

## DUSTY RELICS

*The Healing Kind*, provides the perfect double disc package for an artist rightly considered to be amongst the very best of country music. It serves as an absolute superb addition to any Lee Ann Womack fan's collection of both old and new and certainly one that should get any fan excited—I know I was when I received it! It perhaps serves as a re-introduction to an artist whom since 2008 hasn't released a studio album, but has dealt a hefty blow by parting ways with MCA Nashville. Fans will be crossing their fingers and toes and hoping for news of a new studio album in the not too distant future, but until then, this release from Hump Head Records allows us to bathe in her past successes with these 34 gems. You'll not be disappointed with this career-defining collection. **Emily Saxton**

[www.leeannwomack.com](http://www.leeannwomack.com)

### Various Artists CLASSIC HARMONICA BLUES

Smithsonian Folkways  
SFW CD40204

★★

*One man's classic is another man's waste of time*

Let me begin by saying that I actually love the sound of the harmonica. In fact, I have a list of my top five harmonica players, somewhere in my head and many years ago once actually learnt to play the instrument; but...20 harmonica tracks spread over 66 minutes when I only recognise Sonny Terry's name is too much to bear. Mercifully, the majority of tracks aren't instrumentals; but there aren't very many memorable tracks here, either, and none appear to be 'rare recordings' that collectors will want to seek out.

Sonny Terry, with and without Brownie McGee appears four times, with *Custard Pie Blues* (probably featuring JC Burris on vocals) being the only track that I didn't previously have; but it's not really been a loss. Some classic blues tunes make an appearance; *Sweet Home Chicago*, *Nine Below Zero* and *Good Morning Little Schoolgirl*; but I've heard better in local pubs over the years. One interesting track is *Minglewood Blues* as it features John B Sebastian, Geoff Muldaur and Annie Raines, but hardly merits a third listen. If I'm forced to pick one stand out track, it would probably be *Dog Days Of August* by John

Cephas and Phil Wiggins, who I only know by reputation and have wanted to check out for years. The album includes a 35 page booklet taking you through the history of the instrument and the background to most tracks; but the album itself just smacks of being a glorified £1.99 CD from Tesco. **Alan Harrison**

[www.discovery-records.com](http://www.discovery-records.com)

### Various Artists THE LONDON AMERICAN LABEL—1964

Ace CDCHD 1366

★★★

*The Brits made this a frustrating year for American pop*

Uncle Sam was fighting a grim rearguard action in his own backyard as the Beatles led the British musical invasion in 1964. At one point, the Fab Four had five singles nestling in the American Top Ten and it was becoming increasingly difficult for American acts to make any impression on the Billboard charts. And as the British beat boom exploded, King Elvis Presley failed to hit the top in the UK for the first time since 1958. Decca's London American label—the prime source of top US acts in this country—only scheduled 111 singles for release in 1964, a huge drop of 67 on the previous year. To add to the pressure, London lost representation of several crucial US imprints like Atlantic, Sun, Specialty, Cadence and Dot, which had provided dozens of hits over the years, and faced fierce competition from EMI-Stateside and Pye International.

To their credit, London American battled back against the tide with some quality releases which have found their way on to the latest in the Ace Records series. Those Atlantic giants the Drifters, with Johnny Moore taking the lead vocal honours, produced a typically stylish performance on the Bert Berns-Jerry Ragovoy composition *One Way Love* and Solomon Burke smoulders manfully through the soulful *Goodbye Baby (Baby Goodbye)*, while country followers will approve of Jerry Wallace's wistful *Even The Bad Times Are Good* and Ned Miller's cheery *Do What You Do Do Well*. And lovers of the quirky will lap up the Satchmo US number one smash *Hello, Dolly* and *Lewis Boogie*, the last Sun Records 45 to be released in Britain while Sam Phillips still owned the company and, indeed, the final London single by the wild



man of rock'n'roll, Jerry Lee Lewis. The Killer, of course, would go on to country music immortality with his marvellous Mercury recordings. Whither the London American label? Watch this space...

