

the mind boggle and eyes quizzing the ears as to see what they have just witnessed. Despite its sombre opening, *What the Love (Are You Gonna Do?)* seems to explode a third of the way through due to saxophone which wouldn't sound out of place in a Ted Heath track whilst keeping true to its contemporary roots.

Deena is someone who doesn't follow rhythm to be different, but it seems as though this is what seems right to her. No songs like this have been heard before on contemporary albums, which in turn leads to a joyous and genius sound being created right before your very ears.

**RH**  
www.deenashoshkes.com  
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### Goosebumps CHICKEN SKIN SWING

Chicken Skin  
Records

★★★★★

Refreshing to hear authentic-sounding swing and give music in a contemporary band performed to such quality.

Initially believing they were from New Orleans or Austin due to the crisp, sublime sound they create it is surprising to read this band actually comes from Kent. It is quite often that you will find bands that perform jive and swing don't really know what they're doing, which in turn comes across as amateurish rather than a professional and enjoyable experience. This band is certainly not one which adheres to this musical rule of thumb, but are a cut above the rest on their sixteen track debut.

An admirable attempt it may be, the quality of *Get Your Kicks On Route 66* lies not within the energetic sound this band creates but timing in the use of country instruments. Just when you become breathless due to the quality of this version you are hit with some unstoppable harmonica which might seem minimal but the harp player, Mark Churchward, by all means takes advantage of each second he is given. Following on from this track is *Pennies From Heaven*. It might seem like a foolish idea to try and record another classic, but this is no silly venture as their version is superior in some ways than the artists who attempted it after it was first released all those years ago in 1936. Sounding like a traditional rock and roll love song, this version is as melodic as it is swinging and towards its conclusion will probably see you swinging just that little bit more melancholic to the sweet notes played by saxophonist Phil Watkins. Classics aren't the only type of song covered here but tracks which have not been heard previously. *Jack You Dead* is a prime example of this. With a faster beat than many of the large number of tracks found in this sublime album, it has a big band sound about it that is reminiscent of Ted Heath or Glenn Miller but has the cracking bonus of having some country picking throughout on electric guitar. With this debut album there is no hint of amateurism whatsoever from a band that is



### Chris Scruggs ANTHEM

Cogent Records 004UKJL

★★★★★

A treasure trove of country, alt.rock and pop gems from dynamic singer-songwriter

As I write this we're only a couple of weeks past the half-way stage of 2009, and though some quite superb albums have come my way so far this year, without a doubt this is the best of the lot and unlikely to be equalled this year—or maybe even in the foreseeable future. Chris Scruggs might have the musical genes in place, but that means nothing if you can't deliver the goods.

Capturing the essence of country and alt.rock, Chris instantly charms the listener with eleven well-crafted songs (plus one penned by his late uncle Ron Davies). The energetic opener, *Josephine* grabs the listener's attention right from the start with its tough vocals, razor sharp guitar, and solid beat. Showing country at its best, *It Ain't Right* with steady tempo, has an easy-flowing piano accompaniment courtesy of Howe Gelb and stirs up some thoughtful lyrics with memorable and warm vocals.

Defying easy categorisation is Scruggs' ace-in-the-hole on ANTHEM. Instead of letting his song craft be defined by adherence to a particular style or genre, Scruggs simply goes for the hook, a strategy that works very well. He really looks to shake things up with this stunning album by linking more directly to his avowed influences like John Lennon (*A Victim's Song*, *Sing Your Tune*), the Beatles (*Running From The Graveyard*) and Ron Davies (*Change Your Made Up Mind*). There's a distinct uptempo honky-tonk feel to *Where The Wind Might Blow*, with its driving fiddle, *Old Souls Like Me* is an affecting acoustic guitar and piano ballad of no fixed persuasion; the harmonies of Kelly Hogan help create an Everlys' vibe, while *Windows* has a wonderful post-Beatles vibe reminiscent of Ringo's early solo hits.

