

...the new releases

Tracy Lawrence THE ROCK

Rocky Comfort Records

★★★★★

Possibly his strongest album to date

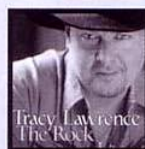
Tracy Lawrence has consistently released great albums ever since his superb debut, *STICKS AND STONES* back in 1991, but this album marks his first venture into inspirational country, and it is an absolute cracker. He has always had one of the best voices in country music, and whilst playing this CD in the house my wife commented 'nice to hear a real country voice,'—that sums it all up.

Every *Prayer* is pure Tracy Lawrence, his undiluted and wholesome vocals an absolute country music treat. The fiddle reigns supreme on the wonderful waltz *I'm Done*, and the fiddle is joined by some exceptional piano on the smooth yet powerful *The Book You Never Read* with rocking guitar to finish. The church organ-sound intro to the gorgeous title song which builds to a vocal crescendo with Tracy's strong and emotive voice backed superbly by some fine gospel singing. *Jesus Come Talk To Your Children* is a lively and rocking religious number, and *Say A Prayer* is the complete opposite as it is a sweet and lovely ballad sung as only Tracy can.

It was a wise decision by Tracy to use his road band for the first time in the studio when recording, as it gives the sound that extra bit of unity and tightness. This album also proves that it was well worth the wait for a Tracy Lawrence inspirational country album as it has him singing at his strongest emotionally—this could well be his best ever album!

DK

www.tracylawrence.com



the song that would really make me smile, that would show me the true honest side of married life and it came in the form of *Wild Wood* with Rennie's lyrics: 'You can growl at me or hit me with a rock, when you want to say I love you in the dark'. You can't beat that for marriage guidance now can you! *HONEY MOON* is a celebration of love and all the weird and wonderful things that come along with it. The things that drive you crazy, weigh you down and may finally kill you. This record is wonderful which is primarily down to the relationship that Brett and Rennie have. Yes their version of country music is gothic but no one makes records like they do and for that, they should be treasured always. **CN**

Tift Merritt BUCKINGHAM SOLO

Vella Recordings

★★★★

Live album that fails to make a lasting impact

The fact that the architecturally grand Radcliffe Centre, the venue for this live recording, is located on Church Street furnishes a clue as to its former purpose. This former place of worship was acquired by the University of Buckingham during the early 1980s and having been deconsecrated began its new life as a performance and lecture space. In a solo capacity, Tift played the venue twice last year. On May 10 and again on November 29, and this twelve-song disc is drawn from the latter performance.

Stripped of the familiar recording studio environment, her road band and studio session players, Merritt accompanies her voice, at turns, with acoustic guitar or grand piano. It's no surprise that the main focus of the material is last year's rather impressive *ANOTHER COUNTRY*. Caressing the piano keys, she opens the set with the title song. Moving to guitar, Tift follows with *Something To Me* and the cleverly-worded *Broken*, and returns to the keyboard for *Tender Branch*. Her waltz through the words and melodies of *ANOTHER COUNTRY* is completed, for the moment, by a guitar led rendition of *Keep You Happy*.

TAMBOURINE, Merritt's sophomore release, ended up with a Grammy Country Album of the Year nomination and three Americana Music Awards nominations. All the

more curious than that Merritt's label, Lost Highway, subsequently dropped her. From that collection she performs *Stray Paper*, followed by a piano version of *Still Pretending* and then *Good Hearted Man*. The latter is separated from the former pair by *Trouble Over Me*, the only selection from Tift's acclaimed 2002 debut disc *BRAMBLE ROSE*. Merritt returns to *ANOTHER COUNTRY* for *Morning Is My Destination* and draws this live set to a close with *I Live For You*, the country-flavoured bonus cut that surfaced on the 2001 remastered version of George Harrison's *ALL THINGS MUST PASS*. After her performance Tift offers the insight: 'I think that's my favourite song in the world.' Merritt ends her set with the previously unrecorded *Do Something Good*. She mentions at one point that the concert was delayed due to her late arrival at the venue, and while she is in fine voice throughout, the sole instrumental backdrop of acoustic guitar or piano, lacking variation, this disc failed to hold my attention from Glitterhouse Records GRCD688 beginning to end. **AW**
<http://tiftmerritt.com/>

Triflmore WORDS FROM NOTES

Peeriewys Music
(884501095433)

★★★★

Haunting lo-fi folk

Two distant souls, one in small town America, the other in the Shetland Islands, find they've something in common musically and lyrically and make a CD without ever meeting in person—welcome to the cyber world of Susan Rhea and Owen Goudie. This is no amateur affair, the picking guitar style of Goudie is faultlessly relaxing and the ethereal vocals of Rhea literally take you into the clouds. Her voice, already compared to Joni Mitchell at her best, blends magically with the picked notes as if they are one, hence perhaps the title *WORDS FROM NOTES*.

