

...the new releases

synth from Dave Rowberry and Rick Wakeman at the same time as Peter serenades the love of his life and gives the song more passion than an episode of *Sex in the City*. I don't want to keep name dropping, as this is Peter Barton and Jerry Donahue's album; but what's not to like on an album that includes Zoot Money, Scott Whitley, Clive Bunker, Mickey Gallagher and the superstars that I've already mentioned?

What's Life About? is a tongue-in-cheek pop at rock's glitterati and *First Encounter* is an instrumental so cool, it will make Hank B Marvin consider retiring. *Italian Cowboy* is already a contender for my song of 2010! Very reminiscent of Jimmy Nail's better stuff; the hook is light-hearted enough to be memorable and yet again the musicianship is fabulous and complements Pete's rough-diamond voice like a velvet glove. Baring in mind Peter has been playing and singing in the Animals for the last 10 years it should be no surprise that the album ends with *The House of the Rising Sun* and this version runs Eric Burdon a very close race! Peter gives the song just the right amount of pathos it deserves and the interplay between Jerry Donahue and Snake Davis (again!) provides enough of an edge to make the song sound fresh again. I demand that you hunt this album down like a rabid dog and insist that the guys tour the UK as early as possible! **AH** www.myspace.com/peterbartonram

Skilda LIVE AT KNOCKEN- GORROCH Loz60 ★★★★

Future folk
festival favourites
serve up the changes

At first I wasn't sure whether to review this album due to the fact that it was, what appeared to be, a demo recording. But then, once I put it on, I couldn't put it down. *Glenan Blue* opens with a rip roaring hi-hat and raunchy guitar riff joined by highland pipes, then drifts into something you might expect from a recording by Bjork. It's a crude but attention-grabbing use of audio experimentation that leaves the listener in no doubt that this is a band that means business.

Utilising the Gaelic language for the songs brings to mind a youthful, energised Capercaille and there's nothing wrong with that as Skilda give their own twist to the established *An Nighean Dubh*. Followed by the chant inducing *Saorsa (Freedom, Future)* this exciting explosion of folk/techno/jazz/rock may not be as forward thinking as it purports to be, but it seriously gives a good kick up the backside where other bands fear to tread. Take my word for it, this is the kind of act that every seasoned 'folk' festival organiser should try to finish with, because of the band's butt-kicking enthusiasm.

So, no shrinking violets here then but then again a stiff dose of excitable rhythm never hurt anyone, unless you're a serious folk



Mary Chapin Carpenter THE AGE OF MIRACLES

Zoe/Rounder Records

★★★★★

Chapin not only hits a home run, she takes the pennant

In the Spring of 2007, soon after the release of *THE CALLING*, Mary Chapin Carpenter had a brush with death. Pulmonary embolisms can kill, Chapin survived. Survivors of a life crisis, more often than not, gain wisdom from the experience. The act of measuring each new day as a precious gift was Chapin's reward. The foregoing hopefully illustrates what informs her lyrics. Carpenter waltzes into *THE AGE OF MIRACLES* with *We Travelled So Far*, wherein she muses upon the joy and constancy of walking with love: 'in rain or in sun.'

Zephyr focuses upon that part of our psyche that persistently struggles with the urge to be going, and she's joined, vocally, by Vince Gill on the ensuing *I Put My Ring Back On*. The discovery that 'Life astounds us in an instant, changing all we know, Blink just once and then you've missed it' lies at the heart of *Holding Up The Sky*. Where were you on 4 June 1989? Aged just seventeen, Chen Guang was a soldier (in civilian clothing) who had been ordered to clear the demonstrators occupying the symbolic heart of his nation. The Tiananmen Square massacre ensued. Currently, and at great risk to his own freedom, this activist's paintings capture his haunting memories of that day.

Winged flight, drifting clouds and dancing light are woven into the fabric *I Was a Bird*, to which Alison Krauss adds her voice. Set mainly in Paris during the 1920s, Hadley Richardson, Ernest's first spouse, and not the first woman to lose her husband to a family acquaintance, narrates *Mrs. Hemingway*. *I Have A Need For Solitude* is a straightforward personal statement, belying its title *Iceland* is a truly heartfelt expression of love, while the title song finds Chapin reflect on recent world events—turbulent as well as affirmative—and concludes that we should be positive regarding the future sufficient that 'one day we'll ride up that hill.' Chapin closes with *The Way I Feel* a truly optimistic road song.

