

Tony Bennett and Jim Reeves and other classic voices of the 20th century.

The recordings were made live in the studio with all the musicians and backing vocalists present, the way it was done in 'the good old days' before modern technology took all the heart and soul out of recorded music. It gives the recordings immediacy and a 'feel' that is hard to explain, except to say that it connects emotionally in a way that singing to backing tracks—which is the way most modern recordings are made—rarely does. The title song, originally a French tune, turned into a worldwide hit by the Everly Brothers in 1960, features the harmony of Alison Krauss, but her vocal is mixed so low that you can hardly hear her. A great pity, as this could have been a minor masterpiece. Hank Locklin's Please Help Me I'm Falling follows the original arrangement with the distinctive slip-note piano made famous by Floyd Cramer, and Lovin' Arms, one of my all-time favourite songs, features Dobro, fiddle, harmonica and ethereal harmonies by Vince Gill in with the lush strings to create a superb recording. Oh I know, country traditionalist will be holding their hands up in horror, but

the quality of this music just cannot be denied or ignored. If we're going to have pop-country, I'd rather a singer like Johnny Mathis, who knows how to put across genuine emotion, than the insipid warblings of Irishman Daniel O'Donnell.

Alan Cackett

Jon and Roy HOMES

Pacific Music
PM00581

★★★★☆

An intense record that leaves you breathless



From Vancouver Island but finding influence from around the world, which ranges from the finger picking styles of Zimbabwe to an almost Hawaiian sound which Jimmy Buffett is famous for creating, this duo/quartet pays every little bit of attention to the details which makes a song memorable.

Fourteen tracks with each one categorically different from the next, the concluding *Deerfoot* impresses the most. With the pedal steel making a welcome appearance, this contribution makes it a poignant song which finds everyone giving it their all. Other tunes

are just as good though. *Giddy Up* has a sombre edge to it as demonstrated on the vocals and instrumentation but this contributes towards a sound which many will contemplate whilst the gently picked guitar pleasantly washes over you.

Ending before you know it, I found that this album could have been extended as a few of the songs could have been a minute or so longer, but that's the problem with great records; you always want more. **Russell Hill**
www.rockpaperscissors.biz/go/jonandroy

Joseph Dean Osgood ROCK N' ROLL MAN

Juicy Lucy Promotions

★★★★

Oh dear, a good effort, but so clichéd



This mini-album comes to us with the full baggage of a modern publicity package; before I listen to a note I'm told that 'Vocalist and songwriter, Joseph Dean Osgood is a formidable talent whose presence on stage is as captivating as his singing', elsewhere this album is 'much anticipated', and again, Joseph Dean-Osgood is 'formidably talented.' Joseph has a 'remarkably soulful voice' that has 'drawn favourable comparisons with some of the great British blues and rock vocalists of the last 40 years' and this album 'heralds the arrival on the UK music scene of a special new talent.' Well I suppose it's the publicist's job to write this sort of stuff, but I do feel as if I've been beaten about the head and told: 'You will like this album', before I've heard a note. One of the tracks *Our Country*, 'is a call to arms' and 'state of the nation address'—all I can say is that having read such stuff this had better be damned good with a real cutting edge. Well I'd summarize it like this—the album is OK, the songs are acceptable, with *Holding On* being a country-tinged tune with a catchy chorus, *In A Broken Dream* is just a cover.

Joseph's voice is not bad, fairly typical modern singer-songwriter-ish, but in fairness a degree better than many. But they've compared this to some of the great British blues and rock vocalists of the last 40 years, so let's consider a few—Chris Farlowe, Mick Jagger, Rod Stewart, Ozzy Osborne, Paul Rodgers? I think not. In the end I would suggest that a promising debut album is buried under the weight of cliché that pervades the accompanying publicity, packaging, videos, etc. ...and Joseph and whoever put this together; you need a huge amount more authority to claim a 'call to arms' and give a 'state of the nation address'...and you don't do it with bland videos prancing around outside Downing Street, or carousing along Balearic beaches. What I think I'm saying in the end is please cut out the...well let's use a polite word—hyperbole. **Vicky Martin**
www.josephdeanosgood.co.uk

Josh Bray WHISKY AND WOOL

New Tide Records
CDNTR1

★★★

More wool than whisky in soft focus set of Nick Drake-influenced songs



I'm not really sure if the world needs yet another Nick Drake-influenced singer-songwriter. I'm even more unsure if it needs one whose music could also be compared to that of Jack Johnson and Jose Gonzales. However, Josh Bray is here and his debut album is nothing if not competent. He's a reasonable guitarist, has a solid voice that can do wistful and aching pretty well, and his accompanying musicians, particularly the guitarists, are also pretty decent. None of this though is quite enough, particularly when he doesn't so much wear his influences on his sleeve as wave a banner with them emblazoned on it in ten foot letters.

