

possibly to emphasise the collective nature of the endeavour, Oberst splits the writing credits with his bandmates, who contribute almost half the songs on this seventy-minute epic. Said bandmates, while clearly competent, seem devoid of any sort of spark, so apart from Oberst's Dylan-isms for the most part OUTER SOUTH is relatively straight ahead country-rock, not good, not bad, merely there. Exceptions include the incendiary protest of *Roosevelt Room*, which is replete with squalling guitar and the spirit of raw'n'roll and the mournful *White Shoes*, a still of the night plea to a lover. Even good songs like these though are thrown a curve ball by the sequencing, as the latter's mood is instantly shattered by the immediately following *Bloodline*, a positively jaunty swing around the country boundaries.

It's hard to see what the point of this album, or indeed the whole Mystic Valley adventure, is. There are any number of people doing this sort of thing much better than Oberst, and he seems to have abandoned what he does better than any number of people, namely the experimenting with form and the pushing of boundaries. Add to that the handing over of significant responsibilities to (lesser) band mates and the sense of musician's block, if there is such a thing, is impossible to avoid. Unlike this album, fortunately. **JS**
www.conoroberst.com

**Dale Watson
And His Lone
Stars
THE TRUCKIN'
SESSIONS
VOLUME 2**

Me And My
Americana
Records-
MMACD1039

★★★★

Good old country driving music

Dale Watson has been churning out real solid country music for a good few years now, resulting in a batch of top class albums full of fire and passion, as he makes a stand for the older country artists that have been forgotten by Nashville, at the same time berating the Music Row hierarchy who refuse to acknowledge them in favour of the pretty young singers who are passed off as country artists nowadays.



This CD is a follow-up to his 1998 THE TRUCKIN' SESSIONS album, but there are a few re-recordings of tracks that have been on previous releases such as *Truck Stop In La Grange* and *Hey Driver*. Of the newer songs some seem to be lacking that certain Dale Watson spark that gives his music spirit and feeling, worst being 10-4 which is probably the weakest Dale song I have ever heard. Still a fine album of honest and real country music, but not his best. **DK**
www.dalewatson.com

**David Parmley
& Continental
Divide
3 SILVER
DOLLARS**

Pinecastle Records
PRC 1168

★★★★☆

Superb album offers evidence that bluegrass is loved and enjoyed by the artists

Fronted by one of the founding members of the hugely successful bluegrass band Bluegrass Cardinals, David Parmley has again struck gold by surrounding himself with some quite excellent musicians that show to the world that Parmley has got the Midas touch for forming highly talented bands. Although having been around now for over a decade, this album just shows that they are by no means running out of creativity and flare for continuing to produce some quite beautiful music.

Beginning with an authentic bluegrass sound, *Anniversary Of The Blues* is tenderly sung which seems very reminiscent of Johnny Cash's gentler tracks. Despite the fiddling being quite sparse, it is a track which makes the eyes weep and the body slowly sway from side to side in tune with its harmonic genius. With fiddling so good that it makes you want to holler just to let the world know that everyone must simply hear of this song's existence. *What You Can See From Your Knees* includes angelic harmonies that would give the Louvin Brothers cause for doubt. With simplistic acoustic strumming, this is a track just like the previously mentioned; so good it makes you want to shout so loud that it ends up making you lose your voice. With a honky-tonk beginning, *God Reached Down* has a folk sound to it albeit



with a huge bluegrass influence. With a groovy baritone vocal, the acoustic guitar picking supplied by Parmley is to be congratulated here with the instrumentation more than amply worthy of being on par with the harmonies.

With no scheduled gigs setting foot outside North America, this is a band which would bring the house down over here in Blighty. Their love for bluegrass, as well as the ability to perform it to such a level that it makes you want to shout to the rooftops demanding whoever is nearby to come and listen to these tracks, would surely sell out any venue in which they found themselves booked to play. I sure hope a UK tour happens. **RH**
www.davidparmleyandcontinentaldivide.com

**Doyle Lawson
& Quicksilver
LONELY
STREET**

Rounder Records

★★★★

Lonely Street comes out strong and meaningful for Rounder Records

The sound of bird calls introduces *Monroe's Mandolin*, the opening cut penned by Virginia and Vernon Long, a tribute to Lawson's lifelong musical hero and the founding father of bluegrass. The track ends with a couple of bars of lightning quick Bill Monroe-style mandolin licks. Following stints with Jimmy Martin, J. D. Crowe and the Country Gentleman, Lawson began making recordings in his own name during the late 1970s and to date has cut some three dozen titles, mostly with his band Quicksilver. Some of the current members of Quicksilver weren't even born when Doyle launched his solo recording career, thereby giving witness to Lawson's handing down of Monroe's legacy. A quintet, Lawson and Quicksilver specialise in three-part harmony with Doyle (mandolin, guitar), Darren Beachley (guitar) and Carl White (bass) taking turns as tenor, baritone and lead vocalist. For each of the twelve songs featured, Lawson has penned a short insightful liner note regarding the writer(s), where he first heard the song or the reason for recording it. The only band original, an instru-



