

while the closers *Black Rose*—a plaintive paean to a lost love—and *Dear Friend*—not friendly at all—bring a solid and listenable album to a close. John Jobling

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### Terry Allen BOTTOM OF THE WORLD

Tla Records

★★★★☆

Allen ends his 21<sup>st</sup>

century musical  
silence with a truly  
classic song collection



The last occasion new music penned by Terry Allen graced the public domain was with 1999's *SALIVATION*, the final album in a handful of Sugar Hill Records releases and reissues. Almost 14 years on Allen (keyboards, vocals), aided by Lloyd Maines (guitar, vocals), Richard Bowden (violin, mandolin, vocals), Brian Standefer (cello), son Bukka (accordion, B3) and the latter's wife Sally (vocals) recorded *BOTTOM OF THE WORLD* at Bukka's Screen Door Studio in Buda, Texas. Production of this new 11 song collection is credited to Terry, Bukka and Lloyd.

Back in 1975 Terry debuted with the album *JUAREZ*, and almost four decades later references to Mexico still feature in his lyrics. That said, in opening with *Four Corners*, the chorus only mentions Mexico—Allen reprises a *JUAREZ* song whose focus is the rectangular state of Colorado and toward the close, the south-western town of Cortez. The geographical point at which that corner of the state abuts New Mexico, Arizona and Utah is referred to as Four Corners. As *New Year's Day 1999* '...broke mean and it broke cold...' in *Santé Fe*, New Mexico, Allen curses the (unknown) killer of his beloved dog Queenie. *Queenie's Song* was co-written with Guy Clark, and in the ensuing *Hold On To The House* the narrator describes a mighty storm that's brewing.

The title *Do They Dream Of Hell In Heaven*—'Do they wish they'd been a bit more sinful'—is pretty self-explanatory, and among a number of destinations we finally drift south of the border in *The Bottom Of The World*—'...Iguana Nights in Mexico, I might meet up with Ava Gardner, I'll take that angel to the picture show.' Movie history, huh! Next up, Sally and Terry vocalise on the already familiar *CHIPPY* tune, *Angels Of The Wind*, while 'bringing

bottles of blood for the bleeding' a beat-up, red Dodge Dart races south to the Mexican border in *Emergency Human Blood Courier*.

As the verses of *Wake Of The Red Witch* unfold, we're back in a movie theatre; Allen's cherished childhood hideout. There's allusion to a handful of titles starring late John Wayne, except that The Duke played a Centurion in *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965) not *The Robe* (1953)! *The Gift* finds Allen adopt an unusual writing approach, in that a harrowing, December 2010 event—unconnected to Terry or his family—furnishes the storyline. Allen closes with two songs about friendship *Sidekick Anthem* and *Covenant*, the latter penned for Jo Harvey his high-school sweetheart and wife of five decades and counting. In terms of an entity, a number of subtle cross-connections are woven into *BOTTOM OF THE WORLD*—sic. the repeated reference to blood, pet dogs, movies and on and on. Arthur Wood

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### Steve Azar DELTA SOUL VOLUME ONE

Ride Records: Ride 003

★★★★☆

Slick but soulful set  
from classy country  
singer-songwriter



There are those who might question whether a Nashville singer-songwriter can lay any claim at all to soul, whether of the delta variety or not. But Azar was born in Clarksdale, Mississippi, where the legendary crossroads can be found, and he and his family not only have deep connections there but grew up surrounded by musicians; many coming on the inevitable pilgrimage. So the impossibly youthful-looking Azar has the background, but he also has the chops. There's a touch of Jackson Browne about his vocals and arrangements, particular on the epic *The River's Workin* and David Lindley about his guitar work, which doesn't hurt. He can write a hook and a radio-friendly melody plus, several of the songs here could easily emulate his biggest success to date; *I Don't Have To Be Me* ('Til Monday), which reached number two on the Billboard charts a decade ago

On the downside, in the manner of many American records it does suffer from over-manning—bass, electric guitar and

Hammond each require no less than three players for instance—with the concomitant problem that everything sounds great but nothing sounds like a band. But much can be forgiven for the groove of *Mississippi Minute* and the regret of *Indianola* and, while it ain't no Eddie Hinton or the North Mississippi Allstars, it's still a classy set.

A word of warning though; no less than six of the (fairly paltry) nine tracks here previously appeared on Azar's hard to get 2008 outing *INDIANOLA*, so if you've got that, you don't need this. If you haven't though and your tastes lean towards the smoother end of the market, then you probably do. Jeremy Searle

[www.steveazar.com](http://www.steveazar.com)

### Joshua Radin UNDERWATER

So Recordings:

SOAK016P

★★★★

Classy acoustic pop



Ohio native Joshua Radin comes with a bit of a pedigree. His previous three albums of gentle contemplative pop have spawned a couple of hits, been used extensively on TV and in films and brought him a degree of acclaim and awareness amongst the great and good. He's used this credit to good effect on *UNDERWATER*, calling in Jim Keltner and Benmont Tench amongst others to play on it. The results are a smooth, but never overly so, dozen songs, with plenty of orchestration but a light and airy feel. There's more than a hint of Paul Simon about his work, for although his voice and indeed his music, is much more light and floaty, there's the sense of a craftsman at work. Everything fits together perfectly; the strings are just right, the soft acoustic guitar the same, the results a sound to swoon into and over. Above all his vocals recall Scritti Politti's *Green Gartside's* finest moments (and they were pretty fine).

None of this would matter if the words weren't any good of course, but they are, and then some. The cinematic closer *Any Day Now* would be a standout on a lesser album but here it's just the last of a dozen excellent pieces. Great love songs, evocative stories, songs that evoke a sense of place and mood without appearing to really try, a summer pop song, Radin is the master of whatever he turns his hand to. A marvellous album. Jeremy Searle

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