

benefits from Kristin Wilkinson's delicate string arrangements. The album's second standout track, *Won't It Be Wonderful*, is cleverly arranged, combining a simple stripped down musical treatment with a complicated fine harmony vocal structure. To sum up, bluegrass fans will love this album, which sees the talented duo and their equally talented group of backing musicians taking a contemporary view of the music while still acknowledging its traditional roots. As we said earlier, they know their business. **Jeremy Isaac**

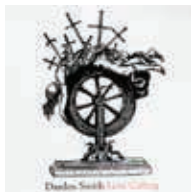
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### Darden Smith LOVE CALLING

Compass Records

★★★★

*Love and love alone is the focus of this eleven-song set*



Darden Smith's 12th original studio release, features a quartet of tunes he wrote on his own, plus one each with Harley Allen, Jack Ingram and Jay Clementi, a trio with Radney Foster—'I met him in 1989 on Austin City Limits'—and finally one with Radney Foster/Gary Nicholson. Darden (vocals, acoustic guitar, keyboards) is supported on his Compass Records debut by the core band of Michael Rhodes (bass) and Byron House (bass), John Gardner (drums, percussion) and Pet Bergeson (nylon string, acoustic and electric guitar) and John Jarvis (piano, keyboards). Harry Stinson (percussion) and Dan Dugmore (pedal and lap steel, electric guitar) also contribute. Produced by fellow Texan Jon Randall Stewart (acoustic and rhythm guitar, mandolin, keyboards, percussion, vocals)—'I met him in 1989 at a festival in Switzerland'—and multi-Grammy winner Gary Paczosa, and mainly recorded at two Nashville studios—a career first for Darden—additions were made at Mark Hallman's Congress House Studio in Austin.

Co-written with Foster, who adds a support vocal, the narrator of album opener *Angel Flight* relates at the outset: 'All I ever wanted to do was fly, Leave this world and live in the sky.' Flying a C-130 Hercules out of Fort Worth, the pilot is on a voluntary mercy mission to pick up fallen soldiers—'We do what we do cause we hear the call, Some give a little but he gave all.' Penned with hit songwriter, the late Harley Allen, on *Seven Wonders* the

obviously grateful narrator intones: '... she's no average, ordinary girl, she's the Seven Wonders of my world.' The second Foster co-write *Mine Till Morning*—'We could hold each other till light is dawning, Till the loneliness in both of us goes away'—features the voice of singer-songwriter Jessica 'Jessi' Alexander, and she resurfaces on *Favourite Way*.

In *Better Now*, the narrator alludes to having been: '... kicked around, one too many times by love.' That was then, now he has rediscovered love: 'Every day I get a little bit higher.' The album title unmistakably pinpoints the subject matter, and on the melodically upbeat title song Mark Douthit (Vince Gill, Amy Grant) plays horns and Austin adoptee Shawn Colvin adds her voice. Smith turns the spotlight on crazy love in *Distracted*, turns to redemptive love in the optimistic Ingram co-write *Reason To Live*, while jealousy fuels *I Smell Smoke* written with long-time Foster collaborator Clementi. The self-penned pairing *Medicine Wheel* and *Baltimore* close this album-long love carnival. **Arthur Wood**

[www.dardensmith.com](http://www.dardensmith.com)

### Delbert & Glen BLIND, CRIPPLED AND CRAZY

New West Records

NWA3067

★★★★

*Humour, heart and roadhouse virtuosity*

As in the acting profession where there is only one Albert, so it is with roots music, everyone knows who Delbert is and heck he doesn't even have to use McClinton in his website address. For this album he has teamed up with his pal of 40 years, fellow Texan Glen Clark, and now in his early 70s and having come through many personal troubles, McClinton still brings a fresh sound to his work and just gets better and better. The album title sets the tone for many of the songs, a lot of humility and self-disparagement but that should fool no one, if things started kicking off I know which side of the house I'd be on if I wanted to get my skin out of there. The shuffle beat opener picks up the theme (*I Ain't Old But I've Been Around A Long Time*, a tag line Clark picked up from a 102 year old Arkansan and sends the message of 'relax, I've been in most situations and I can handle it.'



The full blown duet and rockabilly tempo *Whoever Said It Was Easy (Ain't In Love With You)* is up next and is a whole lot of fun, and I should say that the words I've added in brackets to these first two tracks are not listed in the official titles but hopefully it just helps understand the songs better. My pick of the whole album is one of the slower numbers, *Just When I Needed You The Most* which as beautiful love songs go is right up there with Morrison's *Have I Told You Lately* and the other Texan Clark, Guy's *I Don't Love You Much Do I*. This one is not to be confused with the similarly titled and well known Randy Vanwarmer song, my advance copy doesn't list the songwriter here but I'm guessing that it is a McClinton original.

I also loved *More And More, Less And Less*, another homily to the wisdom of later years and *Somebody To Love You* a full throated duet, which sends the age old message that however much you have you'll never be truly happy without someone to share it with. *Peace In The Valley* is not the old spiritual, in fact nothing like it, this one is an amusing plea for a departed partner to return to the once happy home 'I don't mind talking to myself but I can't stand drinking alone.' McClinton and Clark dovetail perfectly and the paramount impression they convey is that they would not be doing this unless they were genuinely enjoying themselves and that makes listening to this excellent album a real joy too. **Paul Collins**

[www.delbert.com](http://www.delbert.com)

### Emily Maguire BIRD INSIDE A CAGE

Shaktu SHK 2104

★★★

*Straight ahead fourth album from the English indie singer-songwriter*



Maguire's long-awaited fourth album is a consistent follow-up to her first three well-received albums, which have gone over big with the nation's radio broadcasters. Although there are echoes of Dido, Dar Williams and The Cranberries here, the songs are all her own work, ranging from softer, more reflective tunes to more abrasive upbeat numbers. With instruments played by Maguire (acoustic guitar and piano), Christian Dunham (bass) and producer Nigel Butler (electric guitars and keyboards), the album also boasts