary anticipations. A truly incredible collection of musical art which Karl should be more than proud of. **CB**
www.karlculey.co.uk

Robyn Landis MANY MOONS

Brave Hearts Music
★★★★

Fast growing and addictive

It is of little surprise that Robyn Landis has garnered comparisons to the slightly better known singer-songwriter Dar Williams. Her raspy smooth vocal is set to well-composed, shoulder shifting ballads. Her uplifting

energy is as addictive, if not more so than that of Dar Williams, yet that said there seems to be something about Landis that is not quite so likeable. Her knowing tone is less approachable than the welcoming Williams. However, Landis' second album MANY MOONS warrants attention. Having grown since her days as one half of Americana duo Short & Sweet, Landis' likeability factor is fast growing.

MANY MOONS is slow to begin, yet skip past the opening tracks to the unforgettable *Hey Dog* and it becomes clear that Landis knows how to compete. The beautifully crafted four minutes is a tantalising tribute. Coming into her own again for the politically opinionated *Paul's Song*, Landis proves a thought-provoking presence. Had only MANY MOONS contained more numbers of the same ilk. Landis clearly feels at home in saccharine ballad territory, yet her rich vocal demands much more. *Leave You Behind* demands energy, her passive approach drowns any potential.

MANY MOONS contains some tender teasers but on the whole fails to please. Landis has a silky strong vocal but it proves her downfall, often drowning the simplest of compositions. When Landis reigns it in and expresses an opinion, MANY MOONS sparks interest. Williams needn't worry just yet. **JW**
www.robynlandis.com

Joy Kills Sorrow DARKNESS SURE BECOMES THIS CITY

Signature Sounds Recordings
★★★★

Pleasingly, a string band that understands how to kill the speed

Formed in 2005, Joy Kills Sorrow is a five-piece Boston based string band and DARKNESS SURE BECOMES THIS CITY is their sophomore release. Bluegrass pioneers the Monroe Brothers broadcast during the 1930s from radio station WJKS, hence the band's name. Following a number of line-up changes, these days the quintet is composed of founder/guitarist Matthew Arcara—2006 winner of Winfield's National Flatpicking Championship, banjoist Wesley Corbett, vocalist Emma Beaton—2008 Canadian Folk Music Awards Young Performer of the Year, bassist Bridget Kearney—winner of the 2006 John Lennon Songwriting Contest and mandolin player Jacob Jolliff. Kearney is the principle songwriter with five credits while Emma Jean Beaton contributes two tunes, the remaining quartet of songs being covers.

Of the four cover songs, *New Shoes* was penned by Caleb Klauder. Uncle Earl alumni Kristin Andressen composer of *Send A Letter*, was born and raised in Portland, Orengo. Furthermore, by dint of her membership of Sometyms Why, Kristin is a Joy Kills Sorrow label mate. Dave Miles Keenan and Nova Karina Devonia, aka Miles & Karina, are a

Seattle based duo and their myspace site pegs their style lounge, country and Latin. *We Will Have Our Day* appeared on the duo's 2006 album WHEREGO, and the fourth and final cover is New Hampshire based Jeff Talmage's *If It's Rainin'*.

Having already acknowledged the band's folk, rock, pop, and jazz indulgences, the album closes with Beaton's bluesy *You Make Me Feel Drunk*. **AW**
http://www.joykillsorrow.com

Leslie Wilson BROKEN HEARTS

New Mountain Music NMM 2009/1
★★★★

A brave attempt at a different style of music

Born in Willenhall, West Midlands, Leslie Wilson currently lives in Cork, Ireland. For many years he performed under the name of Les Wilson and the Mighty Houserockers, playing slide guitar and singing hard electric blues and rock'n'roll. The band headlined many prestigious blues festivals both in Britain and Europe but Wilson admits that he spent a lot of time listening to some of the great singer-songwriters. Growing tired of the style of music he was playing he dropped the 'Les Wilson,' reverting to 'Leslie,' set about writing original material and has now released what he calls his 'debut' Americana type album. It's a brave attempt at a different style of music but it falls short on a number of counts.

