

...the new releases

It All. No new territory is ploughed here, musically or lyrically, nevertheless there's something curiously addictive about Dalton's oeuvre. **AW**
http://www.myspace.com/kellydalton

MC Hansen
PARIAH
Bogrough Records
★★★★
All American roots music from a Dane based in Sweden



On his latest solo offering this Danish-bred, Swedish-based singer-songwriter most definitely nails his colours to the mast as an American folk/country troubadour. The eleven Hansen-penned originals are either constructed upon an electric band foundation—guitar, pedal steel, bass and drums—or, are stripped down to a folkie voice and acoustic guitar or mandolin presentation. *Melancholy Moon* which opens the collection, *The Song We Never Sing* and the happy-go-lucky hoedown *Take Your Time (The Tale Of Lovelight Ave.)*—with clarinet and a CS Nielsen support vocal—fulfil the former criteria, while examples of the latter include the up-tempo *Down There By The Well*.

On *A Day As Good As Any Other* is a rowdy bluesy slide guitar fest, while the ensuing *Up On A Shelf* offers you the opportunity to grab your partner and waltz the night away. RINGING the changes one final time, PARIAH closes with the jazzy shuffle ...*It Goes Like This*. The rub is that there's not one aspect of the competently recorded PARIAH that's particularly outstanding or different. It simply sounds like too many other roots music recordings. **AW**
http://www.mchansen.com/

John Byrne Band
AFTER THE WAKE
Ri-Ra Records
★★★
Celtic folk-rock via New York and Philadelphia



Although he's lived in America since the 1990s John Byrne was born and bred in rural Ireland, which makes AFTER THE WAKE feel like the genuine article. He was originally in a band called Patrick's Head, which was based in New York and released 5 albums. Eventually John felt he'd gone as far as he could in that format and has now evolved into the John Byrne Band which has a more cosmopolitan feel to the music while still retaining a certain Irishness to the overall sound.

AFTER THE WAKE is made up of a mixture of soft-rockers and ballads as you would expect. The better songs are when John regales us with biographical songs—*It's The Gas That Makes You Laugh Before It Kills You* which is about what it means to be a journeyman musician. It not only sounds like early period Dylan but name checks him too; and the ballad *Midnight In Dublin* about being separated from a loved one and the sudden urge to call them

but not doing so because of the time difference.

One very interesting song is *The Ballad Of Martin Doyle*, which is a traditional folk song about a man from Northern Ireland who fought in the British Army in WWI then, on returning joined the Irish Army in the Irish War of Independence and fought against the British Army. He was eventually buried in 1940 wearing his original British Army uniform. John chronicles the contradictions in the man's life in the first person.

AFTER THE WAKE is very pleasant with some good songs on it but hardly stands out in a very competitive market place. **AH**
www.johnbyrneband.com

David Rotheray
THE LIFE OF BIRDS
Proper PRPCD061
★★★★☆



Beautiful South guitarist makes solo debut with an impressive series of collaborations

Despite this album's title, and despite the titles of several of the songs, this is not an ornithological concept work but rather a series of social commentary pieces some of which are loosely linked by a bird motif. So far, so what, but what raises David Rotheray's (erstwhile guitarist for the Beautiful South and one third of the late Homespun) debut solo album above the pack is the collaborators he has enlisted. The cream of British folk singers appear, including Eliza Carthy, Jim Causley, Bella Hardy, Eleanor McEvoy, Alisdair Roberts and Kathryn Williams amongst others.

It is of course risky using such high profile vocalists because they're what the ear tends to concentrate on, and here this tendency is exacerbated by the fact that the music for the songs is a bit ho, hum, next, something that's fortunately not true of the lyrics. *The Sparrow And The Thrush And The Nightingale Parts One and Two*, which bookend the album, are nicely bile-filled critiques that take in everything from house prices to up themselves lead singers and compensation culture without ever coming across as mere scatter-gun. In poignant contrast *The Road To The South* has Eliza Carthy singing wistfully of those who 'migrated' to London in search of work and *Sweet Forgetfulness* features Camille O'Sullivan taking a left-field look at the impact of Alzheimer's disease and singing bitterly 'the things you can't remember don't hurt/it's the things you cannot forget.'

