

collaborations, before evading the recording studio till 2004.

Not one to waste time, Bonds kicks it straight into fifth gear on the rompastic *Whine*. Bonds knows how to impress and he is willing to pull out all the stops. However, he is far from a one-dimensional artist. He certainly seems more at home on LET THEM TALK's stompier tracks, *Have Mercy* will ensure that you are firmly on your feet shaking from side to side, yet he likes to get in touch with the tender side of his soul. Title track *Let Them Talk* sees an attempt at the full blown, emotionally charged ballad. *Let Them Talk* with its despairingly honest lyrics would sit happily on any Streisand or Dion album, yet somehow Bonds manages to pull it off. Perhaps it is the achingly heartbreaking delivery or even the surprising vocal dexterity, but *Let Them Talk* will make the hairs on your arms stand up.

Things do go awry occasionally for Bonds. *I'm Gone* is a confusing contribution. Sounding like Tina Turner on speed, or even Macy Gray meeting Tom Jones on a dark night with Etta James, Bonds doesn't quite pull it off. Strangely his odd delivery is compelling. She's *A Woman* lacks the veracity of *Let Them Talk*. Most disappointing is the paint by numbers *I Forgot How Bad My Good Woman Could Be*. With predictable structure and lyrics, Bonds appears to be attempting a cruise ship Rod Stewart impersonator. On the whole LET THEM TALK will prompt the desired response. Bonds has lived through it all and can still give as good as the best of them. The bar has been set, roll on the challengers to his throne. **JW**
www.garyusbonds.com

Jamie McClelland
IN TRANSIT
White Fall Records
WFRCD002
★★★★

Impressive set of contemporary folk tunes from Scottish fiddler

Born in New Zealand but a long-time resident of Scotland, this is fiddler Jamie McClelland's debut album. He's been making music for more than a decade and it shows in the assured style and inventiveness that he brings to his playing. The album has a dozen instrumentals, all composed by McClelland, on which he's aided and abetted by half a dozen players of guitar, flute, djembe, whistles and the like. It's a remarkably accomplished band, the more so because, although they can do the fast and furious stuff they don't, as too many do, go in for excessively speedy showboating.

Both *Emily's Wee Tune* (written presumably for Scots singer Emily Smith with whom McClelland plays) and *Peggy's Waltz* are reminiscent of Ric Sanders' classic *Portmeirion* and McClelland displays similar command of his instrument to the great Soft Machine and Fairport man. Elsewhere, while the titles of all instrumentals can seem completely arbitrary to the listener, and indeed

often are, mention must be made of *Demon Ducks Of Doom* and *Rainbow Sheep*, both of which develop into furious jigs after slightly odd openings, which seems only right and proper as they conjure up visions of being pursued by the titular oddities.

In general McClelland's style is soft and relaxing with few hard edges and this can sometimes make things a bit soporific and lacking in energy, but the melodies and the quality of his playing pull him through—though next time around a bit more grit would be welcome. **JS**
www.jamiecclelland.com

Jon Hughes
VOICES FROM A BROKEN WINDOW
Dive Studios
DSCD101
★★★★

A delightfully raucous sound which is played in an attentive yet dedicated style; a joyous album

Originally from Wisconsin, his first album *BECOMING DETAILED* was released at the age of seventeen and was a success in his hometown. Although a second album, *PHYSICS SAYS*, was released in 2007 I believe it is here in his third album that Jon has found his true voice. Full of beautifully played accompaniment which all but the drums were impressively provided by Jon, this fourteen track album keeps you gripped from the very start and is by all means a contemporary classic.

The upbeat *Found My Name* includes in its duration a quite marvellous sound; a groove that must surely find airplay success soon. The acoustic picking that occurs towards the end of this track is most soothing which seems to leave your soul with a smile on its spiritual existence. The intriguing *Sweet Negligence* sounds very similar to one of Todd Snider's more polished tracks, with the backing harmonies proving to be just as good as the acoustic picking which is that stonking I had to listen to this song twice to grasp its genius. The guitar playing on *Over* seems to have taken its influence from a Scott Joplin rag and is most delightful. It isn't often that you hear whistling included in a track these days, and when it is used it must be done with caution as it is not always that effective. Here, this is not the case as it seems to add a doo-wop or even Chicago blues element. A follower of all these musical styles, this track will certainly be played in the near future by yours truly.

