

Both of these recordings from 1969 and 1971 capture Johnny Cash and his entire show in excellent form. Vocally he never sounded better and I thought watching the DVD, he never looked happier. Only a few years before he was literally at death's door and by the time of these recordings not only had he recovered physically and spiritually but his career had taken off to such an extent that he could sell out Madison Square Garden weeks in advance! Despite the claims on the CD sleeve notes that this recording had never previously been issued, I myself obtained a copy several years ago. Opening with *Big River* and closing with the gospel classic *Supper Time* we are treated to 26 tracks including a couple that Johnny never actually recorded on record. You name a Johnny Cash classic and it is somewhere on this album plus we have his entire road show at the time including the great Carl Perkins, the Statler Brothers and the Carter Family minus June his wife who was at home having a baby! As a life long Johnny Cash fan it is hard to pick a favourite but *Where You There (When They Crucified My Lord)* is simply outstanding with Anita Carter reaching heights I've never heard before from any other lady singer, and with fine backing from the Statler Brothers. The DVD was a complete surprise to me, as whilst I have an LP recorded in a Swedish prison I never realised that he had recorded any other concerts in Europe. It is a TV type studio recording with a small audience. Commencing with *A Boy Named Sue* we have 19 tracks culminating with the most astonishing version of *Children Go Where I Send Thee* where Johnny, Carl Perkins, the Carter Family and the Statler Brothers simply blow up an unbelievable gospel storm! Never having seen any live concerts with Mother Maybelle, I was simply blown away with seeing her. Johnny and the Carter Family sing a song directly to her *A Song To Mama* which is very moving to see! Just to sum up, simply everybody involved in this concert was on top form and Johnny never sounded better than when launching into *Man In Black!* An historic and amazing release. **DB**
www.legacyrecordings.com

Josh Ritter GOLDEN AGE OF RADIO Independent Records

★★★★☆

Created early in the new millennium (supposedly) for a mere one thousand dollars, *GOLDEN AGE OF RADIO* has already enjoyed a number of incarnations. Initially self-released by Ritter during late 2001, that pressing quickly sold out while a copy found its way to the desk of label boss Jim Olson. The following year signing with Olson's Massachusetts-based independent Signature Sounds Recordings,



Stateside Ritter's sophomore solo album achieved national distribution. In the process, *A Country Song* was re-recorded and mutated into the album title track. Signature Sounds reissued *GOLDEN AGE OF RADIO* as a 2-CD set during 2004, and the bonus disc featured the songs *Chelsea Hotel #2*, *Come And Find Me* and *Other Side*. The latter pairing were John Dragonetti remixes, plus there were videos of *Other Side* and *Me & Jiggs*. Glen Hansard of the Frames, the man responsible for introducing Ritter to Irish audiences, directed the latter video. When *Me & Jiggs* was issued as a single in Ireland it charted, in the process cementing an enthusiastic and faithful audience for this Idaho-bred musician.

Five years on *GOLDEN AGE OF RADIO* has resurfaced, once again as a double disc. There's version number two of the album, while, on this occasion, the second disc features sixteen songs, plus the aforementioned videos. The main course consists of voice and acoustic guitar renditions of the twelve album tracks recorded in a Nashville studio during June last year. I mentioned a total headcount of sixteen songs, and that total is attained with the Dragonetti remixes, the original and rare—all raw energy n' attitude—self-released album version of *A Country Song*, plus *Don't Wake Juniper* which surfaced as a *GOLDEN AGE OF RADIO* studio out-take on the 2004 retrospective *THE SIGNATURE SOUNDS 10TH ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION*.

Housed in a three-way fold-out card case, the liner booklet features lyrics, photos that date from the period when Ritter was writing and recording the album, plus an essay by film director Cameron Crowe. Any song worth its salt is a living breathing entity that should mature, alter even, with the passage of time. Eight years on, it's the acoustic readings that I intend reviewing. There's a devil-may-care swagger to the *Me & Jiggs* redux, and, in this pack, it remains the audience singalong certainty. Ritter was approaching his mid-twenties when he penned these songs, and Lawrence, KS in particular lends itself wonderfully to the acoustic setting. Townes Van Zandt began his recording career at the same age, while Dylan was a couple of years younger. Ritter's lyric repeatedly revisits the line: 'But I can't leave this world behind' while conjuring images of a life filled with honest labour in: 'Debts are not like prison where there's hope of getting free' and '...my house is a wooden one and it's built on the ruins of a wooden one.' Therein *Lawrence, KS* gives witness to a maturity beyond his then tender years. Anne, the sad tale of loner, closes with the jaw dropping line: 'Water under the bridge is never coming back,' while *Other Side* remains a subtle play on words. As for the title track, he finally recorded '...I've got a worried mind I know, I hear the ghost of Patsy Cline on the Grand Old Opry show' in Music City USA. His sometimes

