

## ...the new releases

Attempting to emerge from the shadows of a famous parent has always been a challenge. For vocalists, if they happen to sound like their parent they are accused of riding on their coattails. If they sound vastly different, admirers of the parent have been known to express disappointment which can too often leave the emergent artist somewhere between the Devil and the deep blue sea. When Steve Earle broke on to the scene a quarter of a century ago he was seen as something of a renegade, someone who was going to do things his own way—and he has done just that. If, on occasion, Justin Townes Earle sounds something like his father, put it down to genes but rest assured that he is not attempting to be a clone. He is already developing his own vocal style and I do believe that in the fullness of time, stylistically, he will have distanced himself sufficiently to the extent that the main connection between father and son will be the family name.

Justin's debut album of 2008, *THE GOOD LIFE*, received glowing reviews from critics right across the board and already many of those same critics, fortunate enough to have received promotional copies of *MIDNIGHT AT THE MOVIES* are declaring it to be even better than his debut. For a start, it is anything but one paced. Stylistically, Justin delves into Delta blues, New Orleans jazz, early rock'n'roll, straight ahead honky-tonk with a touch of authentic vaudeville on the delightful *Walk Out* which he could have performed with some travelling medicine show back in the 1930s or 1940s and still have attracted an appreciative audience. And this, really, is where his skill lies. Listen to *They Killed John Henry*, and many would concede that during the years of the Great Depression he could have been a travelling companion of Woody Guthrie or Cisco Houston. The title track revives memories of days of relative innocence when drive-in movies were the rage, while a song like *Black Eyed Suzy*, following the fortunes, or rather, the misfortunes of a girl working a street corner could so easily have come from the pen of his father's mentor, Townes Van Zandt, after whom Justin takes his middle name. Then there's the honest, autobiographical *Mama's Eyes*, a tribute to his mother and an admission to the conflict between his father and himself. This is written and sung in a style which would not be alien to someone like Slaid Cleaves. *Can't Hardly Wait* stands out largely because of the insistent mandolin which, throughout the entire song, plays just six repetitive notes—but it is different, and it works. There is a lazy, laid back feel to *What I Mean To You*, which, had a clarinet and a brass instrument been added, could have easily fitted in with the style Merle Haggard adopted on his *I LOVE DIXIE BLUES* album. Then, there's *Poor Fool*, a straight down the line honky-tonk number, tailor made for someone like Dwight Yoakam. Some great harmonica playing and an insistent train rhythm give *Halfway To Jackson* a very bluesy feel. It was conceded earlier that occasionally one hears echoes of his father in Justin's deliveries, and these manifest themselves in the slow, remorseful, *Someday I'll Be Forgiven For This*, and again on the closing track, *Here We Go Again*, but this should not be taken as an adverse criticism because how on Earth could the young Justin fail to have been influenced in some way by his father?

Reviewing *THE GOOD LIFE*, one critic had this to say about Justin: 'I

have a feeling that in a few years we'll need backstage passes at the Ryman auditorium to get anywhere near him. He's just THAT good.' Time alone will tell, but as far as this reviewer is concerned, provided Justin keeps on travelling down the road he has chosen to take, he seems destined to make a bigger name for himself than he has to date. **LK**  
www.bloodshotrecords.com

**Michael Martin  
Murphy**  
**BUCKAROO  
BLUE GRASS**  
Rural Rhythm  
Records RHY-1044



★★★★☆  
*Western music  
meets bluegrass with satisfying results*

Texas Michael Martin Murphy was part of the progressive country music scene that evolved out of Austin in the early 1970s. His songs have been recorded by a wide variety of artists from John Denver to the Monkees to Lyle Lovett. In the 1980s he was embraced by the country mainstream with such radio hits as *What's Forever For*, *A Long Line of Love* and *A Face in the Crowd*—the latter a duet with Holly Dunn. For the most part, his work has revolved around the great American west, nature itself, and yes, love. In the late 1980s he turned to his Texas roots and began recording and performing mainly cowboy and western music with remarkable success.

