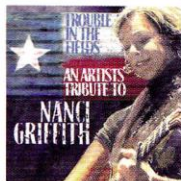


Various Artists TROUBLE IN THE FIELDS

Paradiddle Records

★★★★

Here's a song tribute
to Nanci Griffith's
five decade musical career



The full title of this fourteen-song compilation from Long Island based Paradiddle Records (drum roll please) is TROUBLE IN THE FIELDS: AN ARTISTS' TRIBUTE TO NANCY GRIFFITH. The three-way, foldout sleeve features liner notes from Griffith road band alumni Pete Kennedy, who, along with his wife Maura, is credited as executive producer of this tribute project. Think of any musician who has attained international recognition and it would be true to contend that in reaching such heights, their back pages are a spider's web of fellow troubadour connections. That contention is probably truer of the folk community than of any other musical genre, and that's where this disc subtly scores, since many of the contributing players enjoy a direct connection to Nanci's five-decade musical career. Circa 1987, Griffith was the first of countless musicians to record *From A Distance*, penned by New York City-based writer Julie Gold, and here the former HBO secretary reciprocates with a performance of *Anyone Can Be Somebody's Fool*.

Though not born in Texas, two present day residents select the oldest and most recent Griffith composition. Tom Russell, contrary to ordinary as ever, reaches back to the dawn of Nanci's recording career for *If I Were A Child* from the B.F. DEAL SAMPLER (1977). Supported by Andy Hardin (guitar), with production credited to Gurf Morlix, doubtless this is an archival recording. Just as Tom's solo career was taking off, Griffith covered his *St. Olavs Gate* (1986) and they subsequently penned *Outbound Plane*—a 1991 number 9 country hit for Suzy Bogguss. From FLYER (1994), New York-bred Austinite Jerry Jeff Walker covers *Talk To Me While I'm Listening*, and elsewhere Amy Rigby performs the title song.

While it's a moot comment relative to Nanci's longevity as a composer, the other songs covered all date from the 1980s. Nanci cut her teeth in Austin listening rooms, and the state capital looms large in her story. Current resident Sara Hickman kicks off this collection via the energetic *Listen To The Radio*. Nanci covered Edwina

Hayes' *Pour Me A Drink* and this Dublin-born, Yorkshire based songwriter toured the UK with the Texan a few times during the noughties. Hayes pick is *It's A Hard Life Wherever You Go*. Performed as a duet, the late John Stewart's *Sweet Dreams Will Come* appeared on Griffith's LITTLE LOVE AFFAIRS (1988), and here Big John delivers *Last Of The True Believers*. The Greenwich Village adventures of Texas-born folk musician Carolyn Hester, during the folk explosion of the early 1960s, were an inspiration to young Nanci, and *I Don't Wanna Talk About Love* is Hester's pick.

Nanci's other compositions covered here are, *Trouble In The Fields* (Caroline Doctorow)—co-writer Rick West isn't credited in the liner, *I'm Not Drivin' These Wheels* (The Kennedys), *I Wish It Would Rain* (Eric Brace & Last Train Home), *Lookin' For The Time* (Red Molly) and *Love At The Five And Dime* (Stacy Earle & Mark Stuart). This collection's 'diamond in the rough' is undoubtedly Tracy Grammer and Jim Henry's acoustically atmospheric rendition of *Gulf Coast Highway*. **Arthur Wood**

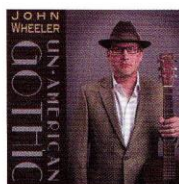
www.paradiddlemusic.com

John Wheeler UN-AMERICAN GOTHIC

Cooking Vinyl

★★★★★

From rock-grass to
singer-songwriter
extraordinaire



John has been the frontman for rock-grass band Hayseed Dixie since 2000, going under the name of Barley Scotch. Now that the band has decided to take time out for a couple of years, it has given John the chance to do other things, this solo album being one of them. Although helped by Ben Bastin playing upright bass on three tracks, Rob Pennel drumming on two tracks and Jayson Wyatt adding cymbals on one track, John actually covers everything else himself, as he takes on lead vocals, guitar, piano, B3 organ, violin, bass, drums and percussion. He has even written ten of the twelve songs...multi-talented or what!

Doomsday Dance was one of the first songs John wrote for the album and it is one of the best. It flies out of the speakers with vitality and enthusiasm, starting with an almost Cajun-sounding drum intro, before going very gypsy with fiery fiddle and storming vocals that sound a bit like Elvis Costello. This track had me reaching

for the repeat button a couple of times as it is just so good.

Deeper In Debt put me in mind of Graham Parker, *Like I Want You* is a stunning love song that would fit in with the playlists of many major radio shows in the UK. *Wondering Why I Ever Go Home* is a fine country tune that could be a hit for a band like Lonestar and *Walk Between The Raindrops* is another outstanding tune that is just so uplifting and stress-free.

John does a couple of covers on the album, including an impassioned rendering of Dylan's *Masters Of War* and an intriguing adaptation of The Jam's *Eton Rifles*. As a big fan of The Jam I was very unsure of this when it first came on, but by the end of the song I was hooked...terrific version.

Never a fan of Hayseed Dixie, but solo John Wheeler is brilliant. **David Knowles**

www.johnwheelermusic.com

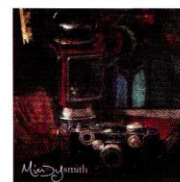
Mindy Smith MINDY SMITH

Giant Leap/TVX

Records

★★★★☆

This may very well
be her defining
moment as an artist and as a writer



Mindy Smith is not exactly the most prolific of artists. A new album seems to arrive around once every three years, but the wait is usually well worthwhile, as she always has something meaningful to say and wraps it all up in exquisite musical arrangements. That is very much the case with this latest effort ... the one big difference, following four albums for Vanguard Records, she's now totally independent and has self-released this self-titled album, which she has also co-produced with Jason Lehning. The result is a true-to-its-roots album with an urbane, seductive spin on alternative country and American folk-pop. Though she has co-written some of these songs with the likes of Phil Madeira, Daniel Tashian, Kate York and Lori McKenna, in my opinion, the best songs are the ones that she wrote by herself. They just seem more focused and create a better performance.

Having said that the spontaneity and intimacy of opener *Closer* (a co-write with Madeira) really pulled me in, and it soon became apparent that it was just the tip of an ocean-deep iceberg. *Take Me Back* has an instantly memorable, yet subtle feel, Mindy's delicate voice hypnotically drawing