

## NEW RELEASES

### Anthony Toner **A LIGHT BELOW THE DOOR**

Dozens of Cousins  
DC002

★★★★

*Bittersweet songs of  
love from a mature viewpoint*

There appears to be a vibrant music scene in Northern Ireland at the moment, with a few young singers and bands slowly coming to the attention of the radio stations and publications across the Irish Sea, but some acts of the slightly older generation like Anthony Toner, still need a push in the right direction. Previously, he was a journalist that will never see 21 again, and has supported just about every 'name' act to visit Belfast in the last 10 years. This is his fourth album since 2002 and it sounds like a man that has found a writing and singing style that he's finally comfortable with and to Hell with trying to be cool!

Toner writes about what he knows and it's apparent that he knows what it feels like to be rejected, as well as being an observer of human behaviour. That said, even his saddest songs sound as if he has a rueful smile on his lips as he sings: 'I lay my pearls of wisdom before her, but after ten minutes they just bore her back to tears'—*East of Louise*, which just happens to be one of the finest songs I've heard this year. *Still Unsigned* will resonate with anyone who had (or still has) a favourite unsigned band and is written from the point of view of a teenage girl having the time of her life, then meeting a boy who kisses her before telling her: '...she goes to school with his older sister.' You just know it's not going to have a happy ending.

I love Toner's Belfast accent when it creeps in and out of songs in the way Van the Man does, and at times there is more than a bit of a Van influence on some of the arrangements, but not enough to worry about, as Anthony has a voice and style all of his own. One really special song is *The Great Escape*, which is about a woman who came into his life as a child and whom he called Auntie, but wasn't related to but was a constant figure in his young life. It's actually two love songs in one, as she dies of a broken heart and that appears to have had a lasting effect on Toner, the romantic songwriter. *Grateful* sounds particularly poignant and will touch both male and female hearts that



have been broken by a selfish lover.

I could easily bore you silly by continually quoting snippets of lines and choruses to impress you with Toner's songwriting skills, but I won't—you'll just have to buy the album to hear how good he is for yourself. *A LIGHT BELOW THE DOOR* is an exceptional record from an exceptional talent, who really should get out more—preferably on tour. **Alan Harrison**

[www.anthonytoner.net](http://www.anthonytoner.net)

### Bibb City Ramblers **MOUNTAIN AIR**

Groove 'n Records  
BCRCD006

★★★★

*Bluegrass and  
country blues are  
fun—this band is very good*

A four-piece outfit from Georgia, Bibb City Ramblers, now onto a sixth studio album, are very popular at festivals and hoedowns across southern USA. It's not difficult to realise just why they're so sought after, especially to support the big names they've already appeared with; their music is as fresh as 'mountain air,' and they convey immense enjoyment in the playing of it.

Songwriting duties on all of the tracks is divided between group members, Dan and Gini Davidson and mandolin player, Brian Fowler. The fourth band member, Steve Wildman, who seems very aptly named, confines himself to the washboard. On the invigorating title track, which is first up, Dan sets the mood: 'mountain air filling up my lungs, when the morning comes this is where I want to be'. Nearly all of the tracks are upbeat, including the misleadingly titled *Reuben's Lament*, which comes hard on the heels of the opener.

Gini's distinctive vocal styles come well to the fore on several tracks, notably the dark *Katie McGee*—a tale of robbery and killing—and a tune and sound, which reminds me a little of old timer, Charlie Daniels' *Devil Went Down To Georgia*. Another of Gini's solos, *3 Bullets* is my next best on the album—a cheating song, which rips along in the best tradition. The husband is away from wife and family for days and found in the arms of a friend's daughter, the 3 bullets making sure he pays the ultimate price.

