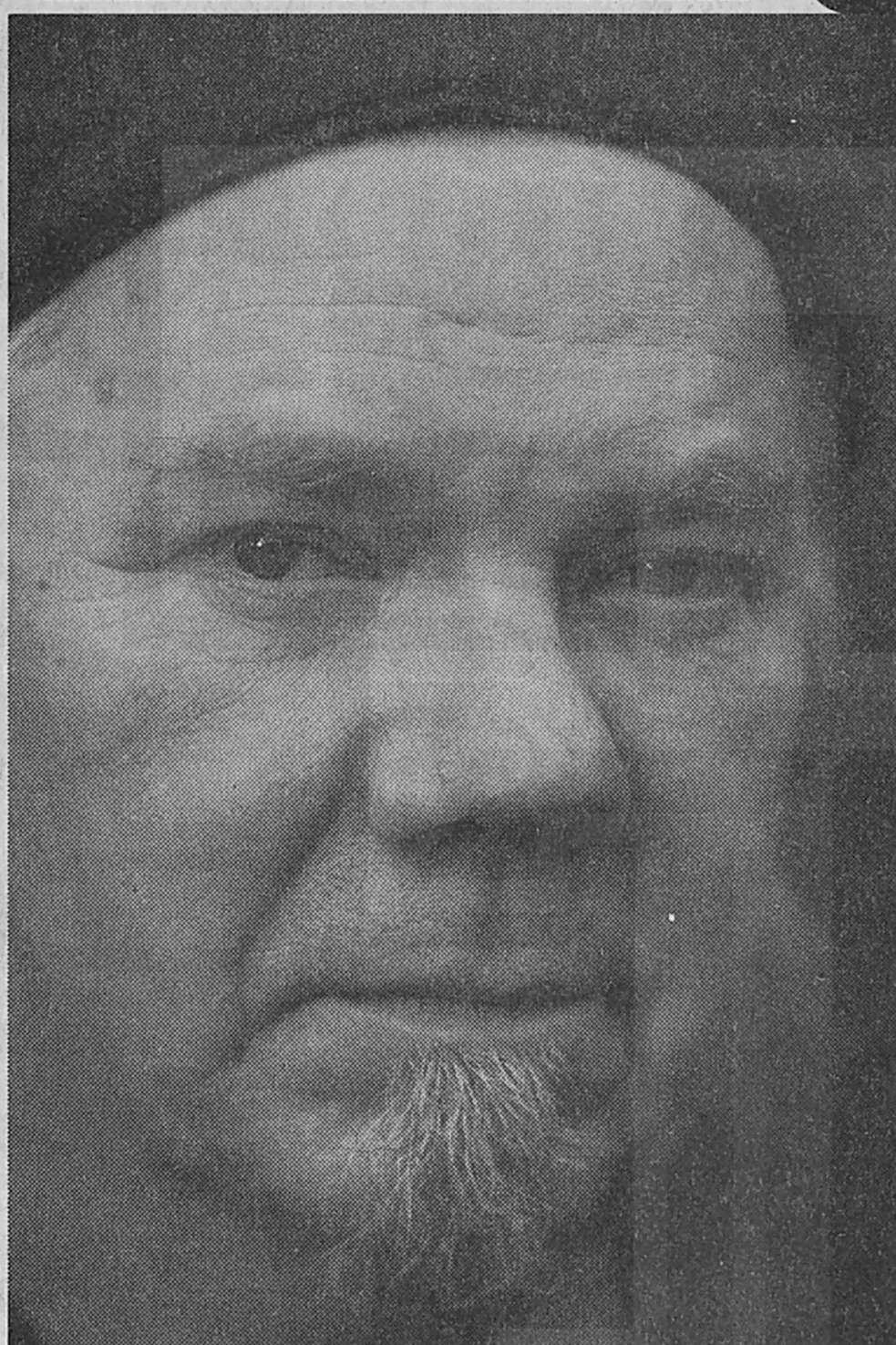


3rd COAST MUSIC



ERIC TAYLOR

#180/269 JANUARY 2012



Gerrie Van Barneveld

REVIEWS

(or not)

JASON ARNOLD &

THE STEPSIDERS

BRIAN T ATKINSON

I'll Be Here In The

Morning;

The Songwriting

Legacy Of

Townes Van Zandt

CHRIS ISAAK

LOUIS JOHNSON

FAR & Away 2011

BAD NEWS FROM HOUSTON

AMERICANA GRAMMY SHAM

What Is A Texas Songwriter?

JOHN THE REVEALATOR

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DURING DECEMBER 2011

#1 JOHN LILLY: COLD COMFORT

(self) *AG/*BG/*CS/*GM/*LMG*MP

- 2 VA: This One's For Him: A Tribute To Guy Clark (Icehouse)
*AH/*MDT/*N&T/*RF/*RV
- 3 Willie Nelson: Remember Me (R&J) *GS/*MT/*RH
- 4 The Far West (Light Fighter) *JP/*PP
- 5 Tom Pacheco: Luminol; The Houston Sessions (Frog Claw) *CJ/*EW
- 6 John Howie Jr: Leavin' Yesterday (Hands Up!) *DF/*DWB
- 7 Lincoln Durham: The Howling Bones (self) *HT
- 8 Jason Arnold & The Stepsiders: Crazy Things (self) *ATC
- 9 Gretchen Peters: Hello Cruel World (Scarlet Letter) *KM
- 10= The Carper Family: Back When (self) *TB
Fred Eaglesmith: 6 Volts (A Major Label) *JB
Tom Russell: Mesabi (Proper)
- 11= Danny Barnes: Rocket (ATO) *BB
Louis Johnson: Old Friend (self) *TF
Red Molly: Light In The Sky (self)
- 12= Kate Campbell: Two Nights In Texas (Large River) *FH
Chris Isaak: Beyond The Sun (Vanguard) *CTS
Tom Waits: Bad As Me (Anti-) *TA
Western Starlanders (Riviera) *JM
- 13= Big Al Anderson: Strings (Amigo Grande) *JF
Johnny Cash: Live Around The World; Bootleg Series III
(Columbia Legacy) *JZ

