

NEW RELEASES

and over again.

Larkin Poe's new sound might lose them a few hardcore folk fans but will unquestionably win them legions of new admirers, and we will probably see them on a series of TV sofas across the UK—good luck to them I say! The release actually includes a terrific bonus DVD from an intimate gig in a Norwegian wine cellar, plus two music videos. **Alan Harrison**

www.larkinpoe.com

Lynyrd Skynyrd LAST OF A DYIN' BREED

Roadrunner Records

★★★★☆

Southern rock legends still going strong



One of my first great concert memories as a teenager goes back to the Knebworth Festival in 1976 that had the Rolling Stones as headliners, plus 10cc, Todd Rundgren's Utopia, Hot Tuna, and the Don Harrison Band, but one group from America blew every other act away that day. That group was Lynyrd Skynyrd, and I've been a fan ever since. They've gone through a few line-up changes over the years, and sadly a few members are now playing the big rock gig in the sky, but however many times the line-up changes the music always remains on top rocking and adrenaline charged form.

The latest line-up for this album is Johnny Van Zant (vocals), Gary Rossington (guitar), Rickey Medlocke (guitar), Mark Matejka (guitar), Michael Cartellone (drums), Johnny Colt (bass), Peter Pisarczyk (keyboards) and the Honkettes: Dale Krantz-Rossington—whom is wife to Gary Rossington—and Carol Chase (backing vocals). The record is eleven tracks of power and passion, riotous rock, brilliant guitar solos and songs worthy of fan appreciation; to be loved both on record and on stage. The voice of Johnny Van Zant is tremendous; the slide guitar on the country twanged *Start Livin' Life Again* is magic alongside Johnny's emotive vocals. Title track *Last Of A Dyin' Breed* gets the album underway with driving guitars and powerhouse vocals—it's no wonder why so many Lynyrd Skynyrd songs are classed as rock anthems; their CDs being great to use as driving music. It's a terrific CD from one of the best ever southern rock groups.

David Knowles

www.lynyrdskynyrd.com

Nicolette Good MONARCH

Self-Release

★★★★☆

Magnificent, melodic and memorable



MONARCH, the ten-song debut album by multi-award winning, twenty-something, Texas songwriter, Nicolette Good (acoustic guitar, microKORG, piano), was recorded in Austin's now ten-year old Ramble Creek Studio and co-produced by Nicolette, sideman Jesse Basham (electric guitar, banjo) and owner and engineer, Britton Beisenherz (electric guitar, electric bass, percussion). Nicolette's fondness for Denton, Texas writer Doug Burr's Ramble Creek recording of *O Ye Devastator* (2010), brought her to Britton Beisenherz's door. The MONARCH session players include percussionist Jon Greene (Matt the Electrician), upright bassist and pedal steel player Jesse Ebaugh (Heartless Bastards), clarinetist Jonathan Doyle (White Ghost Shivers), organist Oscar Interiano and cellist Steve Bernal (Monte Montgomery).

Aged five, Nicolette began playing piano and has never stopped, earning in the process a degree in English and Music from San Antonio's Trinity University. On MONARCH Nicolette supports her vocals—lead and harmony—with acoustic guitar, microKORG and piano. An accomplished lyricist, Nicolette subtly weaves a plethora of human emotions into her songs, those of the 'oh, woe is me' road variety being a songwriter staple. However, Nicolette's very different take, *The Road*—which opens MONARCH—proves to be a discourse on anguish and truth. At the outset the narrator recalls: 'I was raised up down in Texas, with a pickup truck for my home, and my daddy couldn't stay put, so he took to the open road.' Imprinted by that uncertain and nomadic lifestyle, the now grown narrator subtly informs her travelling man: 'Baby, you were long gone, long ago.'

