

NEW RELEASES

minute, Celtic-tinged sweep of *Use It Up*, brooding and echoey. A work of art that unites McGovern's innocent vision, with thoroughly inventive roots music.

Nick Dalton

www.sadieandthehotheads.com

Susan Greenbaum **THIS LIFE**

Compass Records

★★★★★

Relative newcomer rewrites the standards for literate, hard-hitting singer-songwriters



Fragile, with perfect vocals on the slightly vulnerable side. It's a surprise to discover Greenbaum remains such a secret, with five albums behind her. Surrounding herself with top talent aids in her cause to break free of this secret status, her music veering from self-confessional, singer-songwriter fare with touches of bluegrass and country to strong elements of pop, with the potential to garner a solid radio hit (whatever that means anymore).

A quick review of her playmates helps to underline the overall quality of this music across 14 tracks, but one fact remains crystal clear: Greenbaum is a superb songwriter, a bewitching singer and a true presence. The first track is a crippler; an intimate, catch-up conversation between Greenbaum and her late, loving brother who helped set her on her new career path. With a turn of the back to her former big business self, his loss serving to point her compass back towards the things most important in her life, it's also a diary excerpt expressing undying gratitude. Although it's a no-win scenario to attempt to rhyme 'cancer' with anything, the inherent evil in the wake of this disease makes the mention all the more appropriate. One might quickly discount *Big* as mere novelty, especially following the tear-inducing *This Life*. Clearly a tongue-in-cheek fantasy about hitting the big-time, Greenbaum sings it with such breathless joy and passion; it can't help but grow on you. As silly as it may seem, this upbeat ditty soon becomes a favourite. Another highlight is *Penny On The Sidewalk*. With its simple acoustic guitar, electric piano and percussion, it provides an insightful look at luck and love. Reminiscent of an innocent childhood dream, this modern-day Pollyanna harnesses pure pop strengths to sell it, plus some stand-out B3 and stinging

guitar to help drive it home. From Disney character to seductress, Greenbaum reveals another side entirely with *Magic*—a call-to-arms to the bedroom, complete with slinky slide guitar and a chorus of backup singers to raunch up the feral fire. Another smart song is *Fireworks*—a rather complex arrangement featuring searing guitar from George Marinelli, solid percussion from husband Chris Parker and Mark T. Jordan's burbling B3. Some songs prove weaker fits but only because the others are so strong: *Scared To Sit Down* is an unsettling song revolving around the word 'hate' while *Walk In These Shoes* seems to waste high-energy, ringing guitars on a bit of a downer tune.

One of the album's high points comes in the form of *The Season*, featuring Greenbaum in great voice with lovely piano accompaniment by Jordan. Stuart Duncan's fiddle kick-starts *Hear No More*, lending a strong country edge while the Celtic-hued *On My Way* adds yet additional colours to her full palette. Bonus tracks can sometimes detract from the whole but here, they demonstrate another facet of an artist's talent. The Celtic-tinged *Virginia*, *The Home Of My Heart* has been adopted by the lover's state while *The Squirrel Song* is simply a goofy throwaway by drumming legend Chris, chronicling road kill with a light-hearted touch. Track this life-changing release down and call it your own.

Eric Thom

The Malingersers **THE LONELY YEARS**

Fat & Bulbous Record Company: FATHIP008

★★★★★

Still blazin' a trail for rockabilly and old time country blues



Joyously for those of us who love this kind of music The Malingersers have risen from the ashes of the Peterborough-based The Surgens who kicked up a storm around about London and the eastern counties for four years up to around about 2009, before deciding that some of them had seen enough of each other. The main players from the Surgens who have picked things up are brothers Kevin and Craig Murphy and double bass man Andrew Donovan and these three have now been joined by Steve Donovan on mandolin and banjo, fiddle player Tim Palmer and percussionist

John Moseley.

