

NEW RELEASES

drawn in pencil. At the outset, Connor and Hallie sing: 'Oh, what great potential; so much can fit in this frame of pencil, once you commit.' By the couple's twilight years, that refrain becomes: 'But the empty frame, each days it changes, as their life slide show rearranges. Oh, what great memories; so much they fit in this frame of pencil, without touching it.' Frankly, *Pencil Frame* is an amazingly accomplished and mature song for a twenty-something to have created.

'Freedom is flying for those who dare,' is the summation that underpins the almost six-minute long, *The Bird*; a tension-filled tale wherein a trapeze artist achieves precisely that ideal. New England writers, and Mainers in particular, have displayed a penchant for natural world-word portraits, and *Red-Winged Blackbird* fulfils that tradition. The ensuing *Western Wind* is a road song; a genre normally possessing an 'Oh, woe is me' slant. Connor's composition is a joyous travelogue wherein, with Fall approaching, he traverses a continent to witness New England's 'big red.' Waltz-paced, toward the close of *Hold Your Breath*, palpable tension pervades the lyric, and *WHERE OCEAN MEETS LAND* closes with *Mountain Song*. Inspired by French novelist, essayist, poet, and short story writer, Rene Daumal's poem, Garvey's lyric explores the 'because it's there' human compulsion to ascend mountains. **Arthur Wood**

www.connorgarveysongs.com

Highway Ghosts BEYOND ALL HELP

Dedham Street Music

★★★★

Quality Americana
rock mix Boston
style



Some really enduring and original songwriting, distinctive vocals and very good musicianship—what more could you want? This is Highway Ghosts' second album; *AFTER ALL OF THIS TIME* came out a couple of years ago and caught a lot of US East Coast attention without a big breakout. The first album was good but this one is better, packed with memorable tunes that can enjoyably be replayed over and over again. All twelve tracks are written by members of the band with guitarist and lead vocalist, David DeLuca heading up the honours board. DeLuca's *Alone* is the lead off track—a haunting

tale of a lovelorn guy made to look a bit of a fool by a girl he clearly doted on. The second track, jointly penned by DeLuca and lead guitarist, Dan Cody, continues on a similar theme, *Losing Harmony* is however more about a relationship gone permanently bad.

DeLuca can write some fairly dark songs: *Can't Put Me Away* is the insistent tale of innocence in regard to the murder of a guy who had been messing around with the singer's girl and was subsequently found in a mine shaft, and *Done Before* is a plea from the hospital bedside for the survival of a partner near to death. My favourite tracks are the bluesy *Laurie*, and the more upbeat *Nothing's Changed* and *Please Don't Run Away*. The latter is self-explanatory; *Laurie* is another joint DeLuca/Cody effort and tells of a girl treated very badly by her, now departed, chosen partner and the singer wanting to help her through her strife; *Nothing's Changed* is meeting up again after both have been through now broken relationships. Undeniably Eagles sounding, not a lot wrong with that, and probably a bit dated, although there is a school of thought, which says that this music never dates, and I prefer to go with that. One thing is for sure and that is that this band and the music they write and play is undeniably good. **Paul Collins**

www.highwayghosts.com

Joanne Shaw Taylor ALMOST ALWAYS NEVER

RUF Records RUF1181

★★★★

*This Lady sings the
blues and plays them better than most*

Young Joanne Shaw Taylor is not only treated as an equal in what might be the most snobbish of musical genres but genuinely revered by many much older guitarists and her third album could well be the one that attracts the ears of big league promoters across the Atlantic Ocean. Joanne's last album, *DIAMONDS IN THE DIRT* was generally perceived to be career defining but *ALMOST ALWAYS NEVER* actually starts where that album left off. With the aid of some excellent production work from Mike McCarthy, Joanne Shaw Taylor throws down a gauntlet to the rest of the burgeoning British blues-rock scene.