Over the years several of his songs have been recorded by such bluegrass acts as Flatt & Scruggs, Seldom Scene, the Country Gentlemen and Doyle Lawson and Quicksilver. For this latest album he has recruited such bluegrass stalwarts as Sam Bush, Pat Flynn, Andy Leftwich, Ronnie McCoury, Rob Ickes and Rhonda Vincent to bring fresh acoustic arrangements to such classic Murphy songs as *Carolina in the Pines*, *Fiddlin' Man*, and *Boy from The Country*, alongside such new songs as *Lone Cowboy* and *Close To the Land*. The latter has been used the theme song for the hit television show *America's Heartland*. Songs like *What Am I Doing Hanging Around* and *Boy From The Country* fit comfortably into a bluegrass setting. The latter is possibly best-known via the John Denver version. Bluegrass queen Rhonda Vincent adds harmony vocals to the haunting *Lost River* and special mention should be made of Andy Leftwich's contributions, especially his fiddle work on *Dancing in the Meadow* and *Fiddlin' Man*. **AC**  
www.michaelmartinmurphymusic.com

**Maria Dunn**  
**THE PEDDLER**  
Distant Whisper  
Music



★★★★☆  
*A story telling  
album which is  
performed to a  
brilliant standard with effortless, easy  
going music*

Where Dunn's storytelling lyrics consistently embraced historic fact on earlier albums, the characters and events portrayed in *THE PEDDLER* are in the main fictional, although, on a couple of occasions, contemporary social comment has crept in. In terms of melodic approach a distinctly Celtic flavour pervades this collection, the ten songs having been penned in their entirety by Dunn. The energetic opening track *Katie Comes A-Callin'*, is a country jog which will certainly arouse,

**The Haley Sisters**  
**VICISSITUDE**  
Comet Records CD004



★★★★☆  
*Yet another superb release from two of the most underrated  
country roots singer songwriters in the UK*

Those of us that attended the inaugural Maverick Festival in 2008 will never forget the stunning performances by Jo-Ann and Becky—the Haley Sisters. I watched grown men in tears after listening to their angelic harmonies delivering some of the most emotive and heart warming renditions of both covers and their own original material. The Haley Sisters surely rank as two of the most underrated singers and songwriters in the UK country and roots scene today. This newly released EP of six tracks, two of which are original compositions by Becky and Brian Smith show just how exceptional the two sisters are in delivering a song and also that they are no slouches when it comes to writing a good lyric. The EP opens with their version on the Bob Marley penned *Three Little Birds*. Their acoustic version of the classic cut is outstanding as is their version of the Dylan song, *Don't Think Twice*. *You Keep Me Hanging On* by the great J J Cale also gets the Haley Sisters' treatment and what a treat it is. Brian Smith is a superb guitarist and is the perfect accompaniment to Becky and Jo-Ann; his slide work on this track is stunning. Bill Staines is a great songwriter and the sisters' vocal on his song *Roseville Fair* is a joy to the ear. Brian gets his chance to shine on the instrumental title track *Vicissitude*; his acoustic lead over the two rhythm guitars is exceptional, guitar mastery of the highest order. Final track, *We're Together*, written by Becky and Brian, says it all, superb playing, singing and songwriting all combining on this emotional heartfelt ballad. The Haley Sisters will once again be playing at the Maverick Festival this year and I for one will be on the front row—not to be missed. **JHS**  
www.cometrecords.net

within earshot, any slumbering listener.

Initially sung a cappella, Dunn's focus in *The Peddler* is war. The lyric reflects that a recent conflict was marketed with vigour by politicians and power brokers, akin to a peddler cajoling the public to 'buy his [tawdry] wares.' Sisterly sibling rivalry relative to loving the same man is explored in the murder ballad *The Elder Sister*. The opening lines 'The horrors of this bloody war, I'll take to my grave' set the scene in *Tell Her I Was Brave*, the conflict being a contemporary one based upon the subsequent insight 'there's bombers overhead.' Dunn's lyric concludes that it's ordinary citizens who pay the ultimate price when warmongers satisfy their lust for battle.

