

singers from Teeside who have been making music together since 2006. Their style focuses on traditional a cappella folk songs from their local area and are well-known for their lively and energetic live sets. MAN, I FEEL LIKE

The Grascals THE GRASCALS & FRIENDS

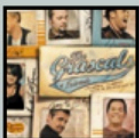
BluGrascat
Records BGR-
CD-1002

★★★★☆

Bluegrass supergroup delves further into mainstream country with guest vocalists

Comprised of musicians who logged significant time as bluegrass sidemen, the Grascals have emerged over the past few years as one of the top contemporary bluegrass bands, including being named the International Bluegrass Music Association's Entertainer of the Year two years running. Initially signed to Rounder Records, they are now self-releasing their recordings and this all-star collection successfully bridges the gap between country and bluegrass music. The six-piece band comprising Terry Eldredge (vocals, guitar), Terry Smith (vocals, bass), Jamie Johnson (vocals), Danny Roberts (vocals, mandolin), Jeremy Abshire (fiddle), Kristin Scott Benson (banjo, guitar) is augmented by Steve Turner (drums), Kent Wells (electric and acoustic guitar), Hargus 'Pig' Robbins (piano), Steve Hinson (steel guitar), and Bessel Hundo (accordion).

They open strongly with Buck Owens' *Tiger By the Tail*, featuring guest vocals by Brad Paisley. Dierks Bentley, no stranger to bluegrass, adds his voice to Johnny Cash's *Folsom Prison Blues*, but it's Dolly Parton who lifts it all up to a higher level with *The Pain Of Loving You*, a great country tearjerker that she'd previously recorded with Porter Wagoner. This version is so good that you could easily forget the original. The often heard *Louisiana Saturday Night* and *The Devil Went Down To Georgia* are probably a little too familiar, and Charlie Daniels on the latter seems to be just going through the motions in a song that he's probably performed one time too many. Other guests include Tom T Hall on his classic *The Year That Clayton Delaney Died*, the Oak Ridge Boys and *Leavin' Louisiana in the Broad Daylight* and Joe Nichols with a superb interpretation of *Mr Bojangles*. Yeah this is pretty good stuff and should help to introduce country listeners to bluegrass and vice-versa. **Alan Cackett**
www.grascals.com



A YOUNG'UN is actually their second record following PLASTIC COD'EADS. *Hard Times* is a beautiful opening track, really showcasing these three wonderful male vocalists and their compatibility, with soaring harmonies and a shred of real character and personality that shines through in all its glory. 'Hard times come around no more'. The following track *Beneath The Sandwell Gate* features violin and guitars but isn't as mesmerising, while *Rolling Up, Rolling Down* again sung a cappella is truly captivating. The songs have been written by a cast of people including Stephen Foster, Jack Forbes, Roger Watson, Tony Dean and Bob Beagrie, amongst others. Tracks like *Watercress-O* (a cappella), *Stockton Lass* featuring an opening on piano and an unblemished recording, and *No More Frying Bacon* a really fun-loving tune sung by Bethan Dolphin and the rest of the students of St Bega's Primary School all really stand out. This record is a wonderful example of true talent in an unbridled sense! **Laura Bethell**
www.theyounguns.co.uk

Tom Corbett TONIGHT I RIDE

Roundhole Records

★★★

California bluegrass musician delivers a western-themed song collection

Let's clear up any misunderstanding from the get go, the fifth song, Tom Corbett's *Tonight I Ride*, shouldn't be confused with *Tonight We Ride* penned by Tom Russell. Talking about his first album in six years, on his web site Corbett relates: 'Even though I was born in the Midwest, in Omaha, and grew up a college professor's son in Ohio, I love the stories of the West and that physical place of the West—not just California, but also Wyoming, Colorado, places like that.'

The rippling banjo lines and uptempo mandolin picking on *Here Comes The Border* launch this disc, the third solo release by California based Corbett. Having hit the jackpot in an edgy South of the border poker game, the gringo narrator immediately finds himself in a gunfight. With three men lying dead, he figures that it's time to head for safety in them there United States. As the song opens, the narrator is close to the border but a posse is hot on his heels. A Johnny Cash bass line introduces the ensuing *Is Anybody Goin' To San Antonio*. Interpreted with a Tex-Mex beat, it's the only cover song here. Charley Price enjoyed a number one country music hit single with the tune forty years ago.

