

## ...the new releases

### Woody Pines COUNTING ALLIGATORS

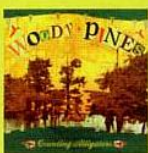
Independent  
★★★★☆

Swinging old-timey country blues with a side of gumbo

'Born in the mountain, raised in the bluff, we came to shake our feet and strut our stuff.' As biographies and manifestos go that's about as good as it gets and both Woody Pines (the man) and Woody Pines (the band) do their not inconsiderable and largely successful best to live up to it on their third album.

Having landed in New Orleans when he came down from the mountain Pines brings a good slug of that city's jazz and rhythms to his old-timey acoustic country blues and the result is the beginning of what sets him apart from the crowd. Being a musical magpie helps—'I pick and choose the best sounding stuff,' he says—and the results are a seething cauldron of anything and everything from Mississippi to Nashville. What seals the deal is the superlative and simpatico playing of Pines and his band, who create a sprightly acoustic jam that has the toes tapping and the head nodding. Old Crow Medicine Show's Ketch Secor and Gill Landry (with whom Pines used to play) show up to help things along, and Aurora Nealand adds subtle accordion from time to time.

Half the album is traditional and the remaining Pines originals slot in seamlessly between such classics as *Casey Jones* and *Harlem*, while Billy Briggs *Chew Tobacco Rag* is two minutes of irresistibility. It's all incredibly throwback but that of course is its charm, and Pines is a respecter of the tradition as well as an expander of it. Stick on your pork pie hat, grab a slug of moonshine and cut yourself a rug. **JS**  
[www.woodypines.com](http://www.woodypines.com)



almost all the instruments on the album and all songs were penned by the different members, showing the ladies' breadth of musical talent.

Country is well-showcased and for those fans who love bands like the Dixie Chicks and singers with the same range and tone must experience the exceptional compositions and lead vocals/ harmonies of WRITTEN ROADS. **Adc**  
[www.myspace.com/bombshelltrio](http://www.myspace.com/bombshelltrio)

### Watson Twins TALKING TO YOU— TALKING TO ME

Vanguard 79997-2  
★★★★★

Sharp pop-edged  
Americana

I first encountered the delightful Watson Twins a couple of years ago when they supported and also sang backing vocals for Jenny Lewis from Rilo Kiley on her solo tour. I remember thinking that they were too good to remain as a support act for too long. As usual, I was right! (joke)

TALKING TO YOU, TALKING TO ME is the Watson Twins' second album and may as well be their debut album as it is so far removed from FIRE SONGS as to make it sound like a set of demos. *Forever Me* shimmers like a flickering candle in a dark brooding country hush as the twins harmonise over a soul-inged backing band. *Midnight* is a beautiful haunting account of a relationship that is about to go to the next level and a young nervous Watson Twin urges her lover: 'to be careful what you wish for/I know the score' as an electric guitar and Hammond organ fight for dominance over the young girl's voice. Intriguing sexual politics crop up again in *Devil in You* when Miss Watson refuses to be coerced into doing something that she has reservations about no matter how 'nicely' her lover tries to talk her round. *Give Me a Chance* goes



right back to basics with a simple jazzy guitar, bass, snare/cymbal backing over a crystal clear vocal performance; absolutely gorgeous.

All 12 songs on TALKING TO YOU, TALKING TO ME are very well-written, sung and produced; which bodes well for the future. **AH**  
[www.thewatsonstwins.com](http://www.thewatsonstwins.com)

### Will Hoge THE WRECKAGE

Rykodisc  
★★★★★

Latest offering  
from this  
Nashville-based  
blue collar rocker

On August 20, 2008 Hoge was heading home from a recording session for THE WRECKAGE when his scooter collided with a delivery van which failed to yield even though the musician had right of way. Sustaining multiple injuries (broken bones, temporarily blinded, cuts requiring around one hundred stitches), the sessions at Nashville's Sound Emporium Studio were suspended for eight months. Recuperation and healing complete, arduous rehabilitation ensued before he could once again strap on a guitar and sing. In a career spanning a mere thirteen years, Hoge has averaged one album release every twelve months, albeit with a penchant for cutting live albums.

Like Will's 2007 Rykodisc predecessor DRAW THE CURTAINS, THE WRECKAGE was produced by the partnership of drummer Ken Coomer (Uncle Tupelo, Wilco) and Charlie Brocco. Hoge had a hand in penning the eleven songs, nine of them with almost as many collaborators including Jim Lauderdale, Greg Crowe and Kyle Cook. Relationships that are damaged and need maintenance form the main subjective focus of his lyrics.