Here's hoping for Jon releasing a fourth album, because if it is as good as this then what a wonderful achievement that will be. **RH**
www.jonhughes.org

Josh Geffin
JOSH GEFFIN
Self Released
★★★★

A master in his own right who must surely be celebrated due to Josh's echoing genius in putting towards a great song or two; a simply beautiful

album

British artist Josh Geffin releases his debut album here, with each and every one of the nine tracks recorded on a single day at Livingston Studios. For this quick recording style, Josh must surely have been having one great day as he recorded some genuinely excellent songs full of acoustic grandness and vocal confidence that is normally seen in artists who have been around for several decades:

With an appealing opening that must be great to catch live, *Coming Soon* is dealt with tenderly by Josh that indicates a gentle yet observant soul. It is worth listening right to the very end of this track as Josh includes some additional picking, a 'CD Extra' if you like, as it demonstrates his ability to strum out a grand tune if requested. Accompanied rather delightfully on backing harmonies, *Dustcloud* seems to morph into an evocatively and emotionally moving track that must surely see its audience nod their heads in acknowledging its brilliance. *Saving Time* includes in its relatively modest duration a fine picking style which is certainly handled well by Josh that should act as a benchmark for those wishing to pursue a career in music.

Joining the ever-growing group of outstanding British artists worthy of worldwide recognition, this has to be included in any music collection and listened to until the CD can take no more as it really is a quite outstanding release. **RH**
www.joshgeffin.com

Katie Garibaldi
NEXT RIDE OUT
Living Dream
Music 962952-5
★★★★

Polished singer-songwriter dipping her toes in folk, country and pop waters

This is Californian Katie Garibaldi's sixth album and she claims to challenge the 'chick with an acoustic guitar,' image bestowed upon female singer-songwriters. For this listener, she hasn't quite achieved her goal. Don't get me wrong, *NEXT RIDE OUT* is a really good record for adult contemporary music lovers, but it doesn't rise above the ordinary status of so many similar albums currently flooding the market. Katie comfortably straddles folk-pop, Americana-styled country and polite urban rock. The bluesy blend of her strong and powerful vocals shines on *Nothing Good Lasts*, as this catchy melody will have your toes tapping to the passionate beat. *I Owe You Nothing* is a song in which Katie opts to croon to us over a pleasant combination of acoustic guitar and a plodding beat. She is a soulful singer-songwriter of largely unheralded, merits. This latest album will hardly set the world alight, but will delight long-term fans and could easily reel in some new ones. **AC**

www.katiegaribaldi.com

Norah Jones
THE FALL
EMI/Blue Note
★★★★

Disjointed and lacking direction, cohesion or killer tracks

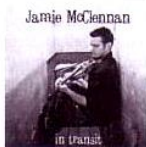
Runaway success can be a double-edged sword. If, like Norah Jones, your debut album was a worldwide smash selling in excess of 20 million copies, you would be catapulted into the spotlight and instantly accorded superstar status. But when the fuss died down, you could suddenly be facing a tricky problem: as expectation levels of those new-found fans run abnormally high, how on earth do you follow it up? Ms Jones is still unsure and it's clear that even with the release of this, her fourth album, the solution is proving elusive. The formula that was so effective on *COME AWAY WITH ME* has been jettisoned, along with boyfriend, mentor and bass player Lee Alexander. Instead, Norah has a new producer in Jacques King on a 13-track collection which contains eight of her own songs and another five co-written with various collaborators including Ryan Adams.

In the past, Ravi Shankar's celebrated daughter touched on jazz, country and blues and drew keyboard inspiration from the inimitable Ray Charles to give her work gravitas. Producer King has introduced changes, but not all the new material impresses and an irritating bass boom holes the opening cut, *Chasing Pirates*, below the water line almost before the good ship Jones has set sail. *Light As A Feather*, the number she wrote with Ryan Adams, is better with an edgy feel which sustains into the moody *Young Blood* as Norah's voice takes on a smoky dimension with faint echoes of Fleetwood Mac's Stevie Nicks. The tempo is raised for *It's Gonna Be*, with Jones switching to a Wuritzer, but the song is too lightweight to excite much interest. The sound of the album tends to vary, largely because of the myriad session players who have now replaced the small, tight band that used to back Norah and established a warm empathy with the artist. While she's in this state of limbo there will be no return to multi-platinum sales and her life now seems to revolve around her dogs, judging by the CD cover and the final track—an amusing paean to her favourite pooch entitled *Man Of The Hour*. As for the somewhat confused listeners, well they'll just have to take the wuff with the smooth. **BK**
www.norahjones.com

Patty Griffin
DOWNTOWN CHURCH
EMI/Credential
Recordings
★★★★

Glory, glory, glory Griffin goes gospel

CHILDREN RUNNING THROUGH Griffin's February 2007 released



...the new releases

Keith Sewell
THE WAY OF A WANDERER
 Rubber Dog Records 845121011142
 ★★★★★

A brilliant album which stands up with the standard of bluegrass legends

Keith Sewell, from the small town of Duncanville in Texas, is certainly multi-talented. Not only does he write many of the songs on this new album and co-writes the rest, but he also plays guitar, mandolin, banjo, fiddle, bass and keyboard too. Not only that, but he has a high tenor voice made for bluegrass. Not surprisingly, he is a popular sessions player, and not only played with the Dixie Chicks on their world tour, but also put ten years in with Ricky Skaggs and currently plays with Lyle Lovett.

