

...the new releases

synth from Dave Rowberry and Rick Wakeman at the same time as Peter serenades the love of his life and gives the song more passion than an episode of *Sex in the City*. I don't want to keep name dropping, as this is Peter Barton and Jerry Donahue's album; but what's not to like on an album that includes Zoot Money, Scott Whitley, Clive Bunker, Mickey Gallagher and the superstars that I've already mentioned?

What's Life About? is a tongue-in-cheek pop at rock's glitterati and *First Encounter* is an instrumental so cool, it will make Hank B Marvin consider retiring. *Italian Cowboy* is already a contender for my song of 2010! Very reminiscent of Jimmy Nail's better stuff; the hook is light-hearted enough to be memorable and yet again the musicianship is fabulous and complements Pete's rough-diamond voice like a velvet glove. Baring in mind Peter has been playing and singing in the Animals for the last 10 years it should be no surprise that the album ends with *The House of the Rising Sun* and this version runs Eric Burdon a very close race! Peter gives the song just the right amount of pathos it deserves and the interplay between Jerry Donahue and Snake Davis (again!) provides enough of an edge to make the song sound fresh again. I demand that you hunt this album down like a rabid dog and insist that the guys tour the UK as early as possible! **AH** www.myspace.com/peterbartonram

Skilda LIVE AT KNOCKEN- GORROCH

Loz60

★★★★

Future folk

serve up the changes

At first I wasn't sure whether to review this album due to the fact that it was, what appeared to be, a demo recording. But then, once I put it on, I couldn't put it down. *Glenan Blue* opens with a rip roaring hi-hat and raunchy guitar riff joined by highland pipes, then drifts into something you might expect from a recording by Bjork. It's a crude but attention-grabbing use of audio experimentation that leaves the listener in no doubt that this is a band that means business.

Utilising the Gaelic language for the songs brings to mind a youthful, energised Capercaille and there's nothing wrong with that as Skilda give their own twist to the established *An Nighean Dubh*. Followed by the chant inducing *Saorsa (Freedom, Future)* this exciting explosion of folk/techno/jazz/rock may not be as forward thinking as it purports to be, but it seriously gives a good kick up the backside where other bands fear to tread. Take my word for it, this is the kind of act that every seasoned 'folk' festival organiser should try to finish with, because of the band's butt-kicking enthusiasm.

So, no shrinking violets here then but then again a stiff dose of excitable rhythm never hurt anyone, unless you're a serious folk



Mary Chapin Carpenter THE AGE OF MIRACLES

Zoe/Rounder Records

★★★★★

Chapin not only hits a home run, she takes the pennant

In the Spring of 2007, soon after the release of *THE CALLING*, Mary Chapin Carpenter had a brush with death. Pulmonary embolisms can kill, Chapin survived. Survivors of a life crisis, more often than not, gain wisdom from the experience. The act of measuring each new day as a precious gift was Chapin's reward. The foregoing hopefully illustrates what informs her lyrics. Carpenter waltzes into *THE AGE OF MIRACLES* with *We Travelled So Far*, wherein she muses upon the joy and constancy of walking with love: 'in rain or in sun.'

Zephyr focuses upon that part of our psyche that persistently struggles with the urge to be going, and she's joined, vocally, by Vince Gill on the ensuing *I Put My Ring Back On*. The discovery that 'Life astounds us in an instant, changing all we know, Blink just once and then you've missed it' lies at the heart of *Holding Up The Sky*. Where were you on 4 June 1989? Aged just seventeen, Chen Guang was a soldier (in civilian clothing) who had been ordered to clear the demonstrators occupying the symbolic heart of his nation. The Tiananmen Square massacre ensued. Currently, and at great risk to his own freedom, this activist's paintings capture his haunting memories of that day.

Winged flight, drifting clouds and dancing light are woven into the fabric *I Was a Bird*, to which Alison Krauss adds her voice. Set mainly in Paris during the 1920s, Hadley Richardson, Ernest's first spouse, and not the first woman to lose her husband to a family acquaintance, narrates *Mrs. Hemingway*. *I Have A Need For Solitude* is a straightforward personal statement, belying its title *Iceland* is a truly heartfelt expression of love, while the title song finds Chapin reflect on recent world events—turbulent as well as affirmative—and concludes that we should be positive regarding the future sufficient that 'one day we'll ride up that hill.' Chapin closes with *The Way I Feel* a truly optimistic road song.

