

the penultimate *One Left In The Chamber* were co-written with Texas singer-songwriter Matthew H. Skinner. Vocally, Lund sounds not unlike Tom Russell on the latter.

The opening shot of this opus *Gettin' Down On The Mountain* finds the backwoods narrator contemplate a time 'when the oil stops.' Come September, she was seduced by the concrete glamour of New York City leaving the (song's) narrator to muse about what might have been, whilst he tends his 'thousand acres' with 'the Rocky Mountains' as a backdrop. Corb pays tribute at 'ninety miles an hour on my German motorcycle' in *Mein Deutsches Motorrad*, and indulges in western swing, with the ensuing and lyrically light *Cows Around*. Lund's latest alcohol themed anthems arrive in the shape of *Drink It Like You Mean It* and album closer *Pour 'Em Kinda Strong*. Replete with Lund's introductory yodel *Priceless Antique Pistol Shoots Startled Owner* features a priceless artefact that 'leaves you just as dead.' In the album's principle sore thumb, Corb adopts a rockabilly stance as he casts a backward glance to his speed metal/punk band days with *The Gothest Girl I Can*. **Arthur Wood**

www.corblund.com

Jenee Halstead RAISED BY WOLVES

Self-Released

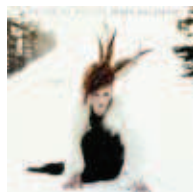
★★★★

Stunningly enigmatic 11-track release from east

Washington's creative songstress

Growing up in the high desert of Spokane, east Washington, Jenee's hippie parents allowed her to find her own direction in life and to dapple in creativity, and her latest release, *RAISED BY WOLVES*—which she has dedicated to her mother, Kathy Halstead—seems to be a product of that creative freedom. On the surface, it sounds like a pop record, with a beat box spine. Delve a little deeper, however and there's a wonderfully sprung riverbed of acoustically fused and fetchingly alternative sounds that complement perfectly her haunting and sultry toned vocals, telling poignant and personal stories along the way.

Like her 2008 debut of *THE RIVER GRACE*, this third release was produced by multi-instrumentalist, Evan Brubaker



(Rachel Harrington & The Knockouts; Edie Carey)—both he and Jenee co-wrote nine of the eleven tracks, after scrapping most of the previous for something a little more wild and favourable—and features the instrumental efforts of Danny Barnes (banjo), Joel Litwin (drums) and Colby Sanders (fobro) as well as Evan Brubaker on a monumental nine instruments, including mandolin, tenor guitar and mellotron.

The sultry and darkly composed *Havana Dress* cracks open proceedings, grabbing attention from its ominous beat box-led opening, whilst the mid-temp, skippy existence of *Rodeo Of Sadness* simplistically follows on, raw and textured by impressively played stringed sounds, yet cloaked in mystery. One of three favourites of mine on the album includes the infectious, guitar-led *So Far So Fast*—memorable, inspirational and musically rich with sounds, it's roped with hit potential; Jenee's vocals fittingly spot on—and the ambiently bubbling *Never Another*, inspired by American singer-songwriter, Elliott Smith's last moments provides another; Jenee's vocals taking on a more contemporary tone. Equally so, the beautifully sung title track *Raised By Wolves*, for me, oozes spiritual wonderment, imagination and beauty and easily provides the record with a highlight. Stunningly closing the album is the gently progressive *River Of Doubt*, which seems to call upon her childhood memories of nature; the memorable chordal patterns and vibrantly musical backdrop drawing the album to a climatic close.

For those who like a voice packed with an emotional charge, yet soft on the ears, as well as mesmerically told stories a little on the enigmatic side, then Jenee Halstead—made of utterly raw, singer-songwriting talent—will take you on an immensely enjoyable journey.

Emily Saxton

www.jeneehalstead.com

Grace Pettis TWO BIRDS

Blue Rock Artists

★★★★★

If you purchase only one album this year, TWO BIRDS is absolutely it!

