

## NEW RELEASES

### Honor Finnegan THE TINY LIFE

No Label

★★★☆☆

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could be mistaken  
for Christine Lavin's  
quirky little sister



Chicago raised, New York City based Honor Finnegan (vocal, ukulele) was one of the half-dozen New Folk Song Contest winners at this year's Kerrville Folk Festival. Honor lived in Ireland for much of the closing decade of last century where she released the cassette album LEARNING TO FLY in 1996. A decade later HUMAN HEART surfaced, followed by THE TINY LIFE the making of which was funded via Kickstarter.

Back in 2002 Cape Cod based Zoe Lewis was a New Folk winner. Born and raised on this side of the pond, now Cape Cod based, Lewis' (humorous) musical shtick is pure Joyce Grenfell, while Finnegan could easily be mistaken for Christine Lavin's quirky little sister—both are just over five feet tall, and share a refreshing offbeat sense of humour. The support players here include Honor's husband Carl Money (acoustic and electric guitar), plus Jeff Eyrich (upright bass), Eric Puente (drums, percussion), Paul Silverman (keyboards, chimes, organ), Catherine Miles (backing vocals), and Jay Mafale (acoustic guitar, shakers, hand-claps). The latter co-produced this album with Honor and Carl.

The bouncy title song launches the album wherein the 'tiny' obsessed narrator affirms: 'Everyone knows that love is the treasure that we're all searching for,' and it's followed by the Sam Cooke/Lou Adler/Herb Alpert collaboration *Wonderful World*—the (album's) only cover song. Another testament to love, the *We Are Hearts* melody soars skyward and swoops back to terra firma. *Life Is Short* is a slyly worded, cautionary black comedy—sic. 'A facelift gives you a permanent grim, You look like a freakin' alien'—that's summed up by: 'Whatever you do, whatever you try, You're gonna get old and you're gonna die.' The *Internet Junkie* narrator confesses: 'There's something on my back and it's worse than crack.' That latter, one of Honor's winning songs, mentions 'Facebook, the World Wide Monkey, e-mail, DSL and more' and includes a funky 'Google It' segment replete with a 1960s girlie chorus. Beware the contemporary ills that have

been visited (by computer techies) upon mankind!

The heartfelt *Pictures Of Snow* memorialises her grandmother's sister, now deceased, to whom Honor was close, while proof that Finnegan possesses a powerful set of tubes is confirmed throughout *Little Bird*. The melodically fluid *Content* reflects the narrator's happiness: 'It doesn't cost a cent to be sitting with the most adorable man,' while melancholic shadings pervade the ensuing *Undone*. Set in the subterranean world of trains, personal impatience bubbles to the surface in album closer *Waiting*. **Arthur Wood**

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

### Shannon & Heather Slaughter & County Clare ONE MORE ROAD

Elite Circle Music 02

★★★☆☆

More bluegrass ... with a touch of country



It seems that a new bluegrass band floats across my radar every other week. This outfit hails from Virginia and Shannon and his wife Heather show themselves to be skilled and highly distinctive lead vocalists ably supported by their band. Shannon plays guitar, Heather is on upright bass with John Boulware (fiddle), Ron Inscore (mandolin) and Casey Murray (banjo) plus guest players Rob Ickes (resophonic guitar), Tina Steffey (clawhammer banjo) and Mike Johnson (steel guitar). They mix in originals with a handful of old covers revived tastefully.

Shannon and Heather slay *If I Were A Carpenter*, the opening cut, and in doing so, reveal a secret in doing a cover—sometimes it's not about changing a song to reflect your personality, or 'making it your own,' it's simply a case of letting the song be front and centre—which they do rather well here. Shannon's songwriting comes very much into its own with such excellent numbers as *They Never Got The Chance*, a sad song about the lost life opportunities of those taken from us much too young. Heather's evocative voice draws you into the story and makes you care about the characters' lives. In stark contrast there is the fond tribute *When Scruggs Made Me A Star*, on which Shannon's throaty vocal is enhanced by the driving bluegrass arrangement utilising banjo, fiddle, mandolin and vocal harmonies. It

bounces right along, everybody bopping righteous and loose. They turn to a more traditional country sound for their revival of *Pass Me By*; Heather gives the song a straightforward, faithful reading with great interplay between fiddle and steel guitar. A good little album well worth seeking out.

**Alan Cackett**

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

### Sam Baker SAY GRACE

Music Road Records

★★★★★

An impressive 'cradle  
to grave' testament  
to life and faith



The sessions for Sam Baker's fourth release took place at South Austin's Cedar Creek Studio, with additions made in Nanton, Alberta and Nashville. Apart from Feast, which Baker (lead vocal, guitar) co-produced with long-time associate Tim Lorsch, the Itasca, Texas bred musician/songwriter steps up to the plate as producer on *SAY GRACE*. Apart from album closer *Go In Peace*, co-written with Liz Rose, Baker is the sole credited composer. The 20 support musicians can be divided into three categories. Lorsch, Mickey Grimm, Britt Savage and Sam's sibling Chris Baker-Davies have played on all his albums. Lloyd Maines, Joel Guzman, Gurf Morlix, Stephen Scott Baker, Steve Conn and Roxie Dean are returning contributors. Finally, there's the Austin area based newcomers Rick Richards, Drew Pressman, Chip Dolan, Oliver Steck, Radoslav Lorkovic, John Ross Silva, Carrie Elkin, Raina Rose and Billy Crockett, plus New York's Anthony da Costa. A mighty and talented brigade.

In creating 14 sonic landscapes, Baker employs 'no two the same' permutations of the instruments and voices. Opening with the title song, therein, in just over four minutes, haunted by her mother, we trace one woman's journey from the blush of just married to a time when: 'She looks at the wrinkles on the back of her hand, Rubs her finger where she wore a wedding band.' In *The Tattooed Woman* as a storm approaches the narrator muses: 'The Lord out wandering with his sheep, Oh so many souls to keep.'

Featuring five support instruments, Elkin accompanies Baker on the chorus to the symphonic *White Heat*. Ageing is again referenced, although it principally charts the death of Cagney's movie character in