

NEW RELEASES

Shannon McNally SMALL TOWN TALK (SONGS OF BOBBY CHARLES)

Sacred Sumac Music-
SSMX8975

★★★★☆

Fitting tribute to a song writing legend

Bobby Charles penned many great songs for artists the likes of Fats Domino, Bill Haley and the Comets and Clarence 'Frogman' Henry. If you are still unsure then you will certainly recognise the song titles; *Walking To New Orleans*, *See You Later Alligator* and *(I Don't Know Why) But I Do*.

Shannon McNally along with Dr John chose 11 songs with Bobby Charles that were all written by him (another three have been added as bonus tracks). Sadly, Charles died at his home in January 2010 before this could be finished, but his estate supported the release. Another little bit of information worth knowing is that both Mac 'Dr John' Rebennack and Bobby Charles were performers at The Band's The Last Waltz farewell concert in 1976.

Shannon has a gorgeous voice that is suited to the rock'n'rollers and swamp-pop tunes on show here. Her version of *But I Do* is dazzling, she rocks on *Love In The Worst Degree* and preaches to the congregation on the gospel tune *Save Me Jesus* with B3 organ accompaniment from Dr John. Shannon's duet with Vince Gill on the ballad *String Of Hearts* is an absolute charm and Derek Trucks adds some searing slide guitar on the throbbing *Cowboys And Indians*, this definitely shows why Derek is rated as one of the best slide guitarists around. Great album and a very fitting tribute to a legend. **David Knowles**

www.shannonmcnally.com



The Black Widows LOVE & LUST

You Made That

★★★★

*Refreshing fun time
alt.country rockers*

The album opens with a rocking Hammond organ and chunka-chunka guitar before the singer swaggers onto the scene and kicks the tables over in his quest to get noticed on *Post Golden Gate Blues*. Sadly, I was sitting in my office as



this post-punk, alt.country, pub rocker belted out of my tiny, but powerful speakers and all I could think of after two minutes was: 'I can't wait to play this in the car!' *Arkansas Sound* has a military drum beat and a guitar-based melody to die for, as the singer lets his girl know she has broken his heart, but not his spirit and he's damn well going to move on. It soon dawned on me that while not quite being a concept album, every song on *LOVE & LUST* is a love song of some sorts and somewhere in here is a tale of love, lust, heartbreak and (hopefully) redemption.

A couple of songs slow down and get nice and soulful, in a manly kind of way and I defy anyone not to get misty-eyed when listening to *I'd Give You My Heart*, especially when Scott Francis wails: 'I'm a train wreck leaving the station' as buzz saw guitars and a pounding drumbeat create a soundtrack to his breakdown. I've had the conversation that must have led up to *Small Town Queen* too many times over the years, and The Black Widows have captured that fractured spirit as well as anyone on Music Row has in the last 20 years! Does the story have a happy ending? I'm not saying, but the finale *Back Home* features a duet and some delightful honky-tonk piano playing from Dom Taylor and a rhythm section straight out of a Soho cellar. The Black Widows hail from the 'other' Newcastle (in the Midlands) and come across as the best pub rock band in the world, sounding like Graham Parker fronting the Waco Brothers and I can't praise this album highly enough.

Alan Harrison

www.theblackwidowsband.co.uk

Amy Speace HOW TO SLEEP IN A STORMY BOAT

WindBone Records

★★★★★

*Listener slumber ye
not, Speace's STORMY BOAT is an 11 song
delight ... and there's more!*

As with its immediate predecessor *LAND LIKE A BIRD*, Amy's new sophomore Nashville studio recording was produced by Neilson Hubbard (piano, vibraphone, acoustic guitar, electric bass). With the exception of Michael Rinne (upright bass) and Jill Andrews (backing vocals), the same session players contribute—Kris Donegan (acoustic, electric guitars,



lap steel), Eamon McLaughlin of The Greencards (violin, viola), David Henry (cello), Dan Mitchell (piano, organ, trumpet) and Evan Hutchings (drums, percussion). I'll credit the guest contributors individually, while drawn from his extensive musical pallet, on a number of songs, Hubbard injects sonically ethereal shadings.

