

drums, percussion and bass there is nothing more than authentic country style guitar, crying steel, fiddle and slip-note piano. Unfortunately, as happens rather often with this particular label, none of the musicians or background vocalists are credited, but this does not detract from the fact that, whoever they are, they understand the music and do the artist proud. Secondly, there is the material. This is good, solid country mixing up-tempo shuffles with slower numbers which allow those who might wish to take to the dance floor the opportunity to do so either to two-step around or dance cheek to cheek. In the best honky-tonk tradition there are beer drinking songs, songs of lost love, advice to lovers on how not to let love slip away, futile hopes that a lost love may relent and come back and of course, the cynical, 'see if I care' attitude from those who sit in a darkened corner of the bar adding a tear or two to whatever it is that they hope to drown their sorrows in. The opening cut, *Wild Turkey And 7 Up* is as country as you please and comes from Curt Ryle, a man who knows what country music is all about. Kathy Louvin, the daughter of the late Ira Louvin, has penned many great country songs for some major names and here she joins forces with Mark Collie to gift Davis with *Down, Down, Down*. The names of Haggard and Jones have been dragged into countless songs over the years and they are dredged up once again on *Hurt Like Haggard and Cry Like Jones*, which, melodically, seems to have borrowed rather liberally from the classic *Six Days On The Road* but will still go down well during a live performance in every spit and sawdust joint it is sung and played. Hank Cochran, now a patriarch within the songwriting community, provides *That Comin' Back Look*, one of the highlights of the album.

Lynn Davis is a competent vocalist who clearly understands and appreciates a more traditional approach to country music. He is not a particularly distinctive vocal stylist but he handles the material which

has been offered to him well. He should, however, have left the closing track, *Peace In The Valley*, well alone partly because it has been done so much better by many others in the past and partly because he displays a few weaknesses in his own vocals by going off key now and then and failing to sound very convincing. That aside, *WILD TURKEY & 7 UP* is deserving of a place in the collections of those who like their country without frills and fancies, served up in a way that it used to be before it was hijacked by those whose only real interest in it was the greenback dollar. **LB**
elgatolyn@aol.com

Morgan Myles MILESTONE

Self-released

★★★★★

Nice independent

release from

Nashville that is

love-focused but

gritty, featuring powerful vocals

A beautiful Nashville-grown talent, gutsy vocals that hit Dixie Chicks notes and grind at the Kelly Clarkson pop love ballad. This is a stunning collection of songs that inspire and agitate some of those feelings dwelling within. The first song is most definitely one of the strongest on the album. Titled *Just Lost Me* it's about letting go of someone, and walking away. The driving guitars and drums on this track just empower that voice, that burns with power and grit: 'You can't let me escape you, do you know what you're putting me through. If it's a game that you're playin', guess what you're losin'—you just lost me.' The following song is a little more heavy-hearted, and the songs continue along this line—focusing on love and all its intricacies. The recording isn't of amazing quality, especially on the vocals, but contains the grit and grime of a small recording, and can be seen as a positive bearing to this album. I really like this—Morgan's vocals are inspiring, the songs are well written and the musicianship throughout the album, especially percussion and guitars are very impressive. Another fine talent to



come from the Nashville scene. **LB**
www.morganmylesmusic.com

Nell Bryden LIVE FROM IRAQ

157 Records

★★★★★

Heart warming
album as

incredible singer

Nell performs to soldiers in Iraq

Nell performed outstanding shows in Iraq to American and British troops that can be heard on this heart-warming album. Nell has an incredibly strong and powerful voice, and she demonstrates on each song of how in control she is. The three band members are terrific, regardless of the fact they had very little time to practise and rehearse. Despite playing to hundreds while anticipating for an evacuation siren to sound, Nell and her three musicians play boldly and fiercely. Hearing these four talented musicians perform so well makes me incredibly eager to watch them live, as the troops in the background scream and whistle at the marvellous show they are putting on. Utterly brilliant. **CB**
www.nellbryden.com



Nothin' Fancy LORD BLESS THIS HOUSE

Pinecastle Records
PRC 1162

★★★★★

Sung with such conviction and quality, this is a band which sticks two fingers up to the current music produced by mainstream Nashville and says we don't give a damn about your preference of sidelining quality for the purpose of making money.