The album is, inevitably, a bit uneven but the guest singers are consistently strong (Jim Causley in particular is outstanding) and it's a pleasure to see a bit of ambition and lateral thinking being displayed rather than yet another dozen songs performed with an acoustic guitar. **JS**
www.davidrotheray.com

Rod Picott
TIGER TOM DIXON'S BLUES
Independent

★★★★

Re-recorded stripped down version of classic singer-songwriter debut

First released ten years ago, Rod Picott's debut album catapulted him straight into the front rank of Americana singer-songwriters. His world weary voice (he was thirty-five when he recorded it and aware of the 'spinning hands') combined with the desperate blues of the likes of *Broke Down* (later to be recorded as the title track of Slaid Cleaves breakthrough album) and *Haunted Man* and the ruined dreams of pretty much every song made it an instant classic. To celebrate its anniversary he's recorded it again, but in completely stripped back style: one man, one guitar, three microphones and, perhaps surprisingly given that it's the same songs in much the same style, it's a remarkable success and well worth acquiring even for those who have the original.

Ten years down the line Picott's voice sounds even more worn out, as though the words have to be dragged out rather than sung. The intimacy of the performance draws the listener in and it's impossible not to empathise with and feel the anguish of his cast of beaten and battered protagonists. Whether it's better than the original is purely a matter of taste—first time round there was more (but not a lot more) backing, a band and so forth, this time there could hardly be less. But, the songs have stood the test of time and remain classics one and all and for my money ten years of playing them, ten years more of living, has brought Picott closer to inhabiting and understanding the songs and the results are outstanding. **JS**
www.rodpicott.com



Guy Penrod
BREATHE DEEP

Gaither Music Group, CD, SHD6052

★★★★★

An amazing country debut album from one of southern gospel's stellar artists



One of the delights of a music reviewer is to come across an album that totally blows you away! I have been listening to Guy Penrod for a number of years in his numerous recordings with the Gaither Vocal Band and as a powerful solo artist, he has always impressed me with his versatility. I have no idea whether this country album marks a new career change or whether it is just a one-off. I have known for some while that living on a farm in Tennessee with his large family, country music is his favourite listening, with such country luminaries as George Jones, Vern Gosdin and Alan Jackson being some of his favourites. This fantastic album has 13 very powerful and original songs (no re-hashes of over recorded country hits!) and is a superb production by Brent Rowan who has enlisted such fine Nashville musicians as Paul Franklin, steel guitar, Brian Sutton, acoustic guitar, Aubrey Haynie, fiddle, to name but a few. Guy's vocals are powerful and meaningful and such songs as the title track, *Every Saint, More Power To Ya* and my personal favourite *The Maker Of Them All* could quite easily be appearing on modern recordings by Tim McGraw and Josh Turner who are well known for their strong Christian beliefs. My only fear for this album is that it will just get marketed as southern gospel so I sincerely hope that it is widely pushed amongst country radio stations as it is not just great gospel music it is also a fantastic modern country album. It gets my vote as the best new recording I have heard this year! 10 squares **DB**
www.guypenrod.com

Indigo Girls
STARING DOWN THE BRILLIANT DREAM

Vanguard Records

★★★★

A two disc live album taking recordings from the many hundreds of shows from 2006 to 2009



On this two disc special, the award-winning Indigo Girls celebrate their live performances choosing live recordings from their shows dating 2006 to 2009. It's a wonderful resounding collection, that showcases some of their best songs that sound just the way they should—performed live they have a new vibe and a completely passionate sound with audience interaction that makes for a great live show. Tracks like *Closer To Fine* has the audience singing along with the chorus and you start to recognise the Indigo Girls ability to entertain and control the stage, but also to offer a crowd of twenty or twenty thousand a compelling show.

Featuring thirty-one songs in total, each was individually selected by the duo Amy Ray and Emily Saliers. With the help of their soundman, who was bought into the choosing process, he also helped steer the girls towards really wonderful recordings, that maintained a good quality of sound, so that the overall album feel would not be diminished in any way. Tracks like *I Believe In Love* on the second disc truly capture what this duo is about, but also their professional and technical ability. STARING DOWN THE BRILLIANT DREAM is also packaged with fan-submitted photos from their times on the road and every photographer will be credited in the booklet. Produced by the Indigo Girls and Brian Speiser this collection serves as a compelling reminder of all of the wonderful things the Indigo Girls have brought to the industry and just why they have stayed so true to their fans. This is in so many ways their dedication to such loyal fans.