Amy (vocals, acoustic guitar) penned five of the songs on her own, the residue being collaborations with Nashville and Kerrville Folk Festival writing partners. The liner booklet finds former actress Speace append at least one Shakespearian epigram to each song, in the process declaring the theatrical potential of her song suite. Graced by a Mary Gauthier backing vocal and co-written with Anthony da Costa (2007 New Folk winner), we learn at the outset of opener *The Fortunate Ones* that this circle embraces: '...the drunks and the dreamers, the criers and cheaters, The ones you'll find down on our knees.' A solo recording artist in his own right, Ben Solee (cello) guests on the lyrically pastoral *Lullabye Under The Willow*. Sally Barris (The Waymores) co-wrote the title song, a metaphor rich voyage through love's tribulations. When Ms Speace tours the UK with John Fullbright during September, audiences could be treated to a live rendition of the sensuously magnificent *The Sea & The Shore*. Co-written with Robby Hecht (2008 New Folk winner) the Speace/Fullbright studio duet is a goose-bump inducing treasure.

The *In Salida* narrator revisits a town where she was once loved. Wounded recently by another, the narrator draws strength from the reflection: 'I travelled a long way from Tennessee—To set all this free.' Melodically rich, lyrically tender and heartfelt, *Bring Me Back My Heart* references the heartache inflicted by parting. The soulful *Hunter Moon* is propelled by a martial beat, Mary Gauthier co-penned the achingly tender *Left Me Hanging*—'Lovers leave each other every day, Some do it clean, others betray,' while Amy's buddy Thomm Jutz (acoustic guitar) guests on *Perfume*. Credited to Speace, Hubbard and Ben Glover, in the penultimate *Feathers & Wishbones* the narrator achieves redemption and love, while the melodically climactic closer *Hesitate*, co-written with Hubbard, finds Amy exchange her piece of wood and

steel for piano.

Funding this new album via Kickstarter, one investor benefit was the six-song SAME OLD STORM EP. Fear not, copies are still available. Penned with Jonathan Byrd (2003 Kerrville New Folk) the up-tempo Hurricane opens, The Letter finds the narrator express regret for her emotive words, Same Old Storm charts the potholes in daily life (and love's rocky highway), while the percussive Memphis finds the narrator appeal: 'Just stay with me through the morning, till I find my feet again.' Serendipity graced this year's New Folk Contest with Honor Finnegan's Stark As Stone—the fifth EP song—deservedly furnishing its writer with a winner's slot, and this thoroughly engaging EP, concludes with a solo reading of The Sea & The Shore. **Arthur Wood**

www.amyspeace.com

Templeton Thompson GIRLS & HORSES

Reve Records

★★★★★

Nashville singer
destined to find

more success with her songcraft



Nashville is full of talented singers, songwriters and musicians destined to remain a mere footnote on album credits. One of the finest that I've recently discovered is Templeton Thompson who over the past decade or so has self-released a series of excellent albums. This latest collection brings together some of her newer songs with a few older ones to create ten tracks of pure listening joy, beautifully arranged and produced. If like me you're not aware Ms Thompson, then you can find her songs on million-selling CDs from country superstars Reba McEntire, Jo Dee Messina and Little Texas. Her song, *Settle Down Cinderella* is featured in the movie, Dr. Doolittle 3. Alongside her songwriting, recording and live performances, Templeton is also a busy demo singer and background vocalist ... oh and by the way, an award-winning horsewoman.