As was the case with her Zoe debut *THE CALLING*, *THE AGE OF MIRACLES* was recorded in Tennessee and co-produced with keyboard wizard Matt Rollings (Lyle Lovett, Keith Urban). Furthermore many of the session players reprise their roles. They include Russ Kunkel (drums), Glenn Worf (bass), and Eric Darken (percussion), while *MIRACLES* also features Duke Levine (electric and acoustic guitar) and Dan Dugmore (steel and twelve-string guitar). What tomorrow will bring, thankfully, remains much of a mystery. Repeated reference to the winds that traverse our planet, the end of day and freedom are woven into this collection for good reason. On her twelfth album Chapin's lyrics have attained a new power and intensity, welcome to *THE AGE OF MIRACLES*. **AW** <http://www.marychapincarpenter.com/>



traditionalist, and let's face it, how many of those are still around these days? **PF** www.skilda.com

West Of Eden TRAVELOGUE

Zebra Art Records

ZAR 851

★★★★☆

The nomadic life of the wandering minstrel comes vividly to life on this the fifth release by the excellent Swedish band West Of Eden. This is an album that in many respects is a retrospective of their touring life and allows the band—Jenny Schaub (lead vocals, accordion, tin whistle), Martin Schaub playing the guitar, mandolin, keyboards, Kenneth Holmstrom on bass, Ola Karlevo on drums and bodhran, followed by David Ekh on electric guitar and Lars Broman playing the fiddle—to explore their rights of passage on the folk circuit.

Having toured extensively throughout Europe taking in Ireland and Scotland and soaking up both countries Celtic culture the band utilise a strong roots connection that is apparent from their use of predominantly acoustic instrumentation. Talking of which, the deceptively cool mandolin accompaniment on *Buttercup Meadow* brings to mind a performance by the sadly missed Louis McManus, of the Bushwackers Band. Meticulous, studied treatments, although not clinical in anyway, in how to play to a song's strength is the band's forte whether from flowing acoustic settings to pop-rock that wouldn't seem out of place on a recording by the Corrs. This is seriously 'easy listening music' and if there is any justice should be championed by the likes of Mike Harding or Terry Wogan. **PF** www.westofeden.com



Chris O'Brien LITTLE RED

Highway 26 Music

★★★★☆

Boston based folk songwriter's second solo outing

LITTLE RED is O'Brien's sophomore solo release, and was produced by Zack Hickman, bass man in Josh Ritter's band. The supporting players include guitarists Austin Nevins (Deb Talen, Edie Carey) and Lyle Brewer (Sarah Borges), percussionist Neil Cleary, drummer Liam Hurley (Josh Ritter) with boy-girl harmony vocals supplied by solo artists Mark Erelli and Antje Duvekot. Even Sean Staples (the Resophonics) was inspired to break out his mandolin for *LITTLE RED*. The album was mainly recorded at Hi-N-Dry Studio in Somerville, which was founded by the late Mark Sandman of Morphine.

Pedal steel, chiming electric guitar and a soaring vocal chorus propel *Carnival*, the urgent paced album opener, wherein, employing a fairground ride analogy, O'Brien's lyric explores relationships: 'I could be the last one who is holding on, Or I could just let go.' A pounding backbeat injects a similarly urgent tempo into the ensuing *Little Red Wagon*, with Charlie Rose exchanging his pedal steel for a banjo. On the third selection, *This Old Town*, O'Brien slows the pace and delivers at the outset a portrait of reclusive poet Emily Dickinson's 'picket fence' hometown of Amherst, Massachusetts. In the second verse Chris reflects on his Amherst high school years and in the next recalls his first hometown sweetheart.

Hurricane Love, finds him muse: 'damn that girl know how to kiss,' while the bluegrass-tinged *Maria* is the portrait of a similarly feisty woman. The little dress worn by



his *Hurricane Love* was 'red' and O'Brien's (sophomore album) colour of choice resurfaces in the funky sounding *Every Shade Of Red*. The autobiographical, and equally red, *Blood Like Yours*, closes the album. Therein Chris questions whether in time, like his father, he will succumb to alcohol addiction. In the course of this three minute long personal revelation the writer recalls how, at aged ten, he was deserted by one parent, a man he didn't see again for some two decades.

Warrants listening too and watching out for in the future, pegs O'Brien's current standing in the pantheon of Boston based folk songsmiths. **AW** <http://www.chrisobrienmusic.com/>

Tony Denikos ALREADY GONE

Tony Denikos Music

★★★★☆

A blue collar effort musically, the lyrics hardly scream 'original subject matter'

ALREADY GONE is this Maryland based musician's third release. He debuted with *NAKED AND SMILING* (2000)—a collection of songs penned during the previous two decades—and followed with *TIME TELLS TALES* (2003). Denikos and his band currently perform in and around Washington D.C. and throughout Maryland, with original material that runs the stylistic gamut of folk, blues and rock.

