

first solo album in 2004 and, rightly or wrongly, challenged himself to release an album of self-written songs every year. The seeds of MUSIC FROM POTTERS FIELD were sown when a friend approached him to produce some songs to accompany a play that he had written about WWI that would be performed by and for schools in the area. Joe has written each song from the point of view of individual soldiers caught up in the front line and makes you feel like you know them by the end of each track. Something as stark and ghastly as WWI shouldn't have been capable of producing songs as fragile and beautiful as achieved here. Joe Solo's voice and the crystal clear production occasionally make the listener actually believe that he's sitting alongside the character who is pouring his heart out.

It would be futile detailing each individual song but the subjects vary enormously from a soldier sent out to collect the remnants of the dead the day after Armistice Day; a soldier's letter to his Mother, a conscientious objector's reasons for not going, a family's memories of their Granddad and an Ode to Peace. As you'd expect, this not an easy album to listen to in the comfort of your own home; but if nothing else it is an incredibly touching way of getting the message that war is futile across to young people. I imagine everyone watching the play and hearing these fragile vignettes won't fail to be touched in some small way. I for one will be searching out more of Joe Solo's work. **AH**  
www.joesolo.co.uk  
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**John Flynn**  
**AMERICA'S WAITING**  
Flying Stone Music Group  
★★★★☆  
A cohesive and thought provoking song collection that bears repeated listening



Philadelphia bred, Delaware based John Flynn, cut AMERICA'S WAITING at Nashville's Sound Emporium, and it was produced by former Hot Band alumni Steve Fishell (Pam Tillis, Rodney Foster). Flynn (acoustic guitar, harmonica, ukulele and vocals) adopts a band sound on this, his sixth, solo collection and is supported throughout by Fishell (pedal, lap steel, dobro), John McTigue (drums, percussion), Dave Perez (upright, electric bass) and Eddie Roe (electric guitar, backing vocals). I hesitate to describe the sound as country-rock per se, although that approach informs some tracks.

When not pursuing his musical career, Flynn volunteers in prisons, rehabilitation centres, half-way houses and more. Events local and national, international even, the lives of people he meets on and offstage inform his lyrics. In that regard, AMERICA'S WAITING is a worthy successor to DRAGON (2003) and TWO WOLVES (2006). Painted in shades of dark and light the title song, which opens the album, expresses

hope for America's future. While George Walker Bush's reign has been consigned to the pages of history his legacy remains—*The Passunder* (New Orleans) and *Semper*

*Fi*, which immediately follows, attest to that. In late 2005, John accompanied Arlo Guthrie on the post-Katrina Train to New Orleans Tour. Deeply affected by what he witnessed in the Crescent City, *The Passunder* (New Orleans) resulted. In the lyric Flynn parallels the flight of Moses and the Israelites from Egypt with the evacuation of New Orleans. *Semper Fi* recalls the life of Marine Corporal Eric Hall, an Iraq war combat veteran, who suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Missing for weeks, in March 2008 his body was found in a Florida storm drain. At the close, Flynn fires from the hip: 'He fought for this land and saluted...the same stars and stripes on a pole that waved goodbye when that fight left him...with scars and stripes on his soul.'

Elsewhere a succinct local newspaper headline: 'Dog dies, man hurt, chicken house burns' supplied the inspiration for *Chicken House*, while *The Darker The Night* recalls the October 2006 Amish schoolhouse shooting. Through repeated use of parable Flynn has created a cohesive and thought provoking song collection that bears repeated listening, particularly *The Prodigal Father* and *The Jesse Tree*. **AW**  
http://www.johnflynn.net/  
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**Johnsmith**  
**GRAVITY OF GRACE**  
Blue Pine Music  
★★★★☆

A group of talented musicians assemble for album number six



Johnsmith was born in rural eastern Iowa, and resides these days just over the state line in western Wisconsin. A 1990 winner of the Kerrville Folk Festival's prestigious New Folk Songwriting Contest, his debut solo album surfaced later that decade. *GRAVITY OF GRACE*, his sixth release, was recorded at Tom Prasada Rao's Dallas, Texas studio. Co-produced with Rao, the session players include friends old and new. In the former category Darrell Scott (guitar, vocals), Tim O'Brien (mandolin, vocals) and Dan Sebranek (guitar, vocals) contributed to Smith's *BREAK ME OPEN* (2006). As for the latter, a prominent feature on this go-round is the presence of a swathe of former New Folk winners including Michael Lille, Ray Bonneville, Jonathan Byrd and not forgetting Rao and partner Cary Cooper. Finally, I must mention that irrepressible master of keyboard and accordion Radoslav Lorkovic, while Smith's daughter Elisi Smith Waller adds her wonderful voice to four cuts.