The album is a joy to relax to. If it could be faulted, then its uniformity is its partial undoing, so much so that it is hard to find a stand-out track, whilst similarly, it is hard to find a low point. If anything, the Jansch-like *Stranger*, which features Goudie on vocals, breaks the mould refreshingly. This minor trifling criticism apart, if you like a spot of classical guitar with a Celtic feel, then this is folk music for

your soul. Try *Illuminate* and *Goudfield* for tasters, if they float your boat, then it's green for go. **AJT**
<http://www.myspace.com/triflmore>

Two Dollar Bash LOST RIVER

Cannery Row CRR

0806

★★★★

This Berlin-based quartet offer warm and good-spirited roots music on their latest release, comprising fourteen all-original songs. One or two tracks fall a little flat but the group's organic, authentic sound provides plenty more moments to savour, taking in folk, country, blues and acoustic rock. Despite their current HQ in Germany, the band members originally hail from Scotland and France and have been playing together in various incarnations for fifteen years. All four—Mark Mulholland, Matt de Harp, Joe Armstrong and Tony Rose—contribute vocal harmonies and guitar lines, plus banjo from Mulholland, mandolin and harmonica from de Harp and bass courtesy of Armstrong.

The album opens with the traditional rootsy country of *Blue Skies Once Again*, with crisp rhythm guitar softened by lyrical harmonica, followed by understated folk with a nod to the gothic on *Man in Black*, featuring laconic, throwaway vocals. *Lonesome Whistle* is taken at a steady lope, a raw, backporch authenticity generated by the blend of banjo, mandolin and guitars. There's a light touch to the roots-rock and breezy harmonies of *Peace of Mind*, while the achingly pretty melody of *Lost River* is complemented by Mulholland's elegant lap steel and boasts an effortless, easygoing charm. Later, interspersed with a handful of unmemorable country-rock numbers, the band relish the infectious Celtic lilt of high-spirited drinking tune *Old Man's Song* and the cheery sing-along *Reprobate*.

There's certainly some slack here—this patchy fourteen-track album could and should have been turned into a much tauter ten-tracker—but the writing is solid if lacking in creative sparkle or true originality. Likeable throughout, however, this has the potential to impress any fan of uncontrived, richly-textured roots music. **HC**
www.twodollarbash.net



Vince Bell ONE MAN'S MUSIC

Self-released

★★★★

Rising from the ashes, Vince Bell will never desert his love for music



Featuring thirteen self-penned numbers and one cover, this CD has been released in conjunction with Bell's autobiography of the same name. That's not the only connection. The songs feature in an hour-long, one-man play about music and brain injury, also titled *ONE MAN'S MUSIC*, which he premiered during mid-April at Anderson Fair in Houston. It's worth mentioning at this juncture that the front cover of the book and the CD feature two of the 'main characters' in his life—the now retired 1968 Martin D-28 dreadnought guitar his constant and faithful companion for three decades, and, since the dawn of the new millennium, the Vince Bell Model Guitar, which he helped design.

A professional musician by intention since the age of nineteen, almost a quarter of a century elapsed before Bell's first CD was released. The title *PHOENIX* referenced his literal rising from ashes following a horrendous car accident over a decade earlier. Most individuals would have abandoned all thoughts of ever making music again. Vince Bell is not one of those. On *ONE MAN'S MUSIC*, Bell revisits seven Phoenix songs, including Houston musician Gary Burgess' *Frankenstein*—sadly society reviles misfits discounting the possibility that a caring person may lie inside. There are also two cuts each from Vince's subsequent releases 1999's *TEXAS PLATES* and 2001's *LIVE IN TEXAS*.

If you've been paying attention, you'll have figured there are three new songs. A pivotal and victorious moment, *Pair Of Dice* was the first song completed fifteen months after Bell's Christmas week 1982 accident. While years of painful recovery lay ahead, it was a precious green light—he had not deserted his music, nor had music deserted Vince. The lyrics are reproduced in the chapter titled *Music School*. Based around Vince's song *Bermuda Triangle*, during 1980 a ballet of the same name was performed by Houston's Space Dance Theatre. Lyrically a dreamy fantasy, this is the first occasion the song has appeared on an official release. This disc closes with the album title song, the lyric reflecting Bell's approach to life: 'One man's music plays like one man's heart. There is no giving in right from the start.'

Recorded in Los Angeles at Ned's Studio, Vince's voice and acoustic guitar are accompanied by Ned Albright on Steinway grand piano. Elsewhere, the Phoenix songs *Mirror*, *Mirror* and *The Beast* find a recovering Bell poetically wrestling with ghosts. Recast in this acoustic duo format, the old and new songs simply sparkle.

Ladies and gentleman I give you *ONE MAN'S MUSIC*, a testament to Vince Bell's tenacity and vision. **AW**
www.vincebell.com