NEW RELEASES

Anthony Toner A LIGHT BELOW THE DOOR

Dozens of Cousins DC002

Bittersweet songs of



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 morepreferably on tour. Alan Harrison

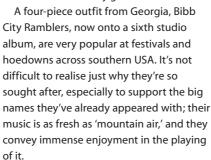
www.anthonytoner.net

Bibb City Ramblers MOUNTAIN AIR

Groove 'n Records BCRCD006

Bluegrass and country blues are

fun—this band is very good



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,

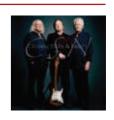
the best of which is probably Whitetail Ridge on which Brian Fowler's frantic mandolin and quest, David Blackman's exquisite fiddle brings the album to a pulverising climax. It may be a bit predictable to include a drinking song but I also really enjoyed Dan Davidson's Drink Drank Drunk, which relates 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

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 (quitar), 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 threepart 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.

www.crosbystillsnash.com

Emma Black SWIMMING IN THE MOON

Arthur Wood

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, singersongwriter 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

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 thoughtprovoking 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 heartwarming 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

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