

DUSTY RELICS

Al Stewart UNCORKED

Freeworld/Floating
World Music

★★★★★

*A charming Al Stewart
live recording*

featuring lead guitarist Dave Nachmanoff.



This acoustic live album surfaced in late 2009 and was originally available via guitarist Dave Nachmanoff's web site, he's the credited producer. It has now received a full UK release to tie in with Al Stewart's 12 date national tour, his first in almost a decade. If you're familiar with the fact that Stewart is a wine connoisseur and collector, and recall his nectar of the grape themed song collection *DOWN IN THE CELLAR* (2000), then you'll appreciate the title of this live recording. The full title being *UNCORKED—AL STEWART LIVE WITH DAVE NACHMANOFF*, it was recorded during the pair's spring-time 2009 East Coast tour.

Across five decades Stewart's lyrical canon has displayed a penchant for embracing historic events and characters. *UNCORKED* opens with a seven-minute plus segue of *Last Days Of The Century* from the 1988 album of the same name, and *Constantinople* from the earlier *24 CARROTS* (1980). Controversy and possible corruption surrounding the American presidency is nothing new, evidenced by *Warren Harding*, who held the post from 1921 until his death from a heart attack two years later, while *Palace Of Versailles* recalls France in the time of Robespierre and Bonaparte. A submariner's life takes centre stage in *Life In Dark Waters*, and the disc closes with an almost six-minute rendition of *Old Admirals* another briny themed tale. Tagged on to the end of the latter is Al's recollection of moving to New York in 1968 with the aim of 'becoming a star,' and the benefits of being, for one night, a Simon & Garfunkel roadie.

Stewart subjectively shifts focus with the recollection of losing a lover in the older tune *News From Spain*—originally released only on a 7" single—and follows with the even earlier *Bedsitter Images*, a poignant recollection of 'flat life' in late 1960's London. In *Auctioning Dave*, one of Al's between song interludes, he amuses the audience with a tale of 'taking Dave home for the night,' particularly the elderly Meridian, Mississippi oil millionaire's widow who returned him 'clothing in tatters and absolutely covered

in oil.' Speaking of Nachmanoff, his tasteful contributions on lead guitar are up front throughout this collection, allied to his occasional contributions on background vocal. **Arthur Wood**

www.floatingworldrecords.co.uk/albums/uncorked/

Blackhawk BLACKHAWK/ STRONG ENOUGH

SPV: 265832

★★★★★

*Two perfect country
records from one of
country music's favourite harmony groups*



Over the past year or so, I've been fortunate enough to have been asked to review several SPV double re-release albums by some of country music's finest, never truly forgotten artists including Ray Price, Marty Robbins, Keith Whitley—and now Blackhawk, (which I have to admit, I'm now completely smitten with); the latest edition to this group, as two of their best-received albums (1994's *BLACKHAWK*; 1995's *STRONG ENOUGH*) re-surface to the attention of modern day ears.

Taking their name from an American luxury car, (Stutz Blackhawk), this male trio, which initially comprised veteran Music Row singer-songwriters and multi-instrumentalists Henry Paul, Dave Robbins and Van Stephenson from 1992-2000, is a tightly-knit unit with an unmistakable and distinctive sound, consisting of richly-textured harmonies, image-laden lyrics, stellar musicianship and country-stitched sounds, that leaves you no choice but to stop, listen and favourably take it all in.

With superb numbers such as *Goodbye Says It All* and *Down In Flames*; you know you're listening to something extra special indeed, unavoidably singing along with every gemstone song. In fact, nearly all from their first two albums featured here give a superb listen; from the rocky *Stone By Stone*, infectious country numbers *That's Just About Right*, *Between Ragged And Wrong* and *One More Heartache*, plus softer treasures *Love Like This* and *Let 'Em Whirl* from their debut, to the harmony-laden *A Kiss Is Worth A Thousand Words*, *Hook, Line And Sinker*, the chordally-steady *Big Guitar*, chorally memorable *Any Man With A Heartbeat* plus love song *I'm Not Strong Enough To Say No* (which earned the hawks a number two slot on the country charts)

from their follow-up record—there's a lot here for the listener to take in, and on every note, Blackhawk gets it right.