There are three high class instrumentals interspersed amongst the twelve tracks,



the best of which is probably *Whitetail Ridge* on which Brian Fowler's frantic mandolin and guest, David Blackman's exquisite fiddle brings the album to a pulverising climax. It may be a bit predictable to include a drinking song but I also really enjoyed Dan Davidson's *Drink Drank Drunk*, which relates the scourge of too much alcohol in a droll, amusing and very matter of fact style. The loud splash of southern colour certainly extends to the sleeve, in fact a bit too far south; the cadavers in hats and with guitars having a Mexican flavour. It's fun and just like their hugely enjoyable music, it grabs your attention. **Paul Collins**

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

### Crosby, Stills & Nash **CSN 2012**

CSN Records

★★★☆

*A twenty-five song,  
live video album  
from 'three together'*



CSN 2012 is released on Blu-ray, DVD/2CD and digital download. In addition to the concert footage, filmed at The Performing Arts Center in San Luis Obispo, California during April this year, extras include interviews with support musicians Todd Caldwell (organ), Shayne Fontayne (guitar), Steve DiStanislao (drums), plus—from Jackson Browne's band—Kevin McCormick (bass) and Crosby's son, James Raymond (keyboards).

The closing year of this decade will mark half-a-century since the appearance of their self-titled debut, and CSN 2012 finds this 'longer-in-tooth' trio perform twenty-five songs, with Disc 2 introduced by a five-song set, solely featuring three-part harmonies and acoustic guitars. A crucial factoid, twenty selections pre-date the trio's 1982 album *DAYLIGHT AGAIN*. Amongst the foregoing, Stills reprises his mid-1960s stint in Buffalo Springfield with a six-minute rendition of *Bluebird* plus the band's late 1966 chart entry *For What It's Worth*. There's a reprise of *Love The One You're With* from his 1970 self-titled solo debut and *As I Come Of Age* from STILLS (1975). In the early 1970s, Stills formed Manassas, and *Johnny's Garden* and *Learn To Live (So Begins The Task)* are taken from their double-disc debut. Graham Nash's only solo career offering is *Military Madness* which opened *SONGS FOR BEGINNERS* (1971).

Toward the close of Disc 1, following *Bluebird*, Crosby offers: 'You know that we have different jobs in this band. Stephen is supposed to write spectacular rock 'n' roll like that. Graham is supposed to write anthems that the whole world wants to sing, and I am supposed to write the weird shit,' and pausing, adds: 'I think I do.' A ten-minute version of *Déjà Vu* follows. That 1970 album additionally furnishes *Carry On*—teamed with *Questions* from the Springfield's swansong *LAST TIME AROUND*—as well as *Our House* and *Teach Your Children*. On CSN 2012 there are no less than six songs from the trio's ten-song debut *CROSBY STILLS & NASH* (1969), including *Suite: Judy Blue Eyes* and *Wooden Ships*.

From the new millennium, James Raymond's *Lay Me Down* debuted on *CROSBY & NASH* (2004), while last year's Nash/Raymond co-write *Almost Gone* (*The Ballad Of Bradley Manning*) was inspired by WikiLeaks whistle-blower, Bradley Manning and finally, there's *Radio*—a new Crosby creation. The third disc of Graham Nash's 2009 box set *REFLECTIONS* closed with the previously unreleased *In Your Name* and an in-concert rendition appears on Disc 2. Back in 2010, CSN worked on a cover song collection with producer Rick Rubin. Subsequently abandoned, one of the songs attempted, Bob Dylan's *Girl From The North Country* is reprised on Disc 2.

**Arthur Wood**

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

### Emma Black SWIMMING IN THE MOON

Cornflower Records:  
CR003

★★★★☆

*Emma's not afraid to share her views on this beautiful and inspiring 13-track studio release*

Leaving home at the age of 17 with nothing but a battered, second hand guitar in one hand, a one-way ticket to Amsterdam in the other, for sure, singer-songwriter Emma Black has come a long way since her busking debut on the city streets of Europe. She's performed in clubs and bars and built up a sizeable and appreciative audience, plus returned home to the UK—after contracting near-fatal septicaemia from toxic waste dumped on a travellers site where she'd been staying—and formed the folk band, The Immigrants.