Son Of My Sister portrays instances where blood is, and is not, thicker than water, following which Nicolette takes the poignant folk ballad *Oh My Darling, Clementine*, deconstructs it—using the folk process—and adeptly delivers the up-tempo reconstruction *Pretty Clementine*. The ensuing album title song, co-written with Jesse Basham, involves a troubadour and a pauper; the latter deluded by the notion that he is a king. The jazz tinged *Call Me* sounds American Songbook familiar,

yet it's a 21st century Nicolette original. Hundreds of words swirl in my brain, relative to the melody, the witty lyric, Nicolette's vocal style, even the manner of its recording, suffice to say *Call Me* is a cleverly conceived classic and the finest song I've heard in ages. Alone, it's worth the price of owning this album.

The Last Word finds the narrator reflect: 'I am the afterthought that you think after you speak.' Set in West Texas, the lingering, sonically eerie, *Marathon* melody is accompanied by a mystically magnificent lyric. *Hurricane Caroline* is a clear case of don't judge a book by its cover—the portrait of a young woman hyped-up 'with chocolate, wine and Adderall.' Towards the close, Nicolette universally transforms the foregoing scenario with 'Wrecking homes in new towns under a different name.' In album closer, *The Flood*, of her art Nicolette enquires: Come and sit with me, tell me, can you hear what I hear?' MONARCH is, quite simply, a cornucopia of musical delights—taste and see. **Arthur Wood**

www.nicolettegood.com

Penny Nichols COLORS OF THE SUN

Pensongs Productions

★★★★☆

Penny Nichols reprises early career songs penned by Jackson Browne



Penny Nichols' performing career began in California during the musically fertile early 1960s, and culminated in the 1968 release by Buddah Records of her debut solo album, PENNY'S ARCADE. These days, Penny resides in the Hudson Valley of New York where she principally pursues a career as a music teacher. This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the release of Jackson Browne's debut solo album, SATURATE BEFORE USING; the sub-title of her latest release being PENNY NICHOLS SINGS THE EARLY SONGS OF JACKSON BROWNE.

Mostly recorded in bassist, Mark Dann's Woodstock studio, this twelve-song, fifty-five minute long collection features contributions from some well-known musicians, including guitarists Pete Kennedy and Mark Goldenberg (Jackson Browne Band, The Cretones), plus the late Kenny Edwards (bass) whilst permutations of Rosemary Butler, Pamela Polland, Greg Copeland, Steve Noonan and Ned Doheny add their voices.

The composer duets with Penny on the poignant *Song For Adam*, whilst his younger brother, Severin performs the same duty and adds background vocals on *From Silver Lake*. In addition to the foregoing titles, *A Child In These Hills* and *Something Fine* are also drawn from SATURATE BEFORE USING. *These Days* from FOR EVERYMAN (1973) opens this tribute collection and *Colors Of The Sun* closes it, whilst LATE FROM THE SKY (1974) supplies *For A Dancer* and *Fountain Of Sorrow*—the latter pair, being inspired renditions. Jackson Browne's demos for Elektra Records' in-house song publisher, Nina Music (1966/67) and Michael Goldsen's Criterion Music (1970) furnish the lesser-known quartet—*The Birds Of St. Marks*, *Shadow Dream Song*—Steve Noonan included it on his self-titled 1968 album for the Elektra label, the Latin American influenced *The Top* and *Gone To Sorrow*—the latter being another inspired version.

Reproduced on the inner, right hand panel of the gatefold card liner are historic 1960's pictures of Penny, the late Roberta 'Berbie Browne'—Jackson's older sister—the 1966 incarnation of the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band featuring Browne (centre rear), Pamela Polland's band the Gentle Soul, and the well-known photograph of Jimmy Speeris, plus co-best men Jackson Browne and Steve Noonan, taken during Greg Copeland and Pamela Polland's 1968 wedding. **Arthur Wood**

www.pennynichols.com

Malcolm Holcombe DOWN THE RIVER

Self-Release

★★★★★

A genre defining record



For the uninitiated, Malcolm's voice is soft, raw and emotive and he's certainly an acquired taste, but nothing prepared me for the righteous fury of opening track, *Butcher In Town*, which is a wolf of song wrapped in sheep's clothing. *Twisted Arms* is Malcolm's take on society today and the injustice and greed that surrounds us all. He doesn't hold back either. This is a dangerous song if you are a politician or media personality. The prettiest song here is probably *The Door*, which has Malcolm looking back on his life, as Russ Pahl's pedal steel playing sets the hair on the back of your neck on end.