Opener *The River Song* is the most Drake-ian thing here, though *Bigger Than Both Of Us* runs it close and several others slouch along behind. None are particularly noteworthy and achieve little but making the listener reach for their copy of BRYTER LAYTER. *Rise* is better, not least because it does display at least some evidence of balls. Bray also lets his voice go a bit and displays an ability to write a decent chorus. *Hard Living* shows Bray's rockier side, albeit one stuck in 1973, while *Indian Gin*, by some way the best thing here, has echoes of Fairport's seminal work with hints of *Sloth* in its hypnotic Eastern-style repetitiveness.

The essential problems here are that Bray's influences are writ too large across a set which has nothing particularly outstanding in either songs or performance, and that, given the legions of people out there doing much the same thing, means that he is destined to be filed under pleasant but unremarkable. **James Soars**
www.myspace.com/joshiebray

Krista Deter CHOCOLATE PAPER SUITES

Tightrope 255 110

★★★★

Very pretty poetic folk songs



CHOCOLATE PAPER SUITES has been a struggle for me to review as it is a collection of 15 very pretty poetic folk songs sung in a sultry jazzy style; but the songs are split into 5 separate 'suites'; which complicates matters. Do I refer to the individual songs or take the writer at face value and refer to the 'suites'? I'll try to do both, but I'll apologise in advance if it doesn't work.

Suite 1: *Oranges Fall Like Rain* is made up of three songs about a young woman who is sitting bored in an office and dreams of running away to start a new life in Spain. I especially liked *Recklessness & Rust* with Krista virtually sighing the words over a tinkling piano,

Jonathan Byrd CACKALACK

Waterbug Records

★★★★★

Byrd conducts a stunning musical tour of his home state

CACKALACK is a colloquial term for the Carolinas. At this early juncture, let it be known that Byrd is a 100% dyed-in-the-wool, North Carolina boy. Aided by members of the Foggy Hogtown Boys and Creaking Tree String Quartet, this ten-song collection was recorded in a mere six hours at Ken Whiteley's Toronto garage studio on Monday November 23, 2009. That's a true testament to Byrd's consummate musicianship, as he went on to play a show at the Cameron House that evening.

Lodged between *Chicken Wire*, the smile-inducing introductory fiddle-driven hoedown featuring a randy old hen and the neighbourhood rooster, and the North Carolina road song/album title track—with appended apostrophe—which closes this set, Byrd once again confirms that he's an accomplished storyteller who deftly paints with pathos as well as humour. You can't fail to visualise Byrd and his restless spirited companion—'She had legs like daggers and eyes like oceans and her heart locked up in a hard combination'—on the state's Outer Banks delighting in the sight of the galloping *Wild Ponies*. Upstate on *Father's Day* Jonathan and a sibling sit by their father's grave picking guitars and singing while recalling the good times. And the hits just keep on coming with the chuckle-fest *Dungarees Overalls*, while *I Was An Oak Tree*, which seems rather familiar to these ears (and I've yet to figure why), is a subtle cyclical history lesson. You wouldn't imagine that a song about roasting a hog for friends and neighbours would be engaging. That's precisely the thrust of *White Oak Wood*, and it bears repeated hearing. Taking its name from a river that flows through the North of the state, *Scuppernong* is a wonderfully gentle and tender love song.

And we're not done yet. There's more, much more...as the ten-tune CACKALACK actually gets you sixteen (tunes). Hiding in the intestines of this disc is a sub-folder titled LIVERS & GIZZARDS which contains a half-dozen bonus JB musical delights. Byrd performed a similar slight of hand with a trio of tunes on THIS IS THE NEW THAT (2006), and there's much to love about this latest crop of goodies, two of which are bluegrass-paced instrumentals. Byrd rocks on *38 Baby*, I recall him performing the bittersweet *Amelia, My Dream* at Kerrville, while the understated profession of love to *Maureen* may just be the diamond in this pack.

I first heard Jonathan Byrd—he sang *Ashe County Fair*—in the pitch black of night four days before he justifiably won the 2003 Kerrville Folk Festival New Folk Song Contest. Of the new artists I've stumbled across in the opening decade of the new millennium, Byrd has maintained a standard of songwriter that's without equal. Musical genius truly undersells his skill with word and melody. **Arthur Wood**
<http://www.jonathanbyrd.com/>