Despite being reminiscent of Bruce Hornsby and the Range and Don Henley, Blackhawk have their own tasty contemporary sound that is still capable of reaching audiences near and far, nearly 20 years after their first two projects were released, and will, without doubt, remain one of country music's favourite harmony groups for some time to come. **Emily Saxton**

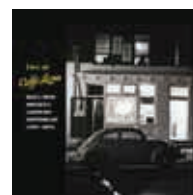
www.blackhawklive.com

Various Artists LIVE AT CAFFE LENA: MUSIC FROM AMERICA'S LEGENDARY COFFEEHOUSE (1967-2013)

Tomkins Square Records

★★★★★

*Folk music is timeless as this 3-CD tribute
ably proves*



During 1960, as a folk music revival was gathering pace, the late Lena Spencer (who died in 1989) opened Caffe Lena in Saratoga Springs, New York. Half-a-century plus later it remains the longest continuously operating coffeehouse and acoustic music venue in the United States. This three disc, 47-song, three-hour long box set gathers together 'amazing performances' from the Caffe's stage.

Co-produced by Grammy winning engineer Steve Rosenthal aided by Jocelyn Arem from the Caffe Lena History Project, over a five-year period their investigations involved 'crawling around in attics and digging through basements' of former venue patrons to locate tapes that furnish the music on *LIVE AT CAFFE LENA*. Accompanied by a 32-page booklet, in his liner note Rosenthal envisions a future where further Lena recordings will be 'uncovered, donated and released.' Following Lena's passing Caffe Lena became a not-for-profit organisation, run by a small paid staff, a Board of Directors and countless volunteers, and in 1998 they purchased the venue assuring its continuance.

Where I alluded in the opening paragraph to Caffe Lena as an acoustic music venue, traditional folk, blues, singer-songwriters, jazz and bluegrass musicians performed there and feature on this set. Disc 1 focuses on the 1960s/70s,

and prominently features the banjo. Following a concise introduction by Lena, Guy Carawan launches the proceedings with the traditional *Cripple Creek*, and the late Hedy West follows with the equally traditional *Shady Grove*. Five strings, stridently plucked, feature on *Will The Circle Be Unbroken* (Frank Wakefield and Friends), *Hunt The Wren* (Billy Faier), *O Death* (Mike Seeger) and *Hello Friend* from Liverpool duo Jacqui (McDonald) and Bridie (O'Donnell). Also gracing the opening opus is blues musician Sleepy John Estes (*Holy Spirit*), while the legendary Jean Ritchie delivers a cappella the soon to be titled *West Virginia Mine Disaster*. Tom Paxton, Patrick Sky, Rosalie Sorrels, Utah Phillips also contribute, and Disc 1 closes with a Kate McGarrigle tune titled *Caffè Lena*.

Laudably there's no attempt to present these recordings in chronological order, and bookending Disc 2—the 1960s/new millennium—are American folk giants, Dave Van Ronk and Pete Seeger. Circa 1968 Jerry Jeff Walker performs *Mr Bojangles*, five years later former sideman David Bromberg delivered *The Holdup*, and Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Arlo Guthrie, Rick Danko and the late John Herald also pitch in. Herald contributes a ditty titled *Ramblin' Jack Elliott*.

Lena's *Dear Little Café* (recorded 1972) closes Disc 3, otherwise the 1990s and the new millennium principally feature, including performances by established artists Patty Larkin, Greg Brown, Christine Lavin, Bill Staines, Chris Smither, John Gorka and the late Bill Morrissey. As for the genre's future, there are contributions from Mary Gauthier, Anais Mitchell, Sean Rowe and Tift Merritt. Edited by Arem, the almost 300-page *Caffè Lena: Inside America's Legendary Folk Music Coffeehouse* (powerHouse Books), is a companion volume that relates in word and picture the history of the venue. It's published Stateside during early October. **Arthur Wood**

www.tompkinssquare.com

Charley Pride THERE'S A LITTLE BIT OF HANK IN ME/BURGERS AND FRIES—WHEN I STOP LEAVING (I'LL BE GONE)

