

NEW RELEASES

The Buffalo Gals WON'T YOU BE CRUEL TO BE KIND

Get Real Records:
GGRCD017

★★★★

The Gals deliver yet another charmingly unique collection of songs

The Buffalo Gals might just be one of the finest old-time country string bands to date, and by far one of the most talented and inventive groups I've so far come across. This year, the six-piece ensemble—consisting of award-winning Appalachian fiddler and banjoist Kate Lissauer, five-string banjoist John Whelan, ukuleleist and guitarist Sooz Clare, flatfooting percussionist Sibylle Riesen and bassist Eve Morris—return with their latest release *WON'T YOU BE CRUEL TO BE KIND*, cleverly paying homage to old-timey roots music that inspired some of the rooting greats, and somewhat giving a history lesson of the migration and integration of various music styles.

There's some great old-timey bluegrass numbers on the record, from the Irish-infused *Jerusalem Ridge* and *Patty On The Turnpike/Shady Grove* to the fast paced and pickings of *Falls Of Richmond*, *I'm A Wild And Restless Cowboy* and *Greasy Coat*; their passion and talent for the craft shining through, and it has to be said, they come together and do it so well.

Sweet Marie, an 1893 classic, opens the album beautifully with some delicious soaring fiddle, laying the tone for the rest of the record—in fact; you can even hear the percussive sounds of Sibs 'flatfooting' and even more so on the superbly self-composed *Frankie*—with the imaginatively re-worked *Captain Had A Bulldog* following closely behind. All the Gals take it in turns on the lead mic and harmony; with Pete leading the herd (and Kate and Sooz harmonising) on the forlorn, fiddle-led Hank Williams gem *Weary Blues From Waiting* and Kate and Sooz dueting on the rather comical, yet sad account of *I Left Her Standing There (With A Doodad In Her Hair)*—a tale of unrequited love by the Dezurik Sisters whom became stars for their unique vocalisations, and the two Buffalo Gals here recreate that to a tee.

Of course, the album wouldn't be complete if it weren't for the inclusion of some self-pens and self-arranged numbers; and the old-timey title track *Won't You Be*



Cruel To Be Kind? and closing song *Sweet Bye And Bye* are just two of them—the former written by Sooz herself and delivered in true Buffalo Gals style, with soaring fiddle, four-part vocals (Pete, Kate, Sibs and Sooz) and flourishes of banjo, whilst the latter, consisting solely of Kate, Pete and Sooz's voices brings the album to a languid, old-timey gospel close.

The band has got something really special here and has made it into what could become their trademark sound. For those of you who like music from the yesteryears, then this one comes highly recommended. Emily Saxton

www.buffalogals.co.uk

Simone Dinnerstein & Tift Merritt NIGHT

Sony Classical

★★★★

Classical music
meets country and folk in a tasteful
fourteen selection exploration

It's only a matter of months since Tift's *TRAVELING ALONE* was released, and unheralded—certainly on Merritt's web site, until the day of its release—she partners a fellow New York based classical pianist Simone Dinnerstein on *NIGHT*. Merritt contributes vocals, with occasional acoustic guitar/harmonica support on 12 of the 14 offerings. In 2007 music teacher Dinnerstein's self-financed recording of Bach's *GOLDBERG VARIATIONS*, released by Telarc, promptly peaked at number one on the Billboard Classical Chart. Brought to national and international concert platform prominence, Simone signed with Sony Classical in 2010.

This unique union furnished the opportunity to, individually, cross borders into previously uncharted musical territory. The challenges they faced forms the focus of a three page, liner booklet interview (with the duo). In terms of content, Juilliard-trained Simone is the sole contributor to Alexander Siloti's arrangement of Bach's *Prelude In B Minor* while The Cohen Variations—is an almost seven-minute long exposition of familiar Lenny melodies. Featuring sterling support from Dinnerstein's grand piano, *NIGHT* includes a quartet of Merritt compositions—two are brand new, two are already familiar—and cover material that runs the gamut of Schubert's *Night*



And *Dreams*, through traditional folk songs *Wayfaring Stranger* and *I Will Give My Love An Apple*, to contemporary times and Billie Holiday's *Don't Explain*, Johnny Nash's *I Can See Clearly Now* and the darkly hued Patty Griffin penned album title song.