The Damn Quails: Down The Hatch (598) *SC

Joshua Davis: Magnolia Belles (Earthwork) *BK

James Faretheewell: Faretheewell (self) *RG

Charlie Faye: Travels With Charlie (self) *DS

The James Low Western Front: Whiskey Farmer

(Union Made) *JT

Lizanne Knott: South of Graceland (self) *GG

Ally Macleod: Astor Place (Barbaraville) *RE

Molly Maher & Her Band Of Disbelievers (Real-Phonic) *DG

Newtown (self) *RW

Paladino (self) *TPR

Pistol Anniess: Hell On Heels (Sony) *MN

Dave 'Snaker' Ray: My Blue Heaven (Blue Suit) *DJ

Reckless Kelly: Good Luck & True Love (No Big Deal) *WR

The Rise and Fall of James Scott Bullard

& The Late Night Sweethearts (self) *SS

The Unthanks: Diversions Vol 1 (Rabble Rouser) *MB

VA: The FAME Studios Story, 1961-1973 (Kent) *RC

Brooke Wylie: Half Empty Moon (self) *BS

Brock Zeman: Me Then You (Busted Flat) *FS



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WHERE MUSIC STILL MATTERS

***XX = DJ's ALBUM OF THE MONTH**

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FAR & AWAY 2011

ALBUM OF THE YEAR

- #1 Eilen Jewell: Queen Of The Minor Key
- 2 John Lilly: Cold Comfort
- 3 Dave Alvin: Eleven Eleven
- 4= Lydia Loveless: Indestructible Machine
- Gurf Morlix: Blaze Foley's 113th Wet Dream
- 5 Rod Picott: Welding Burns
- 6 Hayes Carll: KMAG YOYO
- 7 T Jarrod Bonta: White Lines
- 8 Gillian Welch: The Harrow & The Harvest
- 9 Zoe Muth & The Lost High Rollers: Starlight Hotel
- 10= Grant Peeples: Okra and Ecclesiastes
- Amanda Shires: Carrying Lightning

DEBUT ALBUM

- #1 Lydia Loveless: Indestructible Machine
- 2 T Jarrod Bonta: White Lines
- 3 HalleyAnna: The Country
- 4 Kenny Vaughan: V

LIVE ALBUM

- #1 Slaid Cleaves: Sorrow & Smoke
- 2 Neil Young & The International Harvesters: A Treasure
- 3 Guy Clark: Songs And Stories
- 4 The Bottle Rockets: Not So Loud

REISSUE/HISTORIC ALBUM

- #1 Johnny Cash: From Memphis To Hollywood
- 2 Blaze Foley: Duct Tape Messiah
- 3 Neil Young & The International Harvesters: A Treasure
- 4 John Prine: The Singing Mailman Delivers
- 5 Johnny Cash: Live Around The World

VARIOUS ARTISTS/TRIBUTE ALBUM

- #1 Gurf Morlix: Blaze Foley's 113th Wet Dream
- 2 VA: This One's For Him: A Tribute to Guy Clark
- 3 VA: The Lost Notebooks of Hank Williams
- 4 VA: I Love: Tom T. Hall's Songs Of Fox Hollow
- 5 Laura Cantrell: Kitty Wells Dresses
- 6 Steve Cropper: Dedicated; A Salute To The 5 Royales

FEMALE ARTIST

- #1 Eilen Jewell
- 2 Zoe Muth
- 3 Gillian Welch
- 4 Amanda Shires
- 5 Lydia Loveless
- 6 Connie Smith
- 7 Imelda May
- 8 Tara Nevins

MALE ARTIST

- #1 Rod Picott
- 2 Dave Alvin
- 3 T Jarrod Bonta
- 4 John Lilly
- 5= Gurf Morlix/Hayes Carll
- 6 Ray Bonneville
- 7 Grant Peeples

SONGWRITER

- #1 Rod Picott
- 2 Eric Hisaw
- 3 Eilen Jewell
- 4 Tom Russell
- 5 Lydia Loveless
- 6= Grant Peeples/John Lilly
- 7 Dave Alvin

DUO/GROUP

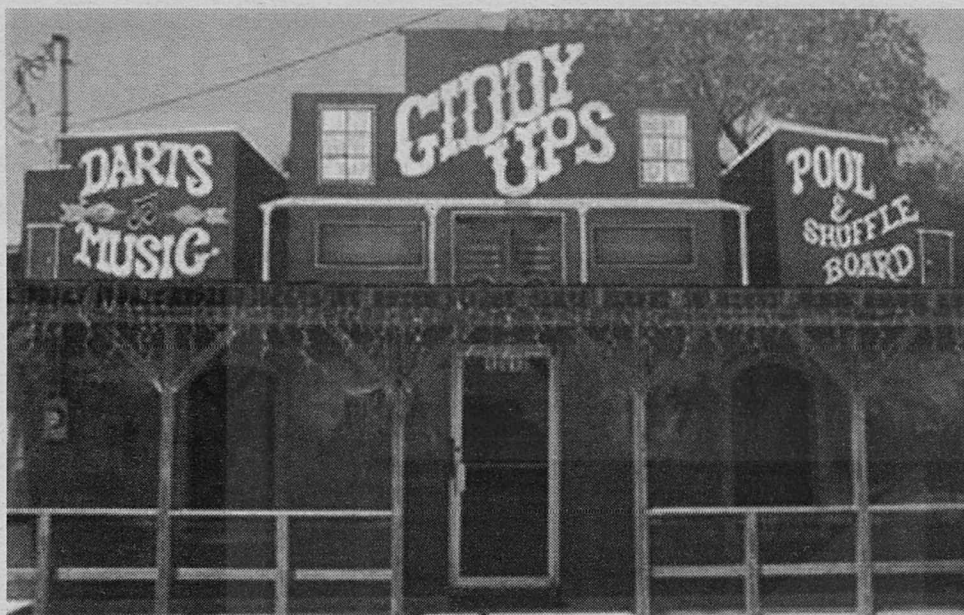
- #1 BettySoo & Doug Cox
- 2 Carrie Rodriguez & Ben Kyle
- 3= Drive By Truckers/The Decemberists
- 4 The Gourds
- 5 The Sweetback Sisters

INSTRUMENTALIST

- #1 Jerry Miller
- 2 Gurf Morlix
- 3 Buddy Miller
- 4 Bobby Flores

BEST IN THE INDUSTRY

- #1 Jenni Finlay
- 2 Joe Swank/Bloodshot
- 3 Ellen Stanley (Red House)
- 4 Peter Holmstedt
- 5 Bill Wence



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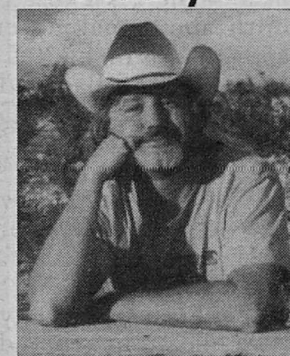
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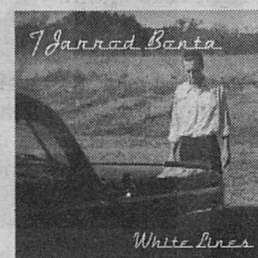
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BAD NEWS FROM HOUSTON

By odd coincidence, if indeed there's any such thing as coincidence, just as I was blocking out some background on Houston as Texas' premier singer-songwriter town in the 60s and 70s (see cover feature), I got an email from my esteemed colleague William Michael Smith asking if I'd be interested in a critique of Houston's contemporary music scene. As I care even less, if possible, than Smith about making enemies in Houston, I'm happy to pass on his 'tell the truth until they bleed' thoughts about Baghdad On The Bayou. Though, in this context, maybe Clutch City would be more appropriate.