The focus in the opening number, *Big Easy Down*, is Hurricane Katrina and the City of New Orleans, while the title cut turns the spotlight on the export of jobs to Far East destinations. Lyrical venom is directed at the financial wizards of Wall Street in *Auction Block*. Sadly,



Dusty Relics - Re-issues & Compilations

stronger vehicle. That said, those lyrics lack the mystery and magic captured on SUSAN PILLSBURY. **AW**
<http://www.sunbeamrecords.com>

**The Hollies
MIDAS
TOUCH: THE
VERY BEST OF**
EMI 50999 608227
27

★★★★
The best—and
plenty of it

Don't be put off by the cover; behind the cheesy, golden sleeve is an impressive 48-track collection from one of Britain's most important bands. The Hollies were pop but with a folk-rock bent, gorgeous harmonies and jangling guitars, a sound which led to the formation of folk-rock super-group Crosby, Stills and Nash.

The tracks here touch all the usual bases, and there are many of them. From their earliest hits (*Just Like Me, Searchin'*) through a string of top 10 smashes, to self-penned gems (*King Midas In Reverse*, of which there's a brand new stereo mix) and Graham Nash's gentle *Butterfly*. Later, post-Nash, material includes the country-rock chug of *Long Cool Woman In A Black Dress*, along with iconic tracks *He Ain't Heavy* and *The Air That I Breathe*. Even later material includes the Billy Bremner/Will Birch song *Laughter Turns To Tears*.

The band's still going, albeit without singer Allan Clarke, and there are several new tracks including the autobiographical *Then, Now, Always* (*Dolphin Days*). Endless things you'll remember, and more besides. **ND**
www.hollies.co.uk

**Tim Hart and
Friends
MY VERY
FAVOURITE
NURSERY
RHYME
RECORD**
Park Records
PRKCD108
★★★★

A double-disc compilation ... not aimed just at kids

Christmas Eve 2009 sadly saw the passing of Tim Hart, who will probably best be remembered as a founding member of Steeleye Span or as part of his sublime duo with Maddy Prior. In fact it is the unusual pairing of Maddy's vocals along with one of Hart's 'friends' BJ Cole on pedal steel guitar on *Sing A Song Of Sixpence* that makes this a must buy for all completists of the folk-rock genre. Casting his net outside of the Steeleye framework (Maddy, Peter Knight, Bob Johnson and Rick Kemp) other musicians involved in the project include John Kirkpatrick, Davy Spillane, seriously! and Melanie Harrold.

As Tim mentions in his sleeve-notes, these albums (originally released as two separate recordings), were basically an antidote to the numerous rubbish releases of a similar ilk foisted on a gullible public

that didn't know any better. Of course the seam of songs (featuring deceptively 'catchy' melodies) such as *Lavender's Blue*, *Oranges And Lemons* and *London Bridge Is Falling Down* have a far darker significance if you care to dig a little into their history and unravelling these gems was always a feature of any Steeleye album at the time. John Dagnall and all at Park Records should be justifiably proud in re-releasing (on double disc), what was a labour of love for its protagonist and a fitting tribute to one of the enduring legends of the folk scene. **PF**
www.parkrecords.com

**Various Artists
JUKEBOX AT
THE LAST
CHANCE
SALOON**
Righteous
Psalms 23: 23
★★★★

One would
be hard pressed to doze off whilst
listening to this

This is a wholly instrumental album made up of tunes which could be heard on most jukeboxes in spit and sawdust honky-tonks, diners, greasy spoons and soda fountains back in the mid-1950s, when rock'n'roll was beginning to make its mark on the music scene. With a few exceptions, most of the selected tunes have a strong backbeat and variously feature electric guitar, honky-tonk piano, fiddle; steel and banjo taking centre stage. The names of some of the artists may have been forgotten despite them being extremely proficient musicians. But there are many who are still remembered, among them Jackie Phelps, a talented guitarist who enjoys the lion's share of the 23 tracks by having four of his recordings included in this collection. One of these, *Guitar Cannonball*, will be recognised instantly, as *The Wabash Cannonball* while the closing track, *Tennessee Strings* is a slowed down version of *Kentucky*. Other names which will be well known to those who have followed the music for any length of time include Billy Byrd, Arthur 'Guitar Boogie' Smith, Buddy Emmons and Shot Jackson, Herbie Remington, Hardrock Gunter, Joe Maphis, Leon McAuliffe and his Cimarron Boys, The Stanley Brothers, Ernest V. Stoneman and Link Davis.