As was the case with her Zoe debut *THE CALLING*, *THE AGE OF MIRACLES* was recorded in Tennessee and co-produced with keyboard wizard Matt Rollings (Lyle Lovett, Keith Urban). Furthermore many of the session players reprise their roles. They include Russ Kunkel (drums), Glenn Worf (bass), and Eric Darken (percussion), while *MIRACLES* also features Duke Levine (electric and acoustic guitar) and Dan Dugmore (steel and twelve-string guitar). What tomorrow will bring, thankfully, remains much of a mystery. Repeated reference to the winds that traverse our planet, the end of day and freedom are woven into this collection for good reason. On her twelfth album Chapin's lyrics have attained a new power and intensity, welcome to *THE AGE OF MIRACLES*. **AW** <http://www.marychapincarpenter.com/>



traditionalist, and let's face it, how many of those are still around these days? **PF** www.skilda.com

West Of Eden TRAVELOGUE

Zebra Art Records

ZAR 851

★★★★☆

The nomadic life of the wandering minstrel comes vividly to life on this the fifth release by the excellent Swedish band West Of Eden. This is an album that in many respects is a retrospective of their touring life and allows the band—Jenny Schaub (lead vocals, accordion, tin whistle), Martin Schaub playing the guitar, mandolin, keyboards, Kenneth Holmstrom on bass, Ola Karlevo on drums and bodhran, followed by David Ekh on electric guitar and Lars Broman playing the fiddle—to explore their rights of passage on the folk circuit.

Having toured extensively throughout Europe taking in Ireland and Scotland and soaking up both countries Celtic culture the band utilise a strong roots connection that is apparent from their use of predominantly acoustic instrumentation. Talking of which, the deceptively cool mandolin accompaniment on *Buttercup Meadow* brings to mind a performance by the sadly missed Louis McManus, of the Bushwackers Band. Meticulous, studied treatments, although not clinical in anyway, in how to play to a song's strength is the band's forte whether from flowing acoustic settings to pop-rock that wouldn't seem out of place on a recording by the Corrs. This is seriously 'easy listening music' and if there is any justice should be championed by the likes of Mike Harding or Terry Wogan. **PF** www.westofeden.com



Chris O'Brien LITTLE RED

Highway 26 Music

★★★★☆

Boston based
folk songwriter's
second solo
outing

LITTLE RED is O'Brien's sophomore solo release, and was produced by Zack Hickman, bass man in Josh Ritter's band. The supporting players include guitarists Austin Nevins (Deb Talen, Edie Carey) and Lyle Brewer (Sarah Borges), percussionist Neil Cleary, drummer Liam Hurley (Josh Ritter) with boy-girl harmony vocals supplied by solo artists Mark Erelli and Antje Duvekot. Even Sean Staples (the Resophonics) was inspired to break out his mandolin for *LITTLE RED*. The album was mainly recorded at Hi-N-Dry Studio in Somerville, which was founded by the late Mark Sandman of Morphine.

Pedal steel, chiming electric guitar and a soaring vocal chorus propel *Carnival*, the urgent paced album opener, wherein, employing a fairground ride analogy, O'Brien's lyric explores relationships: 'I could be the last one who is holding on, Or I could just let go.' A pounding backbeat injects a similarly urgent tempo into the ensuing *Little Red Wagon*, with Charlie Rose exchanging his pedal steel for a banjo. On the third selection, *This Old Town*, O'Brien slows the pace and delivers at the outset a portrait of reclusive poet Emily Dickinson's 'picket fence' hometown of Amherst, Massachusetts. In the second verse Chris reflects on his Amherst high school years and in the next recalls his first hometown sweetheart.

Hurricane Love, finds him muse: 'damned that girl know how to kiss,' while the bluegrass-tinged *Maria* is the portrait of a similarly feisty woman. The little dress worn by



his *Hurricane Love* was 'red' and O'Brien's (sophomore album) colour of choice resurfaces in the funky sounding *Every Shade Of Red*. The autobiographical, and equally red, *Blood Like Yours*, closes the album. Therein Chris questions whether in time, like his father, he will succumb to alcohol addiction. In the course of this three minute long personal revelation the writer recalls how, at aged ten, he was deserted by one parent, a man he didn't see again for some two decades.

Warrants listening too and watching out for in the future, pegs O'Brien's current standing in the pantheon of Boston based folk songsmiths. **AW** <http://www.chrisobrienmusic.com/>

Tony Denikos ALREADY GONE

Tony Denikos

Music

★★★★☆

A blue collar
effort musically,
the lyrics hardly scream 'original
subject matter'

ALREADY GONE is this Maryland based musician's third release. He debuted with *NAKED AND SMILING* (2000)—a collection of songs penned during the previous two decades—and followed with *TIME TELLS TALES* (2003). Denikos and his band currently perform in and around Washington D.C. and throughout Maryland, with original material that runs the stylistic gamut of folk, blues and rock.

