

...the new releases

Jon Brooks
MOTH NOR RUST
 Independent CD 23112003
 ★★☆☆

Powerful set of political and personal songs

'Political' songwriting is all too often assumed to be shouty simplistic protest, and all too often it is and therefore tends to be ignored by those who should take the most notice of it. Canadian Jon Brooks knows this and his songs are songs first and messages second. The result is a powerful set that cuts to the heart of all that matters, and one that Brooks, a man with a powerful and at times brutally clear-sighted vision, has created armed only with an acoustic guitar, a harmonica and a gritty ragged voice.

War Resister tells the story of Jeremy Hinzman, the first American soldier to desert because he opposed the Iraq war. It's a compassionate view of a man who joined the army without really knowing why, whose whole life revolved round 'breathe, trigger, squeeze' until he saw the light, while *The Crying Of The Times* is a more general work that questions how we can walk by on the other side when all that's wrong with the world is staring us in the face. The political can be personal too, and the heartbreaking *Small*, about the failure of a marriage whose participants only stay together for the sake of their child, is Springsteen-esque in its power and insight. Brooks always sees that there is hope though, no matter how small or hard to find, and his credo can be summed up in the title of the album's centrepiece *If We Keep What's Within Us, What's Within Us Will Kill Us, But If We Give What's Within Us, What's Within Us Will Save Us*. Ending on *There Is Only Love*, a powerful expression of belief in the future, this is a real find of an album and Brooks a star in the making. **JS**
www.jonbrooks.ca



There aren't many great thinkers in contemporary artists these days. Sure, there might be the odd spark creeping through the floorboards from time to time but sometimes such minds take time to appear and offer their thoughts on the world. Trevor Jones is by all means such a character, as his insight into this world of bru ha ha is most scintillating. **RH**

Keith Miles
BEYOND THE HEADLIGHTS
 House Of Trout
 ★★☆☆

BEYOND THE HEADLIGHTS is Nashville based Miles' sophomore solo outing and like its 2006 predecessor, *WHAT IT WAS THAT THEY BECAME*, it was produced by Jack Sundrud (Poco). While playing and writing music has been an abiding and lifelong interest, Miles began his career as a daily newspaper reporter, was a Congressional press secretary for a time and these days is a partner in a Nashville public relations firm.

The gem in this eleven song set is most certainly the up-tempo album opener *Road I'm On*, a tale of lovers parted by the: 'black snaking highway, slithering to the west and to the twilight.' The latter is one of five tunes Miles penned, while he collaborated with others on another quartet. Penned with Sundrud, the mellow sounding *The South* is a wonderful evocation of life in that region. *Them Dance Hall Girls* was written by Allan Fraser of the early 1970s Canadian male/female folk duo Fraser & DeBolt—years back, the Tom Russell Band was known to perform this song—while credited to public domain Sampson And Delilah was first recorded back in the late 1920s by Blind Willie Johnson as *If I Had My Way I Would Tear This Building Down*. The Rev. Gary Davis cut it later as *Sampson And Delilah*, and here, supported by harp and female choir, Miles delivers a soulful bluesy rendition. *Iola*, the penultimate cut, co-written with Sue Braswell and Jack Sundrud, was recorded by the latter's early 1990s country-rock band Great Plains. The narrator, a farmer's son, relates that their well has gone dry and he now prays for rain to irrigate the parched land and avert a financial



disaster for this family.

Truth to tell, *BEYOND THE HEADLIGHTS* is a rather pleasant mix of country, folk, soul and blues influences. **AW**
<http://www.keithmiles.com/> <http://www.myspace.com/keithmiles>

The Catalogue Kings
ASTRONAUTS AND ANGELS
 The Piano Graveyard Audio Archive
 ★★☆☆

A fantastic album sent from the angels

ASTRONAUTS AND ANGELS is the new album from the Catalogue Kings. As implied by the title, most of the songs feature something about space and angels, although, there are some songs that are used as feel-good tracks and are not related to the album title. The 11 track album starts off with a fun song, *Strange Angel*. This is a great opening song and is very impressive. The album seems to carry on to impress me throughout. One of my personal favourites is the fourth track *Here is the News*. This is another fun, feel-good song. It is about the positive things in life that should be mentioned in the news instead of all the bad things that are constantly talked about. Another favourite of mine is *Uncle Monkey*. I enjoyed this song because it made me smile and is random and enjoyable. *Angels and Sirens* is a slow track that Ian Hewitt sings wonderfully. I really enjoyed this track and thought it was one of the best on the album.

