

NEW RELEASES

Hem DEPARTURE AND FAREWELL

Waveland Records

★★★★

*A perfectly polished
paean to Brooklyn*



Baroque folk-pop is perhaps the best way to describe this offering from Brooklyn-based quartet Hem. Released a full six years on from their last outing, in the interim they almost dissolved the band amid a welter of drug addictions and broken marriages, but time heals and DEPARTURE AND FAREWELL can be seen as putting the past behind and setting out afresh.

With an expanded line-up and orchestral backing on several of the songs here the band maintain their reputation for having a cinematic quality to their music. It's not the wide screen panoramas conjured up by the likes of Calexico, but the intimate city movie, New York most often, that features relationships twisting and turning while the city stars in the background, think of Simon and Garfunkel scoring a Woody Allen movie with Carole King on vocals. Packing 13 songs into a little over a half-hour, writers Dan Messé and Steve Curtis paint miniature scenes that are superbly brought to life by Sally Ellyson's vocals. Woodwind, sweeping strings, occasional bursts of guitar accentuate the mood of loss which permeates the album although, mirroring the band's near demise and current high hopes, there are glimmers of hope here and there as Ellyson sings of rejuvenation on *Things Are Not Perfect In Our Yard* and *The Seed*. Curtis' *The Jack Pine* continues this theme of rebirth as the nominal tree crackles into life as it's destroyed by fire, a powerful metaphor for the band's experience. The wonderful orchestral tones of *Tourniquet*, a bitter sweet hymn to Brooklyn is the stand out song and one of the best songs we've heard this year. **Paul Kerr**

www.hemmusic.com

Kimmie Rhodes COVERS

Sunbird Records

★★★★

*An engaging and
accomplished
multi-genre musical
exploration*



Supported by son/album producer Gabriel Rhodes (guitars, keyboards, accordion, mandolin, vocals), and a Central Texas/Nashville band, the title of Lubbock bred Rhodes' latest recording perfectly pegs its musical contents. More later, regarding guest contributions. In terms of vintage and style, Kimmie mines pop, rock or blues tunes in every decade from the 1960s through the recent noughties. Considering her folk/country credentials COVERS is a shrewd departure.

Composed around 1975 Kimmie launches the album with a smooth jazz reading of Leon Russell/Buzz Cason's *Bluebird*. From this side of the pond, fronted by slow, adept finger-picked acoustic guitar, a sensitive interpretation of Lennon/McCartney's timeless *Yesterday* is followed by the marginally younger Glimmer Twins (Jagger/Richards) ballad *Moonlight Mile* replete with slide guitar from Canada's Colin Linden. Onstage in Houston, Texas a few years later, Townes Van Zandt's debuted *White Freight Liner Blues*. That live rendition eventually appeared on Townes' legendary, double disc LIVE FROM THE OLD QUARTER (1977) and David Holt (guitar) guests on Rhodes' energetic reinterpretation. From the twilight of the 20th century, the heartfelt *Georgia Lee*, penned by Tom Waits and spouse Kathleen Brennan, follows.

Kimmie includes two Bob Dylan tunes, the first *Everything Is Broken* from OH MERCY (1989), it's pursued by an elegant airing of Neil Young's early *Birds*. As friends they conversed about it, and Bono's *Stuck In A Moment You Can't Get Out Of* lyric imagines a conversation with Michael Hutchence (who died in 1997) regarding suicide. Rodney Crowell and Kimmie duet on the former's 2003 ballad *Adam's Song*, and it's succeeded by Dylan's *Don't Think Twice It's Alright* and an atmospheric version of Tom Petty's *Southern Accents*.

David Holt (guitar) and Gary Nicholson (lead guitar) contribute, while Lubbock born Delbert McClinton plays harmonica and duets with Rhodes on bluesman Jimmy Reed's *Shame, Shame, Shame*. Toting an accordion Marcia Ball duets with Kimmie on Mark Knopfler's percussive *Cannibals*, and daughter Jolie Goodnight (vocals) and Bill Carter (vocals, harmonica) also guest. Curiously never a US number one penultimate COVER, *What*

A Wonderful World, which Kimmie nails, was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame in 1999. Featuring Messrs. Goodnight, Carter, Ball and Crowell cameos, the album closes with Lennon/McCartney's *With A Little Help From My Friends*. It's presence doubtless a thank you to the contributors to this worthy project. **Arthur Wood**

www.kimmierhodes.com

Lucy Ward SINGLE FLAME

Navigator Records:

Navigator083

★★★★☆

*Derby singer-
songwriter utterly
thrives on this beautiful and original
follow-up project*



Derby singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Lucy Ward (guitar, ukulele, concertina, vocals) charmed listeners and won over critics in 2011 when she released the critically acclaimed ADELPHI HAS TO FLY. Two years on and the talented 23-year-old has gone from strength to strength, claiming the BBC's Horizon Award for best newcomer in 2012 plus capturing the affections of fans and festival-goers both near and far. This year marks her much-awaited return to the acoustic folk scene, with the arrival of SINGLE FLAME (produced by Stu Hanna); a stunning collection of songs both beautiful and original, as the Derbyshire fuses essences of folk with moody acoustics and flourishes of the alternative, all knotted tightly with lyrics both infectiously quirky and poetically poignant and a stunning vocal that both captivates and surprises.

The deliciously moody *I Cannot Say I Will Not Speak*; a steady and at times dark arrangement of progressive, climatic acoustics, swirling ambience and sinisterly-edged vocals opens the album perfectly, also giving the album its title (somewhere in the mix); followed by the beautifully simplistic *Honey*. The stunning *Velvet Sky* is undoubtedly an album gem, with a memorable chorus and melody, plus an acoustic-pop arrangement that is just delightful. This should have perhaps been the title track to Lucy's follow up release, but nevertheless it still holds hit potential by the bucket load. Hidden treasure *For The Dead Men* delivers a powerful political message, driven by a