

## NEW RELEASES

### Ted Russell Kamp **NIGHT OWL**

Poetry of the Moment  
Records PoMo-08012

★★★★☆

Superb songs of life lived and more importantly, life observed

I first became aware of Ted Russell Kamp via Shooter Jennings. For several years Kamp has been the bass guitarist, harmony singer and occasional co-writer in Jennings' road band and has participated in several of Jennings' recordings. Alongside this, he's also carved out his own niche as a talented singer-songwriter. **NIGHT OWL** is something of a concept album, all of the songs connected by the life of a travelling musician. It's a subject that is close to Kamp's heart and he also has first-hand experience having spent more than half his life out there on the road trying to make a living playing music.

He plays most of the instruments here on 12 tracks (plus a pair of bonus tracks) full of fuzzy goodness with extra colouring from the likes of Scotty Sanders (pedal steel), Michael Webb (Wurlitzer), Mike Rojas (piano, Hammond), Brian Whelan (accordion, piano) and Bethany Dick-Olds (violin). Kamp's probing stories of real life, fuelled by real emotion, a unique glimpse into everyday events and his poetic explanation are truly profound. The delightful *The Last Drop* is the best example, where Kamp is motivated and looking for more in life with a funky little jazz arrangement. The spirit of John Stewart blows through the epic *Santa Ana Winds*, a lovely, sinuous ballad, warmly conveying the pleasure he derives from his commute to the West Coast, but like most of the songs here, it's not an entirely sentimental affair. The love songs tend to be deeply personal or, as in *My Songs For You*, brimming with gratitude. With *A Whole Lot Of You And Me* he's smooth, and cool and reflective. His voice gets inside your bones. It's a tuneful rasp with a touch of twang, it's like John Prine with more air and less dirt. Country, soul, blues, twang, great pickin' and the real roots of American music, there are many more gems on **NIGHT OWL** that are ripe for personal discovery, a riveting tour-de-force of an album that will open up more ears and hearts to the scintillating sounds of Ted Russell Kamp and an appreciation of the unique perspective he brings to his craft. **Alan Cackett**

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



### Albert Hammond **LEGEND II**

Hypertension Music

★★★☆☆

Lodged in an alternate musical universe, these are pop songs

Albert Hammond scored his first chart hit at the age of 24 when Leapy Lee covered Little Arrows. Four and a half decades and some 30 chart topping songs later, this London-born, Gibraltar-raised musician has amassed worldwide sales of 360 million records. The release of **LEGEND II** coincides with Hammond's celebration of half-a-century in the music business. Following the appearance of the career-retrospective **LEGEND** (2010), Hammond undertook his first concert tours for some 30 years.

Carefully collated classics from Hammond's back catalogue, **LEGEND II** equate to a who's who of late 20th century pop composers—the late Mike Hazlewood (who died in 2001), Diane Warren (the third successful female songwriter of all time and still going strong), Chris De Burgh, King Crimson's Pete Sinfield, Andy Hill, Holly Knight, John Bettis and Richard Carpenter (The Carpenters hit writing team), and finally, Graham Lyle of writing, recording, touring duo Gallagher & Lyle.

Where **LEGEND** featured Hammond performing his compositions as duets with prominent male and female recording artists, **LEGENDS II** is a voice and guitar affair, on which he is supported by album producer Denis Valegra (programming, guitar, background vocals) and Gail Hernandez (background vocals) while the Harmonics Choir contribute to the De Burgh co-write *The Snows Of New York*. Given the small number of contributors, the production consistently leans upon the overblown and grandiose, a prime example being the soaring Brian May-styled electric guitar solo on the Warren co-write *I Don't Wanna Live Without Your Love*, which scored Chicago a number three pop chart entry Stateside during 1988. The May guitar resurfaces on *Ask Me How I Feel*, *Bed Tender With Me Baby* and on and on ad infinitum. Co-written with Bettis and Carpenter, *I Need To Be In Love* is claimed to have been Karen Carpenter's favourite Carpenters song. In 1976 it peaked on the pop charts number 25 in the US and at number 36 in the UK.

Apart from those musicians already



mentioned, with varying degrees of chart success, the 18 songs on **LEGEND II** have been covered by Joe Cocker, Tina Turner, Diana Ross, Westlife, Living In A Box, the late Whitney Houston and Roy Orbison, and by Hammond on his 20th century solo releases. These pop songs possess zero roots music credentials in any shape or form, while the aforementioned grandiose programmed production—synthetic strings, percussion etc.—of these structurally sound songs is quite simply too sugary. **Arthur Wood**

[www.alberthammond.net](http://www.alberthammond.net)

### Anaïs Mitchell & Jefferson Hamer **CHILD BALLADS**

Wilderland Record

★★★★★

Powerful reinterpretations of folk classics from two American singer-songwriters

Child ballads are traditional British (and largely English) folk songs collected by Sir Francis Child in Victorian times. In fact, they are probably the best known and most frequently sung folk songs in the traditional repertoire, and as such, to take them on is a risky proposition to say the least. You stand in the shadows of giants like Martin Carthy and finding a way of doing them that hasn't been done before is well-nigh impossible. When, to cap it all, you're an American, it could seem like a doomed enterprise but Anaïs Mitchell and musical partner, Jefferson Hamer not only succeed; they triumph.

Mitchell has folk form of course, using a galaxy of folk stars including Carthy, for the highly successful UK live performances of her opera **HADESTOWN**. What makes it work is the duo's decision to sing the songs straight, American accent and all, with minimal accompaniment. Here, the song is not just the main thing; it's the only thing, and Sir Patrick Spens, Willie O Winsbury, the mighty Tam Lin and Clyde Waters (another level of jeopardy, given its irrevocable association with Nic Jones) all emerge refreshed. The simple treatments enable the listener to hear them anew and all the tales, never less than gripping, captivate and entrance.

This is a partnership of equals too. Hamer has fewer lead vocals but his accompaniment is the perfect, indeed essential, setting for Anaïs Mitchell's voice.