Unfortunately, there is one let-down on the album and that is *That's How it Felt to Walk on the Moon*. I think the song is much too long and a trifle boring. After a while the song sounded as if it was about to finish but, instead, seemed to replay the beginning which left me wondering if it was ever going to end. This was the song I least enjoyed on the album, purely because it wasn't up to the same standard as the other songs on the album. Apart from that, I think the album is fantastic and has a real feel-good element to it and I highly recommend it.

I think the Catalogue Kings have done really well on this album and I expect it to be a big hit. I would happily listen to it over and over



again. **AmyW**
www.cataloguekings.com

Annie Dinerman
BROKEN COOKIES
 Blue Bird 20092901
 ★★☆☆

An artist who lays down the previous ups and downs of her life and sings her heart out like a woman on some kind of mission

Bringing you her second album, this New-York based artist evidently has all the right tools to be considered one of the finest singers of this generation. With these twelve songs, I see no reason why this most likeable artist will not achieve this. The lyrics to *My Ex-Boyfriend* surely do light-up the soul and make the mouth widen with a smile. With its duration of barely just over two minutes, it sure does fit in an awesomely large amount of goodness into its relatively short time-scale. *Talking With Absent Friends* is similar to Jimmy Buffett's *Everybody's On The Phone* but in a more sensitive way, Annie's song speaks of her regret not being there in person with her friends which I'm sure is based on her personal experience due to the sincere style in which she sings so lovingly. Although it can be a tad downbeat at times, *Different Now* has the ability to up its tempo with the click of her fingers. A pro-woman's rights song sung by an artist who passionately believes in said cause *A King And A Hero* really is a cracker of a track.

It remains a mystery why artists such as Annie are not signed to a label, but when she releases albums like this one you have to ask yourself who needs corporate management? I for one hope Annie keeps on this independent road as the path she is following is a fine one indeed. **RH**
www.anniedinerman.com
www.myspace.com/anniedinerman



Debbie Nunn
HERE FOR YOU
 AGR Television Records: 1922047
 ★★☆☆
Country chic from the UK's hottest country chick!

I suppose I should apologise for



calling the delightful Ms Nunn a 'chick' but hopefully that comment has caught your attention. Debbie Nunn has worked the country music circuit for quite a few years now and all of that hard work and the obligatory piece of 'good luck' will certainly pay off with her second full album *HERE FOR YOU*. No one who has ever heard or seen Debbie could deny that the girl has talent; but the 'good luck' in her life is that Taylor Swift has opened the door to a new generation of younger country fans and Debbie should grab this opportunity with both hands.

HERE FOR YOU is a top quality album chock-full of country-pop songs that will appeal to (mostly female) music fans of all ages. Opener *Look So Good* gets the show on the road with some yelps and a saucy giggle followed by a classy song about a girl out for fun on a Saturday night and spotting the man of her dreams even if: 'he looks so good/he's gotta be bad.' Why do women always like 'bad boys'? There is a delightful mix of ballads and rockers neatly balanced throughout with other highlights being, *God Only Knows*, *Hey Boyfriend*, *If Love Can Move Mountains* and the title track *Here For You*. For the traditionalists out there, the songs on *HERE FOR YOU* are liberally filled with fiddles, banjos, Fender guitars, a pedal-steel and most importantly a stunningly beautiful female singing voice. **AH**
www.debbienunn.com
www.myspace.com/debbienunn

James Keelaghan
HOUSE OF CARDS
 Borealis Records
 ★★☆☆

An interesting collection of freshly-written songs

James Keelaghan has spent much of the new century working on project recordings. *HOUSE OF CARDS* is his first release since 2002's *HOME* to feature new Keelaghan-penned material. *THEN AGAIN* (2004) found this talented Canadian songwriter reappraising previously recorded songs, while *A FEW SIMPLE VERSES* (2006) began life as a traditional folk song tribute and mutated into a collection of favourite compositions, ancient and contemporary. In 2007, a decade after their first outing, James and Oscar Lopez revived their duo *Compadres* with *BUDDY WHERE YOU BEEN?*

It's appropriate that I mentioned *HOME* since it opened with *Red-Winged Blackbird* penned by Scottish/Canadian David Francey. While James has co-written the odd song in the past, half the material on the ten-track *HOUSE OF CARDS* involves collaborations, in varying combinations, with Francey, Dave Gunning, Karine Polwart, Rose Cousins and Lori Wilson. Truth to tell the album title song involved all of the foregoing writers, the bottom line being that in Cape Breton during last year's Celtic Colours Festival the six musicians were 'locked in a house for a week' and set the task of co-writing. By the end of the week,

