

Dusty Relics - Re-issues & Compilations

cross between Gram Parsons and Gene Pitney, should never have been as big as it was. Pub music drenched with pedal steel turned into a sweeping Spectoresque pop by chief Womble Mike Batt for major label success is a hard one to take. Yet having reached the top 20 in 1976 with the anthemic *Little Does She Know*, it's still hard to believe it didn't go much, much further.

Yet GOLDEN MILE remains their milestone, with the Kinks-like Englishness of the lyrics, Paul Shuttleworth's pained crooning and music that cried out to be heard in a California roadhouse. It kicks off with *Little Does...*, which is even grander than one remembers it, a five-minute epic pastiche of a 1950s rock'n'roll ballad, armed with cannons, strings, chimes and hallelujah chorus. But there's plenty more. *Drinking Socially*, *One Arm Bandit*, *Street Of The Music* and *Radio Romance* all have that end-of-the-pier magic. This was the classic line-up, with Graeme Douglas (soon to depart for Eddie and the Hot Rods), Vic Collins on steel, drummer and musicologist Will Birch and bassist Richie Bull, all of whom contributed to songs.

Some might say that following it with a raunchy live set wasn't the most astute commercial decision, and that they should have been working up new chart material, and it was certainly the end of their flirtation with the charts. Graham had gone by this time, replaced by the guitar virtuosity of Barry Martin (to later re-emerge in the Hamsters) and FIVE LIVE KUSAALS, recorded in the sweaty confines of the Marquee, was by any other standards a cracker. A collection of favourites from Golden Mile and their previous two albums (including of course, *Little Does...* along with *Pocket Money*, *Cruisin' For Love* and *Speedway*) it shows the band at their unadulterated best. To revisit that sound, with a more full-blooded country rock punch, listen to Shuttleworth and Collins' latest band, the Ugly Guys (find them on Myspace). **ND**
www.revola.co.uk

The Maddox Brothers and Sister Rose FROM DANCEFLOOR TO DEVOTION: SATURDAY NIGHT BARN DANCE AND SUNDAY MORNING RELIGIOUS HANGOVERS
Righteous Psalm
★★★★

American West Coast early post war era country recordings

One of my musical regrets is that I did not get to see the late Rose Maddox on one of her final UK tours when she was performing mainly in an acoustic/bluegrass style, as evidenced from some of her later Capitol recordings. Although there

are no dates given to any of the 25 songs on this interesting CD, my guess is that they stem from the late 1940s, and they were all originally recorded as the Maddox Brothers and Rose—a popular act in California. Playing a style of music which was quite upbeat and 'poppy' at times, they were certainly not into sad or romantic country songs! This rather unique CD has 13 songs with some very upbeat almost dance type music, such as *Mean And Wicked Boogie*, Hank Williams' original hit *Move It On Over*, and the very risqué but popular *Sally Let Your Bangs Hang Down*, before we then have a dozen popular gospel songs such as *I'll Fly Away*, the Molly O'Day classic *Tramp On The Street* and the under-recorded *When God Dips His Love In My Heart*. The writer of the sleeve notes is quite correct in saying that many of these songs put you in mind of early Tex-Mex country and rockabilly, aka Buddy Holly, Eddie Cochran and Gene Vincent. Personally I have to say that I don't particularly care for much of the style of music on this CD as it sounds very dated although I was surprised at how well the gospel songs sound with the rather frenetic backing style that the Maddox Brothers were famous for. If you are into early country, boogie woogie or western swing this will probably be your cup of tea! **DB**
<http://www.myspace.com/rosemaddoxandmaddoxbro>

Various SING SOS: SONGS OF THE SPECTRUM
SingSOS! Records
★★★★☆
Star studded compilation to aid autism research

SONGS OF THE SPECTRUM is a cycle of fourteen songs, with lyrics that focus solely on the medical condition Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Twelve of the songs are credited to John O'Neil, Jon Fried and Deena Shoshkes. O'Neil penned the lyrics and enlisted Fried and Shoshkes to write the music. John has been an editor/writer at The New York Times since 1989, and is president of the non-profit SingSOS! group. SingSOS! stands for Sing Songs of the Spectrum. In 2004 O'Neil wrote an essay about his son's autism that was subsequently nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. The aim for SING SOS: SONGS OF THE SPECTRUM is to harness the power of music to raise public awareness of this behavioural condition, while generating funds for further research into ASD.

Album producer and bassist Michael Visceglia has toured internationally with numerous musicians including Suzanne Vega, Dar Williams and Valerie Carter. The prominent contributing musicians include Marshall Crenshaw, Richard Julian, Dar Williams, Jonatha Brooke, while Jackson Browne duets with Valerie Carter, Dan Bern with Mike Viola and, finally, Don Dixon with his

wife Matri Jones. Fried and Shoshkes are members of the New Jersey alternative pop band the Cucumbers who perform Shiny House while James O'Neil, John's son, closes this collection with his narrative *My Perspective*.

