

DUSTY RELICS

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS—WHERE COUNTRY MEETS SOUL, a perfect fusion of the two genres with superb soul icons like Solomon Burke, Aaron Neville, Arthur Alexander and Ann Peebles delivering exceptional covers of country staples such as *The Grand Tour*, *He'll Have To Go*, *Detroit City* and *I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry*. The performances were exactly what those excellent songs deserved and the album is still on my playlist 12 months on. Now Ace Records, in their infinite wisdom, have released a second volume in the series. It has a lot to commend it, but ultimately falls short of the original's lofty standards. Take two of the most recognisable country favourites on this collection and you can identify where the problems lie, for Esther Phillips' take on the Don Gibson classic *Sweet Dreams* and *Sixteen Tons* by Johnny Taylor are pale shadows of the originals. Both songs are unnecessarily embellished by the vocalists when a simple, uncluttered approach would have been more effective. With country, less can often be more. Far better are Dorothy Moore's sensitive handling of Willie Nelson's *Funny How Time Slips Away* and Bobby Bland's brilliant reading of the Dan Penn song *I Hate You*—a country hit for Ronnie Milsap in 1973. Other highlights include Clarence Carter's *Bad News*, where the Alabama ace's ribald laughter adds a new dimension to the John D. Loudermilk growler, and the Facts of Life version of the old Bill Anderson cheatin' song *Sometimes*, while Otis Redding brings us a typically soulful *Tennessee Waltz* and the inimitable Millie Jackson nails *Sweet Music Man*. A decent enough collection, then, but without the pizzazz of the first album.

Bob Kilbey

www.acerecords.com

The Allman Brothers Band BROTHERS AND SISTERS

Universal 3728804

★★★★

A monster reissue from the masters of 1970s blues-rock—minus Duane

This remastered deluxe two-CD reissue is part of a major remarketing of the Allman Brothers' classic album that is accompanied by vinyl, single CD and four-CD sets. Originally released on Capricorn Records in 1973, *BROTHERS AND SISTERS* was the first Allman Brothers album made after



the death of leader and guitarist Duane Allman. Fans will need no introduction to this lean, workmanlike pot-pourri of southern rock and blues, whose top tracks include US number two single *Ramblin' Man*, the smouldering blues rhythm of *Jelly Jelly*, Gregg Allman's lead vocals on the radio-friendly *Southbound*, Dickey Betts's scintillating guitar work on *Pony Boy* and the immortal *Jessica*, best-known as the theme tune of BBC TV's *Top Gear*.

So far so good: a nice remastering of a 1970s classic featuring virtuosi musicianship and worthy of a four star rating, even if the passage of 40 years does make some tracks now seem far too long. But what of disc two's collection of previously unreleased outtakes and rehearsals?

With the exception of the dull opening rehearsal on *Wasted Words* and a fussy instrumental alternate take on *Southbound*, the remaining eight tunes did not make the album's final cut at all, and are completely new. These include rehearsals of *Trouble No More*, reminiscent of Canned Heat; the guitar-led instrumental *One Way Out*; the organ-riffed *I'm Gonna Move To The Outskirts of Town*, which clocks in at 11 minutes; and the comparatively short, accessible *Done Somebody Wrong*, which echoes the Butterfield Blues Band. Genuine outtakes include more downhome blues on *Double Cross* and some nice piano work on *Early Morning Blues*. The frenetic 16-minute closer *A Minor Jam* features more busy guitar work, but underlines the fact that, despite the high standard of playing, protracted noodling sessions are not so fashionable today.

The four star rating stands because of the original album's milestone status and the quality of the musicianship, but time has not treated the group's long instrumental workouts kindly, and the appeal of the unreleased material will probably be restricted to die-hards. **Jeremy Isaac**

www.allmanbrothersband.com

Various Artists THE BRIDGE

Self-released

★★★★☆

12 thoroughly engaging roots music tunes, that run the gamut from gentle narrative to melodically muscular.

Featuring 12 roots music songs from mainly Nashville-based artists/bands, the



excellent *THE BRIDGE* has been compiled by Rod Picott, to benefit the 40-year-old Boston based charity Bridge Over Troubled Waters which assists the city's homeless youths to reintegrate with society. At close on seven minutes duration Sam Baker's mighty opening opus, *Snow*, was recorded in Brighton at The Basement during September 2011. It marked the first UK tour on which Baker was accompanied by Chip Dolan (piano), whose two minute plus closing (keyboard) solo is an achingly sensitive delight. As for the classic status of *Snow* that's an already given. It's followed by another live recording, Slaid Cleaves' rendition of *You're Not Missing Anything*, co-written with schoolmate Picott. This is, currently, the only available recording of this song.

Commencing with Rod's love paean *Bluebonnet*—'It's just a little flower, stronger than you think'—the remaining fare on *THE BRIDGE* is studio derived. Recalling the previous evening's events, partway through the intimate *What Happened Last Night* on which Amanda Shires' fiddle supports her vocal, the narrator relates: 'I'll tell you one thing, it wasn't an accident.' Set on a railway station platform Fred Eaglesmith's *The Rocket* is narrated by an up-in-years grandfather/ Great War veteran who recalls that 40 years ago his uniformed son made the ultimate sacrifice for his country. The Canadian's song is perceptively interpreted here by Mary Gauthier. Nashville-based for a time, Greg Trooper moved back to New York City a numbers years ago and *Land Of No Forgiveness* finds him deliver a tale of love in a 'river town,' while Stephen Simmons gently contemplates *Emily's Eyes*.

Austin's Gurf Morlix rocks out on *Coming Back To Haunt Me*, Boston resident Antje Duvekot relates in her rhythmic *Hero* how such model individuals 'someday fall, float downstream and leave me stranded,' while Brother Henry, composed of twin brothers David Henry (cello) and Ned Henry (electric guitar) plus older brother Jeff Henry (bass) and Park Ellis (drums), dispense the rowdy collaboration *Dig It*. Boston's Meg Hutchinson penned the wistful *As The Crow Flies*, and Bob Delevante closes with the melodically muscular *Come On Oscar*. *THE BRIDGE* is solely available from Kansas based Village Records. As compilations go, this one is an absolute gem. Enough said.

Arthur Wood

www.villagerecords.com