tongue-tied in concert introductions apart, accompanied by his band Ritter becomes the energiser bunny. These Nashville acoustic performances display a relaxed approach, and the wisdom of lessons learned. It appears that Independent has only pressed 1000 copies of this enhanced version of *GOLDEN AGE OF RADIO*. Get yours while you can. **AW**
www.joshritter.com



Kevin Ayers THE CONFESSIONS OF DR DREAM AND OTHER STORIES

Harvest 268 2952

★★★★
SWEET DECEIVER
Harvest 268 2962

★★★★
YES, WE HAVE NO MANANAS
Harvest 268 2972

★★★★
The continuing tale of a great songwriter

Kevin Ayers has always maintained he never wanted to be a star and would have been happier sitting quietly singing his songs with an acoustic guitar to a small audience. But in the early 1970s the record companies sensed greatness, both in the music and in the tousled blonde good looks. These albums, part of a major reissue programme show both sides of the man who eventually walked away from the limelight.

DR DREAM is one of Ayers' classic records although for admirers of acoustic and acoustic-ish music it holds few attractions with its full, rock production although the frail side of Ayers peeks through on *Two Goes Into Four*, the whimsical *Ballbearing Blues* and to some extent the classy *Everybody's Sometime And Some People's All The Time Blues*, all benefiting from Ayers' understated guitar playing.

SWEET DECEIVER showed record company desperation, with names like Elton John and John Altman trying to beef up Ayers' standing. The album, while far from Ayers' best, contains lovely moments, notably the eight-minute quiet epic *Toujours La Voyage* and the plaintive *Farewell Again (Another Dawn)* amongst jollier numbers.

Of most interest here in *MANANAS* when Ayers had all but beaten the labels into submission. It's a more laid-back band affair, with keyboard player Billy Livsey (who's just done his thing on Julian Dawson's Dan Penn-produced delight *DEEP RAIN*) joining elegant guitarist Ollie Halsall. BJ Cole adds pedal steel, notably on a dreamy reinvention of *Falling In Love Again*, Plainsong's Andy Roberts plays on the wonderful *Everyone Knows The Song* (with early Elton John drummer

Roger Pope) and even Rick Wills, BJ's campadre in country-rockers *Cochise* lends a hand. It's an album that teeters between happiness that the big time is all but over, tinged with regret.

Each album contains a number of excellent BBC session tracks, although all have been heard before on Hux Records compilations. **ND**
www.kevin-ayers.com



Pete Atkin and Clive James BEWARE OF THE BEAUTIFUL STRANGER

(Edsel EDSS 1029)

★★★★
**DRIVING THROUGH
MYTHICAL AMERICA**
(Edsel EDSS 1030)

★★★★
**A KING AT NIGHTFALL/THE
ROAD OF SILK**
(Edsel EDSD 2028)

★★★★
SECRET DRINKER/LIVE LIBEL
(Edsel EDSD 2029)

★★★★
Folk music from when Clive James was a grumpy YOUNG man

Pete Atkin was one of those singer-songwriter darlings of the early 1970s, the sort of chap feted by BBC2 arts shows or, at least, arty entertainment shows. Oddball nasal delivery and quirky, humorous, often bitter lyrics. That those lyrics were written by Clive James wasn't as important at the time but as the brusque Aussie went on to be a darling of BBC2 arts shows in his own right, or possibly own write, the interplay between the two has taken on a more interesting turn and the re-releases come under a 'Songs Of Pete Atkin And Clive James' banner.

In the intervening years Atkin has slid from the public eye while James has continued along his witty path to become a leading satirical figure and social commentator. Which is what he was doing on these albums, really, with the addition of a bit of rhyming. The six albums the pair were responsible for had all but been forgotten until now, when they emerge as fascinating documents of the time, remastered, and in exceptional packages with comprehensive track-by-track sleeve notes by the pair (as much fun as the records) along with historic cuttings and photos of scribbled lyrics, dodgy moustaches and the like.

The debut alone, *BEAUTIFUL STRANGER*, comes with 10 bonus tracks, including demos of favourites