Arthur Wood

<http://www.simonedinnerstein.com/>

The Milk Carton Kids THE ASH & CLAY

Anti Records

★★★★☆

Two acoustic guitars
and voices magic
contemporary music from folk revival
sounds

The Milk Carton Kids played the closing night of the 2012 Kerrville Folk Festival, and with no prior knowledge, purely based on their name; I expected another (yawn) bluegrass string band. Hallelujah; the duo's 40 minute set was an energetic and memorably melodic acoustic guitar and vocal harmony revelation, infused by, sometimes self-deprecating, always razor sharp between song wit. Kenneth Pattengale and Joey Ryan were raised in Eagle Rock, California and prior to joining forces in 2011 had pursued solo careers, each leavened by a significant back catalogue of recordings.

Bearing their individual names, they debuted with the self-released live set *RETROSPECT*, wherein they revisited songs penned separately. Morphing into The Milk Carton Kids, the studio set *PROLOGUE* followed soon afterwards with words and music credited to the duo. As well as hard copies, both releases were offered as free web downloads. Two years on, those titles have been downloaded a combined total of 150,000 occasions. In April 2013, The Milk Carton Kids undertake their European/UK concert debut.

Signing late last year with Anti Records, the Silver Lake, Los Angeles based imprint, the Kids self-produced *THE ASH & CLAY*. The 12 song set was recorded, mixed and mastered by Ryan Freeland (Ray LaMontagne, Joe Henry). Gus Van Sant's latest movie *Promised Land* released *Stateside* in late December 2012, prominently features *Snake Eyes* from *THE ASH & CLAY*, as well as *The Jewel Of June* plus the album title song. Concurrently, *Snake Eyes* was released as a single, and pursuing further Van Sant's movie, this



album includes a selection titled Promised Land.

Wedding the sound of two acoustic guitars and voices, the music made by The Milk Carton Kids is both retro and contemporary. Here, the third offering Honey, Honey possesses a rhythmic vigour reminiscent of the late and legendary folkie Bob Gibson at his peak, and there are upbeat sonic interludes on THE ASH & CLAY where it would be impossible not to allude to the influence of Simon & Garfunkel and the Everly Brothers—respectively, The Jewel Of June and Heaven.

Central to the Kids sound is the stunningly intricate and inventive finger-picking of lead guitarist Pattengale and his 1954 Martin 0-15, while Ryan holds down the rhythm with a 1952 Gibson J45. Band acquaintance and musician Joe Henry has alluded in print to the manner in which, on occasions, Joey and Ken's voices fuse wonderfully into a single entity. Whether restrained or delivered with alacrity, there's no denying that this duo weaves lyrically thoughtful musical magic. As for the emotions their sound engenders in the listener, there's pleasure as well as melancholy. The Ash & Clay and opening song Hope Of A Lifetime fulfil the elation quotient, while sad reflection pervades the lyrics to the gentle On The Mend and this collection's masterwork, Memphis. The latter, a eulogy to the city and the music that was made there: 'God bless the souls that shook up mine' closes this collection. Arthur Wood

www.themilkcartonkids.com

The Good Lovelies LIVE AT REVOLUTION

Six Shooter Records:
GL005

★★★★☆

Utterly delightful harmonies

This wonderful trio of Caroline Brooks, Kerri Ough and Sue Passmore hail from Canada and are one of the better harmony groups around. This is a master class in harmony singing, made even more special due to the fact that it is recorded live in concert. It is often said that the first track chosen for an album is very important, as it can temper the listeners' mind-set, if it is a weak or uninteresting song then the mood of the listener could be tainted towards the rest of the album, get it right and you will



have that listener's ear right to the end. On this album they have got it spot-on with the tremendously catchy and fun Heebie Jeebies written by Boyd Atkins and recorded and made famous by Louis Armstrong in 1926. The triple harmonies are enchanting and tremendously alluring.

