

died when you left'), the a cappella *The Loser's Prize*—same message, different song—complete with simple but affecting vocals from Sian Webley and the neo-traditional *Devil's Bridge*, where Robert Fisher of Willard Grant Conspiracy guests in surprisingly sprightly mode as he takes the part of the Devil. On the bad is *String Loop*, one of those pieces where everything electronic and non-electronic is thrown at the wall to see what sticks and unfortunately all of it does.

As for the rest, it falls firmly into the 'pleasant but ultimately not particular satisfying' category. On the self-consciously throwback *Red Rag Doll*, which bounces along with all manner of back porch noises going on only Webley's vocals attract. *Your Baby* is a homage to the classic *Is You Is Or Is You Ain't My Baby*, but suffers heavily in comparison and not even the sting in the tail aimed at fat cat bankers can make the light country of *Bumblebee* anything but disposable. Were *Survival* an EP it would be excellent, but it isn't, so the interested would be best advised to cherry pick from iTunes. **JS**  
www.annakashfi.co.uk

#### Andy White SONGWRITER

Floating World  
Records  
★  
Belfast  
songwriter's tenth  
is as generic as  
its title



This is the tenth release from Belfast native, now Melbourne-based White and one can read its title as a kind of ironic self deprecation, a throwing off of pretensions. But perhaps it would be more accurate to see SONGWRITER as a generic template to which White has adhered wholesale, a label stamped on the packaging of this disc, because the record proves a placid and uninteresting recital of all the worst archetypes of the singer-songwriter. There are big, universal statements that don't say a lot, there are plenty of unobtrusively strummed open chord progressions. Clichés are fumbled with, and it's all very earnest. At its best it's listenable, and at its worst it's insipid. Mr. Blunt seems a musical visionary by comparison.

SONGWRITER isn't awful. White is an able musician and his backup crew is drawn from the likes of Po' Girl, the Be Good Tanyas and Neko Case's band, all of whom demonstrate the competence you'd expect but never rise above the arrangements they're working with. The exquisite co-vocals of Po' Girl's Allison Russell are very welcome, and when she is placed in the foreground on *First and Discovery* it renders the song quite lovely. *Kathleen*, co-written by Russell, is another highlight with its nice zydeco flourishes. *Now it's Over* has a widescreen stadium appeal that is certainly catchy. These high points don't elevate SONGWRITER above what it essentially is: an album of filler material, outstaying its welcome with its one-hour runtime and bringing little of interest to the

#### Carrie Newcomer BEFORE & AFTER

Rounder Records

★★★★★

A sustenance filled horde of songs that run the gamut of humorous to intellectually stimulating

Employing sepia as the principal colour, on this occasion graphic artist Hugh Syme's liner motif is rail travel. In the main railway carriage panel Newcomer sits writing. During our recent interview Carrie related: 'Writing is like breathing, writing is how I process my life.' Life is a journey in which we encounter events infinite and infinitesimal. They may not consciously impact at the time but each will, at some future point, shape our life. Featuring a Mary Chapin Carpenter guest vocal, the foregoing thread subtly weaves its way through the opening, album title song. *Myth* is Newcomer's focus in *Ghost Train*, while the ensuing *I Do Not Know Its Name* signifies belief in some greater being. Moments [sic. events] from Carrie's life illustrate the latter lyric.

Major or minor I believe we humans are genetically programmed to mark our time on Earth with a 'footprint.' That 'footprint' may not be apparent in our lifetime, and that's pretty much the basis for *Stones In The River*. In the United States the Civil Rights Movement gathered momentum four decades ago propelled partly by the power of song. These days, mankind stands at a crossroads in his relationship with this planet. The gospel tinged *If Not Now* may be the early 21<sup>st</sup> century anthem that galvanises ordinary people into positive action. Walk before you run is an old adage for living life, and in *A Small Flashlight* Newcomer suggests we: 'find our way' a step at a time.

*I Meant To Do My Work Today* amounts to an honest and personal admission, wherein the narrator simply takes time out to quietly mull over the mysteries of life. That said, I'm sure there was a sly twinkle in Carrie's eye while penning the song. In terms of intent, the thought occurs that *If Not Now* and *A Simple Change Of Heart* are twins. The pivotal (and personal) heartbeat of the latter vocal harmony rich title lies in the line: 'The greatest revolution is a simple change of heart.' *Hush* is a tender love song, *Do No Harm* another WILDERNESS PLOTS song inspired, on this occasion, by author Scott Russell Sanders' one-page long (historically factual) short story *Savages*. In recalling real events, positive and negative, *Do No Harm* reinforces the call for change embraced in *If Not Now* and *A Simple Change Of Heart*. *Coy Dogs*—a mix of dog and coyote—explores those (beings) who struggle with the call of the wild and a domesticated life. Newcomer cleverly draws BEFORE AND AFTER to close with a light touch, in the humorous pairing *I Wish I May, I Wish I Might* and *A Crash Of Rhinoceros*. Featuring thirteen songs, BEFORE AND AFTER Newcomer's thirteenth solo album delivers. **AW**

http://www.carriewcomer.com/  
http://www.myspace.com/carriewcomer



musical genre it apes so explicitly. This is a record that means well, but it isn't very good. **AlexC**  
www.andywhite.com