He uses all of his talents to full effect on the new album, which begins promisingly with the title cut—and it doesn't end there, either. Tracks like *Abigail*, *Josie's Reel* and *Fiddle and Bow* are fun, humorous and expertly performed. *Muscadine Wine* and *The Road Winds* are other highlights, among many. In all, this is an expertly performed, well-produced body of work, and would doubtless have made Bill Monroe proud and could easily stand up with the efforts of Alison Krauss, Dan Tyminski, Alecia Nugent or the Queen of bluegrass herself—Rhonda Vincent. It's a pity the album couldn't have been longer, as after eleven tracks, it leaves you wanting more. **DJ**
<http://www.keithsewell.com/>



predecessor (to DOWNTOWN CHURCH) contained two gospel-flavoured numbers, namely *Up To The Mountain* and *Heavenly Day*. A couple of months ago EMI Records released the eleven-song all-star gospel music compilation OH HAPPY DAY, a collection that featured Mavis Staples and Patty Griffin performing *Waiting For My Child (To Come Home)*. Inspired by the early 1960s Civil Rights Movement and penned by Sullivan Pugh (the Consolers), a solo rendition also appears on this Griffin's full-on gospel collection.

Produced by Buddy Miller this album was recorded during the first week of January 2009 in Nashville's Downtown Presbyterian Church on 5th Avenue North. Griffin toured with Miller as part of the quintet the Sweet Harmony Traveling Revue back in 2004, and again in February last year as Three Girls and Their Buddy with Emmylou Harris and Shawn Colvin. In due course I'll mention the vocalists who assist Patty, while the DOWNTOWN CHURCH sessions musicians include Dennis Crouch (bass), Jay Bellerose (drums), Buddy Miller and Doug Lancio (guitars)—the latter produced Griffin's 2002 classic 1000 KISSES—John Deaderick (keyboard), Stuart Duncan (fiddle) and Russ Pahl (steel guitar). Singing (throughout) from the church's pulpit Patty opens the album with Hank Williams' apocalyptic vision *House Of Gold*, and on the ensuing, rhythmic *Move Up* she's accompanied by Jim Lauderdale and Buddy Miller, plus sisters Ann and Regina McCrary. Their preacher father Sam was a member of the legendary Fairfield Four. The McCrary girls also add their voices to *Death's Got A Warrant* and the Rev. Gary Davis' *If I Had My Way* aka *Sampson And Delilah*.

The traditional *Wade In The Water*, doubled as a coded slave song, and is probably one of the best known numbers in this collection. On this version Griffin is aided vocally by Regina McCrary and highly-rated Mike Farris. In terms of a foreign language number the traditional Spanish song *Virgen de Guadalupe* is to DOWNTOWN CHURCH as *Mil Besos* was to 1000 KISSES. Griffin wrote a number of songs for this project and two of them made the final cut. On *Little Fire* she's assisted by Emmylou, while *Coming Home To Me* features the voice of Mrs Miller, Julie. The latter, a thoughtful ballad paced

number is one of this intriguing album's standouts. Griffin, by her own admission a lapsed Catholic, is in fine voice throughout and closes DOWNTOWN CHURCH with a solo rendition of *All Creatures Of Our God And King* the more than eight-hundred year old words of which are credited to St. Francis of Assisi. **AW**
<http://www.pattygriffin.net/>

Porkbelly Futures
PORKBELLY FUTURES
 Cordova Bay Records
 ★★★

The country and blues musings of a Toronto-based band



Helmed by award winning novelist/musician/songwriter Paul Quarrington, the Toronto-based band Porkbelly Futures was formed early in the new millennium and this self-titled collection is their sophomore release. The other band members include Quarrington's long time buddy Martin Worthy (drums), plus Stuart Laughton (guitar), Chas Elliott (bass), while Rebecca Campbell—long a mainstay of Jane Siberry recordings and concert tours—assists Quarrington with lead and backing vocals.

