

NEW RELEASES

ran the successful Fern Street Circus and performed there in the circus pit band. Variety is clearly the name of his game.

HEART OF A CLOWN is his debut album and bears all the hallmarks of his flamboyant career to date. In the UK, he would have made regular appearances on Leonard Sachs' popular 1970s TV variety show *The Good Old Days*. His vocal styling is similar to that of the late Vivian Stanshall, Paul McDowell (singer with The Temperance Seven) and the singers fronting the New Vaudeville Band on such pop classics as *Winchester Cathedral*. The main difference between these singers and High-Hat is that their performances were humorous pastiches and his appears to be straightforward and sincere. That being the case, his singing style is more reminiscent of a granddad singing at a jolly festive family gathering rather than fronting an entire album of 13 country, swing and easy listening cover songs.

The musicians behind High-Hat show considerable talent, as in the extended pedal steel performance by Teddy Weber on *A Thousand Goodnights*. The vocal here is more Ringo Starr on The Beatles' *Goodnight* (from their *WHITE ALBUM*) than anything that John, Paul or George might have sung. One of two instrumental tracks, *Gingerbread Waltz*, written by album co-producer Steve Jirak, does feature some fine mandolin playing by High-Hat. Jaunty upbeat ragtime-styled numbers such as Bob Nolan's *One More Ride* suit High-Hat's limited vocal range well. *Pipeliners Blues* sounds straight out of Tennessee Ernie Ford's early 1950s repertoire. The album notes refer to the material as containing 'songs of hunger, longing and sadness, change and affirmation.' This might be true of albums by a legend such as Johnny Cash but it is stretching a point to describe this collection as torch songs of this ilk.

There are times when High-Hat's voice is sharp and wavery as he reaches for notes beyond a comfortable reach, such as on the Elvis Presley/Bill Trader classic (*Now and Then There's A Fool Such As I*). He is on firmer ground when playing one of the stringed instruments, for which he has a major talent. *South* is an example of his skills in this regard. Throughout the album High-Hat plays mandolin, upright bass, tenor banjo, mandocello and musical saw.

HEART OF A CLOWN has moments of relaxed enjoyment, such as on the old 1930s classic *Pennies From Heaven*, when High-Hat's

cracked vocals fit the style of the song like a glove and the more up-tempo *'Deed I Do*. In the main, however, this album is somewhat of an endearing curiosity rather than a richly rewarding listen. **Simon Beards**

www.johnnyhigh-hat.com

Jude Johnstone SHATTER

BoJak Records

★★★

No one genre of music can pin down Johnstone's lyrically intense new album



In the gospel-tinged album title song which launches SHATTER, the desperate narrator describes her life as: 'Bearing the weight, of this ball and chain' and how she is: 'Just like a train, gone clean off the track.' Ultimately: 'Looking for peace at the end of the day,' the narrator believes that to: 'Turn the page' she must: 'Shatter the scorn, shatter the rage.' The opening song sets the thematic tone for this album, in terms of the 'relationships in transition' portrayed by Johnstone's 11 original compositions. Two of the latter headcount—*What A Fool* and vocally-distorted *The Underground Man*—were co-produced with co-writer David Ricketts who adds drums, bass, guitar, piano and samples to both. *When Does Love Get Easier* and the closing selection *Free Man* were co-produced with Jackson Browne sideman Kevin McCormick (bass), while Johnstone produced all the remaining selections on her sixth solo outing. That's a concoction which doesn't exactly inspire. Doubtless intended as a tribute to her musical mentor, the late Clarence Clemons, *When Does Love Get Easier* includes a raunchy, heartfelt Marc Macisso saxophone solo.

Among the diverse range of instruments aiding and abetting Jude are Peter White (guitar), Dan Savant (trumpet), Charley Morillas (trombone), Danny Frankel (cajón, bodhran and tambourine), Paddy Keenan (uilleann pipes and flute) and Radoslav Lorkovic (organ). Long-time Jimmy LaFave sideman Lorkovic co-wrote the bluesy *Touchdown Jesus* with Jude, while her collaborator on the aforementioned *Free Man* is Michael Massarik. Here, in the process of leaping from folk to pop to blues and jazz influenced melodies on which she hangs her lyrics, titles such as *Girl Afraid* and *Your Side Of The Bed* find Johnstone's narrators reflect upon and question their

life journey, leading to self-discovery and in some instances redemption. Songs from Johnstone's catalogue have been covered by a coterie of musically diverse artists including Bonnie Raitt, Bette Midler, Johnny Cash and Trisha Yearwood. **Arthur Wood**

www.judejohnstone.com

Lulu Mae THE MOCKINGBIRD AND THE DOGWOOD TREE

Self-Release

★★★★☆

Brilliant follow-up release from this impressively talented five-piece band from Nashville



Lulu Mae (which isn't the name of a young folk woman, making her musical debut, which is what I initially thought from the CD cover—and it's also the name of a bridal shop here in Sheffield) is in fact the band name of this five-piece family acoustic ensemble, that is really packing a punch on the Nashville music scene and has been since the moderate success of their 2010 debut *EVERYTHING IN THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD*—this ten-track collection is set to do even better; and it's not hard to see why.

With lead singer Joel Finley (acoustic guitar, ukulele, harmonica) sharing the vocals with wife Sarah (melodica) plus college buddies and brothers Ben (bass guitar) and Adam Smith (multi-instrumentalist) and Adam's wife Jen (vocals; banjo) not to mention several other musicians hiding in the wings, musically sowing things together, the group create a folk-rock sound highly distinct and superb in appeal and range—with infectious to-tapping rhythms (*The Fire In Your Eyes*; *The Fiction Of Speed*); low-key ballads (*Give Me Some Music*) and beautiful love-esque numbers (*When You're Not Home*) laying amongst some all-round brilliant treasures.

The gentle folk-rock gem, *Hey! Tom!* opens this delightful collection on a soft, yesteryear note with Joel's charming vocal tones coupled perfectly with exquisite undercurrents of ambience; whilst husband and wife Joel and Sarah combine their harmonies to a fine effect on the beautiful guitar-led *Corallina*. The infectious *Why, Wyoming?* and memorable *The Man With The Golden Toy* are just two of the album's highlights; the former, a harmonica-laced gem beautifully sung by Sarah (whose