Claire Holley adds her voice to the melancholic love song *Still Hear Her Crying*, while in the aforementioned album title song the incarcerated narrator dreams of freedom. It appears that Tom was inspired to pen the latter lyric following a visit to the Checkpoint Charlie Museum in Berlin, the crucial line being: 'I may never have touched



the ground of freedom but tonight I ride.' Corbett's *Ease On Down The River* previously appeared the Acousticats release THE CAT'S MEOW (1994), and here former Desert Rose Band alumni Herb Pedersen and Bill Bryson chip in on vocal harmonies. Tom joined the five-piece Acousticats soon after moving to California. Elsewhere on this tuneful collection *Flip Flop Fingers* is an instrumental, while the harmonica prominent hoedown *Welcome To Tom's Place*, which follows, celebrates spending time with a rod and line. The lyrically repetitious *Grandpa Sittin' On The Front Porch* is a familial recollection, *17 Miles A Day* recalls the struggle endured by those wagon train pioneers who headed to America's west during the late eighteenth century, and the album closes with another instrumental namely *Doce De Mayo* (which translates as *Twelfth Of May*). **Arthur Wood**
http://www.tomcorbett.net/

Yusuf Azak TURN ON THE LONG WIRE

Toad Records

★★★

Definitely an artist to watch for but in need of some focus and further work...

Scottish acoustic artist Yusuf Azak, is a guitar wiz, whilst his vocal offering is breathy and can often see the songwriter wheezing his way through a song. By combining loops and loops of musical creations, and overlaying vocals, this record was completed with the aid of the Scottish arts council, but provides no real progression or variety. The tracks themselves lack connection and the breathy vibe has left me all too dismissive. While *Rosalie* is quite nice, a recommended track would definitely



be *The Key Underground* that really picks up on what this artist was maybe trying to create the whole time. It definitely has much more direction and overall the sound production is much more enjoyable. *Eastern Sun* explores Yusuf as guitar extraordinaire and the song itself is beautiful in such a way that it connects and maintains that throughout. Definitely an artist to watch for, but I for one hope that the next record looks into crafting songs where you can hear the vocals and where the sound production really does explore the layering of sound that Yusuf always wanted. **Laura Bethell**
www.songbytoadrecords.com

Trey Blake MURDER BALLADS & LONESOME LAMENTATIONS

Self Release

★

Self penned album of dark deeds, death and even more death from Brighton-based gothic alt.country singer

The Murder Ballad as an art form is not a new concept. Let's face it, blues and country would struggle to exist without it. Stagger Lee, Frankie & Johnny and their kind have graced many a fine album over the years and Nick Cave, the Handsome Family and Kristen Hersh have all released full albums of the genre which have gone on to become classics.

Unfortunately this album does not reach anywhere near the standards of those wonderful practitioners. The main problem with MURDER BALLADS & LONESOME LAMENTATIONS is the quality of the vocals and the overall production. While the musicianship of multi-instrumentalist Paul Roberts who supplies guitar, bass, piano, viola, violin and accordion is



Tia McGraff DIVERSITY

Bandana Records

★★★★★

This album explores what it means to be diverse, seeing things in a slightly different way...

Opening with *Angry Eagle* Tia taps into the unnerving consciousness of many families in this current climate, as everyone worries about the doubts of the world, and how that seeps into the foundations of family. However, it actually comes across as a celebration towards the end, exploring this survival culture and thanks for still having freedom. Tia McGraff creates a stirring within you with this record, it connects on a soul-felt level as she explores a small moment in *Lavender Tea* that creates this momentous feeling, exactly what this entire record is about throughout. *Radical Road* is the first track to grace us with a funky electro vibe, that really lifts your spirit while *Lost Souls Left Luggage* brings it back down again, with a sad heartfelt tune about loneliness. My favourite track has to be *Two Wolves* which opens with a vocal chant and brings Tia's voice out of the mist and into this beautiful atmospheric recording 'there's two wolves living inside every man, one lives in harmony with all around, the other's full of anger and wears you down'. *How Pale The Rose* is also a gorgeous song adapted from a poem by Heinrich Heine, and showcases Tia's beautiful vocals. DIVERSITY is a wonderful album, really exploring what it means to be diverse, but also what it means to spend your life witnessing the same things as everyone else and yet seeing it all in a slightly different way. If you enjoy a listening experience this is something to turn to. **Laura Bethell**
www.tiamcgraff.com

