

NEW RELEASES

delivers her usual polished performance on *It's Too Late*. Several tracks into the 22-song collection you will be struck by the innate humanity in Davies' deceptively simple compositions, whether they are gentle ballads or tougher blues tunes like *It Ain't Easy* (Shelby Lynne), *Say It With Money*, which fits that old growler Delbert McClinton like a glove, and John Prine's dumping ditty *You Stayed Away Too Long*. There's screaming slide guitar and swirling organ riffs on Jimmy Hall's ballsy *Let It Slide*, warm harmonies from Vince Gill and Kelly Hogan on *More Today Than Yesterday*, while other Nashville favourites Alison Krauss, Guy Clark and Rodney Crowell all maintain the high standard. There's even a poignant duet from the Davies siblings on *Steal Across The Border* and by the time Bonnie Bramlett warbles the last note on the CD you will be under no illusions about the lasting legacy left by Ron Davies. Bob Kilbey

www.rondaviesunsunghero.com

Annie Keating FOR KEEPS

Self-released

★★★★★

Classic Greenwich Village singer-songwriter fare ...



Imagine a Sunday-morning headache. Now imagine a large milky coffee and an album on loop. Now put this album in that scenario. I tried it and it worked. Annie Keating has the perfect voice for a Sunday morning. Admittedly, it's the voice of a Sunday morning in a Greenwich Village coffee-house and not a semi- in West Yorkshire but I was transported. Hers is a gentle, bordering on polite, voice. It doesn't harass and it doesn't grate, yet it's oddly redolent of Lucinda Williams, who does both of those things. She's like Williams' quieter, nicer sister, on holiday in New York.

This is Keating's fifth album and it features some notable backing musicians, including Michael Hampton and Jason Mercer. The songs are all sweet little nuggets, from the barnstorming *Storm Warning* to the gentle and poignant *Clyde River*, the timeless lament of life on the road. Her version of Neil Young's *Cowgirl In The Sand*, taken down a few notches energy-wise and the lyrics loaded with a whole different intent, is utterly gorgeous. None of the songs here is ground-breaking. Just *For Today* has all the tropes of your average

road-trip song; there's plenty of getting out of this town, feeling the wind on our faces and reconnecting with the simple things. But the songs are good, they're delivered with feeling and produced to perfection. This is for keeps. Hazel Davis

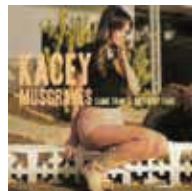
www.anniekeating.com

Kacey Musgraves SOME TRAILER DIFFERENT PARK

Mercury/Decca

★★★★★

Talented youngster different enough to make a huge impact



Though the press release informs that this is Kacey Musgraves debut album, it's in fact her fourth. She self-released *MOVIN' ON*, her first album when she was 13. That was followed by 2003's *WANTED*, *ONE GOOD COWBOY* and 2007's *KACEY MUSGRAVES*, which coincided with her appearance on *Nashville Star*. Now 24 and having had her songs cut by Miranda Lambert, Martina McBride, Lee Ann Womack, plus *Undermined* having been featured in the Nashville TV series, she's now landed on Mercury Nashville with this superb Music City album. Kacey had a hand in writing all songs and shows herself to be a skilled writer, unafraid to confront issues head-on, leaning more towards Americana and traditional country than today's rock-inflected country mainstream.

Whether it's the plucky drive of *Stupid*, the direct advice of *Follow Your Arrow*, the freedom vibe of *My House* or the playful *Blowin' Smoke*, Musgraves delivers a refreshing twist that walks vintage and contemporary lines in imaginative and inventive manners. Though this is the kind of music, certainly lyrically, aimed directly at younger country listeners; ie mid-teens to twenty-somethings, songs like *Silver Lining* and recent single, *Merry Go 'Round*, should also connect with older and more mature listeners. The latter, with its rootsy arrangement, is so perceptively written and sung: 'Mama's hooked on Mary Kay/Brother's hooked on Mary Jane/And Daddy's hooked on Mary, two doors down/Mary, Mary, quite contrary/We get bored so we get married/And just like dust we settle in this town/On this broken merry-go-round.'