Now solo (Emma has supported the likes of The Indigo Girls, Nancy Kerr, The Zombies and James Fagan) and with two highly acclaimed albums—*WHERE DARK HORSES ROAM* (2007) and *THE CROSSROADS RADIO SESSIONS* (2010)—pinned to her name, Emma's success story continues with the arrival of her third album, the beautiful *SWIMMING IN THE MOON*; a thoughtfully crafted and stunningly arranged collection of folk-fused songs; her emotive vocals and honest lyrics of love (*Summer's Gone*) and social and political struggles (*Lies They've Sold*) at the forefront. Emma is also joined on this record by some of the UK's finest roots musicians, including Riognach Connolly (flute, whistle), Eimear Bradley (fiddle), Alan Cook (pedal steel, Dobro, mandolin), and Johnny Bramwell, Maria Corrigan and Kirsty McGee on harmonies—all providing an excellent contribution of sounds and textures.

*The Getaway*—a beautiful, guitar, piano (Alan Lowes) and fiddle-led arrangement—pulls back the curtains, introducing the listener to the movingly crystal clear sounds of Emma, whilst the thoughtful *Florence* takes a thought-provoking view of the economic crisis' effects on society (how the old are treated, poverty, bailing out the banks and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan); its pondering arrangement of gentle sounds being something close to gorgeous. *Jack & Sally* tells another darkened tale of an abusive relationship, and the joy and peace Sally finds eventually with new love, Jack. Irish-esque *The Curlew*—a heart-warming blend of flute and fiddle—and the bluesy *Pauper's Grave* (poverty) and *Castell* provide three of the most movingly heart-warming songs on the album; the two latter numbers encapsulating a plodding, country-blues-fused musicality; the infectious harmonica (Franny Eubank) on both packing a bluesy punch. Title track, *Swimming In The Moon*—a majestic, cello-led (Elizabeth Roberts) number with its own melancholic edge—deservingly sees the album to a memorable close. Pure magic from beginning to end—and every song being a gem—Emma Black has no doubt the promise and talent to continue making beautiful recordings for many years to come. Until now, I'd not had the privilege of hearing her work. Now I have, I'll continue to listen with pleasure.

**Emily Saxton**

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

### Jamey Johnson LIVING FOR A SONG: A TRIBUTE TO HANK COCHRAN

Mercury Nashville

★★★★☆

*Great songs on an album full of the outlaw spirit with distinctive guest voices*

Jamey Johnson is a maverick. He refuses to fit in with the usual way of doing things in Nashville where performers are expected ... no not expected, virtually commanded to bow down to the country music Gods—those radio programmers—who decide what the great American listening public will hear on their radios. Failure to please those self-appointed experts will almost certainly mean the end of an act's career. Johnson is absolutely the right guy to pay tribute to the late Hank Cochran, one of country music's finest songwriters. Like Hank Williams and Harlan Howard, Cochran was a poorly educated southern boy who wrote songs from the heart. He never used any highfalutin words—Cochran wrote simple affecting songs full of everyday language. Just the song titles give it away: *I'd Fight The World*, *Would These Arms Be In Your Way*, *She's Got You*, *Why Can't He Be You*.

On this album Johnson is joined by a whole host of guest singers, but it's Johnson and his co-producer Buddy Cannon that shine here, plus of course the 16 Hank Cochran songs. Cannon is a country traditionalist at heart, but also a realist, which has enabled him to move effortlessly from such contemporary/commercial acts as Kenny Chesney to the more traditional Ashton Shepherd and George Jones. Opening track *Make The World Go Away* sets the bar high with Johnson joined by Alison Krauss for a bittersweet duet. It transpires that Alison was one of Cochran's favourite singers. The pair nail this well-known song perfectly. There are many other highlights here I particularly liked the way Johnson and Merle Haggard slow-down *I Fall To Pieces*, to give the song a different feel to the original. Ronnie Dunn joins him on the lesser-known *A-11*, possibly the finest honky-tonk song ever written. Other guests include inevitably Willie Nelson, Ray Price (who possibly had more hits with Cochran songs than anyone), Emmylou Harris, Vince Gill, Lee Ann Womack, Elvis Costello, Kris Kristofferson, Bobby Bare and