THE WRECKAGE finds Hoge traverse the Springsteen and Petty school of



blue collar roots rock, and standout cuts in that mode include album opener *Hard Love* and Hoge's nod to the road *Highway Wings*, while *Favourite Waste Of Time* is driven by the familiar twang of a Rickenbacker guitar. Hoge's mellow side surfaces on the album title song and the angst filled *What Could I Do*, while there's a pronounced autobiographical slant to *Even If It Breaks Your Heart*—once upon a time a kid fell in love with music and it led to a dream about making his own (music). Elsewhere, former Columbia Records recording artist/singer-songwriter Ashley Monroe shines on *Goodnight/Goodbye*, where she duets with Will.

**AW**  
<http://www.willhoge.com/>  
<http://www.myspace.com/willhoge>

### Phil Burdett BY THE TIME I GET TOMORROW

Suburban Mythic  
BURD CD03  
★★★★☆

Morrison-  
esque poetic  
ruminations from deepest Essex

Despite the country punning title, it seems right somehow that Phil Burdett actually calls Chalkwell Park, a small patch of greenery in Southend-on-Sea, home. Southend is a bit run down, a bit beaten up, one of those places that time forgot, forever trapped in the half-remembered heyday of the British seaside. Burdett is the perfect poet for such a place, one part bohemian-era Tom Waits, two parts stream of consciousness Van the man circa-ASTRAL WEEKS topped off with the sensibility of Robbie Robertson circa *Carry* and *Somewhere Down The Crazy River* (which of course in certain, or perhaps uncertain, light, is exactly where Burdett resides).

A master of imagery and haiku-esque conjuring Burdett, accompanied by guitars, whispered hints of rhythm, thoughtful piano from Rick Dawson but above all some wonderfully hushed backing vocals from Wendy Roberts, Colleen McCarthy and Claire Furley, croons stories of lost loves, the reflections of a man of a certain age ruminating on his life, what he did, what he might have done. Undeniably personal, it's also hugely thought-provoking, promoting the listener to engage in exactly the same sort of examinations, and as Socrates said: 'the unexamined life is not worth living,' so Burdett is definitely on the side of the angels. His vocals, alternately gnarled and tender, are hugely evocative, and in the epic desperate breakup song *Bell Wharf Blues* he excels himself, pouring draughts of 100% proof truth in great sweeping verses.

Although from time to time things move up a notch, as with *February Kind Of Woman's* jazz groove, it's with the downbeat and pensive that Burdett is most at home, and with this album he announces himself as a man not merely to watch, but to actively seek out. **JS**  
[www.philburdett.com](http://www.philburdett.com)



### Sarah-Jane Summers NESTA

Dell Daisy Dell001  
★★★★★

Passionate  
Scottish fiddle  
player goes solo

Sarah-Jane Summers fiddling passion is no surprise, given that she is the fifth generation of her family to be raised on the same Highland Farm. Steeped in the local tradition of the fiddle, Summers grew into an extraordinary fiddler by anyone's standards. Currently one of the most sought after violin tutors in Scotland, Summers is currently head tutor and director of the traditional music course at the RSAMD Junior Academy. NESTA sees Summer move into solo territory. Having played both the fiddle and the Hardanger fiddle in Nu-Nordic band Frido, Summers felt it was time to undertake her own musical exploration.

NESTA named after Scotland's famous River Ness is filled with passion. Summers solo effort is a smile inducing journey through contemporary and classic fields. Opening with the self-composed *The Happy Hardanger*, Summers makes it clear from the start that NESTA is a celebration. The Inverness girl's impassioned approach is truly captivating. *Spike On A Bike* jolts us into a magically lyrical cycle through the twisting and turning hills, whilst I defy anyone not to jig along to *Dancing Dolly*.

In tune with her Highland upbringing, *Tha mi Tinn leis a' Ghaol* stirs wantonly. That Summers can express such emotion in her aching fiddling is high on enough to set the tears flowing. Closing with the self-composed *Urban Trad*, Summers managed to summarise NESTA in just under six minutes. Summers is very much a Highlands' girl, whose intrigue in Nordic music inspired her playing of the Hardanger fiddle. Having mastered both the Scots and Hardanger fiddles, Summers is in a position to take what she has learnt and combine it with whom she is today. A true balance between the urban and the rural, Summers storytelling NESTA is essential listening. **JW**  
[www.sarah-janesummers.co.uk](http://www.sarah-janesummers.co.uk)

### Anna Kashfi SURVIVAL

Little Red Rabbit  
LRR015  
★★★★★

Nu-folk based  
highs adrift  
in a sea of  
ordinariness

Named after a fairly obscure actress best known for being married briefly to Marlon Brando in the 1950s, Manchester-based Anna Kashfi's third album is an unusual mix of styles. Although clearly grounded in what subset of nu-folk takes your fancy, they add in Americana, light country, electronics and even on one occasion hark back to the 1940s. The results, as is almost always the case, are mixed.

On the good side is the stately vulnerability of opener *A Lonely Place*, ('I was born when you kissed me/I