OK, now that none of the ZenHill bands or Andrew Karnavas or Kristine Mills or Tontons needs to worry about traveling to Los Angeles and winning Grammys this year, it's time to take a 360 look around, time for another little local reality check.

While we are relieved and pleased it's been quite a while since anyone whined about "lack of a local music scene," we are less than thrilled with a new tendency we are noticing: some people (who should know better) are espousing (or pretending to endorse) the idea that most local bands are as good as most national bands.

This is a small group of people, maybe 200-300, who are music scenesters, music writers, or players with a financial/professional interest, and their favorite word is "great." "Highly talented" and "amazing" usually come into their verbal equations too. Careers in public relations or aroma therapy beckon.

And—news flash—there are those who, if you disagree about this, will accuse you of not "supporting the scene"—although seldom to your face. But, big deal, we're used to being trashed for not "supporting" every Houston band that has a Facebook page and a once-a-month gig at Pizza WhatsItsName or been to BandCamp or played at a campfire guitar pull at Kerrville or an Anderson Fair Thursday night writers in the round or a drum circle at Last Concert Cafe.

Case in point: we recently went to see Oklahoma youngster John Fullbright at Anderson Fair. Fullbright is one of the classiest, most literate songwriters emerging on the national scene at the moment. And he's not folk per se, he's everything a songwriter is supposed to be; Barbra Streisand and Johnny Paycheck could arm wrestle over his songs. He sings and writes like a folkie who has spent an inordinate amount of time listening to Randy Newman, Woody Guthrie and Leon Russell.

A nice, unassuming guy, Fullbright was gracious enough to ask local folkie Matt Harlan to come onstage and sing a couple of his songs, with Fullbright accompanying on piano. Bad move for Harlan. Umpteen people have chastised me in the past for ignoring Harlan, but throwing Harlan's songs into the Fullbright stream only highlighted the mediocrity of the local guy's offerings as well as the thinness of his voice.

Furthermore, the truth is that 99.75% of all the songwriters in Houston have no business putting themselves on the same stage as Fullbright. Most folks don't want to hear that, but truth is truth, no matter how deep one buries one's head in the sand or Wilco's records.

Recently I was confronted by a local music scribe with another "you won't believe what So-and-So (someone who manages some local bands) said about you" story because I had been critical of the amateur hour quality of one of his acts' recent shows.

Trouble is, actually, I would believe it, because I've heard bs before: that I have the ability to "fix" who wins the *Houston Press* Music Awards (rest assured, if I had that ability, a whole bunch of acts that were nominated and/or won would not be on the final list); that I only review bands who give me money (yeah, that's why I only shop at Saks Fifth Avenue and fly to Paris for dinner every other night); that I favor the Continental Club over Fitzgerald's; blah blah blah, whine-and-bitch ad infinitum ad nauseum. I haven't heard anyone yet say I'm responsible for Herman PizzaWhatsItsName Cain hitting on all those women or that I single-handedly undermined the Occupy Wall Street movement, but I wouldn't be at all surprised to hear it. Goes with the territory, especially if you're not agreeing with a certain hipster element about how great everything is.

With the rash of signings of local acts to New West and ZenHill during the past year, there's been a serious rise in homer-ism here in the home town. Believe me, as music writers we'd love to see someone from Houston break out and make a run at the Hayes Carlls and Ryan Adamases of the world. We'd love to say to our colleagues and competitors in Austin and Seattle and Boston that one of our acts is out there kicking ass and taking names. But, frankly, while Buxton and Robert Ellis in particular seem to be making some national headway, we don't see that act here yet. And we don't believe shouting it in 48 point headlines will ever make it so, whether we actually believe it or not (most likely not).

We've had high hopes for going on ten years that Sideshow Tramps might be the next big Americana thing, a meaner, grittier, whiskey-breathed, brisket-carnaging, doin'-Houston-proud Avett Brothers. It hasn't happened and, after so long, it seems pretty unlikely that it's going to happen for them no matter how popular they remain inside the Loop or how good the latest album is—and **Revelator's** damn good.

So let's rein the homer-ism in a bit, shall we? It's really not becoming when we look in the mirror. Let's shoot instead for a bit of realism and honesty. Just an example: venues and public relations people, please stop trying to tell me how "great" Lankford Folk Family Revival is when anyone with a pair of ears knows those kids aren't working at the level the Tramps and a dozen other Houston bands do. And even the Tramps are finding that music as a viable living is a tough row to hoe without a trust fund or daddy's money.

I've never gone along with my colleague who frequently writes how many "hundreds of great, talented bands" no one has ever heard of before there are in Houston, how "they spring to life daily." That's bullshit and every thinking adult who ever paid for an instrument or a music lesson knows it. Even those kids' parents know it. Most new bands don't have enough material or experience to be real contenders. So some band made a video at Caroline Collective once. BFD. To describe them as "great" is a disservice to all of us. Stop acting like everything is a big deal. It will help with that tiny important factor that is really what is supposed to be at the core of journalistic writing: credibility.

Let's keep it real, kids. Most cow turds aren't roses in waiting, no matter how many times some hipster promoting a band—or some "music writer" who has never written a critical sentence in his/her life—tells you they are.

William Michael Smith

GRAMMY SHAM

As if the Grammys didn't have enough credibility issues, NARAS, the organization that controls the process, has left a loophole large enough for a complete unknown to manipulate her way onto the final ballot in the Americana category.

The news broke in *Variety* that virtual unknown Linda Chorney had employed the organization's interactive Grammy 365 site to connect with voting members and get her music heard. Somehow she got enough members to vote for her to get her album **Emotional Jukebox** on the final ballot with Emmylou Harris, Levon Helm, Ry Cooder, and Lucinda Williams, who have collected among themselves 23 Grammys.

On one hand, we have to applaud Chorney for her effort and determination and for her ability to work the system to her advantage. On the other hand, after hearing her music, we want to projectile vomit.

Problems abound with Chorney's nomination. For one, it knocked out much more deserving artists like Hayes Carll, whose **KMAG YOYO and Other American Stories** was one of the most played Americana albums of the year in terms of radio spins. Carll's song *Another Like You* was honored as the #1 song of the year by *American Songwriter*. Chorney didn't make the top fifty. According to Sound Scan numbers, she hasn't moved a single copy of the album, yet she's on the ballot. Sorry, that ain't right.

Let's face it, a Grammy really may not mean all that much career-wise to Lady Gaga or Rihanna, but the award has huge meaning to the careers of artists like Carll, Jason Isbell, Brian Wright, Sarah Jarosz, The Gourds and others who have proved themselves by touring constantly and recording startlingly good albums that received almost universal critical acclaim. Chorney's wan, beyond-lame, easy-listening album sounds like the soundtrack to a bad Lifetime Channel drama, a verbal Hallmark card. Shelby Lynn, who also was not nominated, can eat Chorney for breakfast.

