

2-Bit Palomino
2-BIT PALOMINO
 Songdog Records

★★★★

A lyrically thoughtful, melodic and harmony rich debut disc, from this recently formed Houston trio of songwriters

History reveals that song titles have, in subsequent years, often been adopted as the working name by duos, trios and bands. Bill Ward's composition *Two Bit Palomino* is a case in point. Having penned it four years earlier, the song appeared on Ward's *JUST FOR THE MOMENT* (2009). The song title was recently adopted by this Houston, Texas based trio, of which Ward (vocals, piano, guitar, bass) is a member. Husband and wife team, Andi (vocals, percussion) and Peter Renfree (vocals, guitar, bass) complete the line-up.

Each trio member is a contributing writer with Ward's name appended to four songs, while the Renfree's contribute the remaining nine titles—together, apart or with others. 2-BIT PALAMINO opens with the joyously upbeat and optimistic *Today I Am A Pirate* penned by Andi (christened Andrea) and Ren (his nickname), and verse by verse, each trio member takes the lead vocal. Next up, Ren leads on the melodically light and airy *Whistlestop Café* the tale of a marriage where love has gone cold. Andi's *Run Girl, Run*, and the Renfree's rodeo rider tribute *Boots And Dust And Dirt*, the latter surfaces toward the close, furnish ample evidence that this folk-country trio know how to rock.

Ren hails from the Golden State and, co-written with Andi, the gently paced *Leavin' California* is most probably autobiographical. Andi and Houston writer Mark Beets penned the inspirational *Wings*, the sad story of a Native American child, Josie, who was abandoned to a life of prostitution. The album title song and Ward's lyrically sly *Cowboys In Dallas*, focus on interpretations of the Wild West. *Two Bit Palomino* is a jovial recollection of open air childhood adventures that closes with a stinging indictment of 'the Gameboy generation,' while the latter title focuses on life for current day cowboys. *Sherman's Chimneys* finds Ward survey the still physically tangible scars of the American Civil War and their part, decades earlier, in his rite of passage into adulthood.

Lloyd Maines contributes pedal steel, mandolin and Dobro to three songs, the same number feature Mike Lindauer's trademark bass lines and Brian Kalinec's electric lead guitar, while cellist par excellence Dirje Smith appears on two of the tunes. Co-written by Andi, Willie McCulloch and Clay Canfield, the late Chris LeDoux (d.2005) included *The Buffalo Grass* on his final album *HORSEPOWER* (2003), and it closes 2-Bit Palomino's debut collection. Currently in the grip of winter snow, the song's sixty-five year old narrator (a recent widower) dreams of next spring and the return of the life-sustaining grass. Supported vocally by Andi and Ren, Ward takes the lead on this truly atmospheric song. **AW**
<http://www.2bitpalomino.com/>



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www.larrymiller.co.uk

Marianne Green
DEAR IRISH BOY
 Glas Records
 MEGCD02

★★★

Mainly traditional and tranquil folk music by this Irish lass

In a world that is fast losing any sense of calm isn't it nice to find an oasis of tranquillity in the shape and sound of Marianne Green. Based in Denmark, Green's beautiful Northern Irish lilt will obviously draw comparisons to Cara Dillon for her almost waif-like inflection. But don't be fooled by her charismatic charm for here is someone who knows how to convey lyrics with conviction ably accompanied by the gently tailored mandolin/bouzouki of Andy Irvine, Colum Sands on double bass and Gerry O'Connor's fiddle. The album features predominantly traditional songs including *The Banks Of The Bann*, *The Road To Dundee* and the title track *Dear Irish Boy* with the exceptions being Martin O'Hare's *Cian's Song*, Green's own



traditional style *Wife's Lamentation* and the upbeat *You Make Me Fly*. This recording is an impressive debut by an artist that has a lot going for her and although perhaps not ground-breaking will surely see her follow the same path as trod by the aforementioned Dillon. **PF**
www.mariannegreen.com

Sally Spring
MADE OF STARS
 Sniffinpup Records
 CD SNP 0002

★★★★

What should have been an acoustic masterpiece is marred by inappropriate electric guitars, drums and bass

Born in California, raised in North Carolina, Sally Spring acquired her first guitar at the age of eleven and within a short time she taught herself open string tuning. By the time she reached college she was appearing on open mic sessions, playing coffee houses and later, clubs. She has gained a lot of experience over the past thirty years or so and has four albums to her credit, *MOCKINGBIRD*, *COUNTRY BLUES*, *BIRD* and *SAVE THE NEW RIVER*. Sally is an alto with a slight huskiness at the bottom end of her range which is quite arresting. A competent writer, she has had a hand in the composition of all but three of the eleven songs and the subject



matter varies from love songs, to a plea for peace, recollections of childhood and days of innocence to a yearning to return to a familiar place she left behind during her wandering days. There is an atmospheric song which would seem to look back to a time when crossing the Atlantic was a hazardous undertaking, but despite the fears of leaving all that was familiar to join a loved one across the ocean the protagonist takes the risk. Perhaps the closing track, *Boys In The Cornfield*, harks back to the days of the American Civil War and the waste of so many young lives and, as such, proves to be a strong anti war song.

