

MAVERICK

CD REVIEWS - THE NEW RELEASES

time and captivate with wonderful tones. *Child Of A Blind Man* has to be one of my favourite tracks alongside *Two Forty Seven* with harmonies that have you singing along and a range of styles featured that make every track stand out on its own. *Cicada* is an outstanding track for its spoken vocal content and chorus at the end accompanied by some magnificent playing. The creativeness explored in this song does include jazz influences but brings in so many other elements—individuality really shines through. *I've Been Lonely For So Long* is a heartfelt tune that truly showcases Schuman's multi-dimensional and astonishingly captivating vocals.

I have honestly really enjoyed this record—the musicianship displayed here cannot be doubted, their abilities and talents are ten-to-nine and while the content occasionally had me a little lost, it provided an exciting listening experience, whilst awakening something deep inside you don't really know is there until you listen to something as passionate and old-timey as *CICADA*. **Laura Bethell**
www.hazmatmodine.com

Joe Crookston

DARKLING & THE BLUEBIRD JUBILEE

Milagrito Records

★★★★★

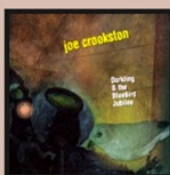
Lyrical intelligent, thought provoking, consistently melodic, mainly employing acoustic instruments Crookston's album ticks every box...

Crookston's fretless gourd banjo strikes the album's opening chords. *I Sing*, constructed around the repeated: 'I sing for the beauty that's still left on this earth,' is an invocation to mankind to put aside all its differences and live in harmony. Crookston isn't the first male folk songwriter to construct a lyric in the female voice, but I consistently applaud those (writers) who do. In this instance the narrator is the precocious Caitlin Macnamara, widow of self-destructive Welsh poet Dylan Thomas. Set in the period post Thomas' late 1953 passing—'I sailed you home, Across the sea, Alcohol and poetry'—*Caitlin At The Window* is a wonderful evocation of what was a tempestuous union, and ultimately one that history proved was founded on love (although Joe's focus is the period immediately following the poet's passing). Deliberately shunning the limelight Caitlin subsequently relocated to Italy and resided there for some three decades. During that time she lived with Giuseppe Fazio, yet upon her passing was interred next to Dylan in Laugharne. It's nearly a year ago since I first heard this song, performed live. It's one of those extraordinary creations I know I will love forever and yearn to hear often...and I doubt if, ere long, I'll be alone in that regard.

The album's only cover song is Mary Gauthier's *Mercy Now* which Joe has been performing in concert for a number of years. Featuring a runaway horse, naysayer neighbours, a wild white mare, a broken leg—which prevents the main character's conscription—and a healing angel of mercy whom that always optimistic (male) character subsequently marries, *Good Luck John* is an uptempo hoot. *The Nazarene*, also first heard almost a year ago, is another composition that rivals *Caitlin* in every regard, and is a particularly courageous creation since it takes mental health as its focus. While the age of the narrator isn't stated, his home life—'Dad is watching TV, I'm learning minor chords'—sharply contrasts with every 'Tuesday' when, accompanying his baseball coach father, they visit the mental institution where his other parent is incarcerated—'Mom thinks she's Jesus Christ the Nazarene.'

Populated by natural world characters Crookston's *Darkling & The Bluebird Jubilee* lyric, explores a confrontation between good and evil. The ensuing *Everything Here Is Good* subtly poses the pertinent question: 'But is it?' relative to the contemporaneous portrait of life painted, as for the melody it simply flows like warm honey. *Blue* is a tale of love lost, the colours 'red' and 'green' are referenced at, respectively, the close of the first and second verses. Cleverly, 'blue' is unsaid, but is clearly present at the close of the third verse. Partly a road song and commentary on our troubled early 21st century world *To Keep You Warm* doubles as a tender creation wherein Crookston joyously celebrates fatherhood—'Every time I see the joy on your face, Seems I'd do anything to make the world a kinder place.'

Darkling/Bluebird (Fear & Transcend) an alternative arrangement and marginally longer version of the title song closes this collection. Melodically it's much darker hued with strident, almost threatening, sounds from cello and piano. Currently based out of Ithaca in upstate New York, Joe is accompanied on this collection by a coterie of talented local acoustic pickers. With 2011 already almost half done, Joe Crookston's latest release is a shoe-in contender for Album of the Year. **Arthur Wood**
<http://www.joecrookston.com/>



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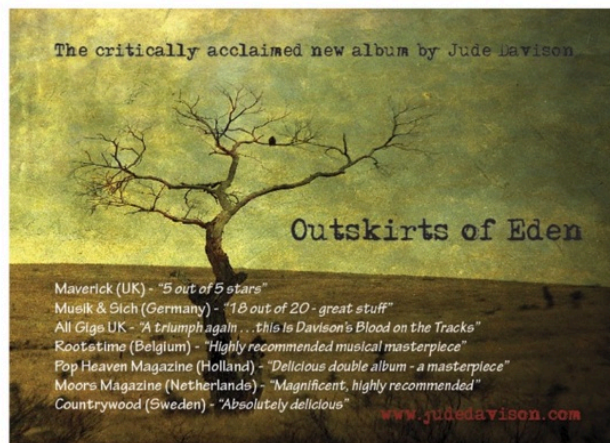
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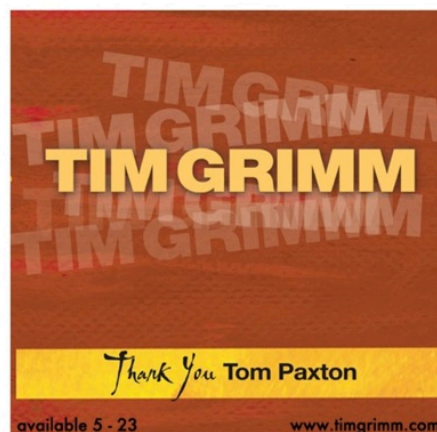
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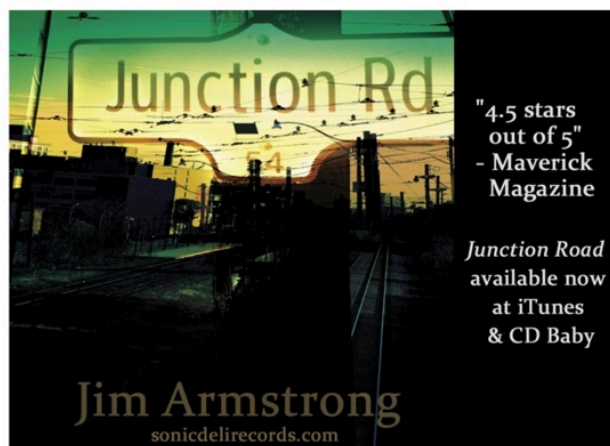
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