Others online have speculated that Chorney's inclusion is a ploy to create controversy and drum up some additional audience after the ratings drop-off most awards shows have been experiencing. We love a good conspiracy theory as well as the next paranoid schizophrenic, but it seems unlikely they would want to create the controversy in a category that so few potential viewers care about. Let's face it, 99 percent of all people who listen to Americana don't watch these over-blown reality-show-like awards fiascos. Now if Chorney was in there duking it out with Bieber, someone might give a damn.

Still, the larger question is: who are these music experts and cultural tastemakers/gatekeepers whom Chorney was able to persuade that she belonged on the ballot? We'd like to think that the folks vetting the final ballot would have good enough ears to weed out albums like Chorney's without so much as a second thought. But long time music industry veteran Greg Ellis noted on Facebook that these are the same people who "voted for Taste of Honey over Tom Petty, Elvis Costello and The Cars."

As for Chorney's successful campaign to insinuate her tepid album into the finals, Ellis quipped, "Just because you can make a retard dance don't make it right."

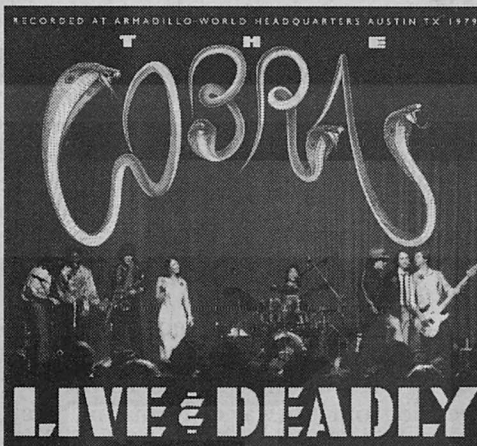
We second Mr Ellis's opinion. Linda Chorney, do the right thing: Withdraw your nomination now. Grammy idiots: How about next year you have a category called Non-Deserving Performer With Best Manipulation of the System?

William Michael Smith

Thank You, Austin

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*The only thing wrong
with this disc?
It came out 30 years late.*
Margaret Moser



Scores of radio stations around the globe have been playing this CD, and its second pressing is awakening new attention and garnering even more acclaim..

*...what can I say that adequately
conveys the beauty of her leads
and harmonies? She
glows in the dark.*

John Conquest

This song swap among musical pals has led to a successful songwriter series in Lockhart at their Gaslight-Baker Theatre and Dr. Eugene Clark Library.

*There's not been another project
like Fletcher Clark's Taking Turns.*
Hank Alrich



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LOUIS JOHNSON • OLD FRIEND

(self ****)

Having learned, the hard way, that introducing yourself as 'Cowboy Johnson' when cold-calling acoustic venues invited the person on the other end to hang up the phone, Kent Louis Johnson, who'd held down an Evangeline Cafe residency and put out an outstanding collection of Mickey Newbury songs (**A Grain Of Sand**, MoonHouse, 2004), as Cowboy, has rebranded himself. Either way, his name hasn't been heard around these parts for a while as he'd been working the Florida/Alabama border region, apparently fruitful territory for a working musician, but recently moved back to Austin to be closer to his fifth wife, fellow singer-songwriter Amanda Percy, and who can blame him? Second time round, Johnson offers ten originals, plus, an echo of the earlier album, *Is She Your Memory Or Mine*, left unfinished by Newbury and Jim Pasquale and later completed by Pasquale and Johnson. Opening with **Some Day**, a wee hours West Coast Cool lament featuring Ephraim Owens trumpet and Chris Gage organ, Johnson, who produced the album himself, keeps things tight, only one song, the gospel **Standing At the Crossroads**, with a choir that includes Gage, Percy and Leeann Atherton, has more than two other players, predominantly Gage, on dobro, mandolin, baritone guitar, accordion, B3 or harmony vocals, or Bradley Kopp acoustic guitar. It rather goes without saying that Newbury was a major influence on Johnson, and, like Newbury's, his songs and his delivery of them are introspective, melancholy and emotionally complex. Reviewing **A Grain Of Sand** (3CM #88/177), I remarked that Johnson "brings more depth and sincerity to [Mickey Newbury's songs] than most singer-songwriters can bring to their own," and he certainly doesn't sell his own material short. **JC**

CHRIS ISAAK • BEYOND THE SUN

(Vanguard ****)

Can't figure out quite what Isaak is trying to do on a record, mainly recorded at Sun Studio, which he says, in the liner notes, "I always wanted to make." Isaak's music has always reflected the influence of Sun Records, but if this is a tribute, why does it open with *Ring Of Fire*, recorded five years after Johnny Cash left Sun for Columbia, or include four songs Elvis cut for RCA? One way to make sense of them would be if Isaak had cut them the way they might have sounded if they'd been produced by Sam Phillips, but *Ring Of Fire* retains the Tex-Mex horns, *It's Now Or Never* the background singers, thankfully not a feature of Sun Records, though he does bring the piano to the fore on *Trying To Get To You* (Elvis played piano on the original but it wasn't miked). The actual Sun material is a curious mix of all too familiar hits, Elvis' *I Forgot To Remember To Forget*, Jerry Lee Lewis' *Great Balls Of Fire* and Cash's *I Walk The Line*, with obscurities, ultra in the case of Jimmy Wages' unreleased *Miss Pearl*, which didn't see the light of day until 1995, Carl Perkins' *Dixie Fried*, Warren Smith's *So Long I'm Gone* and *My Happiness*, one side of the 1953 acetate Presley recorded for his mother's birthday and which led Marion Keisker, the unsung heroine of the Sun Records story, to draw Phillips' attention to the young truck driver. However, if anyone can pull off a hodge-podge like this, it's Isaak, who could have made a decent living as an Elvis impersonator if he hadn't happened to be a pretty good songwriter—and you sure have to admire the chutzpah of including an original, *Live It Up*, which fits right in. While this is rather, in fact *very*, self-indulgent, and I wish Isaak had dug a lot deeper into the Sun archives, I'll leave the last word to Sam Phillips, who told the *Oxford American* (2000), "I love to listen to Chris Isaak. He's very talented, and his music is damned honest. It's incredible." **JC**

JASON ARNOLD & THE STEPSIDERS CRAZY THINGS

(self ****)

