

to become a honky-tonk standard. Such was the popularity of the duo, particularly through the 1950s that they were dubbed Mr and Mrs Country Music.

Both individually and jointly Joe and Rose Lee recorded quite prolifically over the years and once again, Righteous Psalm has trawled through their catalogues and presented us with a selection of their recordings. The first ten tracks feature the pair of them vocalising together on a number of heartbreak songs like *Cold Heart Of Steel*, *The Parting Of The Ways* and the often related tale of separation in *Dream House For Sale*, written by Joe, who also penned the title track and *I'm Willin' To Try*, while Rose Lee demonstrates her own writing skill on *Please Mr Mailman*, which she sings solo. Another heartbreaker is *I'm A Stranger In My Home*, a sort of accusation by Joe followed by a response from Rose.

The next five tracks are instrumentals showcasing the talent of Joe on three tunes he wrote himself, *Sweet Rose*, *Moonshot* and *Short Recess*, along with *Del Rio* and the finger busting *Pickin' and Guttin'* on which his mind boggling virtuosity is enough to make any aspiring young guitarist hurl his instrument into a corner and sulk for a week! The final track features the Rockabilly Rose Lee belting her way through *Country Girl Courtship*, which tells of her efforts to win the hearts of various musicians until she finally succeeds in winning that of a multi-instrumentalist. **LK** www.righteous23.com

Emitt Rhodes THE EMITT RHODES RECORD-INGS (1969-1973) Hip-O-Select/ Universal BOO12926-02 ★★★★



Forgotten singer's life's work

Four albums and a single, 48 tracks, the complete recorded works of the under-rated singer-songwriter and one-man-band in one neat, reverential package. Rhodes came from a 1960s American pop background but expanded into a creator of something that went further, often with overtones of the slick country which was around at the time, certainly with an air of sunny, West Coast pop-rock. As much as he was a writer, he became a studio whizz kid, playing and recording everything at home.

His debut album, *EMITT RHODES*, was well-received, hitting the US top 30, with the charming single *Fresh As A Daisy* just missing the top 50. It was a beguiling record, elements of Byrds, Beatles and British psychedelic folk. It's actually the second album here, following *THE AMERICAN DREAM*, which was actually released later but recorded earlier. *DREAM* was the only one using studio musicians—including the likes of legendary Hollywood session drummer Hal Blaine—as Rhodes fulfilled the contract of his former band Merry-Go-Round. There were two further albums, *MIRROR*

and *FAREWELL TO PARADISE*, which did reasonably well. But the work involved in piecing together each one meant Rhodes couldn't keep to his contract and was sued by his label for \$250,000. At the age of 24 Rhodes walked away from it all and has barely been heard from since.

It's an impressive catalogue he leaves behind, even though at times you think he might have found more acceptance, in the years of Crosby, Stills and Nash and the folk-rock revival, if he's have kept things simpler. **ND** www.hip-o-select.com

Old Man Luedecke MY HANDS ARE ON FIRE AND OTHER LOVE SONGS Black Hen Records ★★★★



Banjo toting Canadian roots musician delivers album number 4

Chris Luedecke's chosen instrument is the banjo. Although he plays acoustic guitar on two songs and he penned ten of the eleven songs on this, his fourth recording, released in the UK last year and now out worldwide on Black Hen. By way of a tribute, there's a cover of the late Willie P. Bennett's *Caney Fork River*. Born in Toronto, Luedecke subsequently headed east and has resided in Nova Scotia. The town of Chester to be precise. For many years, but

MY HANDS ARE ON FIRE AND OTHER LOVE SONGS his third Black Hen release was conceived on Canada's west coast. Produced by Black Hen owner Steve Dawson, recording sessions took place at the Factory Studios and the Henhouse in Vancouver, British Columbia. *PROOF OF LOVE*, Old Man's third album. He's still in his early thirties. Picked up the 2009 Juno for Best Roots Traditional Solo Album. Bluegrass ace Tim O'Brien (fiddle, mandolin, acoustic guitar, vocal) contributes to ten of the *MY HANDS ARE ON FIRE* songs, Dawson employs a swathe of instruments that are either strung or played with keys, while bassist Keith Lowe (Fiona Apple, Bill Frisell) and drummer John Raham (Be Good Tanyas, Po' Girl) firmly hold down the backbone.

There's intentionally wry humour in the name *Old Man Luedecke*. Chris' banjo being the old traditional element in his musical oeuvre. While Chris' lyrics are subjectively contemporary and occasionally amusing. A prime example of the latter is album opener *Lass Vicious*. The tale of a couple who filled with spring fever visit Nevada's neon lit playground. On the front cover picture, with his wings spread, Icarus rises toward the Sun and a similar flight of fancy is referenced in *The Rear Guard*. A powerful political commentary *Woe Betide The Doer Of The Deed* opens by referencing how: 'The gray train has thinned out in the rain, Of Wall Street washing down the drain' and there's subsequent mention of: 'The crushing pain of

our debts, The way you drove your country to the ground' and of 'foreign wars' that 'cut the purse strings of the poor.' Now I wonder who that 'you' can be?

