

Dusty Relics - Re-issues & Compilations

Cal Smith
THE BEST OF CAL SMITH
Hux Records HUX 110

★★★★

Country music—you know drinking, cheating, hypocrisy—real life

Cal Smith was one of the vastly underrated and virtually forgotten singers of the 1960s and 1970s. His career was relatively short and his chart success somewhat sporadic, but as a distinctive country stylist he ranks up there alongside the likes of Gene Watson, Vern Gosdin and Randy Travis. The one-time member of Ernest Tubb's Texas Troubadours, Smith was a master of songs that told human stories. With his deep, rich and melodic baritone, he imbued realism and honesty into simple country yarns. The story of *Jason's Farm* is universal and heartbreaking; *the Ghost of Jim Bob Wilson* unbelievable, but highly listenable; Bill Anderson's superbly written *The Lord Knows I'm Drinkin'* and Smith's biggest hit, *Country Bumpkin* which walked off with all the major CMA Awards back in 1974.

A couple of the songs featured here have gone on to further success, with few today even connecting them to the almost-forgotten Cal Smith. Bill Mack's *Drinking Champagne* was revived by George Strait (amongst others) and John Anderson was to record the definitive version of *I Just Came Home To Count The Memories*. Those raised on today's country music will probably dismiss this kind of collection out of hand, the fact is that these songs about cheating, adultery, drinking, hypocrisy and real small town life is much closer to what country music stands for than all the fiddles, mandolins and steel guitars trying to be heard amongst the screeching electric guitars and heavy basses that Nashville serves up these days. **AC** www.huxrecords.com

Justin Tubb
PEPPER HOT BABY
Bear Family Records

4000127168597
★★★★

Wonderfully comprehensive showcase of a forgotten hit-maker

For what seems like forever, the offspring of popular artists have followed in the footsteps of their famous mum or dad. Nancy Sinatra, Hank Williams Jr and Pam Tillis are just a few who have gone into the family business. Like these artists, Ernest Tubb's oldest son Justin Tubb was a raw talent, and although his hits may have been only moderate, none of them lacked energy and all of them are collected on this new single-disc retrospective by



collector's favourite Bear Family Records.

Although Tubb was averse to recording rock'n'roll, he did make a couple of compromises, such as *Rock It On Down to My House, Baby*. Other times, his honky-tonk material burned with the fire of rockabilly—most notably *Pepper Hot Baby* and *Bachelor Man*, while others were given a doo-wop arrangement, such as *If You'll Be My Love, I Saw Your Face In the Moon, Into Each Life Some Tears Must Fall* and *There'll Be No Teardrops Tonight*.

Although his hit *I Gotta Go Get My Baby* isn't strictly rock'n'roll, it does include much of the musical DNA which would be fed into the genre. The tune alternates between up-tempo honky-tonk and gentle waltz, in much the same way as Wanda Jackson's hits *I Gotta Know* and *Tongue-Tied* did. Like much of the best traditional country, the strident fiddle takes centre stage and beautifully complements songs like *My Heart's Not for Little Girls to Play With*, the Cajun-leaning *All Alone* and the highly melodic *You Nearly Lose Your Mind*. At times, Tubb adopts the yodel of his hero and biggest influence Hank Williams and at times these moments unfortunately come across as superfluous mimicry rather than artistic endeavour. This minor quibble aside, this showcase proves that Tubb Junior was just as noteworthy as his legendary father.

One of the finest retrospectives this reviewer has come across in ages, *PEPPER HOT BABY* is lively and melodic throughout and could easily be enjoyed by both traditional country purists and rock'n'roll fans. **DJ** www.bear-family.de

Jesse Fuller
MOVE ON DOWN THE LINE
Fledg'ling Records

FLED3074

★★★★☆

Thrilling early material from the Lone Cat

This release represents some of the earliest 1954 recordings of one-man blues band and self appointed 'folk songster' Jesse Fuller, together with sessions recorded in London in 1965 when Fuller had finally risen to prominence in the folk and blues revival of the time.