**Bob Kilbey**

[www.acerecords.co.uk](http://www.acerecords.co.uk)

### Ian Tyson ALL THE GOOD 'UNS VOL. 2

Stony Plain Records

★★★★

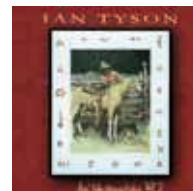
*Cowboy songs are alive and well in*

*Tyson's reprise collection*

17 years on from the release of the first volume to reprise Tyson's solo recording career, Canada's Stony Plain imprint has released the 19-song *ALL THE GOOD 'UNS VOL. 2*. It draws material from five of the musician/rancher's releases, with six songs from 1999's *LOST HERD*, a trio from 2002's *LIVE AT LONGVIEW*, a quartet from 2005's *SONGS FROM THE GRAVEL ROAD*, the same number from 2008's *YELLOWHEAD TO YELLOWSTONE AND OTHER LOVE STORIES* and a pair from 2012's *RAVEN SINGER*. No songs are taken from 2011's five-selection EP, *SONGS FROM THE STONE HOUSE*.

Anyone familiar with 80 year old Tyson's canon will be aware of his penchant for lyrics that portray man and the natural world, and from album opener *Land Of Shining Mountains*, through *This Is My Sky*—which also embraces political commentary 'Sweet America comin' off the rails, That's what lies and money do'—and *Smuggler's Cove*, there's sufficient examples here to satisfy the casual listener as well as the avid Tyson listener. *SONGS FROM THE GRAVEL ROAD* charted, in part, the demise of his two-decade marriage to second wife Twylla Dvorkin, and the penultimate song *Love Without End* is a reminder of that event. Tyson turns his focus on that cowboy essential, the horse, in *La Primera*, *Brahmas And Mustangs* and *Yellowhead To Yellowstone*. Studies of historic as well as contemporary characters who chose to pursue the cowboy life, have made rich pickings for Tyson, and that's evidenced here by a live rendition of the Paul Zarzyski co-write *Jerry Ambler*—a tribute to the 1946 World Champion Saddle Bronc Rider—and studio recordings of *Bob Fudge*, *Ross Knox* and *Charles Goodnight's Grave*.

Circa 2006 Tyson scarred his vocal chords struggling with a poor sound system at



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an outdoor festival, and was struck down by a virus a year later. While a change was evident on his 2008 release, Tyson's gruff new vocal timbre was more apparent on *RAVEN SINGER* which is represented here by *Song In A Dream* and the aforementioned Charlie Goodnight song. *ALL THE GOOD 'UNS VOL. 2* winds to a close with a 1999 rendition of the Harold Arlen penned American Songbook standard *Somewhere Over The Rainbow*. **Arthur Wood**

[www.myspace.com/honorfinnegan/music/songs](http://www.myspace.com/honorfinnegan/music/songs)

### Mac Davis HARD TO BE HUMBLE: THE BEST OF MAC DAVIS

Hux Records HUX 135

★★★★

*Mac Davis at his best before he went all Las Vegas on us ...*

Mac Davis was one of the most successful pop-country singer-songwriters of the 1970s with a slew of mainly pop hits, though many also scored heavily on the country charts. This long-overdue collection features 22 of them, though a few—*In The Ghetto*, *Memories*, *Watching Scotty Grow*, *Something's Burning*, *Daddy's Little Man*—were his songs that artists like Elvis Presley, Bobby Goldsboro and Kenny Rogers & the First Edition turned into hits. Nevertheless, there is still a good many of Davis' own hits here including the million-selling international hit *Baby Don't Get Hooked On Me* and his later 1980 smash *It's Hard To Be Humble*.

Although Davis was born in Texas he spent his teenage years in Atlanta, Georgia, and in the late 1950s he formed a rock'n'roll band and hung around with people like Tommy Roe and Bruce Channel, both of whom hit the big time in the early 1960s. He recorded for several small labels before making his mark as a songwriter. His success as a writer led to him signing with Columbia Records in 1970 and making his chart debut with the tear-jerkin' *Whoever Finds This, I Love You*, a top 50 country and pop hit. One of the best constructed country-weepies ever written, Mac gave the song plenty of feeling, but never allowed the song to be dragged down into the mire. Because of the vivid lyrics that he employed in his songs Mac was often referred to as 'a song painter' and when he made his first album for Columbia it was

naturally titled *MAC DAVIS—SONG PAINTER*.