mental, *Down Around Bear Cove*, was co-penned by Lawson and Josh Swift (resophonic guitar). Among the mix of songs that focus on love (including the lyrically twee *Johnny And Sally*), stormy winds and hard times, Carl Jackson co-wrote *Oh Heart, Look What You've Done* with Russ Roberts, there's a reading of Marty Robbins' *Call Me Up And I'll Come Callin' On You*, while Doyle's vocal is rather nasal on *The Human Race* a call for environmental sanity, and also on the later cut *My Real World Of Make Believe*. The disc closes with *When The Last Of Our Days Shall Come* a gospel number penned by Merlefest Chris Austin Songwriting Contest winner Chris Stuart. **AW**
www.rounder.com

**Eddi Reader
LOVE IS THE
WAY**

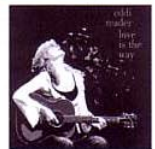
Rough Trade

★★★★

As the title suggests, a romantic collection from talented singer-songwriter

Two acoustic guitars launch Boo Hewerdine's waltz-paced *Dragonflies*, a four verse treatise on the fleeting and fragile nature of life. One guitar is plucked, while the finger-picked other carries the melody. Twenty seconds in sideman Roy Dodds' drums and percussion join the fray and as the remainder of this five-minute long opening track unfolds, little by little, Teddy Borowiecki adds a virtual orchestra pit of instruments. The Canadian has contributed to a few of Reader's recordings beginning with her 1994 self-titled disc, and has even co-written with EddiNbut not here. Borowiecki has recorded extensively with Jane Siberry and k d lang. Hewerdine also supplies the second selection *Silent Bells* - 'All that we are without love are silent bells' - and it is followed by *New York City* the first of three songs in this collection penned by Eddi's partner John Douglas. *New York City* simply celebrates being there. Alan Kelly's accordion features prominently in the latter pairing, and also in Hewerdine's happy-go-lucky *Dandelion* which follows. On Reader's previous album, PEACETIME, Declan O'Rourke penned the lilting *Galileo* (*Someone Like You*). His contribution on this go-round is the album title track, a mellow, gently paced love song.

Sweet Mountain (*Of Love*) was penned by living legend Brian Wilson and sometime collaborator David Sandler. During the early 1970s, in the guise of American Spring, it was recorded by Marilyn Wilson (Wilson's then wife) and her sister Diane Rovell. While their version tipped a nod to Phil Spector's production style, Reader's version is somewhat low key. Eddi's quirkily worded remembrance *Queen Of Scots* - 'You told me I was good luck, I'm seventeen in Kilmarnock' - segues with some of Lindsey Buckingham's words but mostly the melody to his *Never Going Back Again*, while with a sly wink the *Over It Now* lyric - a Reader/Hewerdine collaboration - alludes to



**Barty
TWO KINDS OF FOOL**

Terrapin TRP-CD 1608

★★★★

Brit country-rock fun but never foolish

Not, perhaps, a name to make you sit up but this is a corking, quirky, country album by a face many would know. Barty is actually Ian Bartholomew, one of Britain's leading character actors who you'll have seen in everything from spy thriller *Spooks* to sit-com *Hardware*, although he's also a regular on the stage. More pertinently, he's also been a regular on harmonies and acoustic guitar in the band of Britain's most inventive country guitarist, singer and producer, Wes McGhee, for many a year. (He's also Vince in *Vince and the Viletones*, a Barty-Wes annual Christmas party turn).

This, then, is the solo album, but also a kind of team-up. Barty has written a number of the songs and plays guitar and much else while Wes plays more guitars, bajo sexto, Dobro, and bass. The result is a record, which sounds as if it was the work of many (thanks to Wes' production skills, which have achieved to the same result on records such as Terry Clarke's *NIGHT RIDE TO BIRMINGHAM*.) There's an impressive breadth of material, from Barty's own expansive piano ballad, *Some Kinds Of Love*, through a brave yet effective acoustic go at Pink Floyd's *Wish You Were Here* to a simple, rocking version of Jack Clement's *It'll Be Me*. A couple of McGhee classics—*No Angel On My Wing* and *Whisky Is My Driver*—are given new life, sitting neatly alongside Barty's 1950s pop-rock number *Velma, Don't Break My Radio*. There's more, but you get the picture. Good songs well played by people who sound as if they're having a good time, and with an off-the-wall attitude which makes it all special. **ND**
www.properdistribution.com



...the new releases

the attractions (including boys) that can be found in fairgrounds!