I Want is another enjoyably lively tune with Caroline playing some fine banjo. In fact all three play a variety of instruments, swapping constantly throughout the concert. Their harmonies are bewitching on the beautiful Winter Hours; they do a wonderfully spine-tingling a cappella version of Gram Parsons and Chris Hillman's Juanita and with just Caroline's acoustic guitar as accompaniment, they do a charming rendition of Leonard Cohen's Hallelujah. There is also the obligatory audience sing-along on the popular Lie Down that also includes some fine mandolin from Caroline and a good lap steel solo from Christine Bougie. A very good live album from this hugely talented trio. David Knowles

www.goodlovelies.com

Thomas Hine FORGIVE MY FUTURE

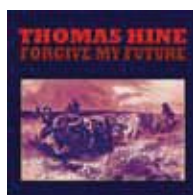
Self-Released

★★★★

Coloradosong-smith invokes traces of Beach Boys harmonies, twinned with a melancholy world-weariness of Townes or Neil, but with his own personal stamp

FORGIVE MY FUTURE is the fourth album released by Hine, following on from the quite well received INTO THE BOTTOMLANDS (2011). Playing all the instruments himself, which is quite an arsenal as along with the obligatory guitar, bass and drums are glockenspiels, mandola, tin whistles and a harmonium. On a couple of tracks he is helped out by Sadie Hine, whom I assume to be his wife, and Swedish singer-songwriter, Thomas Jonsson (I'm Kingfisher).

The songs themselves are a well-crafted mixture of lo-fi and low key stories relating to the whole concept of loss in one form or another. Some songs follow a more traditional line and I point to the quite wonderful Tomorrow I Have My Doubts, where a simply strummed acoustic guitar underpins a gorgeous vocal, evoking an early morning feel of a man sitting on his porch reflecting. Praise also to quite



possibly the album's highlight, Bright Shining Mountain which is where I hear the sound of those Beach Boys traces—think more God Only Knows rather than Surfin' USA!—as Hine invokes his love of his home in Colorado. Another close runner for best song status is Owen, based on the tale of an 1800s outlaw, which has terrific imagery in the traditional western ballad style. But there are many other highlights here such as Conquistadores or the seven-plus minutes of Should Have Stayed At Home.

Too many self-released albums are indulgent or don't have the material to hold the listener's attention. For once, Thomas Hine has managed to overcome and avoid these pitfalls and put out something as strong as many a label-backed 'product' I have heard. I really recommend you giving this a listen. John Jobling

www.thomashine.com

Various Artists UNSUNG HERO: A TRIBUTE TO THE MUSIC OF RON DAVIES

Little Chickadee 96859
10962

★★★★

Some of Nashville's finest pay their respects to the late singer-songwriter who deserved a lot more recognition

Ask any Briton of a certain age if he remembers Ron Davies and the most likely answer would be: 'Wasn't he that blond bloke who played centre-forward for Southampton and Wales in the 1960s? Very good with his head.' Indeed he was—but only a tiny minority of people would recall the other Ron Davies, an American singer-songwriter of a country persuasion who flirted with stardom after composing hits for luminaries like David Bowie, Jerry Jeff Walker and the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band. Much better known is Ron's sister Gail, a well-loved country star with a big reputation for live performance. She is the producer and motivator responsible for this excellent tribute album to a man who was taken before his time after a heart attack in 2003 when he was 57.

Gail sets the tone with an emotional take on the opener One More Night With You, a typically beguiling Ron Davies song. The great John Anderson—like Davies himself, a pitifully underrated talent—picks up the baton and canters home with What Good Is A Secret while the delicious Dolly Parton