Full of gorgeously moody, bulletproof songs, great playing by Chris (guitar, steel, piano, vibes, bass), some former BR549 mates (Shaw Wilson, Don Herron, Chuck Mead) along with Matt Arnn, Jared Manzo, Harvey Brooks, Paul Neihous, Nick Luca, Chris Dettloff and added vocals by Gail Davies and Kelly Hogan this is a stunning album full of potential left-of-centre radio hits. **AC**  
www.chrisscruggs.com



assured of further success around the corner. **RH**

www.myspace.com/goosebumpsmusicuk  
www.goosebumpsmusic.co.uk

### Jeff & Vida SELMA CHALK

Rosebank Records

★★★

Interesting and varied album by modern duo who tour the UK regularly

Jeff (Burke) and Vida (Wakeman) met in New York City half way through the closing decade of the last century, relocated to the Big Easy in 1999 and split the difference by settling in Nashville four years ago. Recorded in Fort Collins, Colorado, and co-produced by the duo, this is their fourth studio album, and Jeff (mandolin, vocals) and Vida (guitar, vocals) are accompanied by their Nashville band—Jake Schepps (banjo), Justin Hoffenberg (fiddle), Greg Schochet (guitar, bouzouki) and Will Downes (bass).

According to a note in the three-way folded card liner, Selma Chalk, mainly found in Alabama and Mississippi, is 'An impurity found in the most fertile ground of the South.' From beginning to end, the bluegrass/string band material here sounds as if it was penned pre-WWII. That said, Wakeman is the principal writer with her name appended to all thirteen songs, four co-written with Burke while the closing selection *Time Will Heal Your Wounds* was penned with regular collaborator Pat Flory.

There's an undeniable twang inherent in Vida's vocal delivery that you'll either adore or abhor, while the boys in the band amply prove throughout the album that they are accomplished pickers. Stand-out cuts include *Sharp As A Knife* a ballad of desperate love to which is appended a spirited banjo and fiddle instrumental *Petal In The Creek*, the melodic *Never Hurt Before*, and the almost gospel tune *Fall Like A Stone*. For good measure there are a couple of cuts—one sad, the other happy—



that reference riding the rails, namely *Heartache Train* and *Boxcar Blues*

(*Hello Sunshine*). **AW**  
http://www.jeffandvida.com/  
Jeff%26Vida/Welcom.html  
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### John Rich SON OF A PREACHER MAN

Hump Head  
Records HUMP 057

★★★★★

Little fault can be found on this tremendous self penned album

When John Rich moves up a couple of gears into a raw-boned, southern rock mode on what sounds convincingly like an autobiographical he was down and out, struggling to be heard, and was largely ignored by those he hoped to impress. An intelligent and articulate writer, Rich does not confine himself to any one aspect of life. The opening track, a co-write with John D. Anderson, is a scathing indictment against those fat cats who, anticipating the current global financial collapse, unscrupulously feathered their nests, grabbed whatever they could before cutting and running. They left in their wake a seismic disaster, caring nothing for the countless loyal, hard working men and women whose jobs vanished and who have been left virtually destitute. This is at the core of the hard hitting *Shuttin' Detroit Down*, a topical and very political song. Another serious, political song, *The Good Lord And The Man* finds Rich decrying those who criticise the efforts of the many brave young men who, over the years, have laid down their lives in their endeavours to allow those same critics the right to enjoy their present freedom. In many ways this harks back to Merle Haggard's tirade against similar critics some four decades ago when he released the controversial *The Fighting Side Of Me*. But do not imagine that this is an album of political songs; it is not. Certainly, he questions why people stubbornly refuse to pay heed



to calamities which lie ahead until the inevitable happens, but mixed in with these serious topics he writes about truckers, matters of the heart, and, musically and lyrically differently to whatever has gone before, he leaves us with a light hearted take on the pleasures of drinking without falling foul of the law—or his neighbours.

He enlists the help of co-writers, Marv Green on *Another You* on which he sings the praises of the woman he loves, Vicky McGhee on six songs, including another autobiographical number, *Preacher Man*, reminding us that his father was such a man and wondering if he approved or was proud of the road his son had chosen to follow. McGhee also co-wrote *Turn A Country Boy On*, detailing what a city girl needs to know if she wishes to capture the heart of a Redneck. Perhaps the most romantic song in the set is another co-write with John D. Anderson, *I Thought You'd Never Ask*, light years away from their *Shuttin' Detroit Down* collaboration, proving that Rich is every bit as capable of writing a hard hitting, bitter political song as he is of penning a gentle, romantic ballad. It is worth mentioning that Rich is also a sought after producer. He had a hand in bringing Gretchen Wilson to the attention of the public, and she now returns the favour by singing harmony on *I Don't Wanna Lose Your Love*.

Instrumentation ranges from driving rock to a gentler, acoustic approach, both of which suit Rich well. He has produced the album himself and, with his past experience in production, one will find little to fault in the way he has accomplished this. **L.K**  
www.johnrich.com

### Kate Rogers Band BEAUREGARD

Self-Released  
KRCD004

★★★★★

Vocal superiority matched quite beautifully by instrumentation in the most superlative way possible

