

Various Artists SMOKE THAT CIGARETTE

Bear Family
Records BCD 16800
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★★★★

It seems quite incredible today that, until relatively recently, the inherent effects of smoking on one's health appeared to be unrealised, overlooked or ignored. Smoking was largely socially acceptable and was an activity engaged in by members of both sexes. In Britain tobacco companies advertised heavily on television and in the media at large with impunity. They sponsored a wide range of sporting activities and music events; one does not have to go too far back to recall that the prestigious annual Wembley Country Music Festival was once sponsored by Marlborough and also Silk Cut. Between the 1940s and 1970s there were many country songs related to smoking and Bear Family Records has collected thirty such songs to include in this interesting concept album.

Many of the songs relate to someone resorting to a cigarette because they feel isolated or crave the need to light one up while they are busy trying to drown their sorrows in some dimly lit bar. Among this group are songs by Marty Robbins with *Cigarettes and Coffee Blues*, *One Cup Of Coffee And A Cigarette*, by Glen Glenn, *Coffee And Cigarettes (Thinking It Over)* from Johnnie Ray and Bill Mack's *The Smoke, The Bottle And The Wine*. A cigarette features in songs of betrayal, examples being Patti Page's *While A Cigarette Was Burning*, a piece of advice to an ex-lover from the sultry Peggy Lee as she scribbles him a goodbye note which includes the words, *Don't Smoke In Bed*, Patsy Cline lamenting the day that she found *Three Cigarettes In An Ashtray* and a similar lament from Bonnie Guitar in *Three On A Match*. A few of the songs tell of feeble attempts to give up the wicked weed; Jimmy Martin's *I Can't Quit Cigarettes*, Jerry Reed's humorous take on the subject with *Another Puff*, Roger Miller's observation, *Dad Blame Anything A Man Can't Quit* and possibly the best known smoking related song of all, Tex Williams' *Smoke, Smoke, Smoke That Cigarette*. The Rev J.M. Gates preaches a sermon on the scandalous habit of women smoking in the street and a song about a man's final cigarette, *My Last Cigarette*, is related by Paul Clayton. Amongst other singers who touched on the pleasure gained from smoking are Joe and Rose Lee Maphis, Autry Inman, Slim Dusty, Jimmy Dolan, Homer and Jethro, Billy Walker, Frank Sinatra, the Sons Of The Pioneers, Wilf Carter, Tommy Collins and Little Jimmy Dickens. The album is brought to a close with two major long running advertisements in



America, *Dragnet Advertisement* and the *Richard Diamond Advertisement* which actually promotes the many benefits to be gained through smoking Camel cigarettes!

Well, being familiar with many of the featured songs, I enjoyed this collection, but on the health issues I shall remain neutral! That I will leave to the two diametrically opposed lobbies here in Britain, Action On Smoking And Health (ASH), and Freedom Organisation For The Right To Enjoy Smoking Tobacco (FOREST) and allow them to battle out the pros and cons on the contentious issue. 'Seconds Out - Round One!' LK

The Blue Shadows ON THE FLOOR OF HEAVEN

Bumstead
Productions

★★★★☆

Pop backbeat

and glorious harmonies merge in a, decidedly different, country tinged mix

Signed to the Canadian arm of Sony/Columbia, the Blue Shadows debut album *ON THE FLOOR OF HEAVEN* was released in 1993 but only saw the light of day north of the 49th parallel. This Vancouver, British Columbia based quartet was composed of Jeffrey Hatcher (guitar, vocals), J. B. 'Jay' Johnson (drums), Elmar Spanier (bass), and Rhode Island born Billy 'Bud' Cowsill (guitar, vocals). Billy, a founding member of 1960s bubblegum pop sensation the Cowsills, passed away four years ago, one of his final wishes being that *ON THE FLOOR OF HEAVEN* was reissued.

Released by Ontario based Bumstead Productions, this deluxe version of *ON THE FLOOR OF HEAVEN* is accompanied by a twelve song, second disc featuring mostly unreleased material. With Barry Muir replacing Spanier, the Blue Shadows recorded a sophomore album, *LUCKY TO ME*, which was released by Sony during 1995. No material from that second album appears on this reissue.

While the quartet's principal influence is country music, it's not country-rock as we know it. The Blue Shadows plough a marginally different furrow since theirs is a subtle marriage of country and early-1960s pop influences. In the latter regard, vocally speaking, Messrs. Hatcher and Cowsill sound not unlike Don and Phil (Everly), while the pair's co-written songs clearly reference Roy Orbison, the Beatles and others. The medium paced *Think On It* is a gem—as is the album title song, *If It Ain't Rockin'* traverses rockabilly territory, while the Big O lives on in the closing selection *Is Anybody Here*. Other standouts include album



opener *Coming On Strong, If I Were You* and *A Thousand Times*.

