

## NEW RELEASES

so impeccably, but I will mention just one song. *The Night That Johnny Cash Played San Quentin* was written by Dean and is sung from the standpoint of a prisoner on Death Row about to face the dreaded chair and his last memories are of seeing Johnny Cash play his infamous prison concert. Masterful! As is the rest of this quietly absorbing album. **Alan Cackett**

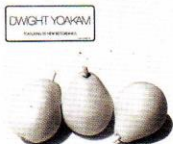
[www.deanowens.com](http://www.deanowens.com)

### Dwight Yoakam 3 PEARS

Warner Bros/Via  
Records 9362-49492-5

★★★★★

*Dwight continues to hold high the banner of real country*



Why some records stand out and others (most, really) don't is somewhat of a mystery. There are so many superb musicians walking around, but very few can translate themselves to disc without diminishing their impact. Well, fortunately, Dwight Yoakam has cracked the case and made one of the best in recent memory. It doesn't hurt that Yoakam is a marvellous songwriter. His songs explore a myriad of human emotions within the grooves of 3 PEARS. As a producer, he shows remarkable skill in pacing 45 minutes of great country music without once losing 100% of your attention. He plays most of the lead guitar parts himself, ably supported by a crack studio band that never wavers in its commitment to Yoakam's vision. He leaves a few edges a little ragged, which only adds to the soulfulness of this session and helps keep the music engaging and surprising. The supporting cast including Brian Whelan (pedal steel, bass, harmonium, piano, organ, wurlitzer, vocals), Mitch Marine (drums), Jonathan Clark (bass, vocals), Eddie Perez (guitar, vocals) is first rate. The addition of strings and horns on *It's Never Alright*, is a particular treat. Here's how orchestral sweetening can really enhance a country song without in any way detracting from the soul and passion of the performance.

Dwight delivers a scorching honky-tonk rave-up on *Dim Lights, Thick Smoke* (*And Loud, Loud Music*), without doubt the greatest honky-tonk song ever written. How come it's taken him so long to revive this 1950s classic? The opening *Take Hold Of My Hand* is one of the finest album openers I've heard in years. The chord

changes are big and bold, but never over the top, and his back-up musicians know how to produce a perfect blend. He eases the listener gently with the soft focus *Trying* where organ and strident lead guitar sprawl freely—things heat up for handclapping barnstormers *A Heart Like Mine* and *3 Pears* before stunning finale track *Long Way To Go* (*Reprise*) closes the deal. This is a stripped-down, piano-backed version of the song that appears earlier in the album and is a genuine highlight amongst a dozen of them. Dwight Yoakam does a terrific job fusing country with pop-riddled vocal melodies and honky-tonk guitar riffs on an album that will appeal to the young and old, freestyle and line dancers, and fans of both traditional and contemporary country music. **Alan Cackett**

[www.dwightyoakam.com](http://www.dwightyoakam.com)

### Iain Morrison TO THE HORIZON, SIR

★★★★☆

*Western Isles-bred Morrison celebrates the marriage of voice and instrument on his fifth outing*



The major portion of Iain Morrison's fifth album was captured in late 2011 in a studio set among the Green Mountains of Western Vermont. Subsequent additions were made in Glasgow, Greenock and the musician's native Isle of Lewis. Production is credited to Morrison and Vermont-based Michael Chorney (Anais Mitchell, Dollar General). In addition to Chorney's guitar, Stateside Morrison was supported by Geza Carr (drums) and Robinson Morse (double bass). In Scotland, Iain enlisted friend and occasional touring companion Pete Harvey (cello), plus time-served studio collaborators Seamus O'Donnell (drums), Ross Hamilton (bass) and finally, Iain Hutchison (guitar, harmonium) who also mixed this collection.

The ten Morrison originals featured on *TO THE HORIZON, SIR* run for a tad over forty minutes and open with *Stones & Matches*—the latter for lighting lamps; the former for building cairns. Morrison is not a conventional storyteller per se, rather his stock-in-trade is soaring and ethereally repetitive choruses wed to image filled snapshots that are subjectively diverse. While his lyrics are as impenetrable as a Gordian Knot, in terms of definitive meaning, cast aside convention and view

each as a hypnotic soundscape and *TO THE HORIZON, SIR* becomes an entrancing entity. Morrison's voice consistently displays a heart-wrenching melancholy, which is balanced, for instance, by moments of vocal rage midway through *Dear Goose*.

From an early age his respected father, Pipe Major Iain M. Morrison, tutored his young offspring on the bagpipes. While the expectation was that Iain Jr. would pursue tradition, he now paints on a sonically diverse contemporary (musical) landscape. There's much allusion to 'woman,' 'little girl,' 'her,' 'my dear' and 'love' throughout *TO THE HORIZON, SIR*, allied to seemingly darker references such as 'go my love to the other land' and 'six feet down nowhere to shout, Take a shovel and figure it out' in *My Calm*. The colour 'black' and the winged 'crow' also enjoy a degree of prominence. Morrison's native Western Isles are classified as an archipelago, which doubtless inspired the dreamlike *Lost With The Archipelago*. Located on the remote Assynt peninsula near Achmelvich, on Sutherland's west coast, the Hermit's Castle is reputedly the smallest such structure in Europe. Built in concrete during the 1950s by English architect David Scott, he left the area shortly after completing it. Morrison's *Hermit's Castle* is underpinned by the repeated mantra: 'please comfort her, don't let her go, I'll be there every time the storms blow.' The album title song (and penultimate selection) is the collection's most melodically and vocally robust, and is followed by the nightmarish tale of lost love *Dream Of The Bear*. **Arthur Wood**

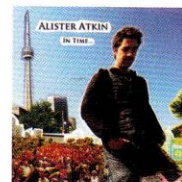
[www.iainmorrisonmusic.com](http://www.iainmorrisonmusic.com)

### Alister Atkins IN TIME ...

AACD1

★★★★

*Singer-songwriter who gets to the very heart of the matter with sensitivity and honest emotion*



I've known Alister Atkins as a skilled and highly regarded acoustic guitar craftsman for years, but had no idea that he was a somewhat closet singer-songwriter. Based in Canterbury, where he hand-crafts his renowned Atkins Guitars for such musicians as Richard Hawley, Ronan Keating, Kate Walsh, Kathryn Williams and many others, this is his debut album and it's a very good, laid-back singer-songwriter-album, where he gets some help from friends Kathryn