Don't know why I never thought of this before, but a good way of sizing up young country acts would be to ask 'Would James Henry have booked them?' Sadly, James is no longer around to give the definitive answer, but having spent a large chunk of the early 90s in Henry's Bar & Grill, I don't think I'm going out on much of a limb by thinking that he'd have had this outfit in monthly rotation. Though Arnold bass/lead vocals, Jon Jaffe pedal steel, Tom Umberger lead guitar, Sean Orr fiddle/harmony vocals, Terry Kirkendall drums and Erik Metzger piano are, as an ensemble, rather more accomplished than some of the Henry's regulars, the difference between them isn't the music, real deal, if it ain't broke don't fix it, barroom honky tonk rooted in the 50s and early 60s. However, almost 20 years since Henry's closed, Arnold & Co are fighting even more of a rearguard action. Their second album, following **With Friends Like These** (2007), which features eight Arnold originals in the classic mold, plus Bob Wills' version of *Maiden's Prayer*, Willie Nelson's *Half A Man* and Charlie Daniels' *Texas*, shows the Justin Trevino influence, heavy on 4/4 shuffles for one thing, but that's just another way of saying the Johnny Bush/Don Walser influence, which is just another way of saying the Ernest Tubb/Webb Pierce/Faron Young influence. They may be playing at joints like Giddy Ups, which is really, rather than, like Henry's, metaphorically, on the edge of town, but Jason Arnold & The Stepsiders really are, as they justifiably boast, 'Country as country was.' **JC**

BRIAN T ATKINSON

I'LL BE HERE IN THE MORNING; THE SONGWRITING LEGACY OF TOWNES VAN ZANDT

(Texas A&M University Press ****)

Not sure if four books merits the term Zandtiana, but then how many singer-songwriters, other than Hank and Dylan, can boast even one? Apart from **For The Sake Of The Song** (Wings, 1977), a collection of lyrics, there have been two foredoomed attempts at biography, John Kruth's wretched **To Live's To Fly** and Robert Hardy's **A Deeper Blue**. Atkinson takes a very different approach, stringing together the musings of 40 other songwriters (plus Graham Leader, producer of the documentary **Heartworn Highways**) on Van Zandt's influence, though whether it's any more successful is another matter.

The problems start with the list of musers, which doesn't include Steve Earle, Eric Taylor or Barb Donovan, but, for no obvious reasons, does rope in Jim James (My Morning Jacket), Adam Duritz (Counting Crows) and Grace Potter. Do what? Actually, Duritz ("I'm not sure I could do justice to the songs, and I say that being a pretty egotistical person") is rather good value, with James it's all about him, while Potter comes up with the silliest line in the whole book, saying she was turned on to Townes by "this house-sitter guy who was kind of a weirdo from Norway or Romania." Well, I guess all those European countries do look alike. Even rather less marginal contributors are hard to take too seriously when they start off saying things like "I didn't know nothin' about no Townes Van Zandt until after he was dead" (Kevin Russell of The Gourds) or "I never got the opportunity to meet Townes. At the time of his death, I was unaware of him" (Terri Hendrix). Russell goes on to say "I never went to see Townes ... he wasn't much of a performer... If anybody asks me about Townes, I just say 'Go get **Live At The Old Quarter**.' Then forget about it. It's all there; it's brilliant." Hang on Kevin, exactly what part of that album title do you not understand?

There are some very good moments in the book. Guy Clark calls Townes "the Van Gogh of country music." Billy Joe Shaver recalls, "My wife, she'd say, 'Get out the razor blades. Townes Van Zandt could make a lot of money selling razor blades at his shows.' I'd say, 'Brenda, that's art.' She'd say 'Shit.'" Robert Plant on recording *Harm's Swift Way*, "Another reason why I shouldn't write another song." Kasey Chambers on Australian requests for a Townes song, "Oh, cool, I'd much rather play that than one of mine." Butch Hancock, "If I knew what was most compelling about Townes' songs, I could make \$1 million in the music business—if I started out with \$2 million." Tom Russell, "The whole talk about Townes not reaching a wider audience during his lifetime is a lot of bullshit... He led the life he was meant to lead. There's no sense in trying to figure out why he wasn't as popular as Springsteen or Dylan."

Then there are the failures to grasp the concept. Kevin Russell again, "I'd put Townes in the Top Twenty of all-time. He's maybe around Number Fifteen or Sixteen." Josh Ritter compares *Snowin' On Raton* with one of his own songs. Shawn Camp believes "I have a natural tone that's similar to Townes... Maybe I write songs similar to his sometimes." And don't get me started on David Broza's bullshit, which Atkinson swallows without question. Which brings us to the most tedious aspect of this book, Atkinson's intros, which fail to make meaningful connections to Townes, though you hardly need to be a Zandtista to deduce that quite often there simply is no meaningful connection to be made. My feeling is that anybody interested in Van Zandt probably doesn't need five pages of exposition on Guy Clark. Come to think, anybody who does need five introductory pages in a book about Van Zandt probably shouldn't be in it in the first place.

On top of that, Atkinson makes several curious errors. Some are perhaps a tad esoteric, such as saying that Joe Ely included four Butch Hancock songs on **The Best Of Joe Ely** (that was compiler Andy McKaie's call), or scrambling the title of **One Road More**, but stating that Steve Earle produced **Car Wheels On A Gravel Road** is rather glaring. As was widely reported, Lucinda Williams fell out with Earle, who described the experience as "the least amount of fun I've had working on a record," and the producer credit went to Roy Bittan. Also, this is quite certainly the only place you'll see the word "syrupy," seemingly as a compliment, in the contexts of Townes, James McMurtry and Cowboy Junkies.


There's an interesting, if much shorter, book hidden inside this one, Some participants, notably Billy Joe Shaver, Chip Taylor, Butch Hancock and Tom Russell, are articulate and illuminating, others I'd have edited down, if not out. However, by far the most perceptive comments come from somebody whose name doesn't appear in the Contents, but is quoted in the Preface—Hayes Carll. "Townes saved me and ruined me at the same time. I don't think there's anyone who's ever done or ever will do what he did, and as a young writer trying to figure out your own voice and how you're going to express yourself, it's sort of devastating and inspirational and painful and beautiful, all the emotions he was able to make you feel that no one else could. As a writer, you realize on some level that you're never going to be able to connect or channel that way... There's pain and life experience in Townes's music that you can't fake or even learn." **JC**



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5th, Liz Morphis, 7pm	20th, Cran D'Arret, 10pm
6th, Larry Lange's Lonely Knights, 10pm	25th, Tommy Elskes, 7pm
7th, Sunset Valley Boys, 3pm	The Peacemakers, 10pm
11th, Louis 'Cowboy' Johnson, 7pm	26th, Matt Smith, 7pm
The Peacemakers, 10pm	27th, Mike Barfield w/The Horton Brothers, 10pm
12th, Paul Glasse, 7pm	

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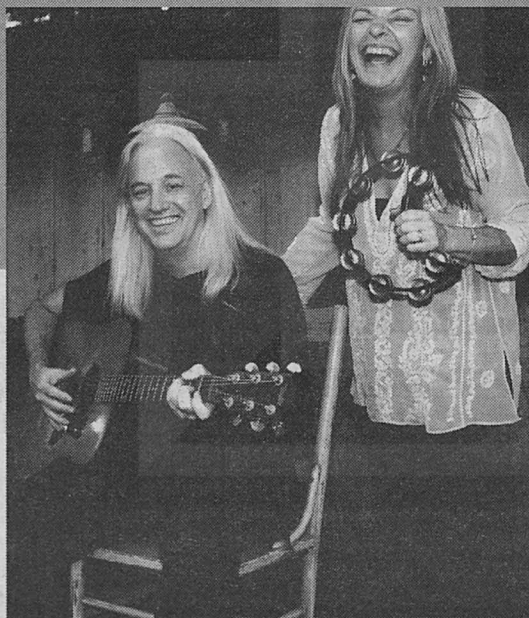
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JOHN THE REVEALATOR