#### Cath & Phil Tyler THE HIND WHEELS OF BAD LUCK

NO-FL

★★★★★

Cath & Phil Tyler  
are a chilling  
combination



When Anglo-American duo Cath & Phil Tyler unleashed their 2008 debut DUMB SUPPER it was to universal critical acclaim from the much splintered folk community. Whilst embracing the lo-fi contemporary approach, the duo managed to retain an essence of traditional folk. Which, for the duo, meant that working on a follow-up which would be equally pleasing to the entire folk community would be no small challenge. Undeterred, the pair set to work with Newcastle based producer Andrew Gardiner on the tracks that would form THE HIND WHEELS OF BAD LUCK. The oddly titled collection retains the elements which made DUMB SUPPER so popular, whilst allowing the Tylers to grow as artists. Both borrowing, reinterpreting and creating their own material, THE HIND WHEELS OF BAD LUCK is a sorrowful simple affair.

Phil excels on guitar and banjo alike, complimenting Cath's uninhibited vocal with his harrowing harmonies. Whilst reinventing classics ensures their reputation in both camps of the folk world, it is in fact their newer compositions that demonstrate their real skill. Then youthfully charged, yet somehow wilted beauty of instrumental *Whip Poor Will* exudes excellence. A contradiction to THE HIND WHEELS OF BAD LUCK's woeful sound, it is

an uplifting breeze. Similarly, the apparently optimistic *Castle By The Sea* demonstrate colours to Cath's vocal that warrant further exploration.

Following up the defining DUMB SUPPER will have been no easy task, yet Cath & Phil Tyler make it seem effortlessly easy. THE HIND WHEELS OF BAD LUCK is a sumptuously sublime heart stealer. **JW**  
www.myspace.com/cptyl

#### Char Butler and Amber Whitworth SLEEPER'S AWAKE

Quantumelody

★★★

Mother and  
daughter duo  
offer folk-tinged new age album

Somewhere between folk and new age, there is Char Butler and Amber Whitworth's SLEEPER'S AWAKE. Marinated in lush orchestrations, the mother-daughter duo have crafted a semi-decent and sometimes enchanting album which feels like it's meant to be the product of medieval witchcraft with Irish overtones. Daughter Whitworth sings only a little lower than Alison Krauss and sometimes it's difficult to follow the lyrical narrative. These songs are certainly melodic, but they aren't different enough from each other to be sufficiently memorable. There are some highlights, however, including the enjoyable mid-tempo *Place Your Burdens* and *Love Me Dare*—which wears its pop pretensions on its sleeve—and *Waited Till Dawn*. It's perhaps surprising that the duo chose to cover *Let It Be*, and equally surprisingly, they manage to get away with it. The two alternate leads and the whole thing isn't the strings-fest Spector tried to make it. Like any artist who dares to cover



the Beatles and thus tamper with the crown jewels of pop royalty, they are in a no-win situation: such a faithful rendition (or, if we were to be nasty, a karaoke-reading) of a timeless classic can't hope to eclipse the original, but this one certainly compliments it. In the main, SLEEPER'S AWAKE—if heard by fans of new age music—will be undoubtedly appreciated, but served to a folk-country audience, it will probably confuse. **DJ**  
http://www.charbutler.com/

#### The Coal Porters DURANGO

Prima Records

★★★★

Some more  
strokes for  
folks who love  
bluegrass

DURANGO was recorded at Ed Stasium's Kozy Tone Studio which is located on the outskirts of the South-West Colorado town that gives this album its name. Sid Griffin, a son of Louisville, Kentucky, founded the Coal Porters two decades ago and for ten years they purveyed electric country-rock in the mould of the Byrds/Gram Parsons and their ilk. Back then the Porters line-up altered with regularity, but since they went acoustic and bluegrass around a decade ago it has pretty much stabilised. Well almost, since Jeff Kazmierski handles dogwood bass on DURANGO having replaced Andrew Stafford.

Stasium (Ramones, Mick Jagger) produced, engineered and mixed TWO FISTED TALES (1987) the final studio album by the Long Ryders, Griffin's rock'n'roll band, and he also fulfils those roles here. DURANGO is a mix of thirteen band-penned originals and covers. Griffin penned five songs, Scot Neil Robert Herd three more with lyrics that indulge in