Soul Station, which opens the album, has all the hallmarks of a timeless classic,



and *Beautifully Broken* which follows is a breathy heartbreaker with a Rhodes organ complementing the nicely choppy guitar breaks, before Joanne slides in her own trademark fluid solos. Whilst Joanne was originally billed as a teenage guitar prodigy, it's her maturing vocals on *ALMOST ALWAYS NEVER* that have impressed me the most, although her guitar playing is still astounding! On this album she sounds as if she could have been the offspring of an illicit union between Rory Gallagher and Maggie Bell as her voice has a lived-in richness to it that is perfect for the blues, but it's also clear and smooth enough to cross over onto the commercial radio stations.

Several songs are definitely strong enough for radio play with *Jealousy* being absolutely perfect for a late night when you've had one too many alcoholic beverages as it will induce even the toughest of masculine souls to shed a tear. *Tied And Bound* isn't as risqué as the title might suggest but of a tale of a shattered romance, and Joanne appears to make her guitar growl during the choruses, which is really impressive. *ALMOST ALWAYS NEVER* has been a pleasant surprise as I didn't expect this daughter of the Black Country to be able to match the heady heights she achieved only two years ago with *DIAMOND IN THE DIRT* but, after repeated listening in and out of the car, I think she's actually surpassed that award winning album.

Alan Harrison

www.joanneshawtaylor.com

Joel Rafael AMERICA COME HOME

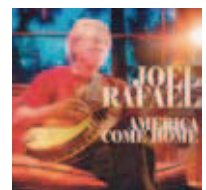
Inside Recordings

★★★★☆

*Old and brand
spanking new,
original or cover,
here is a magnificent song bag*

In the final verse of the already familiar Joel Rafael/Woody Guthrie co-write *Dance Around My Atom Fire*, this California based musician sings with conviction: 'Warfare is not the settlement; bloodshed is not the element; shake hands and work together; dance around the atom fire.' 2012 marks the 100th anniversary of Guthrie's birth and the song previously graced Rafael's Oklahoman troubadour tribute *WOODYBOYE* (2005).

The latter collaboration opens



this twelve-song collection wherein Rafael revisits a further quartet of his compositions. By any standard you'd care to construct, nothing need be said regarding *America Come Home* other than it's a classic song and an impassioned plea to his countrymen to make America mighty once again. David Crosby and Graham Nash add harmony vocals to this latest incarnation, which debuted on THE JOEL RAFAEL BAND (1994) as did, *I Can't Feel Your Love* and this album's penultimate selection *Goldmine*. The magnificently melodious *Meanwhile The Rain* hails from Joel's sophomore set OLD WOOD BARN (1996).

Joel (acoustic guitar, vocals) is accompanied throughout AMERICA COME HOME by Jackson Browne band alumni, Mark Goldenberg (electric guitar, B3 organ) and Kevin McCormick (bass), plus long-time Crosby sideman Steve Distanislao (drums) and the fits-like-a-glove vocal tones of Beth Fitchet-Wood. A member of 1970's California rock band Honk, Beth has contributed to albums by Jackson Browne, Jennifer Warnes and Jack Tempchin. In the AMERICA COME HOME cover song department, *Go Tell The Savior*, penned forty years ago by the late, great Jack Hardy, resurfaced on THE FOLK BROTHERS (2008); Jack's collaboration with long-time friend David Massengill. Joel's country tinged reading finds an errant son contemplating an uncertain future: 'And the mornin' just might find me, halfway to hell.' The other cover song *Singing In The Streets* was composed by Jack Tempchin.

The Kerouac connection apart, in 1981 Rafael released an album titled DHARMA BUMS, and a song bearing that title is included here. Goldenberg's electric guitar intro possesses real bite, whilst Rafael's lyric moves on to celebrate human endeavour. An up-tempo delight and fall celebration that anticipates the impending 'freeze,' *Indian Summer*—co-written with David O' Brien—also offers the environmental ideal, '...The water in the river is a mirror of the sky...' Midway through Joel's melancholic *Runaway Girl* the narrator intones, '...We hoped it would work out for the best.' Relative to life, *Within Your Graces*—to all intents a love ode, co-written with Rebecca Unger—and the reflective closing selection *Racing And Chasing The Sun* are each subtly infused with a mystical undercurrent. **Arthur Wood**
www.joelrafael.com