Had I thought to check my very own CD database, I would have known that **Guy Clark** was on **Texas Renegade Radio Vol 2; Live In The Studio** (KNON, 2000), but TxRR (KNON, Dallas) ramrod Mark Mundy had to remind me. When I did run a search, I found two more albums that don't show up in Clark discographies, **VA: Caught In The Webb; A Tribute To The Legendary Webb Pierce** (Koch/Audium, 2002), on which Clark sings *Honky Tonk Song* with The Jordanares, and **Lonesome, On'ry And Mean: A Tribute to Waylon Jennings** (Dualtone, 2003), on which he sings *Good Hearted Woman*.

- Joe Specht, my man in Abilene, came up with a real oddball, "Check out Clark and **Mary Gauthier's** *I Drink* at Lost Highway website. For whatever the reason, the producers decided to scrap this version much to Mary's disappointment and dismay." Joe thought I should have included **Steve Earle, Townes Van Zandt, Guy Clark: Together At The Bluebird Cafe** (American Originals, 2001), which, as it does get listed in some discogs, was a judgement call I might have got wrong. He also sent the track listing for a CD he put together called **Guy Sits In With...**, which features 1978-2007 collaborations with Buck White, Nancy Griffith, Tine Valand, Leroy Parnell, Kate Campbell, Chip Taylor, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Verlon Thompson, Terry Allen, Hal Ketchum, Floramay Holliday, Wayne Scott, Vince Gill, Tracy Nelson and Lyle Lovett. "Not complete, but these are the cream of the crop. The most recent assignments find Guy in recitation mode."

- Rating **This One's for Him; A Tribute to Guy Clark** as B+, *Entertainment Weekly's* incisive review read as follows: "A galaxy of roots-music stars, including Willie Nelson, Emmylou Harris and Steve Earle, toast the beloved songwriter's 70th birthday. Extra points to Kris Kristofferson, who makes Clark seem like Taylor Swift on the ultra-grizzled *Hemingway's Whiskey*." Picking up on that "beloved," the most interesting comment I got on last month's Guy Clark feature was from a singer-songwriter, not himself a participant in **This One's For Him**, who attributed the album's "weird negative vibe" to the possibility that while people admire Clark, they don't necessarily like him very much.

- British music writer **Arthur Wood** had a very different take on **This One's For Him** in *Maverick*. Fair enough, but his full page rave did contain one ineffably silly stretch. "Anyone who tackled *The Randall Knife* had to be damned foolhardy. Vince Gill, however, held the credentials. His late father, like Clark's, was a lawyer." In related news, Clark and Gill's fathers are suspected of having unprotected sex with their mothers. Before you run out to buy a copy of *Maverick*, be warned that the January/February cover story is Lady Antebellum, which tells you all you need to know about 'The UK's Leading Independent Country Music Magazine.'

- Couldn't figure out how to slide it into the cover feature, but unless you were around during Chicago House days, you may not be aware that **Susan Lindfors Taylor**, who produced Eric Taylor's **Live At The Red Shack**, and sings on one of the tracks, was, sans the Taylor, a pretty good singer-songwriter herself back then. Since hooking up with Taylor, she's been one of the super spouses, along with Karen Cleaves, Judy Hubbard and Bob Brom, but Taylor tells me that he can't wait to produce an album by his wife (his third, if I've counted right).

- Listening to Eric Taylor's *Dean Moriarty* (see cover feature) reminded me of my one and only **Jack Kerouac** story. In 1985, when I was working at *Time*

Out In London, I got a call from a publicist working **Kerouac; The Movie**, which turned out to be a rather dull pastiche of archive footage and talking heads. Anyway, he wanted to know if I'd be interested in interviewing **Carolyn Cassady**. Those of you who know their Kerouac mythology will instantly understand my response: "Interested? Are you fucking kidding me? When? Where?" However, as the only **3CM** reader I can absolutely guarantee will grasp the significance of this story is Ronny Elliott, Carolyn Cassady was married to Neal Cassady, aka Dean Moriarty in **On The Road**, and was Kerouac's lover and confidant, making her a rather unique figure in the 'Beat Generation,' which, incidentally, is a term she dismissed as "something made up by the media and Allen Ginsberg." If you didn't know about her, you're far from alone, back then the publicist told me, "You're the first person I've talked to even who knows who she is."

- Reader Bob Kinney sent me a link, way too cumbersome to reproduce here, to a slide show of photographs which a search for **American Country Awards** *Washington Post* should bring up easily enough. Unless I totally misread **3CM's** demographic, you've all long ago despaired of commercial country, but prepare to despair just a little bit more with these pics. They're all massively repulsive, though I rate #14 as Most Puke Worthy. As Bob asks, "Are you sure Hank done it this way?"

- According to *Wikipedia*, the **New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival** is "an annual celebration of the music and culture of New Orleans and Louisiana." Or not. Announced for 2012 are The Eagles, Tom Petty, Foo Fighters and John Mayer.

- In Brian T Atkinson's **I'll Be Here In The Morning** (see reviews), Kevin Russell (of The Gourds) comments that Townes Van Zandt wasn't better than Ted Hawkins. Having seen them both more than once, my first reaction was "Bollocks," but Hawkins raises an editorial subject for next month.

† HUBERT SUMLIN

For British music lovers, the best thing about the British Invasion was that the US/UK one-for-one work permit swap became a positive rather than a negative. As I like to say to Americans, you got Freddie & The Dreamers, we got Howlin' Wolf—sounds like a deal to me. As an added bonus of Chester Burnett's frequent British tours, we also got his guitarist, Hubert Sumlin. Born November 16th, 1931, in Greenfield, MS, Sumlin was enticed to Chicago in 1954 to be second guitar in Howlin' Wolf's band, soon stepping up to be lead guitarist, a post he held for the rest of Howlin' Wolf's career apart from a brief 1956 stint with Muddy Waters. To put this in context, Howlin' Wolf not only paid well but offered unheard of benefits like health insurance, so he got his pick of the very best sidemen around. What I remember most vividly about Sumlin, apart from the fact that he was in a different class from any British blues guitarist and that he and Howlin' Wolf were an inspired partnership, was that the only part of his body that moved was his fingers. Sumlin, who, after Howlin' Wolf's death in 1976, led some other members of the band as The Wolf Pack for a few years, turned out to be a pretty fair singer himself and put out many albums under his own name. After his death, on December 4th, at 80, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards insisted on paying for his funeral (Richards had also been helping Sumlin with medical expenses), which I have to say is pretty classy of them—it's almost unheard of for British Invasion stars to acknowledge their debts.

