

NEW RELEASES

pedal steel weaving in and out, little mandolin flourishes, touches of harmonica, unobtrusive piano and organ, intricate bass playing, subtle drums and percussion all sensitively enhancing Selcer's uniformly high quality songs that bear repeated playing. A sleeper of an album that I know will bring me hours of listening pleasure for a good many years to come. **Alan Cackett**

www.kennyselcer.com

MaryJean Lewis and the Starlight Boys MISSIN' MEMPHIS

8 Ball Angel:
8BAMJLSB001

★★★★☆

Foot-stompin', hip-shakin', American roots-bearin' 13 track debut from MaryJean Lewis and the Starlight Boys

MISSIN' MEMPHIS provides the perfect introduction to MaryJean Lewis—the niece of music's original wild man, the incomparable Jerry Lee 'The Killer' Lewis—and the superb Scottish 5-piece, the Starlight Boys—Martin Barrett (guitar); Keith Turner (acoustic guitar); Kenny Tomlinson (saxophone, percussion); David Cameron (drums) and Alan McCubbin (bass). Typically of Memphis-sounding quality, this toe-tapping collection of infectious self-pens and wonderfully interpreted covers fuses the nostalgic sounds of rockabilly, rock'n'roll, and rhythm and blues together with unforgettable lyrics, tight harmonies and musically-packed arrangements.

Memphis bursts open the track list, with memorable lyrics and comedically-tinged saxophone riffs from Kenny Tomlinson—who, together with acoustic guitarist, Keith Turner—wrote the song, whilst the musically rich LaVern Baker cover—and one of three personal favourites—*Dix-A-Billy* follows in a contagious, sing-along styled fashion—both tracks boasting of impressive musical talents of all six musicians. *Valley Of Tears*—a beautifully sung Buddy Holly cover—sees MJ's emotive vocals intertwine with Keith's yesteryear felt voice, whilst Ruth Brown's scandalous *Daddy Daddy* sees her deliver deliciously in waves of sultry tones.

Rhythm tingers: *Whipper Snapper*, *Marriage Blues* and *Mean Mean Man* supply the album with sure-footing highlights, each adding their own spice to the mix and

all three demonstrating MJ's soulful and at times, breezy voice—a key aspect of the album that, together with the band's lush harmonies and infectiously spun musical backdrops, weaves magic right through to the end of this long-awaited and utterly delightful debut. **Emily Saxton**

www.8ballangel.co.uk

Matt Harlan & The Sentimentals BOW AND BE SIMPLE

Berkalin Records

★★★★☆

Texan Matt Harlan

goes Danish and records, in just one day, a masterful roots music gem

Texan singer-songwriter Matt Harlan hasn't made it to our little island yet, but when he does I guarantee he'll rapidly become an audience favourite and thence, a regular visitor. Matt has already captured Europe having toured there annually in recent years, and last autumn the Texan recorded his sophomore solo album in Denmark supported by touring companions/local combo The Sentimentals. The latter trio, formed around eight years ago, has similarly supported the legendary Dana Cooper and the estimable Jonathan Byrd on tours of Scandinavia and Europe, and is composed of solo recording artist in his own right MC Hansen (acoustic, electric guitars, lap steel, harmonica), Jacob Chano (drums, percussion) and Nikolaj Wolf (bass).

The making of BOW AND BE SIMPLE turned out to be something of an impromptu affair, with eight of the songs being recorded on the final day of August last year. Matt's *Long Ride Home*, which in all probability planted the seed for this collection, was captured in a Copenhagen studio during Harlan's late 2010 Danish tour. In the role of songwriter Matt's name is appended to eight titles, three being co-writes, while the ninth selection is a cover of Hansen's ballad *Baby Blue*. The latter tune appeared on Hansen's (triple disc set) TRILOGY 3 (2011), and, as with most of BOW AND BE SIMPLE, MC's rendition of *Baby Blue* was recorded at Real Farm Studio on the island of Møn near Copenhagen.

The album opens with the gently-paced title song, one man's uncomplicated assessment of his attitude to faith. It's time to come clean as, earlier, I deliberately omitted reference to the fifth and significant contributor to Harlan's

sophomore set, vocalist Rachel Jones. On *Bow And Be Simple* Rachel's input on two of the four verses fits Harlan's timbre like a glove, while on the ensuing *Too Much Going On*, Rachel solos on the second verse and shares the remaining pair. In terms of focus, the lyric finds the world weary narrator reflecting upon his life journey. Before I move on I should mention that in the final verse of *Bow And Be Simple*, Matt tips a nod to Rod Picott with mention of 'angels or acrobats.'

Pushing the pedal to the metal, *Darker Shade Of Grey* Matt cranks up the pace significantly while lyrically the narrator delivers a diatribe that hinges upon the insight: 'Some say the world revolves around the slow pull of the sun, But I'm learning it's the darker things that get the moving done.' There's a curiously raw and ghostly—doesn't quite sound like him—edge to Matt's voice on *Simple Song*, while sly, self-deprecating humour pervades the bookend chorus. *The Ring* witnesses domestic abuse colliding with deadly force, while the sonically eerie *Elevator Ride*, replete with the insight: 'All day I'm chasing money like the cure for some disease,' finds an office worker contemplating another day of '9 to 5' drudgery set to the beat of capitalism's drum. Three blue-collar characters 'Mining the hard scrabble of this new decade' weave personal contemplation upon the current economic downturn into the fabric of the sardonically titled *The Easy Road*, and album closes with the aforementioned *Long Ride Home*. A conventional love song, therein a traveller waxes tenderly: 'You're a ghost in every room that I sleep alone.' **Arthur Wood**

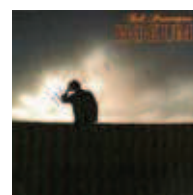
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Rob Pennington HOKUM

Self release

★★★☆☆

There's some good country music in South Wales



By day, Rob Pennington is a manager at the Office for National Statistics in Newport, South Wales and is someone, who as part of his day job, has completed many, fairly tedious, twelve page returns for this government department. The first thing to say is how good it is to see his face in public. Judging on the music he plays, Pennington is a Merle Haggard fan, which gets him off on the right foot with me. Now