It's a fine package, and an essential document of a great and largely unsung bluesman, one who lived the requisite hard life of displacement and squalor before finding his way into show business. Maybe it's this that informed his sometimes vaudevillian approach to his music, operating as a one man band, blowing into a taped-together mouthpiece combining harmonica and kazoo, hitting bass notes with



his fiddle (his own invention; a kind of deformed upright bass with piano strings stretched across it,) refusing to put his faith in support musicians and in this way earning his nickname the Lone Cat.

This musical ethos lends a ramshackle intensity to the music, most notably the 1954 cuts, as well as giving it more personal dimensions. And it's all made more personal by some excellent liner notes from British photographer Val Wilmer, reminiscing on her early correspondence with Fuller. This is rounded out by a drier essay from Joe Boyd and as such the disc is lent an air of both scholarly documentation and living, breathing relevance. This is music that has been preserved and revisited but remains just as exciting and visceral as the moment it was created. **AlexC** <http://www.topicrecords.co.uk>

I See Hawks In L.A.
SHOULDA BEEN GOLD 2001 - 2009
American Beat Records

★★★★

Good heavens 1970s style country-rock still lives and breathes

For starters there's a degree of presumption in the album title...or did I miss the intended humour? Over the course of the opening decade of the 21st millennium, the Hawks have released four albums, witnessed a couple of line-up changes and though it all doggedly plied their take on 1970s style country-rock. This seventeen song almost eighty-minute long retrospective draws a decade of songs from their second through fourth releases, although the track list on the rear of the gatefold card liner fails to credit *Wonder Valley Fight Song* as hailing from the band's June 2004 released sophomore effort *GRAPEVINE*.

As for the seven previously unreleased tunes their 2001 self-titled debut release is represented here by a Y2K demo version of *I See Hawks In L.A.* recorded by David Jackson (Dillard & Clark, J. D. Souther). The collection closes with a live version of the bluegrass/gospel tinged *The Mystery Of Life* which appeared on the Hawks debut album, while *Shoulda Been Gold*, *Bossier City* and *Laissez Les Bon Temps Roulet* were specifically recorded for this release. The latter pair of songs feature a guest vocal by Textones founder Carla Olson. As for album opener *Sexy Vacation* and the later *Soul Power* they hail from the Hawks vault of unreleased material.

If country-rock ala the Flying Burrito Brothers and their ilk remains your sonic elixir of life, then *I See Hawks In L.A.* is most definitely your brand of poison. A few songs to note...the career of Democrat



Senator Robert Carlyle Byrd a controversial American politician for five decades is the focus of *Byrd From West Virginia*, while *Raised By Hippies* recalls the summer of love. The accompanying eight-page liner booklet features a detailed band history penned by quartet founders Rob Waller and Paul Lacques, and the liner features a touching dedication to the late Amy Farris. **AW** <http://www.iseehawks.com/> <http://www.myspace.com/iseehawksinla>

Elvis Presley
THE COLLECTION
Sony 8869756482

★★★★★

The history of Elvis in seven original albums

Elvis would have been 75 in January, so it's a good enough time to dust off his original albums. The neat, black box of *THE COLLECTION* houses seven of them, all lovingly created with facsimiles of the original card covers, dust sleeves and even the changing face of the RCA label itself. First off is the iconic *ELVIS PRESLEY*, the one with the cover that was aped by the Clash for *LONDON CALLING*. What perhaps strikes one first is how while you think you know Elvis, his albums hide a wealth of things which escaped public attention. This might contain *Blue Suede Shoes* and *My Baby Left Me*, but who remembers *I Got A Woman* or his version of *Shake Rattle And Roll*? It's a classic album which says a lot about Elvis and a lot about music and starmaking at the time.

It wasn't long before Elvis had moved on to his next phase, as a film star and the *BLUE HAWAII* soundtrack is a very different affair with numbers like *Rock-A-Hula Baby*, the dreaded *Hawaiian Wedding Song* and standards such as *Can't Help Falling In Love*.

His next incarnation comes with the mighty *FROM ELVIS IN MEMPHIS* which contains *Suspicious Minds*,

