

MAVERICK

CD REVIEWS - THE NEW RELEASES

forgiven for thinking the band are right with you in the room performing live. From *My Seat At The Bar* a great folk-country song sees the talented singer Beth Rowley join Mark on lead vocals as their voices complement each other perfectly. This is definitely one of the gems on this splendid album. *Egyptian Cotton* is a slow song that sounds like it has been dug out of the music archives with Mark's voice gravelly and raw.

Glass Eyes is a high octane song with a definite rock feel that would not sound out of place in the singles charts where it could be compared to music by Kasabian or the Raveonettes. *Ten Paces* sounds like it has been taken straight off the soundtrack to *True Blood*. Mark's lead vocals on this song could definitely give Jace Everett a run for this money with phenomenal accompaniment. *Funny Way Of Wining* is another fast paced rock/country song. *Leaves*, which brings the album to an amazing close is another really atmospheric song that suits its position on the album. Rousing and anthemic this is the kind of song you can imagine thousands singing along to a concert. This album is rich in lyrical content, stunning instrumentation and striking vocals. It is hard to compare Howlin' Lord to any one else as they are so unique. At times there are hints of Jack White and Justin Townes Earle. **Sara Hunt**
<http://www.myspace.com/howlinlord>

Israel Nash Gripka BARN DOORS & CONCRETE FLOORS

Self-released

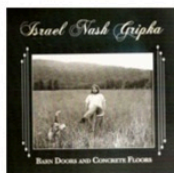
★★★★☆

Here's a grab-bag of songs to listen to when you need a pick-me up

BARN DOORS & CONCRETE FLOORS is Ozark Mountains, Missouri-bred Gripka's second solo release. Leaving the peaks and the rural green grandeur for a forest of impersonal concrete Big Apple skyscrapers, curiously, Israel's debut disc was titled *NEW YORK CITY* (2009). The hirsute son of a southern Baptist minister, Gripka's back to nature sophomore album was recorded in an isolated barn in Upper New York state's Catskill Mountains—hence the album title. This collection was produced by drummer Steve Shelley (Sonic Youth) and a gaggle of players from New York indie roots rock bands support, including Joey McClellan (guitar, bass, slide guitar), Eric Swanson (bass, mandolin), Jason Crosby (keyboards) and Brendon Anthony (guitar, banjo, fiddle).

Gripka's song *Baltimore* appeared on the *HOMEWARD BOUND* contemporary folk-rock themed cover disc that accompanied the April 2011 issue of *UNCUT*. Here, it's the seventh of eleven Gripka penned originals that grace *BARN DOORS & CONCRETE FLOORS*. For me, the general thrust of Israel's sophomore songs is captured by 'women and pain they never wait.' In that regard, lyrically, this album is a consistently open vein. The foregoing phrase appears in the penultimate number *Bellwether Ballad* (*Oh Missouri*), *Bellwether* being a reference to Missouri's reputation in American presidential elections for consistently indicating whether the next incumbent will be Democrat or Republican. *Bellwether Ballad* is the album's only truly stripped-down production, thus allowing the song to breathe—Gripka's acoustic guitar and harmonica support his voice, aided by subdued contributions from Shelley and McClellan. As for the storyline, the narrator relates that his hopes of marrying the farm owner's daughter have been dashed.

Fool's Gold is a play on the saying all that glitters, while employing traditional folk song themes, in *Drown*, a hardscrabble farmer's son describes his upbringing as 'back then it was only living at best' and aged eighteen (he) leaves home. Initially finding work in a Colorado coal mine, ensuing events include his mother's passing, a worker's strike, a move east, an affair with a married woman, (marriage to Roberta Jean?) and, ultimately, an existence filled with personal depression. Sonically, the dense swampy *Louisiana* smacks of a union of the Band's rural ethic and Rolling Stones swagger, as the narrator portrays a wayward woman of his past acquaintance—"She'll take the bedroom and she'll give you the floor." The narrator in *Black And Blue* states at the outset that as far as his immediate male descendants are concerned he's not like them—sic. 'Sometimes the apples it falls far from the tree.' As for what transpires across three verses, the main character relates that taking lessons in the school of personal experience is best. Containing interesting turns of phrase, Gripka's eleven song *BARN DOORS & CONCRETE FLOORS* is a marriage of folk, country, gospel and rock influences. **Arthur Wood**
<http://www.israelgripka.com/>



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