

CD REVIEWS THE NEW RELEASES

Joe Ely

SATISFIED AT LAST

Rack 'Em Records

★★★★☆

Since 1977 Joe Ely has recorded some classic sets. Here's another...



SATISFIED AT LAST is the fifth release on Joe Ely's imprint Rack 'Em Records, and is somewhat unique in relation to its predecessors. Where the 2007 releases HAPPY SONGS FROM RATTLESNAKE GULCH—a companion piece to Ely's book BONFIRE OF ROADMAPS—and SILVER CITY bore the legend: 'Pearls From The Vault'—respectively Volume XX and Volume I—and featured new recordings of old, previously unheard songs, those disc were followed by a couple of live releases. LIVE CACTUS (2008) was recorded at the legendary Austin university venue in late 2006, while Joe considers LIVE CHICAGO 1987 (2009) to be an 'official' bootleg.

Following a couple of years of solo silence—interrupted only by the appearance of the Flatlanders HILLS & VALLEYS (2009)—the rather excellent ten-song SATISFIED AT LAST amounts to Ely's first collection of newly-birthing songs on his own label, albeit augmented by a trio of cover songs. The pounding drum beat, swirling keyboard and riff-driven lead guitar on the energetic opening tune *Highway Is My Home* very much reminded me of the Ely band that debuted on MCA Records back in 1977. Lyrically it's a reflection on past events allied to the theme of love, the title alone being a four-word autobiography. Replete with flamenco guitar flourishes from Tey, the foreign conflict in which the returning soldier has been involved isn't named, the inference being that relative to the soldier's hometown *Not That Much Has Changed*, while he has been irrevocably affected by his recent tour of duty (in the military). The album title track—wherein Joe gives thanks that he's still around—features the massed electric guitars of David Grissom, Mitch Watkins, Robbie Gjersoe and 'from across the water' Fred Stitz, and is followed by the bittersweet story song *Mockingbird Hill* wherein a barmaid, Cassandra Corrina, and an unnamed 'dark, weary driver' enjoy a light-night assignation.

While it initially contains profound lines such as: 'Heaven's here on earth, and so is hell' and 'You can measure your riches by the ones you love,' proof that Ely possesses a razor-sharp sense of humour becomes apparent during the latter part of *You Can Bet I'm Gone*. All I'll add at this juncture is that this song is destined to become an audience favourite in the vein of *Me & Billy The Kid*. Featuring Jeff Plankenhorn's classical guitar, the first cover song is Butch Hancock's intriguing *Leo And Leona*, a tune that first appeared on the latter's live cassette album *CAUSE OF THE CACTUS* (1987). It's followed by a Tex/Mex rendition of the much-covered *Live Forever*, penned by Billy Joe Shaver and his late son Eddy.

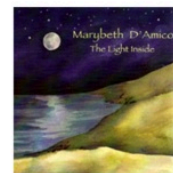
Where the foregoing trio of songs constitute the pulsating heart of SATISFIED AT LAST, Ely cleverly changes pace on *Roll Again*. Propelled by a quasi-reggae rhythm, leavened by a dash of blues guitar, Ely's words reflect upon the human conundrum: 'Nobody's satisfied the road they chose to ride.' It's followed by the funky blues shuffle *I'm A Man Now* wherein the once young and cocky narrator, counts the cost and the lessons learned in becoming a man. Midway through, Ely engages in religious commentary with the line: 'Just one thing I can't stand to see, is a pious man begging on TV' and then shifts focus to political/social commentary with: 'This sad old world's giving me the blues.' At the outset of this review, I mentioned a trio of cover songs and Joe closes SATISFIED AT LAST with another 'summation of life' themed number, namely Butch's *Circumstance*. **Arthur Wood**
<http://www.ely.com/>

www.luckybonesmusic.com

Marybeth D'Amico • THE LIGHT INSIDE •

LongMan Records Ltd • ★★

Receiving praise from all directions I feel like the only person who just couldn't appreciate Marybeth's music...



In order to connect more valuably with her audience, Marybeth D'Amico's second record THE LIGHT INSIDE focuses on a personal look at her own struggles through life. This album moves a touch away from the country, folk-pop sound of her debut, and towards an edgier, melancholic vibe. As with her debut, this record was produced by Bradley Kopp, known for his work with the likes of Eliza Gilkyson, Iain Matthews and Jimmie Dale Gilmore. Featuring twelve heartfelt and poignant songs, this record is of high quality, and praise for her music continues to come from all directions, including Bob Harris and the likes.

Though I definitely couldn't say that it's a standout record for me, the overall content is good enough. The songs are impressive and well-written, but for me the vocal style lets the record down. With a whiny tone, the songs feel repetitive and hum-drum much of the time. Songs like *Inside Out* ended up providing a frustrating listening experience, while *Beneath The Rubble* is a beautiful story, but one that I struggled to warm to. *Stubborn Land* was an enjoyable track however, alongside *Walk Away*, and while the majority of the songs on this record do seem quite down-trodden, vibrancy and variation has not come through at all. For some reason I feel like I am the only person on the planet who doesn't understand the hype... If you appreciate Marybeth D'Amico maybe you'll find something I couldn't. **Laura Bethell •**

www.marybethdamico.com

Mathieu Lavigne • LITTLE WARS • CD

Baby/self-release through website • ★★

Debut album of very personal brooding letters home



Monsieur Lavigne hails from Quebec but now resides in Vancouver and spent many years working in deepest darkest British Columbia planting trees where he appears to have spent his time honing his songwriting craft. Much to my wife's despair; I get to use my favourite expression to describe another album full of torment from a new singer-songwriter: 'There aren't many laughs here.' Mathieu chooses every word carefully and uses them sparingly as his achingly soft but rich voice pleads, praises and promises on *Sixteen Months*, *Burning Heart* and title track *Little Wars*. *Lullaby* which ends the album begins with a delightful accordion and goes on to become a simple yet beautiful ode to his new born child and is by far the best song on the album.

There are elements of early Leonard Cohen throughout LITTLE WARS but the more relevant comparisons from today's popstars would be Iron & Wine or perhaps Okkervil River as Mathieu also bares his soul in a very soft and

contemplative manner. **Alan Harrison •** www.mathieulavigne.ca

Megan Henwood • MAKING WAVES • Dharma Records Ltd • ★★

BBC Radio Two 2009 Young Folk Award Winner Megan Henwood's first album: -bright, melodic and original with great songs and fine musicianship.

Megan Henwood's album MAKING WAVES showcases her abilities perfectly. The eleven original tracks range over several styles and are assured, thoughtful and imaginative. There are pretty songs but some grittier material, too—and all demonstrate Megan's real talent for writing memorably different lyrics. Her work has been described as: 'vibrant, energetic, pure, beautifully simple and bloody good. The sheer niceness of a few of her lines—e.g. 'clouds resembling white marshmallows or clean and comfy, fluffy pillows'—led the Guardian to teasingly dub Megan the 'Mother Theresa of Pop'. But this album confirms there is far more to her than that.



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86 maverick

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