Many of the self-composed songs stay with the overall theme of broken hearts but lyrically a number of them sound rather contrived and lack any real depth. Of course, there are exceptions; *Half A Man (Without You)* and *I Don't Want To Get Over You* but, generally speaking, the level of self-pity expressed in numbers like *Don't Cry About Me*, *Piece Of My Heart*, *Sorry But I've Got No Sörrys Left* and *Why Did You Cry* fail to generate much sense of empathy in the listener.

Vocally, Wilson is not a particularly distinctive stylist. When it comes to a sense of conviction he fails to be as convincing as the material demands and this, combined with a lack of any raw passion, takes away a lot from his deliveries. It has long been accepted that the selection of a deep and meaningful song from another's pen is invariably preferable to a weak original, and Wilson has mixed a few strong numbers in with his own compositions. The first of these is *Gulf Coast Highway*, written and recorded by Nanci Griffith some years ago. An excellent composition, Wilson is joined by Jean Vincent and it is sung as a duet. Unfortunately, as good as the song is, the duo does little to enable this reviewer to nominate it as a standout song. Much the same can be said of *Love Hurts*, a great Boudleaux Bryant composition, popularised by the Everly Brothers. Wilson and Vincent add nothing to the original, and they fail to do so on Rodney Crowell's soulful *Till I Gain Control Again*. However, in fairness, Wilson does make a very good job

of Richard Thompson's *Waltzing For Dreamers* and his rendition of another Thompson original, *How I Wanted To* is also worthy of mention.

Despite the number of negative comments, it must be said that Wilson is an excellent guitarist. For the most part he has laid his electric guitar aside and retrieved his acoustic guitar. He has surrounded himself with a group of equally talented musicians who between them add accordion, fiddle, pedal steel, banjo, piano, Dobro, cello, harmonica, bass and drums, giving him a solid bedrock on which to build. It may appear presumptuous to say that since this is Wilson's first attempt at recording in a style very different to what he has been used to playing, if he is serious about his writing and is prepared to work at his vocal deliveries, he will surely progress in the difficult field of music he has chosen. **LK**
www.myspace.com/lesliewilsonacoustic

Meg Hutchinson THE LIVING SIDE

Red House Records
★★★★

Meg says, maybe it's time we got back to the basics of life

Central Massachusetts bred, Boston based Hutchinson's sixth solo outing is her third consecutive disc that Crit Harmon (Martin Sexton, Susan Werner, Lori McKenna) has produced. Many of the players who contributed to her Red House debut COME UP FULL (2008) reprise their roles here. On this occasion Richard Gates (bass), Jeff Berlin (drums), Brad Hatfield (keyboards) and Steve Sadler (mandola, accordion) are augmented by Kevin Barry (acoustic and electric guitars) while Harmon pitches in on guitars, piano and more.

In album opener *Hard To Change*, her voice double tracked, Hutchinson alludes to the: 'Year of the billion dollar bailout' while relative to saving time modern technology earns the stiff rebuke, 'Well if they save so much then where's all mine?' The American Dream hasn't been irrevocably crushed, but it's certainly battered and badly bruised. That said, Meg's real aim here is to again enjoy the simple pleasure of face-to-face communication. As for laptops, I-pods and their ilk she advocates: 'Turn 'em all off and tell me about your dreams.'

The lines: 'When I drink whiskey, sometimes I do things I don't regret, Sometimes I say things I can't forget' bookend *Hopeful Things*, and while they are possibly personal and true for Meg, it's her mid-song reference to the *Miraculous* real life event—'Big jet floating down the Hudson, Everyone balancing on those sinking wings'—that truly reflects her optimism that everything will be alright. Observed from an airplane window *Yea Tho We Walk* opens with the picture perfect: 'Cold morning in the Midwest, winter earth in a wedding dress.' There's subsequent mention of how: 'this valley grows