Morello Records MRLL 14

★★★★☆

One superb and one sub-standard album in



this 2-on-1 reissue

At a time when Nashville was being swamped by lush string orchestration, Charley Pride came along with straight country arrangements utilising steel guitar, fiddles and acoustic picking on such memorable early hits as *Just between You And Me*, *Is Anybody Goin' To San Antone*, *All I Have To Offer You (Is Me)* and *I Can't Believe That You've Stopped Loving Me*. Over the years, he did enlarge his musical arrangements and for a time in the early 1970s he seemed to be coasting, churning out two or three albums a year as if on some studio conveyor belt. But in-between the dross he did produce such classics as *She's Too Good To Be True*, *Mississippi Cotton Picking Delta Town*, *She's Just An Old Love Turned Memory* and *Where Do I Put Her Memory*. That latter song, a Jim Weatherly composition, is the standout track on Pride's 1978 *BURGERS AND FRIES*, a collection that by his own admission, saw the singer shake-up his sound, which in his own words, had become tired and somewhat predictable.

Charley had built a career out of positive, family-oriented love songs, and this album was dominated by them, several penned by Ben Peters, who had provided the singer with some of his biggest hits. To my 'country-tuned' ears, the album was over-produced with lush Bergen White string arrangements and heavy-handed vocal background by the Nashville Edition and the Jordanaires. It's not an album I embraced back in 1978, and 35 years later, apart from Linda Hargrove's *Mem'ries* and the aforementioned *Where Do I Put Her Memory*, there's little here that I'd want to hear again.

Much better is Pride's heartfelt tribute to Hank Williams, although again Bergen White is allowed too much scope with his strings and comes close to suffocating the raw hurt and pain of *You Win Again*, *I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry* and *I Can't Help It*. Pride is in great voice here, especially on *My Son Calls Another Man Daddy*; lonely, regretful lyrics counter the upbeat tempo, deceptively diluting the power and beauty of this finely penned country song. Throughout Pride's restraint lends a beautiful subtlety to this collection of classic country tunes. Anybody hungry for a dose of the supple, rustic baritone of Charley Pride, this album is the perfect place to start, but you might need to skip a good many of the *BURGER AND FRIES* songs.

Alan Cackett

www.cherryred.co.uk

Dean Dillon SKICK NICKEL/I'VE LEARNED TO LIVE

Morello MRLL 17

★★★★☆

Top songwriter shows us that he's also an underrated country singer



Dean Dillon is one of the most successful country songwriters of the past 40-odd years. Not only that, he's also a damn fine country singer who deserved to be as well-known as any one of the dozens of country singers who've scored hits with his songs. Between 1979 and 1993 he recorded for RCA, Capitol and Atlantic scoring 20 lowly country chart entries. The closest he came to making the top 20 was with *Nobody In His Right Mind (Would've Left Her)* in 1981, a song which George Strait took to number one five years later. This pair of albums is from his Capitol tenure and date from 1988-39. The fact that such superb singles as *I Go To Pieces*, *The New Never Wore Off My Sweet Baby* and *Back In the Swing Of Things* failed to find favour with American djs is a travesty.

I often wonder as I listen to this collection how George Strait has inadvertently borrowed heavily from Dean Dillon when it comes to his phrasing. You can hear it time and time again in songs like *You Sure Got This Ol' Redneck Feelin' Blue*, *Still Got A Crush On You* and *It's Love That Makes You Sexy*. Bearing in mind that ol' George included six of Dean's songs on *STRAIT COUNTRY* his first major label release and would've heard Dean's demos in order to learn the songs, I think you can see where I'm coming from. Over the years Strait has recorded more Dean Dillon songs than just about anybody. More than that, they've been highly successful with such Dillon-penned songs as *The Chair*, *Famous Last Words Of A Fool*, *Easy Come, Easy Go*, *Ocean Front Property*, *She Let Herself Go* all topping the charts for the Texas singer.

These 20 tracks remind us that Dean Dillon is not just a first-class country songwriter, but a vastly underrated trad-country vocalist who if there was any justice in the world of music, would've been a major star. I'm sure that he's not complaining, as he's made more than a small fortune penning hits for others. But I would urge you to search this one out ... it really is classic country. **Alan Cackett**

www.cherryred.co.uk