In *Romance On The High Seas*, her 1948 movie debut, Doris Day performed the Sammy Cahn/Jule Styne tune *It's Magic*. Subsequently nominated for a Best Original Song Oscar, Reader renders a jazz-tinged reprise. Bookended by the voice of a child, in *Roses Douglas* and Reader urge the listener, during their three score and ten years of life, to fashion a familial footprint in which love is generously shared. The penultimate track, *My Shining Star*, comes from the pen of Sandy Wright leader of Edinburgh's Toxic Cowboys, and it is followed by John Douglas' *I Won't Stand In Your Way*. The latter, at over six-minute's duration, is the longest track. The subtle, marginally melancholic lyric could reference losing a lover, although a beloved child now grown and preparing to explore this world is the more likely scenario.

Eddi's initial aim was the recording of bonus tracks for a Best Of collection, but like the nose of a certain puppet the project flourished and the affection filled *Love Is The Way* resulted. Last time around PEACETIME included *The Shepherd's Song* a goose bump raising/chill inducing classic. Nothing here replicated that effect, and while this album is refreshingly melodic it's beset by (too many) lyrics that focus on matters of the heart. **AW**
<http://www.eddireader.co.uk/>

Eef Barzelay LOSE BIG

Freeworld

★★★★

Solo effort proves more honest than snide

Back when Clem Snide was very much dead and gone, and frontman Barzelay had no intention it seemed of reforming the group, he set about the recording of a second solo record, something more personal, deeply so. *LOSE BIG* is the result and it's informed by lack and sadness and possesses a low key and melodic aesthetic that turns these stories of desperation and bemusement into something perversely catchy. It actually doesn't sound much different from what Barzelay was turning out with Clem Snide, though it is geared somewhat towards a more accessible pop sound, eschewing the occasional countrification of Snide's output. *Apocalyptic Friend* is an outright rock number. *True Freedom* is a deeply affecting tale of suicide and release elevated by the most emotive vocal Barzelay's ever given. *Numerology* is a droll and disaffected story of misfortune and failure.

There are a couple of bonus tracks stuck onto the end of the record, and it's touching and a little sad that among them is *Me No*, a track from the 'unreleased Clem Snide album' *HUNGRY BIRD*. Of course, that album has been released in anticipation of the reformed Clem Snide's upcoming tour, but its inclusion here perhaps speaks to how profoundly Barzelay felt their absence while embarking

upon this solo venture. *LOSE BIG* is an album of isolation and reconciliation, existing entirely in Barzelay's own world. 'One plus one is three,' he sings, 'believe me I know about these things.' **AlexC**
www.eefbarzelay.org

Georgia's Horse THE MAMMOTH SESSIONS

Fire Records

★★★★

Unsettling folk

balladry hints at brilliance

Georgia's Horse hail from Texas but their music doesn't so much embody the Lone Star State as lurk about its periphery, sullen and brooding. Their debut LP is a noirish and spectral affair, ghosts rising from the ether on swirls of strings and droning guitar patterns, hushed and elliptical lyrics whispered like secrets in your ear. The songs creep into the back of your mind to fester, often recalling the deathly, nervous Cat Power of *MOON PIX*, only more purposeful and prophetic. Arrangements are mercurial and shifting, melodies fall apart into hypnotic drones, what sounds sparse one moment overwhelms the next with floods of dark and whirling sound. Organic noise suddenly sparks with electric excitement. The music ebbs and flows. It's utterly mesmerising.

Georgia's Horse number among the artists of the Fire Records label and fit in with their strange and exciting output. It's an apt home for their neo-gothic folk and dark-hearted Americana and one in which I hope they thrive and grow like some demented malformed fruit. **AlexC**
www.georgiashorse.com

Great Lake Swimmers LOST CHANNELS

Nettwerk

★★★★

Softly

melancholic

American folk rock that brushes against perfection

The fourth album from the sweetly melodic Swimmers promises much. As the first notes of opening track *Palmistry* ring out and Tony Dekker's voice slides into place above the chiming sound of the gorgeously melancholic tune all is right with the world. When this is followed up by the early REM sound plus added harmonies of *Everything Is Moving So Fast* and the impossibly perfect ache of *Pulling On A Line*, all subtle acoustic jangle and a sweetly soulful sound, it seems impossible that the band can maintain the standard for a further nine tracks.