Kevin is given most credit for the songs and there is some strong material here. The opener *House Of Mine* has been issued as a single and is a yearning Hank Williams type number, with its core of what has happened, just about everything's gone. The second track *Lonely Years* is on a similar theme, as are a couple of the later tracks. This is country blues after all. However it is the rockabilly stuff I enjoyed the best and particularly *Maddie*, the imaginary girl of your dreams; the very cheery *Could You Believe* and *Want Me Back* which is very cleverly written and about a couple playing mind games with each other. The arrangement here catches the attention with the band in true 1950s and earlier style, answering back to the lead singer.

Some thoughtful philosophical stuff, particularly the four tracks at the end; *Down To The Sea* is a plea, wrapped up in a country theme, for protection of the environment. *Tweed Overcoat* runs for over five minutes and is a stirring tale of a now neglected old soul; *Drunken Angel* is back to Hank Williams territory and the near compulsory inclusion of a barfly song. The package is completed by a bit of a classic, *The Comic*; a sensitive song which very descriptively puts into words the dreads and depressive fears of those who have to stand on stage and make people laugh.

Asides that the new name is very different but maybe a bit dodgy and, if Sun Records were still in existence, they may have something to say about Fat and Bulbous' direct lift logo emblazoned, as Sun's was, across the top half of the record. The music is very enjoyable; East Anglia can share this band with the rest of us.

Paul Collins

www.themalingersers.co.uk

The Staves **DEAD & BORN & GROWN**

Atlantic Records

★★★★★

If rich three-part, female vocal harmonies is your favourite aural poison, you need The Staves



Following a quartet of EP releases, including one that the Watford-bred sisters recorded live at Cecil Sharp House, they deliver their full-blown twelve-song debut *DEAD & BORN & GROWN*, produced by father and son, Glyn and Ethan Johns. The

story goes that, individually, the Johns pursued the sisters with a view to taking them into the studio. The writing credits are shared jointly by the sisters—Emily (vocals, whistling), Jessica (vocals, acoustic and electric guitar, organ, vibraphone) and Camilla Staveley-Taylor (vocals, ukulele)—apart from *Gone Tomorrow* where Tom Billington's name is appended. Early incarnations of half of the DEAD & BORN & GROWN songs, including the co-write, appeared on the aforementioned EPs, while the rear of the liner booklet bears the credit: 'To Mum & Dad, for teaching us harmonies and how to go wisely and slow.' Vocal harmonies are where the sisters excel, and they replicate onstage what they achieved in the studio; more so, actually.

DEAD & BORN & GROWN begins with an a cappella rendition of the four-verse *Wisely & Slowly*, in the process delivering snapshots related to human interaction, and closing with the touchstone 'Troubles in tow, go wisely and slow.' The foregoing vocal cycle is repeated with organ accompaniment, followed by a drums and handclaps supported reprise of the opening verse. Subjectively their lyrics relate, in the main, to the often emotion filled boy/girl conundrum. 'I can't be married' is the retort one man receives in *The Long Run*, while *Snow* finds another dismissed as 'a little child' to which is added the resolute 'I will never belong to anyone.' As for the equally seasonal and mostly up-tempo *Winter Trees*, the events of a traumatic November night are recalled therein.

Marginally changing tack, *Pay Us No Mind* is a feminist manifesto complete with the F-word. The opening verse of *Tongue Behind My Teeth* hints at unease, if not restrained venom—'Patience is a virtue and mine with you is wearing thin'—that's further confirmed by the subsequent and repeated 'And I know it would do no good, but I'd hurt you if I could.' Following the closing number *Eagle Song*, a one-hundred second long hidden song surfaces. Thankfully the Johns stripped down production approach allows the three voices to 'do the singing,' including renditions of the already familiar *Gone Tomorrow*, *The Motherlode* and *Facing West*.

The Staves—imagine The Roches reincarnated, without the quirky lyrical edge. Their take on folk-rock isn't born of time-served adherence to tradition; rather it's a 21st century recall of the 1970s Laurel Canyon ethos—thanks to their parent's

record collection—merged, of course, with typical English restraint. Lyrically there are hints of subtlety, sadly no great intellectual depth (in time that may come), and certainly no conventional beginning—middle—end storytelling. While the latter would have enhanced the end result, darn they sound good, addictively so.

