

CD REVIEWS - THE NEW RELEASES

Marc Black PICTURES OF THE HIGHWAY

Suma Records

★★★★

In terms of stylistic content, Black's latest is more slick pop than grounded roots music

With significant input from horn player Don Davis, Black channels Van the Man on languid opener *Red Lite* and, again, on the later, marginally more, upbeat *My Live It Up Baby*. A Johnny Cash backbeat initially propels *Moment After Dawn*, wherein Black recalls a childhood road trip to a Florida alligator farm. As for the tune that's squeezed between the foregoing pair, the title not only sums up the content *Ooh I Love My Coffee*, but in a moment of inspirational humour Black came up with the—yawn—much repeated 'Love it a latte' as well as the succinct 'Expresso yourself'. The almost five-minute long, rambling album title song finds a mature in years narrator reflect on the events of his life while also dreaming of a pastoral life in the future. In the boisterous *I Love You Rachel Maddow*, Black reveals his hand regarding the MSNBC television host and political commentator. Here, Black's subjective mainstay is love in all its various shades.

Black has resided in the Woodstock, New York area since 1969, cut an album for the legendary ESP Disk label a decade later, worked extensively as a support musician and since the dawn of the new millennium has released a swathe of albums supported by bands such as the Funky Sex Gods (DANCE STEPS INCLUDED 2002) and the Accidental Orchestras (DARK LIGHT DARK 2002). This latest album was mostly recorded in California with assistance from drummers Jay Bellerose (Alison Krauss/Robert Plant, Ray LaMontagne) and Steve Gadd (Paul Simon, Chick Corea), bassist Jennifer Condos (Ray LaMontagne), pedal steel player Eric Heywood (Ray LaMontagne), guitarist Mark Goldenberg (Jackson Browne) and backing vocalist Sloan Wainwright. PICTURES OF THE HIGHWAY is pleasant enough, but breaks no new ground musically or lyrically. **Arthur Wood.**
<http://www.marcblack.com/>



North Lawrence Midnight Singers LAST GREAT SATURDAY NIGHT

Independent

★★★★☆

Fresh and invigorating rootsy rock'n'roll

Even the smallest hint of something new or different in the hydra-headed monster of a genre that calls itself Americana is to be welcomed, so the second album from Philadelphia's Midnight Singers is the proverbial breath of fresh air. It may be rooted in the classics—southern rock, classic rock'n'roll singles, even a hint of doo-wop, as well as the more expected rootsy rock'n'roll—but it's what they do with those well worn items that counts, and what they do is make music that has a freshness, a youth to it, something that sounds like it was knocked up by a group of teens who've just formed their first band and are having a go in a garage. Not because it's rough and ready, far from it, but because it captures that joy of exploration and just playing, and because it doesn't have that world-weariness that is fine when it's done well, but is too often overdone. The album is only thirty minutes long and gradually ups the tempo as it progresses, with the driving roadhouse rocker *All Night Rain* adding a bit of Tom Petty and *My Way Is Lost* providing plenty of torch and twang, but the band save their best for the closing title track, which has serious anthem potential and is both elegiac and forward looking. One love leaves, another arrives, everything changes, everything stays the same. One thing is for sure though, there should be plenty of great Saturday nights in store with the Midnight Singers. **Jeremy Searle**
www.midnightsingers.com



The Redlands Palomino Company DON'T FADE

Clubhouse Records-CRUK002CD

★★★★☆

Terrific album from one of the UK's best alt.country bands

It has been a long wait for a new studio album release (four years) but it's been worth it as this is their best album yet. With Alex writing three of the songs and Hannah six this album is proof that they are two of the best alt.country songwriters around at the moment. A good example of the quality of writing being the opening verse of Hannah's song *Brass Bed* in which she pens: 'I know I should apologise to whom it may concern, but in my defence tonight I lit the fire but no one burned'—brilliant.

