

is very high, but I'm guessing that the bluegrass and traditional country fans this music is aimed at, are, like me, stick-in-the-mud album fans, so are unlikely to be 'downloaders.' So please give us full albums, whilst CDs are still viable.

Lee's vocals are pleasingly nasal, while sister Elaine's voice carries the introspection of the poignant *Living Scrapbook* beautifully. The first single, *Still Standing* is pure bluegrass with blazing fiddles and mandolin runs on this up-tempo tale of perseverance and personal identity. The emotional *Daddy To Me* is a cut above the remaining songs and again has a powerful vocal performance by Lee, highlighting some fine harmony singing with tight instrumentation. If this had been a full album with another five or six songs of equal quality, this would have been a four star review, but I'm sorry I refuse to endorse these mini-albums. Perhaps if we music lovers all stick together, we can persuade the record labels to cease this practice and release full albums. **Alan Cackett**

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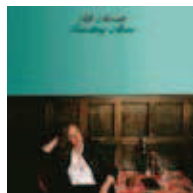
Tift Merritt TRAVELING ALONE

Yep Roc Records

★★★★

Studio album

five finds Merritt
standing at a crossroads



There's an element of full circle relative to the release of Tift Merritt's fifth studio album. In the final year of last century, Yep Roc issued a seven-song EP titled THE TWO DOLLAR PISTOLS WITH TIFT MERRITT. Subsequently signed by Lost Highway Records, this Texas-born, North Carolina-bred songbird cut two albums for them including the Grammy nominated TAMBOURINE (2004), and a move to the resurrected Fantasy label brought two more. TRAVELING ALONE was recorded in her adopted home of New York City, in a Brooklyn studio with Tucker Martine (The Decemberists, My Morning Jacket) once again occupying the producer's chair. The principle session players are Marc Ribot (guitar), Rob Burger (accordion, keyboards), John Convertino (drums and percussion), Eric Heywood (pedal steel) and Merritt's long-time collaborator, Jay Brown (bass). Over a period of months, Merritt reputedly penned these songs on

the City Winery's piano. Located in Long Island's SoHo district, a mere two blocks from her home, the Winery was a handy creative hideaway.

Earlier this year an acoustic rendition of *Sweet Spot* featured on an episode of the CW Network's *Hart Of Dixie* and is available on iTunes. Andrew Bird duets with Tift on the bittersweet, Orbison-esque sounding *Drifted Apart*, whilst *Still Not Home* finds Merritt rocking out ala Emmylou Harris & Spyboy; the foregoing lyric and the title song share a yearning for home. The consecutive ballads *Feeling Of Beauty* and *Too Soon To Go* slip down like warm honey. The ponderous *Small Talk Relations* piano intro echoes Norah Jones' COME AWAY WITH ME approach, whilst the repeating *To Myself* riff strays perilously close to Joel's *We Didn't Start The Fire*. As a sonic marriage of instruments and voice, *Spring* is darkly impenetrable. Piano-led, the penultimate selection *In The Way* finds the narrator wax optimistic. The album's longest song (almost six-minutes) is the ethereal album closer, Another allusion to home, Merritt's *Marks* is a treatise on 'the ropes of time' that 'tangle the threads of hope.'

With BRAMBLE ROSE (2002) Tift Merritt embarked on a journey of self-discovery that—across four albums—enjoyed a directed focus. Emotionally and spiritually, this set finds the talented thirty-seven-year-old pausing to look inward, outward, backward and forward. **Arthur Wood**

www.tiftmerritt.com

The Trishas HIGH, WIDE & HANDSOME

Self-released

★★★★☆

Texas female

quartet deliver a
stunning and eclectic debut album



The Trishas comprise Jamie Wilson, Liz Foster, Kelley Mickwee and Savannah Welch, four very talented but quite different women, who first performed together in January 2009. At the time their intention was simply to perform a couple of songs as part of a tribute to Savannah's father, singer-songwriter Kevin Welch. There were no plans to pursue a joint musical future—each had their own solo careers. But the reaction was so compelling with offers of bookings that they decided why not. They wound

up calling themselves The Trishas on a whim because they were covering a Kevin Welch-penned Trisha Yearwood hit. Since then they've performed or recorded with such diverse acts as Raul Malo, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Todd Snider and Kevin Welch and released the EP THEY CALL US THE TRISHAS. Now comes this debut full-length album, an intriguing and highly listenable collection of eclectic songs and musical arrangements that is a total joy from beginning to end.

All four women are talented instrumentalists and are joined by guitarist Kenny Vaughan and drummer Harry Stinson of Marty Stuart's Fabulous Superlatives, bassist Viktor Krauss, fiddler Tammy Rogers and steel guitarist Russ Pahl. The sessions were held at Nashville's Sound Emporium with veteran engineer Mike Poole producing. But this not a mainstream country album, despite the fact that the various Trishas co-wrote with such Nashville tunesmiths as Jim Lauderdale, Natalie Hemby and Owen Temple, as well as Texas-based writers Bruce Robison, Jason Eday and Kevin Welch and his son Dustin Welch. Most of the songs are acoustic-based allowing the thoughtful and provocative lyrics room to breathe and the exquisite four-part harmonies to shine.

I don't have any credits with my advance copy, so cannot say who handles the lead vocals on each song, but by alternating the leads they produce a rich and varied vocal sound. They head straight for your heart and mind on the opening *Mother Of Invention* as easily as they do on diverse numbers like *Strangers* (a gorgeous song about changes in a long-standing relationship) and *Little Sweet Cigars* written by Jamie Wilson and Evan Felker about being seduced and misled by an older worldly man. The inventive musical arrangements are different for each song, but hold together to create a cohesive album and range from the fiddle-driven trad country vibe of *Liars & Fools* to the mandolin-driven folk-pop of *Looking At Me* through the breathy *Why* with its funky undertones to the restrained jazzy tones of *Cold Blooded*. But whatever the style, it's the heartfelt lead vocals and wondrous and exquisite harmonies that helps to make the Trishas HIGH, WIDE & HANDSOME an outstanding album ... one of the best so far of 2012. **Alan Cackett**

www.thetrishas.com