JC's BEST O'2011

ALBUM OF THE YEAR

Lydia Loveless: Indestructible Machine
Michael Fracasso: Saint Monday
T Jarrod Bonta: White Lines
Amanda Shires: Carrying Lightning
Eilen Jewell: Queen Of The Minor Key
Grant Peeples: Okra And Ecclesiastes

DEBUT ALBUM

The Far West
HalleyAnna: The Country
The Carper Family: Back When

LIVE ALBUM

Slaid Cleaves: Sorrow & Smoke;
Live At The Horseshoe Lounge

VA/TRIBUTE ALBUM

Gurf Morlix; Blaze Foley's 113th Wet Dream
Laura Cantrell: Kitty Wells Dresses
VA: The Best Of Ripsaw Records

REISSUE/HISTORIC ALBUM

Buck Owens: Bound For Bakersfield
Hal Harris: Gold Star Guitar

FEMALE ARTIST

Lydia Loveless
Amanda Shires
Connie Smith

MALE ARTIST

Rod Picott
John Lilly
Gurf Morlix

DUO/GROUP

Carrie Rodriguez & Ben Kyle
Eilen Jewell Band
Zoe Muth & The Lost High Rollers

SONGWRITER

Lydia Loveless
Michael Fracasso
Nathan Bell

INSTRUMENTALIST

T Jarrod Bonta
Gurf Morlix
Jerry Miller

BEST IN THE INDUSTRY

Jenni Finlay
Bloodshot (for signing Lydia Loveless)
Fred Remmert (Music Road/Cedar Creek Studio)

FAR & AWAY 2011 NOTES

Alongside this month's FAR chart, you'll find this year's FAR & Away, my annual ballot of the Far reporters on their picks for best of the year. This time round, I added, by request, Live Album, which left no room for commentary, and there are a couple of things that I feel need clarification.

One is that both Lydia Loveless and T Jarrod Bonta, #1 and #2 in Debut Album, have, in fact, both put out albums before. Loveless has another on Peleton, a Columbus, OH, indie, Bonta has a jazz instrumental on Jim Stringer's Music Room. As they were comfortably ahead of the competition, I invoked the 'New To Them' clause, which allows me to ignore such technically disqualifying complications.

In case you wonder why some categories have more entries than others, 12 in Album Of The Year, only four in Debut Album and Instrumentalist, there's a hurdle, the minimum number of points needed to make the cut. There were dozens of Debut Album nominees, but very little consensus, while there was considerable consensus but far fewer nominations for Instrumentalist.

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WHAT IS A TEXAS SONGWRITER?

Even though 'Texas Music,' which meant something very different 20 years ago, is a lost cause, 'Texas songwriter' still has resonance, unless some huckster decides it might be a useful marketing tool for current 'Texas Music' tools. However, when you come to poke at the concept, it raises certain questions. The obvious one is, do Texas songwriters have to be born in Texas? Obviously, they don't have to live there, most of them are in Tennessee. A follow-up would be, does being born in Texas and writing songs make you a Texas songwriter? To me, the answer to both would be No. While it certainly helps to have a Texas birthplace, if I saw Ray Wylie Hubbard (OK), Blaze Foley (AR) or Eric Taylor (GA) on a list of great Texas songwriters, I'd have no quarrel with that, though there are some auslander songwriters I admire, for instance Michael Fracasso (OH), who live in Texas but I don't think of as Texas songwriters. As for the other question, two words—Mac Davis.

Another question that occurs to me is, does national success transform a Texas songwriter into an American songwriter? To put it another way, would someone listing great Texas songwriters necessarily think of Cindy Walker or Mickey Newbury? I'd be about the last person to measure success by hits, but Newbury was also a major influence on many of the usual Texas songwriter suspects, Kristofferson, Nelson, Clark, Jennings, Shaver and Van Zandt.

To test out these questions, I asked the Freeform American Roots reporters to send me their Top 10 Texas songwriters, though I spotted them Townes Van Zandt, Butch Hancock, Terry Allen and Guy Clark. Within 24 hours, I had 71 more names, of which only 33 were listed by more than one responding DJ. Of those 33, five weren't native Texans, Hubbard, Foley, Taylor, Fracasso and Tom Russell (CA). So, while some disagreed with me about Fracasso's status, basically we were on the same page when it came to defining 'Texas songwriter.'

On the national success issue, the voting was more ambiguous. Leaving aside the four gimmers, Willie Nelson, Steve Earle, Billy Joe Shaver, Cindy Walker, Rodney Crowell, Kris Kristofferson and Lyle Lovett despite being national figures, are clearly still identified with Texas, but Newbury was way down towards the bottom of the list.

Even so, this quasi-scientific survey did demonstrate that FAR DJs as far afield as Alaska and Massachusetts, Italy and Australia, could, on a moment's notice, come up with a list of six (often more) favorite Texas songwriters. By contrast, had I asked them if they knew, off the top of their heads, no peeking, where Harlan Howard was born, how many would know Kentucky? Or that Boudleaux Bryant was from Georgia, Felice from Minnesota?

Which helps explain why 'Texas songwriter' is a coveted, if much abused, designation. It is, however, one much easier to claim than to validate. Of the 33 songwriters recognized by FAR DJs, ten are dead, and most all the rest have spent decades, usually many decades, burnishing their credentials, "one fan at a time" as David Rodriguez used to say. For the record, my Top 10 is: Townes Van Zandt, Butch Hancock, Terry Allen, David Rodriguez, Jo Carol Pierce, Blaze Foley, Mickey Newbury, Eric Taylor, Cindy Walker, Lydia Mendoza. **JC**

ERIC TAYLOR & FRIENDS LIVE AT THE RED SHACK

(Blue Ruby ****.5)

Back in 1970, towards the end of the Great Folk Scare, a young man, who'd started writing songs that weren't exactly suited to the Atlanta R&B band in which he played bass, stopped over to visit family in Houston on his way to California, The Promised Land for singer-songwriters. Forty years later, Eric Taylor has got as far as Columbus, about midway between Houston and Austin. His westward progress was slowed down by The Family Hand. "I saw Lightnin' Hopkins there on Friday night, Townes Van Zandt on Saturday night, then I got a job as a dishwasher at the club just so I could be around music like that."

I'm not sure quite how long you have to spend inside the city limits to be claimed as an Austin songwriter, but the fact is that, in historical terms at least, Houston is the singer-songwriter capital of Texas. Clubs like The Jester Lounge, The Old Quarter, Sand Mountain and Anderson Fair were seedbeds and springboards for a generation of artists, most obviously Van Zandt, Guy Clark, Steve Earle, Lyle Lovett, Lucinda Williams, Rodney Crowell, Nanci Griffith, Vince Bell and KT Oslin, who were far more successful, albeit in different ways of measuring success, than Austin-based singer-songwriters, most of them following the trail blazed by Mickey Newbury that led from Houston to Nashville and major label deals. Austin-centricity is somewhat of a sore point with Houstonians. As Rex Bell, who now runs the Mark 2 version of The Old Quarter in Galveston, says of the original, "Yeah, they'd go play Austin, but they were from Houston, they lived in Houston, and they were in my club just about every week."