Featuring lyrics that focus on a diverse range of subjects, *MY HANDS ARE ON FIRE AND OTHER LOVE SONGS* is, beginning to end, a banjo driven bluegrass cocktail. **AW** www.oldmanluedecke.ca

Texas Ruby TEAR-DROPS IN MY HEART Righteous Psalm 23:22 ★★★★

Heartbreaking country songs from the 1940s by oft forgotten hillbilly singer

Ruby Agnes Owens was born in 1908. Her brother, Tex Owen was the writer of *Cattle Call*, the song which really put Eddy Arnold on the map. At a relatively young age she was performing on radio in Kansas and was dubbed 'Radio's Original Cowgirl.' Ruby had a very distinctive voice, deep, husky; an almost masculine alto. Perhaps it was her fondness for hard liquor and her addiction to cigarettes which were partly responsible for that huskiness, and they may also have contributed to her fiery temper, but whatever the causes, no other female singers at the time sounded quite like her.

In 1939 she met and married Curly Fox, an outstanding fiddle player. The pair of them made regular appearances on the Grand Ole Opry between 1944 and 1948 but although Ruby recorded briefly for Decca, the majority of her recordings were made for King and Columbia. Despite being country to the core, both vocally, in her selection of material, much of which was either self-penned or in collaboration with Curly, and her choice of instrumentation, lashings of steel, fiddle, country guitar and slip-note piano, Ruby failed to make the charts. The closest she came to a major hit was with a Fred Rose composition, *Don't Let That Man Get You Down*.

By all accounts the folk at Righteous Psalm had a wealth of material from which to select the 23 featured tracks. Whether or not Ruby was given to recording many optimistic songs, the evidence from this collection suggests that it was the heartbreaking, cheating, losing in love, honky tonk songs which she favoured. The titles speak for themselves; *Teardrops and Empty Arms*, *Big Silver Tears*, *It's Raining Teardrops In My Heart*, *The Letter That Broke My Heart*, *Those Dreams Are Gone*; the list goes on and proves to be meat and drink for those who sit in darkened corners of spit and sawdust honky tonks shedding salty tears in their beer. Apart from convincingly delivering these cheating songs Ruby also turned to old time ballads, generally tragic, with titles like *Falling Leaf*, *Soldier's Return* and *The Code Of The Mountains*. Added for good measure are some titles which did not originate from Ruby's pen, another well known Fred Rose composition, *We Live In Two Different*



Worlds, a blue yodel, associated with Jimmie Rodgers, *Travellin' Blues* and a song which proved to be a number one hit for Wesley Tuttle in 1945, and later recorded by Hank Williams, *With Tears In My Eyes*.

Texas Ruby deserved far greater success than she received, but perhaps some of her failures could have been self-imposed. Too many times she failed to appear for scheduled auditions, or if she did, she was somewhat inebriated. Tragically, on March 29, 1963, while her husband, Curly, was performing on the Opry, Ruby fell asleep while she was smoking in their mobile home. She died in the resulting fire—at the age of 55. **LK** www.reighteous23.com

Various Artists YOU HEARD IT HERE FIRST VOLUME 2 Ace CDCHD 1250 ***

Original versions—some good, some not so...
You'll know the songs backwards. After all, Mustang Sally, California Dreamin', Everybody's Talkin' and Hush were all big hits and part of the soundtrack of a generation. But the artists singing them are rather less memorable—let's face it, Sir Mack Rice and Fred Neil are hardly household names even in their own households. Yet that's the fascination of the second edition of *YOU HEARD IT HERE FIRST*, 24 original versions of numbers that would later become chart successes for other singers. Most of them offer a different slant on a familiar theme—for instance, Billy Joe Royal's take on Hush is bright and poppy in contrast to Deep Purple's much heavier hit version and the gentle Four Preps alternative *Love Of The Common People* compares favourably with better-known stylings by Nicky Thomas, Waylon Jennings and Paul Young. And Johnny Kidd's 1960 UK number one *Shakin' All Over* remains definitive, despite a later chart placing for Canadian band The Guess Who. Dan Penn's original of his own *I'm Your Puppet* has rarity value—he actually sings: 'I'm THE puppet'—even if James and Bobby Purify were far more commercial, and Chuck Berry cut a superior version of his composition *Come On* before up-and-coming British blues boys The Rolling Stones released it as their debut single. There are several quirky blueprints, notably Tony Joe White's *Old Man Willis*, which was not very snappy until he rewrote it, gave it some alligator bite and reissued it as the stompin', chompin' Polk Salad Annie. And how about Mbube by Solomon Linda's *Original Evening Birds*? That was a 78rpm smash way back in 1939 for Solomon's tribe in their native South Africa before it was transformed into *Wimoweh* and then The Lion Sleeps Tonight as it extended its chart life into the 1960s. Oddities and talking points abound in this offbeat collection and pop pundits and chart students will find plenty to absorb them. **BK**