The bonus disc includes further Hatcher and Cowsill originals, some co-written with others, as well as a handful of covers that include Merle Haggard's *If We Make It Through December* and Joni Mitchell's *Raised On Robbery*, while Arthur Alexander plus the Beatles (on their *LIVE AT THE BBC* album) also recorded *Soldier Of Love*, and George Jones covered Bobby Harden's *Hell Stays Open All Night Long* on his final Epic album *YOU OUGHTA BE HERE WITH ME* (1990). *ON THE FLOOR OF HEAVEN* received a Juno nomination in the Best Country Group or Duo category, losing to the Rankin Family! While justice is never guaranteed, this excellent reissue restores some of the previous imbalance. **ArthurW**
<http://www.myspace.com/theblushadowsowsill>

Viper Central THE DEVIL SURE IS HARD TO PLEASE

Self-released

Brilliant

musicianship, a

tad short

Viper Central is a six-piece acoustic band from Vancouver and their music goes right to the very roots. The musicianship is frighteningly good. This album, released in 2008, is a mix that draws together Appalachian, bluegrass, old time, Irish/Celtic music and fuses it all seamlessly together. The opener *Shotgun Wedding* is uptempo country with Celtic roots. The echoes of Appalachian styles are everywhere to be heard. A good start, but it really kicks in on *Gold Road*, an instrumental. The theme is stated on slide guitar and the music constantly returns to that theme. The solos are brilliant with the mandolin standing out, especially with figures played over a descending cycle. There is a lovely diminuendo section then a rip-roaring finish, wow! It's so good it almost takes your breath away. All of this music is very bright sounding but it is the fiddle in general that adds a touch of darkness that gives it all the right balance, it's hard to figure out why this is, but believe me it does. The third track is *Mountain of Trouble*, a dark tune with a very traditional almost Irish feel to this and it was my favourite, super vocal, fiddle and again a perfectly placed diminuendo. There is an amazing amount going on in this music, yet magically there is space, it's never crowded. *Down in Western Virginia* has a classic country almost rockabilly feel, excellent harmonies and a very catchy tune. The next track *Devil in the Hourglass* is an uptempo instrumental and demonstrates extreme dexterity for guitar and banjo. As good as it is, however,



for me it lacked a hook, it does get close too flashiness for its own sake (mind you, who wouldn't if they could play like this?) The traditional *Roving Gambler* follows, a super version with Lorraine Cobb on lead vocals (something we could hear more of?). The song *Sadie's Ghost* is a dark minor key tune that nods to bluegrass and Celtic traditions and is a very interesting listen. The album closes with *Come Along*, a catchy and uplifting instrumental that is the perfect closer. The band members are Lorraine Cobb vocal and rhythm guitar; Steve Charles bass, banjo, vocals; Kathleen Nisbet violin and vocal, Tyler Rudolph banjo, and finally Mark Vaughan mandolin. They are all top-notch, a right clever bunch and this is a first class album, it lacks a total killer song and the record is just less than 30 minutes long which is a tad short. Surely they could have put on an extra track or two at least? So that stops me just short of five stars, so its four and a half stars, but if you buy it you're certain to like it. **VM**
www.myspace.com/vipercentral

Various TRANS- ATLANTIC SESSIONS 4 VOLUME TWO

Whirlie Records-
WHIRLIECD19

★★★★☆

Second CD

instalment of the excellent fourth series

When reviewing the first CD volume of TS4 I mentioned the artists and musicians taking part so won't list them all again, but I will state that this is yet another excellent addition to the growing catalogue of Transatlantic Sessions CDs and DVDs that all fans of the series will I am sure be collecting. The CD opens with the fantastic *Copperline* by James Taylor followed swiftly by the bluegrass tune *The Boy Who Wouldn't Hoe Corn* with great vocals from Dan Tyminski plus some amazing Dobro accompaniment from Jerry Douglas. Other stand-out tracks are *500 Miles (Away From Home)* by Rosanne Cash, the fast-paced instrumental *Lee Highway Blues* featuring the fiery fiddle playing of Stuart Duncan and the tender ballad *Worry Not* sung by Liam O Maonlai with backing vocals from Martha Wainwright, Mairead Ni Mhaonaigh and Emily Smith. The best track though has to be the truly enchanting ballad *Mocking Bird* sung by one of the best female country singers (in my opinion) Allison Moorer, this song is just so captivating and bewitching and Allison sings it beautifully. If you haven't started collecting this series yet then you have a bit of catching up to do. **DK**
www.whirlierecords.co.uk