Hannah has a quite gorgeous voice as can be heard on *The Boat* with Alex adding harmonies and Tom Bowen accompanying with scything guitar. *Call Me Up* is a super duet, with Alex's gritty vocals melding so well with Hannah's pure, sweet voice. The one non Elton-Wall tune is a fine cover of the Dillards *One AM* and the CD closes with



Neil Getz FACTORY SECOND

Agillator Records AGLTR-001

★★★★

An American Richard Thompson for the younger generation?

If I was just aimlessly flicking through the Americana section of a record shop and stumbled on FACTORY SECOND I think I would pick it up; which is surely the purpose of good cover art? The picture of the young Getz in front of a Jeep holding a rifle and a dead bird is certainly eye-catching and inside the cover you get a lyric booklet that includes more childhood photos and doodles; already I'm hooked. Which finally brings us to the music, of course, and much like the cover it is quality folk-Americana of the highest order. Neil Getz, from Berkeley, California, is a storyteller par-excellence and each song tells a tale from beginning to end; some humorous, some pithy and all interesting and listenable to say the least.

He also has the knack of writing a good melody and bringing his characters to life, which is a rarity these days. Opening tracks *Bad Case Of Passion* and *Factory Second* both sound like Richard Thompson circa RUMOUR & SIGH, with *Factory Second* using the purchase of a dodgy guitar as a metaphor for his life and subsequent loves (RT would be proud to write the same song.) *Not in Love*; *Just Falling* is an exquisite country-folk shuffle about the happiest time in a man's life—just before the hard work begins! *Counting Trains* which features cello, bodhran and concertina alongside some delicate acoustic guitar playing harks back to Richard Thompson territory for a dark tale of a young boy daydreaming about leaving home. *Flock of Demons* is another grief-tinged tale with a banjo and bottleneck guitar sound that cuts through the words like a knife through butter. Neil Getz is a spectacularly good songwriter and uses words like talons to draw you in and keep you dangling until he's finished with you; then just when you think you are safe he attacks again and you are at his mercy...for life.

I apologise for the references to Richard Thompson, but as a *Maverick* reader, when you hear FACTORY SECOND you will grant yourself a rye smile; but Neil Getz's target market will probably never have heard of RT and weren't even born when he was at his commercial best so the marketplace is wide open for this incredibly talented young man. **Alan Harrison**
www.neilgetz.com



the rockier *Sirens* with Tom on lead guitar and David Roth on pedal steel seeing the track out to its siren wailing climax. This album definitely puts the Redlands Palomino Company into the premier league of alt.country music. **David Knowles**
www.redlandspalomino.com

Siobhan O'Brien SIOBHAN O'BRIEN

Independent

★★★

Lacks the prowess of a good songstress but offers some great song ideas...

Siobhan (pronounced Shiv-awn) was born in Limerick, Ireland, and is a newcomer to the singer songwriter scene. Performing with guitar and harmonica, her first recording was at the age of six with an old sea shanty. With four generations of her family a part of the music industry, boasting great grandparents that were travelling opera singers, most notably Siobhan is the niece of Ireland's 1960s legend Brendan Bowyer. Though this record is her debut she has supported such acts as the Cranberries, Christy Moore, Paul Brady and Donovan on tour.

Her style is a soft country twang mixed with acoustic sensibilities and a concern with lyrical effectiveness when describing her stories. Opening with *Leaving Me* the harmonica plays a prominent element, while her vocals are grainy and grounded. The choruses don't stand out as much as you'd hope and instrumentally the sound is similar from one tune to the next, but nothing outlandish. It rolls as you'd expect it to roll and so for that reason it's a little disappointing. *My Man* is repetitive and whilst again opening with guitar and harmonica, vocally the tone is much more enjoyable than many of the others, though in the chorus she reaches new heights that vocally feel a little out of her comfort zone. I'm afraid there are some great song ideas here, some wonderful lyrical content but vocally, I feel Siobhan lacks the prowess of a great singer. However, if you can look past that and enjoy the songs, then tracks like *Naked* and *Indians* really stand out. **Laura Bethell**
www.siobhanobrien.com



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