Where *The Elder Sister* focused on rivalry, *You Can't Take That Away* reflects on harmony. Loosely based on the life of Mary Read, the woman who disguised herself as a man to join pirate Calico Jack's crew, *Sailor Song* portrays a seventeenth century woman, a skilled singer and fiddle player, ahead of time. *La Baule* is a wistful sounding instrumental featuring Dunn's accordion, album producer Shannon Johnson's fiddle, Simon Marion's acoustic guitar and Jeremiah McDade's whistle, and takes its name from the coastal resort in North-West France. In *Signal Hill* a father travels westward across Canada in search of work, but eventually returns to construct a home in the place where his heart always lay. The life of an emigrant to Canada who lived through the horrors of WWI is the focus in *Chavala, Eva*. This album, Dunn's fourth, closes with *William McIlroy's* a celebration in word and melody of a beloved uncle who passed away during 2007. **AW**

**Mascott**  
**ART PROJECT**  
Reveal 54

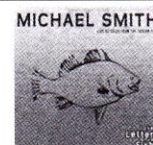


★★★★☆  
*From NYC via  
Detroit, Kendall  
Jane Meade aka  
Mascott brings a  
breath of fresh air to our troubled world*

There really is some darn good music being released this year and it's only the end of February as I write this, and a majority is from artists that are new to me and probably to our readers. Mascott is a collective name for a group of musicians whose head honcho is songwriter Kendall Jane Meade notable for her collaboration with Sparklehorse. They produce indie pop with a roots

twist, simple songs sung well and very Radio 2 friendly. *ART PROJECT* is their third release and at only twenty-five minutes long they still manage to cram in ten tracks all of which are top quality, no fillers here. The album opens with the jaunty *Live Again*, a song with simple lyrics on the age old theme of love backed by piano led instrumentation and quite simply it's a good song, the sort of track that makes you feel warm inside and ready to face the day ahead. *4th Of July* follows in a slightly rockier vein but still the sound of summer is to the fore, nice guitar hook, breathy vocals from Kendall all making for a track that wafts over you like a warm breeze, the ideal tonic to a grey winter day. Kendall I think must have written *Press Play (And The Repeat)* with me in mind as that's exactly what I did. This song is once again bright and breezy with a great hook and lovely harmonies, pure pop pleasure but not sickly sweet, there is a depth in the lyrics but yet oh so commercial. Quietest track on the album is the solo acoustic *Red Flowers*, gently picked guitar backing the sad ode to Kendall's sister, a beautiful lament. The full band then comes back in on the following track, *Opposite*, complete with exquisite guitar work from Doug Keith. As soon as I heard *Dream Another Day*, sounding very much like our own Lily Allen I immediately thought Radio 2, this track would be the perfect single to get day time airplay. *Letting Go Of The Sun and Nite Owl* follow, the former showing a slightly darker side to Mascott but not for long as *Wildwood Flower* has a real old time bluegrass feel with high harmonies over simple acoustic guitar and percussion, a great foot stomper and quite a surprise on such a pop styled release. The album closes with a bonus track entitled *Oh Peggy* I and then sadly they were gone. This is a lovely album of intelligent pop and well worth looking out for. **JHS**  
www.reveal-records.com

**Michael Smith**  
**LOVE LETTER  
ON A FISH:  
TALES FROM  
THE TAVERN  
RECORDS**  
Tavern Records



★★★★  
*Humorous, edgy songs performed with  
great imagination and passion*  
Humorous lyrics, the subtle variety, are a Smith speciality and from the outset he's right on the money with *Dead Egyptian Blues*. Historic