Eamon Friel THE STREETS FORGET

Thran Records

★★★★

Another perceptive collection of relatable life vignettes by Friel



Born in London 'a few years ago' to Irish parents, Friel has resided in Londonderry since the age of six and these days, is a respected broadcaster on BBC's Radio Ulster and Radio Foyle. This eleven-track album is his sixth solo release, and opens with the event filled childhood recollection *All The Fun Of The Fair*. The narrator's first utterance '...It's where I wanted to be...' sets the scene and, joined by two chums, the trio head for the bright lights of the Daisyfield on the edge of town. By the close, the darkness brought to the fair by an earthbound power failure furnishes the revelations that '...millions of stars...' light the night sky. *Forget The Fandango* is a rousing foot-tapper, whilst the later and inspirational *Jerusalem Today* counsels for the demise of Babylon—Blake's *Jerusalem* was Friel's template. Both songs hail from his musical comedy, The Music Makers which made its world premiere in Londonderry during late 2010.

Featuring the contrary characters Upside Down and Outside In, *On A Lullaby* is precisely what it claims to be on the box. Inspired by the title song lyric, an autumnal street scene graces the front of the liner booklet. Wry intricate wordplay is woven into the seven verses that constitute the humorous *The Man Of Few Words*. Having referenced the beauty of a clear, star-lit night sky in the opening song and autumn days in the title song, *Cygnus The Swan* focuses upon the firmament at the same time of day and year.

In the liner booklet Friel reveals that the encounter which unfolds in *Better The Devil You Know* occurred '...on a hill behind Derry called Sheriff's Mountain...' The seasonal *Again For The First Time* finds the mature in years narrator revelling in childlike innocence at the rediscovery of a natural world that has been once more carpeted in snow. Set in a Reno, Nevada gambling den, the closing selection *Rock And Roll Ballads* is a sly commentary on the harsh realities of the music business and finds a former headlining musician reflecting upon the true cost of fame as well as the slow demise of his

performing career.

Eddie O'Donnell (guitar, mandolin, banjo, piano, organ, whistle) is credited with arranging Friel's songs, and there's additional support throughout THE STREETS FORGET from permutations of Norman Doherty (guitar), Marie Clarke (accordion), Tracey McRory (fiddle), Ciaran O'Donnell (bass), Liam Bradley (drums, percussion), Marc Gallagher (recorder), Seamus O'Kane (bodhran), Percy Robinson (Dobro), Frank D Robinson (saxophone) and The Rathmore Four (backing vocals).

Arthur Wood

www.eamonfriel.com

Kenny Selcer DON'T FORGET ABOUT ME

Touch the
Sky TTS 1012

★★★★

A great discovery which I urge you to seek out



It never ceases to surprise me some of the musical gems that drop through my letterbox quite unexpectedly. This album by Kenny Selcer is a good example. I'll be honest, when I first opened it I hardly took any notice and just placed it amongst the growing pile of CDs to try and listen to one day if time allowed. A few weeks later I was looking for another CD and I took a second look at Kenny's album and decided to have a quick listen to the first track. Just over an hour later the CD finished and I had no hesitation in playing it again, all thoughts about what I was doing or going to do blown out the window as I relaxed with a steaming hot cup of tea and really listened to Kenny Selcer. The songs, all self-penned were slowly insinuating into my mind, the musical accompaniment impressing with its clarity and quality and Kenny's vocals sounding like a long lost friend that I'd not heard from in many a year. Yet until I played this album the first time, I didn't know Kenny Selcer from Adam

I can tell you that these fifteen songs were written over a long period of time, one going back to 1994, a few from some ten years ago and others from 2011. Regardless of when they dated from, there's a continuity that you don't get with most albums these days. The names of the accompanying musicians meant nothing to me, yet the musical arrangements and musicianship is nothing short of inspired. Clean and clear picking,