Comprising of twelve songs, this is bluegrass at its very finest. With a dream-like start and containing some harmonies which seem to be influenced by the Louvin Brothers,

Heart That Will Never Break Again includes in its entirety some sublime banjo picking which at no point does it become overbearing and therefore ruining the harmonies. The latter



point being a sign of a quality and talented band, *Let Me Catch A Fish* continues to show evidence that what Nothin' Fancy are a band certainly up there for consideration of being pure brilliance. Although I am an out-and-out fan of the banjo, it has to be played to a good enough quality in order for me to listen to any track. The song in question by no means fails in this effort to demonstrate that a quality banjo picker is part of the band. Having heard many versions of it before, it is always a treat to listen to a rendition of *Peace In The Valley* and in the case of this band they have turned it from a revivalist, inspirational song into a bluegrass track and I absolutely love it. Nothin' Fancy have breathed a whole new interpretation into this traditional track that if other bands discover of its existence then maybe further interpretations would be possible.

No matter what occurs, further success will definitely come the way of Nothin' Fancy due to this album; it really is a treat which has to be heard to be believed. **RH**
www.nothingfancybluegrass.com

Peatbog Faeries LIVE

Peatbog Records

★

Disappointing

cacophony

of noise

masquerading as music

Recorded north—Queens Hall, Edinburgh—and south—Durham Gala Theatre—of the border during the band's 2008 UK tour, with a running time just seconds short of seventy-six minutes, the eleven numbers featured are drawn from this band's handful of studio releases. These days this Western Isles based six-piece Celtic fusion band, founded in 1994, is augmented by a four-piece brass section that goes by the *nom de plume* the Wayward Boys. The latter combo adds, on occasions, a jazz/soul edge to the sound generated by the band's back line of electric guitar, keyboards, bass and drums.

Peter Morrison (bagpipes, whistles) is by far the major contributor of original material with eight live credits beginning with album opener *The Anthropologist* taken from 2005's *CROFTWORK*. It's hardly surprising that practically half the music on *LIVE* is drawn from the band's most recent studio release 2007's *WHAT MEN DESERVE TO LOSE*, track two being *The Invergarry Blues* the first of two of Adam Sutherland (fiddle) originals. Morrison's *The Locks And Rocks Reel*, the opening track from the aforementioned release follows, and the band move on with his *Friend Of Crazy Joe* from the same collection.

With nary a word wasted on lyrics the toe tapping instrumental rhythms—read 'noise only'—generated by the ten players finds them barely drawing breath before tearing into *Wacko King Hako* from 2003's *WELCOME TO DUN VEGAS*. *Still Drunk In The Morning* is the fourth *WHAT MEN DESERVE TO LOSE* selection; at twenty



Martina McBride

SHINE

RCA 88697-34190-2

★★★★★

Martina's powerhouse vocals shine like never before

Despite the chart success and huge album sales by the likes of Shania Twain, Faith Hill, Carrie Underwood and Taylor Swift, the undisputed queen of today's pop-country is the diminutive Martina McBride. In a world of artists struggling for a focused direction or delivering spotty material, Martina never fails to hit the creative mark. Most of the songs here fairly crackle with emotion. It's her ability to adapt to various arrangements with consistent sensitivity that separates Martina from her peers. You can hear her sweet voice on songs like *Sunny Side Up* and *Don't Cost A Dime*. Martina also has a talent for singing heartfelt lyrics with emotional flair as on *I'm Trying* and *I Just Call You Mine*. Her vocals are sleek, and they shine through each song.

Possessing one of the most expressive, powerful voices in any genre of music, Martina draws you into the compelling and emotional heart of *Lies*. It is not the kind of song you'd expect to find on a country album. Lyrically deep and moving with a wondrous piano weaving in and out of the background, it is just one of the many highlights. Her intelligence, compassion, confidence and spunk hints at more pop-laden sounds on *You're Not Leaving Me* and *Ride* with dynamic rock-styled electric guitar, while *Wild Rebel Rose* is a lovely heartbreaking composition with a realistic tale that hits deep into the soul. It is arranged with softly-plucked mandolin, sweeping pedal steel and powerful electric lead as the drama builds. It is a setting that inspires a strong performance. Equally as impressive is *Walk Away*, a more typical McBride big-ballad performance that will send those goose-bumps running up your spine.

The girl has the chops; a diva who stands up there alongside all of the pop greats. You just cannot fault the quality. Forget musical genre, country tradition and all the other jargon that gets in the way and sit back and marvel at the sheer musical joy of this album. **AC**
www.martinamcbride.com



...the new releases

seconds over eighteen minutes in terms of its duration—get your kaftan out man, for 1960s style band member solos—there's a reprise of *The Dancing Feet Set* from the Faeries' Greenrux Records 1996 debut MELLOWOSITY, and at just short of ten minutes follow with Sutherland's second selection, *Decisions Decisions / Kevin O'Neill Of Rutherglen*.