As the title suggests, she brings her equine career into her music with several of the songs featured here inspired by our four-legged friends. With the exception of the evocative *Tall In The Saddle*, all songs are penned by Templeton, mainly in partnership with hubby Sam Gay, who

also provides all the instrumental support. This isn't a project created by some producer to make the next female country superstar happen. Templeton Thompson is the real deal and she's come up with what could be one of my favourite albums of the year. The entire album breathes Templeton's personality, the songs all marked by uplifting melodies, insightful lyrics, her quietly powerful vocals and the understated instrumental virtuosity of Gay. *Guardian Angel* is a song full of life advice intertwined with horse-riding references that works beautifully. Taking a more emotive tone, *She Remembers Ridin'* tackles dementia in a straightforward and heartbreaking way, Thompson's voice cutting right through to your inner soul. In contrast *Cowgirl Creed* is more edgy with its anthemic chorus and Thompson's passionate vocal chock-full of determination. There are no over-elaborate arrangements, yet neither are there any tracks that have been stripped back to the extent that they lose the music's inherent dynamic elements ... overall it's a winner from beginning to send. **Alan Cackett**

www.TempletonThompson.com

David Olney PREDICTING THE PAST

Rootsy Records

★★★★☆

A sprinkling of

Olney gems grace the 16 new studio recordings merged here with 17 previously released songs.



Olney's latest musical offering is a Europe only, two-disc set released by the Swedish based Rootsy imprint. Disc 1, PREDICTING THE PAST, contains 16 new recordings, while its 17-song partner is titled A RETROSPECTIVE 2000—2012. Regarding the genesis of PREDICTING THE PAST, Olney's liner note relates: 'One of my goals was to feature my road compadre, Sergio Webb. Sergio's guitar playing is mind boggling. On electric or gut string, he takes chances, skates on thin ice, goes out on limbs and makes a song much more compelling than it would be otherwise.' Webb had worked with Paul Burch, making him a natural project producer/collaborator. Recorded at Pan American Sound in Nashville, the principal voices and instruments heard on disc 1 are Olney (Archtop guitar, vocals), Mark

Sergio Webb (lead guitar) and Birch (fuzz/rhythm guitar, drums, bass). Fats Kaplin (fiddle), Dennis Crouch (upright bass) and Tomi Lunsford (vocals) support on *Cruel Symphony*, Fats' lap steel graces *Walkin' Blue*, while Jen Gunderman (Jayhawks) plays keyboards on *The Beginning And The End* and *Long Gone Daddy*.

Olney is the sole composer of six PREDICTING THE PAST songs, the same headcount is shared with long-time collaborator John Hadley, while on the remaining quartet Messrs. Olney/Hadley collaborate with Webb on two songs, and one each with Gwil Owen and Kieran Kane. From the first riff on opener *Girl Up On A Hill*—wherein the narrator professes his love for her—Olney's in vocally raucous rock'n'roll mode. On the ensuing *A Long Time Ago* the Rhode Island bred writer slows the pace, and from his back catalogue moves on to resurrect the rowdy *Jama Ball*. The latter previously saw the light of day on the Italian Appaloosa imprint's TOP TO BOTTOM (1991), as did the later *Smoke On Ice*.

A prison inmate narrates *We're All Innocent In Here*, the Webb co-write *Johnson City Blues* is a road song, while *Long Gone Daddy* possesses a bluesy feel as does the later *Walkin' Blue*. Featuring Webb's ukulele the gently paced gem *There Was A War* I'd characterise as twin to the classic 1917. Webb fingerpicks Spanish guitar on the optimistic ballad *Look*, the lyrical enigma *Lampshades* simply rocks, while *Things Fall Apart* explores the torch song genre. The penultimate *Cruel Symphony* finds Webb's Spanish guitar adopt a Latin rhythm while Kaplin's fiddle gently weeps. Narrated by a road weary individual, and possessed of a much slower tempo, the melody to the heartfelt album closer *The Beginning And The End* hints at Prine's *Souvenirs* and *Speed Of The Sound Of Loneliness*.

Disc 2 reprises material from some of David's 21st century releases. There are three selections from 2000's OMAR'S BLUES, five from 2007's ONE TOUGH TOWN and four from 2010's DUTCHMAN'S CURVE. Olney's recent trio of EPs draw disc 2 to a close, with two songs each from 2011's FILM NOIR and the stunning THE STONE (2012), while *Go Down Dupree* from 2012's ROBBERY & MURDER ends the journey through this talented writer's recent back pages.

Arthur Wood

www.davidolney.com