Inevitably, they don't, but only by comparison to what's gone before. Songs like *She Comes To Me In Dreams*, the none-more-calm *Stealing Tomorrow* and the oddly titled but curiously moving *Unison Falling Into Harmony*, with its hints of plucked banjo and the resigned regret of Dekker's voice ('save up your tears for the next time it rains')

would be highlights on any album that didn't contain that hat trick of genius at its start. Lest everything lapses into sameness Dekker reaffirms his potency and passion on the atypically loud and rousing *Still* but it's the quiet stuff he does best and in *River's Edge*, with its echoes of Dylan's *Billy 4* in its lamenting chorus, he comes close to matching that first ten minutes.

Listening to the Swimmers is like reading a palimpsest. Their influences are discernible (Byrds, REM) but only in a vague, indistinct way underneath the delicate carpet of folk rock that the band lay down on top of them. The richness of their music repays repeated listens, slowly revealing depths and layers unlike almost anything else around today. Another album of the year contender. **JS**
www.greatlakeswimmers.com

Jenn Grant ECHOES

Six Shooter

Records-SIX048

★★★★

At times very

diverse, but a

good album that tends to sneak up on you when you least expect it

Born 1980 in Canada and based in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Jenn Grant is an alternative country singer-songwriter who won both Best New Artist and Best Female Artist at the 2006 Nova Scotia Music Awards. *ECHOES* is her second full album release after 2007's *ORCHESTRA FOR THE MOON*, and she recorded it on Puck's Farm in rural Ontario.

Jenn Grant has one of those voices that can sometimes take a while to get used to, and I have to admit that I have had trouble making my mind up. I have listened to a couple of tracks and think that it sounds too depressing, but then her haunting, tormented vocals will deliver an absolute gem of a song like *Parachutes* on which her voice seems to fill your whole body with a warm feeling of happiness. Then she wins you over even more with the slightly unconventional sounds of *I Was Your Woman* with quite zany musical accompaniment.

There is a wonderful country tune (*I've Got The Two Of You*, which seems to skip on very pleasantly. As well as her own songs she also does a delightfully despondent version of Neil Young's *Only Love Can Break Your Heart*, plus a thirty eight second rendition of Noel Coward's *I'll See You Again* to close the album, this sums up the strangeness that this album conveys at times. The more I listen the more I seem to be coming over to Jenn Grant's voice, but I think I will have to try and catch her in concert before making a final decision. **DK**
www.jenngrant.com

Iona Leigh BESIDE THE WAVES OF TIME

CMOON032009

★★

The title of

Iona Leigh's

BESIDE THE WAVES OF TIME did



nothing to make me want to give it the time of day and, if I'm honest, it lived up to its dismal expectation.

It's not clear whether Leigh is a Matthew Arnold aficionado but she's obviously trying to convey her intellect is deep (maybe as deep as an ocean?). It's a standard lazy old title along the lines of *Sands of Time*, *Falling Leaves*, and so on and it's a disappointment. But it's not the only one. There is no denying that Iona Leigh has a lovely voice. Born in Australia and raised in the spiritual community of Findhorn, she's grown up immersed in music and listening to the many traveling artists who came to play at the community's Universal Hall. I would like to say that these influences are in evidence here but what is in evidence is the over-emphasis on 'spiritual' sounding noise. This is a collection of traditional-inspired tracks with a heavily Corrs-influenced sound.

Genuine folk lyrics as collected by Cecil Sharp have a certain time-honoured naïveté. They sound like they've been knocked together like a dry-stone wall from whatever's available and each piece fits in place. It would be unfair to judge a lyric developed over ten generations. But there really is nothing worse than when people write ersatz folk designed to imitate naïve folk-poetry. So Leigh's 'The fisherman each day would go/Out in his boat through the ocean flow/Beneath the waters blue and green/He saw a silver shadow gleam,' is unnecessary when people like Johnny Flynn are writing exciting modern folk lyrics. Why write like a 19th-century farmhand when you are a 21st-century maiden? This album probably deserves three stars but I hate it so I am giving it two and I'm off to buy Martin Carthy's reworking of old Snoop Dogg classics. **HD**
www.ionaleigh.com

Jerry Leger YOU, ME AND THE HORSE

Golden Rod

Records-TJLCO08

★★★★☆

Reminiscent of

the some of the

greats but adding his own take on

country music with style

Consisting of eleven tracks, this self-penned and stylish album is one which hums to the tune of possible legendary status and purrs like an old-time rocker who has discovered some great talent. This being only the second album by this Toronto-born artist, it sure is quite a refreshing sound to say the least. With its slow country start, the vocals of *Half Asleep And Drunk* sound like Dylan but not quite and vocals akin to the Byrds but, again, not quite. This is the track which you swear you know and heard before, but at a second glance you realise that it is not. It has a very similar sound to the past greats, but some input which you cannot quite put your finger on. With a slow-train beat, the emotional and quite moving *Daddy's Lantern* is the hallmark of this fine artist. Sounding as though possibly even Gram Parsons had written it instead of

