

NEW RELEASES

Eilen Jewell QUEEN OF THE MINOR KEY

Signature Sounds
SIG2039

★★★★★

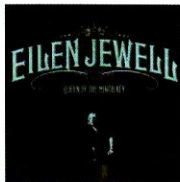
2011 Album of the
Year?

Eilen Jewell along with her skilled road and studio band is one of the most distinctive female singer-songwriters to have emerged in years. With every record, from her 2006 debut through to her personal tribute to Loretta Lynn she has demonstrated musical integrity whilst pushing the bar in her continuing search for uniqueness. With this latest release Eilen has written an inventive and fresh collection of songs that explore interesting themes within classic country and rock styles, creating and pioneering a highly original sound all her very own.

The album is book-ended by two brief yet quite different instrumentals—*Radio City* and *Kalimotxo*—both of which evoke the classic instrumental hits of the late 1950s and early 1960s without in any way being derivative. Weaving hypnotic rhythms and melodies over varied soundscapes that delight as much as they surprise, QUEEN OF THE MINOR KEY is a rare and potent mix of music styles. Eilen's engaging voice imbues her original songs with a warmth that cannot be imitated, revealing in melodically rich tunes the universality inherent in the country-pop tradition. *I Remember You* has a melody as immediate and lasting as they come, with a haunting blend of pedal steel and electric lead behind Eilen's passionate vocal. The title song bounces along on an insistent country-rock beat with tasty guitar accompaniment straight out of the early 1960s. Zoe Muth adds a second voice in spots to *Over Again*, maintaining the same standards of musical exploration in harmonies that add yet another, almost grounding aspect to the richly diverse set of songs. *Sante Fe* with its melancholy pedal steel and Eilen's sensitive vocal, is a particular highlight, but the rhythmic *Warning Signs* and melancholic bluesy *Only One* are no less compelling.

The production of this album captures the relaxing melodic vocals while maintaining the ambience of the cohesive selection of well-written songs. As a singer Eilen Jewell is soulful, lonesome, powerful, vulnerable and relentlessly engaging. Her poetic poetry is just as brilliant as her voice and songs are. In short, one of the very best albums of 2011.

Alan Cackett



www.eilenjewell.com

Jason Michael Carroll NUMBERS

Cracker Barrel

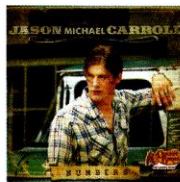
★★★★

Modern country with
twang, grit and heart

Jason Michael Carroll burst upon the country music scene some four years ago with the self-penned sad story ballad *Alyssa Lies*, a top five country hit that dealt with child abuse in a sensitive way. This latest album, available exclusively in the Cracker Barrel Old Country Music Stores across America, features ten new co-written songs along with the title song and the bonus of that debut hit single. A preacher's son, Jason was only allowed to listen to gospel music while growing up in North Carolina. This is reflected in his distinctive strain of country music with a pronounced moral, religious or gospel feel to songs like *Hell or Hallelujah*, *Can I Get An Amen* and *Ray of Hope*.

To hear this twangy vocalist is to hear a straight-up, full-tilt, no-frills country singer who works a groove like a mule team, a melody like a barrel racer going for time, and a tear-jerker with the dignity of Sunday grace. Whether it's the poignancy of *Alyssa Lies*, the roof-raising country boy anthem *Meet Me In The Barn*, or the sweeping desire for a woman getting ready to move on in *Stray*, Carroll finds his voice in any kind of song—just so long as it's country. With the complementary accompaniment of Nashville's finest session players such as Pat Buchanan, Dan Dugmore, Jonathan Yudkin, Shannon Forrest and Ilya Toshinsky, this is top quality modern country music. **Adrian Cooke**

www.jasonmichaelcarroll.com



Jeff Black PLOW THROUGH THE MYSTIC

Lotos Nile Music

★★★★☆

Fourteen songs that
plow through the
mystic of our human
existence

This album has been a long time coming. Jeff's previous song collection TIN LILY appeared in late July 2005. Following a quartet of releases on the short-lived Arista Austin and still vibrant Dualtone label, PLOW THROUGH THE MYSTIC is the debut release on Black's own imprint Lotos Nile Music—named after his paternal grandmother. Self-produced by Black (vocals, guitar, piano,



keyboards, banjo, bass, percussion) and recorded in his home studio, Arcana Sound, this son of Missouri is mainly assisted on this collection by his buddy Sam Bush (mandolin, octave mandolin, slide mandolin) and Transatlantic Sessions co-host Jerry Douglas (resonator guitar, lap steel).

Having already mentioned Missouri, the songs on this collection begin and end there—both reference rivers. The lyric to opener *Walking Home* focuses on the thoughts of an awkward teenager treading the streets of his hometown of Liberty contemplating growing up, while *Ravanna*, a small town located on the northern border of the state, finds Black recall his birth, and also proffers fond memories of his parents and visits to his maternal grandparents who lived in that small northern town. Matraca Berg and Gretchen Peters deliver top drawer guest vocals to the soulful *Sorry*. Black performs *Immigrant Song* as a semi-spoken piece. The narrator therein reflects upon the cycle of life beginning with: 'When I first started falling, Through the hole in the sky, Man I was travelling like I'd never known' and closes with: 'See I spent a lifetime searching the skies, To see if I could spot some sign from home, And one of these days when my work is done, I'll head on back there where I come from.'

Cure is a dark tale that opens with the revelation: 'Polly's daddy was a hard shell preacher' and moves on to relate how: '... they pounded it in that she was born with sin, So she almost went insane.' Although a seven line lyric features in the liner booklet, on the CD *Virgil's Blues* is a two-minute long banjo instrumental, while the ensuing *Wounded Heart* ploughs a blues groove. Douglas' resonator guitar shines on the six-minute long *Plow Through The Mystic*, and Jeff supports his voice with organ on the ensuing, self-explanatory *New Love Song*. *Waiting* is the only selection that features Kenny Wright (drums, percussion) and the lyric was inspired by a day-long snowbound traffic jam that Jeff was once trapped in. In spite of its title *What I Would Not Do* is a heartfelt love song, while the penultimate, *Run*, features a Kim Richey harmony vocal. There's every indication that Bush and Douglas were allowed free reign with their contributions and as such PLOW THROUGH THE MYSTIC possesses a loose melodic feel, while Black's main mystic themes as he journeys through life are family, love, religion and a little redemption/salvation. **Arthur Wood**

www.jeffblack.com