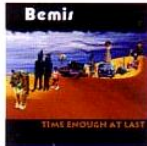


**Bemis
TIME ENOUGH
AT LAST**
Self Released
★★★★☆

Superlative vocal
and acoustic
efforts from a
much underrated duo



Made up of just Gareth Howells and Ritchie Leo who write all the material on this ten track debut album, this duo from the South of England have some of the sweetest and purest sounding harmonies I have ever had the pleasure to experience.

Slogan Song begins quite sparse and in a tamer spirit on acoustics than other tracks on this album but this somewhat lack of overpowering instrumentation does not by any means harm this tune's overall feeling as it offers a social commentary whilst sung in the lad's own style which seems to impress once the first note has been sung. The picking to *Brilliant Fire* can be best described as knockout which, along with both Gareth's and Ritchie's impressive efforts on vocals, have surely been adored by past audiences and certainly will occur once again in future gigs. On the vast majority of songs, Gareth takes the lead on vocals but when the opportunity arises for Ritchie to flex his vocal muscles he grabs the harmony bull by the horns and relishes every second. This is most evident on *There's More To Come*, with Gareth by no means giving a poor performance on support. The picking is by all means worth a mention, as the combination of their acoustic efforts and singing is quite special. With regular gigging happening across the country but concentrating more in Southern England, I urge you to attend one of their gigs. Having seen them appear at the 2009 Southsea Folk and Roots Festival, they sure are a delight to see. **RH**
www.myspace.com/bemisuk

**Ben Bullington
WHITE
SULPHUR
SPRINGS**
★★★★

Polished singer-
songwriter with
much to say
lyrically about the world we live in



Bullington eases into his sophomore release with the gentle night-time portrait *Ring Around the Moon*. Set in a diner booth the down-on-his-luck, much-travelled narrator in the ensuing and wistful *Ain't Found It Yet* relates how: 'I've been all over this country, but I ain't found it yet.' Posing serious questions about life, and how people choose to live it, Rodney Crowell and Bullington duet on *Toe The Line*—'Am I messenger for the king's liars, Am I sneaking round putting out other men's fires, Do I celebrate more than I criticise, Do I find my own truth, do I toe the line.' In the latter, Bullington recalls a time when honesty was a valued currency and an American could hold his head high and proudly call himself a liberal.

In the autobiographical *Born In '55*,

the setting is a barroom. Bullington nails how during the 1960s the western world lost its way—'At that point three great men were dead and Nixon left alive.' This reflection upon the turmoil-filled decade includes mention of Vietnam and Hendrix at Woodstock. Opening lines in the charming, waltz-paced love song *No Matter How Many Times*—'I liked the way you looked in jeans, They fit like July and bare feet'—captures that moment when everything changes. Ben's acoustic guitar and voice are ably supported by violin and cello on the latter. For the narrators—a husband and wife—life with their kids goes on, but an undercurrent of unease is woven into the fabric of the deceptively lyrical *Twangy Guitars*. In the closing segment there's a deal of good news and joy for all. Anyone whose life has been touched by life-threatening illness will take comfort from this genuinely unsentimental portrait. As for *White Sulphur Springs*, it's in Montana and has been Virginia-bred Bullington's home in recent time. On the plaintive gospel-tinged album closer *I'm A Stranger* Ben is vocally supported by Tracy Nelson, while the lyric focuses once again on America and its politics, at home and abroad.

The aforementioned guest appearances apart, the only support players on this ten-song set of Bullington originals are Fats Kaplin (pedal steel, violin, mandolin, accordion), George Bradfute (bass, electric guitar, cello) and one-time Sony music executive Joanne Gardner (vocals). While music has been a constant undercurrent, Ben has been an oil field geologist, doctor and in recent times, a performing musician. There's a subtle and gentle grace to this man's music that warrants your hearing. **AW**
<http://benbullington.com/>

**Billy Irvine
WEAR A
NUMBER**
Self Released
★★★★★

Extraordinary
material which
has echoes of
Paul Simon running through its veins



With this his second album, UK singer-songwriter Billy Irvine has released a quite sublime albeit short EP album consisting of six songs that highlight his ability to pick an electric guitar like a man on a mission as well as write some superb songs that seem to hark back to the days of Hendrix and Denver in their prime.

Evening Hill has an all round quality that really is superb. Billy hits the musical G-Spot on more than one occasion with pulsating efforts on background instrumentation with the electric guitar picking towards this song's conclusion quite beautiful to say the least. With a peach of a start, *Bring It Home* seems to sound like so many artists that it's quite outstanding. Whether it's Paul Simon or if it is Hendrix, this self-penned tune certainly doesn't harm Billy's credentials as a very fine musician who should be playing in the big leagues and in some of the world's larger stadiums. *Right Some*

Wrong seems to invite its audience to continue listening as it seems to grab you by the cochlea which in turn gives you no urge to leave this track before its eventual demise. It seems to merge many different genres together towards the creation of a potential classic that has definite radio possibilities; a cracker of a track which I know many will love even after hearing it for the first time.