"Houston was incredible, just so fruitful with songwriters," says Taylor, who credits Newbury with inspiring Van Zandt and Clark, who, in turn, drew other writers to Houston, and the showmanship of Lightnin' Hopkins. "So many of us learned to tell stories from Lightnin'. I couldn't believe a person could sit on a stage and capture an audience like that, with a story. He was incredible influence on all of us, though he kind of tolerated us. I played bass on and off with Lightnin' for eight years and it was a hard ticket. He had no trouble stopping in the middle of a number to tell you how you just fucked up."

Not that Houston was more financially rewarding than Austin, "We were working for next to nothing." If you have a copy of Taylor's first album, **Shameless Love** (Featherbed, 1981), in the cover picture, he's wearing a vest to hide a rip in his only shirt and a pair of trousers borrowed from Lyle Lovett. Mind you, Lovett wasn't doing any better, Taylor had to drive him to his weekly paying gig at a Mr Gatti's Pizza. However, you couldn't put a price on the education they were getting, even if one club's "no covers" rule wasn't cool encouragement of original material but to avoid paying for ASCAP and BMI licenses. "We wanted to be artists when we grew up, and I thought performing was something I had to do to get people to listen to the songs, but I learned to be a carny."

Getting back into writing after open heart surgery, Taylor came up with the album's concept, "my best bad idea." Coordinating schedules with Lyle Lovett, Nanci Griffith, Denise Franke and Italian guitar wiz Marco Python Fecchio, Taylor was well aware that "Sometimes these kind of records are fraught with ego, tension, bad memories, unpaid bills and too much water under the bridge." As it turned, the biggest problem, in a studio with no AC, was having to take a break every 20 minutes or so to cool off and get something to drink.

Like so many in his field, Taylor has been on several indie labels, about which he does have good words to say for Eminent, which released **Scuffletown** (2001). "I always got checks from them and when they closed it down they let me buy my masters for cents on the dollar. The only label I've made money off except my own." **Live At The Red Shack** can be seen as a conflation of two other earlier albums, about both of which Taylor says "I never saw a dime." They are **Eric Taylor** (Watermelon, 1995), from which he draws a full half of the material, and another live album, **The Kerrville Tapes** (Silverwolf, 2003).

Recording straight to the board, with no headphones, before a small, invited audience, Taylor, backed by Fecchio's eerily beautiful electric guitar, opens with *Carnival Jim And Jean* and *Texas, Texas*, then Lovett joins him on *Memphis Midnight*, *Memphis Morning*, *Tractor Song* and *Visitors From Indiana*. Franke, a Houston singer-songwriter who actually lives in Houston, comes up for *Blue Piano*, a nod to Anderson Fair. Taylor solos *Dean Moriarty*, with a fantastic spoken intro, before Nanci Griffith harmonizes on *Mission Door*, *Dollar Matinee*, which she'd recorded but Taylor hadn't had up to now, and *Deadwood*. Griffith, Franke and producer Susan Lindfors Taylor provide a chorus on *Prison Movie*. Finally, Taylor calls up "my oldest compadre in this business," percussionist James Gilmer, to help him with the very early, previously unrecorded *Good Times*, *Fickle Friends*.

Live At The Red Shack puts some of Taylor's best songs in new settings, but, more importantly, it offers them live, which is what he does better than almost anyone. The extraordinary intensity he brings to bear, his ideosyncratic spacing and unexpected stresses, make him unique. You don't just listen to Eric Taylor, you experience him. **JC**

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- 9th Buck Ramsey • 1938 Lubbock Co, TX
Jimmy Day • 1934 Tuscaloosa, AL
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- 12th Fred McDowell • 1904 Rossville, TN
Tex Ritter • 1905 Murvaul, TX
Ray Price • 1926 Perryville, TX
- 13th Rick Broussard • 1962 Seguin, TX
- 14th Allen Toussaint • 1938 New Orleans, LA
T-Bone Burnett • 1948 St Louis, MO
Audrey Auld • 1964 Hobart, Tasmania
Bobby Charles † 2010
- 15th Queen Ida • 1929 Lake Charles, LA
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- 18th Al Perkins • 1944 Odessa, TX
- 19th Leo Soileau • 1904 Ville Platte, LA
Sleepy Hoffpauir • 1931 Crowley, LA
Phil Everly • 1939 Brownie, KY
Janis Joplin • 1943 Port Arthur, TX
Wilson Pickett † 2006
- 20th Leadbelly • 1889 Mooringsport, LA
- 21st Smith Ballew • 1902 Palestine, TX
Snooks Eaglin • 1936 New Orleans, LA
Wolfman Jack • 1938 Brooklyn, NY
Jackie Wilson † 1984

- 22nd Sam Cooke • 1931 Clarksdale, MS
Jimmy Day † 1999
- 23rd Django Reinhardt • 1910 Liverchies, Belgium
Lisa Pankratz • 1968 Austin, TX
Paul Robeson † 1976
- 24th Tuts Washington • 1907 New Orleans, LA
Doug Kershaw • 1936 Tiel Ridge, LA
Jack Scott • 1936 Windsor, Canada
Warren Zevon • 1947 Chicago, IL
Tex Thomas • 1951 Littlefield, TX
- 25th Sleepy John Estes • 1899 Ripley, TN
Jimmy Wyble • 1922 Port Arthur, TX
Speedy West • 1924 Springfield, MO
Etta James • 1938 Los Angeles, CA
Laura Lee McBride † 1989
- 26th Stephane Grappelli • 1908 Paris, France
Huey 'Piano' Smith • 1934 New Orleans, LA
Lucinda Williams • 1953 Lake Charles, LA
Charlie Louvin † 2011
- 27th Joe Shelton • 1911 Hopkins Co, TX
Elmore James • 1918 Richland, MS
Bobby 'Blue' Bland • 1930 Rosemark, TN
Buddy Emmons • 1937 Mishawaka, IN
Moon Mullican † 1967
Mahalia Jackson † 1972
- 28th Carolyn Hester • 1938 Waco, TX
Mary Cutrufello • 1970 Meriden, CT
T Texas Tyler † 1972
Al Dexter † 1984
- 29th Al Stricklin • 1908 Antioch, TX
Willie Dixon † 1992
- 30th Ruth Brown • 1928 Portsmouth, VA
Norma Jean • 1938 Wellston, OK
Mance Lipscomb • 1976
Professor Longhair • 1980
Warren Smith • 1980
Lightin' Hopkins • 1982
- 31st Roosevelt Sykes • 1906 Elmar, AK
Chuck Willis • 1928 Atlanta, GA
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