PORKBELLY FUTURES is dedicated to the late pianist Richard Bell, who played on a number of the songs. Featuring fourteen songs, nine penned by Quarrington, the material mostly runs the gamut of blues and country. Album opener *Sweet Daddy* is a prime example of the former, *You Gotta Love A Train* possesses a definite country flavour, while the extensive use of pennywhistle on the seafaring themed *March Storm* hints at Celtic folk. Among a wide range of subjects, the lyrics focus on loneliness, love lost and found, women in tight dresses, and the sports—boxing and ten pin bowling. All in all there's nothing here that, musically speaking, is contrary to ordinary. **AW**
<http://porkbellys.com/>

Ray Wylie Hubbard
A. ENLIGHTENMENT B.
ENDARKENMENT (HINT: THERE IS NO C)
 Bordello Records
 ★★★★★

More dark of night crossroads blues from Hubbard

On the front cover picture, regaled in a long coat and wielding a sword in his right hand, Hubbard grasps the hair of his bespectacled head in his left. Macabre as it may appear the Texan would doubtless add a sly wink in the spirit of Captain Jack Sparrow and his scurvy crew. By his own admission, Edgar Allan Poe's *THE RAVEN* is Hubbard's favourite poem, and there are a number of lyrical references on this twelve-song collection to black, wings and crows. Propelled by an almost martial beat, the title song launches the collection with the opening lines running to: 'Tarnished and disgraced, I lay down, A black sparrow come to me in a dream' while there's hints of apocalypse in the subsequent chorus line: 'And heaven pours down rain and lightning bolts.'

Supported initially by a chorus of handclaps, and subsequently by the Trishas—a Central Texas quartet that includes Kevin Welch's daughter Savannah—*Whoop And Holler* is the first of two gospel numbers, the other being album closer *The Four Horsemen Of The Apocalypse*. Savannah's (electric) banjo toting sibling, Dustin, contributes to the latter song. Among other Central Texas pickers contributing the album are Gurf Morlix (electric guitar, vocal), Bukka Allen (keyboards), Jeff Plankenhorn (electric guitar) and Ray Bonneville (harmonica), while Ray's electric guitar playing youngster Lucas appears on the rhythmic and energetic *Pots And Pans*. As for the album's metronomic backbone it's manned, where necessary, by Rick Richards (drums) and George Reiff (bass). Reiff and Ray co-produced the album.

On recent albums Hubbard has consistently delved into blues, and that journey continues here. The risqué worded *Drunken Poet's Dream* was co-written by Ray and Hayes Carl, the aforementioned *The Four Horsemen Of The Apocalypse* with Billy Cassis. The remaining songs were penned solely by Ray. In *Down Home Country Blues* a song for and about musicians, Hubbard testifies: '...that Muddy Waters is as deep as William Blake,' *Wasp's Nest* references the cocoon on the Hubbard back

porch, while *Loose* is the portrait of a deceased lady of the night.

Back in 1994 Wylie Lama's LOCO GRINGO'S LAMENT compositions set the bar at an extraordinarily high level, and A. ENLIGHTENMENT B. ENDARKENMENT (HINT: THERE IS NO C) is the latest engaging episode from this music legend. **AW**
<http://www.raywylie.com/>
<http://www.myspace.com/raywylie>

Sylkie Monoff
GENUINE
 Self-released CD
 34479 91390
 ★★☆☆

Modern country with classic melody and drive



Sylkie Monoff has been around the block a time or two. As a teen she performed throughout Germany with local country-rock bands and released her first record for Teldec twenty years ago. Since then she's recorded several albums for BMG Ariola and enjoyed success as a songwriter with the international hit, *All The Places* and others. For this latest self-produced album she travelled to Nashville to work with some of Music City's finest, including Brent Mason, Eddie Bayers, Bruce Bouton, Danny Parks, Mike Noble and Matt McKenzie. Both in her voice and straight-up modern country style, Sylkie Monoff, despite being German, actually recalls such North American artists as LeAnn Rimes and Carrie Underwood (among others) over 13 songs imbued with classic country-pop-like melody and drive.

Laughin' opens the album with an impassioned, up-tempo blast of identity crisis featuring a chorus tailor-made for radio. *Can't Be Worse (Than LA)* is more acoustic-based with mandolin and acoustic guitar to the fore on this well-written soulful ballad. *Steal Your Crown* is a fun, catchy romp that's refreshingly literate and polished. Showing her softer side with a more subdued vocal, *Little Did You Know* is delicate and moody as Sylkie displays a nice vocal range with beautiful dynamics. Throughout the musical arrangements are good, without exactly being earth-shattering, but overall this stands up to anything the major Nashville labels are currently producing and should find favour with those who enjoy, polished, heartfelt modern country music. **AC**
www.sylkiemonoff.com

The Unwanted Music
FROM THE ATLANTIC FRINGE
 Compass Records
 ★★☆☆

A transatlantic trio of established folk performers bring their diverse musical influences to the table

A trio, the Unwanted is composed of present and past alumni of the Irish band Dervish, respectively, Roscommon-born Cathy Jordan (vocals, tenor guitar, autoharp, bodhrán, bouzouki, bones) and Sligo-bred Seamie O'Dowd (vocals, guitar, Dobro, mandolin, fiddle,