Grace Pettis is a twenty-something troubadour who traverses the highways



and byways of our planet, earning tens of dollars annually, dispensing to those who listen to her magical musical elixir. There's a vast array of platitudes that illustrate the difficulties inherent in fashioning a sophomore recording. Grace's *TWO BIRDS* has resourcefully cleared that hurdle and then some. The essence of this collection, and for that matter Pettis' past, present and future canon, is encapsulated by the *TWO BIRDS* lines: 'And this dream that I am after, it won't leave me alone.' We listeners are the privileged beneficiaries of Grace's unbending reverie.

Recorded at Blue Rock Studio in Wimberley, Texas (as was her 2009 debut) Pettis is supported throughout this lyrically poetic, folk-rock collection by a coterie of Austin's finest players. Co-written with Colorado based singer-songwriter Megan Burt, the theme of leaving pervades *Moving On*, the urgently paced album opener, and the later *Abilene*. We learn in the second verse of the bittersweet latter that 'Daddy he drinks, sometimes he gets mean; and Mama's always been a timid little thing.' The sixteen year-old narrator, named Abilene, finds herself trapped in a domestic arrangement, which she finds intolerable.

Reason To Fall offers an invitation to love; dedicated to her father, Pierce, *Little Blue Bird* is that rarity—an optimistic and engaging road song, whilst the second Burt co-write *Murder Of Crows* is a tale of dark Wild West deeds. At birth it was titled *Yellow Apples*. Renamed *Lighthouse*, this beacon of accomplished writing tips its cap to folk traditions then adds a contemporary twist. Launched by: 'There was a maiden, loved a sailor' and lasting almost six-minutes, the description stone classic vastly undersells it. Robby Hecht furnishes a fits-like-a-glove duet vocal on the self-explanatory, melodically divine *Love You Staked Your Claim*. Another epistle from the road, the narrator in the upbeat *Edge Of The World* reflects: 'this is my life,' one where resistance is futile: 'And all for the music calling...calling me.'

The album closes with a trio of deeply personal reflections. Many listeners will relate to Halley's Comet which bears the credit—'For my parents'. Halley's Comet was last witnessed from Earth in 1986. Born the following year, Grace's parents parted before her teens. An elegiac masterpiece Halley's Comet is graced by countless stand-out lines including: 'But they can't blame me for longing for the

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country of my birth, before the border lines.' Launched by a snapshot of the past, *Ebb And Flow* segues to the present day as Grace pursues the 'All the taillights, setting out, and the headlights, coming home' life of a touring musician. The up-tempo, soulful closer *Don't You Worry None* doubles as a wonderfully positive antidote to the foregoing pairing, and to the emotionally intense fabric of TWO BIRDS. **Arthur Wood**

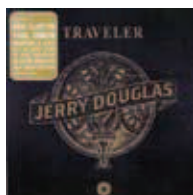
www.gracepettis.com

Jerry Douglas TRAVELER

Proper

★★★★

A master musician at work ...



The Dobro and Jerry Douglas are two words that just go together. You would have trouble finding a better player. I first came across him in the early 1980s when he played with the Whites. Most know him from his work with Alison Krauss & Union Station, or the acclaimed Transatlantic Sessions TV series. For years he was an A-team session musician, appearing on more than 2000 recordings with everyone from Gail Davies to Paul Simon, Garth Brooks to Ray Charles and Emmylou Harris to the Chieftains. In more recent years, when not working with Krauss, he leads his own band and every once in a while releases an album under his own name. This latest one shows that Douglas can play much more than just Dobro riffs with the best of them. Several celebrity guests grace this eclectic affair including Eric Clapton, Paul Simon, Munford & Sons, Marc Cohn, Keb' Mo' and inevitably Alison Krauss & Union Station.

Douglas plays many styles on this set, ranging from bluegrass to acoustic country to jazz and in between. He even offers a rare lead vocal on the opening *On A Monday*, taking the old Leadbelly tune out for a bluesy outing. He delves even deeper into blues territory with *Something You Got*, with a great vocal workout by Eric Clapton. Then comes a lighter touch with Paul Simon's *The Boxer*, with Mumford & Sons joining Simon and Douglas providing some quite inspired Dobro playing to put his own stamp on the well-known tune. The guests just keep popping up with Keb' Mo' adding a lazy, drawling vocal to *High Blood Pressure*, then comes Marc Cohn *Right On Time*, a laid-back ballad, a nicely textured masterpiece with some beautiful,

dreamy Dobro and nice interaction with the studio band.