It appears that FAERIE STORIES, a 2001 Greenrux release, is highly rated by Peatbog Faeries' fans and from that set *Folk Police* is followed by *Caberdron*, and the band winds down with *All About Windmills* the closing track on CROFTWORK. Boy, was I relieved when silence prevailed.....

According to the band's web site, *There's A Girl Behind The Bar Who Thinks She's Garbo* should appear on this release, whereas *Decisions Decisions / Kevin O'Neill Of Rutherglen* takes its place on the finished CD. So you want parody? Going nowhere special, this lyric simply goes round and round in my head: 'I'm just down from the Isle of Skye, I'm no very big but I'm awful shy, All the lassies shout as I walk by, Who's a Peatbog Faerie.' A reluctant but generous 1 out of 10. **AW**
www.peatbogfaeries.com

Pete Wernick & Flexigrass

WHAT THE
Niwot Records
NR-2007

★★★★☆
Eclectic bluegrass music that crosses more boundaries than cricket balls in an English summer

On blending jazz, bluegrass and country, Hot Rize founder member, banjoist Dr. Pete Wernick with the aid of vibraphone (Greg Harris), clarinet (Bill Pontarelli), bass (Roger Johns), drums (Kris Ditson) and the vocals of Joan Wernick, create music of an innovative quality.

Highlights come thick and fast as delightful combinations deliver an all-fired-up version of Gram Parsons *Luxury Liner*, as vibraphone, banjo and clarinet hit the road running. Then there is songbird Joan Wernick, who like on a remake of Anne Murray's world-wide 1970 hit *Snowbird* and the funky Opal (Dave Stamey) lends much (an understated charm included) to the respective songs.

She gives the listener much to savour with her warbling, and on being in command of such stylistic qualities that likewise complements the innovative and often quirky arrangements. None more so than on *Bye Bye Blackbird*, *Blue Train* and Wernick's inspired working of the traditional instrumental *Blackberry Blossom*. Although I am unsure what Norman Blake, who has previously covered it would make of having vibraphone and clarinet playing alongside banjo, whatever, but like with the entire album it works.

For those who enjoy a spot of frenetic picking then *The Highest Place* alongside *Leavin' Town* and the wonderful *Traveling Home* (where more than a hint of an old bluegrass classic comes to mind) are for you. Then, you have shuffling, banjo led



Michelle Shocked

Soul Of My Soul

Mighty Sound

★★★★

★★★★★
Shocked rocks (in all senses of the word!)

Lyrical it may be business as usual on Michelle Shocked's umpteenth album, with songs split between state of the world anger and personal love, musically it's anything but. Yes, there's the gentle acoustic sound you expect, but on a significant number of songs she wheels out the guitars, cranks up the drums and generally makes so much like an old school hard rocker that you can almost smell the spandex. And, perhaps a little surprisingly, it works. Big tunes, solos and hard rocking may have become unfashionable, but when there's plenty of substance under the style, as there is here, it moves the head and the feet.

That substance is presented in a fairly familiar way, as Shocked issues calls to arms to her nation. Sometimes she does it directly, as on the verbosely titled *The Ballad Of The Ballot And The Bullet Part 1: Ugly Americans* where she excoriates both the outgoing president and those who supported him then and support him still or the more subtle *Other People*. Sometimes it's more oblique (the comparison to *Pompeii* is particularly apt) but a couple of decades of ploughing this furrow have honed both her craft and her barbs until not a syllable is wasted. On the love side of the fence there's the throwaway but enjoyable pop of *Paperboy* and two deeply personal songs, *True Story* and *Heart To Heart*.

Being at a Michelle Shocked gig is sometimes akin to being at a particularly raucous religious ceremony, with acolytes rather than fans, but with music like this it's not hard to see why this is. She's always worn her personal and political heart on her sleeve, but also known that the music comes before the message. The result is a catalogue of mighty albums, to which this is an impressive addition. **JS**
www.michelleshocked.com



piece *Waiting For Daylight*, among others that are well worth your attention. Unclassified. **MH**
www.drbanjo.com

Red Stick Ramblers

MY SUITCASE IS ALWAYS PACKED

Sugar Hill Records-
SUGCD4053

★★★★★

Country music
that is a real pleasure to hear

The Red Stick Ramblers play a mixture of honky-tonk, western swing (as well as other forms of swing) and Cajun in their own unique way, and they do it amazingly well. The group is made up of Glenn Fields on drums, Eric Frey (bass, vocals), Chas Justus (guitar, vocals), Kevin Wimmer (fiddle, vocals) and lead singer and fiddle player Linzay Young who vocally puts me in mind of a cross between Brian Hofeldt from the Derailers and Hot Club Of Cow Town's Whit Smith.