Considering the subject matter of these songs it's difficult to review them dispassionately, since I have no personal experience of this 24/7 condition. All I can do, is urge you to financially support this project. **AW**
<http://singsos.org/>

The Explosives THREE RING CIRCUS

SteadyBoy CD/
DVD SB-0029

★★★★

Texan New-Wave-country crossover

The band of Steady Freddie Krc before he recorded his superlative Freddie Steady's Wild Country album LUCKY 7 in England, before he was part of Jerry Jeff Walker's band, before his Shakin' Apostles and Freddie Steady 5 psychedelic Texan country-rock incarnations, and before he was inducted into the Texas Music Hall of Fame. This is post punk power pop from the early 1980s, music that fits alongside what Nick Lowe and plenty of other chums from this side of the pond were doing, as they drifted into country and roots. Great songs, nods to the Beatles and yet true to its Texan origins. The Explosives were (and again are, now reformed) Freddie along with guitarist Cam King and bassist Waller Collie.

This is an impressive CD/DVD double set. The first starts with the Explosives' never-before-on-CD album RESTLESS NATIVES from 1982, produced in Austin by Creedence bassist Stu Cook. Featuring the jungle rocker *Headhunter*, Krc's power-pop masterpiece *A Girl Like You*, his *Love You Tonight* (reworked five years later into a swamp rocker on LUCKY 7 (with the likes of Wes McGhee, BJ Cole and Geraint Watkins) and King's somewhat more esoteric *I Thought You Were A Man*. There are also appearances from sometime Joe Ely keyboard whiz Reese Wynans, while Fab Thunderbird Kim Wilson plays harp. It's backed up by a couple of unreleased live tracks and 10 tracks from singles and EPs, which appeared on the KA-BOOM compilation several years back. All three share vocals but it is Krc (from behind the drum kit) who has the edge, with his soaring Brit-pop tones.

The DVD features 20 power-packed songs from three Texan concerts between 1981 and 1988 (during which time they were also working with ex-13th Floor Elevator Roky Erickson) which prove the band's lasting cult appeal, and suggest that they really deserved to be on Stiff Records with the Brits they were inspired by. **ND**

The Jayhawks MUSIC FROM THE NORTH COUNTRY: THE JAYHAWKS ANTHOLOGY
Sony Music 88697 47043 2

★★★★★

Not before time comes this harbinger of the alt.country pioneers declaration to stumble down the remastering and rumoured reformation campaign trail

Originally centred on the writing partnership of Mark Olson and Gary Louris they sauntered out of mid-1980s Minneapolis, issuing a quartet of releases including the hallowed HOLLYWOOD TOWN HALL and fabled TOMORROW THE GREEN GRASS before the twain split under the strain like the twin cities of their hometown. The earlier material—take the gently disembodied loping opener *Two Angels or Waiting For The Sun*—shows their clear passion for Gram Parsons and Crazy Horse though the sheer songcraft easily sets them several saddles apart from mere Americana five-minuters, as does the ascanse, sardonic worldview shared by fellow Minneapolis alumnus Paul Westerberg.

The seemingly simplistic songs being shrugged off are in reality unassuming masterclasses and defining examples of autumnal, starkly sun-dappled laments and lonesome, cloudy lullabies. Concise, eloquent, evocative and sent still further astray from the middling majority by virtue of the unique, quite possibly divinely ordained, celestial harmonies of the two songwriters' tremulous, keening draws. Utterly entrancing on the more (often than not) subdued mournful moments, positively ecstatic on the less present but more madly exuberant elegies like the deliriously sublime *Miss William's Guitar*—a hugely endearing, off-kilter love-ode to Olson's future spouse Victoria Williams—leaving the largely illusory and veiled lyrics to subtly incise meanings into your subconscious, these songs can truly tear tears from the most arid trails without notice.

Post-split Louris charted an inconsistent course out of their earlier country by-ways into power-pop and straight-ahead West Coast American rock territory of the sort hinted at and, it appeared, perfected on 1995's TOMORROW THE GREEN GRASS. Pleasingly, though, Louris alone rarely strays into overly lush, stagnant and self-satisfied straits that suggests nor strife-fuelled self-despair. That they floundered somewhat with the double-blow of losing Olson and presumable label dictates is readily discernible, as over-long songs and cluttered production stifled either by guitar or orchestral sludge at times attest. Whether desperation through loss of direction or experimentation gone slightly too far there could be a case made that at least some of these elements were bitterly self-aware