The focus in the opening number, *Big Easy Down*, is Hurricane Katrina and the City of New Orleans, while the title cut turns the spotlight on the export of jobs to Far East destinations. Lyrical venom is directed at the financial wizards of Wall Street in *Auction Block*. Sadly,



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Denikos' subject matter chases the tailwind of far more literate song scribes. **AW**
http://www.tonydenikos.com/

Eugene Ruffolo & Doc Schneider SONGS & STORIES LIVE Homemade Songs ★★★★

Two friends share an Atlanta stage for an afternoon of acoustic music magic

This two-CD live recording was made on a sunny Saturday afternoon during mid-April last year in Atlanta, Georgia's famed folk venue Eddie's Attic. Ruffolo met Schneider four years ago when Eugene's long time production collaborator, Ben Wisch, invited him to sing on a Doc Schneider project he was working on. During the week Richard 'Doc' Schneider practises law in Atlanta, but music has been an almost lifelong consuming passion. Aged nineteen (circa 1973) he composed his first song and according to Doc's web site: 'the first good one at 39.' CHOICES & CHANCES his debut album appeared in 2003. Three years later while working on SECOND CHANCES Doc met Eugene. A fast and firm friendship ensued.

Since 1998 New York based Ruffolo has released five albums, the most recent a Yuletide set on the German Stockfish label. SONGS & STORIES LIVE finds the duo draw on those recordings as well as new material, while between song introductions are liberally laced with tall tales and truths—the one about the guitars that Jim Olson built is a gem. Doc and Eugene are self-confessed fans of the art they practice, and in that regard cover songs by their heroes James Taylor (*Shower The People*) and David Wilcox (*Dream Again*)—I've said it before, the latter is one of the finest and most optimistic songs I heard last year.

There's no denying, based on the evidence of SONGS & STORIES LIVE that Ruffolo is blessed with a great singing voice and he takes the lead vocal on a number of Schneider's songs in addition to his own. Schneider's *Wherever You Are* hints at Paul Simon's compositional style, while his *Nantucket Island (The First Day Of September)* is a consummate love song that lacks even the slightest hint of being maudlin, and the same can be said for the edgy later work (*Give Them*) *A Second Chance*. Ruffolo is also no slouch when it comes to writing tunes that bear repeated listening. Try his *The Hardest Easy* and the heartfelt *A Rose For Pierrette*. Having sung *Hills Of Sicily*, penned with the late Artie Traum, Eugene comments that the loss of his friend inspired a couple of new tunes and a rendition of the bittersweet *World Minus One* follows.

Applause apart the aural backdrop also includes the occasional chinking of cutlery and crockery as audience members consume food, but it's the sound of this duo sharing their music and friendship that lifts this live recording to the status of really rather

endearing. **AW**
www.eugeneruffolo.nl

Graham Parker IMAGINARY TELEVISION Bloodshot Records-BS172 ★★★★☆

Very clever idea, and quite enjoyable

Last Spring Graham Parker was asked if he could write a title theme to a new TV sitcom, he was intrigued by this request and set about writing a song. Annoyingly for Graham the tune was turned down, but then a couple of weeks later he received another request for a theme song, again his song was passed over, but this time for what Graham described as 'a lame piece of work for the show you could possibly imagine.' From these two disappointments Graham Parker decided to go into the studio and record his own album of theme tunes for his own imaginary television shows. With Graham on vocals, acoustic guitar, lap steel, banjo and kazoo and backed by Mike Gent (drums, backing vocals), Professor 'Louie' Hurwitz (keyboards, accordion), Alphonso Marseille (electric guitars), Bergen Hardwood (bass) and Benny Austere (percussion), this is a clever idea that works quite well.

Each song is given a covering story detailing the storyline of the show, such as the catchy *See Things My Way* about conjoined twins who have moved to Washington DC from Taiwan after their diplomat father gets posted there. *Not Where You Think You Are* is one of the better tracks as it is a bit more like the music that I have become accustomed to from Mr Parker. Probably my favourite song though is the jazz lounge styled *Head On Straight* with some great kazoo playing, although he also does a fine version of Johnny Nash's *More Questions Than Answers*. Good album, but not his best. **DK**
www.grahamparker.net



Jenna BROTHER Hands On Music- HMCD31 ★★★★

Second album is a gem

Still only 21 years of age this young singer-songwriter from North Devon is writing with an assuredness that some twice her age would struggle to achieve, she also has a voice that has real maturity and brings the emotions that she is singing about to life. Jenna was discovered by Steve Knightley (*Show Of Hands*), well actually she was brought to Steve's attention by his mum, who thought she had a great voice. Steve has since taken her under his wing and has co-produced this album with Mark Tucker. Both appear as guest musicians along with multi-instrumentalist Phil Beer and drummer Andy Tween.