There is a wide range of styles and tempos and a good blend of instruments ensuring that the listener is not lulled into a state of somnambulism! It is interesting to note that on Buddy Dee's *Country Rockin' And Flyin'* one will hear a young Eddie Cochran trying out some of the guitar licks which in time would make him something of a legend in rock'n'roll. One would be hard pressed to doze off while Allen Shelton is *Bending The Strings* on his banjo or when the frenetic fiddler, Buck Ryan, launches into *Nervous Breakdown*. If, by some remote

chance, the listener did manage to succumb to a quick nap, then Joe Maphis' blistering *Fire On The Strings* would be enough to rouse all but the dead, although Ernest V. Stoneman and the Stoneman Family with their breathtaking rendition of *Orange Blossom Breakdown* may even succeed in doing that.

Readers who may conclude that their collections are somewhat bereft of instrumental albums and would like a genuine slice of the type of music which featured prominently on countless jukeboxes before it was hi-jacked by rock'n'roll, may consider checking out *JUKEBOX AT THE LAST CHANCE SALOON*. It really does go some way into preserving the spirit of the age. **LK**
<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Jukebox-At-Last-Chance-Saloon/dp/B002XMGJFI>

**The Kentucky
Headhunters
AUTHORIZED
BOOTLEG:
LIVE, AGORA
BALLROOM,
CLEVELAND,
OHIO**
Mercury 800
13159-02
★★★★

A Kentucky based band, calling itself Itchy Brothers, enjoyed regional success through the 1970s. It recorded a relatively inexpensive demo tape, intended to be sold at gigs. A decade later, the band, having changed its name to the Kentucky Headhunters, hit Nashville like a tornado. Signed to Mercury Records, the band, comprising Fred Young (drums), Greg Martin (lead guitar), Ricky Lee Phelps (guitar and harmonica), Doug Phelps (bass) and Richard Young (rhythm guitar), released their debut album, *PICKIN' ON NASHVILLE*, in 1989. Doug and Ricky Lee Phelps, along with Richard Young, shared lead vocals, with the other two members offering vocal harmonies. Their music was raw, rowdy, exciting Southern rock and shortly after the album was released it rocketed up Billboard's Country Chart, peaking at number two. It remained on the charts for an incredible 147 weeks, achieved double platinum status, won a Grammy, plus the Best New Vocal Group Award from the Academy of Country Music in addition to three prestigious awards from the Country Music Association. Early 1990 saw the band touring, coast to coast, filling every venue they played with enthusiastic fans. On May 19 of that year they appeared at the Agora Ballroom in Cleveland, Ohio. The show was recorded but failed to get a release until now, the 20th Anniversary of the release of *PICKIN' ON NASHVILLE*.

The roar from the audience as the band took to the stage is deafening. The boys opened their set with a blistering rendition of the Hank Williams classic, *Honky Tonk Blues*, and during their performance they

delivered high octane versions of Don Gibson's *Oh Lonesome Me* and *Walk Softly On This Heart Of Mine*, a Bill Monroe original which, no doubt, would have left the Father of Bluegrass feeling somewhat bemused! The last two songs mentioned, along with *Rock And Roll Angel* and the catchy *Dumas Walker* proved to be successful singles from the album, and, not surprisingly, another five songs from their hugely successful debut were included in the performance, each one being met with cheers loud enough to tear the roof off the building. The Kentucky Headhunters were far more than just a noisy country rock band. Their close vocal harmonies on a number of their songs, notably, *Rag Top*, were truly impressive, but the boys loved to rock, and they did just that on Doug Sahn's *She's About A Mover*, which plays for just short of eight minutes and includes a relentless instrumental break in the middle which must surely have had every member of the audience on their feet, clapping, cheering and boogieing in the aisles. Since one of the band announced: 'There is only one rule tonight, and that is, there are no rules!' the audience took that literally and one can sense the electrifying atmosphere as the band delivered Larry Williams' frenetic *Dizzy Miss Lizzy*, a mind blowing, six minute reading of Robert Johnson's *Crossroads* and the number with which they finally closed the show, Norman Greenbaum's *Spirit In The Sky*. This song, along with the penultimate number, *Wishing Well*, gave the audience a small taste of what they could expect from the band's follow-up album, *ELECTRIC BARNYARD*, which was released in 1991.

The recording of this live album is excellent; almost as good as any studio recording. It captures the atmosphere which was generated that night in May, 1990 better than many other 'live' albums, and what is particularly pleasing is the fact that the applause after each song is not suddenly cut dead but leads seamlessly into the following song with no pregnant pauses in between. The Phelps Brothers left the band in 1992, but they continued to perform and record on small Indie labels and today, with four of the original members, the Kentucky Headhunters still rock on. **LK**

**Malcolm
Holcombe
ANOTHER
WISDOM**
Southbound SB264
★★★★
Songwriter proves
wise but far from
wizened.



ANOTHER WISDOM almost passed us by but we wised up and can now give this 2004 release its due. Holcombe has been turning out records at a steady pace since this one, his third, and throughout his