Ten of the thirteen tracks are Johnsmith penned originals or co-writes, and *GRAVITY OF GRACE* can be summed up as an old-school marriage of folk and rock, although,

Rao's fondness for jazz-tinged guitar riffs is up-front and obvious on a few selections. Album opener *Right Into Love*, an autobiographical travelogue-love ode, is for certain one of the latter. On *Ring That Bell* Bonneville's harp adds blues to the mix. Recalling a long ago phone conversation with his late dad, *Father's Day* finds Smith lyrically wear his heart on his sleeve, Lorkovic's accordion shines on the hoedown paced *Scotch Pine*, while *Juni Rae* was penned for Smith's latest grandchild.

Elsewhere, Jonathan Byrd helped write *Jay Bird* and supplies a support vocal on the cut. As for the three cover tunes that emerge late on in this collection, Dylan's *The Times They Are A Changin'* is followed by *The Only One For Me*, a love song penned by Cork bred John Spillane. Smith frequently visits the Emerald Isle and the latter pair feature Irish whistle. A percussive reading of Gary Brooker's (Procol Harum) arrangement of the traditional *On The Mainline* closes the album. **AW**  
www.johnsmithmusic.com/  
http://www.myspace.com/johnsmithjohnsmithmusic

**Katie Quick**  
**BE THE CHANGE**  
Independent release  
★★★★★

Infectious, country release that is intriguing, captivating and

compelling... for a self released, self produced debut, this is a masterpiece

This album has caught me by surprise. With so many American female country vocalists trying to hit the big time, we've been inundated with review requests. But this is truly awesome. Opening with *Lonely Stage*; an upbeat full country sound, convicting in both style and ability, Katie soon makes a huge positive introduction to her music and the level of talent on show here. As the story gets underway, country twang and lyrical essences stream through and the current is somewhat uplifting. The second track *Gone* provides us with a convincing love song but also the chance to see Katie take on a slower track with passion. By now I was comparing her to Laura Vecchione, Alana Kurtis and Lisa Redford, but with track three *85 Degrees* this all changed. Suddenly a full catchy country-pop song hits the waves and within a minute you're hooked and everything's changed. Now I could happily put her in the same category as Carrie Underwood, Dixie Chicks and Jewel—the wonderful vocals shine through as do the songs that come across with ease and conviction and the musicianship



**Guy Clark**  
**SOMEDAYS THE SONG WRITES YOU**  
Dualtone Records  
★★★★★

Quality songcraft that as always passes the test of time

Co-produced by Clark, sideman/writing partner Verlon Thomson and Chris Latham, the same team responsible for *COLD DOG SOUP*, *THE DARK* and *WORKBENCH SONGS*, the eleven songs here find Guy co-writing with some old friends—Thompson, Gary Nicholson and Rodney Crowell—and a few new ones—Jedd Hughes, Joe Leathers and Ashley Monroe. Essentially this is an acoustic string band album with acoustic guitars, upright bass, cello, mandolin and fiddle furnishing a delicate backdrop for Clark's ever more thoughtful lyrics, while Kenny Malone's drums/percussion, when present, are pleasantly understated. Songwriters are heralded, but most simply enjoy their fifteen minutes and fade back to from whence they came. In four decades of recording Guy has never dropped the ball, and when some scribe sits down to piece together the root and branch history of this genre of music (that we love), I pray that Clark's canon will come to be regarded as ageless as that of, say, Porter's or Gershwin's. There is no denying Guy Clark is a bona-fide American original!

I've heard the art of merging word and melody referred to, euphemistically, as: 'taking out the trash.' In the album title song (which opens this collection), constructed around the repeated: 'Somedays you write the song, Somedays the song writes you,' Clark muses about this mystery with: 'There's no rhyme or reason, Ain't a damn thing you can do,' and: 'You can curse you can pray, But the words have a way of their own,' then in the closing verse, with a sly wink, he adds: 'You may think I made this up, But I would not lie that's true.' *The Guitar* is a spooky tale wherein the narrator finds a battered old instrument in a pawn shop. In the spirit of the foregoing lyric (and for that matter, Charlie Daniels' *The Devil Went Down To Georgia*), when the narrator begins playing the instrument the question arises: 'Is he playing the guitar, or is the guitar playing him?' As for the punch line, that comes when the shop owner hands the narrator the guitar case—buy the album and unravel the mystery.

Clark reflects further upon the artist and his art in *Hemingway's Whiskey*, *The Coat* is simply classic Clark, while *Eamon* is the portrait of a sailor finally home from the sea. (Beginning with *COLD DOG SOUP*) Guy's fourth, consecutive nod to Townes is an up-tempo cover of *If I Needed You*. Upright bassist Bryn Davies (formerly Bryn Bright) supplies the harmony vocal on the latter tune, and her striking voice features on a number of other cuts as does Verlon's. As for Guy, in every facet, his music and voice matures with age. Simply put, *SOMEDAYS THE SONG WRITES YOU* is another robustly constructed song collection from the craftsman's workbench. **AW**  
www.guyclark.com  
www.myspace.com/guyclarkofficial  
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