Ray Kennedy's production throughout DOWN THE RIVER keeps Holcombe's grizzly voice to the forefront at all times, as the backing musicians manage to make this sound like a band recording rather than a singer and a bunch of hired hands in an anonymous studio. Speaking of hired hands, I sat up like a meercat when I first heard *In Your Mercy*. It's an intricate and clever love song, but just under halfway through an angelic voice joins our man on harmonies. Flipping heck! It's only Emmylou Harris dueting with Malcolm Holcombe—who'd have thought that day would come?

A couple of years ago, Neil Young huffed and puffed that there weren't any protest singers any more—Neil, listen to the anger, bile and eloquence that inhabits *Whitewash Job* and you'll know that these guys are still out there; you just have to look for them.

The one track that is guaranteed to finally bring Malcolm to the notice of national radio, magazines and newspapers is *Trail O' Money*, which combines the best of everything else on the album, and allows Steve Earle to share vocals and a shimmering harmonica solo on a song that I bet he wishes he'd written, himself. DOWN THE RIVER is angry, simple, complex and beautiful all rolled into one and by far Malcolm Holcombe's finest album to date. I promise you that it will feature in many, many end of year Top 10 releases of 2012.

Alan Harrison

www.malcolmholcombe.com

Rant 'n' Rave LOVE CAN BE MURDER

Brindle Cat Records

★★★★☆

Eight eye-popping, ear-opening tunes from the musical virtuoso, Essex-set quad



Now, I'm not a bit squeamish usually, but the front cover of musical four-piece Rant 'n' Rave—comprising of Doug Brown (lead vocals, acoustic guitar, mandolin); Sandra Brown (pianos, organs, synthesisers, backing vocals); Ron Bennett (drums, percussion) and Kieran Carrigan (lead and rhythm guitars, six string banjo)'s new record, LOVE CAN BE MURDER doesn't half make me feel a little queasy. A blood-drenched knife distastefully adorning the front; a bunch of dead roses on the back, the record could easily be mistaken for being of heavy metal taste—if you

didn't know who the band were, that is—but this is in fact a collection of eight rockabilly, yesteryear-fused tunes, revealing imaginative stories revelling in the highs and lows of life and love, to put it mildly.

The more rockabilly-ish tunes include the toe-tapper *We Gotta Move* and *There It Was, Gone*, the latter beginning the roller-coastal journey in true guitar-led and memorable fashion. The album also features a sinister murder ballad (*Cheatin' Valentine*—a psychopath's confession of killing his lover and getting away with it), a musically infectious tale of a man's life dedicated to work and the sacrifices he's made, only for him to be laid off during the financial crisis, with vocals that remind me of REM's Michael Stripe (*Dedicated Officer*) and an animated, zydeco-tinged story of *Tex From Texas*—all very different sounding songs in their own right.

Highlights, for me include the heartbreak-roped *Since You Left Me Here*—an infectiously composed number with a memorable set of lyrics and well-gelled vocals from Doug Brown, made for hit potential—the gentle, piano-led *Empty Eyes*, which seems to be another heartbreaker, with Sandra Brown's vocals twinkling in the chorus against Doug's, and the perfectly titled *Do It All Over Again*—a rocking and rolling number with impressive piano (Sandra Brown) and lead guitar (Kieran Carrigan) solos that infectiously get the foot-stomping—providing a fantastic ending to a surprising collection of songs.

With songs like this, the rockabillying four-piece are made for the stage, and their second release has utterly surprised me. Sceptical at first, I'm now a fan, and if their debut is anything like this, then I'm logging on to iTunes right now to download it.

Emily Saxton

www.reverbNation.com/rantnraveband

Ry Cooder ELECTION SPECIAL

Nonesuch STCD 400180

★★★★☆

Cometh the American election, cometh the protest songs

Ry Cooder is the latest, or possibly the first, to get his two-penneth in ahead of the American Presidential election and he's not a happy man. Frankly, who could blame him? The titles tell their own tale: *Mutt*