Goodbye To The Blues is not too distant from the sound of Buck Owens, *Drinkin' To You* is a quality honky-tonking two-stepper, *My Suitcase Is Always Packed* is a superb western swing tune with a fine guitar solo from Justus, and *Lay Down In The Grass* is a wonderful jazz swing number with a slow bluesy feel to it. Throughout the album the musicianship is superb, and it is great to hear the sound of twin fiddles. The band also include a few Cajun tunes, but as I have never liked this style of country I tended to skip past those. Cajun aside, I loved the music on this CD and especially the slow country songs like *Doggone My Time* with its relaxed vocals and laid-back musical accompaniment. **DK**
www.redstickramblers.com



Richard Dobson

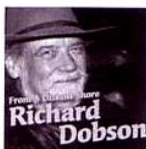
FROM A DISTANT SHORE

Brambus Records
200948-2

★★★★★

A fine collection
of new material

Richard Dobson, dubbed 'the



Ernest Hemmingway of country music' by Nanci Griffith, has proved himself to be the essence of consistency in both his writing and performances since releasing his first album. It's not difficult to understand why Nanci Griffith chose that particular title for Dobson because, like Hemmingway, he has led a colourful life, wandered far and wide, run with the likes of Townes Van Zandt, Guy Clark, Jerry Jeff Walker and others and has written about his life as a troubadour in so many of his songs. A literate writer, capable of composing memorable melodies as vehicles for his absorbing lyrics, *FROM A DISTANT SHORE* is Dobson's twentieth album to date with a dozen of them having been released on the Swiss Brambus Record label. The album, jointly produced by Dobson and his long-time friend and musical cohort, Thomm Jutz, comprises eleven new Dobson originals. If anything, this album is fractionally more country than some of Dobson's previous projects and Jutz, appreciating that, has assembled a small group of highly proficient musicians to provide Dobson with exactly the type of backings which the songs require. The core players lay down bass and drums with Jutz on lead guitar and Dobson on rhythm. This is then fleshed out with fiddle, mandolin, pedal steel, with keyboard on just one track, to give a wholly satisfying sound devoid of unnecessary clutter.

Dobson has a somewhat whisky-soaked, world weary, slightly serrated voice, ideally suited to his material. At times one may hear distant echoes of the late Townes Van Zandt, but that will come as no great surprise to Dobson fans, familiar with the fact that he and Townes were close friends in their tearaway days in Texas and when, in 1994 Dobson released his AMIGOS album he covered 15 of Townes' songs. As for Dobson's songs, as usual, a few are partly autobiographical, notably *That Was Then And This Is Now*, where he looks back on his childhood, and *The Old Rhythm Rebel*, when, caught up in the euphoria of simply making music he took the outlaw thing too seriously and occasionally went too far. There are some tender love songs, nothing

mawkish or sloppy, like *The Old Wild Country*, *Windows Of The Soul*, *It's Been This Way Forever* and *Let Tomorrow Come*, with a couple of up-tempo, light hearted numbers, *A Little Behind My Shoes*, a fiddle and mandolin dominated jig and the slightly more funky *Let's Talk Trash* thrown in to alter the mood. The closing track, *From A Distant Shore* is a deeply meditative song in which Dobson reveals his sense of compassion for those caught up in conflicts not of their making.

As mentioned earlier, Dobson has been most consistent in his work through the years and he does not break from this consistency on his latest album. This is a fine collection of new material from him which will not disappoint his long-standing admirers. **LK**
www.brambus.com

Sean Taylor

CALCUTTA GROVE

Self-released

★★★★★

Sensibilities of
an impassioned
musician—it

all works so seamlessly, this man
could produce music in his sleep, and
probably has

'Calcutta Grove is what became of Eden, just as Revelations is where you are certain to hear a dog sharing secrets with a cat. We have all been buried alive and Salvo is the testimony of dirt falling onto a coffin lid, while *The Killing Floor* is where life is bought and sold. We remain lost until our nightmares turn upon us like serpents sucking their own tails. I hold on because there is nothing else beyond the concept of irony. Freedom is just another word for being and the wife of the river merchant waits in translation. Tom the banker raises his hat in greeting and farewell.'

Above is what's written on Sean Taylor's myspace page to define his latest album CALCUTTA GROVE. I could've tried but I would never have quite come to this definition or put it so eloquently. What he has used above are the titles and explanations of the songs on the album, including *Revelations*, *Buried*