The pinnacle of Mac's recording career came, though, when he returned to Atlanta in 1972 and recorded with Rick Hall at Muscle Shoals, and though it took the lightest song, lyrically, that he had ever written, *Baby Don't Get Hooked On Me* really established him as a singer as well as a writer. On the album that followed he seemed more assured than ever before, the backing was simple, but effective, a small rhythm section, a touch of steel guitar ably supplied by Leo LeBlanc who never tried to be too clever and some pleasant acoustic guitar work from Travis Wammack.

Though renowned for sensitive ballads, there was always a deep south soul edge to him, his deep voice having those blues inflections that cannot be faked—just sample *Burnin' Thing* or *Something's Burning*. There was also a sentimental streak that floored me completely in such songs as *Watching Scotty Grow*. Sadly for us—but fortunately for Davis—he became an all-round entertainer with his own TV variety series, *Las Vegas* shows and even a film career. It meant that his songwriting talent was to diminish rapidly and that soulful edge was gradually worn away. Still, we can always return to these excellent early tracks and remember when Mac Davis was at the peak of his creativity. **Alan Cackett**

[www.huxrecords.com](http://www.huxrecords.com)

### Michelle Wright MICHELLE WRIGHT/NOW & THEN

SPV Country 265842

★★★★★

*A classic double reissue set pairing the Canadian singer's eponymous Nashville debut with her career-defining masterpiece*

By the time she signed with Arista-Nashville in 1990, Ontario-born Michelle Wright had been performing for more than 10 years and had scored seven Canadian country hits from her debut album *DO RIGHT BY ME*, released on Savannah Records in 1988. She hit big in Nashville in the early 1990s, charting a further 11 country singles during her ten-year stay with Arista, her striking face and vocals becoming Country Music Television icons. Since then she has recorded for several other labels, releases singles and albums regularly, and is a perennial star in her native Canada with a raft of number one hits.

This pairing of classic Wright albums returns to the heady days of Wright's early 1990s success, starting with her eponymous 1991 Nashville debut (surely a contender for country music's worst album sleeve design, with its curiously-appointed floral display and 1980s country wardrobe, complete with Marty Stuart-style boots-cum golloshes). The album includes five singles in *All You Really Wanna Do*, *New Kind Of Love*, *Woman's Institution*, *Not Enough Love To Go 'Round* and the powerful ballad *A Heartbeat Away*, with its luxuriantly low vocal lines. The songs, mostly written by producers Steve Bogart and Rick Giles, were solid Music Row compositions performed by top Nashville musicians, but only three charted, the highest-placed of those, *New Kind Of Love*, peaking at number 32. Other highlights included the driving *Like A Hurricane*, penned by Chapin Hartford and Michael Clark, and the album's standout song, Matraca Berg's moody *As Far As Lonely Goes*.

MICHELLE WRIGHT did not chart, but Wright had made her mark, establishing herself as an upcoming talent to watch through her unmistakable husky vocal delivery and alternately sensitive and gutsy reading of the material. She would do much better next time around.

Released the following year, *NOW & THEN*, with its iconic sultry sleeve photography, would be Wright's career-defining set. The 1980s fashions were replaced by a slick, sophisticated look that complemented feisty single releases such as *Take It Like A Man*, mirroring a new assertiveness among female country singers. Bogart and Giles realised the need for more varied material, adding more songs by Hartford and Clark as well as by Trisha Yearwood, Jill Colucci, Pat Bunch, Gary Harrison and Karen Staley, who joined Lari White on backing vocals. The performances are outstanding: of the album's ten shimmering tracks, seven were singles, including *Take It Like A Man*, *One Time Around*, *The Change*, *If I'm Ever Over You*, *Guitar Talk* and the title track. Then there's the immaculate, heart-wrenching *He Would Be Sixteen*, in which a thirty-something woman recalls a teenage love affair that ended with her giving a child up for adoption. Wright nailed the song as only she could, entering CMT territory with a vengeance and making it her signature ballad, her tortured vocal ensuring that, once heard, it would never be forgotten.

Michelle Wright's career continues