This is Jenna's second album and it opens with the title song which is about the bond between blood brothers as well as soldiers on the front-line, Jenna's voice soars back and forth superbly building to a great finale with some wonderful slide acoustic guitar from Beer. *Blinded* has a great rhythm and beat throughout that gives it a certain amount of suspense, with Jenna's fearsome vocals quite awe-inspiring. She also sings a cappella on the slightly haunting folk tune *Keep Me From The Cold* which shows off the beauty of her voice perfectly. Great album from a rising talent in folk music. **DK**
www.myspace.com/jennadwitts



in Santorini, Greece where it was recorded. For this new album Joe and Kevin wanted to 'explore a world feeling' which led them to record it in Greece, as well as using some of the finest Greek musicians to help add a different sound to a couple of the tracks by using instruments such as the bouzouki and clarino. Joe also wanted to venture back to his early albums where he rocked with a real freedom. This can certainly be heard from the very first track, the powerful blues rocker *Steal Your Heart Away* from the pen of Bobby Parker.

Joe also does some other superb covers such as a pulsating version of the John Hiatt tune, *I Know A Place*. The wonderfully fun and slightly crazy jazz-blues styled *Baby You Gotta Change Your Mind* (Blind Boy Fuller) as well as a great duet with his hero B.B. King on Willie Nelson's *NightLife*. Of Joe's own songs, *When The Fire Hits the Sea* is a blistering blues rocker and *Wandering Earth* is just mega! Although not sold on the addition of the Greek instruments and the 'world' feeling, this is still a massive blues album that Joe's fans will love. Another work of art from this master craftsman. **DK**
www.jbonamassa.com

Johnson's Crossroad BLOOD IN BLACK AND WHITE Dirty Boogie Records. ★★★★

Excellent first album by a new Americana band

This band describe themselves as 'bent acoustic country.' Maybe they should add 'alt.' in front of country, as they are certainly an excellent alternative to the Nashville Sound that many people associate with country. They give a modern take on the old time stringbands, but do at times veer into the more popular side of country. Paul Johnson's appealing gravelly voice avoids blandness, as does the band's excellent playing of their acoustic instruments. The



Joe Bonamassa BLACK ROCK Provogue Records- PRD73002 ★★★★★

Hard rocking blues with a hint of Greece

This is Joe Bonamassa's tenth solo album and once again it teams him with top producer Kevin Shirley, who has done a fantastic job. The album title BLACK ROCK is named after the studios of the same name



Barney Bentall THE INSIDE PASSAGE True North TND530 ★★★★☆

Musical sincerity in every note and fresh vocals that are rootsy and melodic

Canadian Barney Bentall has enjoyed a music career dating back to the late 1970s, including stints with the bands Brandon Wolf and the Legendary Hearts. The latter outfit enjoyed tremendous success in Canada with gold and platinum albums and a heavy touring schedule from 1988 through to 2000 when they disbanded. He left music to become a cattle rancher in British Columbia ten years ago, but the pull of music became too strong and three years ago he released GIFT HORSE a solo album on True North. This latest effort was recorded at Barney's Nashcroft Studios and is a superb collection of country-folk-rock songs that vary from mellow and reserved to excited and rock-like that all follow his vocals first, and then his guitar and harmonica.

Starting things off is *Hold My Heart* an old-fashioned country-rock toe-tapping song, in which guitars, fiddles, harmonica, and well harmonised vocals all help to spin this colourful melody. *Sending Out A Message* is a down-home folk-country song with heartfelt lyrics entwined with rich western imagery and splashed with great harmonica riffs. *Catch That Train* is a catchy musical number that will get you off your feet in no time as it has charming lyrics that swirl around the vibrant and upbeat rhythm. *I Never Meant To Make You Cry* is a gentle and slow moving song that is steeped with emotive vocals and laid back pedal steel guitar chords. *Papa Henry's Boy* is a fun loving hillbilly piece, with just a hint of bluegrass due to the addition of banjo and fiddle, in which Bentall reminisces about an interesting character who has lived life to the full before settling down. It could be argued that no new ground is being broken here, but what Barney Bentall does is so damn good with incisive lyrics, stunning musical arrangements and honest and deeply-felt vocalising that THE INSIDE PASAGE is fast developing into one of my favourite albums of the year. Highly recommended. **AC**
www.barneybentall.com