Arthur Wood

www.thestaves.com

Wayne Hancock RIDE

Bloodshot

★★★★

That rarest of 21st century country albums: it's full of genuine retro country music

Wayne 'the Train' Hancock doesn't like his music being referred to as 'retro.' Well, I'm sorry Mr. Hancock, but with my 45 years of experience in writing about music, to me there's only one way to describe the music on *RIDE*, and that is 'retro.' It's nothing to be embarrassed or ashamed about, but the fact is if you're 'fat' then you're 'fat,' if you're 'thin' then you're 'thin; and if you're 'retro' then swallow your pride and accept it. The ghost of Hank Williams hangs heavily over many of these tracks, but also you'll hear echoes of Chuck Berry, Ernest Tubb and even ol' Jimmie Rodgers. In fact, there's nothing here that I haven't heard a thousand times before. Some of the up-tempo numbers too often sound like honky-tonk retreads, but as he proves with *Best To Be Alone* he can deliver a sad-tinged ballad like few others, even it does sound like a long-lost Hank Sr. nugget. That is maybe the major drawback with Wayne 'the Train' and *RIDE*. I kept being distracted as his influences flashed across my mind, like the Chuck Berry guitar lines that drive across the opening *Ride*. Visions of ol' Chuck duck-walking across the stage wouldn't disappear. Then came Ernest Tubb walking the floor with his deep Texas drawl in *Fair Weather Blues*.

The rest of the CD features varied textures, with the mainstream country swing of *Home With My Baby*, the subdued rockabilly beat of *Cappuccino Boogie* and the Hank-styled *Lone Road Home* on which electric guitar playing is exemplary. The Austin-based singer is entirely convincing throughout. Production by Lloyd Maines is clean and perfectly captures the essence of yesteryear's country music with a



modern sheen that makes retro perfectly acceptable in 2013. **Alan Cackett**

www.bloodshotrecords.com

Buddy Mondlock THE MEMORY WALL

Sparkling Gap Music

★★★★☆

Buddy's subtle strategy is to allow five years between albums. Result, they're peppered with quality fare

On his latest musical outing, Mondlock's fifth, this Nashville-based son of Illinois is supported by Kenny Malone (drums, percussion), Dan Dugmore (pedal steel, Dobro, lap steel), Stuart Duncan (violin, mandolin, mandocello) plus, his school pal and regular touring companion Mike Lindauer (bass), while vocal harmonies are supplied by singer-songwriters Celeste Krenz and Melissa Greener. Mondlock's name is appended as composer to the 13 songs, half-a-dozen being co-writes. The opening opus *The Ugly One* is one of the latter; a collaboration with Galway-based musician-songwriter Parisch Browne—and it's a gem. References to the Native American world pervade the lyric, voiced by *The Ugly One* who is 'strangely formed' and spends his tribal life 'outside the fire.' That said; we learn of his numerous talents, mystical, artistic and medicinal, and how his legacy will be imprinted 'on the memory wall.' Guy Clark spotted Buddy's undoubted songwriting talent during a 1986 Kerrville Folk Festival Ballad Tree, and advised the young musician to move to Nashville. Guy's roles of staunch supporter and mentor gave way in time to co-writing partner. Their *The Holes You Leave* is chock full of wisdom, and jaw dropping lines—'All the news that's fit to fool you' which references a bundle of old newspapers, being a prime example.

Some Kind Of Hope, Crooked Scars written with English musician Richard Evans, *The Disappearing Girl* and *Let Me Go* trace the rise and fall of relationships, while the narrator in *Stone In My Pocket* hurtles 'through the modern age' on the interstate near Mount Shasta and yearns for a precious person 2000 miles away. Buddy's banjo and Stuart Duncan's violin imbue the latter melody with a folk feel. *A Canary's Song* was co-penned during the late 1980s when Buddy and Garth Brooks were the