Dandelion finds her in more delicate, reflective mode; *Step Off* is a great brush-off song; *Keep It To Yourself* is a half-hearted

warning to a former lover to forget any reconciliation. These are natural emotions we've all gone through and the enthusiasm and love oriented lyrics grown on you and you soon find yourself grooving with them. With inspired arrangements utilising pedal steel, banjo, fiddle, mandolin and various keyboards and guitars this music is made with honest integrity without playing homage to the current radio playlists mentality. Wouldn't surprise me to see something this refreshing take-off in a big way. Mainstream country desperately needs something a little left of centre to shake things up. Kacey Musgraves' trailer park music might be just the thing to do it. Alan Cackett

www.kaceymusgraves.com

Patty Griffin AMERICAN KID

New West Records

★★★★★

Passionate and personal, life's rich tapestry unfolds in this amazing album



Maine-bred Griffin's last outing, the Grammy Award-winning *DOWNTOWN CHURCH*, featured 12 gospel covers leavened by two Patty penned tunes. In terms of composer contributions *AMERICAN KID* reverses that formula, with Griffin's lyrics seeking to honour her late father, a WWII veteran and later high-school science teacher. Recorded in Memphis and co-produced by Griffin and Craig Ross (Lisa Germano)—he produced her 2004's *IMPOSSIBLE DREAM*—the session players include Luther Dickinson (guitar) and Cody Dickinson (drums) of the North Mississippi Allstars', long-standing sideman Doug Lancio (guitar), while Ross contributes guitar, bass, mandolin, baritone, omnichord and organ.

Soldiers and 'war' are—directly and indirectly—referenced throughout, although the conflict is not necessarily one that involved Griffin's late parent. A paean to the hard-won personal freedoms that allow lives to be fulfilled, album opener *Go Wherever You Want To Go* delivers the repeated: 'Never have to go to war no more.' The narrator of the melodically insistent *Don't Let Me Die In Florida* alludes to being born in Boston's South End and how, when victory came, he: '...went home and gave my girl a ring.' Ohio possesses an Eastern/Native American feel. The second

verse mentions a future reunion on 'the other side' of the Ohio River, the mighty Mississippi's largest (volumetric) tributary. Post 2010, Griffin recorded/toured with Robert Plant's reincarnated Band of Joy and, subsequently, his Sensational Space Shifters. Plant sings on Ohio, the first of three such contributions. An observation (made on U.S. Highway 93) that compares God to a Wild Old Dog, Griffin's narrator concludes: 'He don't belong to no one else.' The only cover, Lefty Frizzell's Mom & Dad's Waltz, is followed by the sympathetic character portrait Faithful Son. Joined vocally by Plant, the participants in the exquisitely beautiful Highway Song find themselves parted by time and distance.

Recorded many times with unsatisfactory results, Patty allowed weeks to elapse before attempting Irish Boy one final time. She nailed it. It was St. Patrick's Day 2012. Post a war, an inebriated soldier dances with a dark-haired girl in downtown Boston's Scollay Square, and recalls an innocent bygone time when he climbed trees with his kid brother in the city's West Roxbury Cemetery. At a SXSW

2013 promotional appearance, Griffin intimated Get Ready Marie was: 'a sexy song about my grandparents. That's a pretty hard thing to write.' Lighthearted and humorous (nay ribald) lyrics are not Griffin's 'stock in trade,' yet the boisterous 'kick over the traces' piano/mandolin propelled Get Ready Marie is a departure and delight. A sing-along to boot, there's a (ribald) clue in: 'But to get anything she said 'show me the ring'.