The instrumentation on much of the album is acoustic; guitar, accordion, resonator guitar, cello, viola, violin and piano and this proves to be the ideal vehicle for Sally's voice, but occasionally she includes electric guitar, played rather loudly, and I found this to be rather intrusive and something she could well have done without. Johnny Cash's *I Still Miss Someone* is a great song and Sally sings it with a lot of soul, but her decision to include an electric guitar, played with a lot of tremolo, detracts from her vocals and this is one song where she should have used a wholly acoustic sound. *It Don't Make Sense*, her plea for peace, is one of the three songs that she didn't write and it is also the only 'live performance' while Gurf Morlix joins her vocally on *Mentone, Alabama*. On a couple of other songs it is the sweet voice of Susan Cowsill which can be heard offering pleasing harmonies. The one song which stood out from the rest was the gentle *Beautiful Ride*, a co-write with Byron Hill, the song with which Sally chose to open her album and on which, vocally, there are strong echoes of Mary Chapin Carpenter. In summary, a collection of well constructed songs which deal with varied subjects, sung by a woman with a warm, expressive voice, but one where Sally Spring may have benefited by opting for a wholly acoustic backing rather than including drums, prominent bass and electric guitar. There is a place for these instruments but in my opinion *MADE OF STARS* was not that place. **LK**
www.sallyspring.com

the foothills of the singer's gentle acoustic persona and the dark, threatening peaks of his grunge-racked, mad axeman alter ego. As ol' Neil enters his mid-60s, his unique high-pitched voice remains as strong as ever and his anger shows no sign of abating as he rails against the world's inadequacies. Lanois layers the familiar spluttering guitar sound on the first two cuts, *Walk With Me* and *Sign Of Love*, before a soaring vocal takes over on *Someone's Going To Rescue You*. The atmospheric *Love And War* has strong echoes of *Eldorado*, Young's masterpiece of the 1990s, with its Spanish guitar phrasing and bitter reminiscence. The most arresting track here, though, is *The Hitchhiker* in which Young takes us on a painful journey through his drug excesses, from hash in Toronto to cocaine in California. In the end, he says, he's just thankful to have survived. The less frazzled *Peaceful Valley Boulevard* still packs a lyrical wallop as it attacks man's cynical disregard for his own environment and calls for 'a beacon in the night' to save the planet. It is to Neil Young's credit that his muse remains intact after nearly five decades and I certainly wouldn't bet against him delivering one final classic album before he shuffles off this mortal coil. But although the sound and the fury are still evident on *LE NOISE*, he would be wise to take his time over the next project and concentrate on creating more memorable songs. Quality, not quantity, must be the legacy of this fine artist. **BK**
<http://www.neilyoung.com/>

RW Hampton
AUSTIN TO BOSTON
 Cimarron Sounds-
 CS11092

★★★★

Country and western music of the finest quality from a real Texas cowboy

Just listening to RW Hampton sing on his albums is a great way to relax and clear away all the stresses of work. His smooth and velvety rich baritone voice is just a joy to listen to and I always pictured him as a true gentleman, then I was fortunate enough to meet him in London and my image of him was totally correct as he is a very genuine and extremely nice person.

This is his latest release and includes some superb covers that include Queen's *Crazy Little Thing Called Love* and a beautiful version of the Eddy Arnold/Cindy Walker ballad *You Don't Know Me* that suits his voice perfectly. RW also gives a tender rendition of Michael Buble's *Home* with some fine mandolin from Joe DiBlasi, there is also the classic *Danny Boy* with bagpipes and Irish whistle from Eric Rigler supporting the wonderful baritone of Hampton. The delightful love song *Lady, Rodeo Man* co-written with his son Colter and the enjoyable *Short Grass* are all RW Hampton originals.

If you are fans of country singers such as George Strait, Alan Jackson and Jim Reeves then this terrific CD will sit comfortably next to any of



Neil Young
LE NOISE
 Reprise 93624
 96186

★★★★

Quantity not quality as Neil churns out his latest annual album collection

Describing Neil Young as prolific is rather like saying the Chinese are quite fertile. For while his ageing contemporaries have drastically reduced their recorded output—Steve Miller's new blues album, for example, is his first for 17 years—the cantankerous Canadian continues to churn them out annually, with varying degrees of success. The latest release, *LE NOISE*, is a play on words around the name of producer Daniel Lanois, noted for his work with Bob Dylan and U2. With Young, he has pitched camp somewhere between