Wowing the crowds at the 2009 Southsea Folk & Roots Festival, this artist is one person who is just as good live as he is on an album. An exceptional talent who must be heard to be believed as no review can ever summarise Billy's genius. **RH**
www.billyirvine.co.uk
www.myspace.com/billyirvinemusic

**Boulder
Acoustic
Society
PUNCHLINE**
Nine Mile Records
★★★

Wacky quartet
with varied
musical genres all wrapped up in
their own on-the-edge style



The packaging that accompanies this release borders on the ridiculous. Quite frankly, 'What was the point?' The main card structure, coupled with lenses can be made into a 3-D viewer and is accompanied by five inserts, most double-sided, that portray this quartet together and individually. Once seen ... enough said. The separate backing card contains instructions for building the viewer. To prevent the foregoing contents spilling out they're housed in a clear cellophane re-sealable packet. The viewer totally works, and the band's fifth disc is housed in a compartment on the underside of the packaging.

So what of the music made by this quartet, is it as frivolous as the packaging OR does it actually possess merit? In terms of instrumentation the Society features accordion, keyboards, drums, violin/viola, upright bass, guitar, lap steel, ukulele, banjo and cornet. Album opener *We Tried* lyrically attempts humour but in truth, sounds contrived. An inauspicious start, the ensuing *Until Then* is a straight arrow love song. Launched by a martial drumbeat, the vocally frantic and angry, *Give It Away* takes a side swipe at the American government's policies at home and abroad. In terms of tempo, *Frog Pajama Waltz* is precisely that. Since Klemzer is the stylistic undercurrent of *So Confused*, I felt uneasy regarding the lines: 'She stutters in Sunday school, got Hitler's brain in a jar, She turns her tricks on Monday's by the new family car.' Maybe I'm the one that needs to lighten up? I feel there should still be (some) boundaries...

There are snatches of blues, folk, gospel, indie and world music in the Society's oeuvre. Based on evidence delivered on the fifteen-song PUNCHLINE, this wacky foursome knows exactly how to abandon musical caution in word and melody. **AW**
<http://boulderacousticsociety.net/>
<http://www.myspace.com/boulderacousticsociety>

**Caroline
Herring
GOLDEN
APPLES OF
THE SUN**
Signature Sounds
Recording Co.
★★★★



Herring's fourth
release is a seamless mix of originals
and covers

On GOLDEN APPLES OF THE SUN, Herring is at turns radically new and same old same old. Same old, since she appears to love producers who are accomplished guitarists. John Inmon helmed her 2001 debut, Robert Earl Keen sideman Rich Brotherton produced the ensuing pair. Six-string wizard David 'Goody' Goodrich fulfils the role here. The Inmon and Brotherton discs were created in Texas, GOLDEN APPLES OF THE SUN was recorded at Signature Sounds studio in Pomfret, Connecticut at the turn of the year. Not only was this Mississippi girl on unfamiliar Northern ground, the air temperature was a tad cooler. Think snow, deep snow. A coterie of session players contributed to Herring's previous albums, while support on GOLDEN APPLES OF THE SUN is pretty much down to Goody's acoustic strung instruments plus his occasional input on piano. As a result, Herring's voice, banjo and guitar are front and centre as never before. Not averse to recording covers this twelve-song disc features five of them. As I said, new and old.

Having, so far, name-checked male associates past and present, here are the ladies and those covers. *See See Rider* was first recorded by Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey back in 1924, *Cactus Tree* covered Joni Mitchell's 1968 debut *SONG TO A SEAGULL*, while six years earlier Judy Collins included William Butler Yeats' *Song Of The Wandering Aengus* on her sophomore album, GOLDEN APPLES OF THE SUN. Ann Castro adds a backing vocal to *Long Black Veil*, a song co-written by the late Marijohn Wilkin and Danny Dill. Cyndi Lauper will forever be associated with her 1986 number one pop hit single *True Colors*, a song penned by Tom Kelly and Billy Steinberg. Adopting a distinctly softer approach Herring owns the latter song, the Yeats arrangement is pleasingly unique while Herring's rendition of *Cactus Tree* strays close to Mitchell's original.

Time for a few thoughts on some of Herring's new creations—*Tales Of The Islander*, a song that took years to complete, was inspired by the life of Walter Anderson, the Mississippi artist/naturalist. Launched by a descriptive pastoral portrait *A Turn Upon The Hill* the narrator goes on to enquire: 'Can you see inside my soul' and 'Can you see inside me.' *The Dozens* is upbeat and melodic, while Herring's words concentrate on life and racial tolerance. *Abuelita*, a Spanish word that translates as 'grandmother', is a tender portrait of her maternal relative. The closing songs, respectively, *The Great Unknown* and *The Wild Rose*, draw upon the world of novelists and poets. Dante's *DIVINE COMEDY* and the trials life throws in our path is