A conflict stressed 'American kid' narrates the subtly powerful, penultimate offering Not A Bad Man. Five years ago he: 'signed up when I was nineteen,' now he's the troubled victim of a sophisticated contemporary conflict. An ethereal sounding backdrop supports a finger-picked acoustic guitar on Gonna Miss You When You're Gone. While it's not the first occasion (on this album) that they are alluded to—'The secrets that you keep will be the things I never know'—nails one of the human condition's darker quirks. As for this closing song's final line, it's the optimistic: 'I'll see you again.' Arthur Wood

www.pattygriffin.com

Steve Earle & The Dukes (And Duchesses) THE LOW HIGHWAY

New West NW6262

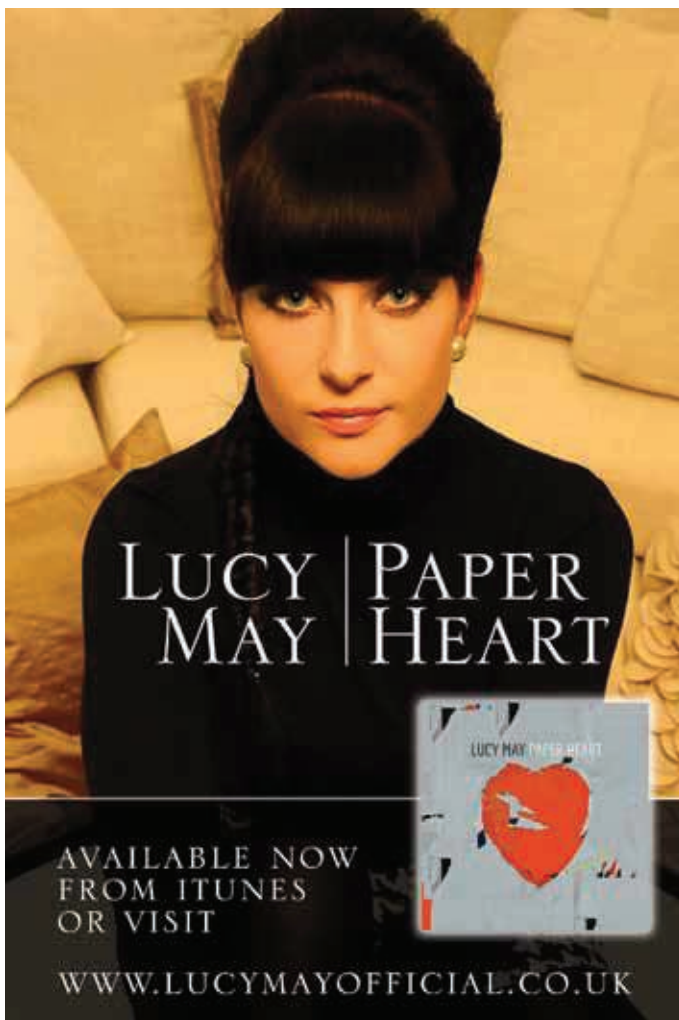
★★★★★

One of the best country singers ever, at his very best

Steve Earle never fails to enchant and surprise; the boyish good looks may have been replaced by those somewhere between a college professor and a drifter, but the music retains its youthful energy, reinvigorated by a worldly-wise air. Here the worlds of Earle, from twanging country-rocker to blazing bluegrass star, sensitive-singer songwriter to roots revivalist, come together in a blaze of extraordinary, seemingly effortless brilliance.

Earle is the laconic, drawling frontman to a musical journey that has a where-did-that-come-from? feel, something that's everything and yet not quite anything.

The album kicks off with the brooding title track but just when you think you



"And our favorite albums from new artists (The Stray Birds, The Lumineers) were full of universal coming-of-age themes: facing reality with determination, learning how to proceed with courage. This was not a year of navel-gazing, confessional songwriting. Folksingers in 2012, more often than not, were making music to highlight communities."

npr

— Kim Ruehl & Linda Fahey

FOLK ALLEY

www.thestraybirds.com