So Here We Are is a tune that really rocks, with a great sounding melody, Viktor Krauss on bass underpins it solidly and Douglas plays some aggressive guitar. *Gone To Fortingall* is sweet with a Celtic vibe, Douglas and his Dobro work is quite exquisite, whilst *King Silkie* is a more traditional bluegrass tune with great banjo by Bela Fleck and driving fiddle. Douglas fully exploits the Dobro's resonant guitar sound, his aggressive touch, incredibly fast finger picking and deft use of the steel bar giving the instrument a bright, cutting tone-quality. Whether you're talking about blues, bluegrass, country or any type of acoustic music, when it comes to the Dobro there's no one more accomplished or technically masterful than Jerry Douglas. There is no box to put this super eclectic, blue-grassy, bluesy, jazzy, southern jam band material into. Might not be for you, but I give it a big thumbs up, Douglas really goes out on a limb to make something that is musical art. **Alan Cackett**

www.jerrydouglas.com

Jessica Ridley FIT TO BE TIED

Crystal Teardrop
Productions

★★★★

Promising collection of country-pop fused songs from the dreamy-eyed, fresh-faced Canadian



For Jessica Ridley—a green-eyed, dreaming songstress from Calgary, Alberta in western Canada—being a country singer was all she'd ever wanted to do, showing real potential from a very early age. But it was a chance meeting with her now manager/producer, Don Somerville whilst singing at the local church in her hometown that really set the wheels in motion, making her lifelong dream eventually become a reality. The success of her childhood fantasy comes in the form of her already acclaimed 13-track debut, *FIT TO BE TIED*—a delightful country-pop fused record of pleasant co-writes (*Because I'm Not, Home To Me*) and potential hits (*Play With You, Rain*).

Guitar-driven toe-tapper and title track *Fit To Be Tied* kicks off proceedings, with an energetic hook about being tied-up in love. *Hit And Run* follows on deliciously in

a memorable, Sara Evan-styled fashion, whilst chorally-driven *Flaming Red*—the first single taken from the album, about taking time out for herself—provides a thorough gem. The album also really accentuates her vocal talents, no more so than on the beautifully sung love ballad, *Velvet Sky*; Jessica delivering with utter, emotive bliss. *Make It Alright* too really stands out as a vocal gem; its catchy and infectious chorus lush with harmonies. The piano-led heartbreaker *Undone* closes the album with languid, simplistic effortlessness.

Jessica has bags full of potential and is not only one to watch, but is certainly a country artist well on her way up to join the likes of Taylor Swift, Jessica Andrews and Sara Evans near the top. Every track on the record could easily be the next hit for Jessica, and I for one can't wait to hear more material from her in the future.

Emily Saxton

www.jessicaridley.com

Kasey Chambers STORYBOOK

Sugar Hill Records

★★★★☆

Super covers album

Even though Australian singer Kasey Chambers is a fine songwriter in her own right, for her latest album release she has decided to do all covers and I have to say, what a terrific job she's done. I've listened to and reviewed many covers albums by various artists and there have been many a disappointing one where the artist just doesn't do justice to the class of songs chosen. In Kasey's case, she's nailed most of them; possibly helped by the fact that she has got such an incredible voice, never failing to send goose bumps down my spine on ballads and sad songs. The album opens with the bouncy *Happy Woman Blues* (Lucinda Williams) with its infectious beat, pedal steel solo and fun, lively vocals. Her voice is just wonderful on the Gram Parsons classic *Return Of The Grievous Angel*. It was almost as if this song was written for her type of voice.

Two more songs that just seem so right for her amazing voice are Suzanne Vega's *Luka* and a fantastic version of *True Colours*, which was a hit for Cyndi Lauper. The emotion and power of her vocals on the former is just mind-blowing; the latter done so gorgeously. Steve Earle's *Nothing But A*

